

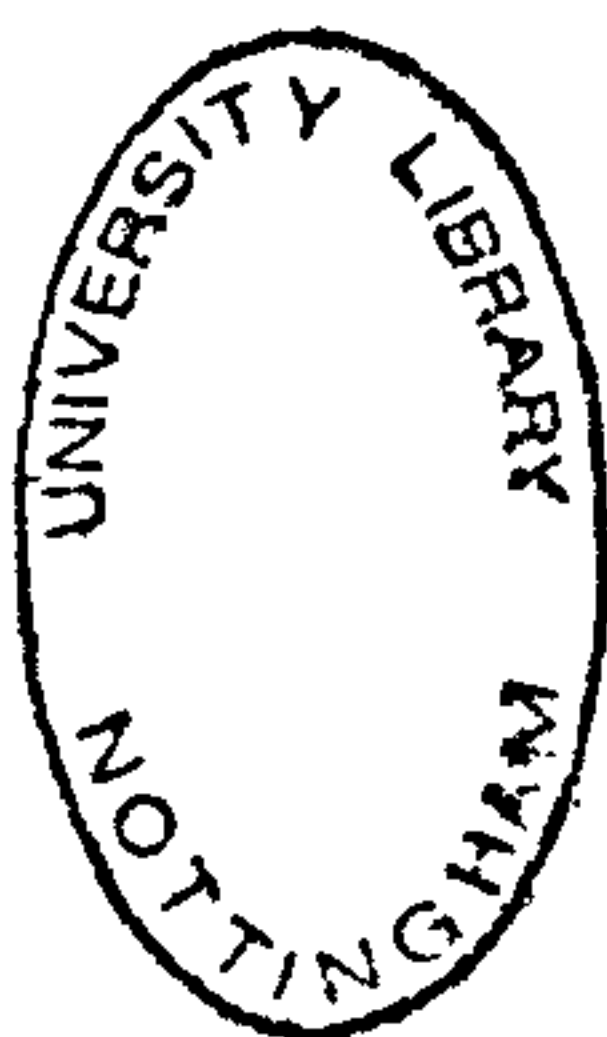
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**The British labour Party and  
Palestine 1917 - 1949**

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"'The British Labour Party and Palestine  
1917-1949' by Andrew Sargent, B.A.

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## Abstract

The thesis is an attempt to examine the Labour Party's involvement with the question of Palestine from the time of the party's first declaration on the subject in 1917 to the de facto recognition by a Labour Government of the State of Israel in January 1949.

It considers the development of attitudes within the Labour Party, primarily those of the party leaders and policy makers, but also of the wider party membership, on the questions of Zionism, the Palestinian Arabs, the role of the British Mandatory Government, and the future of Palestine. It also discusses the formulation and content of official party policy throughout the period, and the part played by groups representing Zionists and Arab interests, in particular the Jewish Socialist Labour Party, Poale Zion.

The thesis also assesses the extent to which the Labour Party was able to influence the Palestine policies of successive British Governments. During two crucial periods, between 1929 and 1931, and from 1945 to 1949, Labour Governments held office. Both periods are considered exclusively with the aim of examining reactions within sections of the Labour Party to the policies pursued, and the influence such attitudes had on Government policy.

## Introduction

There has been no detailed account of the British Labour Party's involvement with the question of Palestine during the Mandatory period. For historians of the Mandate, of Zionism and of the Palestinian Arabs the Labour Party has chiefly merited attention only, in passing, as the source of one of many domestic pressures on British policy makers. For historians of the Labour Party the subject of Palestine has impinged primarily in relation to the troubles experienced by the 1945 Labour Government. Concentrating on the one hand on certain party declarations and interventions, and on the other almost exclusively on Government policy and manifestations of disquiet expressed within the PLP, both groups of writers have necessarily presented an incomplete, unbalanced and occasionally inaccurate picture. This thesis seeks to meet the evident need for a coherent and balanced assessment of the attitudes and influences of the Labour Party throughout the period 1917 - 1949.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore the events of the post war years have cast a shadow over the entire period and have in part distorted discussion of the earlier years. Thus for many Zionists it seemed that they had been 'led down the garden path'<sup>2</sup> by the Labour Party, and subsequent comments largely relate to the alleged betrayal, of Zionism and of traditional party policy, by the Attlee Government. In contrast the

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<sup>1</sup> In November 1917 the Balfour Declaration was issued; in January 1949 Britain recognised de facto the State of Israel.

<sup>2</sup> B.Bell, Terror out of Zion (Dublin, 1979) p. 146.

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experiences of several Labour Ministers seemed to prove that they had been the victims of an 'overwhelming approach by their Zionist friends',<sup>1</sup> and attempts have been made to show that the Labour Party was both manipulated and misled.<sup>2</sup>

Party policy prior to 1945 also became the subject of considerable disagreement. The Zionist Harry Morris<sup>3</sup> argued in Parliament that 'it is idle to pretend that resolutions passed...were irresponsible outbursts of enthusiasm...they were serious and considered'.<sup>4</sup> But Richard Stokes commented disparagingly that 'I do not think the party had the slightest conception of what it was doing',<sup>5</sup> and one historian has argued that events highlighted 'the glib way in which the party could commit itself to a position of foreign policy'.<sup>6</sup> It is only through a detailed examination of the period before 1945 that an assessment of the various later interpretations can be made.

A major aim of the thesis is to examine attitudes within the Labour Party. The principal sources are

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1 J.Kimche, Seven Fallen Pillars (London, 1950) p. 157.

2 See especially D.Watkins, Labour and Palestine (Labour Middle East Council, London, 1975).

3 Throughout this work, following contemporary usage, the designation 'Zionist' is used only to describe a Jewish supporter of Zionism.

4 HC Deb. Vol. 426 c.1030, 31 July 1946.

5 Ibid., Vol. 433 c.1970, 25 Feb. 1947.

6 C.R.Rose, The Relations of Socialist Principles to British Labour Foreign Policy 1945 - 1951, PhD Thesis, Nuffield College, Oxford, 1959, p. 135.



### III

published writings and records of speeches, though private collections of letters and documents, in particular those of Arthur Creech Jones and James Middleton, are also used. Though such a discussion necessarily concentrates on the opinions of party leaders and influential supporters it is noticeable that the issue, unlike, for instance, that of British policy in India, provoked a significant reaction among wider sections of the party, especially when linked with the fate of the Jewish communities in Europe. From Annual Conference reports, from the resolutions submitted by local Labour Parties, and from records of meetings - often held through the initiative of local Zionists - it is possible to piece together a picture of popular attitudes within the party.

It has been argued that such attitudes can only be understood with reference to certain ideological traditions - of, for example, Fabian 'efficiency first' in international affairs or the contrasting Hobsonian critique of Imperialism.<sup>1</sup> But did support for the self determination of peoples necessitate support for Zionism or for the rights of Palestinian Arabs? Should 'progressive Colonialists' advocate or oppose Jewish development in Palestine? In fact it is here argued that feelings within the party were shaped, as Rose has suggested, by factors 'as much accidental and personal as ideological'.<sup>2</sup>

It is partly for this reason that, although until at

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<sup>1</sup> M.Leifer, Zionism and Palestine in British Opinion and Policy 1945 - 1949 PhD Thesis, University of London, 1959 pp. 268-268a.

<sup>2</sup> Rose, op.cit., p. 134.

least 1945 a basic 'Labour Party attitude' can usefully be delineated, just as differences of opinion were to be found within almost every established British political grouping, so there existed throughout the period a number of different strands of opinion within the Labour Party which challenged party orthodoxy. || The resulting disagreements were rarely concerned with questions of emphasis or degree, but often stemmed from a fundamentally different approach to the Palestine problem. ||

A second aim of this work is to provide an understanding of the nature and formation of party policy on Palestine. But it is necessary to appreciate that 'party policy' is necessarily an all embracing designation for something which included Annual Conference resolutions, NEC declarations, statements contained in official foreign policy documents, decisions of the NEC designed to guide the party's reaction to specific issues, and finally the - occasionally impromptu - pronouncements of party representatives, in Parliament and elsewhere.

Labour Party records now available<sup>1</sup> allow for the first time a detailed examination to be made both of the various processes by which policy emerged, and also of the pressures and considerations influencing timing and content. In particular it is possible to discuss some of the charges later made: || that conference resolutions were ill considered and little understood, that despite the

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<sup>1</sup> These include the records, minutes and correspondence of the National Executive Committee, the International Sub Committee, the International and Imperial Advisory Committees and the International Department.



availability of a body of 'expert' opinion policy was inspired by a minority of naïve enthusiasts, and that certain programs emanating from the NEC showed signs of scant discussion or of 'shallow irresponsibility'.<sup>1</sup> ||

It is now also possible to examine the extent to which the party was influenced, both in the moulding of opinion, and in the formulation of policy, by outside interest groups. On the one hand Palestinian Arab representatives made sporadic attempts to mobilise support within the Labour Party and to intervene in the policy making process. But, as foreign supplicants lacking any popular base in British political life, their position was in striking contrast to that of the Zionists' spokesmen, who could rely upon a large body of sympathetic public opinion, and an influential domestic Zionist organisation. More particularly Socialist Zionists were able to develop intimate institutional and personal links with the Labour Party which their Palestinian rivals could not hope to match.

Indeed, through the affiliation of a Labour Zionist organisation, the Jewish Socialist Labour Party, Poale Zion, there existed from 1920 onwards a compact and influential Zionist pressure group inside the Labour Party. Though small in membership it was to play a vital role in providing a further point of access into Labour Party politics and policy making for the wider Labour Zionist movement, and in inspiring and co-ordinating manifestations of popular support for Zionism within the Labour Party.

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<sup>1</sup> M.A.Fitzsimons, The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Government 1945 - 1951 (Indiana, 1953) p. 81.

Poale Zion records in Britain are scarce but Jewish and Zionist publications, in particular the Zionist Review, yield a mass of information, and Labour Party documents indicate a great deal about the role it was able to play.

|| For most of the inter war period the Labour Party was not in office. || The Palestine policies of successive British Governments are not here discussed beyond what is necessary to determine the extent to which the Labour Party was able to influence such policies. || This has also dictated treatment of the two major periods, from 1929 to 1931 and between 1945 and 1949, when Labour Governments were confronted with the problem of Palestine. In both cases it is possible to examine reactions within the party - specifically within the Parliamentary Labour Party, the National Executive Committee and the party organisation, and the wider 'rank and file' - towards the policies adopted, and the extent to which Labour Government felt obliged to shape their policies in the light of such opinions. In the later period Cabinet records can also be used to assess the level of disagreement within the Labour Cabinet.

In the context of the British Labour Party and Palestine the years between 1917 and 1949 fall naturally into five distinct periods. Thus, with the exception of chapter four, which attempts to analyse certain attitudes within the Labour Party and the wider British 'left' mid way through the Mandate, one chapter is devoted to each period, though within each chapter it is often necessary to abandon a

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strictly chronological approach and consider in turn various significant developments.

Chapter one therefore deals with the years before 1929, chapter two with the Second Labour Government and chapter three with the 1930s. During the Second World War, the period covered by chapter five, the Labour Party was in certain important respects both an opposition party and a party of government. This had a significant bearing on developments after July 1945, with which the final chapter is concerned.

For their helpfulness and courtesy in the preparation of this work I am indebted to the librarians and staff of the following institutions: the Labour Party; the British Library; the Public Record Office, Kew; the British Library of Political and Economic Science; Nottingham University Library; the Bodleian Library, Oxford; St. Anthony's College, Oxford; the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

I would also like to thank Baron Janner (formerly Barnett Janner, MP), Professor R.H.Pear, Professor C. Abransky, Dr.D.Childs and Dr.S.Levenberg for their comments and advice.



## CHAPTER I

Early Enthusiasms 1917 - 1929A. Some Pre - War Aspects

The Labour Party was slow to develop distinctive policies before the First World War; this was particularly evident in the field of foreign affairs.<sup>1</sup> The party had been formed with the aim of promoting the election of working men to Parliament and it remained little more than a working class pressure group. In the same way the Zionist movement in Britain had achieved neither a commanding position within the Jewish community nor a significant place in the British political scene. For both the Labour Party and the Zionist organisation the war proved to be a major turning point. But a number of pre war developments may be noted, in particular the growth of a working class Zionist movement within the Jewish community in Britain.

Between 1870 and 1914 some 120,000 Jews from Eastern Europe emigrated and settled in Great Britain.<sup>2</sup> Most were drawn to the poorer Jewish communities in London, Leeds and Manchester, and in 1900 an estimated 125,000 Jews were living in the crowded streets of the East End of London.<sup>3</sup> The immigrants brought with them, particularly to their

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1 See C.Brand, A History of the British Labour Party (2nd ed. Stanford, California, 1974) p. 23, J.F.Naylor, Labour's International Policy: The Labour Party in the 1930's (London, 1969) p. 3.

2 L.P.Gartner, The Jewish Immigrant in England 1870-1914 (London, 1960) p. 49.

3 V.D.Lipman, Social History of the Jews in England 1850-1950 (London, 1954) p. 164.

'stetl named Whitechapel' a distinctive religious and social pattern and added their own political beliefs and experiences to the political life of the area. For radical Jews in the East End who sought political debate and activity a heady and shifting kaleidoscope of left wing groups, movements and ideologies was readily available.<sup>1</sup>

Many saw concern with the 'Jewish problem' as peripheral or irrelevant to their activities and worked in the belief that with the development of Trade Unionism, Socialism or Anarchism problems of Jewish individuality and exclusiveness would decline, and anti semitism and persecution disappear. Some Jewish Socialists were quick to co-operate with their British colleagues, and as early as 1895 an East London (Jewish) branch of the Social Democratic Federation had been formed.<sup>2</sup>

Other radical Jews sought to emphasise their Jewish identity together with their Socialist commitment. In 1876 Aaron Liebermann had formed in London the Hebrew Socialist Union, in an attempt 'to synthesise the opposite ideals of Socialism and Nationalism, and to amalgamate the struggles for working class and Jewish national independence'.<sup>3</sup> His group - the first such Jewish Socialist organisation - soon disintegrated, but with renewed Tsarist persecution came the formation of further such groups in Russia. One strand in this development was to lead to Socialist Zionism.

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1 See R.Rocker, The London Years (London, 1956) and W.J. Fishman, East End Jewish Radicals 1875-1914 (London, 1975).

2 E.Silberner, 'British Socialism and the Jews', Historia Judaica, Vol 14, 1952, p. 38.

3 Fishman, op.cit., p. 76. For Liebermann see ibid., pp. 98-134 and N.Levin, Jewish Socialist Movement 1871-1917 (London, 1978) pp. 38-46



In July 1896 Herzl had received an enthusiastic reception from working class Jews at a mass meeting in Whitechapel, a success he repeated two years later. The English Zionist Federation, formed in 1898, nevertheless drew most support from prosperous middle class Jews. But in the early years of the next decade a number of immigrants brought with them the ideas of a new Russian movement, Poale Zion ('Workers of Zion'), whose ideology sought to combine Marxist theory with a program which would lead to the development of a Jewish State in Palestine.

The leading ideologists of the new movement were Nahman Syrkin, whose Call to Jewish Youth was published in London in 1901,<sup>1</sup> and Ber Borochov. The latter, who lived in England for a short period, was a rigorous and brilliant thinker, and strove to outline 'a new theoretical economic base and a new revolutionary situation for the Jewish masses while keeping the Marxist dialectical framework'.<sup>2</sup> He rejected 'mystical and messianic' Zionism but used Marxist analytical methods to mount a challenge to the theoretical basis of the Socialist but anti Zionist Bund.<sup>3</sup>

Later Poale Zionists moved away from a belief in the inevitability of the 'stychic' process which would result

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1 The pamphlet was printed in Berlin but published in London to avoid trouble with the German police.

2 Levin, op.cit., p. 418. See also A.Perlmutter, 'Dov Ber-Borochov: A Marxist-Zionist Ideologist', Middle East Studies, Vol 5, No. 1, 1969, pp. 32-43, S.Levenberg (ed.), Selected Essays in Socialist-Zionism (London, 1948). For Poale Zion in Russia see Levin, op.cit., pp. 393-419, Z. Abramovich, "The Poale Zionist Movement in Russia: Its History and Development" in H.F.Infield (ed.), Essays in Jewish Sociology, Labour and Co-operation (London, 1962) pp. 63-72.

3 The Bund - The General Jewish Workers League in Russia and Poland - grew rapidly in the early years of the century, reaching a peak in 1905.

in a Jewish Palestine, and drawing in part on Narodnik traditions stressed the importance of a regeneration through a Jewish 'return to the soil' in Palestine. But it was Borochoy who first provided working class Zionists with the theoretical tools to argue, on equal terms with other left wing Jews, the Socialist case for a Zionist program.

Poale Zion groups developed in Russia from 1902 onwards and in spite of internal disputes and schisms rapidly gained ground. In 1907 at a conference at The Hague the 'Jewish Socialist Workers' World Confederation Poale Zion' was formed. Commitment to the class struggle and the socialisation of the means of production was affirmed, but this was to complement 'the territorial solution of the Jewish question through the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine'.<sup>1</sup> Forty seven Socialist Zionist delegates had attended the Zionist Congress in 1906, but three years later Poale Zion withdrew from the organisation, and formed its own Palestine Workers' Fund.<sup>2</sup>

As early as 1902 two groups 'whose ideology was similar to Labour Zionism' had been established in Britain, among poor Yiddish speaking Jews in Leeds and East London.<sup>3</sup> Both soon collapsed, but a renewed effort was made in London the following year. The new group joined the Zionist

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1. H.Finemman, Poale Zionism: An Outline of its Aims and Institutions (New York, 1918) Appendix C.

2 Levin, op.cit., pp. 408-9.

3 S.Levenburg (ed.), The Jews and Palestine: A Study in Labour Zionism (London, 1945) p. 126.



Federation, though seeing as its role the democratisation of the movement and the furtherance of the class struggle. A library was established and cultural activities conducted 'on an extensive scale'.<sup>1</sup>

The attitude of Jewish trade unionists towards Zionism was generally cautious, and often bitterly hostile. The new Poale Zion group was nevertheless based on the existing union organisation. The first branch was formed within the United Garment Workers (later non union members were admitted) and further branches stemmed from the Boots and Shoes Union and the hitherto anti Zionist Cabinet Makers Union.<sup>2</sup> A number of leading Jewish trade unionists declared their support, though resistance to Zionist ideas remained strong.

Although reaction to the Kishinev program gave additional momentum to the Poale Zion movement in both Russia and Britain both organisations were soon divided, as was the Zionist movement as a whole, over the question of the Ugandan offer.<sup>3</sup> Supporters of the scheme were relatively numerous in Britain, but enthusiasm declined as the realisation of the plan grew less likely. 'Orthodox' Poale Zionism continued to grow, and branches were established in Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Glasgow.<sup>4</sup>

A leading figure within Poale Zion was Kalman Marmor,

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1 Ibid., p. 126. The Jewish Yearbook (London, 1903-4) p. 114 lists 'Poale Zion' as a London Zionist Society.

2 M.J.Goldfine, The Growth of Zionism in England 1870-1914, (Unpublished Master's Essay, Columbia University, 1939) pp. 53-70. The Jewish Yearbook (London, 1905-6) p. 116 lists Poale Zion No. 1 & No. 1a in London and also a Poale Zion group in Liverpool.

3 Many Zionists, including Herzl, looked favourably on the suggestion that Jewish colonisation should be encouraged in Uganda.

4 Levenberg, op.cit., p. 127. In January 1905 Weizmann

who worked for a time as a chemistry teacher in London. In 1905 he became editor of the short lived Yiddish publication Die Yiddishe Freiheit which appeared as the organ of the United Poale Zion.<sup>1</sup> A friend of Chaim Weizmann, Marmor had also been active as Secretary of Maarov, a middle class group engaged in Zionist cultural activities in the East End.

Though Weizmann was active in Maarov he typified the ambivalence of bourgeois Zionists towards the new Socialist Zionist movement. Syrkin's Call to Jewish Youth he had considered 'an outrageous mixture of meaningless phrases and sheer stupidity'.<sup>2</sup> Though he addressed a meeting of Leeds Poale Zion friction evidently arose over an unfulfilled pledge to write an article for Die Yiddishe Freiheit. In June 1905 Weizmann was referring to grievances held against him by Poale Zion groups.<sup>3</sup> A group of his own 'democratic fraction' also became active in the East End with a program combining a revival of Hebrew activity with practical work in Palestine<sup>4</sup> but relations between 'East End' and 'West End' Zionists remained poor.

At this time Poale Zion lacked both a clear statement of its aims and a practical program of action, as the manifesto of Leeds Poale Zion indicated:

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referred to the Poale Zion 'Ugandan' wing as remaining 'completely inert'. C. Weizmann to K. Marmor, 25 Jan, 1905, in L. Stein (ed.) The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann, Series A, (henceforth LPCW), (London, 1968) Vol. IV, p. 12.

1 Fishman, op.cit., p. 286.

2 C. Weizmann to V. Khatzman, 26 June 1901, LPCW, Vol. I, p. 137.

3 C. Weizmann to K. Marmor, 25 June 1905, LPCW, Vol. IV, p. 113. Weizmann admitted that the complaints might be 'partially justified'.

4 Gartner, op.cit., p. 207.



'Poale Zion is a national movement of Jewish workers which undertakes the following tasks (1) To create a national-political centre in Palestine for the Jewish people (2) To lead a struggle for civil and national rights in the Diaspora (3) To struggle against the present economic order, equally with other proletarian organisations'.

As Gartner comments 'the second and third points... meant little in the English environment... while a 'National-political centre' is political Zionism at its lukewarmest'.<sup>2</sup>

In 1906 disagreements came to a head within Poale Zion between the advocates of the existing policy of 'trade unionism' and critics who called for a more determined Socialist policy. At a conference held in Manchester in April a Central Committee was set up, but no agreement could be reached between the two factions, though the Socialist group was to be allowed to propagandise freely.

The final victory of the 'Socialists' was not long delayed. Following the arrival of new immigrants from Russia a further conference was held in Liverpool on Christmas Day, which declared itself to be 'the constituent conference of the Poale Zion in England'.<sup>3</sup> A radical Socialist Zionist program was adopted, and the following year Kalman Marmor represented his party at the establishment of the World Union in The Hague.

Despite these developments the momentum of the early years could not be maintained. The Russian organisation faced severe difficulties and a Jewish State in Palestine

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1 Published in Die Yiddische Freiheit May-June 1905 and quoted in ibid., p. 266.

2 Ibid., p. 266. 3 Levenberg, op.cit., p. 127.

seemed as far away as ever. In 1910 the Zionist Banner remarked on the low membership of the British Poale Zion, which it ascribed to a vague program and lack of organisation.<sup>1</sup> Similar problems beset the English Zionist Federation, and at no point before the war did Zionist membership exceed 6% of the Jewish population.<sup>2</sup>

Opposition to Zionism amongst the Jewish working class remained strong. In May 1905 Weizmann debated with Manchester Social Democrats the question of Zionism before a large audience; to his wife he claimed a great victory.<sup>3</sup> But although the influence of Jewish Social Democrats was more significant outside their own community, their outright opposition to Zionism in whatever form was a further check to the expansion of Poale Zion. The anti Zionist Bund also found some support in the years before the war.

The most vibrant and successful of the Jewish left wing factions were the anarchists of the Arbeiter Friend group, led by the gentile Rudolf Rocker. He was not unfriendly towards Socialist Zionists - whose creed, he noted, had few supporters among Jewish workers<sup>4</sup> - and reserved his chief enmity for the Social Democrats. Indeed some members of his circle combined both Zionist and Anarchist beliefs<sup>5</sup> and many more moved towards Zionism after 1914. Nevertheless

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1 Goldfine, op.cit., p. 53.

2 Ibid., p. 82. See also P. Goodman, Zionism in England: A Jubilee Record (London, 1949) pp. 29-31.

3 C. Weizmann to V. Khatzman, 12 May 1905, LPCW, Vol. IV, p. 75.

4 Rocker, op.cit., pp. 179. See also Fishman, op.cit., pp. 267, 286.

5 Rocker, op.cit., pp 32, 143.



the Arbeiter Friend, the most successful radical Jewish publication, consistently opposed Zionism, as did the majority of anarchist sympathisers.

Socialist Zionists were small in number and weak in influence among the Jewish community before the war. Their chief success was in breaking down a little of the hostility or apathy shown by working class Jews towards Zionism, often seen as an irrelevant or impossible program propagated by bourgeois English speaking Jews. As working class Yiddish speaking Jews, who combined Zionism with a Socialist outlook, when wartime opportunities came Poale Zionists were at least in a position to take a leading role in enlisting support for Zionist aims both from working class Jews and from within the wider British Labour movement.

The view of the dominant Jewish Labour and Socialist groups that Zionism represented a reactionary nationalist creed echoed that of the European Socialist movement as a whole. Hostility within the Second International to Zionism in the years before the war was an aspect of a more general antipathy towards Jewish Socialist movements of any kind, which in earlier years had seemed to border on a form of anti semitism.<sup>1</sup> In the 1890's Jewish Socialists from New York received unfriendly receptions at meetings of the Second International, and the Bund continually failed to

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<sup>1</sup> E. Silberner, 'Anti Semitism and Philo Semitism in the Socialist International', Judaism, II, 1953, pp. 117-22. For the hostility of German Socialists to Zionism see E. Silberner, 'German Social Democracy and the Jewish Problem Prior to World War One', Historia Judaica, Vol. 15, 1953, pp. 3-45.

gain independent representation.<sup>1</sup> For Socialists of the Second International even the Bund's proposals for cultural autonomy were unacceptable. All Socialists should join the particular Socialist party of their state, and participate in the common struggle of the whole working class.

In 1906 the International adopted the principle of 'national' representation. But although, for example, Polish Socialists could now become full members, the change did not extend to representation on an extra territorial basis, and the Bund still failed to gain acceptance. Between 1907 and 1911 Poale Zion sought to challenge their own exclusion from the International, but with no success,<sup>2</sup> and in this respect the attitude of the Bund provided additional support for the position of anti Zionist gentile Socialists. Although the general climate of Socialist opinion towards both Jewish Socialism and Zionism was now less uncompromisingly hostile<sup>3</sup> it was not until the war that any practical change of heart was seen.

In Britain hostility was most clearly manifested by the Social Democratic Federation. Silberner has noted that 'none of the British Social Democrats seems to have liked the Jews'<sup>4</sup> and that view that 'Jews represent capitalism in its worst form'<sup>5</sup> was not infrequently expressed. Overt hostility declined in the 1900's as a number of Jews became

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1 Levin, op.cit., p. 110.

2 M.Jarblum, The Socialist International and Zionism (New York, 1933) pp. 9-10.

3 R.Wistrich, 'Marxism and Jewish Nationalism: The Theoretical Roots of Conflict', Jewish Journal of Sociology, Vol. 16, 1974, pp. 50-1.

4 Silberner, 'British Socialism', op.cit., p. 39.

5 Ibid., p. 42.



prominent in the SDF, and a strong campaign was mounted in opposition to the anti-alien legislation.<sup>1</sup> The Jewish members of the SDF nevertheless helped ensure that the Zionist position was either rejected or ignored and in 1903 following the Kishinev pogroms the party refused to participate in a demonstration in Hyde Park unless Zionists were excluded.<sup>2</sup> Of the SDF leaders only Herbert Burrows evinced any sympathy for Zionist aspirations.<sup>3</sup>

For most Labour leaders the main points of contact with the Jewish community were the questions of immigration and trade union organisation. In fact the reaction of many trade union leaders, and some Socialists, to the issue of anti-alien legislation did them little credit. Sympathy for persecuted Jews did not often lead to a friendly attitude towards Jewish immigrants, and agitation by Socialist groups against the anti-alien regulations was generally remarkable by its absence.<sup>4</sup> Gentile suspicions of Jewish exclusiveness and allegations of a Jewish inability to work within trade union organisations further harmed relations.<sup>5</sup>

There were nevertheless a few Socialists whose contacts with the Jewish working class did lead to a certain

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1 P.Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The Struggle for London 1885-1914 (London, 1967) p. 31.

2 Rucker, op.cit., pp. 162-3.

3 Goldfine, op.cit., p. 72. Silberner, 'British Socialism', op.cit., p. 52.

4 J.A.Garrard, The English and Immigration 1880-1914 (London, 1971) pp.157-82, 193-202.

5 It is evident that Beatrice Webb's investigation among the Jewish community in London did not increase her sympathy for the Jews. See Y. Gorni, 'Beatrice Webb's Views on Judaism and Zionism', Jewish Social Studies, Vol. XL, 1978, pp. 95-116. Silberner, 'British Socialism', op.cit., p. 34-6.

sympathy for Zionist aspirations. In 1900, replying to enquiries from the English Zionist Federation, George Lansbury declared his belief that 'Zionism is a movement which will contribute not only to the benefit of the Jews, but of all nations',<sup>1</sup> whilst Philip Snowden answered that he was 'most certainly in favour of Zionism'.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore it is clear that many within the Labour Party were sustained in their later support for a Jewish revival in Palestine by their memories of the arrival of destitute persecuted Jewish immigrants, and by the degradation and poverty of much of Jewish life in their new home.

#### B. The Memorandum on War Aims

Although by the end of the First World War the Labour Party had formulated a reasonable coherent and distinctive set of foreign policy proposals it had, for a long period, refrained from taking any initiative; in February 1916, for example, the Executive Committee merely declared its intention of holding itself 'in readiness to take action respecting Peace Terms when the occasion arises'.<sup>3</sup> Brand notes that 'until 1917 the party, with few exceptions, accepted the official statements of war aims and the necessity of peace through victory'.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the propagandising of the Union of Democratic

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1 B.Jafee, 'The British Press and Zionism in Herzl's Time', Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society, Vol. 24, 1970-3, p 97.

2 New Judea May 1929. 3 EC 14 Feb. 1916.

4 C.Brand, op.cit., p. 43. See also ibid., pp. 43-54. G.D.H.Cole, A History of the Labour Party since 1914 (London, 1948) pp. 31-44, M.Swartz, The Union of Democratic Control and British Politics During the First World War (Oxford, 1971) pp. 147-69.



Control it was not until the party had felt the convulsions emanating from the Russian Revolution that serious consideration of proposals for the peace settlement began. On 10 August 1917 a special conference was held to discuss the question of participating in the proposed Stockholm Peace Conference, and to consider the first draft of a Memorandum on the Issues of the War.<sup>1</sup>

The Memorandum reserved particular venom for the Turkish Empire. 'The whole civilised world', it declared 'condemns the handing back to the universally execrated rule of the Turkish Government any subject people which has once been freed from it'.<sup>2</sup> Peoples thus liberated must nevertheless be protected from the threat of Imperialist exploitation, and 'Armenia, Mesopotamia and Arabia...and other territories' should therefore be administered under the League of Nations. But special provision had already been made for one part of the Turkish Empire, in the proceeding section entitled 'The Jews and Palestine':

'The Conference demands for Jews of all countries the same elementary rights of tolerance, freedom of residence and trade, and equal citizenship that ought to be extended to all inhabitants of every nation. But the Conference further expresses the hope that it might be practicable by agreement among all the nations to set free Palestine from the harsh and oppressive government of the Turk, in order that such of the Jewish people as desire to do so may return, and may work out their own salvation free from interference by those of alien race or religion.'<sup>3</sup>

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1 Evidently the draft had been seen by few delegates until 10 August, and on the previous day MPs had complained that copies had not yet been received, see EC 9 Aug. 1917.

2 The Labour Party, Memorandum on the Issues of the War (London, 1917) Section XIII.

3. Ibid., Section XII.

The document was largely the work of Sidney Webb.<sup>1</sup> James Middleton, then Assistant Secretary of the Labour Party, was later to confirm that Webb had undoubtedly drafted the above paragraph.<sup>2</sup> Though Webb was later by no means as hostile towards Zionism as he has sometimes been portrayed in 1917 the inclusion of a pro Zionist paragraph in his Memorandum was above all a reflection of the changing attitudes towards Zionism in Liberal and Socialist circles.

By 1917 a growing number of influential politicians, diplomats and journalists were advocating the break up of the Turkish Empire and the utility, for both Jewry and the British Empire, of encouraging Jewish colonisation in Palestine. Assiduously fostered by Weizmann and his colleagues, these sentiments were particularly prevalent in liberal and progressive circles.<sup>3</sup> Webb would certainly have been aware of these developments; as early as 1914 the New Statesman had published a pro Zionist article. This had attracted considerable attention, including that of Lloyd George.<sup>4</sup>

In the changed conditions of the war Socialist Zionists were now achieving much success in propagating their views

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1 Swartz, op.cit., p. 167. His wife called it 'Sidney's Memorandum', see M.Cole (ed.), The Diaries of Beatrice Webb, Vol.1, (London, 1952) p. 93, entry dated 12 Aug. 1918.

2 Private Information, Dr. S.Levenberg.

3 The cultivation of sympathy among British political figures has been described in L.Stein, The Balfour Declaration (London, 1961) and I.Friedman, The Question of Palestine (London, 1973).

4 New Statesman 21 Nov. 1915. T.Wilson (ed.), The Political Diaries of C.P.Scott (London, 1970) p. 112. C.Weizmann to A.Haam, 30 Nov. 1914, LPCW, Vol. VII, p. 65.



within the European Socialist movement. In 1916 a Memorandum from the Poale Zion Confederation had been successfully submitted to the International Socialist Bureau<sup>1</sup> and in July the following year a delegation to the Dutch-Scandinavian Socialist Committee met with great cordiality. The Zionists' statement argued a fundamental difference between Jewish activity in Palestine and colonial exploitation, and demanded 'security for unrestricted activity in Jewish colonisation, aiming at the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine'.<sup>2</sup> The undoubted success of Socialist Zionists in presenting their case was reflected in the favourable comments of many leading European Socialists.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore there is also evidence of Zionist propagandising in Britain directed specifically at the Labour Party. This involved members of Poale Zion<sup>4</sup> but also of Chaim Weizmann's circle. Though scathing of the diplomatic efforts of the Poale Zion Confederation<sup>5</sup> and indifferent to the fortunes of the Labour Party Weizmann was nonetheless too skilled a diplomat to ignore the possible significance of the party's awakened interest in foreign affairs.

On 1 June The Times announced that MacDonald, Roberts and Jowett would attend the Stockholm Conference. Weizmann was prompted to write to his colleague Harry Sacher urging

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1 Jewish Socialist Labour Confederation, Poale Zion, The Jews and the War (The Hague, 1916).

2 Declaration published in Jewish Labour Correspondence (Bulletin issued by the Bureau of the Poale Zion Confederation) Oct. 1917. (Henceforth JLC).

3 See below p.66 .

4 See below p.27 .

5 C.Weizmann to A.Hamm, 16 Aug. 1917, LPCW, Vol.VII, p. 487.

that a meeting be arranged with the delegates to discuss the question of Palestine.<sup>1</sup> He attached little significance to the conference but felt that in the changing circumstances Zionists should be prepared 'for any emergency'. Though there is no evidence that a meeting took place - the delegation was prevented from leaving England - the following month the Zionist Review was able to publish a message of support from MacDonald, who claimed to have 'read with great interest the literature issued by the Zionist Federation'.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover when, on 11 August, Webb's draft appeared in the press, Sacher was moved to write in triumph that 'this is the biggest score of a diplomatic kind we have made during the war, and without arrogance, it isn't Chaim (Weizmann) or Sok(olow) who have won it, but our group in Manchester'.<sup>3</sup> Though he doubtless exaggerated the importance of his group's efforts his letter indicates the considerable attention now being paid by Zionists to opinion within the Labour Party.

Webb's draft was the first public expression of support for Zionist aspirations from a political party. Although by the time the policy was finally ratified much had happened to overshadow the importance of the declaration, in August it represented a significant breakthrough for

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1 C. Weizmann to H. Sacher, 1 June 1917, LPCW, Vol. VII, p. 425.

2 Zionist Review July 1917 (Henceforth ZR). The monthly paper first appeared in May 1913, the organ of the English Zionist Federation.

3 H. Sacher to L. Simon, 11 Aug. 1917, quoted in Friedman, op.cit., p. 254. The 'Manchester Group' consisted of Sacher (then a leader writer for the Manchester Guardian) Simon Marks and Israel Sieff.



for Zionist diplomacy.

The Memorandum as a whole reflected the influence of radical liberal attitudes to foreign affairs - epitomised during the war by the UDC - which were to play a major part in shaping Labour Party policy in the years ahead. This was true of Sections XII and XIII, despite some earlier opposition to the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire<sup>1</sup> which Webb had so unequivocally advocated. The war had now given an added urgency to traditional demands for 'elementary rights' and 'equal citizenship' for Jews in all countries, whilst the linking of Palestine with the 'Jewish Problem' reflected, as we have seen, more recent developments in both Liberal and Socialist opinion.

Palestine was to form not a Jewish Commonwealth (as Socialist Zionists demanded) nor a Jewish Homeland under British protection (as Weizmann and his colleagues wished) but, in keeping with the ideals of the Memorandum as a whole, a 'Free State under International Guarantee'. Webb clearly doubted that immigration to Palestine would appeal to more than a fraction of Jewry, but those who did so would be free 'to work out their own salvation', a phrase which, with its Biblical overtones, was later used by Balfour in describing his interpretation of a Jewish National Home.<sup>2</sup>

The ambiguity of the Balfour Declaration, with its reference to the rights of 'existing non Jewish communities

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<sup>1</sup> In 1916 the UDC published a pamphlet by H.N.Brailsford opposing the breakup of Turkey-in-Asia. See Union of Democratic Control, Turkey and the Roads to the East (London, 1916). But Brailsford was later to become a strong supporter of the National Home.

<sup>2</sup> At a meeting of the War Cabinet on 31 Oct. 1917, see Friedman, op.cit., pp. 278-9.

in Palestine' is well known. Webb's draft, which linked the future of Palestine solely with the needs of European Jewry, and appeared before any mention had been made of the Turkish Empire and its inhabitants, simply avoided any mention whatsoever of the existing population. The people of Armenia, Mesopotamia and Arabia were later mentioned as worthy and, at least potentially, able to 'settle their own affairs'. But in Palestine Jewish settlement could apparently take place 'free from interferences by those of alien race or religion'. A sympathy for Zionist ambitions was thus combined with a complete, though not uncommon ignoring of potential dangers and injustices.

Between August and the end of the year Webb's original draft - 'a satisfactory basis for discussion and amendment'<sup>1</sup> - was considered by a Sub Committee consisting of Webb, MacDonald, Henderson, Jowett, Wardle and Roberts, and also by the International Joint Committee and the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC.<sup>2</sup> Interested parties therefore had a considerable time in which to voice their opinions.

The New Statesman, though welcoming the Memorandum, warned that 'Zionist Palestine' would do better as a 'protectorate or Ally of some definite Great Power' than placed under international guarantee.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand Palestine (whose sponsors undoubtably shared this view) was

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1 EC 14 Aug. 1917.      2 Swartz, op.cit., p. 166.

3 New Statesman 11 Aug. 1917.



naturally lavish in praising the 'magnificent common sense' and the 'large and statesmanlike grasp of the whole Jewish problem' evinced by the Labour Party.<sup>1</sup> But such approval was by no means unanimous among Socialists and working class Jews, and in the months that followed considerable efforts were made by Socialist Zionists to counter anti Zionist criticism and to enlist the support of working class Jews for the party's declaration.<sup>2</sup>

On a more elevated plane Zionists had been careful to assure themselves of the support of George Barnes, Labour's representative in the War Cabinet. Weizmann met Barnes on 1 October<sup>3</sup> and a week later wrote that Barnes had 'advocated our case very strongly'.<sup>4</sup> Barnes continued to support the Zionist cause, despite the intervention of the anti Zionist Sir Mathew Nathan.<sup>5</sup>

The text of the Balfour Declaration was released on 2 November, and the possibility of the Labour Party significantly altering its position, already unlikely, became still more remote. Labour politicians were nevertheless cautious in their reactions, which doubtless reflected a more general distrust of the Government's intentions. MacDonald congratulated the Zionists on their success but hoped that 'no untoward event will prevent the fulfilment of your

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1 Palestine (the organ of the British Palestine Committee, which comprised of Zionists and gentile supporters) 18 Aug. 1917.

2 See below pp.27ff.

3 C.Weizmann to N.Sokolow, 30 Sept. 1917, LPCW, Vol. VII, p. 519.

4 C.Weizmann to L. Brandeis, 7 Oct. 1917, LPCW, Vol. VII, p. 525.

5 C.Weizmann to Lord Rothschild, 2 Nov. 1917, LPCW, Vol.VII, p. 544, but see Barnes' later less favourable comments in ZR 28 Apr. 1920.

desires'. Snowden claimed sympathy with 'the idea of a Jewish settlement' but declined to comment on the Government's plan until further details became known.<sup>1</sup>

A Special Conference of the Labour Party was due to meet on 28 December to consider the redrafted Memorandum. An indication that the party had not significantly revised its declaration on Palestine had come earlier in the month; Henderson's message to the Zionist celebratory meeting at the Opera House repeated almost exactly the words of Webb's draft.<sup>2</sup>

The final draft of the Memorandum on War Aims was duly approved by the Conference. 'The Jews and Palestine' now appeared as a section under the heading of 'Territorial Adjustments'. Only one slight alteration had taken place. Messages of congratulation now included several from American organisations.<sup>3</sup>

The previous year representatives of the Allied Socialists had been unable to accept the party's proposals for a program of war aims,<sup>4</sup> but in February 1918 the significance of the Memorandum was enhanced when an Inter Allied Socialist Conference accepted it as the basis for a joint declaration.<sup>5</sup> Though the Poale Zion Confederation

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1 ZR 1917 'Special Supplement on the Balfour Declaration'.

2 Message quoted in S. Levenberg & J. Podro (eds.) British Labour Policy on Palestine: A Collection of Documents, Speeches and Articles 1917-1938 (London, 1938) p. 154.

3 The Labour Party, Memorandum on War Aims approved by a Special Conference of the Labour Movement, 28th December 1917 (London, 1917). The Movement now 'expressed the opinion that Palestine should be set free...'. International Joint Committee Minutes 8 Jan. 1918.

4 Cole, op.cit., p. 53.

5 The Labour Party, Inter Allied Labour and Socialist Conference, Memorandum on War Aims (London, 1918).



evidently had reservations about a part of the declaration, it nevertheless telegraphed its appreciation of the policy of Jewish settlement in Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

Later that year the Labour Party published a final statement on war aims. It stressed once more that the Turkish Empire could not 'without an outrage upon the conscience of mankind' be restored in Armenia, Mesopotamia, Arabia and Syria. The party was concerned to insist that these area should come under the authority of the League of Nations, lest they become 'areas of exploitation and rivalry' for the Great Powers. There was no mention of Palestine.<sup>2</sup>

This was the last declaration made by the party on foreign affairs before the war ended and the decision was made to withdraw from the Coalition and fight the election as an independent party. The support given to Jewish settlement in Palestine, so welcome to Zionists in August 1917, had now been overshadowed by political and military developments. But for Zionist leaders in Britain, noting the development of the Labour Party as a major political force, it was clear that such early sympathy might, with suitable encouragement and direction, be of considerable importance in the future.<sup>3</sup> Much would depend on the success of Socialist Zionists, working at 'ground level' in permeating the British Labour movement with Zionist beliefs.

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1 JLC 31 Mar. 1918. The reference to the rights of Jews in existing countries - which had been slightly altered - was described as 'leaving much to be desired in respect of clearness'.

2 The Labour Party, Short Statement of War Aims (London, 1918).

3 c.f. Palestine 18 Aug. 1917: 'with such formidable backing to so just a demand it may be assumed that a Jewish Palestine is assured of its place in the peace draft of international democracy'.

### C. Zionists and Socialists

For Jewish Socialists and Zionists alike the year 1917 was the annus mirabilis. On the one hand the Russian Revolution promised the abolition of both class and national discrimination and the chance to construct a new social order. On the other the Balfour Declaration and the capture of Jerusalem 'awakened the age old dream of a national revival, and provided the opportunity for a Jewish national renaissance in their ancient homeland through constructive work and a return to the soil'.<sup>1</sup> In Britain these developments provoked a notable upsurge in political interest and activity among working class Jews.

The war had already illustrated the parlous state of East European Jewry under existing conditions. The destruction of numerous Jewish communities and the atrocities perpetrated by the Russian Army drew a passionate though unavailing response from the Jewish community in Britain. The Jewish Labour League, formed 'to fight for the emancipation of the Jews in the countries where they suffer disabilities' pressed for the active support of the British Labour movement.<sup>2</sup> In September 1915 a conference of Jewish Labour organisations was held in Leeds which repeated the request, noting that the Jewish proletariat was 'part of a people which has the most to

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<sup>1</sup> S. Flapan, Zionism and the Palestinians (London, 1979) p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> The Jewish Labour League, To the Workers of Great Britain (London, 1915).



lose through this war'.<sup>1</sup>

Among the numerous Jewish refugees in Britain there was a continual fear of deportation or compulsory enlistment. Suggestions of voluntary industrial recruitment were also strenuously opposed; in October 1917 the proposal, emanating from a group of wealthy Zionists, that Jewish Labour Battalions be formed from refugees in the East End met with a campaign of resistance, orchestrated by the Jewish Social-Democratic Organisation

The JSDO had grown rapidly during the war, lead by a number of talented Jewish refugees and working closely with exiled Russian Social Democrats. In December 1916 the organisation, bringing with it branches in East and West London, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow and Leeds, affiliated to the British Socialist Party, and thus indirectly to the Labour Party.<sup>3</sup> In the New Year, as the threat to refugees mounted and anti alien feeling grew in the East End, the JSDO mounted a further campaign to defend the right of asylum.<sup>4</sup> The issue served temporarily to unite left wing Jewish groups, and a committee formed to

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1 Poale Zion Confederation, 1917 ibid., pp. 88-9. The final section of the resolution contained the two common demands later to appear in the Labour Party's Memorandum: 'we demand full equality for the Jews in Russia, Rumania and of all other lands where they are under disabilities, and the abrogation of all restrictions against immigration into and settlement in Palestine, as well as in other countries.'

2 c.f. The Call (the newspaper of the British Socialist Party) 12 Oct. 1916.

3 The BSP, formed from the old SDF now (with the departure of Hyndman and his colleagues) took a strongly anti war line. It affiliated to the Labour Party in January 1916; thus for over four years the only Jewish Socialist group officially linked to the Labour Party - albeit tenuously - was an anti Zionist one. For the affiliation of the JSDO see The Call 7 Dec. 1916 and British Socialist Party, Annual Conference Report (London, 1917) p. 17.

4 See ibid., p. 13 for the resolution. See also The

protect Russian citizens in Britain drew support from the JSDO, the Jewish Socialist Party, the Jewish Socialist Territorialists and Poale Zion.<sup>1</sup>

There was no such unanimity on the question of Jewish nationalism, for the Social Democrats firmly rejected both Zionism and any scheme of territorial independence or national autonomy in Eastern Europe,<sup>2</sup> and the hostility between the various groups often threatened the success of their joint campaigns. The Jewish Workers' War Emergency Relief Fund, established in March 1915, was particularly bedevilled by disputes between nationalist and 'internationalist' groups.<sup>3</sup>

The outbreak of the Russian Revolution appeared to confirm the analysis of the anti Zionist Socialists and in the ensuing enthusiasm the campaigns of working class Zionists were naturally overshadowed. Seven thousand people filled the Assembly Rooms in Mile End Road to welcome the revolution<sup>4</sup> and in the months that followed many Jewish Socialists returned to Russia. Later, when faced with the choice of repatriation or enlistment in the Jewish Legion the vast majority of refugees chose the

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Committee of Delegates of the Russian Socialist Groups in London and the Jewish Social Democratic Organisation, The Rights of Aliens (London, 1917), The Labour Leader 1 Mar. 1917, The Call 15 Mar. 1917.

1 The Labour Leader 26 Apr. 1917.

2 BSP. op.cit., p. 12 for resolution on 'Oppressed Nationalities'. The Call 31 May 1917: Special Supplement of the JSDO, 'The Problem of Nationalities and Socialism'.

3 See the differing views of S.Himmelfarb (JSDO) and I.Pomerantz (Poale Zion) in The Jewish Workers' War Emergency Relief Fund Bulletin (London, 1917).

4 The Labour Leader 29 Mar. 1917. See also The Call 29 Mar. 1917 for BSP meeting.



former.<sup>1</sup>

Among those returning were a number of Poale Zion members.<sup>2</sup> Some doubtless wished to join their colleagues or families in Russia; others may have shed their Zionist convictions at the prospect of immediate social transformation. Those who remained faced a double challenge - to build up Zionist sympathy among the Jewish working class, and to persuade British Socialists that Zionism was not a bourgeois distraction from the common Socialist struggle. Zionists had nevertheless benefitted from the revival of interest in Jewish problems that had taken place during the war and one manifestation of this, the Labour Party's declaration, provided both a focus for the activity of Poale Zion and a target for sceptics and anti Zionists.

Opposition was naturally strongest within the BSP and its affiliate the JSDO. Its own statement of war aims ignored the question of Palestine<sup>3</sup> but there could be no doubt of its hostility towards Zionism. On 23 August The Call published an interview with Erlich, a member of the Russian Socialist Delegation<sup>4</sup> in which he attacked the Labour Party's plan as a threat to the liberty of East European Jews. This was duly noted by the Morning Post, and

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1 20,000 chose repatriation, a few hundred enlistment. Flapan, op.cit., p. 102 but see M. Gilbert, Exile and Return (London, 1978) p. 95 for Jabotinsky's recruiting campaign in East London. Membership figures for the Workers' Circle (a Jewish secular mutual aid organisation) illustrate the exodus at this time: 1915 831, 1916 800, 1917 734, 1918 511. Figures in The Workers' Circle Friendly Society, The Circle: Golden Jubilee 1909-59 (London, 1959).

2 Levenburg, op.cit., p. 128. 3 The Times 27 Aug. 1917.

4 A delegation appointed by the Russian Council of Workers and Soldiers Deputies arrived in London on 24 July, The Call 26 July 1917.

Poale Zion hastened to claim that Erlich, a leader of the Bund spoke only for himself.<sup>1</sup>

The view of the ILP were potentially of much greater importance. It remained uneasy at the prospect of the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire and, in a 'Note on the Labour Party's Memorandum', warned of the danger of allowing 'a natural abhorance of the misdeeds of the Turkish Government to lead us into a policy which would create new international problems of the gravest character, and would do injustice to the Moslem population'.<sup>2</sup>

In 1915, in its search for support among British Socialists, Poale Zion had applied for affiliation to the ILP. Discussions took place, but in January 1916 the National Administrative Council, having heard from the Bund that the Russian Social Democratic Party had repudiated Poale Zion, rejected the request.<sup>3</sup> By 1917 the attitude of the ILP, as a major component of the Labour Party, was causing concern not only to left wing Zionists; to Sir Mark Sykes Weizmann confided that 'the more I think of the documents which you read to me, the more I am convinced that they must be given to the LP if one desires to keep this party in order'.<sup>4</sup>

At this stage Poale Zion was having greater success

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1 The Call 23 Aug. 1917, Morning Post 25 Aug. 1917, JLC Oct. 1917.

2 The Labour Leader 30 Aug. 1917.

3 National Administrative Council Minutes, 22 Oct. 1915, 6 Jan. 1916. See also No. 6 (London and Southern Counties) Divisional Council Minutes, 28 Oct. 1915, 25 Nov. 1915.

4 C. Weizmann to M. Sykes, 22 Sept. 1918, LPCW, Vol. VII, p. 519. Stein suggests that 'LP' refers not to the Labour Party, but to the ILP.



within the Jewish Labour movement. In October a National Committee of Jewish Trade Unions was formed which mounted a campaign, with the Central Committee of Poale Zion 'to give proper expression to the claims of the Jewish proletariat'.<sup>1</sup> Poale Zion could now boast several prominent new recruits including Sam Dreen, a former follower of Rocker, and Morris Myer, editor of The Jewish Times, who, with the Secretary J. Pomerantz, was a leading figure in the new initiative.<sup>2</sup>

On 28 October, in an impressive indication of the interest that had been aroused among Jewish workers, Jewish Labour Conferences were held in London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool. Organised by Poale Zion, each conference passed unanimous resolutions of support and appreciation for the Labour Party's declaration.<sup>3</sup>

In December a large meeting of Jewish workers took place in Leeds to welcome the Balfour Declaration. Poale Zion leaders and representatives of Jewish Trade Unions were joined in addressing the gathering by two Liberal MPs<sup>4</sup> and by the Labour MP, W.C. Anderson. 'All speeches pointed out that the declaration of the English Government meets a just claim of the Jewish people supported not only by the English working masses but also by the International Labour Democracy'. The list of Labour Party and Trade Union

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1 JLC Oct. 1918. 2 Levenberg, op.cit., p. 128.

3 JLC ibid.

4 J.D.Kiley (Whitechapel) and J.C.Wedgwood (Newcastle under Lyme).

leaders who sent messages of support was presented as an indication of the growing support Zionists were receiving.<sup>1</sup>

Though such manifestations of popular support helped ensure the Labour Party's declaration remained unaltered in the final draft, they failed to overcome the hesitancy within the ILP. After the capture of Jerusalem, The Labour Leader noted sadly that 'the joy of the Zionist Jews is pathetic in its appeal to our memory of the old free England, the asylum of the oppressed political refugees of every kind. Where is that England now...?'<sup>2</sup>

The ILP continued to criticise the Memorandum's advocacy of the break up of the Turkish Empire. The Labour Leader argued that the Palestine paragraph fitted uneasily with the bold opening assertion of the right of self determination, and again warned of the danger of future conflict.<sup>3</sup> If some questioned the compatibility of Zionism with self determination in Palestine others lamented the intrusion of 'narrow nationalizm' in Jewish life; for Lansbury 'the fact that Jews are cosmopolitan is to me a great thing in their favour'.<sup>4</sup> But such criticisms did not prevent the final adoption of the Memorandum.

Jewish Labour rallies continued in the New Year. In January Manchester Poale Zion and the National Committee of

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1 These included Henderson, Purdy, Barnes, Roberts, Smillie, MacDonald, Snowden, Appleton, Shaw, Jowett, Thorn, Mann, Williams, King and Lansbury.

2 The Labour Leader 13 Dec. 1917.

3 Ibid., 20 Dec. 1917, 3 Mar. 1918. See also The Call 20 Dec. 1917.

4 ZR Dec. 1917. Lansbury did note that if it were possible to re-establish the Jewish people in Palestine, and if they really wished it, he would be in favour.



Jewish Trade Unions held a mass meeting, and a resolution 'while thanking the British Government' continued:

'we sincerely hope the Labour Party, the first political party to declare itself through its Executive in favour of a satisfactory national solution of the Jewish Question, will work towards the realisation of this policy, which should bring back the Jewish nation to their<sub>1</sub> homeland and will create a Jewish national life'.<sup>1</sup>

The growing vitality of the Labour Zionist movement<sup>2</sup> was evident at the Annual Conference of Poale Zion, which took place in Manchester at the end of April. Delegates came from London, Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Birmingham 'and many other towns'.<sup>3</sup> One source speaks of a tenfold increase in membership from the party's pre war total of only one hundred.<sup>4</sup>

Organisational changes emphasised the growth of the party, special committees being established for 'Palestine action', for trade union work, and for historical research. A propaganda office would be opened in Scotland, and a press bureau in England. The party also aimed to publish two monthly papers, in English and Yiddish.<sup>5</sup>

Conference rejected the idea of Palestine becoming a British crown land, as this would be 'annexationist in the fullest meaning of the word'. Rather the goal must be 'the

1 JLC 13 May 1918.

2 During this period the term increasingly replaced that of 'Socialist Zionist'.

3 JLC ibid.

4 Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem, 1971) p. 661.

5 JLC 5 July 1918 reported the press bureau established. In November Poale Zion published a pamphlet entitled Zionism and Socialism by Lewis Rifkind, and the Yiddish fortnightly Unser Veg (Our Road) appeared between May and December 1919.

creation of a free state for the Jewish people in Palestine' and the immediate removal of obstacles to Jewish colonisation. The Zionist Review found it necessary to deny foreign press reports that the policy amounted to a repudiation of British trusteeship, but nonetheless criticised the party for proposing that America might act as 'plenipotentiary' for the new state.<sup>1</sup> The party also decided to maintain its independence from the Zionist Federation and that 'the relations between the party and the English Labour Movement will be developed in the same spirit as before'.<sup>2</sup> Further demands included the legalisations of the Palestine Labour Fund and official representation on the Zionist Palestine Commission.

The Zionists further strengthened their position within the Jewish Labour movement with the formation the following month of the Jewish National Labour Council.<sup>3</sup> At a conference arranged by Poale Zion and the National Committee for Jewish Trade Unions there took place 'the unification of practically all the Anglo Jewish Labour Organisation'. Twenty two trade unions, political and co-operative societies from seven cities were represented.<sup>4</sup>

Poale Zion provided not only the Secretary, Treasurer and Vice Chairman for the new organisation, but also much of

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1 ZR Nov. 1918.

2 Messages of support came from MacDonald, Henderson, Barnes and Roberts.

3 JLC 5 July 1918. See Goodman, op.cit., pp. 46-7.

4 Delegates came from London, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Sheffield. Participating groups included Poale Zion, Socialist Territorialists, branches of the Workers' Circle, and unions representing tailors, shoemakers, hatters, bakers and cigarmakers, JLC op.cit. Goodman, op.cit., refers to 25 groups including 16 trade unions and 6 branches of Poale Zion.



its program, including support for the Jewish National Home. Zionists were naturally delighted with the new body which, they claimed, would 'practically lead the entire Jewish Labour Movement of the country'.<sup>1</sup>

These developments took place despite the continuing hostility of the JSDO. The annual conference of the BSP in April saw the adoption of a resolution condemning Zionism which 'by raising false hopes and unrealisable aspirations amongst the Jewish workers, obscures the real issue of their class interests and makes the struggle doubly hard'. The Balfour Declaration was simply a veiled attempt at annexation. Although 'in conformity with the general principles of internationalism' restriction on immigration and colonisation - 'of the Jews as of all peoples, in Palestine as in all countries' - should be removed, the fate of Palestine should be decided by its existing inhabitants.

J. Wolfe (Glasgow, Jewish Branch) in proposing the resolution noted that it was 'well known' that the Jewish question had been solved by the Russian Revolution. Curiously the seconder doubted whether racial hatred would entirely disappear in Russia, and urged Jews to seek autonomy in Palestine under the Sultan. For this he was suitably chastised by Fineberg and the resolution was carried unanimously.<sup>2</sup>

The dispute between Zionist and Social Democrats spilled over onto the pages of The Call. The JSDO

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<sup>1</sup> Goodman, ibid., notes that the 'JNLC was instrumental in bringing the great majority of organised Jewish workers into line with Poale Zion demands'. The Secretary of the new organisation was Morris Myer.

<sup>2</sup> BSP, op.cit., p. 14-15. The Call 3 Apr. 1918.

denounced Poale Zion as representing only themselves - 'a body as small in number as they are in influence on the Jewish labouring population'. Furthermore, the JSDO argued, 'they have never been authorised by the Jewish Trade Unions to speak on their behalf and if anything these Unions are indifferent and even hostile to Zionism'.<sup>1</sup>

The formation of the JNLC the following month appeared to give the lie to these charges and soon the JSDO came under considerable pressure from the British Government. In October the Secretary, together with the Secretary of the Manchester branch, were arrested and subsequently deported,<sup>2</sup> and a number of other prominent members voluntarily returned to Russia. Furthermore Poale Zion was now able to enlist the support of several leading Socialists from outside the Labour Party. Of these the most active was Tom Mann, soon to participate in the formation of the Communist Party, but who nevertheless spoke at many Poale Zion meetings and argued the case within the British Labour movement for Socialist Zionism.<sup>3</sup>

The tide was now running strongly against the Jewish Social Democrats.<sup>4</sup> Though many Jews were later found within the Communist Party, its creation in 1920 - largely

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1 Ibid., 22 June 1918. 2 Ibid., 31 Oct. 1917, 7 Nov. 1918.

3 See obituary in ZR 21 Mar. 1941: 'In the years after the Balfour Declaration he used to mention in his address in various parts of England the significance of the Zionist Socialist Movement. He kept in close touch with the Poale Zion office in Whitechapel and wrote for Socialist Zionism as part of his work on behalf of the working class'. See also The Labour Leader 9 May 1918, The Call 9 May 1918, ZR Feb. 1918 for Mann at the annual conference of Poale Zion.

4 One sign of this was the advertisement placed by Poale Zion in The Call (17. Oct. 1918) announcing a meeting to be addressed by Camille Huysmans, the Secretary of the International Socialist Bureau.



from the ranks of the BSP - nevertheless helped ensure that no longer would there be any significant Socialist anti Zionist Jewish organisation in Britain. Symbolic of the success of the Zionists was the fact that the new headquarters of Poale Zion had once belonged to the Bund.<sup>1</sup> Moreover many Jewish radicals and anarchists now shed their pre war indifference or hostility towards Zionism, and several took a 'prominent part in the Labour Zionist movement.

The growing strength of Poale Zion was underlined at the Annual Conference in April 1919 when it was announced that membership had again risen rapidly, and delegates pressed for the establishment of Youth Sections and branches for English speakers. The 45 delegates were addressed by Schlom Kaplansky, Secretary of the World Union of Poale Zion, who outlined the party's program in Palestine: nationalisation of land, railways, trams, telephones and water, a minimum wage, and the creation of co-operative banks and colonies.<sup>2</sup>

Conference agreed with its European colleagues that the use of Yiddish in Palestine should be encouraged - which Palestinian Poale Zionists opposed - and as a result drew criticism from The Zionist Review. The paper had been outraged by the decision to hold the conference during Passover week - an indication of a continuing radicalism within the party. 'A broader view', declared the paper, 'would have sacrificed the advantage (of a bank holiday

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1 M.Edelman, Ben Gurion: A Biography (London, 1964) p. 76.

2 ZR June 1919. Membership of the Zionist Federation was also rising rapidly, see Goodman, op.cit., p. 46.

weekend) in deference to the susceptibilities of the great body of Zionists'. It reminded Poale Zion that the Bund had indulged in a similar scorning of Jewish traditions.<sup>1</sup>

During the previous year a slow change had been evident in the opinions of the ILP, as manifested in The Labour Leader. In April 1918, from 'many long official and occasionally conflicting documents from various Jewish organisations (that) have reached our office', the paper chose to publish with its full support a statement from Poale Zion which repudiated the use of force in pursuance of its policy, stressing 'mutual benevolence and peaceful co-operation among peoples'.<sup>2</sup> Since the paper continued to manifest considerable suspicion of the Imperialist implications of Britain's support for Zionism, such statements from Socialist Zionists were particularly welcomed.<sup>3</sup>

In June 1918 the paper introduced its readers to the work of Poale Zion, urging them to combat anti semitism and, more ambiguously, 'to seek to learn from the Jewish Socialists what special part an actively pacifist Zion might play in the building of a new world after the war'.<sup>4</sup> But when the JSDO, perhaps prompted by this article, complained to the ILP, the National Administrative Council nonetheless resolved to reply that the party 'was not

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1 ZR May 1919.

2 The Labour Leader 25 Aug. 1918.

3 Ibid., 3 Oct. 1918. Following the Easter Day riots in 1920 the paper commented: 'the attempt is being made to build a new Zionist civilisation on a soil poisoned by the bitterness and hatred which war and conquest have sown. Is it to be wondered at that the attempt should meet with opposition from a conquered people? We do not believe that a new Jerusalem any more than a new Social order, can be built by the methods of war'. Ibid., 6 Apr. 1920.

4 Ibid., 23 June 1918.



definitely committed to all details of the Labour Party's Memorandum'.<sup>1</sup>

But in the growing polarisation between Socialists and Communists the ILP was clearly warming towards Poale Zion. In the General Election, which according to The Labour Leader gave 'evidence of the loyal labour sympathies of the Jews in this country',<sup>2</sup> Labour Zionists were active in campaigning for the Labour Party. As Jewish anti Zionism in labour circles came increasingly to be identified with extreme left wing parties, and as the divergence between the ILP and its left wing critics became more apparent, so the ILP came to look more favourably upon Labour Zionists.

Furthermore the renewal in the immediate post war months of Jewish persecution in Eastern Europe appears to have encouraged the reappraisal of Zionist aspirations. The Labour Leader, often at the instigation of Poale Zion, carried many reports of the pogroms, and in December published with evident approval a long article entitled 'Poalei Zionism: The Dream of Jewish Labour'.<sup>3</sup>

The following year Zionism received little attention in the paper and, though the affiliation of Poale Zion to the Labour Party was cordially welcomed<sup>4</sup> it was not until late in 1920 that it became fully evident that Poale Zion could now boast the full support of the ILP. In September the paper noted, albeit in retrospect, that Poale Zion had

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1 NAC Minutes 24-5 June 1918.

2 The Labour Leader 5 Dec. 1918.

3 Ibid. See also L. Tobias, Jewish Women in Palestine, the Socialist Review, Vol. 16, No. 88, Jan.-March 1919, pp. 61-7. The Journal was published by the ILP, and edited by Ramsey MacDonald. For reports of the pogroms see Ibid., 7 Nov. 1918, 5 June 1919.

4 Ibid. 11 Feb. 1920.

'taken the ILP line in the war', and declared that 'the British Labour movement is still far too insular, and we hope that the enthusiasm of Poale Zion may win its full sympathy. A British Labour Government should play a big part in helping to form a Socialist Commonwealth in Zion'.<sup>1</sup>

It was clear that the growing support for Zionism within the ILP stemmed from the conviction, fostered by Labour Zionists, that the creation of a Socialist state in Palestine demanded the support of Poale Zion. The Zionists were eager to stress that their goal was 'to save Palestine from Capitalism', and that 'Poale Zionism means to prevent a reproduction of the doomed European system in Palestine'.<sup>2</sup> In December, an interview by Fanner Brockway of Berl Katznelson, editor of the Palestine Labour paper Kuntres, was published under the headline 'Making Palestine a Socialist State'.<sup>3</sup>

Katznelson argued that the Palestine Labour movement sought the enfranchisement of the Arab working class through friendly co-operation and by altering them to their own exploitation. This explanation apparently satisfied The Labour Leader, which commented that only 'Capitalism' was endangered by 'those keen Trade Unionists, Socialist Pacifist Jews of Poale Zion who despise the gains of

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1 Ibid. 9 Sept. 1920. Ibid. 5 Dec. 1918.

3 Ibid. 23 Dec. 1920. Brockway has mentioned a statement he wrote for the ILP after the war on the subject of Palestine, but it is not clear to what he refers, see F. Brockway, Towards Tomorrow (London, 1977) p. 175.



oppression and work for genuine self determination and freedom on International Socialist lines'. Answering a critic from within the Labour Party the paper unequivocally declared that 'Poale Zion has hard and difficult work before it but we believe it to be one of the highest in the world today, and destined to play no small part in the establishment of a new world order'.<sup>1</sup>

The final public identification of the ILP with the aims of Poale Zion came at the Zionists' annual conference in December, at which a powerful delegation led by R. C. Wallhead (Chairman), J. Hudson (National Organiser) and Mrs. Bruce Glazier (editor of The Labour Leader) attended 'to express the identification of the British working class as a whole with the aims of Jewish Labour'.<sup>2</sup>

'On Monday evening a banquet was held in the Maccebean Hall, when the Conference was greeted in the name of the ILP by the Party's National Chairman, Mr. R. C. Wallhead, who remarked on the desire of the Party to aid all nations, whether large or small, in their endeavour to rid themselves of the fetters of capitalism and establish a Socialist Commonwealth.

Dr. Kaplansky, rising to reply, said that there existed a very real unity of identity - the outlook of both parties - Socialistically and Internationally. Special responsibility was laid on the ILP, the most idealistic of all Socialist parties, since Great Britain possessed the Mandate over the future Jewish homeland. Jewish Socialists were determined to construct in Palestine a Socialist Commonwealth, but such was only possible through the aid of the whole of the International Proletariat'.<sup>3</sup>

By December 1920 Poale Zion had achieved a double triumph. In the excitement generated by the Balfour

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1 The Labour Leader 30 Dec. 1920.

2 Ibid. 23 Dec. 1920, 30 Dec. 1920, ZR Jan. 1921, JLC Jan. 1921. See Zionist Bulletin 16 June 1920 for a conference in London earlier that year.

3 The Labour Leader 30 Dec. 1920.

Declaration and the conquest of Palestine the support of much of the Jewish Labour movement had been successfully mobilised, despite the opposition of some Jewish Socialists. The influence of Poale Zion had increased markedly,<sup>1</sup> and support for Zionism was now a significant factor among the Jewish working class.

Furthermore the case for Socialist Zionism had been successfully argued within the ILP, and for many years to come left wing criticism of Zionism was to emanate almost entirely from the Communist Party. These two factors help account for the striking success of Poale Zion within the Labour Party in the years after 1918.

#### D. Poale Zion and the Labour Party

The inaugural program of the Jewish National Labour Council, whose formation had been so conspicuous a triumph for the Zionists, had included a call 'to come into closer relationship with the British Labour Party and whenever possible call into life a Jewish section of the British Labour Party which should embrace all Jewish Labour Organisations'.<sup>2</sup> At the General Election in November the Council urged Jewish workers to vote for the Labour Party, one reason given being the party's declaration on Palestine.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless over the next two years formal

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1 For instance within the Workers' Circle organisation. In 1922 a branch (No. 15) was set up in London under Poale Zion control. Disagreements between Zionists and Communists took early root within the Circle; Branch 9 became Communist controlled after the war, breaking away from Branch 1. See Workers' Circle Friendly Society, op.cit., The Circle (The organ of the Workers' Circle) Oct. 1935.

2 JLC 5 July 1918.

3 Manifesto 'To the Jewish Electors, Men and Women of Great Britain' in Levenberg & Podro (eds.), op.cit., p. 155-6. See also the editorial of The Jewish Times (edited by Morris Myer) reprinted in The Labour Leader 5 Dec. 1918.



links with the Labour Party were developed not by the JNLC, but by its smaller more exclusive godparent, Poale Zion.

Links between the Labour Party and Poale Zion were initially furthered, not by developments in Palestine, but as a consequence of the wave of pogroms in Poland and elsewhere, which afflicted East European Jews at the close of the First World War. One of the first actions of the JNLC had been to protest to the Labour Party, and in July a letter from the Secretary, Morris Myer, was considered by the Policy and Program Sub Committee.<sup>1</sup> In November, as part of a larger campaign within the Socialist International, the Poale Zion Confederation made contact with the Labour Party to seek assistance.<sup>2</sup>

In October 1919 a report from the Central Committee of Poale Zion noted that much of the party's efforts during the previous year had been concerned with mobilising support against the persecutions. This had involved the organisation of a large scale Pogrom Protest Demonstration,<sup>3</sup> and on 4 June the Executive Committee of the Labour Party considered a report from Poale Zion. The following day a request was discussed which asked that a delegate might address the annual conference about the persistence of pogroms in Poland.<sup>4</sup>

Though agreeing that Poale Zion might circulate documents at the Conference the Executive Committee decided to reject the Zionists' application. Nonetheless such

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1 Policy and Program Sub Committee Minutes, 24 July 1918.

2 Zionist Bulletin 20 Nov. 1918.

3 JLC 1 Jan. 1920.      4 EC 4 June 1919.

interventions may well have prompted the moving of an emergency resolution, unanimously adopted without discussion, which protested against the atrocities and called for the intervention of the allied sponsors of the Polish Government.<sup>1</sup>

Later that year Poale Zion welcomed colleagues from abroad, who had participated in the first post war conference of the World Union. Whilst in London the delegates, representing Achduth Haavodah<sup>2</sup> and the American Poale Zion, made contact with the Labour Party. For Zionists the pogroms came as further confirmation of the urgent need to develop the National Home. Action against the persecutions and the promotion of colonisation in Palestine were seen as natural concomitants, and to Labour Party spokesmen the links between the two were continually stressed.

On 25 October a delegation met Arthur Henderson, Secretary of the Labour Party, and emphasised both the difficulties placed in the way of Jewish immigration and the non-departure of the Commission, agreed upon by the Lucerne Conference, which was due to investigate the pogroms.<sup>3</sup> Two days later a deputation raised the same points at a meeting with the Advisory Committee on Inter-

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1 Labour Party Annual Conference Report (henceforth LPACR) 1919, p. 138.

2 The party had been formed in 1919, uniting most Palestine Labour Zionist groups. One of the delegates was Berl Katznelson, a leading theoretician of the new party.

3 JLC Jan. 1920. The delegates were Efraim Blumenfield and Nahman Syrkin.



national Affairs,<sup>1</sup> which resolved to draw the attention of the Executive to the fact that the Commission had not yet departed, though the pogroms continued, and also of the need to investigate the restrictions on Jewish immigration.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst in London the delegation was able to conduct some useful propagandising, and met a number of Labour leaders.<sup>3</sup> These links were strengthened the following year with the establishment by the Poale Zion Confederation of a political bureau in London, under the direction of Kaplansky. He was assisted by David Ben Gurion, representing Achduth Haavodah, who arrived in London in the Spring with the aim of developing contacts with the Labour Party.<sup>4</sup> He and his colleagues evidently had considerable success.

When the Organisation Sub Committee of the Labour Party met on 5 February 1920 one item on the agenda was a request from Poale Zion for affiliation.<sup>5</sup> For the Zionists this was a logical step to take, building on existing links and

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1 The Advisory Committee had been set up in March 1918, with Leonard Woolf as Secretary, to consist of party members and sympathetic experts who would submit memoranda and recommendations to the Executive. On this occasion Norman Angell, Arnold Toynbee, Palme Dutt, G.D.H.Cole, Haden Guest and Woolf were present.

2 With this prompting the party contacted Huysmans, and on 12 November the Executive Committee heard that the Commission was being formed, LP/IAC/1/81 24 Nov. 1919, JLC Jan 1920, EC 12 Nov. 1919. For the Commission see LPACR 1920, p. 197, Zionist Bulletin 19 Aug. 1919.

3 A particularly warm tribute was paid by Robert Williams, General Secretary of the National Federation of Transport Workers, see JLC ibid.

4 M.Bar Zohar, Ben Gurion: A Biography (London, 1973) p. 43. Kaplansky had helped form the World Union of Poale Zion and had been Secretary of the Jewish National Fund Head Office in The Hague between 1913 and 1919.

5 Organisation Sub Committee Minutes 5 Feb. 1920.

the growing sympathy for Zionist ideas, and stimulated no doubt by the failure of their representatives to gain a hearing at the previous annual conference.

There was little likelihood that the party would follow the decision of the ILP five years before and reject the request. Nevertheless the decision of the Sub Committee to recommend affiliation was not unanimous, Tom Shaw registering his opposition.<sup>1</sup> His decision may have been influenced by his visit to Russia earlier that year - though his two colleagues<sup>2</sup> on the Labour Party delegation did not alter their pro Zionist views - or by his experiences as the party's representative on the Socialist Commission sent to investigate the pogroms.<sup>3</sup> But his opposition - for whatever reason - to the affiliation of Poale Zion was to no avail, and on 9 February the Executive Committee approved the recommendation without comment.<sup>4</sup> Poale Zion could now look forward to wider and more formalised consideration of their views within the party, and a hearing at Conference.

Later that year, evidently wishing to consolidate their position still further, Poale Zion applied for direct representation on the International Advisory Committee. On 10 September the Committee considered 'the proposed appointment of Mr. Kaplansky, or some other member of the Poale Zion Confederation',<sup>5</sup> but though in the case of other

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1 On the Sub Committee were Mrs. C. Crane (Chairman), Tom Shaw, J. Wignall, Sidney Webb, W. Harris, Mrs. Snowden, Dr. Ethel Bentham, J. S. Middleton and Egerton P. Wake.

2 Robert Williams and Ethel Snowden.

3 LPACR 1920, p. 4.      4 EC 9 Feb. 1920.

5 See agenda LP/IAC/1/107.



applicants it resolved to make further enquiries, it was firm in its decision not to recommend Kaplansky as a member<sup>1</sup>

This was the first clear attempt within the Labour Party to limit Zionist influence. Attendance at the meeting was higher than usual<sup>2</sup> and included at least three members we may assume opposed Kaplansky's membership: E.N. Bennett and Captain Stokes, both later known as 'pro Arabs' and the Communist Palme Dutt. Though the decision was only a minor setback for Poale Zion, non representation on the Committee was to be a recurring irritation throughout the Mandate period, and was one reason why the Advisory Committee was consistently to manifest less sympathy for Zionist aspirations than its parent body, the NEC.

In all other respects Poale Zion must have viewed their new links with the Labour Party with considerable satisfaction. A resolution passed at their annual conference in December indicated the quid pro quo Poale Zion was hoping to achieve:

'The Conference calls upon the various branches to affiliate with their local Labour Parties and to take an active part in their work, particularly in the Parliamentary and Municipal elections. The Conference expects that the British Labour Party will continue as hitherto to support, in accordance with its program of international solidarity, the Jewish working class in its campaigns, particularly for the establishment of a Jewish Socialist Labour Palestine'.<sup>3</sup>

To cement the new relationship the Executive of the Labour Party sent the Chairman, A.G. Cameron, to the

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1 LP/IAC/108 10 Sept. 1920.

2 At the meeting were Cole, Bevin, Lawrence, Burns, Scurr, Presbury, Dutt, Haden-Guest, Bennett, Stokes and Woolf.

3 JLC Jan. 1921.

Conference. In a 'striking address', he pledged the 'whole hearted support of the Labour Party to Jewish national aspirations and the Poale Zion policy'.<sup>1</sup> Such support had already been manifested earlier in the year.

In April 1920 Allied leaders had met in San Remo, and one question discussed was the Palestine Mandate.<sup>2</sup> Zionist leaders were particularly concerned lest the persistence of French claims in the area might weaken British resolve to adopt the Mandate, and engaged in energetic lobbying. On 20 April the Executive Committee heard an appeal from Poale Zion and the English Zionist Federation, and as a result resolved to reaffirm its policy of 'Palestine becoming a Jewish Homeland'.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly a telegram, over the names of the Chairmen and Secretaries of the EC, the TUC and the PLP, was sent to the Prime Minister, and copies distributed to the press. The telegram reminded the Prime Minister of the Labour Party's declaration on Palestine, and concluded:

'The National Committees desire to associate themselves with the many similar representations made to the Government urging the settlement of this question with the utmost despatch both in the interests of Palestine itself as well as in the interests of the Jewish people'.<sup>4</sup>

For Lloyd George the telegram probably represented yet another ponderous kick by the Labour movement against an open door. The pages of The Zionist Review nevertheless

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1 Ibid., and see EC 15 Dec. 1920.

2 H. Sachar, The Emergency of the Middle East 1914-24 (New York, 1969) pp. 260 ff.

3 EC 20 Apr. 1920.

4 Telegram in EC minutes. (Curiously ten years later Gillies assured Zionist Revisionists that 'no official appeal was made to San Remo' LP/WG/11(b) 26 May 1932). Many Labour MPs signed a petition organised by the Zionist Federation urging the Government to accept the Mandate, see Zionist Bulletin 30 Apr. 1920.



reveal the considerable gratitude of the Zionists for the message, and also indicate the realisation among non Socialist Zionists that, in their search for support, the Labour Party remained a useful ally.

The Executive of the Zionist Federation had decided on 13 April that prompt action was necessary,<sup>1</sup> and the following day established a Political Committee to co-ordinate action. At one of its first meetings it decided to approach the Labour Party, which was found 'ready and willing'. Poale Zion, though not affiliated to the Federation, was fully involved, and The Zionist Review acknowledged that 'in this connection a word of appreciation is due to J. L. Cohen<sup>2</sup> and J. Pomerantz, Secretary of Poale Zion. 'The Labour leaders', the paper solemnly declared, 'have stood by us in our crisis and have earned our gratitude'.

The following month Cohen described the event more flamboyantly:

'every section of the Labour Party in this country was mobilised by experienced and skillful Labour leaders to flash across to San Remo the unshakable decision of Labour to hold the Government to their promise'.<sup>3</sup>

Poale Zion backed up their appeal with a statement to the Executive Committee and a memorandum to the Advisory Committee, which as a result primed C. Edwards to ask in the House whether 'the pledge to restore Palestine to the

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1 ZR June 1920.

2 Cohen, now a member of Poale Zion, had edited The Zionist Banner before the war, and was a friend of Weizmann.

3 ZR July 1920. For the Memorandum Poale Zion submitted to the Executive Committee, which also dealt with the recent disorders in Jerusalem, see Zionist Bulletin 5 May 1920.

Jewish nation' had been agreed to, and whether Britain was to become the Mandatory power.<sup>1</sup>

A further intervention was made by Poale Zion in November. A Memorandum, written by Ben Gurion, was submitted to Henderson and the Advisory Committee, arguing for the largest possible deliniation of the new territory: 'the frontiers must therefore be regarded...exclusively from the standpoint of the future of the Jewish people in Palestine'.<sup>2</sup> On this occasion Poale Zion was too late. The Advisory Committee reported that the question had been settled, though it prompted a further question to make certain.<sup>3</sup>

During 1920 Poale Zion also participated for the first time in a Labour Party Conference. A resolution urging the Government to remove restrictions on Jewish immigration and to allow 'immediate entry to the large number of suffering Jews in Eastern Europe anxiously waiting to settle in Palestine' was proposed by Pomerantz of Poale Zion, and seconded by Oscar Tobin of Stepney Central Labour Party.<sup>4</sup> On the recommendation of the Standing Orders Committee the resolution was passed unanimously without discussion.

In May 1921 violence broke out in Jaffa, and in a

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1 LP/IAC/1/100 18 June 1920, HC Deb Vol. 128 c.392 27 June 1920.

2 Memorandum 'On the Boundaries of Palestine' (LP/IAC/2/169) and meeting LP/IAC/1/129 15 Dec. 1920. See D. Ben Gurion My Talks With Arab Leaders (Jerusalem, 1972) p. 9.

3 HC Deb Vol. 136 c. 1290 20 Dec. 1920.

4 LPACR 1920, p. 177. Poale Zion had affiliated with a membership of 3,000 see ibid., p. 92. Their resolution appeared under the heading of "Palestine for the Jews".



number of other towns. In Britain Poale Zion responded by publishing a pamphlet which stressed the weakness and bias of the Palestine administration and the culpability of the Arab leaders: 'there is no doubt at all that this was a carefully prepared and formed part of a definite plan for a general attack on the Jews in Jaffa and the colonies'.<sup>1</sup>

The Memorandum concluded with an appeal to the Labour Party, and was probably printed with an eye to the Annual Conference, which took place at the end of June. Kaplansky represented Poale Zion and was able to move a long resolution. While noting the assumption by Britain of the Mandate 'with the object of assuring the development of a Jewish Autonomous Commonwealth' it condemned the constricting boundaries and the separation of Transjordan. It also demanded, for both Jews and Arabs 'full autonomy, democratically organised, in their respective internal affairs'.

For the first time a Zionist was able to address Conference. Kaplansky expounded the Zionist theory of the necessity of a Jewish Homeland. Though stressing Jewish sensitivity to the rights of self determination of Palestinian Arabs he argued that Palestine could become a centre for 'national and social regeneration for millions of Jews'. Kaplansky emphasised that the support of the British Labour movement, 'rightly listened to with great confidence in the Orient', was of the greatest importance. There was no need, he said 'to think in terms of generations

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<sup>1</sup> From a memorandum on the troubles from Achduth Haavodah published in Jewish Socialist Labour Party, Poale Zion Palestine and Jewish Labour: Two Documents (London, 1921). (The second was the Memorandum of the Poale Zion Confederation on the Mandate).

to see an autonomous Jewish Society in Palestine under the protection and guidance of British Labour'.<sup>1</sup> The Zionists had been able to persuade Neil MacLean.<sup>2</sup> a prominent Clydeside ILP MP, to second the motion and once again, when the resolution was put to Conference, it was carried unanimously.

After the 1921 Conference contacts at the higher levels between Poale Zion and the Labour Party declined. In Palestine the 1920's were years of slow and unspectacular Jewish colonisation, and though many friendships and contacts between Zionists and Labour Party members developed there was an absence of specific issues on which Zionists sought to enlist the aid of the Labour Party.

Similarly, though Jewish Labour had shown, and would show again, that in times of high excitement or crisis support for Zionism was considerable, in years of quiet progress enthusiasm waned. As early as 1920 the East London Zionist Association reported that, although membership remained at around 500, few would take part in propaganda work.<sup>3</sup> Poale Zion activity decreased, and membership showed a steady decline.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless the position of Poale Zion within the

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1 LPACR 1921, pp. 198-9. The local newspaper, the Sussex Daily News, commented 'he apologised for his 'very imperfect' English, but it was good, and his argument, although somewhat too academic for the Conference, was excellently expressed' - clipping in EC minutes.

2 See also the question asked by MacLean in the Commons, which was clearly inspired by the Zionists, HC Deb Vol. 142 c.1069-70, 1 June 1921.

3 ZR March 1920.

4 2,000 (1922), 1,740 (1925), 980 (1926), 600 (1927)  
Source: LPACR.



Labour Party had been secured. Though Zionism might have its critics within the party, Poale Zion could speak with the authority of a group both Zionist and Socialist, and one with intimate links with Palestinian Jewish Labour organisations. As the only group within the Labour Party whose primary interest was Palestine it was accepted as the chief political spokesman on all questions affecting that country.

Labour Party leaders were now becoming accustomed to campaigning with Labour Zionists, speaking at or sending messages to their gatherings, and defending their views in public. Labour Zionists in their turn were quick to express their gratitude and stress that the support of the Labour Party was the utmost significance. From a vague affirmation of the rights of Jewish colonisation by 1921 a resolution had referred to a 'Jewish Autonomous Commonwealth', and the resolution had typically met with no opposition. As significant as the content of resolutions and messages was the fact that there was already developing, thanks largely to the efforts of Poale Zion, a history of pledges affirming support for Zionism which would provide the basis for the party's attitude in later years.

#### E. The Labour Party and Palestine in the 1920s

Within the House of Commons the Labour Party's developing sympathy for Zionism did not find expression until 1920, the year of the affiliation of Poale Zion. The first MP to raise the subject was C.H. Stitch, who asked in March about alleged Bedouin attacks in Jewish colonies.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> HC Deb. Vol. 127 c. 1048-9, 30 Mar. 1920.

The following month Ben Spoor enquired about the 'lack of sympathy on the part of the British military establishment in Palestine with the Government's declared policy of establishing a Jewish National Home', whilst William Lunn echoed the demand of Labour Zionists that representatives of Jewish Labour organisations should be included in the new administration.<sup>1</sup>

Such questions, though few in number, did indicate that in general Labour MPs had sympathy with Zionist endeavors in Palestine. Nevertheless the enthusiastic claim later made by J. L. Cohen that Labour members had 'pelted the Government with questions on the Jerusalem riots, and the imprisonment of Jabotinsky'<sup>2</sup> was a considerable exaggeration. That year, of the half dozen questions concerned in any way with Palestine asked by orthodox Labour MPs, two were prompted in the Advisory Committee and two others came from indefatigable questioners. But there was one MP, until the previous year a Liberal but now theoretically in receipt of the Labour whip, who did 'pelt' the Government with questions, as he was to do for the rest of his life. This was the MP for Newcastle under Lyme, Josiah Wedgwood.

Wedgwood was a member of the famous pottery family. He was considered a radical, and was an enthusiastic 'progressive' Imperialist.<sup>3</sup> He was also a passionate supporter of Zionism. Having served at Gallipoli alongside

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1 HC Deb. Vol. 128 c. 1397-1400, 29 Apr. 1920, Vol. 130 c.898, 14 June 1920.

2 ZR July 1920.

3 See C.V.Wedgwood, The Last of the Radicals (London, 1951), J.Wedgwood Memoirs of a Fighting Life (London, 1941) passim.



the Zionist Mule Corps he later joined Weizmann's circle of friends who furthered the cause of Zionism within British political life.<sup>1</sup> In 1920 from the Labour benches he asked a variety of critical questions on Palestine - twice the number asked by his new colleagues.<sup>2</sup>

Wedgwood was only one of a number of politicians with Zionist sympathies, hitherto Liberals, whose recruitment to the Labour Party during this period significantly augmented pro Zionist opinion within their new party. Among their number - including Norman Angell, Pethick Lawrence and Philip Noel Baker - were several former Liberal MPs, such as Commander Kenworthy, Dr. Spero and C. L'Estrange Malone.<sup>3</sup> Many such erstwhile Liberals, whose sympathies were often with the humanitarian and regenerative features of the Zionist philosophy, were prominent within the party's Advisory Committees. Although the Liberal influx included two strong opponents of Zionism - E. N. Bennett and T. S. B. Williams - pro Zionist sympathy was dominant within the group.

If the Liberal influx was one reason for the strengthening of Zionist sentiment within the party during the 1920s equally important was the development of contacts between prominent Labour politicians and Palestine Labour Zionists.

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1 Meinerzhagen, though himself a committed Zionist, had little patience with Wedgwood's approach, see eg. R. Meinerzhagen, Middle East Diary (London, 1959) pp. 99, 138. Wedgwood himself noted that 'The Labour Leader was by no means so pleased with my Zionist views on Palestine', J. Wedgwood, op.cit., p. 177.

2 On the Jerusalem riots see HC Deb. Vol. 127 c.1834, Vol. 228 c.394, 841, 1021 and concerning Jabotinsky Vol. 128 c.1022, 1272, Vol. 131 c.223, and many others on different aspects.

3 See especially C. Cline, Recruits to Labour (New York, 1963) pp. 149-78. The most prominent Zionist defection from the Liberal Party - many years later - was that of Barnett Janner.

Particularly significant were the visits to Palestine made by party members. Such visits were frequent during the 1930s, but began in the previous decade. Josiah Wedgwood was naturally an early visitor<sup>1</sup> and so, in 1922, was the party leader Ramsey MacDonald.<sup>2</sup> Accounts of the experiences were published in The Labour Leader and Forward; Poale Zion subsequently printed a special pamphlet by MacDonald entitled 'A Socialist in Palestine'.<sup>3</sup>

MacDonald evidently enjoyed his trip. Arriving in Nazareth he was moved to write that 'after far wanderings I seem to have come home. I feel as familiar with this place as I do with the beautiful hills<sup>of</sup> Lossiemouth'. The Dome of the Rock was, for MacDonald, beyond compare, and the deeds of the Zionists impressed him little less: 'they will fail, the man of practical intelligence will say. I hope he is wrong, but if they do and are scattered they will have clothed the northern sides of Mount Gilboa, made rich the waste lands at its fell, and cheered and refreshed everyone who will come into contact with their work. They are believers'.<sup>4</sup> Such was his enthusiasm that to Norman Bentwich he subsequently ascribed his election to Parliament later that year as in no small part due to the picture he presented to his Welsh constituents of

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1 New Judea 12 Nov. 1926, 26 Nov. 1926, 24 Dec. 1926. See also C.Wedgwood, op.cit., p. 186, J.Wedgwood, op.cit., p. 194.

2 The visit is not mentioned in David Marquand's lengthy biography of MacDonald, nor is his role in the crisis of 1929-31.

3 Forward 11 & 18 Mar. 1922, published in R.MacDonald, Wanderings and Excursions (London, 1925) pp. 185-9, Jewish Socialist Labour Party, Poale Zion, A Socialist in Palestine (London, 1922) The Labour Leader 23 Feb. 1922, 6 Apr. 1922, 29 April 1922. MacDonald also contributed articles to the paper of the Zionist Organisation of America, see New Palestine 5 Apr. 1922, 23 Aug. 1922, 24 Jan. 1924.



developments in Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

MacDonald had been entertained by Jewish Socialists, whom he had assured that 'the British worker will be interested in Palestine when he knows that from it he can learn how land is nationalised'.<sup>2</sup> He advised the Histradut<sup>3</sup> that a description of actual achievements was the way to win the support of British Labour.<sup>4</sup>

This only confirmed Labour Zionists in their determination to propagandise their work and to make full use of the visits of British Labour representatives. The following year Achduth Haavodah sent Ben Gurion to Egypt to invite the Labour MPs on the Parliamentary Egyptian Committee to visit Palestine; though forced to decline, the MPs questioned Ben Gurion closely on Labour activity in Palestine.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the decade visitors from the British Labour Movement were welcomed by Labour Zionists and proudly shown the evidence of Zionist achievement. A typical reaction was that of R. H. Tawney who on his return 'characterised the success of Jewish Labour in Palestine as very remarkable' and gave his support to

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4 MacDonald, op.cit., p. 189.

1 N. Bentwich, A Wanderer Between Two Worlds (London, 1941) pp. 125-6.

2 ER April 1922.

3 'The General Federation of Jewish Labour in Palestine' was the Palestinian Jewish Trade Union organisation, formed in 1920.

4 ZR ibid.

5 JLC Dec. 1922.

Zionist ambitions.<sup>1</sup>

Such contacts were strengthened by the participation of Palestine Labour Zionists in a variety of international Labour and Socialist organisations<sup>2</sup> and by the presence in Britain of Palestinian Socialists. Some, like Kaplansky and Ben Gurion, were official Zionist representatives, whilst many others came as visitors or students. A surprisingly large number of Palestinian Jews, including Maurice Shertok and David Ha Cohen studied at the London School of Economics.<sup>3</sup>

Zionist influence, when allied with the natural sympathy within the Labour Party, was sufficient to parry the first faltering interventions of Palestinian Arab representatives. In 1922 a delegation visited London as part of its campaign successfully requested an interview with the Advisory Committee.<sup>4</sup> In 1920 the Zionist Federation, concerned lest the Committee be over anxious about the position of the Arab population had submitted a memorandum on the subject.<sup>5</sup> Now, through William Gillies,

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1 At a meeting organised by Poale Zion and Chaired by Herbert Morrison, see New Judea May 1929. A particularly enthusiastic visitor was Ethel Snowden, see G. Meir, My Life (London, 1975) p. 73-4, and F. Kische, Palestine Diary (London, 1938) p. 49. See also eg New Judea 26 Sept. 1924 for the visit of three Labour MPs and Kische, op.cit., pp. 286-7, 336-7, for the visits in 1930 of Daniel Hopkin and Richard Denman.

2 See below pp. 64-74.

3 H. Dalton, Call Back Yesterday (London, 1953) pp. 111-2. Dalton was then an economics lecturer at the School.

4 LP/IAC/1/156 18 Jan. 1922. There is no record of the meeting, but see the documents brought by the delegation in LP/IAC/2/234.

5 'The Arab Population of Palestine: Memorandum submitted by the Zionist Organisation, 5 August 1920' LP/IAC/2/157.



the Secretary of the International Department, the Secretary of the Zionist Federation heard of the Arabs' request and accordingly requested Woolf's help in ensuring that 'should the Arabs present their case...the Zionist Organisation is heard in reply otherwise it is feared the Committee will obtain a very imperfect picture of the situation'.<sup>1</sup>

The request was considered on the day the Committee met the Arab delegation and a fortnight later a group of senior Zionists were received.<sup>2</sup> From subsequent communications it is clear that the main charge levelled by the Arabs, which the Zionists were very concerned to deny, was that eviction of Arab tenants had been caused by Jewish land purchase in the Esdraelon Valley. This the Zionists hotly contested and later supplied evidence to refute the charges.<sup>3</sup>

Later that year the Labour Party was called upon for the first time unequivocally to demonstrate its sympathies in Parliament. Considerable anti Zionist sympathy had been mobilised in Conservative circles, which focused on the proposed 'Rutenberg Concession'.<sup>4</sup> In June a motion opposing the concession had been passed by the House of Lords, and the following month the Commons debated the issue.

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1 L. Stein to L.Woolf, 12 Jan. 1922, LP/IAC/2/231.

2 Weizmann, Dr. & Mrs. Eder, Stein, Shertok and Kaplansky, see LP/IAC/1/157 1 Jan. 1922. Dr. Eder, a member of the Executive of the Zionist Organisation, had as a non Zionist before the war been a member of the ILP and the Fabian Society, and had helped found the London Labour Party, see J.B.Hobman, 'An Introductory Sketch' in J.B.Hobman (ed.) David Eder: Memoirs of a Modern Pioneer (London, 1945) p.13.

3 L.Stein to L.Woolf 12 Jan. 1922, LP/IAC/2/237.

4 Gilbert, op.cit., pp. 141-6. A monopoly had been

The Labour Party spokesman was Morgan Jones. He affirmed his belief in the determination of both sides 'to do all they can to live in peace, and to agree together', and ascribed the agitation in the press to the jealousy of British firms to the proposed concession. Though he admitted to a slight misgiving about the monopolistic aspects of the arrangement he ended by noting that 'on sentimental grounds, as well as on the grounds of good statemanship good policy and good politics, I entirely support the mandate in Palestine and, incidentally, this Rutenberg concession'.<sup>1</sup> When the House divided 41 MPs assisted the Government in gaining an overwhelming victory over its critics.

During his speech Jones poured scorn on Conservatives who, though doughty opponents on Indian and Egyptian independence, now appeared to discover 'that there is such a principle in the world as self determination'.<sup>2</sup> This was a potentially dangerous line of attack for a number of critics, including some within the party, had begun to question the compatability of the commitment to Zionism

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granted to the Zionists to develop the electrical resources of Palestine, based on Pinhas Rutenberg's scheme to harness the waters of the country. For various meetings of MPs see The Times 21 & 22 Apr. 1920 (the formation of a pro Zionist committee), 11 Apr. 1922 (meetings with the Arab Delegation), 30 Apr. 1922 (meeting with the High Commissioner).

1 HC Deb. Vol. 156 c.327, 4 July 1922. Jones remained a strong supporter of Zionism till his death, see ZR 4 May 1939. Later that year a message from Arthur Henderson was published which affirmed the Labour Party's support for the Palestine Mandate, see Levenberg & Podro (eds.) op.cit., p. 12.

2 HC ibid, c.320-1.



with an overall policy of support for self determination.

Some official policy statements blandly ignored potential contradictions,<sup>1</sup> others only served to highlight a certain ambiguity. In 1921 Tom Shaw declared that:

'So far as the party to which I belong is concerned, we want to be out of Mesopotamia at the earliest moment. So far as Palestine is concerned we desire, without any excuse for doing otherwise that we should leave the management of Palestine to the people who live in it. That is our desire, with regard both to Palestine and Mesopotamia'.<sup>2</sup>

Shaw's vague opposition to Zionism, evident in his disagreement with the affiliation of Poale Zion, was never clearly stated. But some made their hostility plain. In December 1920 a correspondent to The Labour Leader attacked the Mandate as a flagrant breach of the principle of self determination for which the party stood. 'The Mandate', he believed 'appears to be one of the maddest results of that strange blend of Imperialism and non conformist conscience'. To express support for Poale Zion, he felt, would be 'simply to play a sordid game of the Jingoists and Capitalists who framed the Treaties of Versailles and Servres'.<sup>3</sup>

The writer was Ernest Bennett, a former Liberal MP, who

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1 For instance A.Henderson, The Aims of Labour (London, 1917): 'There will have to be certain restorations and reconstitutions. Such necessary changes will be covered by the application of the principle of the right of self determination. The question of...Palestine (is) capable of being settled on this basis'.

2 HC Deb. Vol. 144 c.1543, 14 July 1921.

3 The Labour Leader 30 Dec. 1920.

had travelled widely in the Middle East and had even worked for a time as a press censor in the Ottoman army. In 1916 he had joined the ILP and had fought unsuccessfully in subsequent elections. In 1920 he joined the International Advisory Committee and on a number of occasions raised the question of Palestine. Early in 1923 the Committee discussed a letter from Bennett on the subject, and also one from Colonel T.S.B. Williams, an ex Indian Army doctor, and, like Bennett, an unsuccessful Parliamentary candidate.

Williams had been moved to write to the Fabian Society by the pro Zionist declaration of Josiah Wedgwood. He too considered the Palestine Mandate a serious mistake which 'if persisted in will inevitably lead the Labour Party into serious difficulties'. He therefore urged the Fabian Society and the Advisory Committee to take action.<sup>1</sup>

Williams characterised the Mandate policy as 'one designed to control Palestine in the interests of the Jews, as long as they are in a minority; when they reach a majority control is to be relaxed and Palestine will be run as an independent state'. The Labour Party was thus acting in contradiction to its own fundamental principles by supporting a policy of running Palestine in the interests of a privileged minority. He protested strongly against the argument that Britain was aiding the Arabs by raising their standard of living, that 'we think we know better for them than they do themselves'. Moreover the Jews who desired to 'return' to Palestine had in most cases no direct

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<sup>1</sup> Copy of letter from Lt.Col.T.S.B.Williams dated 17 Oct. 1922 in LP/IAC/2/267.



ancestral ties at all.

His view of the future was in stark contrast to the blandly optimistic views of the official Labour spokesmen. He foresaw massacres of Jews throughout the Moslem world; the feeling was that which had led to the massacre of Armenians in Turkey. The Labour Party must therefore be deflected from its present policy which 'if they get into power, will hang like a millstone round their necks'.

The efforts of Bennett and Williams had no obvious result<sup>1</sup>. Moderate ex Liberals, their views on Palestine were those of no significant section within the party. Their analysis shared some ground with the left wing critique of Zionism but, with the disaffiliation of the BSP in 1920, this was not heard again inside the party until the 1930s.

Party spokesmen naturally denied that Zionism - Labour Zionism - posed any threat to the Arab inhabitants, or that hostility between the two peoples was either deep rooted or inevitable. Public statements stressed that the conflict in Palestine lay solely between Socialism and Capitalism, but in doing so accepted exclusively the definition of Socialism proffered by Labour Zionists.

Thus the thrust of the resolution adopted by the 1921 Conference was that Palestine should be developed 'not upon the foundations of capitalist exploitation, but in the interests of Labour,' whilst simply assenting in passing

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<sup>1</sup> The Committee merely resolved to reconsider the question at a later date; see LP/IAC/1/185.

that the object of the Mandate was the establishment of a 'Jewish Autonomous Commonwealth'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly Cameron had the previous year expressed the apparent choice before the Labour Party in the following terms: 'The British Labour Party has no interest in a Palestine based on capitalist exploitation, but sticks solid for a Jewish Labour Commonwealth.'<sup>2</sup>

Labour Zionist literature emphasised the unity of interest of the two work forces. A memorandum published in 1921 is worth quoting at length as it clearly expressed the picture Labour Zionists successfully presented to the Labour movement during this period:

'Therefore we appeal to the British Labour Party. Our road is the road of International Labour, economic, political and cultural action, and the development of the creative powers of the working class. The natural upbringing of the land that was once Jewish is in no way opposed to the interests of its present working population. On the contrary, the interests of Arab workers and peasants are closely linked up with our development of the country which will bring about the advancement and the progress of all its inhabitants. The strengthening of the Jewish workers in Palestine will bring about the strengthening also of the native workers for one watchword brings us together: we seek the goal of the international working class of Palestine. We believe that the day is not far distant when the Arab worker and peasant will recognise his own essential interests which unite him to the Jewish worker, and he will break the chains which held him enslaved for generations at the mercy of his feudal co-nationals who oppress and exploit him'.<sup>3</sup>

To meet the arguments of left wing critics an article

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1 LPACR 1921, p. 198.

2 ZR Jan. 1921.

3 Poale Zion, 1921 op.cit.



by Kaplansky was published in The Socialist Review.<sup>1</sup> Their case, he argued, was based on a 'misleading vulgarisation of the idea of the right of self determination'. Jewish rights were not historical, but those of a landless people seeking 'constructive creative work'. Labour democracy should regulate immigration and colonisation of a sparsely occupied land; 'the proletariat must put forward its own Socialist colonisation policy'. From this standpoint 'a hundred thousand Arabs have no right of possession in Palestine. They have a right to work the lands on which they are settled. They cannot, however, prohibit the approach of other land and work seeking people to soil which is lying idle'. This policy might threaten the great landowners, but the interests of the Arab working classes lay in co-operation with the Jewish proletariat.

Such arguments provided intellectual justification for the support given by most interested Labour Party members. Nevertheless theoretical arguments were of comparatively little importance in shaping party attitudes; as we have seen, sympathy for the sufferings of Jewry, admiration for Zionist achievements and friendships with Labour Zionists, a history of Labour Party support and the fact that anti Zionism in Britain was chiefly to be found among opponents of the Labour Party on both right and extreme left, all played an important part in moulding party opinion.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Kaplansky, 'Jews and Arabs in Palestine', The Socialist Review, Vol.16, No.102, 1922. Also published as Jewish Socialist Labour Party, Poale Zion Jews and Arabs in Palestine (London, 1922).

It was therefore of no surprise that early in 1924, with the formation of the first Labour Government, a question elicited from Thomas, the Colonial Secretary, the announcement that, after careful consideration of all the circumstances, the new Government had decided to adhere to the policy of giving effect to the Balfour Declaration.<sup>1</sup> Even so the announcement came as a great disappointment to some sections of Palestinian Arab opinion, who had placed great hope on a change of Government.<sup>2</sup>

Among those elected in 1923 was T.S.B. Williams who did attempt during his short period in Parliament to make known his views on Palestine.<sup>3</sup> In July he raised the question during a debate on Supply. He was not opposed in general to British activity in the Middle East: 'if you look at the Near and Middle East one may truthfully say that in general we have now come round to the policy of consulting, and trying to pursue a policy in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants (but) there is one exception, and that exception is Palestine'.

Williams maintained that 'the idea behind political Zionism is unsound, unworkable and against the best interests of the Jews themselves'. He concluded: 'if I am right in my contention, it is obvious you are acting most

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1 HC Deb. Vol. 170 c.63, 25 Feb. 1924. Josiah Wedgwood had apparently hoped to become Colonial Secretary, see Dalton, op.cit., p. 144.

2 Y. Porath, The Emergence of the Palestinian Arab National Movement Vol. 1 1918-29 (London, 1977) p. 241.

3 Williams became Parliamentary Private Secretary to Sidney Webb, the President of the Board of Trade.



unjustly in subordinating the wishes of these people who are in their national home to the wishes of people whose national home it never was'.<sup>1</sup>

Williams and Bennett made a further half hearted attempt to raise the question once again within the Advisory Committee. In June a letter from the pair was discussed but since neither were present consideration was deferred.<sup>2</sup> Later that month, with an even smaller attendance, the Committee agreed to consider a memorandum from Williams, should he care to submit one.<sup>3</sup> There is no evidence that Williams did so, and Palestine was absent from the agenda for the next five years.<sup>4</sup>

In fact affairs in Palestine had fallen very much into the background. Though The Jewish Times urged its readers to vote for the Labour Party because of the sympathy shown by the Labour Government, the Palestine issue received no attention in the ensuing election, prompting New Judea to announce that the issue had 'fortunately passed beyond the range of party'.<sup>5</sup>

The following years saw mounting economic difficulties in Palestine, and a falling off of Jewish immigration. Labour Party involvement amounted to little more than

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1 HC Deb. Vol. 176 c.195-6, 29 July 1924.

2 LP/IAC/1/228 11 June 1924. 3 LP/IAC/1/229 26 June 1924.

4 Williams lost his seat in the following election, and died in 1927.

5 New Judea 7 Nov. 1924.

ensuring the inclusion of a 'fair conditions of labour' clause in the 1929 Palestine Loan Bill<sup>1</sup> - later the TUC responded to a request from the Histadrut to investigate labour conditions in work arising from the loan<sup>2</sup> - the sending of occasional messages of support, and in the membership of party leaders of certain pro Zionist organisations. In 1926 Labour members joining the newly formed Pro Palestine Committee of the House of Commons included MacDonald and Snowden,<sup>3</sup> and the two leaders also lent their names to the Palestine Mandate Society, founded two years later by Ethel Snowden and Blanche Dugdale.<sup>4</sup> But such activity was no preparation for the storm that was to break on the morrow of Labour's triumph in the subsequent election.

#### F. British Labour, Zionism and International Socialism

Before the war the Second International remained hostile to the claims of Zionism, whether 'bourgeois' Zionism or in the form of the Socialist synthesis propounded by Ber Borochoy and adopted by Poale Zionists.<sup>5</sup> Nationalistic territorial claims made by Jews were unacceptable, whatever socialistic interpretation was placed upon

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1 See ibid., 10 Dec. 1926, 24 Dec. 1926.

2 See below p. 77 Trade Union Congress Reports 1929, pp. 229-30, 1930 pp. 187-8, 1931 p. 227.

3 New Judea 29 Oct. 1926. The instigator was S. Finburgh, Conservative MP for North Salford. Snowden had not his wife's passionate enthusiasm but see eg ibid., 7 Oct. 1927: 'one of the outstanding achievements of modern time, (and) an unsurpassed example of sacrifice for a great ideal'.

4 New Judea 30 Mar. 1928, N. Bentwich, Mandate Memories (London, 1965) p. 128.

5 See above p. 9.



them. Since the road to salvation lay through individual participation in the wider Socialist movement even the anti-Zionist Bund was suspect. Nevertheless in the years before the war the beginnings of a change in attitude were discernable. 'The decision that each nation should be master of its own house gradually came to dominate Socialist thought. The failure of the Second International and the First World War gave this trend an irresistible impulse'.<sup>1</sup>

The Poale Zion Confederation maintained its central organisation during the war in neutral countries, first in The Hague (1915-16) and then in Stockholm (1917-19).<sup>2</sup> In the changed conditions of wartime Europe Poale Zionists were markedly more successful in presenting their view of the particular condition of Jewry, and in gathering support for a Socialist Zionist solution. In 1916 a memorandum entitled The Jews and the War was submitted to the International Socialist Bureau and attracted considerable attention. When, the following year, the Dutch Scandinavian Socialist Committee began its work of reconstructing the International and searching for acceptable peace terms, among the 22 Labour and Socialist groups contacted was the Poale Zion Confederation.<sup>3</sup>

The Zionists were invited by the Committee to present their case and, led by their Secretary Schlomo Kaplansky,

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1 Wistrich, op.cit., p. 50.

2 Encyclopaedia Judaica, op.cit., p. 600.

3 Levenberg, op.cit., p. 113.

were evidently well received. Weizmann later poured scorn on the wisdom of 'comrade' Kaplansky in 'demanding' a Jewish State in Palestine,<sup>1</sup> but although the Committee's subsequent peace proposals merely called for the 'protection of Jewish colonisation in Palestine'<sup>2</sup> Zionists had gained their first real success in seeking the acceptance of 'International Socialism'. Similarly, although in August 1917 an Inter Allied Socialist Conference rejected the Labour Party's proposals for a statement on War Aims, in February 1918 the amended memorandum was accepted, together with the reference to Jewish colonisation in Palestine.<sup>3</sup>

Moderate Socialists throughout Europe could now be found supporting Zionist demands. The Belgian Socialists Emile Vandervelde and Camille Huysmans - Secretary of the Dutch-Scandinavian Committee - were particularly enthusiastic.<sup>4</sup> In France Leon Blum and Jules Guesde gave Zionists encouragement.<sup>5</sup> Support was often linked to perceived national needs. Noske, Schiedemann, Quessel and Cohen-Reiss of the SPD became members of the German 'Pro Palestine Committee' which sought a Jewish Palestine under German protection.<sup>6</sup> The French Socialist Gustav Hervé had earlier

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1 C. Weizmann to A. Haam, 16 Aug. 1917, LPCW, Vol. VII, p. 487.

2 Manifesto of the Delegates of Neutral Countries, reprinted in The Labour Party, Labour and the Peace Treaty: Handbook for Speakers (London, 1918). See above p. 15 and Jarblum, op.cit., p. 11-13.

3 See above p. 20 When the Allied Socialists met for the last time in September Morris Myer asked that the JNLC be allowed to participate, though this does not seem to have been granted, see LP/LSI/8/1-4.

4 See interview with Huysmans in ZR January 1921 and obituary of Vandervelde, ibid., 14 Dec. 1938.

5 Stein, op.cit., p. 396. For Eugene Debs, the American Socialist, see Zionist Bulletin 31 May 1918.

6 I. Friedman, 'Germany, Turkey and Zionism' (Oxford, 1977) p. 240.



called for the restoration of the Jews in Palestine under the aegis of France.<sup>1</sup>

Poale Zion consolidated its position at the first post war conference of the Second International, in February 1919. For the first time 'Palestine' was directly represented. On 7 February Berl Locker addressed the Congress and as he spoke Huysmans chalked the words 'Labour-Zionist' as a sign that he spoke not simply for Jewish Socialists in Palestine.<sup>2</sup> When the Permanent Commission met later that month in Amsterdam to consider its attitude to the Peace Treaty<sup>3</sup> the Zionist representative, Chasanovich, successfully canvassed for a reference to Palestine, and in April the Commission accordingly adopted a resolution on 'The Jewish Question' which included the demand for:

'the recognition of the right of the Jewish people to create a National-Centre in Palestine, under conditions determined by the League of Nations. The League of Nations will be responsible for the protection of the interests of the other inhabitants of the country'.<sup>4</sup>

With a specific reference to Jewish rights and a more casual mention of the 'other inhabitants' the resolution seemed to echo the Balfour Declaration, but although for Zionists the reference to a 'National Centre' was a

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1 Stein, op.cit.

2 ZR 8 Jan. 1940. Text of Locker's speech in LP/LSI/Box 6.

3 For Poale Zion's submission see Poale Zion, 1921 op.cit.

4 The Labour Party, The International at Lucerne, 1919 (London, 1919). Zionist Bulletin July 1919.

disappointingly vague definition of their aims it nevertheless constituted a major breakthrough.

But consolidation of the Zionists' position within the International was soon placed in jeopardy by the involvement of Socialist Zionists in the developing split between left and right wing Socialists which culminated in the formation of the 3rd (Communist) International. At the fifth conference of the Poale Zion Confederation, held in Vienna in the summer of 1920 Socialist Zionists were utterly divided over the question of joining the new international: 178 delegates voting in favour, 179 abstaining.<sup>1</sup> Left wing Zionists now sought affiliation to the Communist International, and denounced the Zionist Organisation. Believing that only through participation in the world revolution would Zionists have any chance of success they accepted the 21 rules for admission to Comintern and adopted the name Jewish Communist Union Poale Zion.

In fact there was no likelihood that any definition of Zionism would prove acceptable. The Comintern soon demanded that Poale Zion members join their respective Communist Parties, and thereafter denounced Zionism, maintaining that 'the theme of Palestine, the attempt to divert the Jewish working masses from the class struggle by propaganda in favour of large scale Jewish settlement in Palestine is not only nationalist and petty-bourgeois but is counter revolutionary in its effect...'<sup>2</sup>

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1 Encyclopaedia Judaica op.cit., p. 662.

2 To the Communists of all Countries: To the Jewish Proletariat Extracts from the ECCI statement of 29 July 1922 reprinted in J.Degras (ed) The Communist International 1919-1943 Vol.I (London, 1956) p. 365.



On the other hand the 'right wing' Poale Zionists, led by Kaplansky and Locker, which included the British and Palestinian parties,<sup>1</sup> also resolved to leave the Second International. With the backing of the ILP<sup>2</sup> they participated in the formation, in February 1921, of the Viennese 'Two and a Half' International.<sup>3</sup>

Reunification of the non Communist International did not take place until the Hamburg Conference in 1923 but Poale Zion, now representing the main body of Socialist Zionists, was able to participate, and Kaplansky was appointed to the Executive.<sup>4</sup> As the new Labour and Socialist International was to be exclusively territorially organised the status of Poale Zion caused some controversy, but finally in June 1924 the Executive decided that 'as the special conditions of the Jewish people constituted a unique problem, Palestine will be considered as the main country of the Federation and the groups in other countries...will be regarded as sections'.<sup>5</sup> With this announcement Labour Zionists again became an integral part of the mainstream Socialist fraternity, 'Palestine' being accredited with a membership of 13,200.

For the Zionists participation in the LSI was an enormous gain. Labour Zionism was thereby accepted by the

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1 See Manifesto in Zionist Bulletin 1 Oct. 1920 signed by I.Traub and J.Pomerantz of Great Britain.

2 ZR Jan. 1921.

3 J.Braunthal, History of the International 1914-43 Vol.II (London, 1967) p. 233.

4 Report of the LSI Congress in Hamburg, 21-5 May 1923.

5 Report of the Second Congress of the LSI, 1925, p. 174.

leaders of the non Communist Socialist world as progressive and truly Socialist. By contrast those who opposed Labour Zionism were, in the east, feudal and reactionary, and in the west either Capitalist and Imperialist, or Communist and non democratic. Furthermore as the divisions in the Socialist world grew so did the value Democratic Socialists placed on the support of Socialist Zionists.

On the other hand the LSI appears to have avoided making a detailed examination of the problem of Palestine. In 1928 Sidney Olivier, reporting on the findings of the Colonial Commission, informed the Congress that the question of Palestine had been raised, but with regard to 'a difference of point of view between various sections of the population the Commission felt that it was quite unable to deal'. He added, somewhat disingenuously, that 'there was a suggestion that, as a matter of fact, the rights of the various sections of the population are properly and sufficiently guaranteed by Mandate rule under the League of Nations. At any rate we felt we could not express any opinion...'.<sup>1</sup>

Representatives of Labour Zionists and of the British Labour Party were naturally drawn together in the formation of the LSI and in its later development. This, and the international sanction given to Labour Zionism, was an important factor in the binding of the Labour Party to the cause of a Jewish Palestine.

This was strengthened in 1928 when Poale Zion,

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Third Congress of the LSI, 1928 Item 3.



encouraged by the enthusiasm shown by leading European Socialists on visiting Palestine, took the initiative in forming a 'Socialist Committee for a Workers' Palestine'.<sup>1</sup> Henderson, Blum, Vandervelde and Bernstein were persuaded to lend their names to a call for an inaugural meeting, which took place in Brussels, immediately preceding the 3rd Congress. Forty delegates were present, Britain being represented by Henderson, Susan Lawrence and Harry Snell.<sup>2</sup>

After speeches from Vandervelde, Kaplansky and Jarblum the meeting resolved (in language appreciably stronger than any yet used by the LSI) that 'the effect of Jewish Labour in Palestine and its striving to build the new Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine on the principle of work and Socialist forms of living, imbued with the spirit of international solidarity, deserves the active support of the Socialists of all countries'. A bureau was established to carry on the work of the committee; Labour Party representatives were initially Wedgwood, Lansbury and the Secretary of the International Department, William Gillies.

On procedural grounds there had been some objection to the formation of the Committee<sup>3</sup> and in fact the success of Poale Zion caused a considerable stir among both supporters and opponents of Zionism. Two years later the Bund

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1 Wistrich, op.cit., p. 51, Levenberg, op.cit., pp. 118-9, Jarblum, op.cit., pp. 18-24.

2 It is surprising to find that Snell was a delegate, since he was chosen in 1929 as an uncommitted 'reasonable man' for the Shaw Commission. Kenworthy and Tawney were also invited.

3 New Judea 31 Aug. 1928.

successfully applied for affiliation to the LZI, and at the Congress of 1931, as Golda Meir has recounted, 'as far as we were concerned, the atmosphere was very charged'.<sup>1</sup> But although Vandervelde was to maintain that 'the International, as such, takes no sides<sup>and</sup> does not have to take sides between Socialist Zionists and, say Bundism',<sup>2</sup> the prevailing pro Zionist sympathy of the LSI was in no doubt, and the Committee for a Workers' Palestine<sup>3</sup> continued its task of defending and propagandising Zionist activity throughout the 1930s.

Links between the British and the Zionist Labour movements were established in a number of other areas. At its Second General Convention the Histadrut resolved to join the International Federation of Trade Unions; 'the starting point for repeated meetings of representatives of Palestine Jewish Labour with International Labour'.<sup>4</sup> Several Histadrut trade unions (including railwaymen and textile workers) joined international trade secretariats<sup>5</sup> and Hevrat Ovdim, the Histadrut's co-operative organisation, joined the International Co-operative Alliance in 1925. Similarly Ben Gurion, attending a conference in Oxford on workers' education, was able to note in his diary: 'yesterday we talked to some of the delegates from Britain,

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1 Meir, op.cit., p.92.

2 Introduction to Jarblum, op.cit., p.4.

3 The Committee was also known as the Socialist Pro Palestine Committee.

4 W.Preuss, The Labour Movement in Israel (Jerusalem, 1965) p. 96.

5 eg see CO 733/190 77186 for the intervention of Cramp, as President of the International Transport Workers Federation.



America and Australia about the Labour Movement in Palestine. They were extremely impressed and were surprised to hear about our achievements'.<sup>1</sup>

Of particular importance was the participation of Zionists in British Commonwealth Labour Conferences, 'Palestine' being represented by Achduth Haavodah and the Histadrut. To the first conference in the summer of 1924 the Histadrut sent three senior officials - Ben Gurion, Chiam Arlosoroff and Ben Zvi - and one full day was set aside for a discussion of employment, migration and Labour legislation in relation to Palestine.

Ben Gurion emphasised the need for freer immigration for Jews, which would benefit the whole country, and for adequate Labour legislation. He admitted that 'the Jews had their national aspirations and the Arabs had theirs', but there was no need for conflict: 'they were associated as Labour men and wanted to help each other'.<sup>2</sup>

The views of the Zionists were well received by the large British delegation, though several Indian delegates expressed concern at the Zionists' constitutional recommendations. George Lansbury also indicated some doubt: 'was Mr. Ben Gurion claiming that the white minority should have equal power with the majority, or was he saying that they would determine the rule at the centre by democratic methods, which meant that the Arabs would have the

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1 D. Ben Gurion, Letters to Paula (London, 1971) p. 53.

2 Report of the First British Commonwealth Labour Conference held at the House of Commons, 27th July - 1st August, 1925 p. 40.

preponderant influence?'. In reply he deprecated the idea of a 'white minority' in Palestine, and stressed the need for immigration to develop the whole country for the benefit of all. The Zionists were equally successful in arguing their case at the second conference, held three years later.<sup>1</sup>

The Zionists' success within the British Labour Party was mirrored and reinforced by their success inside the wider International Socialist movement - a success all the greater when compared to the hostility exhibited by the Second International before the First World War. The enthusiasm shown by European Socialists for Jewish work in Palestine - especially when combined with a disinclination to examine 'the difference in point of view between various sections of the population' - and joint participation in numerous international organisations could not but reinforce the Zionist sympathies of the British Labour representatives. As Chaim Arlosoroff noted: 'on the whole we have been able to entrench ourselves in the international councils, from the Geneva League to the Socialist International before the Arabs ever entered the scene'.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Report of the Second British Commonwealth Labour Conference held in London, 2nd - 6th July, 1927. See also agenda, and reply to questionnaire, pp. 18-23, 44-5. Dov Hos was the leader of the delegation.

2 Quoted in S.Hattis, The Bi National Idea in Palestine, (Haifa, 1970)p. 86.



## CHAPTER II

The First Crisis 1929 - 1931

Three months after the formation of the Second Labour Government serious communal disturbances took place in Palestine, which ended the longest period of peace that Palestine was to know under the Mandate. The main disorders took place between 23 and 29 August, and the Royal Commission later reported that casualties had amounted to 472 Jews and 268 Arabs killed or wounded.<sup>1</sup>

The reaction of Zionists, and of their British sympathisers, was swift. Weizmann hurriedly returned from Switzerland to co-ordinate Zionist activity in London, and in the next few weeks Jewish protests reached the Government from 14 countries.<sup>2</sup> As early as 26 August Wedgwood had written to the new Colonial Secretary, Lord Passfield, suggesting that a parliamentary commission be sent to Palestine, to investigate the causes of the disturbances and the working of the Mandate.<sup>3</sup> Wedgwood volunteered his services, but his suggestion was rejected.

On 3 September the Government announced that a Royal Commission would be sent to Palestine, to be chaired by Sir Walter Shaw. In an attempt to avoid party controversy his three colleagues were drawn from each of the three major

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1 Cmd. 3530, The Shaw Report on the Disturbances of August 1929 (1930) p. 65. When the War Office contacted Tom Shaw, now Secretary of State for War, his Secretary apparently reported that 'Mr. Tom Shaw says he is a pacifist and does not wish to have anything to do with war or military operation'. Quoted in D. Carlton, MacDonald Versus Henderson: The Foreign Policy of the Second Labour Government (London 1970) p. 18.

2 G. Sheffer, Policy Making and British Policies Towards Palestine 1929-1939 Unpublished thesis, Oxford University, 1970) p. 88.

3 N. Rose, The Gentile Zionists (London, 1973) p. 2.

parties, the Labour representative being Harry Snell, MP for Woolwich East. Snell was surprised to be chosen, and very nearly withdrew when he discovered that, contrary to assurances, the Commission's investigations would be of a judicial character: 'I afterwards sincerely regretted that I had not done so'.<sup>1</sup> To the disappointment of the Zionists, the terms of the Commission directed it to examine the immediate causes of the troubles, and not questions of major policy or the operation of the Mandate, though in practice it was by no means clear how this distinction could be preserved.

Inside the Labour movement reactions to the disturbances were immediately felt, for the TUC was then meeting in Belfast and was an obvious target for protests. On 31 August a letter was read to the General Council from Rabbi J. Shachter asking that a resolution be passed deploring the Arab attack on the Jewish population in Palestine.<sup>2</sup> After some discussion Ben Tillet was instructed to explain that 'it was not a matter in which the General Council could express an opinion, and they believed the Government would take the necessary steps to deal with the situation'.

This decision, to leave the question in the hands of the Labour Government, guided the General Council during the next few days, when messages from a number of Jewish

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1 H. Snell, Men, Movements and Myself (London, 1936) pp. 236-7. Alone of the Commission Snell had no legal training.

2 GC 31 Aug. 1929. Shachter was a local Rabbi and minor Zionist leader in Northern Ireland.



and Zionist bodies were noted and forwarded to the Labour Party.<sup>1</sup> There was also a communication from an Arab organisation - one of the very few ever noted either by the General Council, or by the NEC of the Labour Party. The Secretary's minutes read:

'Telegram from Palestine Committee (Mr. Eljabri of the Syrio-Palestine Delegation) dated 4 September 1929 was read beseeching the intervention of the English Labour Movement on behalf of the Arabs in Palestine'.<sup>2</sup>

It too was referred without comment to the Labour Party.

Although recent events in Palestine were not mentioned during Congress the attention of delegates was drawn to conditions of trade unionists working on the construction of Haifa harbour. Until now this had been a major concern of Zionist Labour organisations in Britain; on 5 July, for example, Poale Zion had submitted a survey to the Labour Party on labour legislation and the problems in Haifa. The Colonial Office had earlier received a TUC delegation on the subject, and during Congress an emergency resolution was passed.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless the subject of Palestine was not to be brought to the attention of the General Council for another seven years.

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1 GC 4 Sept. 1929. Messages came from the Jewish National Labour Council, the Jewish Agency and Kaplansky, who wrote as an Executive member of the LSI.

2 Ihsan al-Jabri was a leader of the Syrian-Palestinian Congress. See Y.Porath, op.cit., pp. 116-21, Y.Porath, The Palestinian Arab National Movement: From Riots to Rebellion, Vol.II (London, 1977) p. 65.

3 See 'Survey of Questions to be Discussed with Rt. Hon. Lord Passfield, Submitted by the Jewish Socialist Labour Party, Poale Zion, 5 July 1929' (JSM 210/6 and TUC Annual Conference, 1929, pp. 229-30.

By now communications had begun to reach the Labour Party.<sup>1</sup> From the Central Committee of Poale Zion came an emergency resolution for the forthcoming Annual Conference. The messages were considered by the NEC on 27 September but the resolution - it was not in fact submitted to Conference - was remitted to the Standing Orders Committee. The NEC clearly felt that the Government should be given a chance to deal with the situation, and that a critical resolution should not disturb what was to be, in part, a celebration of the party's recent electoral victory.

Poale Zion nonetheless published its resolution, together with a message from the Histadrut to the British Labour movement, in the form of a pamphlet.<sup>2</sup> It described the 'well planned, premeditated, determined attempt to exploit religious feelings and fantasies of Moslem Arabs', castigated the Palestine Government, and called for a complete change in the administration of Palestine, both in detail and spirit. Included in the pamphlet were various past pledges made by the Labour Party.

Although the New Statesman urged that 'we shall have to abandon both the appearance and the reality of that pro Jewish bias which inspired our original acceptance of the Mandate',<sup>3</sup> Labour MPs and officials hastened to reassure

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1 Correspondence from Palestine Labour Party and Poale Zion in JSM 210/3&4. For the Histadrut and branches of Poale Zion see NEC 27 Sept. 1929.

2 Jewish Socialist Labour Party, Poale Zion, Palestine Events 1929 (London, 1929).

3 New Statesman 7 Sept. 1929. The paper also commented that the Balfour Declaration had been 'itself a dangerous leap in the dark. Moreover it cut across other pledges which we had previously given to the Arabs. It was a blunder, perhaps the worst blunder that Lord Balfour ever



Zionist opinion. Daniel Hopkin felt certain that 'this Parliament will confirm the policy set forth in the Balfour Declaration',<sup>1</sup> whilst a letter from the Socialist Pro Palestine Committee - which included Wedgwood and William Gillies, the Secretary of the International Department - assured the Histadrut that 'the British Government is determined to remain true to the traditions of the Labour Party and to the pledges of its leaders regarding the Jewish National Home'.<sup>2</sup>

In fact within the Labour Party organisation the thoroughness of Zionist lobbying caused a certain amount of irritation. In a letter to Gillies, James Middleton, Assistant Secretary, noted:

'I have no comment to make upon this letter. During a personal interview and two telephone conversations, which seemed interminable, I have explained the whole situation to SK (Kaplansky) until I am sick of the whole subject. I also recall what Mr. Henderson promised to do yesterday. I think you or I should simply acknowledge this letter, stating that it will be submitted to the EC.'<sup>3</sup>

At the Brighton Conference Henderson referred to Palestine in order to reaffirm the Government's adherence

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made in his political life...In short, the historical case of Jewish rights in Palestine, with all its religious, political, financial and sentimental backing, is in truth no case at all'.

1 New Judea Nov. 1929. Hopkin's enthusiasm for Zionism appears to have stemmed from his experiences commanding Jewish troops in the war.

2 Socialist Pro-Palestine Committee to Histadrut, 19 Sept. 1929 printed in Jarblum, op.cit., pp. 25-7.

3 J.S.Middleton to W.Gillies, n.d., (JSM 210/7). (Between 1929 and 1931 Kaplansky directed the London Political Office of Poale Zion.) For Beatrice Webb's comments of the insistent lobbying of the Zionists see M.Cole (ed.), op.cit., Vol.II, p. 219, entry dated 2 Sept. 1929.

to the Mandate, and to give details of the Shaw Commission.<sup>1</sup> A note of dissent was nevertheless struck by Alex Gossip of the Furnishing Trades Association who asked why the Government gave its support to a capitalist organisation 'which includes Lord Melchett and people of that kind, against Arab and Jewish members of the working class'.<sup>2</sup>

Gossip's view found little support. Dov Hos, representing Poale Zion and the Palestine Labour organisations, congratulated Henderson on his 'wonderful statement'<sup>3</sup> and stressed the religious nature of the conflict, the achievements of Jewish Labour, the evil of the Arab 'notables', and the failings of the Palestine administration. Earlier Herbert Morrison had expressed, in his Chairman's address, the traditional view of the party: 'no enduring divergence of interests exists between Jewish and Arab working populations in Palestine. There is room for them all.'<sup>4</sup>

The Shaw report was not due to be published until March, but in the meantime Zionists and their friends continued vigorously to press their case. This was mainly through direct contact with the Government, and by

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1 LPACR 1929, p. 206.

2 Ibid., p. 211. Gossip was a well known Communist sympathiser, though he remained within the Labour Party for much of the 1930s.

3 Ibid., p. 212.

4 Ibid., p. 153. During the Conference Hos had spent much time describing to delegates Jewish achievements in Palestine. Beatrice Webb, however, was little impressed, see Gorni, op.cit., pp. 97-8, 111.



extracting declarations of support from Opposition leaders and non party figures.<sup>1</sup> But a number of Labour MPs did take active steps to influence Governmental thinking.

On 21 the Parliamentary Palestine Committee was reformed to be, once again, a 'watch-dog' for Zionist interests.<sup>2</sup> Josiah Wedgwood took a leading part in forming the new Committee, and of the 21 MPs who attended the initial meeting over half were from the Labour Party.<sup>3</sup> Wedgwood was chosen as Chairman, and Dr. Spero as Secretary. Through its leading members (including Amery, Samuel and James de Rothschild) and also with the help of Mrs. Snowden<sup>4</sup> the group maintained contacts with Zionist leaders and sought to co-ordinate activity in the House.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand there was a small handful of Labour MPs who, although wielding little influence inside the Labour Party, were able to do no small service to the Arab

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1 In particular General Smuts, see The Times 20 Dec. 1929, Rose, op.cit., p. 27.

2 See above p. 64, Sheffer, op.cit., pp. 100-1, Rose, op.cit., p. 26, B.Janner, 'Zionism in Parliament' in P.Goodman (ed.), The Jewish National Home (London, 1943) pp. 106-10. Selig Brodetsky also claimed the credit for reforming the group, see S.Brodetsky, Memoirs: From Ghetto to Israel (London, 1960) p. 151. The group was also variously known as the 'Pro Palestine Committee' and the 'Parliamentary Pro Palestine Committee'.

3 J. Wedgwood, Dr. Spero, Capt. Hudson, N.Day, Dr.H.B. Morgan, A.Smith, F.Messer, D.Hopkin, Lt.Col.Malone, H.Knight and N.Angell; for the last named see N.Angell, 'A Non-Jew's Defence of Zionism' in New Judea March-April 1930.

4 For Mrs.Snowden's enthusiasm for Zionism see above p. 64, Brodetsky, op.cit., p. 133, C.Weizmann, Trial and Error (London, 1949) p. 410.

5 For a meeting with Weizmann which included Wedgwood, Hopkin and Spero see Rose, op.cit., p. 30 note 38.

cause. These MPs, led by Seymour Cocks<sup>1</sup> and J. McShane were able, with certain Conservative MPs, to suggest with considerable success that the Government was keeping something rather nasty in the woodshed.

This concerned the so-called 'MacMahon-Hussein Correspondence' in which, it was suggested, the British Government had promised an independent Palestine after the First World War. Though the correspondence did no such thing<sup>2</sup> the refusal of successive Governments to publish the documents did nothing to still the allegations and accusations of bad faith. In a series of Parliamentary Questions Cocks and Howard Bury (Conservative) urged publication. This the Government steadily refused to do, and on 7 May Cocks raised the matter on the Adjournment.

Cocks, Bury and McShane argued powerfully for publication. Cocks maintained that 'if the pledges are as I think they are, then they are absolutely opposed to the extreme Zionist claim to make Palestine as Jewish as England is English'.<sup>3</sup> From the Labour side Lang, Hudson and Brockway, though Zionist sympathisers, joined in the demand, admitting that promises made should be acknowledged and taken into consideration. For the Government Drummond

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1 Jeffries appears to suggest that Cocks had links with the pro Arab 'National League', but throughout his book confuses Seymour Cocks, MP, with Somers Cocks. For the 'National League' see J.M.N.Jeffries, Palestine: The Reality (London, 1939) p. XVII-XIX, Porath, Vol.II,op.cit., pp. 23-4, 224.

2 See E.Kedourie, In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth (London, 1976) passim.

3 HC Deb. Vol. 238 c.1089-1100 7 May 1930.



Shiels, the Colonial Under Secretary, again claimed that publication was not in the public interest, but did promise a departmental review of the situation. But, after a series of questions throughout the summer, a Private Notice Question in Cock's name brought the final decision against publication.<sup>1</sup>

Although such publicity was welcomed by Arab supporters, they may have underestimated the effect of the campaign. The Foreign Office had already instigated a reappraisal of the correspondence; this had also been urged by Sir John Chancellor, the High Commissioner for Palestine, who was feeling qualms about the moral position of his rule.<sup>2</sup> Though the examination, by W.J. Childs, was the most thorough yet, and showed to his satisfaction that no such pledges had been made, many officials were far from convinced, and the corroding feeling of guilt and uncertainty lingered on.<sup>3</sup> The correspondence was finally published in 1939, in what was seen as a major concession to the Arabs. Shiels' statement on 1 August - drafted by Passfield and approved by the Cabinet on 30 July - did little to still the uncertainty:

'The ambiguous and inconclusive nature of the correspondence may well, however, have left an impression among those who were aware of the correspondence that HMG had such an intention' (to include Palestine in the projected Arab state).

In the months before the publication of the Shaw

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1 HC Deb. Vol. 242 c.900-2, 1 Aug. 1930.

2 Sheffer, op.cit., p. 9.

3 Kedourie, op.cit., p. 252-8.

Commission Poale Zion maintained contact with the Labour Party. On 26 November Gillies reported to the International Sub Committee a request that action be taken concerning the suspension of the Palestine Labour paper Davar. Gillies had written to Passfield and Hopkin had asked a question in the House, but by the time of the Sub Committee's meeting the suspension had been lifted.<sup>1</sup>

Early in the New Year Poale Zion asked the NEC 'to undertake whatever steps it may think fit with a view to restoring full freedom for the left wing Poale Zion in Palestine'. On Henderson's suggestion the letter was sent to Passfield. This forced the Colonial Secretary to order an investigation, but the reply stated that the party in question was an extreme Communist splinter group and the matter was dropped.<sup>2</sup>

The Government had hoped that the Shaw Report would be unanimous, but Snell, the Labour member, submitted a minority report expressing certain important reservations.<sup>3</sup> The majority report had agreed that the trouble had consisted of unjustified Arab attacks upon Jews, but severely criticised Zionist activity in Palestine, particularly in the spheres of immigration and land

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1 International Sub Committee Minutes (henceforth Int Sub) 26 Nov. 1929.

2 Int Sub 26 Feb. 1930 and see correspondence in CO 733/190/77164.

3 Cmd 3530, op.cit., pp. 172-6. See also New Judea June 1930. Norman Bentwich commented that 'the member of the Commission who took his function with supreme conscientiousness was Mr. Snell. As I walked to my office every morning I would see him walking and meditating, almost visibly wrestling with the problem', N. Bentwich, Wanderer Between Two Worlds (London, 1941) p. 154.



purchase, arguing that a discontented class of landless Arabs was thereby being created.

Snell disagreed in part with these conclusions, and also criticised the activities of the Arab leaders, in particular the Mufti. Snell later explained that 'my colleagues knew far more about legal casuistry than I did, but I was at least able to recognise a political manoeuvre when I met one face to face'.<sup>1</sup> Nor, unlike his colleague, did he absolve the Palestine administration entirely from blame. Indeed, he alone of the Commission did not form a warm friendship with the High Commissioner and Snell was certainly the least receptive to his opinions and prejudices.<sup>2</sup> Snell signed the report with 'great reluctance and misgiving'<sup>3</sup> and for the rest of his life was an active supporter of the Zionist cause.

Rightly predicting a Jewish uproar over the report the Prime Minister decided to intervene. Despite his apparent enthusiasm in the recent past for Zionist achievements his concern was now chiefly with the probability of clashes with the Opposition, and within his own party. The position of his Government was uncertain. Mosley and the ILP were causing concern, trade union relations were uneasy<sup>4</sup> and as yet no parliamentary agreement had been

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1 Snell, op.cit., p. 239.

2 P.Offer, The Role of the High Commissioner in British Policy in Palestine: Sir John Chancellor 1928-31  
Unpublished thesis, London University, 1971 pp. 178-85.

3 Snell, op.cit., p. 240.

4 R.Bassett, Nineteen Thirty One: Political Crisis (London, 1958) pp. 35-6.

reached with the Liberal Party. His intervention was to lead to a year of unhappy negotiations and changes of course which did little for the prestige of his Government or for his own peace of mind.

MacDonald had hoped that a White Paper could be issued at once, and thus curtail debate. But deliberation with Passfield and with Henderson, the latter both as Foreign Secretary and Secretary of the Labour Party<sup>1</sup> resulted in meetings both with Jewish leaders and leaders of the Opposition on 28 March. On 2 April, in answer to a pre-arranged question from Baldwin, the Prime Minister announced that a further, one man, commission would be sent to Palestine to study the key questions of land purchase, immigration and development. The Government would continue to abide by its dual obligations. Inter and intra party trouble had been averted for a time.

Throughout this period, leading up to the publication of the Shaw Report and the negotiations resulting in a fresh commission, the Zionists had been active in Labour Party circles. Weizmann and his friends maintained their contacts with sympathetic Labour MPs and supporters<sup>2</sup> and pressure was maintained inside the party organisation. On 9 April Weizmann addressed the Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions at the House of Commons, which 'received his

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<sup>2</sup> See Rose, op.cit., p. 23 note 48 for a meeting on 17 March with Parliamentary friends including Wedgwood, Malcolm MacDonald and Ethel Snowden.

<sup>1</sup> Scheffer, op.cit., p. 25.



statements favourably'.<sup>1</sup> But though such contacts undoubtedly helped the Zionists maintain pressure on the Government, according to Beatrice Webb 'as for the PLP and the House of Commons as a whole neither one nor the other comes into the picture...'.<sup>2</sup>

Among the large membership of the Advisory Committee were to be found several Zionist supporters, including Harry Snell, but also a number of Arab sympathisers, in particular Sir John Maynard, Ernest Bennett and Philip Price. Thus at the following meeting, when the question of Palestine was again discussed it was decided 'to ask Captain Bennett whether there is an Arab representative who would attend the Committee'.<sup>3</sup> But despite the presence in London of a Palestinian Arab Delegation<sup>4</sup> nothing appears to have come of the suggestion. Zionists, on the other hand, were well aware of the need to keep their case clearly before the Committee, and when next month Maynard submitted a memorandum on the subject of Arab landlessness, which stressed the dangers of creating a landless proletariat, Kaplansky was quick to respond with a memorandum of his own

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1 Rose, op.cit., p. 23, LP/ImpAC/1/20 9 Apr. 1930. During 1930 responsibility for Palestine was transferred from the International to the Imperial Advisory Committee. The Committee had sought to meet Weizmann earlier in the year, see LP/ImpAC/1/8 & 10 11 Dec. 1929, 29 Jan. 1930.

2 M.Cole (ed), Vol.II, op.cit., p. 239 entry for 30 Mar. 1930.

3 LP/ImpAC/1/28 25 June 1930. Bennett entered Parliament in 1929, having defeated Barnett Janner, a prominent Zionist (see below p.105), in Cardiff Central.

4 See 'Arab Statement on Palestine to Members of the House of Commons by Jamal Hussein, May 1931' (Kings Cross, London, 1930).

refuting Maynard's arguments.<sup>1</sup>

A few days after Weizmann had addressed the Committee the NEC was circulated with a document on the Shaw Commission Report from his left wing colleagues in Poale Zion. The Committee also heard of the discussions Gillies had been conducting with Lord Passfield.<sup>2</sup>

Negotiations continued between the Government and the two sides, but a new crisis was not long in coming; on 15 May, as a concession to the Arabs, the labour immigration schedule was suspended. This sparked off a fresh wave of Jewish protests. The Conservative Party was beset with difficulties and could not be expected to intervene to any great extent, but the Liberal Party at this juncture was a useful source of pressure.<sup>3</sup> Of particular concern to MacDonald was the potential threat to Anglo-American relations, and in the months that followed an important role in transmitting American-Jewish pressure was played by Harold Laski.<sup>4</sup>

Since the crisis concerned labour immigration, the Labour Party itself was a particularly appropriate focus for Zionist activity. At a meeting of the NEC on 25 June

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1 Arab Landlessness in Palestine, Memo. by Sir John Maynard, ditto S.Kaplansky (LP/ImpAC/2/77&8). The Committee postponed consideration of the document until 5 November, and then decided to take no further action.

2 NEC 22 July 1930. See also Jewish Socialist Labour Party, Poale Zion Statement on the Report of the Palestine Enquiry Commission (London, 1930).

3 The Liberal-Labour rapprochement had now taken place.

4 Laski affected impatience with both Government and Zionists, but he clearly enjoyed his role as a go between, see M.de Wolfe Howe (ed), The Holmes-Laski Correspondence, Vol.II, (Cambridge, Mass., 1953) pp. 1296-9, 1301-3. At the height of the crisis MacDonald asked Laski to try to calm American opinion. Laski refused; 'the PM had the shock of his life', he boasted, see V.Weizmann, The Impossible Takes Longer (London, 1967) p.113.



Gillies reported that protests had been received from 17 organisations throughout the world.<sup>1</sup> Passfield, in a letter to the committee sought to justify the ban, but the NEC also heard from Snell, now recognised as a party expert on the subject.

It was clear that the NEC was now becoming seriously concerned with the Government's handling of the problem. The minutes record that

'after discussion the suspensions were considered to be unfortunate, and it was suggested that, assuming it were possible for the Colonial Office to take action, they should give the matter attention'.

Once again Henderson, whose own Foreign Office was not as yet directly involved in the problem, was chosen to represent the party and, on Lansbury's suggestion, was invited to inform Passfield of the NEC's criticism. The result was further discussion involving Passfield, Henderson and Gillies, and a further letter of explanation from Passfield to the NEC.<sup>2</sup> Similar unease was felt within the Parliamentary Party, and on 26 June Passfield appeared before a party meeting to answer what his wife described as the 'Jewish complaints'.<sup>3</sup>

Two days later the Zionist were able further to press their case on Labour Party and TUC members at the afternoon session of the Commonwealth Labour Conference, then being

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1 NEC 25 June 1930.

2 NEC 22 July 1930.

3 Passfield to B. Webb, 26 June 1930, N. & J. MacKenzie (eds.), The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Vol. III, Pilgrimage 1912-47 (Cambridge, 1978) p. 329.

held in London. Ben Gurion referred to the great disappointment caused by the check in immigration and insisted that there was 'no question of supplanting the Arabs...the Jews in Palestine regard the Arab working men as their fellow citizens and workers'.<sup>1</sup> Goldie Myerson referred to the effect the suspension had on the minds of the Jewish population in Palestine, and Dov Hos made the not unreasonable claim that 'the impression had been created that it was better to have a Labour Party in opposition to compel a Tory Government to do things'. It was left to Shiels to defend the Government's policy and the suspension of labour immigration: 'there must be periods for assimilation...'.

'The Government was now caught between conflicting pressures of equal persistence emanating from the Arabs, through Chancellor on the one hand, and from the Jews on the other',<sup>2</sup> and it should be added that a significant portion of this Jewish pressure was channelled through the Labour Party. MacDonald in particular was fast becoming tired of Jewish lobbying. To Michael Marcus, Labour MP for Dundee and an enthusiastic Zionist, he wrote that 'I do not want to lose my patience with the Zionists, but they try it greatly'.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Report of the Third British Commonwealth Labour Conference, 1930 (London, 1930) p. 25.

2 Sheffer, op.cit.,<sup>p.53</sup> Chancellor was attempting to rectify what he saw as anti Arab bias.

3 Rose, op.cit., p. 13. Marcus, an energetic Zionist, was the most vociferous of the Government's back bench critics. See also M.Marcus to D.Shiels, 15 May 1930 (CO 733/191/77253). Marcus was defeated in 1931. In November 1938 he joined the National Labour Party and characterised the Labour Party's criticism of Chamberlain's foreign policy as a 'menace to world peace', see The Times 24 Nov. 1938.



On 20 October the Government published the Hope Simpson Report, and its own White Paper (the 'Passfield White Paper').<sup>1</sup> The former, of questionable accuracy in part, had seemed to pose the choice of massive investment or the stoppage of immigration. Although Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, agreed to recommend a loan of £2-2½ million for agricultural development and the resettlement of evicted Arabs there could be no question, he said, of large scale expenditure; this partly explains the nature of the White Paper, for in tone and detail it was decidedly hostile to the Zionists, severely limiting Jewish immigration and land purchase, and particularly criticising a number of the Histadrut's activities.

Zionists in London, including Labour Zionists,<sup>2</sup> had sought to delay the publication of the White Paper, but without success, whereupon Weizmann resigned as President of the Jewish Agency and of the Zionist Organisation, and the 'Jewish hurricane' Passfield had predicted<sup>3</sup> was soon raging. For MacDonald American Jewish pressure was particularly worrying, with threats of political and economic pressure, and helped propel him and his colleagues towards the final de facto repudiation of the White Paper in

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1 Cmd. 3692, Palestine, Statement of Policy by HMG (1930).

2 S.Kaplansky to J.Middleton, n.d., (JSM 210/26). A copy of the letter was sent to Lord Passfield.

3 Passfield to B.Webb, 28 Oct. 1930 quoted in Rose, op.cit., p. 17.

February of the next year.<sup>1</sup>

The hectic events of the next few weeks can best be understood by examining three aspects of the pressure that emanated from within the Labour Party for a change in policy; the activities of the NEC and the party organisation, the pressure exerted by Labour MPs, and the circumstances of the by-election of Whitechapel St. George.

The White Paper had left the Labour Party in a highly embarrassing position, and one which further highlighted the divergence between Party and Government. For less than two weeks before the Labour Party Conference had taken place in Llandudno. A resolution from Poale Zion condemning the Government's recent suspension of labour immigration was not accepted<sup>2</sup> but Conference had passed, without dissent and with the approval of Hugh Dalton for the NEC, a long resolution from the same organisation which included a demand for 'the development of the economic possibilities of the whole of the Mandated Territory and thus (the encouragement of) Jewish immigration and the close settlement of the land to its utmost capacity'.<sup>3</sup> In case anyone could miss the contradictions between the resolution and the White Paper, Commander Kenworthy, now Labour MP for Hull Central, wrote to The Times to point them out.<sup>4</sup> As

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1 Mrs. Snowden assured Weizmann - quite inaccurately - that Passfield had been instructed by the Cabinet not to publish the White Paper without the Zionist's approval, see V. Weizmann, op.cit., p. 113.

2 See resolution in JSM 210/77 and New Judea Oct. 1930.

3 LPACR 1930, pp. 220-3.

4 The Times 28 Oct. 1930.



Kaplansky commented, in a lengthy letter to Henderson at the end of the month, 'the voice of Downing Street is not the voice of Llandudno'.<sup>1</sup>

When the NEC met on 27 October 'Palestine' was therefore high on the agenda. Protests had already begun to pour in, and the Committee was read a sample.<sup>2</sup> Susan Lawrence, an NEC member, had also submitted a letter proposing that a Round Table Conference be called - this had been proposed by Weizmann and echoed by a number of Zionist supporters.<sup>3</sup>

'Considerable discussion ensued'. Henderson urged caution, warning that any action taken should be in line with the wishes of the Permanent Mandates Commission, but his colleagues resolved to take immediate action. A Palestine Sub Committee was set up, consisting of Stanley Hirst, Barbara Ayrton Gould, George Latham and Ethel Bentham, which would confer with Snell and then interview the Prime Minister. It met at the conclusion of the NEC meeting<sup>4</sup> and arranged to meet Kaplansky the following day in the House of Commons.

The meeting with Kaplansky - and Dov Hos - on 28 October was the first of many.<sup>5</sup> Events surrounding the Whitechapel By-Election were now causing much concern, and

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1 S.Kaplansky to A. Henderson, 31 Oct. 1930, copy in JSM 210/34.

2 NEC 27 Oct. 1930. These included several from Poale Zion.

3 Ibid.

4 J.Middleton to G.Latham, 27 Oct. 1930 (JSM 201/37).

5 NEC 25-6 Nov. 1930, LPACR 1931, p. 43.

the following day the Sub Committee met Passfield. The Colonial Secretary was pressed to arrange for a Parliamentary debate, but when he merely indicated that he had arranged for 'some sort of reassuring statement to appear in Reynolds's News on Sunday', his colleagues reacted strongly: 'this would be a very limited and altogether inadequate way in which to overtake the opposition, world wide as it is in character'. The Sub Committee pressed Passfield to issue a statement 'elucidating' some of the main points of the White Paper, which they tactfully referred to as being misunderstood and misinterpreted.<sup>1</sup>

Middleton, in a letter to the Prime Minister, emphasised the need for some such statement:

'we all feel very strongly that with the present electoral vacancy to consider, apart from the real need for a clearer and more definite pronouncement on the merits of the Government's policy, such a statement can hardly be issued at too early a stage. For another full week to elapse before an authoritative and more detailed explanation is given to the public at large will render a position already particularly awkward almost beyond recovery...'.<sup>2</sup>

Middleton then contacted Kaplansky once more to describe his various efforts and those of his colleagues. The fiction that the White Paper had merely been misunderstood and needed 'elucidation' was maintained: 'we are hopeful that steps will be taken to clear away many of these misconceptions at a very early stage'.<sup>3</sup> His mollifications

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1 J.Middleton to R.MacDonald, 30 Oct. 1930 (JSM 210/45).

2 Ibid.

3 J.Middleton to S.Kaplansky, 31 Oct. 1930 (JSM210/46).



had little effect.

Although Middleton saw his duty as urging the Government to modify its policy in the light of Zionist protests, party opinion and electoral exigencies,<sup>1</sup> and although he had much sympathy for Zionist aspirations, he nevertheless believed with some feeling that much of the protest evoked was unjustified. At the NEC meeting on 25 November, no doubt echoing the feelings of a number of senior party colleagues, he complained that 'the situation had not warranted the world wide publicity it had received'.<sup>2</sup> A stronger statement of his views, which bore a close resemblance to those of Passfield, is to be found in a letter written in December, to answer a critic of the Government's policy:

'I am not necessarily defending the draughtsmanship of the White Paper but I have held from the beginning that there is nothing in the actual text or intent to justify the row that has been proceeding throughout Jewry ever since, indeed before, publication...my opinion remains unshaken that the real origin of all the criticism lies in internal Jewish politics rather than misgivings or failures in policy on the part of the Labour Government.'<sup>3</sup>

By the time the NEC next met the picture had changed considerably. Its members heard a statement from Henderson, who believed that 'some of the misunderstandings had been cleared away', and once again recommended strict attention to the wishes of the Mandates Commission.

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1 See below p. 103 ff.

2 NEC 25-6 Nov. 1930.

3 J.Middleton to H.Nevinson, 3 Dec. 1930 (JSM 210/73), see also ibid, 54,71. For Passfield see Passfield to H.Laski, 1 Nov. 1930, in N.& J.MacKenzie, op.cit., p. 337.

The intervention of Henderson was significant. There was by now a widespread feeling that the Government's performance, and in particular that of Passfield, had been less than competent. Although Henderson was already overburdened with work, he began to take an active part in the problem, and Passfield, even MacDonald, were increasingly pushed into the background.<sup>1</sup> At the Cabinet meeting of 6 November Henderson raised 'as a matter of urgency' the Government's policy in Palestine 'as bearing on the PMC in Geneva...as well as on the home domestic political situation'.<sup>2</sup> A 'quasi formal' transference of the Palestine problem from the Colonial to the Foreign Office took place.<sup>3</sup>

Henderson was fully alive to the international aspects of the Government's predicament - through Laski he was kept informed of the American Jewish aspect - but as Party Secretary and Party Manager par excellence he took particular notice of the concern inside the party and the dangers these might pose to the Government. During the next few months his concern was to extract the Government from an embarrassing situation which was damaging both the international and domestic standing of the Government.

The second source of pressure centred upon a group of Labour MPs. On 27 October Marcus was invited to Downing

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1 The Foreign Office tended to take an irritated, somewhat superior view of the crisis, see the Minute of G.Rendel; 'it is unfortunate that neither the statement in its final form nor the result of Lord Passfield's interview with Dr. Weizmann were communicated to the FO, since this might have enabled us to anticipate, and possibly forestall, some of the difficulties (Henderson Papers, FO 800/282).

2 CAB 66(30) 6 Nov. 1930.

3 Sheffer, op.cit.; p. 72ff.



Street to indicate to Passfield and MacDonald Jewish objections to the White Paper. He is reported to have warned - threatened - that many Labour members would vote with the Opposition should the House divide on the new policy, a claim which, however wild, MacDonald could not ignore. Indeed, his own son was evidently among the potential rebels.<sup>1</sup> Later that evening Marcus informed Weizmann that MacDonald had said 'Passfield and Chancellor must go'. According to Vera Weizmann Marcus had reported that MacDonald proposed to invite 'Marcus, Hopkin and a few parliamentary friends' and Passfield to a meeting. The latter was to be criticised in such a way that he should be compelled to resign.<sup>2</sup>

On the following day Passfield, having offered to meet interested Labour MPs, addressed the PLP, and then a smaller group of members 'who are better informed and more keenly interested in Palestine conditions, more particularly from the Jewish point of view'.<sup>3</sup> Passfield attended for 90 minutes and did his best to meet the various criticisms. 'There was no intention whatsoever', he said, 'on the part of the Government to diverge from the policy carried out by successive Governments', and he repeated the assertion that 'the agitation which has been created must be due entirely to misconception'.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Rose, op.cit., p. 20.

2 V. Weizmann, op.cit., p. 113. Though her story is certainly overdrawn - and no such meeting took place - it does indicate the confusion and disarray the Government now manifested.

3 Middleton to Kaplansky, op.cit.

4 Manchester Guardian 30 Oct. 1930, Rose, op.cit., p. 19.

The help of Labour MPs was appreciated in Jewish circles. A resolution of the Board of Deputies welcoming the support of Labour Party members was defeated, but only because of the desire of the Board to avoid any entanglement with party politics. The Secretary nevertheless paid tribute to the work Marcus had done for Jewry 'in the present crisis'<sup>1</sup> and indeed Marcus, though a Labour MP, had been particularly violent in his attacks on the Government. To a conference convened by the Jewish Agency he had announced that

'although it was an unpleasant thing for a Labour member to associate himself with a protest against the present Government...I believe the Jewish people will sweep past this Government, or any Government, which dares to stand in the way of Zionist achievement.'<sup>2</sup>

Various members of all parties pressed for a debate, which on a Liberal motion was scheduled for 17 November. The Government was clearly going to come under severe attack, but it could at least take comfort that both Baldwin and Lloyd George had difficulties inside their own parties and would, it was hoped, be unlikely to force a vote. In fact the Government's retreat began well before the Debate, with Passfield's letter to The Times on 6 November attempting to remove 'misconceptions' and defending the Government from the charges of Hailsham and Simon that on legal grounds the restrictions on land sales

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1 Board of Deputies of British Jews, Minute Book No. 24, 16 Nov. 1930, Jewish Chronicle 21 Nov. 1930. (Marcus was a member of the Board).

2 New Judea July-August 1930, Kische, op.cit., pp. 324-5, entry dated 20 July, 1930.



and immigration were a violation of the terms of the Mandate.<sup>1</sup> On the same day the Cabinet, with Henderson now playing a leading role, decided to renew labour immigration.

MacDonald was now in a particularly black mood, 'cross'<sup>2</sup> about the handling of the problem and increasingly worried about American reactions.<sup>3</sup> On 9 November he confided in his diary that 'even if the present clouds were to roll by (and the most they can do however is not to break) the position of the Government is steadily becoming worse. With blunders like Palestine...I can do nothing'.<sup>4</sup> On the 18th The Times carried a report of rumours that MacDonald was considering resignation, and of the possibility of a coalition.<sup>5</sup>

Another man feeling the strain was Passfield. Although in general 'Sidney's inability to worry...reached a Buddhistic level of serenity'<sup>6</sup> his composure was certainly threatened by the Palestine crisis. Accordingly to one observer Webb became 'as nearly ruffled as I have ever seen him' following a heated argument with Wedgwood.<sup>7</sup> Beatrice, admittedly not a neutral observer<sup>8</sup> noted that 'Sidney

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1 The Times 4 Nov. 1930.

2 Unpublished diary of Beatrice Webb, 4 Oct. 1930.

3 See eg R. MacDonald to L. Wald, 29 Oct. 1930, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69 579.

4 D. Marquand, Ramsey MacDonald (London, 1977) p. 577.

5 The Times 18 Nov. 1930.

6 J. Vincent in The Times Literary Supplement 19 May 1978.

7 K. Martin, 'The Webbs in Retirement' in M. Cole (ed), The Webbs and Their Work (London, 1949) p. 287.

8 Gorni, op.cit., passim. The policy of the Jewish National Home she considered one of the biggest mistakes of the Versailles Treaty, see B. Webb to A. Carr-Saunders, 8 Oct. 1938, N. & J. MacKenzie, op.cit., p. 424.

started with a great admiration for the Jews and contempt for the Arab', but then came to ask 'why is it that everyone who has dealings with Jews ends by being prejudiced against them?'<sup>1</sup> Her husband had predicted a 'shriek of anguish' from world Jewry<sup>2</sup> and when the protests began considered them hysterical, misplaced and inspired by suspect motives.<sup>3</sup> He was depressed by his 'failure' as Minister<sup>4</sup> and disagreed with Henderson's handling of the negotiations. He considered resignation, but decided that 'it would have aggravated the Government's troubles; and I don't do that sort of thing'.<sup>5</sup>

The Government's policy also tried the patience of Government Ministers, like George Lansbury<sup>6</sup> forced, against his will, to support the White Paper in public. On the other hand Mrs. Snowden had few inhibitions in associating with Zionist leaders and in publicly denouncing the Government's policy.<sup>7</sup>

Before looking at the debate on 17 November it is worth

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1 Diary of Beatrice Webb, 30 Oct. 1930.

2 Passfield to B. Webb, 22 Oct. 1930, N. & J. MacKenzie, op.cit., p. 334.

3 'I have my suspicions that the misunderstandings are deliberate and intentional on the part of the original disseminators'. He believed that Weizmann was driven by a wish to boost the contributions of Jewry during a period of economic stagnation in Palestine. See Passfield to H. Laski 1 Nov. 1930, op.cit., p. 337.

4 'People will say that your husband has not been a success as minister'. M. Cole (ed), Diaries, Vol. II, op.cit., p. 260, entry dated 14 Dec. 1930.

5 Passfield to Amulree, 10 Feb. 1931, N. & J. MacKenzie, op.cit., p. 424.

6 'The one occasion I recall seeing George Lansbury really ill at ease with himself was when he was called upon...to justify Lord Passfield's Palestine policy. It was at a meeting of a Jewish Friendly Society Order in the East End of London and he was quite unable to proceed with the matter in hand', Obituary in ZR 16 May, 1940.

7 Brodetsky, op.cit., p. 139 for speech in the Albert Hall.



considering those Labour members we know to have been active in some way over the Palestine issue. Although Shiels' later claimed that 'the Labour Party (had) perhaps more Jewish members than any other'<sup>1</sup> Jewish MPs were in fact evenly distributed between the three parties, and in the PLP only three could be considered Zionists.<sup>2</sup> Of the non Jewish members a number of different groups can be identified.

Firstly there was the tiny but vocal group of pro Arab Labour members: Seymour Cocks, J. McShane and Ernest Bennett. By their very scarcity they could perhaps be dismissed as mild eccentrics, as indeed could Wedgwood and Kenworthy, former Liberals, whose passionate attachment to the Zionist cause was coupled with a lively belief in the service a Jewish Palestine might do for the cause of Empire. Both had been active in promoting the 'Seventh Dominion League' which, based on a book by Wedgwood, pressed for Dominion Home Rule for Palestine.<sup>3</sup>

There was a further group of Labour MPs, sufficiently large in number to form a significant faction, who could also be considered strong pro Zionists. These numbered

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1 D. Shiels, 'Sidney Webb as Minister', in M. Cole (ed), 'Webbs', op.cit., 213.

2 Sixteen Jewish MPs were elected in 1939, six Conservatives, six Labour and four Liberal. Of the Labour MPs Harry Day, Marcus and Spero were Zionists. The others - Shinwell, Strauss and Marion Phillips - had little interest in Palestine, though Dictionary of Labour Biography, (J.H. Bellamy & J. Saville (eds.) Vol. 5, (London 1979) p. 177) notes that Phillips had been 'co-operative with local Zionists'.

3 J. Wedgwood, The Seventh Dominion (London, 1928). See Rose, op.cit., pp. 71-94. The League was formed at a meeting in the Central Hall, Westminster in February 1929, with the support of, among others, Sinclair, Hore Belisha and Mrs. Snowden. Shiels also sent his support. The crisis of August 1929 broke up the League, but it was reformed in the 1930s, see below p. 210.

perhaps 25 to 30. Many, like Daniel Hopkin, Norman Angell and Richard Denman<sup>1</sup> by membership of PPC, by personal contacts with Zionist leaders and by friendships with Opposition leaders were active in co-ordinating pro Zionist pressure inside and outside the House.

Some further 25 Labour MPs, including a number of left wing members like Brockway and Kirkwood, can be found in Hansard taking an active interest in the affairs of Palestine. This was generally expressed in Parliamentary Questions on social or humanitarian aspects: prison conditions, hunger strikes, labour legislation and immigration. A number of these were doubtless pro Zionists; many more would have been likely to side with the Zionists if the matter came to a head.

In fact the debate of 17 November was relatively unimportant in that the Government had already decided to retreat from its position, though anticipation of the debate had no doubt helped cause the retreat. Parliamentary pressure had done all that it could do, though there was still considerable Zionist lobbying<sup>2</sup> and discussion of tactics by Zionist supporters.<sup>3</sup> MacDonald had hoped Henderson would reply for the Government, but his Foreign Secretary politely declined.<sup>4</sup> The Government's performance,

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1 See articles by Angell and Denman in New Judea November 1930.

2 For instance, a copy of the Labour Zionist paper Davar was sent to every member, see HC Deb. Vol. 245 c.146, 17 Nov. 1930.

3 According to Kische 'the success of the debate from our point of view was largely due to the personal efforts of Walter Elliot who, a few days previously, had arranged a private meeting in the House for Members interested in Zionism, to which Mrs. Dugdale, Namier and I were invited in order to answer questions', see Kische, op.cit., p. 360-1.

4 Henderson did not want to disrupt his talks with Jewish



and especially that of MacDonald, was an uneasy one and strong, if predictable attacks were made by Lloyd George, Amery and Samuel. It was clear that, as a number of speakers pointed out, the Whitechapel By-election loomed large over the debate and many saw the announcement that £2.5 million would be spent on development in Palestine in this light.

Only three backbench Labour MPs participated, and their arguments were unsurprising: Snell defended his minority report, Hopkin attacked the White Paper from the Zionist standpoint, and Cocks the Zionist movement from the standpoint of the White Paper. The House did not divide at the conclusion of the debate.<sup>1</sup>

Though the Government could feel aggrieved that the crisis in Palestine had exploded almost as soon as it had come to office, from that point onwards the problem was largely of their own making. But the fates could still conspire to compound their misery.<sup>2</sup> In the late summer Harry Gosling MP, first and only President of the TGWU died, thus leaving vacant the seat of Whitechapel St. George. The official notification of the resulting by-election came on 25 October, some five days after the publication of the White Paper.

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leaders, and wished to 'reserve' himself for Geneva, A.Henderson to J.R.MacDonald, 14 Nov. 1930, Henderson Papers, op.cit.

1 HC Deb. Vol. 245 c.77-210, 17 Nov. 1930. Wedgwood, unable to speak due to illness, sent his views to The Times 30 Nov. 1930.

2 MacDonald complained that 'our luck as a Government has been simply atrocious...', 31 Dec. 1930, R.MacDonald to Mrs. Gordon, (MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69 1440).

For the Government this was a fiendish misfortune, for the timing and location of the impending by-election combined to make it the first, and probably the last electoral contest to be crucially influenced by the Palestine issue. Whitechapel, in the heart of the East End, included a large number of dockland workers - but it was estimated that as many as 40% of the electorate were Jewish.<sup>1</sup>

Events leading up to the election suggested that most were also Zionists. On 27 October some 4,000 Jews crowded into the Pavillion Theatre, Whitechapel, to hear Weizmann, Sokolow and Brodetsky denounce the White Paper, and to pass a resolution condemning the Labour Government.<sup>2</sup> A Palestine Protest Committee was formed, which posted bills throughout the East End: 'Scrap the White Paper' and 'Palestine Betrayed by the Labour Government'. At the first meeting listeners heard Rabbi Rabinovitz urge all Jews to unite against the White Paper.<sup>3</sup>

Government and party were well aware of the electoral dangers, which provided an extra spur to party and Cabinet deliberations. Shiels confessed to Henderson that 'I am rather doubtful about the electoral help we shall get as Amery, Lloyd George and Co. are heavily in with Weizmann'.<sup>4</sup> There were even difficulties over the non Jewish electorate, since many were Catholic, and the Chief Agent reported that

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1 The Times 18 Oct. 1930.

2 Ibid., 28 Oct. 1930. (V.Weizmann, op.cit., p. 113.)

3 The Times 28 Nov. 1930.

4 D.Shiels to A.Henderson, 15 Nov. 1930, Henderson Papers, op.cit.



'while (the Jews) are affected by the White Paper on Palestine, we may expect some polling difficulties with the Catholics owing to the school question'.<sup>1</sup>

Opposition candidates were not slow to take advantage. Guinness, the Tory candidate, appeared on the platform at the Pavillion Theatre rally, and stressed his agreement with the views of Baldwin, Chamberlain and Amery as expressed in their critical letter to The Times on 23 October. The Liberals went one better. Having approached Selig Brodetsky (a member of the Zionist Executive) they finally chose as their candidate Barnett Janner, President of the North West London Zionist Executive.<sup>2</sup> Brodetsky later wrote that 'my position would have made it a Zionist election' but the choice of Janner was certainly not designed to avoid what was already extremely likely. The only shred of comfort for the Labour Party was the certainty that the views of Harry Pollitt, the Communist candidate, would appeal to few Zionists on the Palestine question, though even he seemed to find much support for other reasons.<sup>3</sup>

For the Labour Party one of the many imponderables was the attitude of Poale Zion. From the highwater of 1920

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1 By-Election Report, NEC 25-6 Nov. 1930.

2 The Times 25 Nov. 1930, Brodetsky, op.cit., p. 139. Within the local Labour Party Janner's career as a Liberal candidate, and later MP, did not stand in his way twelve years later when he sought nomination as Labour candidate. However, he was forced to complain to the NEC that certain wards had been prevented from nominating him, and he subsequently entered Parliament for Leicester, West. See NEC Election Sub Committee Minutes, 28 Nov. 1942.

3 J. Mahon, Harry Pollitt: A Biography (London, 1976) pp. 164-5, The Times 21 Nov. 1930.

membership had fallen to 600 and the number of Branches had declined<sup>1</sup> but Poale Zion still claimed considerable membership in the East End.

There are indications that the organisation itself was divided over the tactics it should adopt,<sup>2</sup> but on 29 October Middleton received from Maurice Rosette, Secretary of Poale Zion, a communication that could leave Middleton with few misapprehensions and which gave further urgency to the talks he and his colleagues were then conducting with the Government:

'The sympathy of British Labour with the natural aspirations of the Jewish people...was a powerful argument in our hands which we used to win over the Jewish masses to the cause of Labour. The success of Labour candidates in Jewish areas was a practical manifestation of the confidence of the Jewish in British Labour. (It is now) hard to go to the masses as hitherto. The Executive Committee of Poale Zion has therefore decided to request the Executive of the British Labour Party to use its influence for securing the withdrawal of the White Paper, even if this involved the resignation of the Minister responsible. We would urge upon you the necessity for an early decision and reply with a view to the imminence of a by-election in an area which has a substantial Jewish vote. We feel bound to add that your reply will largely influence the Jewish vote in that constituency.'

A later Poale Zion report summarised the possibilities of the by-election:

'we should not allow the anti White Paper campaign to become an anti socialist campaign...at the same time the party was alive to the fact that the Whitechapel by-election gave us an opportunity to push forward our demand for the withdrawal of the

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1 The Jewish Yearbook (London, 1930) lists the central headquarters at Great Alie-Street, Branch 15 Worker's Circle, Young Poale Zion and Leeds Poale Zion. But there must have been further branches in London, and for the resolutions from Glasgow and Manchester branches see JSM 210/55 & 70.

2 Poale Zion By-Election Report p. 10,14 in JSM 210/79.

3 M.Rosette to A.Henderson, 28 Oct. 1930 (JSM210/79).



White Paper, to draw the attention of the Labour Party to the injustices of that document, and to secure the co-operation of members of the Labour Party in our fight against the Palestine policy of the Government'.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the truth of the claims that the Jewish vote would be determined by the Palestine issue, and that the role of Poale Zion would be crucial - and the former at least seemed likely - Middleton could take no chances. He replied the same day listing the efforts he and his colleagues had made, and promised to show Henderson the letter.<sup>2</sup>

The Government had hoped that Whitechapel might provide Stafford Cripps, the Solicitor General, with the seat he needed. After the White Paper, and the flat refusal of Poale Zion to support any member of the Government as candidate<sup>3</sup> the idea was dropped. If the seat might be lost through the Jewish vote, it would have to be won with the dockers. So Henderson turned to Ernest Bevin.<sup>4</sup>

Bevin would not stand as candidate himself, but would not see Gosling's old seat lost to the party or, for that matter, to the Union. James Hall, a union organiser from Wapping, was suggested by the TGWU, and adopted by the constituency party. Bevin then set about to still Jewish fears, for amidst rising unemployment in the Port of London, with the danger of apathy, or support for Pollitt, among

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1 JSM 210/79 op.cit.

2 J.Middleton to M.Rosette, 29 Oct. 1930 (JSM 210/42).

3 JSM 210/79 op.cit.

4 See A.Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, Vol. 1 (London, 1960) pp. 455-7.

the dockers, it was clear that the Jewish vote would still be crucial.

In a conference with Dov Hos Bevin told the Poale Zion organiser that he would 'instruct my boys' to vote against the Government if the White Paper was not amended.<sup>1</sup> This pledge he was later to repeat at a public meeting on 28 November:

'Mr. Bevin, who delivered a forceful speech in spite of continuous interruptions, said that the transport workers had 26 members in the House of Commons. If the White Paper came up before the House they would all vote against it, as would Mr. Hall when he got there.'<sup>2</sup>

Bevin's threats came as one more blow to an already battered Government. After submitting a memorandum to the Labour Party and holding further talks with Henderson, in which he threatened to withdraw union support if assurances were not forthcoming, on 4 November a public statement was released over Bevin's name.<sup>3</sup> It told of the representations made by the union to the Government, and of the latter's assurances that Jewish protests had been founded on complete misconception. Then came a definite pledge: 'they neither enact or intend any stoppage or prohibition of Jewish immigration, and they expressly provide for the continuation of colonisation operations without a break'. The Government's new development plans were mentioned, and the document concluded by describing the Government's replies to three questions concerning immigration and the use of

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1 Rose, op.cit., p. 37.

2 JSM 210/79 op.cit.

3 Document 'Palestine' in JSM 210/51.



Jewish labour.

Bevin's biographer ascribes considerable importance to his intervention. Bevin himself took great pride in his achievement.<sup>1</sup> Years later he reminisced to a Labour Party Conference how he had 'got MacDonald to make Arthur Henderson the Chairman of a Committee. This Committee amended the White Paper and the Jews were very pleased...'.<sup>2</sup> But, though he may not have realised it, his intervention by no means ended the immediate problem for the Labour Party.

Despite the efforts of Bevin, Henderson and Middleton, and despite the obvious signs of the Government's change of course, Poale Zion remained unsatisfied. At a joint meeting of London Poale Zion branch committees it had been decided that the party would take no part in the election unless 'a clear and unequivocal statement (is issued) by the Labour Party Executive regarding its attitude to the White Paper, as requested in the letter to the Executive on 28 October'.<sup>3</sup> Nor was this all. Three days later a letter was received from the Jewish National Labour Council.<sup>4</sup> Though, perhaps due to Bevin's intervention, the Council was prepared to campaign energetically for James Hall, the letter added that 'the JNLC would, however,

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1 Rose, op.cit., p. 40.      2 LPACR 1946, p. 166.

3 M.Rosette to J.Middleton, 7 Nov. 1930 (JSM 210/47).

4 The JNLC (see above p. 30 ) was evidently reformed by Poale Zion in 1929 to give support to the Labour Party in the forthcoming election, see Manifesto in JSM 210/78.

in the circumstances, be glad if you sent a message to the Jewish electorate of Whitechapel, clarifying the position and assuring them of the sympathy of the party on this specifically Jewish question'.<sup>1</sup>

At the NEC's next meeting the party duly obliged.<sup>2</sup> Taking advantage of an invitation from an American Jewish organisation<sup>3</sup> to send a fraternal delegate to its annual conference a statement was prepared - probably by Middleton - and issued to the press: 'we are profoundly disturbed that our Jewish friends in Palestine and their colleagues abroad should even for a moment doubt our sympathy with their ideals or suspect the British Government of putting obstacles in the way of their practical realisation within the Mandate'.<sup>4</sup>

James Hall had also been obliged to define his position, which he did in a letter to the Central Committee of Poale Zion of 20 November.<sup>5</sup> He found 'certain inferences in the White Paper which I cannot reconcile with the declaration of the last Annual Conference' and vowed to vote against any attempt to deviate from the Llandudno declaration. With this assurance Poale Zion finally resolved to enter the contest 'keeping, however, in the forefront of all our election propaganda the demand for the withdrawal of the White Paper and the fulfilment of the Palestine program of

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1 L.Liff to J.S.Middleton, 10 Nov. 1930 (JSM 210/48).

2 NEC 25-6 Nov. 1930.

3 The National Labour Committee for Organised Jewish Workers of Palestine.

4 NEC ibid and LPACR 1931, p. 43.

5 JSM 210/79 op.cit.



the Labour Party in letter and spirit'. At last the Labour Party could mobilise all resources to save a seat that was now regarded as highly marginal.

It proved a difficult campaign.<sup>1</sup> MacDonald wrote to The Times in support of Hall, again stressing that colonisation and immigration would continue, and referring to the discussions taking place with the Jewish Agency. Hall's manifesto restated his 'determined opposition' to the White Paper policy<sup>2</sup> and the Labour Party approved and circulated to all Jewish electors a message in Yiddish.<sup>3</sup> Hall had been having a hard time campaigning; addressing Jewish electors on 17 November he had been shouted down, and the meeting broke up in confusion.<sup>4</sup>

Several Labour leaders, including Bevin, were active as speakers. The most interesting incident came when Poale Zion arranged a meeting in support of Hall on 28 November. Again the meeting became chaotic. Harry Snell, addressing the meeting, claimed that the hecklers, both Liberal and Communist, had not the true interests of Zion at heart, but there were immediate cries of 'No, we are anti Labour. We are true Zionists'.<sup>5</sup> At one stage police were called in,

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1 After the election Bevin complained to MacDonald of 'the cross purposes existing during the campaign (which had) made our task extremely difficult' and asked that certain Ministers might have 'a little more regard to these cross currents of opinion with which we are faced in the constituencies', E. Bevin to R. MacDonald, 8 Dec. 1930 (MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69 1175).

2 The Times 24 Oct. 1930.

3 Ibid., NEC 26 Nov. 1930.

4 The Times ibid.

5 JSM 210/79 op.cit., The Times 18 Nov. 1930.

but Bevin in the chair was able to restore order enough to speak, and for Marcus to announce that 'I have already seen last night a document, a copy of which is being sent to Dr. Weizmann by the British Government, which contains proposals which will materially influence the present position in favour of the Zionist movement'.

According to Rose this letter, written by Henderson, had not yet reached Weizmann, and he believes that Marcus was probably acting after a deliberate leak by the Government.<sup>1</sup> But a letter from Alexander to Henderson reveals the embarrassment Marcus' statement had caused: 'I am of course a little anxious about this sudden demand for a rushed reply...our hands are being forced by Weizmann on a statement alleged to have been made by Marcus, which cannot be soundly based as we have not finished the drafting of our reply...'<sup>2</sup> Weizmann was also concerned, and through Laski sought to obtain a copy of the letter as soon as possible; it was delivered the following day.

The result of the election was declared on 4 December.<sup>3</sup> Gosling's majority had been over 7,000; now Hall was the victor by a mere 1,088 over Barnet Janner. The failure of the Conservative candidate and the near victory of the Liberal, which ran clean against the national trend<sup>4</sup> left little doubt of the influence of the Palestine issue. Bevin saw the result as a victory<sup>5</sup> and perhaps it was a triumph

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1 Rose, op.cit., p. 39.

2 A.Alexander to A.Henderson 28 Nov. 1930 (Henderson Papers, op.cit.)

3 J. Hall 8,554, B.Janner 7,445, L.Guinness 3,735, H.Pollitt 2,106.

4. J.Stevenson and C.Cook, The Slump (London,1977) pp. 95-6.

5. JSM 210/79 op.cit., for celebration tea for Poale Zion and TGWU officials.



of sorts. But the unwelcome by-election had seriously worried the Government and the Party, and Zionist pressure of the most direct kind, channelled and amplified by the Labour Party and the trade union movement, had helped modify the Government's policy, and rather more obviously than it might have wished.<sup>1</sup>

The Government was now in full flight from the White Paper. The Zionists' attention could now be turned away from the mobilising of pressure<sup>2</sup> to the business of direct negotiation with the Government. The first formal meeting took place as early as 17 November, with Henderson in the Chair, and continued until 11 February. The Government was concerned to secure a speedy end to the talks; Weizmann sensed it was on the run and continually raised his demands. The talks were finally wound up thanks in part to efforts of Malcolm MacDonald, who played an important role as intermediary.<sup>3</sup>

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1 There was naturally much comment on the influence of the by-election. Officials in the Colonial Office were particularly bitter. Sir John Campbell, Economic Adviser, wrote that 'the Government has treated the whole thing in a most deplorably rotten way... and in my private opinion the PM was prepared to abandon the White Paper holus bolus if it should seem necessary to gain Whitechapel', quoted in Offer, op.cit., p. 320 note 82. Many Labour Party members were critical, see eg G.T.Garratt: 'the Colonial Office appears to be like a reed blown hither and thither by every wind which may blow from New York, from Delhi, or even from Whitechapel (Political Quarterly, Jan-March 1931 p. 53).

2 The Socialist Pro-Palestine Committee issued a resolution condemning the White Paper. It was not, however, signed by any of the British members of the Committee, see resolution dated 13 Dec. 1930 in Jarblum, op.cit., pp. 27-8.

3 Weizmann had written to the Prime Minister on 12 November asking if his son could have some official capacity at the forthcoming conference: 'he has our complete confidence, and if you will allow me to say so, our most sincere affection and respect...' (Henderson Papers, op.cit.).

Among those who took part in the negotiations were Kaplansky and Laski. The latter was not yet a Zionist - 'His interest in Palestine was the result of his friendship with American Zionists rather than of his own Jewish parentage or political outlook'<sup>1</sup> - but he still contrived to render useful service to the Zionist cause. His final contribution came on 11 February when, with Weizmann, he successfully insisted that the Government publish its forthcoming letter on Palestine in the form of a Parliamentary Paper.

On 14 February, in answer to a question from Kenworthy, the Prime Minister read to the House his letter to Weizmann.<sup>2</sup> Maintaining the traditional diplomatic language employed since the White Paper, and which could scarcely have deceived a soul, he insisted that the White Paper still stood, and that the letter represented merely an 'authoritative interpretation'. In fact, the only promulgations that now remained concerned security and the proposals for a Legislative Council. The Government 'did not contemplate any stoppage or prohibition of Jewish immigration, land transfers were only temporarily to be controlled, and the economic conditions of the country were not to be 'crystallized'. By strenuous effort the Government had returned to its initial position.

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<sup>1</sup> K. Martin, Harold Laski (London, 1953) p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> The so called 'Black Letter', HC Deb. Vol. 248 c.599, 751-7, 13 Feb. 1931.



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## CHAPTER III

Labour and Palestine in the ThirtiesA. 'A Socialist Utopia'

The years between 1931 and 1936 were a time of comparative tranquility in Palestine. They were also years of large scale Jewish immigration. 61,844 Jews reached Palestine in 1935, the highest annual total for the Mandate period. In 1936 the population consisted of 370,000 Jews and 940,000 Arabs.<sup>1</sup>

Jewish development and prosperity in Palestine, the absence of serious disorders and the weakness and introspection of the Labour Party following the débâcle of 1931 combined to reduce official contacts between Zionists and the Labour Party to a low level.<sup>2</sup> Poale Zion declined in membership still further, and between 1931 and 1936 did not even appear on the Labour Party's list of affiliated societies. The London Political Office closed down in 1932, not to reopen until 1938,<sup>3</sup> although sporadic visits by Labour Zionists, in particular Dov Hos, ensured that contacts were maintained. In 1933 an official statement on foreign policy issued by the Labour Party made no mention of Palestine.<sup>4</sup> The diminutive Parliamentary Labour Party now contained few members interested in Palestine; many had lost their seats, others, including Denman and Bennett,

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1 N.Bethell, The Palestine Triangle: The Struggle Between the British, the Jews and the Arabs 1935-48 (London, 1979) p. 25, Gilbert, op.cit., pp. 159,165.

2 There were occasional requests and invitations from Zionist bodies (eg NEC 10 Nov. 1931) and messages of support continued to be sent, see eg. J.L.Cohen to G.Lansbury, 3 Jan. 1934 (Lansbury Papers 15/39).

3 Levenberg, op.cit., p. 129.

4 A.Henderson, Labour's Foreign Policy (London, 1933).



joined the National Labour Party. There was nevertheless one significant development during this period, namely the visits of a number of prominent Labour Party figures to Palestine.

An early visitor was Arthur Creech Jones, the future Colonial Secretary. A former National Secretary of the TGWU, Creech Jones was now parliamentary candidate for Shipley, and developing a particular interest in Colonial matters. In the spring of 1933 he led a tour to Palestine under the auspices of the Workers' Travel Association, of which he was Organising Secretary.<sup>1</sup> He and his party were entertained by Dov Hos, and by members of the Histadrut, and on his return Creech Jones reported to J.L.Cohen that 'all of us have returned enthusiastic about what we have seen and what is being done, and with our views on Zionism revised and events in the Near East seen in quite a new perspective'.<sup>2</sup> 'We shall', he promised Hos, 'now do our best to encourage people to see Palestine for themselves, and particularly to see what is being done by the Jewish people'.<sup>3</sup>

Creech Jones admitted that 'before my visit to Palestine I was somewhat sceptical about Zionist achievements',<sup>4</sup> and he later claimed that 'if I had any prejudices

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1 For an earlier tour organised by Poale Zion in conjunction with the WTA see New Judea Dec-Jan 1931-2.

2 Creech Jones to J.L.Cohen, 19 May 1933 (CJ 30/1/2).

3 Creech Jones to D.Hos, 18 May 1933 (CJ 30/1/10-1).

4 'A Few Impressions by a Gentile Socialist after a Short Visit to Palestine' in CJ 30/1/27. See also A.Creech Jones, 'Prosperity and Strife in Palestine' in New Statesman & Nation 18 Aug. 1934.

at all they were certainly in favour of the Arabs'.<sup>1</sup>  
 Nevertheless 'I returned impressed and enthusiastic that the utmost encouragement should be given to the Jewish people in developing in Palestine a national home'.

Creech Jones made considerable efforts to interest other unionists in visiting Palestine, though he seems to have had little success. In July 1935 he confessed to Hos that none of the larger unions would send an official to Palestine. Plans for a special tour had been curtailed. Creech Jones felt his failure keenly, but assured the Zionists that 'this failure should not be regarded as any lagging of interest in Palestine'.<sup>2</sup>

One who did visit Palestine was Frederick Pethick Lawrence, who made a leisurely tour of the Eastern Mediterranean in the winter of 1934. He sent detailed reports to his friends and on arrival in Palestine, where he met Weizmann, he reported that 'it would be difficult to exaggerate the wonderful achievements that (the Jews) have effected in Palestine both in the natural field of cultivation of the land and in the social realm of human relations'.<sup>3</sup>

A more significant visit was that of Herbert Morrison, who led a further WTA party to Palestine in 1935. He brought back glowing reports of Zionist work and evinced a lively interest in Palestine from thenceforth. With Dov

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1 ZR 30 May 1941.

2 Creech Jones to D.Hos, 1 May 1935 (CJ 30/1/45-6).

3 Notes dated 31 Jan. 1935 in CJ 30/4/6-11.



Hos he struck up a particularly warm friendship.<sup>1</sup> In the Daily Herald he told of his enthusiasm for the Jewish pioneers:

'Most of them are young men and women - some were, until recently, the victims of Nazi persecutions in Germany; some belong to the interesting new generation that has been born in Palestine - all surely among the most splendid types to be found anywhere in the world...the new Jew to be found in Palestine was a revelation to me. Go and see him if the chance comes your way'.<sup>2</sup>

Some of his colleagues were surprised at the enthusiasm now displayed by the practical, unsentimental Morrison. He later told the House of Commons that, following his tour of agricultural settlements 'I came back with the humble feeling that I should like to give up this business of the House of Commons and politics and join them in the clean healthy life they are leading...it is one of the most wonderful manifestations in the world'.<sup>3</sup>

Colleagues were equally impressed. Tom Williams, MP for the Don Valley, travelled to Palestine with fellow members of the Parliamentary Palestine Committee.<sup>4</sup> He felt that 'rarely in the history of the world have human beings shown such faith and devotion or thrown themselves into a task so wholeheartedly as the Jews in Palestine'.<sup>5</sup>

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1 'They liked each other from the start; both were practical, common sense able men', B.Donoughue & G.W.Jones, Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician (London, 1973) p. 255. Hos was also deputy mayor of Tel Aviv between 1935 and 1940. Zionists did, however, make use of Morrison in another way - by smuggling weapons in with his luggage, ibid.

2 Daily Herald 12 Nov. 1935.

3 HC Deb. Vol. 313 c.1380-90, 19 June 1936.

4 T.Williams, Digging For Victory (London, 1965) pp. 95-6. The tour was organised by Barnett Janner, since 1931 Liberal MP for Whitechapel, see B.Janner in P.Goodman (ed.) op.cit., p. 107. The PPC had been reformed in November 1931 with Buchan Chairman, Wedgwood Vice Chairman and Janner Secretary, see New Judea Nov. 1931.

5 HC Deb. Vol. 310 c.1131, 24 Mar. 1936. Williams recalls

Susan Lawrence was similarly moved, and told the 1936 Conference of her experiences:

'I cannot tell you with what an uplift of spirit I saw our old Utopia in 'News for Nowhere' actually practised. It seemed so beautiful, it seemed so impossible but there it was, and I felt that in that experiment in those colonies there is something<sup>1</sup> to inspire western democracies and western socialism.'

The succession of visits from representatives of the Labour Party and the trade union movement<sup>2</sup> did much to restore relations between the British and Zionist labour organisations, strained during the troubles of the previous Labour Government. Helen Bentwich, though feeling that 'the labour masses in Palestine are still not quite sure how they stand in regard to the Labour movement in Great Britain' noted that 'the visits recently of influential persons in the Labour and Co-operative movements are doing much to stimulate a proper friendship and understanding'.<sup>3</sup> And in contrast to the 1920s there were now a considerable number of men and women in senior positions within the Labour Party eager to speak on Palestine and to defend the Zionist position spurred on by admiration for achievements

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that 'as a result I was invited by the party to intervene in many debates on the Palestine question between 1935 and 1939. So carefully did we exploit any direct personal experience of the issues of the day - however slight!', see Williams, op.cit., p. 95. See also LP/ImpAC/1/170, 15 May 1935, 'matters raised by Mr. Williams after his visit: the draining of malarial swamps, education of Arab children, education grants, transport, roads, railways, Arab standpoint'.

1 LPACR 1936 p. 217. See S. Lawrence, 'Jewish Colonies in Palestine', in Labour Vol. XI, No. 11, July 1935.

2 See especially George Isaacs (see TUC Annual Conference report 1936, pp. 393-6.) Another enthusiastic visitor was Rhys Davies MP, see articles in ZR April 1934 and New Judea March 1934. For ILP visitors see below p. 196.

3 H. Bentwich to Creech Jones, August 1935, (CJ 30/2/4-8).



they had themselves witnessed.

The effects of the visits were complimented by the informal contacts Zionists maintained within the Labour Party. In this connection J.L.Cohen was particularly active. Cohen, now an economics lecturer at Cambridge University was a protégé of Weizmann but had become a leading member of Poale Zion and had for a time directed the London Political Office.<sup>1</sup> He had been, according to Middleton, 'exceedingly helpful to the party, together with other colleagues, during the Whitechapel by-election'<sup>2</sup> and had stood unsuccessfully as Labour candidate for Wandsworth Central.<sup>3</sup>

Cohen developed cordial relations with a number of influential members of the Labour Party. He was particularly friendly with William Gillies, the International Secretary, whilst James Middleton later noted that 'to J.L.Cohen belongs my interest in Zionism'.<sup>4</sup> Both officials appear to have used Cohen as an unofficial adviser on questions relating to Zionism and Palestine<sup>5</sup> and Cohen was an important link between the Labour Zionists and Transport House until his death in the blitz. New Judea commented: 'through his connections with the Labour Party he was able

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1 See above p. 41 Levenberg, op.cit., p. 129. Of Cohen's many articles see esp. 'Labour Zionism: Its Principles and Practices', Jewish Chronicle Supplement 28 Oct. 1932.

2 J.Middleton to D.Shiels, 10 Aug. 1931 (JSM 210/94).

3 In 1937 the seat was won for the Labour Party by another Jew, Harry Nathan, and in 1940 provided Bevin with a seat in Parliament.

4 ZR 22 Nov. 1941.

5 See eg JSM 210/97-8, correspondence in LP/WG/11(b).

to win the active sympathy of its leaders for the Zionist ideal; and the consistently pro Zionist attitude of British Labour is in no small measure due to his influence'.<sup>1</sup>

Of the two party officials Middleton showed the greater enthusiasm for Zionism, and soon forgot his irritation at Zionist pressure during 1930. He was always willing to contribute an article encouraging Jewish immigration and colonisation,<sup>2</sup> and his commitment to Zionism was to blossom in later years. Gillies' feelings were less pronounced, despite his friendship with Cohen, though he dutifully reflected the pro Zionist bias of his party. Though a member of the Socialist Pro Palestine Committee he nevertheless told Jarblum in December 1935 that 'he did not see his way to writing an article at the moment upon the necessity of a great increase in immigration into Palestine'.<sup>3</sup>

Social contacts were maintained at a modest level. In December 1935 for instance Creech Jones arranged a dinner for Labour MPs and supporters with an interest in Palestine at which speeches were made by Wedgwood, Pethick Lawrence, Morrison, Norman Bentwich and Dov Hos.<sup>4</sup> Several Labour MPs

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1 New Judea Dec. 1940. See also ZR 22 Nov. 1940, LPACR 1941, p. 43.

2 For example, see article written for the National Labour Committee for Palestine, 25 Apr. 1936 (JSM 210/129).

3 Correspondence with Jarblum in LP/WG/11(b).

4 It is not clear at whose instigation the dinner was arranged; Creech Jones had earlier written to Morrison that 'I am being pressed by our Palestine friends to arrange a dinner...' (CJ 30/1/47-9, 19 Nov. 1935).



were persuaded to join the Paladin Club<sup>1</sup> and in April 1936 Gillies was Cohen's guest at a meeting addressed by Sir Herbert Samuel, and by Dr. Levenberg of Poale Zion.<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes, however, party leaders did show some reluctance to speak in public about Palestine. Norman Bentwich could persuade neither Morrison nor Creech Jones to address the Club; surprisingly Creech Jones claimed to be 'bankrupt in saying anything worth while'.<sup>3</sup> But the good relations between Labour Zionists and the Labour Party - occasionally furthered by gifts of Palestine citrus fruit<sup>4</sup> - were fully in evidence during the election of November 1935.

The Zionist Review sought the opinion of prospective candidates, and was able to print messages of sympathy and support from over 50 Labour candidates.<sup>5</sup> From Attlee came a clear statement of party views, which were published in the Daily Herald:

'The British Labour Party recalls with pride that in the dark days of the great war they associated themselves with the ideal of a National Home in Palestine for the Jewish people...they have never faltered, and will never falter in their active and sympathetic co-operation with the work of political and economic reconstruction...we are proud of our close association with the organisation of Palestine Labour who have fulfilled their responsibilities in the rebuilding of Palestine in a manner which has

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1 A dining club for those interested in Palestine; half of the 60 members were gentile, half Jewish, see Bentwich, 'Wanderer', op.cit., pp. 213-4. Among Labour members were Daniel Hopkin and Lewis Silkin.

2 J.Cohen to W.Gillies, 14 Apr. 1936 (LP/WG/9(a)).

3 Creech Jones to N.Bentwich, 9 Jan. 1936 (CJ 30/1/58).

4 See letters from Middleton, 14 Mar. 1933 (JSM 210/100), Creech Jones, 1 May 1935 (CJ 30/1/46) and Gillies, 25 Jan. 1937 'I assure you that I will be a more energetic publicity agent for the products of your Jewish co-operatives' (LP/WG/9(b)).

5 ZR 1935, including messages from Attlee, Alexander, Bondfield, Angell, Gaitskell, Adamson and Creech Jones.

earned wide admiration.<sup>1</sup>

Poale Zion responded with a manifesto which urged full support for the Labour Party, the party with 'a real understanding and profound sympathy for a Jewish National Home in Palestine'. Zionists arranged a number of meetings in support of Labour candidates. On 12 November Morrison spoke at a meeting called by Poale Zion in support of the three Hackney candidates.<sup>2</sup> In Whitechapel James Hall, mounting a successful challenge to Barnett Janner, stressed his own previous services to the Zionist causes: preventing the deportation of two Jewish workers, and helping regain the six day week for Jewish workers in the Athlit quarries and the Haifa construction works.<sup>3</sup>

The election saw a partial recovery for the Labour Party from the ruin of 1931. Of a total of 154 Labour MPs, five were now Jewish.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, Tom Williams was now joined on the Labour benches by a number of enthusiastic gentile supporters of Zionism.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Daily Herald 11 Nov. 1935. Meinertzhagen castigates Attlee for shameless vote buying and duplicity. Had the declaration been issued in November 1945, as Meinertzhagen believed, he might have had a point, Meinertzhagen, op.cit., p. 198.

2 Leaflets in LP/WG/11(b).

3 ZR Nov. 1935. The results were:

1931 Janner (Lib)	11,013	Hall (Lab)	9,964
Pollitt (Com)	2,658	Lewis (NP)	154
1935 Hall (Lab)	13,374	Janner (Lib)	11,093

4 David Frankel, Harry Day, George Strauss, Emanuel Shinwell and Sidney Silverman. In the following years they were joined by Lewis Silkin (1936) and Harry Nathan (1937).

5 In particular Morrison and Creech Jones. The Parliamentary Palestine Committee was reconstituted following the election; Labour members included Wedgwood, Creech Jones, Hopkin, Williams and Smith.



B. Policy Making in the Advisory Committee 1934 - 1936

It is perhaps surprising to find that the process of formulating a party policy for Palestine began well in advance of the troubles which began in Palestine in 1936. This took place within the Advisory Committee on Imperial Affairs which, less concerned with immediate political considerations, had the responsibility of advising the NEC on developments and problems in the field of colonial affairs. It is not clear, however, what prompted this renewed consideration of the Palestine question, but the subject appeared on the agenda on two occasions in 1933 and was finally discussed in May 1934.<sup>1</sup>

The minutes of the meeting simply record that Sir John Maynard was requested to invite an Arab representative 'Mr. Shahla', to address the committee.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that, as on previous occasions, the concern to hear from an Arab spokesman was prompted by the knowledge that a Zionist approach to the Committee was forthcoming. Certainly not long afterwards a long memorandum was received from Berl Locker.<sup>3</sup>

Locker admitted that it might come as a surprise to

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1 LP/ImpAC/1/120 & 124, 22 Nov. 1934 & 20 Dec. 1933. The Jewish Chairman, Leonard Woolf, was no Zionist. 'All the eloquence of Lewis Namier and Chaim Weizmann, however, could not shake Woolf's view that to introduce a racial and religious minority into the Middle East was to court trouble.' F. Gottlieb, 'Leonard Woolf's Attitude to his Jewish Background and to Judaism', Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England, Vol. XXV, 1977, p. 36. See also D. Wilson & J. Eisenberg, Leonard Woolf: A Political Biography (London, 1978) passim.

2 LP/ImpAC/1/134, 16 May 1934. I have not been able to trace this person.

3 B. Locker, 'The Present Position in Palestine' in LP/ImpAC/2/139. Locker was then on the executive of the Jewish Agency in London.

learn that great dissatisfaction existed among Jews in Palestine for, he claimed, 'the possibilities for immigration have never been so restricted'. There was an acute shortage of Jewish labour, and as a result the balance in wage levels was being destroyed and Jews diverted from agriculture to industry. Locker appealed for the help of the British labour movement in attempting to secure 'a fair and full application of the principles of absorptive capacity'.

Labour Zionists were aware that their policy with regard to Arab workers was, as Locker put it, 'misunderstood and misrepresented as anti Arab or as contrary to the principle of the solidarity of labour'. In an additional note he sought to refute the charges: it was only in the field of employment created by Jewish enterprise that, in order to create a Jewish working class, Arab workers had to be excluded. Solidarity of labour did not require the disappearance of Jewish labour in these areas. In fact there was much co-operation between workers in public and semi public workers, and the Histadrut was actively encouraging the organisation of Arab workers.<sup>1</sup>

'We cannot agree, however, that the basic aim of creating a Jewish working population, especially in agriculture, should be emasculated by an artificial check on Jewish immigration and replacement of present and prospective Jewish workers by means of the vast reserves of Arab labour, inside and outside Palestine'.

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<sup>1</sup> But see A.Shapiro, 'The Ideology and Practice of the Joint Jewish-Arab Labour Union in Palestine 1920-39', Journal of Contemporary History, Vol.12, 1977, pp. 669-92, N.Caplan, Palestine Jewry and the Arab Question 1917-25 (London, 1978) pp. 18-9, 132-46, Flapan, op.cit., pp. 199-207, G.Mansur, The Arab Worker Under the Mandate (Jerusalem 1937) passim. For labour immigration see especially Sheffer, op.cit., pp. 160-93.



On 20 June a well attended meeting of the Advisory Committee considered Locker's memorandum. At 5 o'clock Shahla attended to make a statement but this was immediately followed by the appearance of another Zionist, Selig Bordetsky, who answered various questions.<sup>1</sup>

Shahla had agreed to write his own memorandum and this was presented the following month though not, it seems, considered formally by the Committee.<sup>2</sup> It told of the unhappy relations between Jews and Arabs in Palestine, in contrast to the peaceful pre war conditions.<sup>3</sup> Shahla outlined the threat posed to the Arab population by Zionist immigration and colonisation policies: 'is there any wonder that Arabs are apprehensive and in a state of great national tension?...It (is) a case of a weak individual struggling against a powerful and rich organisation...'.<sup>4</sup>

The Advisory Committee, however, felt no need for haste. In November it considered appointing a sub committee to draft a policy for Palestine, but it was not until the summer of the following year that work began.<sup>5</sup> On the sub committee were Drummond Shiels, the former Colonial Under Secretary,<sup>5</sup> G.T.Garratt and Thomas Reid. Garratt, a

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1 LP/ImpAC/1/138, 20 June 1934.

2 Shahla, 'Jews and Arabs in Palestine', July 1935 (LP/ImpAC/2/139).

3 But see N.Mandel, The Arabs and Zionism in Palestine Before World War One (Berkley, California, 1976) passim.

4 LP/ImpAC/1/147, 14 Nov. 1934.

5 'There was nothing of the wild revolutionary about him; he was a hard headed liberal minded unsentimental Scot, and he was a convinced believer in the necessity for putting into practice the colonial policies worked out by the Advisory Committee', L.Woolf, Downhill All the Way (London 1969) pp. 236-7.

prospective Labour candidate and expert on Indian affairs, had written occasional articles on Palestine and took a moderate line. Reid on the other hand, like Woolf a former member of the Ceylon Civil Service, was soon to be known as a staunch opponent of Zionism.<sup>1</sup>

Dov Hos, learning of the sub committee, offered to submit recommendations on behalf of the Histadrut. Both sub committee and the Advisory Committee therefore postponed their deliberations but Hos, who planned to visit Britain, was delayed in Palestine and the sub committee finally went ahead without him on 6 August.<sup>2</sup> Neither Shiels or Garratt were present, but the sub committee now had a Zionist member in Norman Bentwich.<sup>3</sup>

Two further meetings took place, the latter being held

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1 There was one notable absentee from the Committee, one who would doubtless have staked his claim to a seat on the sub committee; when the Committee had been reconstructed in December 1931 all names had been approved by NEC with the exception of Josiah Wedgwood, NEC 16 Dec. 1931.

2 B.Locker to W.Gillies, 6 July 1935 (LP/WG/11(b)), LP/ImpAC/1/174 19 May 1935, T.Reid to W.Gillies, 10 July 1935 (LP op.cit.). Sub Committee meeting in LP/ImpAC/3/4, 6 Aug. 1935.

3 Though later seriously at odds over the question of Zionism, Vera Weizmann noted the friendship of Bentwich and Reid during this period, V.Weizmann, op.cit., p. 165. Bentwich was the son of a distinguished British Zionist and had served as Attorney-General in Palestine from 1920 to 1931, when complaints from the High Commissioner led to his early retirement (see Passfield to A.Henderson, 9 Dec. 1930, Henderson Papers). From 1932 to 1951 he was Professor of International Relations at the Hebrew University. A moderate Zionist, he often faced considerable criticism from his more extreme colleagues. See his numerous books, C.Bermant, The Cousinhood (London, 1971) p. 274, A.Kayyali, Palestine: A Modern History (London, 1978) p. 146. S.Brodetsky, op.cit., pp. 132-3 comments that 'many Jews considered him excessively liberal in his approach to the Arabs'. For Bentwich's advocacy of bi-nationalism see Hattis, op.cit., pp. 195-8.



in Brighton during the Labour Party Conference.<sup>1</sup> Although the report was now complete the sub committee hesitated to submit it until the arrival of Hos' memorandum. Some sections arrived shortly before Christmas. There was still no particular urgency, and even when Hos arrived in Britain the sub committee apparently ignored Gillies' suggestion that the Zionist be given an interview. Nor indeed was his submission ever considered by the sub committee, though it was not entirely wasted.<sup>2</sup> On 12 February the Advisory Committee passed the report, with certain minor amendments. Wending its way through the party's committee system the report was accepted by the International Sub Committee, circulated among PLP executive and was finally received by the NEC on 26 February.<sup>3</sup>

The memorandum<sup>4</sup> was the first attempt within the party to formulate its own considered policy on Palestine, which until then had consisted of an assortment of conference resolutions and party declarations. Though prompted by Locker's submission, the memorandum ignored both his plea for increased immigration and protection for Jewish labour, and the claims of Shahla that Arab peasants were the victims of Jewish development. Given the wide spread of opinion on the Advisory Committee, the final result was

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1 See LP/ImpAC/3/7 for meetings attended by Bentwich, Garratt and Reid on 26 July 1935 & 30 Sept. 1935. Mrs. Bentwich, a member of the London County Council, decided to submit her own memorandum. Woolf found it 'reasonable', but did not distribute it, (CJ 30/2/2-8).

2 See below p. 136.

3 LP/ImpAC/1/184, 12 Feb. 1936. Four Zionist sympathisers from the PLP - Creech Jones, Williams, Adams and Lawrence - were present. Int Sub 19 Feb. 1936, NEC 26 Feb. 1936.

4 'A Long Term Policy for Palestine', Feb. 1936 (LP/ImpAC/2/160). For the initial version submitted by the sub committee, see FCB 176/1/File 1.

evidently very much of a common denominator.

The objective of the party's long term policy would be 'as stated in Article 2 of the Mandate'<sup>1</sup> which would continue in operation until 'such time as Arabs and Jews can live in tolerable harmony, political and economic'. The Mandate should only be given up if desired 'by the clearly expressed wish of the leading communities', in other words by both Jews and Arabs. The only reference to Jewish immigration and settlement was, rather curiously, in relation to Transjordan.<sup>2</sup> Apart from some comments on the constitution<sup>3</sup> the program concluded with some suggestions for 'raising the standard of living of all races'. This would include increased state activity in the fields of education, labour organisation, public works and social insurance.

In fact the report was so much of a compromise as to be almost worthless. Certainly it failed to provide any useful guidance for the party's leaders and although it might have stood as an unobjectionable statement it singularly failed to provoke the kind of discussion and reappraisal a more detailed or controversial report might have prompted. In future years the pressure of events were to bring disagreements within the Advisory Committee into sharper relief.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Article 2 referred to the establishment of the Jewish national home, and the 'safeguarding (of) the civil and religious rights of all the inhabitants of Palestine, irrespective of race and religion'.

2 The National Home should not be extended to Transjordan, but efforts should be made to withdraw restrictions on Jewish settlement. The Advisory Committee added: 'subject to the precaution being taken to safeguard the rights of the indigenous population in land'.

3 See below pp. 135-6.

4 The leading subjects for consideration by the Committee between 1935 and 1939 were West Indies (23), Palestine (19), Gold Coast (12) and Kenya (9). As Gupta comments (*op.cit.*, p. 230) 'the regions most discussed were those where social and political tensions resulted in serious violence'.



This did ensure more specific and thus more controversial recommendations. But those of February 1936 did represent the first and only attempt within the Labour Party to formulate a policy for Palestine at a time when the pressure of events did not compel it to do so.

### C. Labour and the Legislative Council

An important section of the Advisory Committee's program concerned the party's attitude to the proposed Legislative Council for Palestine. Because this was a specific, controversial problem and because the attitude of the Labour Party had some effect in influencing Government policy, it is necessary to consider this issue separately.

Proposals for a Legislative Council had been discussed between 1921 and 1923, and the Passfield White Paper contained a pledge to establish 'a measure of self governing institutions' and 'to encourage the widest measure of self government for localities consistent with prevailing conditions'. Palestinian Arabs demanded majority rule and self determination through an elected legislative assembly. Zionists feared the 'crystallisation' of the National Home should an Arab dominated council be established. Zionists were less uniform in their opinions, and Weizmann had been strongly criticised for conceding too much in this area during negotiations leading to the MacDonald letter.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Rose, op.cit., pp. 50-1. For the Legislative Council see ibid., pp. 41-71, Kayyali, op.cit., pp. 187-9, Porath Vol.II, op.cit., pp. 143-58, Sheffer, op.cit., pp. 255-65. See also Bentwich's letter to The Times (22 Aug. 1935) advocating parity.

National Government, urged on by Sir Arthur Wauchope, the new High Commissioner, reopened discussions and in November 1933 the Colonial Secretary announced to Parliament the Government's intention of setting up a Council.<sup>1</sup>

The Zionists' main concern was to delay the Government's decision and to convince their supporters that any significant development in this field<sup>would</sup> be ill advised. Concern over the proposals doubtless prompted Brodetsky to ask to meet the Advisory Committee;<sup>2</sup> later that year he sent Gillies a copy of a confidential memorandum submitted to the Colonial Secretary on the subject.<sup>3</sup> This argued the case for 'parity' - equal representation for Jews and Arabs - and the need for a Round Table Conference to discuss the proposals. One result was that 'Palestine: New Constitution' appeared on the agenda for 14 November.<sup>4</sup>

The meeting was addressed by Dov Hos, who had at last arrived in Britain. Clearly his main concern was the Legislative Council for as a result, as well as setting up the sub committee, the Advisory Committee instructed Woolf to draft a resolution for the party on the subject. This was considered at the next meeting and accepted by the NEC on 19 December.<sup>5</sup>

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1 HC Deb. Vol. 233 c.259, 23 Nov. 1933.

2 See p.129 above. S. Brodetsky to W.Gillies, 7 June, 1934, confirming meeting with Advisory Committee on Foreign Affairs (sic) (LP/WG/11(b)).

3 S.Brodetsky to W.Gillies, 16 Nov. 1934 (LP/WG/11(b)).

4 LP/ImpAC/2/142 (agenda), LP/ImpAC/1/147, 14 Nov. 1934.

5 LP/ImpAC/2/142 28 Nov. 1934, NEC 19 Dec. 1934.



The memorandum drew the attention of the NEC to recent Government statements. It argued that the improving inter communal relations could only be jeopardised by the publicity surrounding the establishment of a Legislative Council, which should therefore be opposed by the Labour Party 'whether composed of nominated or elected members, at the present time'.<sup>1</sup>

Woolf's suggestions were clearly in stark opposition to the Arabs' demands. Indeed, by opposing the idea of a Council of whatever composition or powers, the party offered a policy more intransigent than that espoused by most Zionists. But for the Labour Party to oppose a move towards representative self government a convincing reason had to be found, and Woolf therefore stressed his view that 'opposition should be based solely on the contention that the moment is inopportune'.

At this stage the party was not called upon publicly to state its views, but the following year great consideration was given to the question by the Advisory Committee's Sub Committee, and Reid and Bentwich had several discussions with Dov Hos. Their final proposals, adopted by the NEC in February 1936 included support for self government in local affairs, but again 'a Legislative Council wholly or partially elected, without Ministerial or executive responsibility' was opposed on the grounds that 'such a body would be likely to promote irresponsibility and discord without satisfying Jews or Arabs or facilitating

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<sup>1</sup> 'Palestine: Proposed Legislative Council', Nov. 1934 (LP/ImpAC/2/143).

good government'. The Advisory Committee did nevertheless amend the sub committee's report by stressing that only the immediate establishment of a Legislative Council should be opposed. The Committee also adopted the Zionist's suggestion that a Royal Commission should investigate the whole problem.<sup>1</sup>

On 27 November Hos' chapter on self governing institutions reached Transport House. Copies were also sent to sympathetic MPs,<sup>2</sup> and indeed members of the PLP were now beginning to stir themselves. On 17 December Wedgwood chaired a meeting of the PPC, which was attended by some 50 members. One result was a delegation to Thomas, the Colonial Secretary, which included Wedgwood and Williams. The latter also saw Thomas individually.<sup>3</sup>

Creech Jones also active. On entering the House he had offered his services to J.L.Cohen and to Arthur Lourie of the Jewish Agency, and early in the New Year he wrote to Lourie that 'I think the question of the Legislative Council for Palestine is very much in the newspapers. Do you want any questions put in the House? I expect you have already considered the matter, but if I can be of any help in this direction will you let me know?'<sup>4</sup> On 10 February

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1 The sub committee had suggested that the Royal Commission 'which should not be a Parliamentary one' ought to include representatives of the Opposition 'and one Jew and one Arab', but this was omitted.

2 see A.Lourie to Creech Jones, 29 Nov. 1935 (CJ 30/1/52).

3 Rose, op.cit., pp. 59,67-8 note 89. For another meeting of the PPC at which Blanche Dugdale spoke see N.Rose (ed), Baffy: The Diaries of Blanche Dugdale (London, 1973) pp. 4-6, diary entries 10 Feb. 1936, 17 Feb. 1936, cited henceforth as 'Dugdale Diaries'.

4 Creech Jones to J.L.Cohen, 13 Dec. 1935 (CJ 30/1/49), Creech Jones to A.Lourie, 4 Dec. 1935 (CJ 30/1/53), Creech Jones to A.Lourie, 3 Jan. 1936 (CJ 30/1/54). In reply



Tom Smith, a friend of Williams, asked Thomas whether 'in view of the protests made' he would make a statement on the matter.<sup>1</sup>

Labour peers had already gone one step further. On 6 February Namier learnt that Lord Snell, now Opposition leader in the House of Lords, had put down, with a number of colleagues, resolutions on the Legislative Council, and that a debate was likely.<sup>2</sup> In fact Labour peers were forcing the pace more than the Zionist leadership would have wished. Weizmann, indeed, had 'envisaged fighting the Government through the medium of parliamentary questions, not a full scale debate'.<sup>3</sup>

The party's initiative, which startled Weizmann's circle, was partly the result of the efforts of Labour Zionists. Hos had persuaded Williams and Snell to work for a debate;<sup>4</sup> Poale Zion had already joined in a delegation to Thomas protesting about the proposals,<sup>5</sup> and on 19 February the International Sub Committee discussed a memorandum it had submitted. The Council, Poale Zion argued,

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Creech Jones was asked to table a question concerning the Immigration Amendment Act (see CJ 30/1/55,63,64-7,68-70 & HC Deb. Vol. 309 c.431-2, 26 Feb. 1936).

1 HC Deb. Vol. c.552, 10 Feb. 1936. See Brodetsky, op.cit., p. 170 for a Congress of Anglo Jewry against the Legislative Council.

2 Rose, op.cit., p. 61. Namier at first believed that the debate would consider the Palestine situation in general. (Later Namier commented that Snell was the best informed person on the subject of Palestine in the Labour Party, Dalton Diaries, 18 June 1937.)

3 Sheffer, op.cit., p. 264.

4 Ibid.

5 The Times 1 Feb. 1936.

'would merely be a tool of vociferous Arab agitators...the mouthpiece of Arab vested interests'. A Legislative Council could only succeed if Jews ceased to be a minority, and when all members accepted the terms of the Mandate.<sup>1</sup> In Parliament this argument was taken up by Tom Williams,<sup>2</sup> and the International Sub Committee evidently concurred, as it circulated copies of Poale Zion's memorandum to the PLP, and resolved to support the opposition of the Advisory Committee.

Labour Zionists' arguments were expanded in an article sent to Stafford Cripps by Dov Hos, entitled 'Is this Democracy?: Palestine Labour and the New Legislature.'<sup>3</sup> Arab labour, Hos wrote, would be unrepresented on the Council, 'although agitators and feudal landlords would not'. In fact since 'up to date no Arab labour representative has found a place in a municipality, local council or advisory committee of the Government except one, the result of Jewish efforts' the Labour Party must, for the good of both Jewish and Arab labour, fight against the proposals.

On 26 February the House of Lords debated the Legislative Council. On behalf of the Labour Party Snell opened the debate on a motion urging the Government to defer the proposals until greater experience of local government had been gained. Snell argued that his motion was not designed

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<sup>1</sup> Int Sub 19 Feb. 1936, see copy of memorandum in LP/WG/9(a).

<sup>2</sup> HC Deb. Vol. 309 c.1364, 4 Mar. 1936. Williams, following the Advisory Committee, recommended 'greater development of municipal government to qualify people for democratic institutions'.

<sup>3</sup> Copy in CJ 30/2/9-18. D.Hos to S.Cripps, 5 Mar. 1936 (CJ 30/2/20-1).



to 'prejudice the legitimate interests of the Arab people', and indeed, he said, his party had the interests of the Arabs close at heart. But the proposals could only arrest the development of friendly relations between the two peoples. The Mandate required the reconstruction of the National Home. Self determination, since it conflicted with this obligation, must be deferred.<sup>1</sup>

Though Lord Mansfield found some amusement in the position of the Labour Party in the light of 'what I may perhaps be pardoned for describing as a pathetic belief in the value of representative institutions'<sup>2</sup> all speakers, with the exception of the Government spokesman, joined with Snell in opposing the Government's proposals. Snell was clearly tempted to ask for a vote, but decided not to jeopardise his considerable success.<sup>3</sup>

Weizmann and his colleagues were not inclined to press for a debate in the Commons<sup>4</sup> but the Labour Party evidently saw no reason to let the Government off lightly. On 20 March Mrs. Dugdale noted 'the sudden resolve of the Labour Party to have a Palestine debate next week. Rather tiresome, but if it is to be, then we must organise some speakers'.<sup>5</sup>

On 11 March William Mathers unsuccessfully suggested to

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1 HL Deb. Vol. 99 c.750, 26 Feb. 1936.

2 Ibid., c.769.

3 Ibid., c.795.

4 Rose, op.cit., p. 62. A desultory suggestion was made during a Zionist meeting that 'it might be possible to arrange in advance between the Leader of the Opposition and Thomas for a debate which would be moderate in tone'.

5 'Dugdale Diaries', 20 Mar. 1936.

the Colonial Secretary that a Royal Commission examine the problem.<sup>1</sup> The rejection of this proposal, which represented Labour Party policy, probably set the seal on the party's determination to press for a debate. There was a chance, clearly too good to be missed, to attack the Government with some effect, as the proposals were evidently unpopular on both sides of the House. Dov Hos, pursuing a line at variance with Weizmann's wishes<sup>2</sup> encouraged the Labour Party in its intentions, and at a meeting with Snell and Williams stressed the usefulness of such a debate.

When the debate finally took place on 25 March Wedgwood-who later claimed the credit for persuading Churchill, Amery and Sinclair to speak - opened for the Labour Party. He violently defended the rights of Jews to develop Palestine and to immigrate in large numbers, but spent little time on the actual proposals. In his view they would 'ruin any chance of developing Palestine in the future, as it had been developed in the past, supported by English justice, financed by Jewish capital, and inspired by the desire of a great people for freedom'.<sup>3</sup>

If for the Labour Party the debate was an opportunity to enjoy a mild revenge for Conservative attacks in 1930, for the Government there was the chance to pin the blame for the project on the last Labour Government, and at one stage Mathers was moved to intervene to defend the reputation of

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1 HC Deb. Vol. 309 c.2111-2, 11 Mar. 1936.

2 Sheffer comments 'that Mapai (the Palestine Labour Party) should operate on its own in promoting such a policy is plausible...', op.cit., p. 264.

3 HC Deb. Vol. 310 c.1090, 25 Mar. 1936.



Shiels, whose PPS he had been.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the tide was in the party's favour. After contributions from Hopkin and Silverman the attack was concluded by Tom Williams, who argued that only with great co-operation and experience of local democracy could such an assembly be set up.<sup>2</sup>

The debate was a considerable setback for the Government. Thomas' speech was unconvincing, and subject to continuous interruption. Wedgwood later wrote to his daughter in exultation that 'I have had a successful week...actually slain the Palestine Constitution...leaving the Rt. Hon. J.H. Dress Shirt in tears'.<sup>3</sup>

Several speakers, including Churchill and Melchett, had urged the party to raise the matter again in a Colonial Office debate, where the question could be taken to a vote,<sup>4</sup> but there was no need. Two weeks later an answer from Thomas indicated that the whole matter would quietly be dropped.<sup>5</sup> Soon afterwards violence again broke out in Palestine and the question became irrelevant.

If for Arab sympathisers the debate revealed once again the incorrigible influence of Zionism within the House of

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1 Ibid., c.1116-7.

2 Ibid., c. 1140-47.

3 C.Wedgwood, op.cit., p. 191. His aggression was not always admired even by Zionists. See Meinertzhagen's description of a speech by Wedgwood at the Anglo Palestine Club: 'his platitudinal catchphrases, his intense desire for cheap applause, his vulgar parliamentary delivery, disgusted me so much that I left before he had finished', Meinertzhagen, op.cit., p. 138, diary entry 11 Nov. 1927.

4 The debate was during the second reading of the Consolidated Fund Bill, where no votes could be taken.

5 HC Deb. Vol. 310 c.2760, 8 Apr. 1936.

Commons,<sup>1</sup> for Zionists the result was a triumph for parliamentary democracy through the defeat of an unpopular and unreasonable proposal.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless the Jewish Agency had perhaps been right to view the prospect of a full scale debate on the subject with some scepticism, for they were to be one factor leading to the appointment of a Royal Commission later that year, in the face of the Agency's objections.<sup>3</sup>

For the Labour Party the question of the Legislative Council developed into an excellent opportunity to attack the National Government, already weakened by the revelation of the Hoare-Laval Pact. If on the one hand the party moved faster than the Jewish Agency had wished, on the other it had been propelled by the verbal and written encouragements of Labour Zionists and - notwithstanding being seen to oppose a move towards Colonial self government - by its own instinctive dislike of the scheme. Though the party could boast a pleasing if minor victory, which further helped restore relations between the Zionists and the Labour Party, it stemmed from the happy coincidence of an unpopular proposal, a weak Colonial Secretary, and the existence of a vocal group of Conservative dissidents.

#### D. The Rejection of Partition 1936 - 1938

On 15 April 1936 two Jewish immigrants were killed by

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1 Porath, Vol. II, op.cit., p. 155,158-9, Kayyali, op.cit., pp. 187-8.

2 eg B.Janner in P.Goodman (ed), op.cit., pp. 109-10.

3 Sheffer, op.cit., p. 265.



Arabs on the road to Nablus. The following day an Arab was murdered, and on the 19th Arab riots began in Jaffa. On 25 April a Supreme Arab Committee was set up and a General Strike declared with the aim of achieving an end to Jewish immigration, a ban on Jewish land purchase and Arab majority government.<sup>1</sup> Until the end of May disorder was general throughout the country, and what became known as the 'Arab rebellion' was to continue until the outbreak of the European War. On 18 May Thomas announced that a Royal Commission would be sent to investigate the troubles and the 'alleged grievances'.

The Jewish Agency, with bitter memories of the Shaw Commission, had made strenuous efforts to prevent a repetition.<sup>2</sup> As part of their campaign Hos met Clement Attlee and other Labour leaders<sup>3</sup> and on 14 May Melchett discussed with his colleagues 'whether Attlee should move a Private Notice Question, adjourn the House and try to defeat the Government that very night'<sup>4</sup> but Attlee, it seems, strongly opposed the idea. Attlee, who as early as 22 April had answered questions on the subject at a meeting of the NEC,<sup>5</sup> took a similarly cautious line when at a later

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1 Royal Institute of International Affairs, Palestine 1915-39 (London, 1939) pp. 73-4, 76.

2 Weizmann called the Commission 'a foolish and useless thing', Rose, op.cit., p. 124. Ben Gurion 'was more frightened of the British than the Arabs', Bar Zohar, op.cit., p. 86.

3 Sheffer, op.cit., p. 265.

4 'Dugdale Diaries', 14 Mar. 1936.

5 Attlee was questioned by Susan Lawrence, NEC 22 Apr. 1936.

meeting he advised the Zionists to drop their idea of boycotting the Commission.<sup>1</sup>

On 27 May Lawrence again brought the disturbances to the attention of the NEC but evidently aroused little interest, for her colleagues ignored the subject for another four months. Lawrence was not to be diverted, and two days later submitted to the International Sub Committee a memorandum which drew attention to 'the real danger of leaving the Mufti with complete control of large funds of which no account is ever published'.<sup>2</sup>

By now protests had arrived from Palestine. A telegram from the Arab Labour Federation complained of Jewish outrages and asked the party to demand that the Government change its pro Jewish policy.<sup>3</sup> A much larger letter from Berl Locker on behalf of the Histadrut told of crimes perpetrated by Arab agitators, of the 'unclear, contradictory and weak' actions of the Palestine Government, and of the bitterness and suspicion of the Jewish population. Though, he said, debates in Parliament had strengthened Jewish faith in British public opinion, the fear remained

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1 M.J.Cohen, Palestine: Retreat from the Mandate. (London 1978) p. 14, note 16, for meeting between Zionists and Labour leaders. On 19 May Mrs. Dugdale noted: 'invented one or two questions for Attlee and Sinclair to put tomorrow', but there is no sign that Attlee responded to her promptings, 'Dugdale Diaries', 19 May 1936.

2 S.Lawrence to W.Gillies, 29 May 1936 (LP/WG/9(a)), 'Palestine' by Miss A.Susan Lawrence in ibid., Int Sub 8 June 1936. The memorandum was forwarded to the PLP.

3 Telegram, Arab Labour Federation, 24 May 1936 (LP/WG/9(a)). The Federation was based in Jaffa and claimed membership of 7,000, see Mansur, op.cit., p. 7.



that the Government contemplated abandoning the Balfour Declaration.<sup>1</sup> Locker's letter was circulated to all NEC members; Arab telegrams were merely noted.

Though Locker's message doubtless contributed to the PLP's decision to raise the matter in Parliament, for the second time that year Zionists were taken by surprise. To his wife Ben Gurion noted that 'the actual decision to hold a debate was not inspired by us. The Labour Party demanded it of its own accord'.<sup>2</sup>

The Jewish Agency nevertheless hurried to make the most of the debate. Ben Gurion and Weizmann visited Lloyd George and persuaded him to speak,<sup>3</sup> and the Agency prepared information for potential participants in the debate; Ben Gurion claimed that 'the speeches by Lloyd George, Leopold Amery, Creech Jones, Herbert Morrison, James de Rothschild, Victor Cazalet and Tom Williams were wholly or partly prepared by us'<sup>4</sup> and indeed the Labour members mentioned were the only ones to speak during the debate.

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1 B.Locker to W.Gillies, 14 May 1936, (copy in EEC minutes). Between 1936 & 1938 Locker was a member of the Histadrut Executive. In Britain Poale Zion was concerned to argue that the strike was no such thing: 'instigated by Arab capitalists, the landlords and the notables, who exploit the Arab workers the more brazenly as the workers are backward and unorganised and so at the mercy of their masters', see Jewish Socialist Labour Party, Poale Zion, Palestine Jewish Labour and the Arab 'Strike' (London, 1936).

2 Ben Gurion, 'Letters', op.cit., p. 100, letter dated 21 June 1936.

3 Ibid., p. 96-7, 14 June 1936. During this period he and Weizmann 'launched a campaign of unprecedented intensity to mobilise support for the Zionist view. They met the Colonial Secretary...the senior officials at the Colonial Office, lectured to political and public bodies, conferred with Zionist sympathisers in Parliament and briefed pro Zionist journalists', Bar Zohar, op.cit., p. 86.

4 Ben Gurion, op.cit.

The Advisory Committee took some notice of the forthcoming debate and asked Susan Lawrence to submit a memorandum suggesting ways of improving social services in Palestine and raising the Arab standard of living. No memorandum was submitted before the debate, though the request may have prompted Lawrence's later submissions.<sup>1</sup>

Making full use of statistics and information from the Jewish Agency Tom Williams, who opened for the Labour Party, denied that a 'land hunger' was being created by Jewish immigration, and told of large scale Arab immigration. He was also concerned to argue that the strike was simply a stoppage instigated by the Arab leaders, and condemned the fact that the Mufti was in receipt of Government funds. All three Labour speakers were recent visitors to Palestine and felt strongly that Jewish work should be protected and encouraged. Creech Jones saw the conflict as 'a clash between the centuries'.<sup>2</sup> Herbert Morrison was particularly fluent and Ben Gurion believed that 'his remarks on the workers' settlements and the human material which is building these settlements, and the spirit prevailing among them made a tremendous impression on his hearers'.<sup>3</sup>

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1 LP/ImpAC/1/187, 10 June 1936.

2 HC Deb. Vol. 313 c.1354, 19 June 1936.

3 He had himself prepared much of Morrison's draft, see Ben Gurion, op.cit., p. 99, 18 June 1936. Morrison was also 'very doubtful' about the Royal Commission.



Zionists naturally saw the debate as a victory.<sup>1</sup> Arthur Lourie, in thanking Creech Jones for his contribution, felt that the debate had been useful in urging the Palestine administration 'to execute the Mandate more positively' and in showing the Arabs that the authorities would not give in to violence.<sup>2</sup> In raising the question the party had certainly been prompted by legitimate concern, and Williams repudiated any notion of party political conflict,<sup>3</sup> but the Labour Party cannot have been sorry to have the Palestine question provide yet another chance for a telling if minor attack on the Government.

In the following weeks Labour MPs had the chance of hearing from both Arab and Jewish leaders. On 24 July Jabotinsky addressed the Parliamentary Palestine Committee<sup>4</sup> and early the following month 100 MPs from all parties heard a statement from the Arab delegation then in London.<sup>5</sup> Weizmann spoke at a similar gathering on 22 July to refute the Arab claims: 'apart from 2 or 3 friends of

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1 The only speeches unfavourable to the Zionist were from Clifton Brown, Crossley and the former Labour MP, Ernest Bennett, though Ben Gurion complained that, partly because it was held on a Friday, the debate had been ill attended.

2 A.Lourie to Creech Jones, 22 June 1936 (CJ 30/1/75).

3 'I want to say here that this is not a party question, and we have no desire to turn it into any form of party question, it is purely a Palestine question, and we want it to remain on that level', c.1326.

4 See CJ 30/1/75.

5 The Times 3 Mar. 1936 comments: 'all parties were represented and a large number of questions representing different points of view were put to and answered by the delegation...it was clear that very divergent views were held by those who were present'.

the Arabs, the meeting was on our side...'.<sup>1</sup> Jewish communities throughout Britain made their protests known, and Labour MPs met several deputations at the House of Commons.<sup>2</sup>

Zionists were now worried that, as in 1930, immigration might be suspended during the unrest.<sup>3</sup> As a precaution 'friends of all parties in the House and elsewhere' were sounded about their attitude,<sup>4</sup> and following Weizmann's meeting with MPs on 22 July a resolution was passed opposing any cessation of Jewish immigration.

Labour Zionists in the Yishuv were particularly worried. On 31 August an urgent telegram from the Histadrut warned that the Cabinet was thought to have agreed to a suspension.<sup>5</sup> Personal messages were sent to Labour leaders<sup>6</sup> and, with an eye to the forthcoming Congress, a telegram was sent to the TUC. Again it was Attlee who took action, visiting the Colonial Secretary to threaten a debate on the question of immigration and suggesting the immediate recall of Parliament in view of the critical situation in Palestine.<sup>7</sup> When the NEC and the General Council met on 4 September Attlee had the satisfaction of informing his

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1 Ben Gurion, 'Letters', op.cit., p. 106, 23 July 1936.

2 eg for a deputation of Yorkshire Jewry see CJ 30/1/76-7, for Manchester and Salford Jewry see N.Laski to J.Compton, 24 Aug. 1936 in LP/WG/9(a).

3 Rose, op.cit., p. 125, 'Dugdale Diaries' 1 July 1936, 20 July 1936.

4 Ibid., 1 July 1936.

5 Telegram dated 31 Aug. 1936 in LP/WG/9(a).

6 eg D.Hos to H.Morrison, 31 Aug. 1936 (LP/WG/9(a)). See also Leeds Labour Party asking for permission to send a telegram to the Colonial Offices, as urged by Leeds Poale Zion, (ibid.).

7 Cabinet minutes, quoted in Kayyali, op.cit., p. 200.



colleagues that the Government had decided immigration would not after all be curtailed. Hos cabled his 'heart-felt appreciation'.<sup>1</sup>

The Government's decision did not end the TUC's interest in the matter. On 7 September the General Council was read a telegram from nine American union leaders asking for assistance, and the Council decided to submit an emergency resolution to Congress.<sup>2</sup> On 10 September, following a long and heated debate on Spain the resolution was successfully proposed by George Isaacs in an equally passionate speech. The Government was urged to bring the disorders to an end, since they threatened to destroy 'this great humanitarian project, and to deprive the Jewish people of the opportunity of developing their own political, social and cultural interests'.<sup>3</sup>

The Labour movement had responded quickly to what proved to be a false alarm. The Government's decision stemmed chiefly from a desire not to be seen to be surrendering to violence, but the opinions of Opposition leaders were undoubtably a contributory factor. On 30 September Attlee and Greenwood had a further meeting with Ormsby-Gore, and the following month the Colonial Secretary recommended that immigration should continue during the investigations of the Royal Commission.<sup>4</sup>

In October the Annual Conference of the Labour Party took place in Edinburgh, and for the first time since 1931

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<sup>1</sup> GC & NEC 4 Sept. 1936, W.Gillies to D.Hos, 4 Sept.1936, D.Hos to W.Gillies 7 Sept. 1936 (LP/WG/9(a)). For a further letter from the Histadrut and a meeting between Greenwood and the Colonial Secretary, see NEC 5 Sept. 1936.

<sup>2</sup> GC 7 Aug. 1936, The Times 11 Aug. 1936.

<sup>3</sup> Report of the Annual Congress of the TUC, 1936 pp. 393-6.

<sup>4</sup> Rose, op.cit., p. 125.

Poale Zion sent a delegate. The Histadrut telegraphed their 'deep appreciation for the prompt effective response to approaches in this time of stress'<sup>1</sup> and sent as a representative Berl Katznelson, editor of the Palestine labour newspaper Davar. The Thursday session began with a debate on Palestine.

The NEC had decided to present an emergency resolution, and this was introduced by Susan Lawrence. It was predominantly a duplication of the TUC's resolution but there was a significant addition: conference was to recognise the vital strategic importance of Palestine 'and as such an object for rival imperialist interests'. Nevertheless the Mandate should continue to be held by Britain 'to ensure equal economic opportunities to all countries and a proper protection of minorities'.<sup>2</sup>

Conference had been dominated by an acrimonious debate on Spain, and now Lawrence drew the connection with her own topic: both Spain and Palestine were in vital strategic positions in the Mediterranean, and each was inflamed by arms and propaganda from 'a western power'. Thus, though the administration in Palestine could be criticised, the principle of 'international control' had to be maintained.<sup>3</sup>

Maurice Rosette seconded the resolution for Poale Zion, and spoke of the appreciation felt by Jews throughout the world of the TUC's resolution. Though a speaker from

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1 Telegram dated 30 Sept. 1936 in LP/WG/9(a).

2 NEC 4 Oct. 1936, LPACR 1936, p. 217.

3 Ibid., p. 218. Lawrence also spoke of Jewish achievements in Palestine, and of the need to improve Arab life.



Lewisham criticised the Mandate policy and the implication, as he saw it, that efforts towards reconciliation would begin only after force had quelled the disorders, after a speech in support from Helen Bentwich the resolution secured an overwhelming majority.<sup>1</sup>

There was a further resolution, proposed by Alex Gossip of the Furnishing Trades Association. This offered a left wing critique of the problem: the interests of Jewish and Arab workers were identical, and the enemy the capitalist and landlord of both races. Gossip argued that British rule in Palestine 'is one that in no sense whatever any real Socialist can defend'.<sup>2</sup> His seconder, Lester Hutchinson, felt that Zionism was profoundly reactionary. Arabs were fighting Jews 'not as Jews, but because the Jews have allowed themselves to become the unconscious tools of British imperialism'. The sponsors of the resolution could expect nothing more than a hearing. Rosette had denounced their line, and after Lawrence replied for the NEC the resolution was rejected.

The following month the Peel Commission began its enquiries, but the final report was not published until 7 July 1937.<sup>3</sup> It nevertheless soon became evident that the

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid., p. 220, see below p. 194.

3 In the upsurge of interest in Palestine during this period party members were often found addressing Zionist meetings, whilst the Creech Jones papers indicate the approaches being made to Labour MPs with an interest in the subject. In the latter half of 1936, for example, he was asked to the Parliamentary Council of ORT (an international organisation concerned with the training and settlement of Jewish refugees), the Palestine Crown Colony Association and the Freeland Committee (see CJ 30/1/78,88-9,91-100). Also

Commission was considering the possibility of partition as a solution. On 8 January Professor Coupland had questioned Weizmann on his attitude to such a scheme. Early the following month the two men discussed the subject in private, and on leaving Weizmann was moved to remark that 'today we laid the basis for the Jewish State'.<sup>1</sup> But many other Zionists reacted with caution if not hostility to the idea, and in this they were encouraged by the majority of Zionist sympathisers in Britain.

Yet one of the first British politicians who did advocate partition was a member of the Labour Party, though not, it is true an orthodox one. In July 1936 Stafford Cripps had written to the Manchester Guardian suggesting a compromise in the form of two independent states within a Palestine Federation. Immigration would be limited to the level of 1925-29 - that is, to a very low limit - and land settlement temporarily halted. Both immigration and land sales would restart if negotiations broke down; this, Cripps believed, would encourage Arab co-operation.<sup>2</sup>

Another maverick, Josiah Wedgwood, hurried to deride the scheme as 'the wisdom of Solomon'<sup>3</sup> but it became evident the following year that more representative members of his party shared his instinctive hostility to such a scheme. When

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during this period came the reconstruction of Wedgwood's 'Seventh Dominion League, see below p.211.

1 J.L.Melzer, 'Towards the Precipice' in M.Weisgal & J.Carmichael (eds.), Chaim Weizmann: A Biography by Several Hands (London, 1963) p. 241.

2 Manchester Guardian 8 July 1936.

3 Ibid., 11 July 1936.



invited by Victor Cazalet to sign a statement advocating partition Creech Jones declined, and his reaction was typical of many Zionist supporters within the party:

'Does it represent a considerable volume of opinion among Jews? I have grave doubts as to its practicability and I do not know whether at this stage it would be wise for those who have supported the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine to make such a proposal which is a considerable limitation and might prove to be a big modification in the conception of the Balfour Declaration!'

On 26 April Weizmann heard from Coupland that the Commission would unanimously recommend a scheme of partition.<sup>2</sup> With the help of Sinclair he arranged a dinner to assess the reaction of political friends. Churchill roundly condemned the idea, as did Wedgwood. Clement Attlee, who had also been invited, was 'shocked at the idea of partition. It was, he felt, a concession to violence, a confession of failure, and a triumph for Fascism'.<sup>3</sup> Dalton later warned Namier, who had outlined a scheme acceptable to the Jewish Agency, that 'many of my colleagues who were very friendly to the Jews would be inclined to oppose partition in the interests of the Jews themselves'.<sup>4</sup>

In the light of the disturbances and the investigations of the Peel Commission the Advisory Committee again involved

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1 V.Cazalet to Creech Jones, 8 Apr. 1937 (CJ 30/3/1), Creech Jones to Cazalet (CJ 30/3/5), see R.Rhodes James, Victor Cazalet: A Portrait (London, 1976) pp. 174-8.

2 Rose, op.cit., p. 130. Several of Coupland's colleagues were sceptical of the plan but agreed to make the report unanimous, see M.Gilbert, Sir Horace Rumbold: Portrait of a Diplomat (London, 1973) p. 427.

3 'Dugdale Diaries', 9 June 1937, Dalton Diaries 18 June 1937, Rose, op.cit., p. 132.

4 Dalton Diaries op.cit., for Bentwich's hostility to partition see Hattis, op.cit., p. 196, Martin, 'Rumbold', op.cit., p. 439.

itself in the problem, prompted yet again by Susan Lawrence. In October she presented a memorandum arguing the need for further education and social provisions for the Arab population.<sup>1</sup> To this Helen Bentwich took great exception: 'I don't think it touches the problem at all'. She believed the real problem was the lack of sympathy of the Palestine administration.<sup>2</sup>

Conscious that events had overtaken the usefulness of their earlier work the Committee resolved to re-establish the sub committee, which was to proffer another long term report.<sup>3</sup> This was presented in January 1937, the work chiefly of Lawrence<sup>4</sup> and dwelt again on what she saw as the 'Arab case' - the need for Government action to raise the standard of living. But the Committee clearly considered the report insufficient. Thomas Reid and Lord Snell were added to the Sub Committee, which was instructed to prepare a comprehensive report, to deal with immigration, land and the constitution.<sup>5</sup>

The sub committee met twice in early February and again a week later to consider yet another submission from Lawrence. On this occasion she proffered a plan for

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1 'Palestine', Memorandum by S. Lawrence, October 1937 (LP/ImpAC/2/169), meeting 14 Oct. 1936 (LP/ImpAC/1/195).

2 H. Bentwich to Creech Jones(?), 25 Oct. 1936 (CJ 30/2/23). She again- unsuccessfully - asked to address the Committee.

3 LP/ImpAC/1/198, 11 Nov. 1936.

4 The other sub committee members were Shiels and Maynard, though the report simply stood over Lawrence's name, see 'Palestine' (LP/ImpAC/2/178).

5 LP/ImpAC/1/2-4, 27 Jan. 1937.



proportional representation, an idea incorporated in the final report for use in municipal elections.<sup>1</sup>

The recommendations clearly reflected the divided opinions of its members. Two, Snell and Lawrence, were well known as supporters of Zionism whilst their three colleagues - Reid, Maynard and Shiels - were cautiously neutral or hostile. Thus, although the sub committee advocated the building of a Jewish National Home and the adherence of 'economic absorptive capacity' as a guide to Jewish immigration, such capacity should be 'carefully gauged', and Transjordan closed to Jewish development. There could not be 'complete self government' but, in contrast to the recommendations of the previous year, there should be an elected legislature with 'genuine executive responsibility'.

One recommendation completely divided the sub committee and was included only through the casting vote of the Secretary, Reid. For a period of ten years the immigration of Jews should be governed by the proviso that 'the present relative proportions of Jews and Arabs in Palestine should be preserved approximately'. This was a condition no Zionist could accept.<sup>2</sup>

In a series of meetings the Advisory Committee discussed the report, now expanded by the addition of a long historical

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1 LP/ImpAC/3/29,30,35 3,10,17 Feb. 1937, 'Palestine: A Note on Proportional Representation', S.Lawrence (LP/ImpAC/2/181).

2 Memorandum adopted a meeting held at House of Commons on February 10th 1937 by Palestine Sub Committee (LP/ImpAC/3/32).

introduction by Reid.<sup>1</sup> In the course of amendment it became clear that, despite the presence on the full committee of further Zionist supporters - including Creech Jones and Noel Baker - the Advisory Committee echoed its sub committee in giving only qualified approval to Zionist aims. Though on one occasion the Chairman's casting vote was needed the main thrust of the memorandum remained, and the suggestion that Dov Hos be called in for consultation was rejected.<sup>2</sup> At a packed meeting on 7 April the document was passed for consideration by the NEC.

The final report dwelt on the pan Arab and pan Jewish aspects of the problem, and on the strategic interests involved.<sup>3</sup> In most respects its recommendations were those of the sub committee, but on the vital question of the limitation to be placed on Jewish immigration the Advisory Committee had been more specific. The Arabs were to be assured of a permanent, substantial majority - 'something like 60% of the whole population'.

This was potentially the most serious check the Zionists had received inside the Labour Party. The suggestion of limiting the Jewish population to 40% of the total had already formed part of a compromise scheme suggested by Lords Samuel and Winterton the previous year. Their efforts had met with no real success<sup>4</sup> and by 1937 no Zionist could

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1 LP/ImpAC/1/208,10,12,14, 24 Feb., 10 & 24 Mar., 7 Apr. 1937, see revised report LP/ImpAC/2/179B.

2 LP/ImpAC/1/212, 24 Mar. 1937.

3 'Report of Proposed Long Term Policy for Palestine', April 1937 (LP/ImpAC/1/179C).

4 See Cohen, op.cit., p. 27, Hattis, op.cit., pp. 194-5.



possibly have agreed to such a limitation which, the Committee suggested, should last for a decade.

But the battle was by no means lost. Just as Zionists during this period gained accurate information of Cabinet decisions from sympathetic Ministers<sup>1</sup> so contacts within the Labour Party were sufficient to provide an early warning of the Advisory Committee's proposals. On 5 May NEC members reported that several approaches had been made by 'prominent Jews'. Several complaints reached Middleton. One correspondent cited the proposal to fix the population ratio, and named the authors of the report.<sup>2</sup>

Middleton tried to reassure complainants<sup>3</sup> but was considerably annoyed at the disclosures. His irritation was shared by the NEC, which instructed him to admonish the Advisory Committee. Someone had been culpably indiscreet; as Middleton pointed out to Gillies, the names of the sub committee members had not even appeared on the documents.<sup>4</sup>

But it was nonetheless immediately clear that the sympathies of the NEC remained overwhelmingly pro Zionist despite the irritation caused by the leaks, and indeed the interventions may have influenced the NEC in its decision to delay taking action until Dov Hos had been interviewed - this the Advisory Committee had declined to do. Only after contacting Zionist spokesmen would the NEC consider the

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1 In particular Walter Elliot, see 'Dugdale Diaries', passim.

2 Letter forwarded by Lord Mayor of Manchester, 21 May 1937 (JSM 210/137).

3 'Apart from the betrayal of confidence in respect to the...Memorandum you and your friends can rest assured that the NEC...will remember the party's previous Palestine policy', J. Middleton to W.Chadwick, 26 May 1937 (JSM 210/138).

4 NEC 25-6 May 1937, J.Middleton to W.Gillies, 7 June 1937 (JSM 210/139).

matter again. On 24 May the International Sub Committee met Dov Hos, Ben Gurion and Berl Katznelson and 'a useful exchange of views took place'.<sup>1</sup>

The Peel Report which, as expected, recommended a scheme of partition, was published in July. During the previous months the Jewish Agency had taken care to keep Labour MPs informed of the case it was presenting to the Commission<sup>2</sup> and now it was decided that consideration of the report was to be by a Joint Committee of the International Sub Committee and the PLP.

Though the Advisory Committee's memorandum was never specifically rejected this decision was the clearest possible indication that its advice was being ignored. Not only did the Joint Committee begin by hearing a statement from Ben Gurion and Dov Hos, but the composition of the Committee was virtually a roll call of Zionist supporters within the party. From the International Sub Committee came Lawrence and Morrison, whilst Williams, Grenfell, Frankel, Hopkin, Wedgwood, Creech Jones and Greenwood represented the PLP.<sup>3</sup>

The NEC had every right to ignore the recommendations and opinions of the Advisory Committee but the episode clearly showed the limitations of such a system. Though backed up by considerable experience and study the opinions of the Committee clearly carried less weight with the NEC

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<sup>1</sup> Report in NEC ibid.

<sup>2</sup> eg A.Lourie to Creech Jones, 22 Jan, 1937 (CJ 30/1/10).

<sup>3</sup> Int Sub 15 July 1937. The remaining PLP representative was D.N.Pritt.



than did the views of Labour Zionists. It is not surprising that after this incident the Advisory Committee showed little inclination to involve itself in the Palestine problem for some considerable time and ignored its own earlier resolve to take further action in light of the Peel Report.<sup>1</sup>

Ben Gurion had initially shown some enthusiasm for the idea of partition. Cripps' proposal had apparently 'fired his enthusiasm'.<sup>2</sup> It was nonetheless only after considerable persuasion from his colleagues that he agreed, in June 1937, to support the Agency's plan of partition.<sup>3</sup> The policy of Weizmann, despite the opposition of many Jews and the scepticism of gentile friends, was tentatively to accept the idea whilst demanding drastic revisions of the practical details. On 13 July Jabotinsky addressed a group of 40 MPs at the House of Commons and attacked the proposals as unfair to the Jews and unwise for the British Empire: 'all hopes of a National Home will disappear if (the Peel proposals) are carried out'.<sup>4</sup>

Attlee had assured Weizmann that although he personally disliked the idea of partition he would not oppose it against the wishes of the Zionists. But it was not entirely clear just what the Zionist did want. Ben Gurion had been confidentially asked on 15 July what reaction he would like from the Labour Party, for the Government had

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1 LP/ImpAC/1/227 14 July 1937.

2 Bar Zohar, op.cit., p. 87.

3 'Dugdale Diaries' 9 June 1937.

4 Zionews (the organ of the New Zionist Organisation, the right wing Zionist Revisionist movement led by Vladimir Jabotinsky) 15 July 1937, and see copy of Jabotinsky's address in CJ 30/2/29-41.

announced a debate on the subject the following week. His reply was that, although an alteration of the plan was needed, the continuation of the Mandate administered in such an unpopular way would prove at least as dangerous as partition.<sup>1</sup> Yet Hos, in a summary of the Zionist's case submitted the following day laid most stress on the dangers of the Peel proposals: 'it was greatly to be regretted that the Commission should have proposed that the Mandate should be submitted and the country be partitioned'.<sup>2</sup> Labour politicians were instinctively drawn to the drawbacks and disadvantages - from the Zionist point of view - of partition, which the Revisionists incessantly pointed out. Labour Zionists failed, if such was their aim, in preventing the Labour Party from mounting a full scale attack on the Peel Report.<sup>3</sup>

A curious situation was emerging. The Cabinet, nervous of parliamentary reaction, instructed the Colonial Secretary to discuss with Opposition leaders their reaction to the plan.<sup>4</sup> It became evident that whilst the Jewish Agency in London were still prepared to give qualified approval to the scheme the Labour Party - and many Conservative critics - were not. On the other hand pro Arabs in the House had

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1 Cohen, op.cit., p. 35. He errs in describing it as a meeting of the NEC.

2 'Note on the Report of the Royal Commission by Dov Hos, 16 July 1937' pp. 35-6, in LP/WG/9(f).

3 Zionist tactics were somewhat confused and inept. 'Whether the Zionists could have exerted sufficient pressure on the Opposition to restrain it from 'overdoing' its attack on partition must remain a matter for speculation', Cohen, op.cit., pp. 35-6.

4 'Sheffer, op.cit., p. 490.



resolved to support partition as 'the only possibility of a permanent solution of the problem'<sup>1</sup> even though Jamal Husseini, the leader of the Palestinian Arab delegation stressed his 'irrevocable opposition' to the scheme.<sup>2</sup>

The House of Lords debated the report on 21 July. Lord Snell, who opened for the Labour Party, regretted that the Commissioners had 'given up their patient before they tried to cure him'. The Labour Party, he said, could not support the scheme. He pleaded for delay and 'a breathing time to try again'. His colleague Lord Strabolgi was particularly concerned to spell out the strategic dangers of the plan.<sup>3</sup>

The following day it was the turn of the Commons. At a meeting of the PLP the party had decided to press for the appointment of a Joint Select Committee and to carry the matter to a division; this had been preceded by a private meeting of Zionist supporters from all parties to co-ordinate their plans for the debate.<sup>4</sup> Ormsby-Gore's private talks had clearly failed, and he warned the Cabinet that the Opposition's amendment would have to be resisted, but when the debate began the Prime Minister insisted that, at whatever cost, a party vote must be avoided.<sup>5</sup> Although it

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1 The Times 21 July 1937 for meeting of pro Arab politicians

2 Ibid. 3 HL Deb. Vol. 106 c.599-674, 21-2 July 1937.

4 The Times 21 July 1937, Zionews 1 Aug. 1937.

5 See FO 371/20809 E4290. Chamberlain had apparently told Ormsby-Gore 'I will not have a party vote on Palestine - you must get out of it as best you can', Rose, op.cit., p. 140. Zionews 1 Aug. 1937 records that 'immediately before the opening of the debate a list bearing the names of a considerable number of Conservative MPs who had decided to vote against the Government's partition motion was handed to Mr. Ormsby-Gore'.

has been argued that the Government's retreat from acceptance of the plan was due to factors outside the parliamentary arena, pressure from the Labour Party and its temporary allies was clearly responsible for the Government's seemingly spineless retreat during the debate, and the crushing rejection of its plans.

Morgan Jones had been chosen to lead for the Labour Party and duly moved that a Joint Committee be established. He and Tom Williams, the other Labour front bench speaker, concentrated on two aspects: that Parliament was being asked to approve a policy it had not been able to consider, and that the plan itself was unsound. Williams told the House his party believed the proposals to be 'ill considered, hopelessly inconclusive, tremendously speculative and hazardous, and may even create less peace in the future than there has been in the past 15 years'.<sup>1</sup>

Dan Frankel<sup>2</sup> and Josiah Wedgwood spoke from the Labour back benches, and were joined in their attack by Campbell Stephen (ILP) and Willie Gallacher (Communist). A major assault was launched by Churchill, who moved that the policy be brought before the League of Nations 'with a view to enabling HMG, after adequate inquiry, to present to Parliament a definite scheme in accordance with the policy as set out (in the White Paper)'. Amidst considerable

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<sup>1</sup> HC Deb. Vol. 326 c.2341, 22 July 1937.

<sup>2</sup> Frankel, MP for Mile End, explained that he had never been officially connected with the Zionist movement, or with any organisation concerned with Palestine, but felt his 'responsibility as a Jew in the House', *ibid.*, c.2285.



procedural wrangling, gleefully pursued by ILP members Attlee, though protesting that he did not desire a party vote, rejected Churchill's amendment as still committing the House to the Government's policy. With Morrison's help a compromise was finally reached and Churchill accepted a modification to his amendment. Ormsby-Gore could only accept it with good grace.<sup>1</sup>

If the Government was highly embarrassed, Arab sympathisers were disgusted, seeing the debate as proof that the friends of Zionism in Parliament could always undo the good intentions of Government and High Commissioner.<sup>2</sup> It seemed a repeat of the debate on the Legislative Council the previous year. In fact the parallel was close, for again a superficial Zionist success had had serious repercussions. As Blanche Dugdale immediately realised, the debate had jeopardised the very principle of partition.<sup>3</sup>

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1 The final resolution read 'that the proposals contained in CMD 5513 relating to Palestine should be brought before the League of Nations with a view to enabling HMG after adequate inquiry, to present to Parliament a definite scheme taking into full account all the recommendations of the White Paper'. It was opposed by Maxton, Stephan and Buchanan of the ILP.

2 Kenneth Pickthorn later referred bitterly to 'a most elaborate and multangular manouever between Ealing (Churchill) and Carnarvon (Lloyd George) and South Hackney (Morrison) and the rules of order and the back of the Speaker's chair and other parts of the world', (HC Deb. Vol. 341 c.2012, 24 Nov. 1938). For a description of the incident see Zionews 1 Aug. 1937.

3 'Dugdale Diaries' 21 July 1937. Tribune (23 July 1937) still believed that 'the plan is likely to go through. It is too good a thing for the British Imperialist'.

This was~~not~~ what the Zionists had wanted. As Rose comments 'the debate...offers the most striking example of the way the Zionists would often overstate their case then, as a result, find themselves outpaced by their gentile supporters'.<sup>1</sup> The doubts felt by the Labour leaders concerning partition had been nurtured and encouraged, but the result was an attack far more wholesale and devastating than suited the Zionists' purpose, for the alternative to partition was potentially far less agreeable.

The Labour Party could take a less unqualified satisfaction at the result.<sup>2</sup> A dislike of partition and a desire, as the party saw it, to assist the Zionist cause again combined with the political capital to be gained by a successful attack on the National Government.

The annual conference was a time for self congratulation. Rosette described the debate as 'not only a victory for the cause in which I am particularly interested, but by its procedure and its determination to check the attempt of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons to impose something against the wish of the people of this country, it was also a victory for democracy'.<sup>3</sup> Williams, who replied for the Executive, promised that the party would 'always be watchful with regard to the interests of those Jews who have gone to Palestine to earn their own livelihood in their own way',<sup>4</sup> and this was echoed by Clement

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1 Rose, op.cit., p. 222.

2 See eg LPACR 1937, Parliamentary Report, p. 95: 'the party, therefore, scored a distinct success, and it was good to see the desires of the House prevail over what in this particular case was a somewhat precipitate decision of the Government'.

3 Ibid., p. 217.

4 Ibid., p. 218. Both Williams and Rosette noted that the



Attlee.<sup>1</sup>

On 21 October the Colonial Secretary announced that a further Commission would be sent to Palestine to examine specific proposals for partition.<sup>2</sup> One of the Commissioners was to be Thomas Reid, a man of undoubted experience in colonial and middle eastern affairs, though one whose views on the subject were certainly not those of his party. On the other hand the Foreign Office, opposed to partition and critical of the Colonial Secretary's other nominees, welcomed Reid's appointment wholeheartedly, Rendel applauding his 'sound judgement and independence of outlook'.<sup>3</sup> On his journey home Reid made known his views to a member of the Jewish Agency. Zionism, he argued, was an unwise movement to foster, for the real solution was assimilation. Above all Jews 'had no right to displace the Arabs of Palestine...the 450,000 Jews in Palestine could stay but they could not expect to establish a state in other people's territory'.<sup>4</sup>

Ministers were now extremely doubtful about a policy of partition, and it was announced on 23 December that the Commission had been instructed to include as few Arabs as possible in the Jewish State. For Zionists this was particularly ominous, as their proposed state would necessarily be small, and intensive propagandising and lobbying

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Government had at last taken action against the Mufti, as demanded by the party.

1 'I assure our comrades that this matter is one of continuing anxiety to us...we shall keep in close touch with our Labour friends in Palestine...and take whatever action is necessary as soon as we get back to the House of Commons', *ibid.*, p. 218.

2 HC Deb. Vol. 327 c.23-38, 21 Oct. 1938.

3 FO 371/21362 E1135, 1 Mar. 1938.

4 Cohen, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

activities began again.

Within the Labour Party such activity was immediate and effective. When the NEC met on 7 January 1938 the question of the Government's White Paper was raised.<sup>1</sup> Members spoke of the number of letters and telegrams received from 'important Jewish organisations and individuals'.<sup>2</sup> As a result the NEC decided to submit a resolution to a Joint Meeting that afternoon. The resolution, which was duly passed, 'profoundly regretted' that there would be further delay in reaching a decision. This was to 'put a premium on terrorism and increase the degree of disturbances'. The Government must reach a decision and submit it to Parliament.<sup>3</sup>

Even after the resolution was made public telegrams, letters and resolutions continued to reach MPs and Executive members. Contacts with leading Zionists were particularly close though Attlee, who dined with Brodetsky on the evening before the NEC meeting, caused some alarm by suggesting that 'supplementary territories' might be considered.<sup>4</sup>

The International Sub Committee took up the question on 28 January and resolved that another joint meeting with PLP members should be held, to which Ben Gurion would be invited. The Zionists, doubtless remembering previous

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1 Cmd. 5634, Policy on Palestine: A Despatch of 23 December, 1937 (1938). See also D. Ben Gurion, Mr. Ormsby-Gore's Despatch Analysed (Palestine Labour Studies No. 8, London, 1938).

2 NEC 7 Jan. 1938.      3 Minutes in NEC ibid.

4 S. Brodetsky to J. Middleton, 10 Jan. 1938. The former claimed Attlee's suggestion had given him 'many sleepless nights' (JSM 210/141).



occasions when the party's call for a debate had taken the Jewish Agency by surprise, let it be known that on this occasion a debate would not be desirable.<sup>1</sup> On 10 February he addressed the meeting. Again the membership was overwhelmingly pro Zionist.<sup>2</sup> There was a general agreement that the party should continue in its critical attitude towards the Government for its 'abandonment' of the Mandate. Party policy would be to press for an announcement of policy, and to raise the question of Jewish immigration.

Despite the strong feelings previously expressed on the subject, the meeting also resolved that a 'non commital' attitude should be continued with regard to partition.<sup>3</sup> In fact several leading Zionist sympathisers in the party now had considerably more sympathy with the idea. Susan Lawrence now felt that although what she termed a 'properly administered' Mandate would have been the best solution the time had come that 'some scheme of partition would be in the best interests of the country'.<sup>4</sup> As a result, claimed the Zionist Revisionists, of 'the machinations of the Jewish Agency' the PPC now abandoned its near unanimous hostility to the idea of partition, and in February Morrison and Wedgwood joined a delegation which urged upon

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1 W.Gillies to L.Scott (Secretary of the PLP), 31 Jan.1938 (LP/WG/9(c)). On 9 February Ben Gurion addressed the PPC (see CJ 30/6/20).

2 For the Sub Committee: Dallas, Attlee, Latham, Lawrence, Morrison, Noel Baker, Prain, Walker, Wilkinson. For the PLP: Creech Jones, Frankel, Pritt, M.Jones, Williams.

3 Any suggested plan for a Jewish State should be examined 'from the standpoint of its practicability as a unit of Government, its security, and the possibility of growth within its frontiers'.

4 'Notes on a Policy for Palestine' by S.Lawrence, Int Sub 28 Jan. 1938.

the Prime Minister that, although it was not an ideal solution, the plan could not be abandoned having received Government support.<sup>1</sup> Later that year Stafford Cripps urged partition as a temporary expedient to enable immediate help to be given to Jewish refugees.<sup>2</sup> There was clearly now a fear that partition, which the party had so roundly condemned, now represented a lesser evil than giving the Government a free hand. Namier's assertion that the party's opposition to partition 'would do no harm'<sup>3</sup> was clearly now being reassessed.

It was now becoming evident that the Government was contemplating an abandonment of partition and a continuation of the Mandate in terms highly unfavourable to the Zionists. But party involvement with Palestine dwindled in the summer of 1938, as tensions mounted in Europe and the Woodhead Commission continued its work. Zionist contacts with the Labour movement were not resumed at any important level until the TUC met in September.<sup>4</sup> Again the object was a favourable reference during Congress. On 1 September the General Council considered a memorandum from Locker asking for a declaration on the need for large scale immigration. After further pleas from Hos Sir Walter Citrine met Locker and agreed that some reference might be made. A resolution was finally presented at a joint meeting with the NEC. It referred to developments in Europe which had made it imperative for Britain to carry

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1 Zionews 28 Feb. 1958, Jeffries, op.cit., p. 694.

2 Tribune 21 Oct. 1938.      3 Dalton Diaries 18 June 1937.

4 There was no Labour Party conference in 1938.



out her Mandate obligations - Jewish refugees must have every opportunity to enter Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

The Woodhead Report was presented to the House of Commons on 9 November. The best partition plan the Commissioners felt able to recommend consisted of a small Jewish state on the coastal plain. Zionists naturally condemned the report. For Weizmann it was 'a piece of bare-faced cynicism'.<sup>2</sup> A Government statement of policy declared that partition was impracticable and proposed a conference to consider future policy.<sup>3</sup>

On 21 November members of the International Sub Committee discussed the report.<sup>4</sup> On previous occasions it had met with pro Zionist members of the PLP, but on this occasion it joined with colleagues from the Advisory Committee. Unanimity was therefore less likely, and the minutes of the meeting record no conclusions or resolutions. The discussion was opened by Thomas Reid. He had not felt able to sign the majority Woodhead Report without a note of reservation, arguing that no form of partition whatsoever would be possible without 'a grave departure from justice'.<sup>5</sup>

The Commons debated the report on 24 November. Morrison was the leading spokesman for the Labour Party, and in a long and rambling speech he condemned the Government's attitude as 'we have a policy for dealing with this matter

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1 GC 1 & 7 Sept. 1938, GC NEC & EC of PLP 7 Sept. 1938.

2 Rose, op.cit., p. 171.

3 Cmd. 5854, The Palestine Partition Report (Oct. 1938), Cmd. 5893 A Statement of Policy by HMG (Nov. 1938).

4 Int Sub 21 Nov. 1938. See also J.Cohen to W.Gillies, 17 Nov. 1938 sending, at Gillies' request, an article on the report (LP/WG/9(c)).

5 Cmd. 5854, ibid., 'A Note of Reservation by Mr. Reid', pp. 263-81.

and this policy is discussion'.<sup>1</sup> With Wedgwood, Williams and McGovern (ILP) he attacked the Government for maladministration in Palestine and procrastination in formulating a policy. All emphasised the desperate need for immigration facilities for European Jews. The Woodhead Report and the question of partition were given scarcely a mention. The idea was dead. But Zionist supporters were now grimly aware that the Government was contemplating the introduction of a unilateral policy of its own. Wedgwood had no hesitation in perceiving 'the prospect of another appeasement'.<sup>2</sup>

Though the Government moved away from partition for reasons other than opposition in the House of Commons it was, through this period, particularly sensitive to Parliamentary opinion on the question of Palestine. The willingness of the Labour Party to serve as a focus of Zionist activity and as an ally for pro Zionists in other parties embarrassed the Government, and on one occasion humiliated it. The Labour Party's reaction, of immediate suspicion of the idea of partition, was representative of the majority of gentile sympathisers, and fitted agreeably into a general campaign of parliamentary activity against the National Government. There was also a particular satisfaction to be had in paying back the Conservative Party for the indignities suffered by the previous Labour Government on the same subject.

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1 HC Deb. Vol. 341 c.1997, 24 Nov. 1938.

2 Ibid., c.2044.



Zionist requests when directed at the Labour Party or the TUC were almost invariably answered, by resolutions, parliamentary activity or meetings with Ministers. Zionist embarrassment was caused less by occasional anti Zionist resolutions proposed at Conference, or by opposing views in the Advisory Committee, than by the eagerness of their friends in Parliament.

E. The Revival of Poale Zion and the Activities of the Arab Centre

Between 1936 and the outbreak of the European War, as violence mounted in Palestine and the future of the Mandate was increasingly called into question, there was a considerable resurgence in the work of Poale Zion. There was also, for the first time, a systematic attempt by Arab spokesmen in London to present their case. Each group, with differing success, sought to influence Labour Party members and to impress their views upon the party leadership.

The years between 1931 and 1936 had seen little activity by Poale Zion in Britain. In 1936, when the party reappeared as an affiliate and participated at the Labour Party conference it was credited with only 450 members.<sup>1</sup> According to Labour Party records membership remained at this level until 1943, but all other indications are that after 1936 membership and activity increased considerably.

A number of new branches were formed, including one founded by Sidney Silverman in Liverpool, so that by 1940 there appear to have been some eight branches, and a

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<sup>1</sup> LPACR 1936, p. 76.

separate London Council.<sup>1</sup> The party also sought to consolidate its position within the Workers' Circle mutual aid organisation, which allowed separate branches to conduct independent political activity. Though many branches remained under non-Zionist or Communist control, in 1936 Poale Zion was able to double the number under its control with the establishment of branches in Glasgow and North London.<sup>2</sup>

This increase was prompted both by the growing concern over developments in Europe and Palestine and by the arrival of many refugees from Europe. In 1938 junior branches of Poale Zion were formed in London and elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> and a number of training farms were established. Among the new recruits to the party was Abba Eban, who became active in political work at the Zionist Office.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand the party still experienced considerable difficulty in propagating Zionism among working class Jews in the East End. An article in the Zionist Review in 1935 lamented the weakness of organised Zionism in the area and urged that a determined effort be made to make it again the strong force it had once been.<sup>5</sup>

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1 The Jewish Yearbook (London, 1940) pp. 81-2, lists branches in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and North, North West and East London.

2 The Circle Oct. 1936, Feb. 1937. Under Poale Zion control were Leeds (Branch 12), Glasgow (18) - both cities also had non-Zionist branches - London (15) and North London (19). Among the branches under Communist control were 1, 9 & 10, see The Circle *passim*.

3 Levenberg, *op.cit.*, p. 331. Dr. Levenberg, a Labour Zionist editor, arrived from Poland in 1936 and thenceforth played a leading part in the party's work.

4 A. Eban, An Autobiography (London, 1977) pp. 19, 22.

5 ZR Jan. 1935, Oct. 1935.



In part this lack of success was due to the strong opposition of the Communist Party, many of whose members were Jewish. Joe Jacobs, then a leading Stepney Communist, has written of a visit by Jabotinsky to the East End:

'We had made our intentions quite clear. It was like preparing to attack a Fascist meeting without having to deal with opposition from the police. It turned out to be more difficult to heckle Jabotinsky than Mosley. His stewards were well organised for dealing with opposition without police aid.'

Though Jacobs also comments that 'the social democratic Zionists were much more effective and enjoyed wide support among working class Jews' in October 1938 Poale Zion found it necessary to form a special committee 'to approach the Jewish workers and Jewish working class organisations of London to enlist their support'.<sup>2</sup> Strong opposition was expected from the Communists but it was felt that the party's views on Palestine were not popular: 'an individual appeal to Jewish trade unions on the basis of the right of free immigration was certain of success'. This was by no means the last of the many attempts made by Poale Zion to enlist the support of East End Jews for the National Home.

Another sign of the growth of Labour Zionist activity was the series of fresh attempts to publicise their case among the wider British labour movement. Poale Zion had published occasional pamphlets since the war but now, at the instigation of Berl Katznelson, a Palestine Labour Studies Group was formed to co-ordinate a more concerted

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1 J. Jacobs, Out of the Ghetto: My Youth in the East End (London, 1978) p. 187.

2 ZR 21 Oct. 1938. At the meeting were Levenberg (Chairman), Locker, Hos and the officials of Jewish trade unions and Workers' Circle branches.

propaganda campaign.<sup>1</sup> It was significant that the first publication was a reprint of a pamphlet answering Communist criticisms of Zionism.<sup>2</sup> In all there were twelve different publications between 1937 and 1938, including contributions from Ben Gurion and Berl Katznelson. The last was a compilation of speeches, resolutions and articles in support of Zionism made by Labour Party speakers and organisations since 1917, to which James Middleton contributed an introduction.<sup>3</sup>

Poale Zion naturally worked closely with the leaders of the Histadrut and Mapai, the Palestine Labour Party. Though the London Office closed down in 1932 representatives of Palestine Labour - in particular Dov Hos - continued to visit Britain, but in 1938 it was decided that a further body was needed to co-ordinate all Labour Zionist activity in Britain and to liaise with British labour, trade union and co-operative organisations. This was named the Palestine Labour Political Committee.

The Chairman of the new body was Berl Locker, who had arrived in England in 1938 to head the political bureau of the Jewish Agency in London. A close friend and follower of Weizmann, for the next ten years Locker was an indefatigable speaker and propagandiser for Labour Zionism, building on the friendly links he had developed during his earlier stay in London. The remainder of the Committee were leading

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1 New Judea May 1937, Levenberg, op.cit., pp. 129-30

2 S.Levi, An Open Letter to Comrade Gallacher (Palestine Labour Studies, No. 1, London, 1937).

3 S.Levenberg and J.Podro (eds), British Labour Policy on Palestine (Palestine Labour Studies, No. 12, London, 1938).



members of Poale Zion.<sup>1</sup>

The function of these new groups, together with the regular Poale Zion organisation, was as much to mobilise support as to convert. At the 1939 Southport Conference, for example, Locker and Hos attended on behalf of the PLPC and joined Levenberg and Rosette in lobbying delegates. A film entitled 'Land of Promise' was shown to a large audience, including MPs and NEC members, who according to the Zionist Review 'watched with evident sympathy and appreciation the presentation of Jewish activity and progress in Palestine'.<sup>2</sup>

Joining with local Labour groups the Zionists were able to arrange a number of regional conferences. In August 1938 a large Poale Zion rally was held in Manchester, and included on the platform were leading representatives of the local Labour movement.<sup>3</sup> A later meeting in Whitechapel drew a crowd of over 1,000, and many hundreds were turned away.<sup>4</sup>

Such joint Labour Party Zionist conferences were evidently successful. In January 1939 a conference at Liverpool was attended by over 100 Labour and trade union representatives. Berl Locker and Goldie Myerson were the main speakers, and from many Labour leaders came messages of support. At a similar conference in Manchester Tom Williams told the audience that the Histadrut was 'the best workers organisation in existence', whilst Clynes admitted that he was 'very proud of the work in Palestine for there

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<sup>1</sup> Levenberg, Cohen, Pearlman and Jackson (Secretary), Levenberg, op.cit., p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> ZR 26 May 1939.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 5 Aug. 1938.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 17 Nov. 1938.

could be no question that it was a great contribution towards making the world a better place'.<sup>1</sup>

On October 1938 the Zionist Federation organised a Palestine Fortnight. Meetings and exhibitions were arranged throughout the country and the majority of speakers appear to have been Labour MPs.<sup>2</sup> In the East End, where John McGovern spoke, there was for once a particularly active response. Indeed a reading of the Zionist Review and the Jewish Chronicle for this period reveals numerous instances of Labour MPs and NEC members, and local party and trade union figures, speaking at Zionist functions. The number of events and the variety of speakers indicates the extent to which the Zionist cause was now embraced by the Labour movement.

Finally mention should be made of the Petition Campaign conducted by Poale Zion. Copies of the petition, which demanded greatly increased Jewish immigration, were circulated to party, union and co-operative branches. By March 1939 over, 250,000 signatures had been collected, and one report states that the total finally reached more than a million.<sup>3</sup>

Zionist articles featured prominently in the Labour press. A.L.Easterman of the Zionist Federation contributed a number of well informed articles in the Daily Herald, which occasionally broke fresh news and caused considerable comment.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Ibid., 19 Jan., 16 Feb. 1939.

2 Ibid., 21 & 27 Oct., 3 Nov. 1938.

3 Ibid., 12 Jan., 2 Mar., 8 June 1939.

4 eg see 'Dugdale Diaries' 30 Dec. 1937.



On the other hand an article published in March 1939 entitled 'Palestine Plan Hitch Explained, Statements to Arabs were not Clear' provoked a swift reaction.

Bakstansky, General Secretary of the Zionist Federation, successfully requested Middleton to raise the matter with Greenwood, and the mediation of Tom Williams sufficed to arrange a meeting with Francis Williams, the Herald's editor, for Bakstansky to present Zionist objections.<sup>1</sup>

Such close and friendly relations contrasted markedly with the reception given to interventions from Arab spokesmen. It was not until 1936 that Palestinian Arab nationalists belatedly acknowledged the importance of cultivating support in non Arab countries. In that year a Palestine Information Centre was opened in London. There already existed an 'Arab Centre', but in the years its activity increased markedly with the arrival of Izzet Tannous, an Arab Christian, as director. Working from the Centre was George Mansur, a former secretary of the Arab Federation of Labour, who now attempted to enlist support within the British labour movement.<sup>2</sup>

In September 1938 Mansur requested a meeting with the Imperial Advisory Committee and from then until May 1939 numerous letters, memoranda and appeals were dispatched to Transport House and Labour MPs known to be interested in

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<sup>1</sup> Correspondence in JSM 210/151-4.

<sup>2</sup> J.C.Hurewitz, The Struggle for Palestine (New York, 1950) p. 86. For the Arab Centre see Jeffries, op.cit., p. XIX, Gilbert, op.cit., p. 206 Bethell, op.cit., pp. 55, 68, see also Mansur, op.cit., passim.

Palestine.<sup>1</sup> As well as striving to present the Arab case as a whole Mansur was concerned to draw attention to allegations of 'military terrorism'. There was certainly concern within the party about the harsh military measures - including house blowing - now being practised against Arabs in Palestine. A number of MPs were active in Parliament<sup>2</sup> but the success of Mansur's efforts can be accounted as slight. Gillies was particularly dismissive: 'in my opinion it is not very objective propaganda. It overdoes the Arab case by gross exaggeration'.<sup>3</sup>

Though representatives of the Arab Centre had a number of meetings with party spokesmen<sup>4</sup> very few of Mansur's communications or statements emanating from the Centre were formally considered within the Labour Party. One reason for this, and for Gillies' scepticism, can be ascribed to the Secretary's habit of submitting Arab material to Zionist friends for interpretation and comment.<sup>5</sup> When asked to comment on a communication from an Arab labour group Locker replied that it was 'obviously...one of the numerous groups

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1 W.Gillies to G.Mansur, 29 Aug. 1938 (LP/WG/9(e)) and see Labour Party and Creech Jones papers passim.

2 See for example the memorandum from the Arab Centre 'The Arrest of Hanna Asfour', 8 Nov. 1938 (CJ 30/2/48) and questions asked by J.Parker (HC Deb. Vol. 341 c.1743, 28 Oct. 1938), D.Freeman (NCCL) to J.Parker, 28 Oct. 1938 (CJ 30/2/47) leading to a question on House blowing (HC Deb. Vol. 341 c.1061, 14 Nov. 1938).

3 W.Gillies to M.Fogerty, 23 June 1939 (LP/WG/9(e)).

4 Op.cit., see also Lansbury's comments in Parliament (HC Deb. Vol. 350 c.831-2, 20 July 1939).

5 eg W.Gillies to J.Cohen, 19 Apr. 1938, 21 Apr. 1939, W.Gillies to B.Locker, 15 July 1939 (LP/WG/9(e)).



established by the Mufti's party with the object of hitching the Arab workers to its wagon and of spoiling attempts of co-operation between Jewish and Arab workers'. He also volunteered information on Mansur: 'he represents himself in London to be an Arab Labour leader with distinctly left sympathies. He has been successful on several occasions in obtaining a hearing in various Labour groups, and I understand that for a time he was taken seriously, especially by the ILP'.<sup>1</sup>

It is possible that Mansur was involved in the appeal launched by the ILP in 1939;<sup>2</sup> certainly Brockway had apparently been in contact with 'an Arab Socialist from Palestine'. It is certainly true that in Parliament Maxton raised allegations of brutality made by the Arab Centre.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand McGovern urged the Government to ensure that the originator of the documents containing such allegations was not a Nazi agent. In Parliament Stephen had derided Mansur as representing 'nobody but himself', whilst the latter complained that the ILP delegation in Palestine had refused all his requests for a meeting and had been prevented by their Zionist hosts from any contacts with genuine Arab labour representatives.<sup>4</sup>

In November 1938 Mansur submitted a memorandum to the

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1 B.Locker to W.Gillies, 31 July 1939 (ibid.).

2 See below pp.197-8.

3 HC Deb. Vol. 349 c.401-2, 28 June 1939, Vol. 349 c.896-7, 3 July 1939, Vol. 350 c.385-6, 19 July 1939.

4 Mansur, op.cit., pp. 4-5.

Advisory Committee and asked for a meeting.<sup>1</sup> The only reaction appears to have been the placing of Palestine on the agenda, where it remained unconsidered until May 1939. This only illustrated the near total failure of Arab propagandising activities directed at the Labour Party. Even a long communication from the Palestine Arab Workers Society, the largest Arab labour organisation, received no attention, in striking contrast to those from the Histadrut;<sup>2</sup> whilst the Zionist labour movement was widely respected and firmly established within the organisations of European labour the weak, fragmented Arab groups were generally ignored or dismissed as creatures of the Mufti. The failure of Mansur and his colleagues to influence the Labour Party was not primarily due to the unsophistication of their propaganda or the disparaging comments it drew from Zionist spokesmen.<sup>3</sup> Rather the circumstances of the pre war years made their failure inevitable, whilst the commanding position of Zionists in their dealings with the Labour Party served to make the failure absolute.

#### F. White Paper and War

On 7 February the Prime Minister opened the conference

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1 G.Mansur 'Memorandum, Criticism and Recommendations on the Palestine Problem', Nov. 1938 (LP/ImpAC/2/200).

2 Letter dated 27 June 1939 in LP/WG/9(e).

3 See the comment of Edward Atiyah, a British educated left wing Arab, on the rejection of his arguments by British Socialists, E.Atiyah, An Arab Tells His Story (London, 1946) pp. 204-5.



at St. James' Palace. No agreed solution was reached, and the Government finally announced its own proposals on 17 May.<sup>1</sup> Palestine would become an independent state within 10 years. 75,000 Jewish immigrants would be admitted during the next five years, after which further immigration would continue only with Arab consent. Jewish settlement would be prohibited or restricted in large areas of Palestine.

During the negotiations Locker had kept the NEC informed of their development.<sup>2</sup> Urgent appeals began to arrive in April, in a series of telegrams to the NEC and to individual party members.<sup>3</sup> Typical was this telegram from Dov Hos: 'make supreme effort to avert imminent calamity. Contemplated Government policy intends to turn the Jewish National Home into a ghetto and Palestine Jewry into bond-servants of the Arabs'.<sup>4</sup> In London Berl Locker kept in close touch with party officials. In one letter he urged that the Government's proposals be delayed for at least six months. He warned that the Yishuv might be driven to a policy of active resistance.<sup>5</sup>

The main focus of activity was now the Parliamentary Party. Jewish appeals to MPs of all parties were numerous

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1 Cmd 6019, Palestine: A Statement of Policy (May, 1939).

2 NEC 22 Mar. 1939.

3 eg D.Hos to J.Middleton, 19 Apr. 1939: 'urge you personally on behalf of my executive to make supreme effort to avert calamity' (LP/WG/9(d)).

4 Telegram dated 19 Apr. 1939 (LP/WG/9(d)).

5 Letter from PLPC, see Int Sub 21 Apr. 1939.

and insistent, and deputations from many parts of the country visited the Houses of Parliament.<sup>1</sup> Already Labour members had been voicing their concern through Parliamentary Questions and through contacts with Ministers.<sup>2</sup> Following publication of the White Paper the party demanded a two day debate. Blanche Dugdale retained some optimism: 'if we can keep it up all the time we may wear MacDonald down. The great thing is to break his nerve before and during.'<sup>3</sup>

The only discordant note was struck by Richard Stokes, whose by-election victory in 1938 had provided the PLP for the first time in over seven years with an active opponent of Zionism. He now circulated to his colleagues a memorandum giving his reasons why the Government's policy should be approved; on moral, practical and legal grounds, he argued, the Arab case must be defended. Furthermore 'if not settled immediately on the lines proposed by the Government (the dispute) may lead to the persecution of the Jews in all the bazaars of the Near and Middle East'. The only solution was 'to make room for the Jews in the British Empire by giving them a substantial area in which to

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1 The Times (25 May 1939) commented that 'the opposition of Jews to the Government's policy was organised and impressed upon members with unusual diligence, both in the constituencies and in Westminster'.

A survey conducted in March by the British Institute of Public Opinion reported that 60% of respondents were in favour of continued Jewish immigration, S. Levenberg in P. Goodman (ed.) op.cit., p. 115.

2 For a PPC delegation to MacDonald, which included Wedgwood and Williams, see ZR 16 Mar. 1939.

3 'Dugdale Diaries' 15 May 1939.



establish their National Home'.<sup>1</sup> His advocacy had no noticeable effect on his colleagues.

Zionist spokesmen discussed with Tom Williams whether the party should press for reference to a select committee.<sup>2</sup> This Williams opposed, and the party eventually resolved to move an amendment declaring the White Paper to be 'inconsistent with the spirit and letter of the Mandate' and calling for delay pending examination by the PMC. The Government spokesmen, especially Sir Thomas Inskip, were less than impressive in the debate. Labour speakers argued that the White Paper represented a betrayal of the Jews and a flagrant breach of Britain's obligations. Morrison warned that:

'I think it ought to be known by the House that this breach of faith, which we regret, this breach of British honour, with its policy, with which we have no sympathy, is such that the least that can be said is that the Government must not expect that this is going to be automatically binding upon their successors. They must not expect I will go further than that, but they must understand that this document will not automatically be binding upon their successors in this affair, whatever the circumstances of the time may be.'<sup>3</sup>

On a three line whip the Government struggled to a majority of 89. The Times estimated that 15 Conservatives had voted with the Opposition and that 21 - including two

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1 Memorandum in Stokes Papers, Box 51.

2 Rose, op.cit., p. 204.

3 HC Deb. Vol. 347 c.2143, 23 May 1939. Five other Labour speakers took part: Williams, Wedgwood, MacLaren, Cripps and Noel Baker.

Cabinet ministers - deliberately abstained.<sup>1</sup> Many Labour members had been unable to speak,<sup>2</sup> though Tom Williams was able to continue his party's criticisms on the radio that evening.<sup>3</sup> But the debate could do no more than give evidence of the manifest unpopularity of the Government's proposals.

At its conference at Southport the Labour Party was able to continue in its condemnation of the White Paper. Ayrton Gould moved an NEC resolution denouncing the White Paper as a violation of solemn pledges, a surrender to violence, and a setback to the progressive forces inside both communities. Above all, it placed intolerable restrictions on Jewish immigration at a time when 'racial persecution increasingly divides the other countries of the world into those which Jews are forbidden to enter and those in which they find it impossible to live'.<sup>4</sup> The NEC reaffirmed its support for

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1 A number of writers have noted that the majority was only eight more than in the debate of May 1940, which led to Chamberlain's resignation. The Times (op.cit.) commented that 'some of the most loyal supporters of the Government found themselves unable to vote on this matter for reasons of conscience and taste'. Many who did vote with the Government were angered by the abstentions of Elliot and Hore-Belisha, and some estimates give a higher figure for the number of abstainers.

2 Including Creech Jones and Stokes. Stokes apparently abstained, and at least one other Labour MP - Philips Price - followed the party line with evident distaste.

3 On a radio debate with MacDonald, Lloyd George and Inskip, Williams, op.cit., p. 95, 'Dugdale Diaries' 23 May 1939. Williams was in close touch with the Zionists throughout this period, and in September he addressed the 21st Zionist Congress, declaring that 'he was convinced that they would win in the end, and the Zionist cause would yet be triumphant', New Judea Nov-Dec. 1939.

4 LPACR 1939, p. 253.



the National Home and its belief that, with the Arab masses benefiting from Jewish immigration co-operation was possible. The White Paper should be rescinded at once.

Only three speeches were heard, from Ayrton Gould, Maurice Rosette and Creech Jones. The tone was set by Gould's opening remark: 'betrayal should be the watchword of this Government. Wherever there is a fine and democratic people it is betrayed by the British Government'.<sup>1</sup> The resolution was carried by a show of hands, with only two dissentients. Though it undoubtedly reflected the opinions of the overwhelming body of delegates there was some criticism reported that the Arab case had not been heard, and no speaker called to put an alternative viewpoint.<sup>2</sup>

The Advisory Committee had played little part in the controversy since the abrupt rejection of its proposals two years earlier. George Mansur had however been requesting a hearing for some considerable time and finally, two days after the White Paper debate, he succeeded in addressing the Committee.<sup>3</sup> The only apparent effect was to stimulate the Zionists to ensure that the Committee remained fully aware of their own case.

On 14 June Brodetsky and Locker appeared before the Committee. Locker once again outlined the policy of the Histadrut towards Arab workers, whilst Brodetsky stated in detail his objections to the White Paper. To condemn the Jews to remain permanently in the minority was contrary to

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1 Ibid., p. 254.

2 M.Fogerty to W.Gillies, 17 June 1939 (LP/WG/9(e)).

3 LP/ImpAC/1/286, 24 May 1939.

the Mandate - it was the curse of the Jews everywhere to be in a minority. The proposed land regulations would make Palestine a Jewish ghetto.<sup>1</sup>

In July the PMC decided, by a small majority, that the White Paper policy was not in accordance with their interpretation of the Mandate. On 12 July the Government announced the cancellation of the immigration quota for the six months after October. The following day the Labour Party decided to raise the matter on the Colonial Office vote the following Thursday. Curiously the Zionists were yet again taken by surprise, and unsuccessfully asked the party not to press its claims.<sup>2</sup> Seven Labour MPs took part in the debate, though unanimity was impaired by the participation of Stokes.<sup>3</sup>

The determination of the Government to adhere to the White Paper, and of the Labour Party to oppose it, were only strengthened by the outbreak of war, though now the Government took somewhat greater trouble to consider the views of the Opposition. On 1 December Attlee and Greenwood discussed the situation with the Prime Minister and three days later Locker learned that an assurance had been given that legislation on land purchase would be fully considered by the War Cabinet before enactment, and that Chamberlain had promised further consultation before any action was taken.<sup>4</sup> In February it was reported that a similar

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1 LP/ImpAC/1/288, 14 June 1939.

2 'Dugdale Diaries' 13 July 1939 (see 19 July 1939 for meeting of PPC). She also commented that 'I am not surprised from their party point of view, but consider it very unfortunate from ours. Now can Walter (Elliot) and others abstain from a Vote of Supply?', Rose, *op.cit.*, p. 215.

3 Labour speakers were Williams, Stokes, Silverman, Lansbury, Fletcher, Hopkin and Noel Baker, HC Deb. Vol.350 c.761-888, 20 July 1939.

4 New Judea Dec. 1939, 'Dugdale Diaries' 4 Dec. 1939.



assurance had been given by MacDonald. Yet the Zionists had good reason to believe that such regulations were imminent. Locker was dispatched to meet Tom Williams to persuade him 'that we are not panic stricken for no cause'.

On the advice of Locker and Shertok Attlee was persuaded to write to Chamberlain requesting clarification, yet on 26 February MacDonald informed the Zionists that the regulations would be promulgated in Palestine the following day. Williams reported that Attlee, normally a mild man, was 'furious' at the way he and his colleagues had been tricked into believing that nothing was imminent. He and Greenwood had seen the Prime Minister at once but 'after an hour's hot argument did not prevail'.<sup>2</sup>

The following day it emerged that the Labour leaders, threatening to break the political truce, had extracted from the Prime Minister a promise to take the matter back to the War Cabinet. This was only a small concession for the Government was determined to introduce the regulations. MacDonald was roundly accused by his former colleagues of deliberate deception<sup>3</sup> and in an acrimonious parliamentary debate that followed Attlee showed his irritation, interrupting MacDonald to attack his 'lack of honesty'.<sup>4</sup> The Government had shown considerable ineptitude in arousing the ire of the Labour leaders so thoroughly, and the Prime

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1 Ibid., 22 Feb. 1940.

2 Greenwood commented to Locker that 'there had been nothing like it since Munich'.

3 Ibid., 27 Feb. 1940.

4 HC Deb. Vol. 358 c.448, 6 Mar. 1940.

Minister cannot have endeared himself to the men who, two months later, were to play a major part in his downfall. But in the short term the Government could not be prevented from securing a large majority for its proposals.<sup>1</sup>

The Labour Party was now considering the publication of an initial statement on war aims, and several Zionists were eager that this should include some reference to Palestine.<sup>2</sup> An initial draft by Noel Baker referred only to the right of Jews to 'a place in the world and (a) share in the bounty of nature'. Middleton urged that something more than this was needed, but the final version showed no alteration.<sup>3</sup> It was nevertheless reported that the statement had received considerable publicity in the Yishuv.<sup>4</sup>

Greater attention was given to the subject when the party met for its annual conference. Although overshadowed by news of the recent German offensive in the west, and by the decision to enter a Coalition Government under Churchill, Conference contrived to devote a significant portion of its time to the topic.

On 15 May Nathan Jackson, representing Poale Zion, moved a huge resolution of some 500 words which, to the satisfaction of the Zionists, later took its place in a publication entitled Labour's Aims in War and Peace.<sup>5</sup>

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1 The Labour Party's motion was defeated 292 to 129. There were a few supporters of the regulations within the party, see JSM 210/166-7 and also Stokes' notes for a discussion with MacDonald in which he urged their immediate implementation, (Stokes Papers Box 51). See also Poale Zion resolution (ZR 7 Mar. 1940) and memorandum (JSM 210/172). The day before the debate Locker and Bakstansky had attended a Labour Party dinner.

2 B.Locker to J.Middleton, 5 Sept. 1939 (JSM 210/163). Locker admitted that not all his colleagues were in agreement.

3 J.Middleton to C.Attlee, 6 Nov. 1939 (JSM 210/163). C.R.Attlee, Labour's Peace Aims (London, 1939).

4 N.Jackson to J.Middleton, 3 Jan. 1940 (JSM 210/164).

5 LPACR 1940, p. 172-4, C.Attlee, A.Greenwood, H.Dalton and



It summarised Zionist demands for extensive immigration and the abandonment of the White Paper, and reiterated earlier party declarations on the subject. There were also demands for safeguards for Jews after the war, and for adequate representations at any Peace Conference. Jackson concluded his speech by urging that, in passing the resolution, 'you will send not only a message of encouragement to the Jewish Labour movement in Palestine, but you will kindle a spark of hope in the depressed hearts and minds of the Jewish people who are now being exploited in the German Reich territories today'.<sup>1</sup>

There was an amendment moved by a delegate from Withington.<sup>2</sup> It saw the White Paper as a cynical attempt to pursue imperialist aims by the traditional methods of divide and rule, and concluded:

'This conference, whilst sympathising with the Jews in their persecution, is of the opinion that the Jewish National Home in Palestine cannot provide a satisfactory solution to the Jewish problem and at the same time give recognition to Arab rights.'

The amendment stood no chance of acceptance. Jackson had called for its total rejection and Barnett Janner, now Labour candidate for Leicester West, rounded off the debate with a similar plea. The amendment was accordingly defeated, and the resolution carried, by a large majority.

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others, Labour's Aims in Peace and War (London, 1940)

1 LPACR 1940, p. 173. The resolution was seconded by James Hall, MP for Whitechapel, a delegate of the TGWU.

2 C.Hammersley. The seconder, Lester Hutchinson, had supported a similar intervention in 1936, ibid., p. 174.

The Conference was the last during the Mandate period when the Labour Party could consider the Palestine question from the unfettered perspective of an opposition party. Until the abandonment by the Government of partition the party could congratulate itself on a certain influence on Government thinking and on a vigilant and not ineffective defence of the interests of Jewish labour. From November 1938 however Labour Party influence, and that of all 'gentile Zionists',<sup>1</sup> sank to its lowest point in the face of a determined Government and a predominantly acquiescent if unenthusiastic Conservative Party.

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<sup>1</sup> See Rose, op.cit., p. 223.



## CHAPTER IV

The 'Left' and Palestine

During the 1930s the question of Palestine became an increasingly important political issue in left wing circles. Rebellion and conflict in Palestine, Jewish persecution in Europe and the struggle against Fascism at home and abroad helped sharpen attitudes towards Zionism and the future of Palestine. The question ceased to be the preserve of a small minority of enthusiasts.

Despite the events of the Second Labour Government by the late 1930s the Labour Party was rightly seen as overwhelmingly pro Zionist. There was nevertheless a wide variety of opinion within the party, and even more so within the wider British 'left'. Indeed across the whole spectrum of British politics party allegiance could be no sure guide to attitudes on the subject of Palestine. Within the Conservative Party Zionism had belligerent spokesmen in Churchill and Amery but remained more than simply a cause espoused by dissidents and critics of the National Government. The pro Arab faction had no such illustrious leaders, but commanded wider support within the party and the Government. The Liberal Party, though its leadership was strongly pro Zionist, naturally contained conflicting points of view, and even within the National Labour Party were found such contrasting spokesmen as Richard Denman and Ernest Bennett.

The party which showed the most unanimity was, not surprisingly, the Communist Party, and though its achievements during the seemingly propitious years of the 1930s

were slight: its views on Palestine constituted a clear challenge to those of the Labour Party leadership and found some support in other left wing circles inside and outside the Labour Party.

For the Communist Party British support for Zionism and for the National Home was at best hypocritical and at worst, as exemplified by Churchill, naked Imperialist opportunism. In 1929 Comintern declared that 'the Zionist colonising bourgeoisie and their lackeys play the part of outright agents of English Imperialism'.<sup>1</sup> In Parliament Gallacher asked: 'is not the real holy place the interest of British Imperialism? Is not the interest of private property and profit the only concern?'<sup>2</sup>

Zionism was a false creed, for Jewish security could only be found in a society which had surpassed the epoch of the class struggle, and the only valid territorial solution was that of the Biro-Bidzhan project in Soviet Russia.<sup>3</sup> In the words of one East End Communist:

'We fought Zionism as a nationalist reactionary creed, based on religious aspirations, which could only act as a means of dividing workers and eventually doing harm to the best interests of Jews and non Jews alike.'<sup>4</sup>

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1 Degras, op.cit., Vol. III, p. 81.

2 HC Deb. Vol. 313 c.1365, 19 June 1936. See also Gallacher's opposition to partition, Vol. 326 c.2358-9, 21 July 1937.

3 See C.Abramsky, 'The Biro-Bidzhan Project 1927-1959', in L.Kochan (ed.), The Jews in Soviet Russia Since 1917 (London, 1970) pp. 62-75.

4 Jacobs, op.cit., p. 187, W.Gallacher, Rise Like Lions (London, 1951) pp. 189-90, G.Lebzelter, Political Anti Semitism in England 1918-1939 (London, 1978) p. 160.



This view was elaborated by Thomas Hodgkin, writing as 'British Resident' in a pamphlet published by the (Communist) Labour Monthly. In Palestine, he argued, following the intrusion of British control and Jewish colonisation both Jews and Arabs were becoming impoverished and increasingly exploited. The unity of all workers was the only solution but was being artificially blocked. Zionist claims that Jewish development brought prosperity to the Arab population was manifestly false, for Government policy resulted in the sale of land by impoverished Arabs. The National Home was

'striking a wedge into Palestine...to suppose that having invaded a country and having disintegrated the life of its people you can go in, interested only in your life and prosperity, without any obligation to the people whose life you have disintegrated is nonsense. But this is the idea of politicians and propagandists of the Jewish National Home.'<sup>1</sup>

Though George Sacks, in a Left Book Club publication, argued that the conflict was a genuine clash of rival nationalisms<sup>2</sup> for orthodox Communists the problem could only be understood in relation to the class divisions in Palestine. But though working class unity remained the only solution, since the Arabs opposed both British and Zionist exploitation their rebellion was therefore 'thoroughly justifiable'.<sup>3</sup> Following the murder of Lewis

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1 'British Resident', Who is Prosperous in Palestine (Labour Monthly Pamphlets, 1936) p. 39. J.L.Cohen unsuccessfully tried to get an article of his own published in reply (see LP/WG/9(b)).

2 G.Sacks, The Jewish Question (London, 1937), see Lebzelter, op.cit., pp. 158-9.

3 Gallacher in HC Deb. Vol. 313 c.1369, 19 June 1936.

Andrews, the District Commissioner for Galilee, Hodgkin argued that the murder could not simply be denounced as a crime, for

'would any liberal minded person speak in such terms of the killing of some prominent Gestapo official by an opponent of the Nazi regime? Yet it is exactly the light in which the assassination of Mr. Andrews would appear to most Palestine Arabs'.<sup>1</sup>

At the Foreign Office George Rendel, head of the Eastern Department, found himself, rather to his surprise, in broad agreement: 'I think this letter has a great deal of sense in it...'.<sup>2</sup>

Such arguments were heard on a number of occasions at Labour Party Conferences, beginning in 1930.<sup>3</sup> In 1936 Alex Gossip, who claimed that his resolution had the support of the majority of Jewish members of his Furnishing Trades Association, argued that the Arabs deserved the full support of the British Labour movement in their struggle for national independence.<sup>4</sup> The resolution failed, as did a further attempt four years later when an amendment condemned the 'unscrupulous tactics of the British ruling class, which having pursued in Palestine a policy detrimental to Arab interests now proposed to vary that policy for the purpose of ranging the Arab people alongside it for the furtherance of its imperialist aims'.<sup>5</sup>

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1 New Statesman and Nation 9 Oct. 1937.

2 Minute in FO 371/20818 E6313 28 Oct. 1937.

3 LPACR 1930, p. 211, see above p. 80.

4 LPACR 1936, pp. 220-1, see above p. 151.

5 LPACR 1940, p. 173, see above p. 189.



If within the Labour Party such an analysis could do nothing more than gain an occasional hearing, it did win some support within the ILP, although by this time the party was in rapid decline and opinions expressed by ILP members on the subject of Palestine were characteristically diverse. In Parliament speakers attacked the Palestine administration and the motives of the British Government, but although Maxton noted in 1936 that 'the ILP, in common with most other Socialist Parties, is not inclined to accept the Zionist view'<sup>1</sup> his party nonetheless maintained links with various left wing Zionist groups, in particular the Marxist Left Poale Zion and the bi-nationalist Hashomer Hatzair.<sup>2</sup>

Both groups were strong critics of the 'unpardonable neglect' of the Palestine Labour Party in organising Arab workers.<sup>3</sup> The ILP, in a policy statement in 1936, urged support for their efforts in building a 'United Front' of Arab and Jewish workers and promoting a sense of class unity. 'In a sentence, the aim must be to combine the workers and peasants of both races in the struggle against Jewish Capitalism, Arab Feudalism and British Imperialism.' But

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1 Introduction to Z. Abramovich, Whither Palestine? (Published by the Foreign Delegation of the Left Poale Zion and Marxist Circles in Palestine, London 1936).

2 For Left Poale Zion see Flapan, op.cit., pp. 178-83. For Hashomer Hatzair see ibid., pp. 183-7, Hattis, op.cit., pp. 71-3, Laqueur, op.cit., pp. 297-301.

3 Reports of Hashomer Hatzair and Left Poale Zion in Revolutionary Socialist Bulletin 4 June 1936.

though the ILP commended the work of Jewish Socialists and acknowledged the effect of Jewish immigration in raising the standard of living, it nevertheless warned its colleagues to 'give up the idea that they have any right to establish a predominantly Jewish State. They must face the fact that ultimately Palestine will become part of a federation including the Arab States of Syria, Transjordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and probably Egypt'. Furthermore left wing Jewish Socialists should consider abandoning the call for further Jewish immigration for the sake of promoting the 'unity of the workers and peasants of both races'.<sup>1</sup>

But for at least two ILP leaders, as for so many in the Labour Party, a visit to Palestine had a profound effect. In February 1937 the Zionist Review, acknowledging that 'the more advanced sections of the Labour movement have hitherto not always been specially sympathetic to Zionism' noted 'a complete change of attitude in some quarters'.<sup>2</sup> This referred to a visit of an ILP delegation, comprising of John McGovern and Campbell Stephen.

Both returned full of enthusiasm for Zionist achievements. McGovern in particular embraced the Zionist cause whole heartedly. In a planned broadcast for Palestine radio, banned as 'likely to provoke harmful controversy' he called for the entry of an unlimited number of Jews and expressed his belief that Zionism was 'bringing civilisation to the Arabs'.<sup>3</sup> In the following year he, and to a lesser extent

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1 'View of the ILP' in ibid., and see NAC to branches, 30 Sept. 1936.

2 ZR Feb. 1937.

3 The Times 30 Jan. 1937.



Stephen, were active as Zionist propagandists, taking a line close to that of orthodox Labour Zionists, though they evidently uncountered considerable criticism within their party.<sup>1</sup>

Though McGovern ridiculed the idea that Jewish immigration posed a threat to the Arab population he too continued to call for working class unity,<sup>2</sup> and in 1939 his party launched a campaign to establish a 'Committee for Jewish and Arab Workers Unity in Palestine'. This was chiefly the work of Fenner Brockway - another recent visitor to Palestine - who had learnt from 'Arab and Jewish sources' that a public appeal for unity might have some success. Its manifesto urged workers of both races to free themselves from the grip of imperialism and to establish an independent workers state. This would have the support of the 'revolutionary socialist workers of Britain and the world'.<sup>3</sup>

This unrealistic campaign received a predictably cool reception from Labour Party officials. Gillies noted that 'the appeal does not impress me. It is a slogan rather than a solution. It is typical of ILP statements on Palestine which according to my recollection always

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1 eg NAC 1 Aug. 1938 for resolution from the Wimbledon branch criticising a speech in Parliament by McGovern. An emergency resolution moved by Stephen at the 1937 ILP Conference which deplored the violence 'committed by terrorist groups under the standard of feudal lords' was passed only by a small majority, see The Times 31 Mar.1937.

2 HC Deb. Vol. 341 c.2065-6, 24 Nov. 1938.

3 See F.Brockway to Creech Jones, 18 May 1939 (CJ 30/2/71) and 'A Call to the Workers and Peasants of Palestine' (ibid., 72-6).

describe the Jewish National Home as one of the aspects of British Imperialism'. It was not proper, he felt, for the Labour Party to make such an appeal to Jewish Socialists'.<sup>1</sup>

The Labour Party's attitude was naturally guided by that of orthodox Labour Zionists. Locker's opinion was sought, and Cohen reported that 'there is a little left group in (Palestine) who may be behind the movement'.<sup>2</sup>

When Laski brought the appeal to the attention of the NEC a critical submission from Poale Zion was enough to prevent any further attention being paid to the appeal.<sup>3</sup>

Similar calls for working class unity were made in the pages of Tribune, for whom the chief villain was the Imperial Government seeking to impose its will on the natives of Palestine.<sup>4</sup> It accepted that the rebellion was 'a revolt of Arab Nationalism'.<sup>5</sup> Reginald Bridgeman offered one solution: communal equality and increased Jewish immigration, 'but the Arabs must not be expected to admit Jewish immigrants to a proportion of more than 30% of the country's total'.<sup>6</sup>

Partition was seen as serving only the interests of the British Empire, and was thus a proposal 'no Socialist can accept'. Since September 1936<sup>7</sup> this had been the solution of the leading figure of the Socialist League, Stafford

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1 Note by W.Gillies, 22 June 1939 in LP/WG/9(d).

2 Ibid. 3 NEC 28 June 1939.

4 Tribune 8 Oct. 1938. 5 Ibid., 25 Feb. 1938.

6 'The Way Out for Palestine', ibid., 24 Mar. 1938.

7 See above p. 152.



Cripps, and he repeated his view two years later. Although Palestine could only become a spiritual and cultural home, at a time of fearful persecution Jews could not be deprived of a chance of reaching safety in Palestine. Partition, as a temporary expedient, was essential. In return, 'for the price of half a battleship', the Arab sector should be developed to ensure economic equality.<sup>1</sup>

Despite his concern for Jewish refugees in a further plan the following year he suggested the temporary cessation of Jewish land purchase and a severe limitation on immigration. These restrictions would be accepted before discussions began and removed if the talks broke down; the final goal was to be the creation of two independent autonomous states, federated into a Palestine Government. Once again his proposals had no effect.<sup>2</sup>

In an editorial in 1941 Tribune referred to 'that little piece of ordinary crookedness' by which the British Government had promised Palestine to both Jews and Arabs during the First World War'.<sup>3</sup> This belief, that Palestine had in some way been 'promised' to the Arabs, was generally a point of agreement between 'Socialist' critics of orthodox Zionism and what might be called 'Liberal Colonialist' critics within the Labour Party.<sup>4</sup>

The opposition of this small group to the predominant

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1 Tribune 21 Oct. 1938.

2 HC Deb. Vol. 347 c.2023-6, 22 May 1939.

3 Tribune 19 Sept. 1941.

4 See above pp. 57-63. For R. Stokes see also Daily Herald 23 Oct. 1943, Manchester Guardian 18 Oct. 1938, 23 Nov. 1943, 30 Nov. 1943.

party attitude stemmed from a basic difference of perspective. Supporters of Zionism tended to take a 'European' view of the problem, stressing the restoration of Jewry and the introduction of modernising Socialist attitudes into Palestine. 'Liberal Colonialist' critics based their opposition to party policy, not on the machinations of imperialist exploitation, but on their perception of the needs of the native inhabitants of the Empire - of which Palestine now formed a part. Unlike the majority of their colleagues such men - including at various times Ernest Bennett, T.S.B. Williams, Thomas Reid, Sir John Maynard and Richard Stokes - had considerable experience of work as Colonial administrators or of travel in the Middle East. This, of course, was the reason for the presence of many of their number on the Advisory Committees.

Some, like Thomas Reid, opposed Zionism as harmful in itself to the best interests of the Jews themselves. All concentrated on the harm they saw being inflicted on the native race by white European settlers. Though few would agree with H. Douglas Norfolk that the Party's support for the Mandate was, in itself, support for the exploitation of Palestine's native inhabitants<sup>1</sup> concern for the welfare of the Arab population was often manifest in suggestions denounced as anti Zionist by their critics: that land sales should be regulated, that Jewish immigration should be restricted to prevent Arab unemployment, or that the Jewish population should be limited to a proportion of the total.

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<sup>1</sup> LPACR 1937 p. 219.



Such men were far from agreeing with the left wing view that the Arab rebellion was in part an expression of legitimate Arab nationalism. They nevertheless rejected an attitude which undoubtedly existed within the party of 'we know better for them than they do themselves',<sup>1</sup> and what one critic characterised as the tendency to look upon the Palestinian Arabs as 'silly children misled by capitalist agitators into misunderstanding their best interests'.<sup>2</sup>

There was naturally a variety of opinions within this group, which included even those with, as G.T.Garratt phrased it, no more than 'a vague feeling that the Asiatic should generally be backed against the European'.<sup>3</sup> Some opposed the very idea of Zionism. Others, whilst welcoming the creation of a National Home, increasingly questioned the manner of its construction. But the chief concern of this group of critics was as expressed by M.P.Fogerty, a parliamentary candidate, who wrote to Gillies to complain of the one sided nature of literature distributed by the party and warned that 'excellent as the Jewish case is, it will not be possible to get a final settlement in Palestine until some understanding of the Arab case is shown'.<sup>4</sup>

But for the majority within the party, from those deeply concerned about events in Palestine to those with only an incidental interest, it was an understanding of the Zionist case that predominated. Two reasons for this state

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1 Letter from T.S.B.Williams, see above p. 58.

2 M.Fogerty to W.Gillies, 17 June 1939 (LP/WG/9(e)).

3 G.T.Garratt, The Mugwumps and the Labour Party (London, 1932) p. 156.

4 Letter from Fogerty, op.cit.

of affairs have already been emphasised. First, there was the existence for over twenty years of the closest institutional and personal links between Zionists and the Labour Party. To this was added the fact that the party had developed since 1917 a tradition of support for Zionist aspirations, a tradition constantly referred to both by Zionist and Labour Party spokesmen, and on which, in a curious way, the events of 1929-30 had served only to strengthen. By the 1930s only a drastic change in the party's perception of Zionism could have threatened its development and this was not to occur until the advent of the next Labour Government.

Many of the reasons for the early espousal by Socialists within the Labour Party of the cause of Zionism have been noted. By the 1930s these had been strengthened, and in a sense supplanted, by a widespread and often passionate admiration of the personal and collective achievements of Labour Zionists in Palestine. Throughout the interwar period visitors to Palestine returned with glowing tributes for the work of their Jewish Socialist colleagues.<sup>1</sup> Long before the Second World War it had been widely accepted that a unique and successful Socialist experiment was in progress in Palestine.

If for many party members Russia remained a model for Socialist development and an ideal for Socialists to aspire<sup>2</sup> for an important minority Zionist work in Palestine

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1 See above pp. 119-123.

2 B.Jones, The Russia Complex: The British Labour Party and the Soviet Union (Manchester, 1977) pp. 11-30.



became the shining example. Many who recoiled from uncritical enthusiasm for the Soviet system were drawn to the idealism and practical Socialism they considered manifest in Palestine. Chief amongst these was Herbert Morrison, who declared in Parliament that 'I have been to Russia also, but as a moral proposition it is a finer thing than is happening in any part of Russia'.<sup>1</sup>

Admiration was for the Labour and Socialist organisations that had been developed, for the 'economic miracle' taking place, and for the perceived physical and spiritual regeneration of Jewish workers. The Histadrut, which Morrison described as 'one of the most ably organised, best led, and most efficient trade union organisations to be found in the world',<sup>2</sup> was repeatedly presented as the epitome of successful trade unionism. For men like Lansbury and Middleton on the other hand, the success of Zionism was to be measured by the transformation wrought on the status and self esteem of individual Jews, from the 'grinding toil and sweat of the East London workshops' to their new life as 'young men and women fired with a holy zeal who have found their fate, have shaped their destiny...'.<sup>3</sup>

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1 HC Deb. Vol. 313 c.1387, 19 June 1936.

2 HC Deb. Vol. 341 c.2006, 24 Nov. 1938. The Histadrut was also the biggest employer in Palestine, and engaged in agriculture, marketing, building, shipping, banking, insurance and civil aviation. Laqueur, op.cit., p. 326 comments that 'a wide divergence developed between Socialist theory and practice, with considerations of efficiency and profitability prevailing over time-honoured doctrine'.

3 Middleton in ZR 25 Dec. 1942.

Middleton's rhetoric is also an example of what might be termed the religious dimension of his party's commitment to Zionism. Crossman later commented that, even before his visit, he knew more of the geography of Palestine than he did of Britain<sup>1</sup> and indeed for many of his colleagues religious faith and a deep knowledge of the Bible was an undoubted influence in their support for Jewish regeneration in the Promised Land. Amongst these was Rev.G.Lang, MP, who believed 'that it is the Divine Will of Almighty God that Palestine should be the national home of the Jewish people'.<sup>2</sup>

For some the development of Zionist Socialism assumed a quasi religious aspect. To the TUC Isaacs declared that 'it seems to me that the new Star of Bethlehem now shining over Jerusalem is the Star of Socialism'<sup>3</sup> whilst for Middleton Socialism, Zionism and Christianity were often inextricably mixed:

'So we realise that our Socialist task here in Britain is akin to that of the Histadrut, and our mission is akin to that they cherish of a new and fairer Jerusalem raised upon the old historical sites that have provided the Jewish race with the deepest inspirations throughout the ages.'<sup>4</sup>

Developments during the 1930s served only to strengthen support for Zionism within the party. With the increasing persecution of European Jews and the growing problem of refugees attention was further drawn to the potential haven

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1 R.Crossman, Palestine Mission (London, 1947) p. 12.

2 HC Deb. Vol. 426 c.1000 31 July 1946.

3 Report of the Annual Conference of the TUC, 1936, p. 393.

4 See article in JSM 210/129.



that Palestine offered. As early as 1935 Attlee, in an election statement, had declared that the development of Palestine was an 'imperative duty' in the light of the sufferings of German Jews, and in 1938 Locker successfully urged the Labour Party and the TUC to demand greatly increased facilities for Jewish refugees.<sup>1</sup> In the declarations of party leaders on the position of Jews in Europe references were increasingly made to the role that Palestine might play. Party members were often involved in cases of individual refugees and Zionists naturally made every attempt to link such rescue work with the need for immigration and the development of the National Home. Teddy Kollek, for example, working to help Jewish youths reach Britain and train at the newly established David Eder Kibbutz, struck up many contacts amongst British Socialists, in particular with Michael Foot.<sup>2</sup>

Labour Zionists also sought, with some success, to tap the anti Fascist feeling within the party. Poale Zion urged members to 'fight Fascism and work for Palestine Labour'<sup>3</sup> and though for many Socialists Zionism was irrelevant or even harmful in their struggle others were increasingly inclined to give Zionism their support. In October 1938 the Zionist Review noted with pleasure that George Latham, NEC member and Chairman of the British Anti Nazi League, had been persuaded to make his first appearance on the Zionist platform,<sup>4</sup> and many others later found as

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1 NEC 7 Sept. 1938.

2 T.Kollek, For Jerusalem: A Life (London, 1978) p. 28.

3 Election pamphlet in LP/WG/11(b).

4 ZR 27 Oct. 1938.

strong supporters of Zionism were to trace their support to the anti Fascist struggle in the 1930s.

No similar developments took place during this period to provoke greater sympathy with the grievances of the Palestinian Arabs. Though events in Palestine had confounded the easy optimism which had led Morgan Jones to declare that both peoples were 'determined to do all they can to live in peace, and to agree together'<sup>1</sup> throughout the Arab Rebellion that official attitude of the party remained that 'there (is) no fundamental need for conflict between Arab and Jew'.<sup>2</sup> Following their Labour Zionist colleagues party spokesmen consistently argued that Palestinian Arabs had benefitted from Jewish immigration and enterprise. In Parliament John McGovern, though a member of the ILP, expressed the prevailing opinion within the Labour Party when he declared that

'the Jew comes into this part of the world and shows a higher standard. He gives cultural development and places his knowledge at the service of the Arabs as well as the Jews'.<sup>3</sup>

The conflict in Palestine could not therefore be seen as a clash of rival nationalisms but had to be ascribed to the jealousy and bigotry of the Arab ruling classes in standing in the way of progress. For H.N.Brailsford resistance to the Mandate was 'led and financed by the feudal landed class. They dread the western civilisation that the Jews bring with them. They fear the progressive Socialist thought...they resent what the Jews have done to

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1 HC Deb. Vol. 156 c.322, 4 July 1922.

2 Herbert Morrison, reported in The Times 26 Oct. 1938.

3 HC Deb. Vol. 341 c.2065-6, 24 Nov. 1938.



organise some groups of Arab workers'.<sup>1</sup> Thus the Arab masses had tragically misunderstood their own best interests for, according to Morrison, 'if (they) were not mischievously stirred up and tyrannised by a well to do and privileged minority there would have been considerable and advantageous co-operation between the Histadrut and the Arab workers'.<sup>2</sup>

As Italian and German propaganda was increasingly directed at the Arabs of Palestine, and as a number of their leaders began flirting with the Fascist powers so the cause of their followers became increasingly damned in the eyes of the Labour Party. Creech Jones now argued that 'it was not so much a conflict between Jews and Arabs as a conflict between the new order of democracy and faith and the other old order of Fascism and feudalism'.<sup>3</sup> At party conferences several speakers drew parallels between the struggles in Palestine and Spain.<sup>4</sup>

Though party spokesmen might criticise the Palestine administration for bias or lack of will there was no support for the Arab demand for the ending of the Mandate and the immediate creation of a unitary state. In 1936

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1 Reynolds's News 24 May 1936. Later that year he argued that 'politically, I believe it would be wise to build the National Home as rapidly as possible, even by shock tactics. So long as the Jewish minority grows slowly, year by year, the Arab will fight against destiny. But when instead of the present 28% the Jewish population consists of a clear 40% or 50% they will bow to accomplished facts', Palestine 12 Aug. 1936.

2 The Times 26 Oct. 1938.

3 Jewish Chronicle 11 Mar. 1938, see also LPACR 1939, p. 256, and Walter Scheverels of the IFTU at the TUC in 1938 (Report p. 366).

4 Lawrence, LPACR 1936, p. 218, Gould, LPACR 1939, p. 254.

Wedgwood declared that his party remained confident that 'so far from injuring the Arabs the access of British rule has been the salvation of the Arab'.<sup>1</sup> There was nonetheless a feeling that the impoverishment of the Arab population lay at the root of the problem. Thus to meet what she regarded as the 'real Arab case' Susan Lawrence urged the need for large scale programs of social development.<sup>2</sup> For Cripps the whole problem was essentially an economic one; he felt that rapid development might lessen support for 'extremist influences'.<sup>3</sup>

Creech Jones, for whom the conflict was 'a clash between the centuries' was later to write that his party

'failed to appreciate that in the course of things Palestinian Arabs (who after all constituted a majority of at least two to one in their country) would legitimately claim self government...indeed when Arab protests flared into violence Labour was hard put to harmonise their belief in self determination with barriers to political advance'.<sup>4</sup>

In fact there is little sign that Labour leaders - included Creech Jones - found any contradiction in their beliefs. Rather, despite the jibes from Conservative pro Arab MPs and the arguments of Arab spokesmen, the contradiction was simply ignored. Political advance was to be found in co-operation with Jewish Socialists, not in misguided demands for independence and the resulting curtailment of Jewish development. The need for both races was for increased Jewish immigration. Furthermore in contrast to the apparent intransigence and negativism of

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1 HC Deb. Vol. 310 c.1083, 23 Mar. 1936.

2 eg Memorandum LP/ImpAC/2/178.

3 HC Deb. Vol. 347 c.2033-4, 22 May 1939.

4 Notes for unpublished book, in CJ 33/2/9-10.



most Arab demands this key requirement was seen as practical and positive. As one British trade union official remarked; 'this is the first time that I have heard representatives of a Labour movement asking for more immigration into his country. It really is a very pleasant change'.<sup>1</sup>

As 'British Resident' Thomas Hodgkin had seen in the comments of Susan Lawrence to the 1936 Conference a sign that, for the Labour Party as for certain Conservatives, support for Zionism and the Palestine Mandate stemmed from Imperial considerations. It is certainly true that speeches of certain party leaders and the recommendations of the Advisory Committee often referred to the importance of Palestine in the defence of the Empire against Fascist aggression. If for the Advisory Committee this necessitated a certain moderation and an appreciation of Arab grievances, for others this was a further reason to develop the National Home with all speed.

In Parliament Labour speakers generally reiterated the Zionist argument that the surest defence of British interests in the Middle East lay in a large and prosperous Jewish community. The White Paper was dishonourable and inhumane, but also strategically misguided. During the debate on the White Paper Lt. Commander Fletcher commented revealingly, and in a way which epitomised the not uncommon contempt for Palestinian Arabs prevalent in all parties:

'The Jews I saw in Palestine were young, virile, vigorous, full of health, whereas many of the young Arabs seemed to me to be sickly, stunted and diseased...I presume that the Government fear that

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<sup>1</sup> New Judea Jan. 1941.

during the war the Arabs in Palestine or elsewhere might come in against us. I can only say that in any case I, personally, from a military point of view, would prefer a Jewish to an Arab buffer state in Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

This was undoubtedly the view of the small group of Labour Imperialist pro Zionists within the party. Their leading spokesman was Josiah Wedgwood who, by the violence of his advocacy and the persistence of his Parliamentary interventions often overshadowed his more orthodox colleagues.<sup>2</sup> For Wedgwood Zionism was not only essential for the Jewish people but could, if properly encouraged, play a crucial part in the civilising mission of the British Empire and make secure the 'Clapham Junction of the Commonwealth'. In 1928 he expounded his views in a book entitled The Seventh Dominion in which he denounced the Palestine administration and outlined his solution of Dominion Home Rule.<sup>3</sup>

To further this aim the Seventh (Palestine) Dominion League was formed in February 1929. Within the Labour Party Wedgwood's leading support was Commander Kenworthy, who as Lord Strabolgi was Wedgwood's leading ally throughout the 1930s and perpetrated his ideas after the latter's death during the war.<sup>4</sup> Though the League

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1 EC Deb. Vol. 350 c.846, 20 July 1939.

2 In the index of Hansard for the years November 1935 - November 1939 Wedgwood achieved 253 references under the heading of 'Palestine'. This compares with Williams (158), Fletcher (53), Adams (47) and Creech Jones (24).

3 See below p.101 Rose, op.cit., pp. 71-92.

4 See above p. 308.



collapsed with the crisis of 1929 it reappeared eight years later when the Peel Report seemed once more to have thrown the future of the Mandate into question. The idea was in fact 'quite impracticable'.<sup>1</sup>

There were naturally few within the Labour Party willing to follow Wedgwood in his attempt to bind the causes of Zionism and Empire. His colleagues also took some care to distance themselves from his more extreme pronouncements, which included in 1938 a call for the arming of the Jewish community and a campaign of passive resistance.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless his opinions on the culpability of both Arab leaders and the Palestine administration, and his enthusiasm for Jewish achievements, were generally shared by his colleagues, if less fiercely expressed, and his position as a senior Labour Party politician served further to publicise his party's commitment to the Zionist cause.

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1 Rose, op.cit., p. 92.

2 The Times 16 Mar. 1938.

## CHAPTER V

The War Years 1940 - 1945A. Labour and the Jewish Fighting Force

On 30 August 1939 Weizmann wrote to the Prime Minister offering, on behalf of the Jewish Agency, 'to enter into immediate arrangements for utilising Jewish manpower, technical ability (and) resources'. This marked the beginning of Zionist efforts to secure the creation of a 'Jewish Fighting Force'.<sup>1</sup> The ultimate Zionist aim was the formation of an exclusively Jewish army unit, fighting under a Jewish flag. Official British reaction varied with the military situation, and a Jewish Brigade Group did not see action until the last stages of the war in Europe. For neither side was it a simple military problem. 'From the outset Zionist offers of military assistance were linked to political expectations, and treated by the British Government accordingly.'<sup>2</sup>

The question of the Jewish Fighting Force was a specific issue for Zionists to promote within the British political arena, and this naturally involved the Labour Party. Senior Labour figures had been approached on the subject as early as autumn 1939 when Weizmann explained his case to Attlee, Greenwood and Williams. He also spoke to Ernest Bevin.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C.Sykes, Crossroads to Israel (London, 1965) p. 247. The best surveys of the long and tortuous series of negotiations are ibid., pp. 247-58, 74-8, Cohen, op.cit., pp. 98-124, B.Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945 (Oxford, 1979) pp. 272-88.

<sup>2</sup> Cohen, op.cit., p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Eban, op.cit., pp. 30-1.



The fall of the Chamberlain Government seemed to mark a significant shift in the Zionists' favour. The new Prime Minister's sympathies were well known, and with the entry of Attlee and Greenwood into the War Cabinet even Ben Gurion acknowledged that 'three of the five members of the War Cabinet are friendly to us'.<sup>1</sup> Labour leaders were eager to confirm the change. On 22 May Greenwood and Morrison saw Locker and Hos 'and told us to remember that things are quite different in the War Cabinet now, they are 'three to two' and the Prime Minister (is) on our side in Jewish matters'. The gentiles also expressed interest in Zionist proposals for the war effort, and asked for further information.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of July the Government decided to raise six Palestinian companies, three Jewish and three Arab, and to recruit in roughly equal numbers from each community,<sup>3</sup> a limitation Zionists found extremely disappointing. In their efforts to circumvent the 'parity' restriction an important ally was, rather surprisingly, the new Minister of Labour and National Service, Ernest Bevin.

On the Zionists' behalf Bevin had a number of conversations with the Colonial Secretary, Lord Lloyd, and brought the subject to the attention of Churchill. He also suggested a possible solution to the restriction: Jewish

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1 Memorandum dated 14 May 1940 quoted in A.Eban, 'Tragedy and Triumph' in Weisgal & Carmichael (eds.) op.cit., p. 258.

2 'Dugdale Diaries' 14 May 1940, see Dalton Diaries 25 May 1940 for a similar meeting.

3 Cohen, op.cit., p. 103.

volunteers in excess of the Arab number should be sent to Egypt as part of the general defence forces in the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> This was taken up by Weizmann in talks with the Prime Minister on 9 August, and afterwards secured the agreement of Lloyd. Bevin was assured that his suggestion 'met with a very favourable reception, and seems likely to provide a way of settling the difficulties raised by the Colonial Office'.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that at this stage Bevin stood high in Weizmann's estimation. In December 1940 he recommended further talks with Bevin as 'the only man who understood (our) problem, and was willing to listen to them and take action'.<sup>3</sup> This appreciation found expression in the Zionist Review. On 23 August the paper carried an article on Bevin, 'a great friend of Labour Zionism'. The same month Tribune urged the creation of a Jewish Army 'into which any British Jew may apply to be transferred and any foreign Jews can be enrolled without restriction'.<sup>4</sup>

Other Labour figures were involved in the Zionists' efforts. Creech Jones was kept fully informed of their negotiations with the Government, and acted as a link with Bevin.<sup>5</sup> In April, when Zionists were particularly concerned to see the establishment of a Palestine Home Guard Mrs. Dugdale noted that 'the Labour members of the

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1 Jewish Agency Executive, Minutes 9 Aug. 1940 (L.Stein Papers, Box 123).

2 C.Weizmann to E.Bevin, 4 Sept. 1940 (ibid.).

3 JA Executive, Minutes 30 Dec. 1940 (ibid.).

4 Tribune 9 Aug. 1940.

5 B.Locker to Creech Jones, 5 Mar. 1941 (L.Stein Papers, op.cit.).



War Cabinet (are) our best method and Berl (Locker) takes that in hand'.<sup>1</sup>

By now there was evidently a desire to supplement informal contacts by an official appeal to the Labour Party. Dov Hos had planned to present the case in person, but following his death in a road accident in Palestine<sup>2</sup> the Histadrut submitted its suggestions by letter, which were considered by the NEC on 23 April.<sup>3</sup> This told of the desire of Jews in Palestine to contribute to the British war effort, but also of the inadequate 'Palestinian' formations, for which few Arabs had volunteered. The letter concluded:

'We feel that we have a right to demand the establishment of a Jewish Force ranking equally with other united forces that are fighting shoulder to shoulder with the British army. It is only in that form that the Jewish effort in this war can attain full fruition and become an adequate expression of our suffering in the Nazi countries, on the one hand, and of our Jewish Zionist education in Palestine on the other.'

Passing from the NEC to the International Sub Committee, the letter was finally submitted to the PLP 'with a request

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1 'Dugdale Diaries' 29 Apr. 1941. Tribune (8 Aug. 1947) later commented that 'it was the Labour Party leaders who during the war mobilised thousands of Palestine Jews to serve in the British forces'.

2 Hos was killed on 29 December 1940, see obituary in LPACR 1941, p. 43. Snell, Creech Jones and Middleton spoke at a Memorial Meeting in London, and among many messages of sympathy were those from Bevin, and his close friend Herbert Morrison, see ZR 10 & 17 Jan. 1941.

3 NEC 23 Apr. 1941. D.Ramez to Labour Party, 18 Feb. 1941 circulated to all NEC members, ibid.

that the whole problem be examined and particularly, and most urgently, in view of the present situation, the question of the adequacy of the Armed Jewish Forces in Palestine'.<sup>1</sup> On the same day Mrs. Dugdale received confirmation from Noel Baker that the party intended to raise the question of the Jewish Home Guard in Parliament.<sup>2</sup> The Government, however, could ensure that Labour objections were dealt with by a Labour MP, George Hall.<sup>3</sup>

During 1941 Zionist communications to the Labour Party continued to include references to the need for a Jewish Fighting Force, and many Labour MPs evinced considerable sympathy with their aim.<sup>4</sup> At the annual conference Zionist representatives were able to propagate their views and distribute documents to delegates.<sup>5</sup> But it was not until the following year, as American pressure mounted and the warfare in the Western desert reached a crisis, that the Labour Party found itself fully involved in the issue.

On 10 July Poale Zion passed an emergency resolution demanding a Jewish Home Guard and a Jewish Fighting Force within the British Army, which it sought to give the widest publicity through its newly established newsletter Jewish Labour News.<sup>6</sup> At the end of the month a conference and

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1 Int Sub 29 Apr. 1941.

2 'Dugdale Diaries' 29 Apr. 1941.

3 See eg HC Deb. Vol. 371 c.1840-1, 28 May 1941, Vol. 373 c.320, 10 July 1941. Hall was then Colonial Under Secretary.

4 eg see J.Parker to H.Muggeridge, 30 May 1941 (FCB 176/6/15-6), W.Leach (Bradford Central) in ZR 30 May 1941 and later resolutions from Manchester City Labour Party, 14 Sept. 1942 (LP/Int/5(e)).

5 ZR 6 June 1941.

6 Jewish Labour News 10 July 1942.



rally were held in Liverpool, organised by the local Labour Party, Trades Council and Poale Zion to express support for a Jewish Fighting Force which, according to the Zionist Review 'was now accepted by the majority of progressive opinion and was gathering momentum'.<sup>1</sup> Speakers included Locker, Sidney Silverman and Mrs. Braddock. Many Labour members sent messages of support.<sup>2</sup>

In Parliament a systematic campaign was mounted. In May a Committee for a Jewish Fighting Force was constituted<sup>3</sup> which by July included Wedgwood (Joint Chairman), Janner (Joint Secretary), Stabolgi, George Ridley, Creech Jones, Tom Williams, David Frankel, Ben Riley, Lady Snowden, Alice Bacon and Harold Laski. At a meeting arranged by Adams, Creech Jones and Ridley, Labour MPs heard Locker speak on the problems of Jewish defence. Nevertheless at a meeting the following week chaired by Victor Cazalet at least one pro Zionist observer was angered by the caution shown by most MPs.<sup>4</sup>

One Labour peer disdaining the slightest caution was

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1 ZR 31 July 1941.

2 Including Creech Jones, James Walker and Harold Laski. See also Tribune 19 June, 17 & 31 July 1942.

3 ZR 22 May 1942, Jewish Labour News 17 July 1942. A 'Jewish Army Committee' was also set up which demanded a Jewish Army but opposed Zionist political objectives, see New Judea Aug-Sept. 1942.

4 '(Cazalet) said that very few MPs would support it but a large number would lend it sympathy but not their names. How typical!... After much talk it was decided to send a delegation to the Prime Minister asking him to adopt a Jewish Fighting Force within the British army as a Cabinet decision', Meinertzhagen, op.cit., p. 185, entry for 21 July 1942.

Lord Wedgwood.<sup>1</sup> In a broadcast to America in December he had urged the United States to take the responsibility for building a Jewish State 'from our enfeebled hands'. It was an angry and violent speech:

'We want the Jews of Palestine armed in the sure and certain conviction that once armed, they will never surrender those arms, save with their lives, either to Hitler's Germans or the British Administration in Palestine. First arms, then land, then freedom!... The whole Administration, from the top to the Irish police who masquerade as British, are against the half million Jews of Palestine. They will never let them have arms, nor land, nor free immigration, nor a refuge, nor a home - never! They don't like Jews. And there are enough anti Semites and crypto-Fascists still in Great Britain to back up the Hitler policy and spirit'.<sup>2</sup>

Anger at his remarks was not confined to Government circles, and his speech was seen as a blatant incitement to violence. Defending himself in the House of Lords, where he had the full support of Strabolgi,<sup>3</sup> he was perfectly candid about his aims:

'Why did I appeal directly to America? Because I am not playing a game, but trying to get arms for the Jews. Why did I tell the Americans the ugly truth? Because I wish to force the hands of the British

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1 He was one of 'three well known friends of the Zionist cause' ennobled at the end of 1941: Wedgwood Benn, Wedgwood and Lt.Cmdr.Fletcher, ZR 26 Dec. 1941. Wedgwood had previously been pursuing this topic in the Commons, see Wasserstein, op.cit., p. 283 for his participation in a delegation to the Colonial Secretary on 17 October.

2 HL Deb. Vol. 123 c.182, 9 June 1942. See also C.Wedgwood op.cit., pp. 196-99, and Wedgwood's article 'Appeal to the New World' in ZR 4 Apr. 1941.

3 'I hope my noble friend...will stick to his guns on this question. I hope that he will be ready to broadcast again, and that if necessary he will go to America and say those sort of things which he said here. I am proud to be associated with him on this question, and I support him through thick and thin', c.195. Tribune (12 June 1943) thought Wedgwood's speech 'a breath of fresh air'.



Foreign Office.<sup>1</sup>

His party proceeded at a more careful pace. Following the resolution of Poale Zion, and communications from other Zionist and Jewish bodies Gillies again brought the question to the attention of the International Sub Committee,<sup>2</sup> James Walker, who had been active among the PLP, was directed to consider the need for a delegation to the Colonial Secretary. But although the party's efforts in Parliament<sup>3</sup> continued the Colonial Secretary eventually received, not a deputation, but a letter from Middleton protesting at his department's unhelpful attitude.<sup>4</sup>

At a meeting of the National Council of Labour it emerged that the Histadrut and the Committee for a Jewish Fighting Force had asked for the help of the TUC.<sup>5</sup> A statement was heard from Lord Nathan<sup>6</sup> and from Greenwood, who told of discussions with Locker. But the conclusions of the meeting indicate that sympathy with Zionist wishes

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1 c.185. See also HL Deb. Vol. 122 c.21-15, 10 Mar. 1942. In 1938 Strabolgi had called for an 100,000 strong Jewish army in Palestine, see The Times 28 Nov. 1938.

2 Int Sub 17 July 1942, telegrams from Histadrut 30 June & 20 July 1942 (LP/WG/5(e)).

3 B.Locker to L.Scott, 21 July 1942 leading to a question by George Ridley, HC Deb. Vol. 381 c.193-4, 1 Aug. 1942.

4 In reply the Colonial Secretary complained of the many 'unhelpful statements' that had been made, Cranborne to J. Middleton, 31 July 1942 (LP/WG/5(e)).

5 NCL Minutes 21 July 1942.

6 Standing as a Liberal candidate in Whitechapel in 1924 Nathan had expressed his strong support for the National Home, but though introduced in the Lords by Snell and Strabolgi, he was by no means a dedicated Zionists: 'there is no getting over the fact that, if the Jews have been out of Palestine for 2,000 years, the Arabs have been there for 2,000 years, and the Arab claim to Palestine is not one which can be lightly set on one side', H.Hyde, Strong For Service: The Life of Lord Nathan of Churt (London, 1968) (London, 1938) pp. 79, 136, 157-8.

might not be sufficient: 'in view of the complexity of the question and the need for a decision to be taken in the light of high policy, the matter should be left in the hands of the Government'.

If the demands of 'high policy' was one factor preventing the full support of the Labour movement, a meeting of the NEC the following day revealed another. The International Sub Committee had been asked to continue to watch developments, but it emerged that some members felt that there were in fact few obstacles in the way of Jews who wished to join the British forces in Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

James Griffiths, speaking for the NEC and the NCL, showed similar doubts when the matter was debated in the House of Commons on 6 August. His organisations, he said 'understand and fully appreciate how the Jewish people must feel in these days when the war gets daily and hourly nearer Palestine' but he admitted with some candour that:

'it is very difficult for MPs and outside bodies, like the body with which I am associated, to make a definite pronouncement upon a matter of that kind. We have not the requisite knowledge to enable us to arrive at a decision as to whether the Government's fears about possible political repercussions are well grounded'.<sup>2</sup>

This appears to have ended official Labour Party concern with the matter, although two years later, following Weizmann's appeal to Churchill for a Jewish Force to participate in the liberation of Europe, Labour members again made some effort to support Zionist demands. In May

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<sup>1</sup> NEC 21 July 1942. The New Statesman similarly would not accept fully the Zionist line, arguing that the Jewish Fighting Force 'must not be sent to Palestine... or any part of the Middle East'. See criticism in ZR 21 Nov. 1941.

<sup>2</sup> HC Deb. Vol. 382 c.1248, 6 Aug. 1942.



1944 Strabolgi tabled a motion in the House of Lords urging the formation of a Jewish Army, and a similar motion in the Commons had the support of 63 MPs.<sup>1</sup> In July Mack and Griffiths were among members of a delegation led by Strabolgi which met the Secretary of State for War,<sup>2</sup> but Tribune now perversely questioned the wisdom of establishing a Jewish Brigade on the grounds that 'it might lead to the under estimation of the Jewish contribution to the war.'<sup>3</sup>

Though there had been evident sympathy for Zionist aims within the Labour Party support for a Jewish Fighting Force was not sufficiently widely held to make a significant impression on Government policy. The issue also suggested that the party's new position had drawbacks as well as advantages for the Zionists. The positions of power now held by sympathetic Labour politicians undoubtably gave the Zionists some much needed support inside the Government. But war time exigencies made the party less willing officially to voice criticism, and led to a greater acceptance of the demands of 'high policy', as perceived by a Government which now included the party's own representatives.

#### B. The Jewish Massacres

The Labour Party entered the war with the strongest sympathy for the plight of European Jewry, which augmented and strengthened its traditional commitment to Zionism. By

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1 ZR 5 May 1944.

2 Ibid., 14 July 1944.

3 Tribune 26 May 1944.

1944 revelations of the appalling massacres of Jews in Europe had confirmed still further the belief of most party members that in the development of Palestine lay the main hope for the Jewish people in the post war world. Proposals accepted by the Annual Conference that year were the work of one man, but genuinely reflected majority opinion within the party decisively influenced by events of the previous years.

It is, therefore, necessary to consider the reactions of the Labour Party to the persecutions of the Jews in Europe. This involves consideration of the plight of Jewish refugees, including those attempting to reach Palestine despite the restrictions of the White Paper. In turn this raised the question of the development of the Yishuv and the future of Palestine. For Zionists any separation of the questions of the Jewish massacres and the future of Palestine was absurd and unthinkable. This and later sections will attempt to indicate to what extent this belief came to be accepted within the Labour Party.

Throughout the war the Labour Party received requests from numerous Zionist and Jewish bodies asking for assistance in facilitating the escape of Jews from Europe and their resettlement in Palestine, but the ones which will be particularly noted are those from the organs of Palestine Labour - Mapai and the Histadrut - and from their sister organisations in Britain, Poale Zion and the Palestine Labour Political Committee. Partly because of the close links between Labour Zionists and the Jewish Agency certain



activities of this organisation will also be noted.<sup>1</sup>

It should be noted in passing that the Labour Party remained willing during these years to intervene at the Zionists' request on a variety of questions concerning the Yishuv; for example in the summer of 1941 the Histadrut twice asked for help in modifying legislation proposed by the Palestine Government. On both topics Labour MPs were later found asking questions in the House of Commons.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the war Zionists brought to the attention of party spokesmen the plight of refugees reaching Palestine but there refused admission under the White Paper regulations, and it is evident that among party members as a whole (with the exception of certain Labour members of the Government) the harsh treatment meted out to aspiring immigrants aroused great concern and sympathy. In September 1939 Locker discussed with Dalton the question of the refugee ship Tiger Hill and urged that Greenwood raise the matter with the Colonial Secretary.<sup>3</sup> Yet it seems that when the Labour Party joined the Coalition Government once again the Minister most active on the Zionists' behalf was Ernest Bevin. Thus in November, when Jewish refugees arriving in Haifa were threatened with deportation, Dov Hos

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1 Berl Locker headed the political bureau of the Agency in London from 1938. Maurice Rosette, a London born leader of Poale Zion, was in charge of the Information Department between 1942 and 1948.

2 For the Palestine Trades Dispute Act see Histadrut to Labour Party, 22 July 1941 (JSM 210/188), 18 Feb. 1941 (LP/WG/5(a)), HC Deb. Vol. 385, c.1709, 10 Dec. 1942. For the Surface Water Bill see Histadrut to Labour Party & W.Gillies to Lindsay Scott, 3 July 1942 (ibid.), HC Deb. Vol. 380 c.1231, 15 July 1942.

3 Meeting 12 Sept. 1939 (HEN/18/7). On 2 September the Tiger Hill, landing 1,400 illegal immigrants on a Tel Aviv beach, had been fired on by a British patrol.

hastened to contact Bevin, who also received complaints from American Trade Unionists forwarded by the International Sub Committee. As a result Bevin, so the Jewish Agency believed, went 'straight to the Prime Minister who ordered Lloyd not to send the (refugee) ships away'.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless refugees were transferred to the S.S.Patria and preparations made for their deportation. But following the arrival of a third ship the Haganah placed an explosive charge in the engine room which, although designed to disable the ship resulted in the sinking of the Patria with great loss of life. The incident outraged the Yishuv, and set the temper of the distrustful and bitter relationship between it and the Palestine Government which was to persist throughout the war. Zionist complaints soon reached the NEC, whilst in the Commons Wedgwood took the offensive.<sup>2</sup> In the Cabinet there was a strong feeling that the survivors should be allowed to remain in Palestine, despite the opposition of the Colonial Office, and of General Wavell. Churchill later commented that 'I overruled the General...all went well and not a dog barked'.<sup>3</sup> Yet the Jewish Agency ascribed the cancellation of the deportation order to the intervention of Bevin.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Int Sub 25 Nov. 1940, 'Dugdale Diaries' 22 Nov. 1940.

2 NEC 27 Nov. 1940, considering a letter from the PLPC. HC Deb. Vol. 367. c.995 11 Dec. 1940, Vol. 367 c.1238-9, 18 Dec. 1940.

3 Cohen, op.cit., p.111. For the Patria incident see ibid., p. 95, Sykes, op.cit., pp. 268-70, Wasserstein, op.cit., pp. 67-8, 70-3, Bethell, op.cit., pp. 93-6.

4 'Prof. Namier said that they might tell Mr. Creech Jones that the administration had 'taken it out of' the Atlantic refugees because Mr. Bevin had obtained cancellation of the deportation order against the refugees on the Patria', (JA Minutes, 15 Jan. 1941, L.Stein Papers).



Bevin's help, through the good offices of Creech Jones, continued to be sought over questions of the treatment of refugees.<sup>1</sup> In striking contrast to his later views Weizmann now confessed that 'he had a great belief in Mr. Bevin, who was open minded and energetic'.<sup>2</sup> On 28 January 1941 Bevin, Creech Jones, Locker and Weizmann dined at the Dorchester Hotel.<sup>3</sup> Weizmann took the opportunity to explain the Zionist demands more fully, and raised the question of further deportation. 'Mr. Bevin seemed to be most disturbed - first by the facts themselves, and secondly because he had heard nothing of them: the Cabinet had been consulted about the Patria people, why not about the other ships.' Bevin promised to investigate, and to invite Churchill to a lunch party Weizmann was arranging. The following day Creech Jones reported that Bevin had been 'much impressed', and had written a strong letter to the Colonial Secretary. According to Creech Jones, the latter 'had been very much disturbed because a member of the War Cabinet had taken a hand'.<sup>4</sup>

Yet in the face of the White Paper policy Bevin could do little more than make his dissatisfaction known, and indeed other Labour ministers sympathised more with Lloyd's irritation. In April a telegram from the Histadrut to the

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1 Ibid., 16 Dec. 1940, 'Dugdale Diaries' 15 Jan. 1941.

2 JA Minutes, 8 Jan. 1941.

3 Report of dinner in L. Stein Papers op.cit.

4 JA Minutes, 7 Feb. 1941. On 24 January Weizmann had written to Lloyd protesting at the violent removal of refugees from the Athlit camp and their deportation to Mauritius, see Bethell, op.cit., p. 98.

Labour Party warned that 'it is impossible to expect the Jewish community to acquiesce to this treatment'. It passed to Attlee, and thence to George Hall, already considerably embarrassed by his position as a spokesman on Palestine. To Attlee he replied plaintively 'you, I know, appreciate our difficulties in this matter'.<sup>1</sup>

Such developments doubtless helped prompt the Histadrut to make a fresh approach to the Labour Party and a letter, considered in April 1941, dwelt on the problems of Jewish immigration into Palestine '(on which) the Jewish contribution to the war effort depends'.<sup>2</sup> It told of the plight of the Jews in occupied lands, of the obstacles placed in the way of Jewish refugees - the lack of assistance for Jews stranded in Balkan countries, the refusal of immigration certificates, the expulsion of illegal immigrants. 'It is only the policy of the Government which prevents Jewish refugees being saved for Palestine and their service utilised for the common cause'. These complaints were repeated by Nathan Jackson, who represented Poal Zion at the annual conference in June.<sup>3</sup>

The following month the International Sub Committee interviewed a delegation of Labour Zionists, who dwelt on the plight of Jewish refugees both in itself and also as intimately bound up with the future development of

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1 Int Sub 1 Apr. 1941, W.Gillies to C.Attlee, 1 Apr. 1941 LP/Int/5(a), G.Hall to C.Attlee, 3 Apr. 1941 (Attlee Papers).

2 During 1940 Poale Zion had submitted two memoranda on the subject of refugees, ZR 16 Aug. 1940.

3 LPACR 1941 pp. 160-1.



Palestine: 'after the war a great migration problem will inevitably arise from masses of Jews in Central and East Europe...and Palestine will have to play a decisive part in solving this problem'.<sup>1</sup>

In March the following year the plight of Jewish refugees was tragically illustrated by the sinking, with great loss of life, of the immigrant boat Struma.<sup>2</sup> Zionist protests quickly reached Transport House, and local Labour parties voiced their concern.<sup>3</sup> In Parliament David Adams demanded that any further refugees in a similar plight be admitted into Palestine<sup>4</sup> whilst Tribune condemned the 'blind stupidity of the Colonial Office' and asked: 'who then is responsible for doing Goebbels' work at the Colonial Office or inside the Palestine administration?'<sup>5</sup> When the NEC met a week later, following renewed protests, further action was felt necessary, and as a result a deputation was sent to Lord Cranborne, the new Colonial Secretary, to press for freer immigration into Palestine 'with particular reference to the refugees from Nazism'.<sup>6</sup>

With the annual conference <sup>drawing near</sup>, Nathan Jackson wrote to

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1 Int Sub 11 July 1941, interview with Locker, Levenberg, Jackson and Kollek. See also Poale Zion memorandum 'The Jewish People and Palestine', para. 11, in NEC minutes.

2 The Struma, whose refugees had been refused entry to Palestine, sank in the Black Sea. See esp. Bethell, op.cit., pp. 113-20, Wasserstein, op.cit., pp. 143-57.

3 Int Sub 16 Mar. 1942. For example, the Leeds Labour Party, at the instigation of a Poale Zion delegate, unanimously passed a resolution demanding 'a public enquiry and possible change of personnel', ZR 26 Mar. 1942.

4 HC Deb. Vol. 378 c.1219, 12 Mar. 1942.

5 Tribune 6 Mar. 1942.

6 NEC 25 Mar. 1942.

Middleton arguing that in the worsening conditions there was now a pressing need for a definite resolution on the subject from the NEC.<sup>1</sup> To this the International Sub Committee agreed, and a resolution was presented by Noel Baker on 28 May which, although modified somewhat by Hugh Dalton, clearly summarised the Zionist view of the problem:

'The Conference records its detestation of the sufferings inflicted upon the Jewish people. It reaffirms its determination that, in the new international order after the war, Jews shall enjoy civil, religious and economic equality with all other citizens, and that international assistance shall be given to promote immigration and settlement in the Jewish National Home in Palestine'.<sup>2</sup>

Two days earlier, replying to Jackson's short speech, George Dallas had commented that 'we feel as deeply as Mr. Nathan Jackson on the sinking of the Struma. We have kept the matter very much to the front, and Mr. Jackson may rest assured we are continuing to watch the whole situation in Palestine very closely'.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed as definite reports of Jewish massacres reached the outside world to watch and protest was all that the party could do. On 4 December, as part of the growing wave of protests, the Foreign Secretary received an NEC deputation which 'examined the problem with him in all its aspects',<sup>4</sup> and shortly afterwards a resolution was adopted

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1 N.Jackson to J.Middleton 20 May 1942 (LP/Int/5(a)), Int Sub 22 Apr. & 21 May 1942.

2 LPACR 1942, p. 151. For Poale Zion's draft see N.Jackson to J.Middleton op.cit., The resolution was curiously similar to Webb's draft some 25 years earlier, but although it was the very least the party could be expected to say Jackson stressed that its adoption 'would constitute a great encouragement to the Jewish people in all countries and especially to our work and situation in Palestine'.

3 LPACR 1942, p. 128.

4 Ibid., p. 39.



and published entitled 'The Massacre of the Jews', which 'appealed to the conscience of civilised mankind to arise in passionate protest against the bloodiest crime in history'. The language of the declaration underlining the hopelessness of the situation - 'at least make an effort to save the children'.<sup>1</sup>

Though no mention was made of Palestine, Zionist organisations expressed gratitude for the declaration and suggested further proposals that the party could press on the Government.<sup>2</sup> Poale Zion also published a pamphlet Under Sentence of Death, with an introduction by Middleton, which the Labour Party helped distribute.<sup>3</sup>

In answer to a Private Notice Question from Sidney Silverman<sup>4</sup> Eden had reported to the House of Commons the facts of the genocide being organised by the Nazis. This had led a Labour MP, Will Cluse, successfully to urge the House 'to rise in their places and stand in silence in support of this protest against disgusting barbarism'.<sup>5</sup>

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1 NEC 15 Dec. 1942, see also T.D.Burridge, British Labour and Hitler's War (London, 1976) p. 67.

2 NEC 20 Dec. 1942 considering communications from Poale Zion, the Jewish Agency and the World Jewish Congress.

3 Jewish Socialist Labour Party, Poale Zion, Under Sentence of Death (London, 1942). The pamphlet, with a black border, contained details of the massacres, Labour Party statements, and a plan of action which included the opening of the doors of Palestine, shelter for refugees in the British Empire and in neutral countries, and the formation of a Jewish Fighting Force.

4 In Parliament many Jewish Labour MPs and peers - including Silverman, Silkin, Frankel, Mack and Nathan - were active in attempting to help organise and co-ordinate relief for Jewry (see correspondence in Board of Deputies, C 10/2/8), Brodetsky, op.cit., p. 228.

5 HC Deb. Vol. 385 c.32, 17 Dec. 1942 (Cluse was PPS to Stafford Cripps). For the effect of the gesture see Wasserstein, op.cit., p. 173, but for a sceptical contemporary reaction see Tribune 25 Dec. 1942.

Yet appeals from Labour MPs, including Arthur Greenwood, that urgent relief for Jewish refugees should include the lifting of immigration restrictions into Palestine were unavailing.<sup>1</sup> It fell to Clement Attlee, on 19 January, to outline the Government's policy, and to Cluse's interjection that 'as we are, after all, in control of Palestine, cannot we ease the immigration arrangements for the quota so that a larger number (of refugees) can go to Palestine'. Attlee could give no positive reply.<sup>2</sup>

Zionists felt that statement to be totally inadequate, and from Locker and the Histadrut came further suggestions and a demand for 'the most active intervention for rescue action of a material character'. The NEC was clearly in sympathy with these appeals and issued a further resolution which urged that new measures be adopted 'with the minimum of delay and the maximum of co-operation and the maximum of effectiveness'.<sup>3</sup> On 29 January Labour MPs joined an all party delegation which pressed on Attlee, Eden, Morrison and Stanley the need for further action.<sup>4</sup>

Many Labour Ministers were concerned about the continuing operation of the Palestine White Paper,<sup>5</sup> but on the other hand there is little sign of any bold or compassionate intervention on behalf of Jewish refugees. On the

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1 eg. HC Deb. Vol. 386 c.32, 19 Jan. 1943.

2 Ibid., c.32-3, 102.

3 NEC 26 Jan. 1943. ~~THE~~ NCL issued a similar statement two days later.

4 The Times 30 Jan. 1943. The delegation was led by Greenwood, and included Sidney Silverman.

5 See below pp. 275-6.



question of the entry of such refugees into Palestine the intervention of Bevin appears to have been unique; in contrast was the apparent attitude of Attlee whom Weizmann described as behaving 'very much in the manner of Lord Passfield'.<sup>1</sup>

Most Labour Ministers evidently concurred with the Government's belief that refugees would best be served by a speedy victory, which therefore precluded any diversion of efforts or resources. But the attitude of such Ministers to the admission of Jewish refugees into Britain was depressingly negative. Herbert Morrison, the Home Secretary, shared with many of his colleagues a fear of the growth of anti semitism in Britain, and felt that the entry of large numbers of Jewish refugees could not therefore be contemplated. On 31 December 1942 he told a Cabinet Committee that the number must be as low as 2,000.<sup>2</sup> To Churchill Laski wrote in disillusion that 'what hurts me so deeply is the realisation that among my own colleagues in your Government Dr. Goebbels has induced a spirit of caution (on the Jewish refugee problem) when you have so amply shown that audacity is the road to victory'.<sup>3</sup>

It is nevertheless significant that Morrison, though

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1 Quoted in Wasserstein, op.cit., p. 70.

2 Ibid., pp. 114-5, see also pp. 130-63. According to Wasserstein 'there was a definite Government tendency, exemplified most notably by Herbert Morrison in his attitude to wartime refugee immigration, to bend with the wind of hostility to refugees, rather than give a lead or build upon the more generous elements in public opinion' (ibid., p. 351). For Cripps' fear of anti semitism see Meinertzhagen, op.cit., p. 194.

3 H.Laski to W.Churchill, 1 July 1943, cited in Wasserstein, op.cit., p. 33.

playing a leading part in Jewish immigration into Britain, remained a friend of the Zionists and supporter within the Cabinet. On the question of immigration into Palestine he, unlike many of his colleagues, was far from unsympathetic; such was his friendliness to a deputation from his constituency that he left the impression that, although shipping could not be provided, free immigration would be allowed into Palestine.<sup>1</sup> In fact the restrictions on immigration into Britain and the meagre help offered to refugees served only to give greater weight to the Zionists' demands and stimulate further support within the Labour Party.

The party's protests continued in Parliament<sup>2</sup> and culminated at the Annual Conference in June in a debate on 'The Jewish People'. The tone was set by A.J.Dobbs in the Chairman's address: 'language fails me when I recall the foul assault upon the helpless Jewish people'.<sup>3</sup> Ten resolutions had been submitted which dealt with anti semitism and the Jewish problem, and again that of Poale Zion formed the basis for the main resolution submitted to Conference. It urged Governments of the United Nations and of neutral countries to admit as many Jews as possible, and reaffirmed party policy of building Palestine as the Jewish National Home. The Jewish Agency should be given 'authority to make the fullest use of the economic capacity

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1 M.Rosette to S.Brodetsky, 29 Jan. 1943 (Board of Deputies op.cit.).

2 See especially the debate on 19th May, with contributions from Mack, Silverman, Grenfell (New Judea May 1943, Wasserstein, op.cit., p. 203). On 30 June Grenfell joined a delegation which visited the Foreign Office.

3. LPACR 1943, p. 117.



of the country to absorb immigrants', and the Jewish people granted 'an equal status among the free nations of the world.'<sup>1</sup>

Although the Zionist Review particularly welcomed the reference to the Jewish Agency as 'an act of great statesmanship and vision',<sup>2</sup> there had been some significant alterations made by the NEC to Poale Zion's resolution. This had called for 'the gates of Palestine (to) be thrown open to Jews escaping from annihilation' and for the establishment of Palestine as a 'Jewish Commonwealth'. The former omission certainly indicated a lingering official disinclination at this stage to link the plight of Jewish refugees squarely with the future of Palestine, but this was certainly influenced both by the fact of Labour participation in the Government and because the process of formulating a post war policy for Palestine had begun within the party machine.

It was nevertheless noticeable that in the debate on the resolution, although delegates - including James Walker and Harold Laski for the NEC - spoke passionately of the massacres and the need for action, Maurice Rosette of Poale Zion was the only one to stress the role of Palestine.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Ibid., pp. 188-9.

2 ZR 18 June 1943.

3 A resolution calling for unrestricted right of entry for refugees to any country under British control, and for a Ministry of Refugees, was moved by Hackney North but defeated. The successful resolution and speeches were published in Jewish Socialist Labour Party, Poale Zion Labour and the Jewish People (London, 1943). The introduction was by George Ridley, Chairman of the NEC, who commented: 'few speeches have more impressed me than the speech you will read here by Mr. Maurice Rosette'.

Though the Zionist Review praised the quality of the debate not all readers agreed. One noted that 'all speakers showed an embarrassing and distressing preoccupation with the Nazi persecution, emphasising almost exclusively the punishment to be meted out on the day of retribution'. Zionists should seek more than atrocity mongering, and tell their friends that their aims lay elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

Labour Zionists in Britain were well aware of this necessity. The horror of the Jewish massacres and the miserable treatment of the dwindling stream of refugees created a powerful sense of outrage and horror within the Labour movement. It was for Labour Zionists to ensure that this phenomenon was fully channelled into support for Zionist aims. At the following annual conference the NEC was able to present its own proposals, whose nature and reception indicated the influence the massacres had had on thinking within the party. Any remaining hesitation in linking the atrocities with the future development of Palestine had passed. One reason for this was the notably successful attempt by Poale Zion to mobilise, co-ordinate and channel the support of sections of the Labour movement, both at local and national levels.

### C. Poale Zion in Wartime

Although Poale Zion had played an important role in promoting the cause of Zionism within the Labour Party between the two world wars, membership had fallen from 3,000 in 1920 to a mere 450 in the late 1930s, and its

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<sup>1</sup> ZR 25 June 1943.



influence increasingly depended on its role as a spokesman for Palestine Labour. However, with the outbreak of the war and the growing realisation of the fate awaiting European Jewry the party showed a considerable increase in membership and a dramatic increase in educative and propagandising activity. These developments can be traced chiefly through the pages of the Zionist Review.<sup>1</sup>

Membership, initially slow to increase, showed a considerable growth as the war developed. Affiliated membership to the Labour Party rose from 450 in 1942 to 600 in 1943, and reached 1,000 in 1944 and 1,500 in 1945.<sup>2</sup> War time conditions caused some disruption, but a membership drive began in 1941, and was accompanied by a new system of centralised personal membership.<sup>3</sup> Many new branches were formed during the war and by 1944 there were at least 16 branches in London and the provinces, and a number of youth sections.<sup>4</sup> The numbers attending annual and regional conferences further illustrated the growing vitality of the party.

During the war a renewed effort was made to mobilise the support of working class Jews. In August 1941 the Zionist Review, commenting that 'it has long been felt among Zionists in this country that more attention should be paid to educative and propaganda work among the masses',

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1 From 1941 the editor of the paper was Dr. Levenberg, Secretary of Poale Zion from 1939 to 1942 and thereafter Chairman.

2 LPACR 1942-45.

3 ZR 19 Sept. 1941.

4 ZR 28 Jan. 1944. By 1945 there were branches in Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Birmingham, Glasgow, Oxford (and possibly Edinburgh), and in London North West, North, West Central, East, Wembley, Dalston, Willesden and Bow.

was able to report the creation by Poale Zion of a 'People's Department' of the Jewish National Fund.<sup>1</sup> At an inaugural conference in Caxton Hall 'to express the solidarity of Jewish Labour with workers in Palestine and to give practical support to activities of the Jewish National Fund' James Middleton joined Ben Gurion and Berl Locker in addressing the meeting.<sup>2</sup>

Prompted by the tragedy of the Struma a number of Jewish Labour leaders in the East End also took the initiative and formed a new organisation: 'Friends of Jewish Labour in Palestine' to support the work of the Histadrut and began a membership drive in the workshops and factories of Whitechapel and the surrounding area.<sup>3</sup> The first public meeting in Toynbee Hall was a great success, and among the speakers were Wedgwood and Middleton.<sup>4</sup> Yet it seems that the following year a further initiative was felt necessary, for another special meeting of Poale Zion, Trade Unions and Workers' Circle groups was called 'to discuss ways and means of helping the Histadrut'. A United Jewish Labour Committee was set up, and its second conference in March 1945 was attended by delegates from

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Youth sections included those in Leeds, Manchester, North and North West London. There were also three kibbutzim.  
Sources: ZR passim, Jewish Yearbook (London, 1945) p. 73.

1 ZR 22 Aug., 19 Sept. 1941. Between 1936 and 1941 Rosette had been General Secretary of the Jewish National Fund.

2 Ibid., 17 & 24 Oct. 1942.

3 Ibid., 6 Feb. 1942.

4 Ibid., 1 May 1942.



over 30 Labour organisations.<sup>1</sup>

In May 1943 the Zionist Review could nevertheless still note that 'there is a strong pro-Palestine sentiment in Whitechapel which no one has taken the trouble to organise in an efficient manner'.<sup>2</sup> To revive the enthusiasm shown in the East End after the Balfour Declaration was evidently no easy task, though a branch of Poale Zion was established in East London, with the veteran Sam Dreen as Secretary, and later branches reappeared in Whitechapel and Bethnal Green.

Poale Zion's relations with the wider British Zionist movement underwent a significant change when in 1942 it was announced that the party had successfully applied for membership of the Zionist Federation: 'the agreement thus reached is an important event in British Zionism. At this period of crisis in World and Jewish history the Executive of Poale Zion are confident that it will help to rally the Jewish masses in this country around the banner of Zionism'.<sup>3</sup> Despite a history of uneasy relations between the two organisations Poale Zion members quickly achieved positions of prominence within the Federation<sup>4</sup> and the party participated fully in the various Zionist fund raising activities.

To the 1945 Poale Zion Annual Conference the Chairman,

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1 Ibid., 12 Dec. 1943, 23 Mar. 1945.

2 Ibid., 12 May 1943.

3 Ibid., 9 Jan. 1942.

4 In the 1944 elections to the Zionist Federation Berl Locker joined Barnett Janner as a Vice President, whilst Levenberg and Jackson joined the London Executive.

Dr. Levenberg, outlined the various fields in which the party operated:

'In the general political field they were an integral part of the British Labour Party; in the Zionist political field they worked through the Palestine Labour Political Committee; in regular Zionist work they closely co-operated with the Zionist Federation, of which Poale Zion form an important part; in the communal sphere some of their members are closely associated with the work of the Board of Deputies and its most important committees.'<sup>1</sup>

Our concern, however, is with the Zionist activity of Poale Zion within the British Labour movement. Many members of the Labour Party expressed their sympathy for the plight of Jewish refugees, or support for the Jewish National Home through organisations other than Poale Zion, or through no organisation at all. But Poale Zion deserves special attention as the chief agent of Zionist activity within the Labour Party.

One important part of Poale Zion's work was the distribution of literature. Some 20,000 copies of Under Sentence of Death were produced, of which 13,000 were distributed to 'key men' in the Labour Party, trade union and co-operative organisations. Several other pamphlets were produced during the war including Jews, Arabs and the Middle East, which the Labour Party distributed to 5,000 affiliated organisations, and 7,000 copies of The Jewish Co-operative Movement in Palestine were circulated within the Co-operative organisation. Labour and the Jewish People containing the speeches from the 1943 conference was also printed in large numbers, 15,000 reaching non Jewish

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 15 June 1945.



organisations.<sup>1</sup> At Labour conferences Zionist delegates were able to distribute pamphlets and policy statements describing Jewish activity in Palestine.

In the winter of 1941 Poale Zion set up a Labour Press Service, in the form of a newsletter entitled Jewish Labour News which by 1943 was being sent regularly to over 200 Labour publications.<sup>2</sup> The following year Jewish Labour appeared, 'the organ of Poale Zion'.<sup>3</sup> A film of Jewish work in Palestine, entitled 'Land of Promise' was shown some thirty times in the later half of 1943 and 'A Day at Degania' was shown at the Labour conference.<sup>4</sup> In the summer of 1944 an exhibition entitled 'Jewish Palestine at War' visited several cities, including Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and Glasgow, being opened on each occasion by a prominent local dignitary.<sup>5</sup>

Personal contacts and propaganda work within the Labour movement were equally important and leading roles were played by Dr. Levenberg, Maurice Rosette and Berl Locker. The latter had particularly friendly relations with many Labour Party figures,<sup>6</sup> but cordial informal links between

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1 Ibid., 20 Aug. 1943, 28 Jan. 1944, 26 Jan. 1945.

2 N.Jackson to W.Gillies, 11 Nov. 1941 giving news of the service (LP/Int/5(f)).

3 ZR 26 Jan. 1945. 4 Ibid., 20 Aug. 1943, 28 Jan. 1945.

5 Ibid., 13 May, 30 June, 21 July, 18 Aug. 1944.

6 Locker also developed close links with the Fabian Society, from which had developed in 1940 the Fabian Colonial Bureau, with Creech Jones as Chairman. Rita Hinden, the Secretary, had lived in Palestine for three years and gained a doctorate for her thesis 'Palestine: An Experiment in Colonisation'. Her Zionist beliefs declined with the growing emphasis on militant nationalism, though she maintained her links with moderate and Labour Zionists. For the Bureau see especially D.Goldsworthy, Colonial Issues in British Politics 1945-1961 (Oxford, 1971) pp. 123-7.

Labour Zionists and their gentile colleagues existed at every level, and provided the essential counterpart to the official Zionist links with the Labour Party.

At the apex of the Labour Party Poale Zion delegates to annual conferences were often accompanied by fraternal delegates representing Palestine Labour organisations, and at Trade Union Congresses, Conferences of Labour Women and even Co-operative Executive meetings Zionist delegates were able to present their views and distribute literature.<sup>1</sup> These contacts were extended to the international Labour organisation, such as the International Federation of Trade Unions and the International Co-operative Alliance.<sup>2</sup> In 1942 Locker joined two committees of foreign Socialists in Britain, and when the International Labour and Socialist Committee was established in 1944 Berl Locker represented 'Palestine'.<sup>3</sup>

Such formal contacts were supplemented in a variety of ways. For example, in the autumn of 1941 Poale Zion organised a series of luncheons at which leading Labour figures were invited to speak. These included Creech Jones, James Middleton, George Ridley, James Walker and the

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1 ZR 22 Aug. 1941, 3 July & 11 Sept. 1942, 28 Jan. 1944. For a deputation of the PLPC to the Co-operative Executive see ibid., 19 Mar. 1943: 'Mr. Berl Locker...reported on the achievements of Palestine Labour...the Chairman expressed warm sympathy and suggested collaboration...to this end it was agreed that a memorandum should be drawn up and submitted by the deputation indicating the line of common action'.

2 Ibid., 28 Jan. 1944, 14 Apr. 1944, 5 Mar. 1945. See Levenberg, op.cit., p. 120 for resolution of IFTU demanding that Jewish refugees be allowed to enter Palestine.

3 Ibid., 11 Sept. 1942, 22 Sept. 1944.



political correspondent of the Daily Herald.<sup>1</sup>

At a local level - particularly in London, Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds - Poale Zion groups co-operated fully with Labour organisations and often instigated or assisted in the passing of resolutions in favour of the opening of the doors of Palestine and its development as the National Home. Poale Zion also organised a series of conferences to mobilise full support for Zionist aims. The first of these took place in Leeds on 29 April, and was attended by 150 delegates from Yorkshire Labour, Trade Union and Co-operative bodies. A resolution was passed which demanded the formation of a Jewish Fighting Force and noted 'with indignation that in spite of the horrible conditions the doors of the Jewish National Home in Palestine are not kept open for Jewish refugees from Nazi persecution'. Among the speakers were Locker, Brodetsky and A.L. Williams, the Secretary of the Labour Party in Yorkshire. A mass meeting was held in the evening, presided over by Alice Bacon, a member of the NEC. Messages were read from Middleton and Strabolgi, and the evening concluded with a showing of the film 'Collective Adventure'.<sup>2</sup>

At a similar conference in Liverpool Silverman and Bessie Braddock spoke, and the Zionist Review reported that 'much enthusiasm was shown by the audience, mainly non-Jewish, and it was suggested that a chain of similar meetings should be organised throughout the country'.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Ibid., 18 Sept., 17 Oct., 7 Nov. 1941.

2 Ibid., 1 May 1942.

3 Ibid., 23 Oct. 1942, 6 Nov. 1942.

In the following months further conferences were held in Glasgow and Manchester, and the pattern was followed on several occasions later in the war.<sup>1</sup>

The conferences revealed what there could have been little cause to doubt - that there existed inside the Labour movement overwhelming support and sympathy for the Jewish position, considerable admiration for Jewish achievements in Palestine, and a strong desire to do right by the Jews after the war. These feelings, encouraged and channelled by Poale Zion, were a major reason why this apparently minor organisation could win such support within the Labour Party, and why their requests were met by the NEC with such consideration.

This was underlined by the large number of Labour MPs and members who spoke at Zionist meetings, or on behalf of Zionists, or sent messages of support. Some, like Silverman, Mack, Frankel and Mikardo were Jews and Zionists, others such as Morgan Jones, Rhys Davies and Creech Jones were Zionist supporters of long standing, but many more, like Will Cluse<sup>2</sup> had until then shown little interest in Zionism or Palestine.

It may be argued that this was not an indication of support for Zionism and the Jewish National Home, but simply of outrage and horror at the extermination of Jewry. But it is quite clear that for many in the Labour Party the case for a Jewish National Home, or even for a Jewish

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1 Ibid., 23 Oct. 1942 (Glasgow), 6 Nov. 1942 (Manchester), 24 Sept. 1943 (North East and London), 26 Nov. 1943 and 22 Sept. 1944 (Liverpool), 2 June 1944, 8 Sept. 1944 (Leeds).

2 Ibid., 29 Jan. 1943.



Palestine, had been conclusively demonstrated by the massacres, and felt that Zionism provided the only practical plan of action for a problem that otherwise showed little sign of being tackled in any effective manner. Large numbers of Labour MPs went well beyond vague messages of sympathy, and gave their full support to Zionist aspirations. A typical example was William Leach, MP for Bradford, 'who traced the development of British policy since the Balfour Declaration and went on to identify himself completely with Zionist aspirations and the policy for Palestine as a Jewish State'.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most active speakers was J.S. Middleton, Secretary of the Labour Party. Though his position precluded his making definite promises, time and again he assured Zionist audiences that 'when the call came for aid, as far as the British Labour movement was concerned, it would not come in vain'.<sup>2</sup> In his farewell speech to the 1944 Annual Conference he spoke emotionally of his work with the Jewish Community, and 'Ruth' in the Zionist Review wrote of 'this remarkable man (who) has placed himself in the irreparable debt of the Jewish people. He has a warm sympathy for our cause, born of his great humanity and fortified by his conviction that Zionism is compatible with all his party stands for'.<sup>3</sup> His sympathies were also an advantage to the Zionists when the Labour Party came to

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1 Ibid., 2 June 1944.

2 Ibid., 24 Jan. 1941. See also 7 May 1943 for his speech to a May Day Rally of Poale Zion which also, rather inappropriately, stood in honour of the late Beatrice Webb.

3 Ibid., 22 Dec. 1944.

formulate its policy for the future of Palestine.

D. Policy Making: As an Opposition Party

(1) Early Moves by Zionists and the Advisory Committee

The Labour Party's plans for the post war world were finally presented in the summer of 1944 in a document entitled The International Post War Settlement.<sup>1</sup> This included a paragraph on Palestine. But the development and adoption of a general policy for the party may be thought to have begun in July 1941 when, in a memorandum and a subsequent meeting with the International Sub Committee, members of the Palestine Labour Political Committee presented their thoughts on the future of Palestine.<sup>2</sup>

The Zionists had been prompted by the speech of the Foreign Secretary at the Mansion House on 29 May in which he promised Arab countries a greater degree of independence after the war, and the full support of the Government for 'any solution (of unity) which commands general approval'. To the Labour Party the Zionists outlined their objection:

'Palestine lies in the very heart of the Middle East. It is the most vital interest of the Jewish people. Yet so far the Jewish people and its internationally recognised representatives, the Jewish Agency for Palestine, have neither been consulted nor mentioned. In Mr. Eden's speech there is not a word about the special position of Palestine and the rights and interests of the Jewish people in it.'

Although a statement that 'general approval in that speech covers the rights of the Jews with regard to

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1 LPACR 1944 pp. 173-4. For the programme as a whole see Burridge, op.cit., pp. 114-25, C.R.Rose, The Relation of Socialist Principles to British Labour Foreign Policy 1945-51, Unpublished thesis, Nuffield College, Oxford, 1959, pp. 74-6.

2 See above p. 226.



Palestine' had been extracted from the Colonial Secretary, the Zionists believed that 'these new advantages (for the Arabs)...cannot be given to them at the expense of the vital interests of the Jewish people'. The situation was clear:

'the Jewish people will need after the war a territory large enough to receive the bulk of the Jewish immigration which must be expected, and to form a foundation for a sound Jewish Commonwealth. This state or Commonwealth must be given the sovereignty necessary to secure it against attacks from without, and against domination by neighbouring states. The Jewish people can never agree to being a permanent minority in an Arab state... or a combination of Arab states so far as the vital interests are concerned'.

Following discussions with Locker, Levenberg, Jackson and Kollek the Zionists were invited to suggest immediate steps to be taken by the Labour Party.<sup>1</sup> They answered that the Government should be reminded of the party's interest in the National Home, and the need to treat it as an aspect of the larger Jewish problem. It must also be told to avoid a situation 'in which the Arabs could claim...to have acquired a new status possidenti before the problem is duly considered at the future Peace Conference'. The Jewish Agency should also participate in any discussions on the future of the Middle East.

The ensuring resolution adopted by the Sub Committee went a long way to meeting the requests of the Zionists: 'no pledge should be given to one side or the other with respect to the future of Palestine in the course of any negotiations which might take place upon the situation in the Near East, until the representatives of the Jewish Agency have been given every opportunity for consultation,

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<sup>1</sup> B.Locker to W.Gillies, n.d., represented in NEC minutes.

unfettered by any previous commitment'. The declaration, which could also be taken as applying with equal weight to the formulation of party policy, was sent to Attlee.<sup>1</sup> Zionist links with the Labour Party policy makers were clearly secure, the more so since, with the outbreak of war, Arab representations to the party had ceased.

Perhaps prompted by the Zionist representations, consideration of the Palestine problem was reopened within the Advisory Committee.<sup>2</sup> The first to submit his suggestions was Creech Jones, whose views followed familiar Zionist lines. On the premise that in the post war years a major refugee problem would exist, to which Palestine alone could substantially contribute, he recommended that:

'the White Paper policy should be abandoned and the Government should move to the establishment of an independent Jewish State (inside the agreed Mandated territory), an associate nation in the British Commonwealth, but collaborating with neighbouring states. It should be able to defend itself and prove a valuable strategic state in the British Commonwealth of Nations'.<sup>3</sup>

Norman Bentwich concurred with Creech Jones' survey of developments in Palestine and with his belief that the White Paper must be abandoned. But although a Zionist he disagreed with his colleague's proposals. He did not envisage a large scale refugee influx into Palestine after the war, and the demand for a Jewish State would, he felt, reopen 'the old troubles with the Arabs and the Moslem world'. He

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1 Int Sub 18 July 1941, W.Gillies to C.Attlee, 1 Aug.1941 (Attlee Papers)

2 Minutes and agenda for the war years have not survived, but many memoranda can be located.

3 'Palestine' by A.Creech Jones (LP/ImpAC/2/238 in FCB 176/1/14).



still hoped for a bi-national Palestine as part of a larger Middle East Confederation. Jewish immigration would continue but into the wider area, particularly Transjordan, with which Palestine would unite.<sup>1</sup>

The following month a memorandum was submitted by Thomas Reid, a stern opponent of Zionism. He too firmly opposed partition, and believed that 'although neither Jewish nor other immigration should be completely stopped... it is just to impose a reasonable restriction on Jewish immigration if the welfare of the inhabitants of Palestine is to be a guide to the policy of British rule or of the Palestine rule which is to succeed it'. Furthermore 'there should be adequate restrictions on the sale of land to Jews to protect the Arabs from economic domination'. But he agreed with Bentwich that a Federated State - to be called the Holy Land - should be set up.<sup>2</sup>

The views of Leonard Woolf, the Secretary, were not dissimilar. Partition, he felt 'is a policy of despair and, under existing circumstances, is so desperate as to be almost disastrous'. He too saw a larger federation as part of the solution and believed that Jewish immigration and land purchase should continue 'but subject to reasonable

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1 'Supplementary Note by Professor N. Bentwich on a Memorandum on Palestine by A. Creech Jones, MP', Dec. 1941 (LP/ImpAC/2/238(a)).

For the Jewish Agency Bentwich's presence on the Committee was a very mixed blessing, see eg B. Locker to W. Gillies, 15 May 1944 (Dalton Papers 7/10 p. 83) warning him of their disagreements. Above all, see Locker's comment to the 1944 Poale Zion conference that 'bi-nationalism is a wonderful formula. But it has one disadvantage; it is unworkable' (ZR 7 Apr. 1944).

2 'Draft Report on Palestine' by T. Reid, 1942 (LP/Impac/2/238(c)).

restrictions'.<sup>1</sup>

Creech Jones was clearly in a minority, but his critics were scarcely of one voice. Bentwich noted that, although Creech Jones' draft was partial on the Jewish side 'Reid's draft is more partial and more coloured on the other side'. To Woolf he sent a refutation of Reid's memorandum. Reid hastened to reply: 'my draft is not partial...it is an attempt to put salient facts in their proper perspective, not in that of Zionist propaganda or Arab propaganda. I fear that my critic's notes are prejudiced and one sided'.<sup>2</sup>

Once again the Advisory Committee accurately reflected the multiplicity of opinion on the subject of Palestine, and as a result found it impossible to present unanimous recommendations. But not for the first time its deliberations did not long remain a secret, and once again Poale Zion was quick to intervene. To Middleton Nathan Jackson complained that 'as an official organisation clearly interested in this issue we should be obliged to receive copies of the documents so that, if necessary, we should be in a position to submit our criticism of them'.<sup>3</sup>

Again the speed in which details of private discussion reached Zionist ears caused a stir within the party. Gillies complained to Woolf that 'this letter places me in an embarrassing position. I have reason to believe that

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1 'Draft Report on Palestine' by L.S.Woolf, n.d. (LP/ImpAC/2/238(d)).

2 'Letter from N.Bentwich on Memo. 238(b) Draft Report on Palestine', 16 Jan. 1942 (FCB 176/1/17), 'Reply to Norman Bentwich's letter regarding Memo. 238(b)', (FCB 176/1/19).

3 N.Jackson to J.Middleton, 26 Jan. 1942 (LP/Int/5(a)).



Poale Zion refers in particular to a memorandum by Mr. Reid<sup>1</sup> Woolf felt strongly that documents should not be shown to 'outside interested parties', and the Committee unanimously rejected the request. Poale Zion were accordingly fended off with the pledge that their request would be considered if any such documents reached the NEC or its Sub Committees.<sup>2</sup>

Poale Zion was not to be put off so easily, and a further request was received in April and considered by the full NEC.<sup>3</sup> Since various memoranda had now been submitted to a new body, the Committee on International Relations, Middleton now did the Zionists the potentially important service of successfully suggesting that a representative of Poale Zion should be invited to take part in any discussion on Palestine within the new Committee.<sup>4</sup>

The stage appeared to be set for confrontation between Poale Zion and the predominantly critical members of the Advisory Committee. During 1941 a Central Committee on Post War Reconstruction was set up and on 6 August the composition of a Sub Committee on International Relationships was decided on, for which Leonard Woolf became Secretary.<sup>5</sup>

However when the NEC invited Hugh Dalton to prepare a

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1 W.Gillies to L.Woolf, 3 Feb. 1942 (ibid.).

2 L.Woolf to W.Gillies, 4 July 1942, W.Gillies to N.Jackson, 17 Mar. 1942 (ibid.), Int Sub 16 Feb. 1942.

3 N.Jackson to J.Middleton, 16 Apr. 1942 (ibid.), NEC 22 Apr. 1942.

4 J.Middleton to N.Jackson, 23 Apr. 1942 (ibid.).

5 LPACR 1944, p. 21. Special Sub Committee Minutes, 6 Aug. 1941 (Dalton Papers 7/10), Dalton Diaries 3 Oct. & 3 Nov. 1941.

draft on post war foreign policy it was to the old International Sub Committee that he reported, and not the new Committee. It seems therefore that the traditional policy making system of Executive Committee, Sub Committee and Advisory Committee continued as before. In fact party policy on Palestine was to emerge in a very different manner to that suggested by the events of 1941 - 42.

## (2) Hugh Dalton Takes Charge

On 22 September 1943 Dalton noted in his diary: 'I pledge myself to make the first draft of my heads of proposals for a post war settlement in time for the next meeting of (the International Sub Committee)'.<sup>1</sup> From his diaries it is clear that he was eager to undertake the task. On the question of Palestine he could be guided both by the long tradition of pro Zionist sympathy and by recent conference resolutions.

With the decision to begin framing post war policy, members of the Advisory Committee hastened to submit their views. Creech Jones recirculated his memorandum, and Reid both redrafted his own and submitted a further memorandum criticising his colleague's draft in detail. His own views were couched in forthright language. 'It is Britain', he wrote, 'which has created the Palestine problem by forcing in Jews against the wishes of the people of Palestine. Britain must resolve the problem'. Again he condemned suggestions of partition and proposed a 'reasonable'

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<sup>1</sup> Dalton Diaries 22 Sept. 1942. Hugh Dalton kept full diaries during the war years, and they give a revealing account of his part in the formulation of party policy.



restriction on immigration and land purchase. He believed that the policy of political Zionists was opposed to the wishes of most Jews and Palestine and described how 'during the last war the British Government in a time of stress and emergency were inveigled by the political Zionists into a plan to rob the people of Palestine of the sovereignty of their country'. His hope was that 'the Labour Party Executive will frame the Party policy in this matter with a complete knowledge of the relevant facts, only a few of which have been set out by me'.<sup>1</sup>

Though Reid was clearly swimming against the strongest of tides his views were not wholly without support. Phillips Price, for example, believed that the Government should affirm that 'we do not threaten (the Arabs)' existence in Palestine and that we stand by the principle of the White Paper'.<sup>2</sup> With this Richard Stokes agreed, and continued his efforts on behalf of the Palestinian Arabs: 'whether we like it or not the persistent tendency in Britain to ignore MacMahon's promises lends colour to the contention that we are more influenced by rich Jews in London and New York than by our pledges to the Arabs'.<sup>3</sup>

There is no sign however that Dalton took any notice of Reid's suggestions, or indeed of any others. On 13 October, following a party, Dalton returned to his office and dictated until 1.20 am his first draft. There was no mention of Palestine, but the bottom of the draft he later

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1 See 'Comment on 235(a)' by T.Reid, Sept. 1943, 'The Palestine Problem' by T.Reid, Sept. 1943 (LP/ImpAC/2/238(d) & (e)).

2 ZR 12 Sept. 1941.

3 Daily Herald 23 Oct. 1943.

noted 'add on...Palestine'.<sup>1</sup>

Dalton returned to his task early the next month, during a weekend spent at his country home, West Leaze. He was clearly pleased with his progress: 'spend a lot of time on my LP draft on Post War Settlement. Each time I spend time with it, I think I improve it a good deal'.<sup>2</sup> The first draft on Palestine was probably written at this time.

Dalton, unlike many of his colleagues, had never been to Palestine. Nor, as he later recounted, was he then in close touch with the Zionists 'though over a long period I used to see Weizmann from time to time and Lewis Namier occasionally, and some of my pupils in the LSE had been and still were, keen Zionists'. He was determined, in tackling the Palestine problem, to start again from scratch. On Dalton, as on many others, the Jewish massacres had a profound effect. 'I had been trying to think out this whole problem afresh, in the light of its urgency and the horror of the Hitlerite atrocities'. His later claims that the policy was his alone - apart from modifications later made by the Sub Committee - and that he did not seek or receive the advice of Zionists seem to be accurate. In May 1944, for example, he noted in his diary: 'Locker to see me. He is, naturally, very pleased with our Palestine paragraph as we put it in, as he says, without pressure from the Jewish Agency'.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Dalton Diaries 13 Sept. 1943, 'Post War Settlement', n.d. (Dalton Papers, 7/10 pp. 36-41).

2 Dalton Diaries, 6 & 7 Nov. 1943.

3 H. Dalton, The Fateful Years: Memoirs 1931 - 1945 (London, 1957) p.425.

4 Dalton Diaries 25 May 1944.



Dalton, as he later wrote, believed that 'we were at a point of sharp discontinuity in world history'. Many old arguments were therefore irrelevant. Most importantly, he felt that the massacres of the Jews had 'destroyed the case for any limitations, by the Mandatory power, on Jewish immigration into Palestine'. The concept of 'economic absorbtive capacity' now had no meaning. Dalton had great faith in the potential of Palestine, and saw his goal clearly:

'given sufficient capital expenditure on developments, given intelligent planning on the spot, and given the diverse and distinguished talents, driving energy and fanatical faith of the Jews, I was sure Palestine could become a most successful, popular and predominantly Jewish State'.

His optimism was as great as ever: 'this', as he later wrote 'would be a unique moment, I judged, when the pulse of history would quicken, and a determined and imaginative leadership could telescope into a few years changes which otherwise would drag along, slowly and painfully, through centuries'. But what of the Arabs in this predominantly Jewish state? 'An Arab minority might wish to remain in Palestine...'.<sup>1</sup>

By November Dalton's first draft was ready for circulation. In a covering note Dalton stressed that it was simply 'a sketch, a rough outline and in simple terms for the preliminary consideration of my colleagues'. Furthermore 'to help provoke discussion and to test how far we really disagree among ourselves I have stated my own

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<sup>1</sup> Dalton, 'Fateful Years' op.cit., pp. 425-7.

views very frankly. The paragraph on Palestine read:

'Here we have halted half way. I see neither hope nor meaning in a 'Jewish National Home' unless we are prepared to let Jews, if they wish, enter this tiny land in such numbers as to become a majority. Here too surely is a case for the transfer of population. Let the Arabs be encouraged to move out, as the Jews move in. Let them be compensated handsomely and let their settlement elsewhere be carefully attended to. The Arabs have not done very well since the war, either for themselves or for us. We should not give in to their policy of Dog in the Holy Manger. They have many wide territories of their own, compared with poor little Palestine. Indeed, I would like to extend the Palestinian boundaries either into Egypt or Transjordan. There is also something to be said for throwing open Libya or Eritrea to Jewish settlement, as satellites or colonies of Palestine. In any case, we must seek to remove Russian dislike of the Palestine experiment and encourage American interest and support for it'.<sup>1</sup>

This remarkable paragraph owed nothing to the views of Advisory Committee members or to direct representations of Zionists, but much to Dalton's interpretation of recent events, and perhaps something to the views of Winston Churchill.

Dalton was a recipient not only of party documents on Palestine but also, as a member of the Cabinet, of Governmental papers. On 28 April Churchill, seeking to reopen consideration of Palestine, circulated a memorandum of his thoughts. A comparison with those of Dalton is interesting. 'Churchill expected full American support for a new policy in Palestine...he advocated an investigation into the possibility of making Eritrea and Tripolitania into Jewish colonies that might be affiliated to the Jewish National

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<sup>1</sup> Dalton Papers 7/10 pp. 42-9.



Home'.<sup>1</sup> As for Arab claims, Churchill considered that, apart from Ibn Saud and Emir Abdullah, the Arabs had been virtually no use to the allies in the present war. The only fighting they had done was against the British. Unlike after the First War, the Arabs could have no claims on the victorious allies. At the very least, it seems that Churchill's views chimed in with Dalton's.

Dalton later reacted strongly against what he saw as the absurd suggestion that German refugees should be given the same help as 'allied' refugees. There is something of this in his belief that 'the Arabs' have not done very well in the war', and its unhappy inclusion as a partial justification for the encouragement of their departure from Palestine. Furthermore, as the Foreign Office commented on Churchill's memorandum 'the question is...not whether we owe the Arabs a debt of gratitude, but whether we have important interests centring in the Arab world. The answer must be emphatically that we have'.<sup>2</sup>

Dalton's call for freer immigration was clear enough, but much else was vague. Partition was seemingly rejected since Palestine, with a Jewish majority, was to be given the chance to extend its boundaries. As a member of the Labour Government Dalton was to criticise Bevin's attempt

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1 Cohen, op.cit., p. 162. The idea of additional territories was given much consideration within the Foreign and Colonial Offices. The two insuperable objections to the idea were, as an official pointed out, 'the disastrous reaction of Arab opinion' and the fact that the great majority of Jews would be unlikely to consider it, W.R.Louis, Imperialism at Bay: The United States and Decolonisation of the British Empire 1941-1945 (Oxford 1977) pp. 58-62.

2 Cohen, op.cit., p. 163.

'to make a synthetic glue of all the Arab states'<sup>1</sup> but in 1943 he apparently regarded the 'Arabs' as an homogenous people whose lands could easily absorb their brothers who happened to live in Palestine. It was not a particularly impressive paragraph.<sup>2</sup>

Dalton introduced his document on 16 November. He was pleased with the reaction. 'It is extremely well received, much better in some quarters than I had expected'.<sup>3</sup> At least one member of the Sub Committee welcomed the Palestine section warmly: '...the most surprising case is little Laski...who is deeply touched by my Palestine paragraph'. Laski was indeed moved. Writing of a later meeting Dalton noted that 'HJL was again most friendly and wrote afterwards a letter, very emotional, thanking me for my paragraph on Palestine'.<sup>4</sup>

Laski's beliefs had certainly undergone a transformation. Although he had raised matters of concern to Zionists on the NEC<sup>5</sup> and had joined the Committee for a Jewish Fighting Force, in November 1941 he could still write that 'I am not, and never have been a Zionist, and I think them mistaken who believe Palestine the solution of the Jewish problem'.<sup>6</sup> For Laski the Jewish massacres led to a profound reorient-

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1 H.Dalton, High Tide and After: Memoirs 1945 - 1960 (London, 1962) p. 160.

2 It was noticeable that Dalton made no comment on the current ideas concerning a Middle East Federation.

3 Int Sub 16 Nov. 1943, Dalton Diaries 16 Nov. 1943.

4 Ibid., 5 Apr. 1944.

5 eg NEC 23 Apr. 1941.

6 Writing in Reynolds's News, quoted in ZR 21 Nov. 1941.



ation. He accepted an invitation from the Poale Zion Executive to attend a meeting, and 'to those present it represented the return of Harold Laski both as a Socialist and as a Jew, to his people'.<sup>1</sup> Though in opposition to Poale Zion orthodoxy he embraced the cause of bi-nationalism, by 1944 he believed that in 'Jewish settlement in Palestine, as a homeland, open to every Jew from everywhere, there is the basis, and there can be no other basis, upon which a permanent freedom for Jewry may in the end be built'.<sup>2</sup>

The one piece of adverse criticism of the entire draft that Dalton recorded concerned Palestine, though he was little concerned by it. This came from Gillies who, as Secretary of the International Department was well aware of the state of the Palestine debate within the party, and also able to appreciate the enormity of Dalton's suggestions. 'Poor little Gillies', wrote Dalton 'is terrified of my Palestine paragraph and thinks this should be referred to a separate committee'. But Gillies was a mild man, and no match for Dalton. 'I say this is all nonsense.' Gillies' suggestion was ignored.

This was a significant incident. Since the program was not, after all, being considered by a special International Relations Sub Committee Gillies' defeat finally ruled out the possibility of any party 'experts', whether from Poale Zion or the Advisory Committee, participating

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1 Yaakov Morris, quoted in G. Eastwood, Harold Laski (London, 1977) p. 97 Morris comments that 'some bitterness (had) existed because he, in the past, had ignored his Jewishness and had been indifferent to the Socialist Zionist group of the Labour Party'.

2 Speaking at a mass meeting of the Jewish National Fund (ZR 10 Mar. 1944).

in the policy making process at an early stage. Dalton's proposals seemed likely to have an easy passage.

Moreover, lest any member of the Sub Committee should be influenced by Reid's anti Zionist submission Middleton again took the initiative and circulated a copy of a letter from James Malcolm to the Manchester Guardian. A barrister of Armenian descent, Malcolm had played a small part in the events leading up to the Balfour Declaration. His letter was concerned to minimise Arab usefulness in the First War, and maximise Arab wickedness in the Second - support, if it were needed, for Hugh Dalton's assessment.<sup>1</sup>

Dalton was satisfied with the progress made. 'It is all going along quite nicely and I have got things pretty comfortably in my own hands.'<sup>2</sup> Discussion continued in the New Year at meetings on 18 January and 8 February... By now Dalton had a new draft to lay before his colleagues.

Section 18 now read:

'Here we have halted, half way, irresolute between conflicting policies. But there is surely neither hope nor meaning in a 'Jewish National Home' unless we are prepared to let Jews, if they wish, enter this tiny land in such numbers as to become a majority. There was a strong case for this before the war. There is an irresistible case now, after the unspeakable atrocities of the cold and calculated German plan to kill all the Jews in Europe. Here too surely in Palestine is a case, on human grounds and to promote a stable settlement, for transfer of population. Let the Arabs be encouraged to move out as the Jews move in. Let them be compensated handsomely for their land and let their settlement elsewhere be carefully organised and generously financed. The Arabs have many wide territories of their own; they must not claim to exclude the Jews from this small area of Palestine, less than the size of Wales. Indeed, we should re-examine also the possibility of extending

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1 'The Future of Palestine' 4 Oct. 1943, NEC minutes, J.Middleton to W.Gillies, 11 Dec. 1943 (LP/Int/5(a)). For Malcolm see Stein, op.cit., p. 374, The Times 8 Apr. 1938 for the 'Malcolm Plan'.

2 Dalton Diaries 16 Nov. 1943.



the present Palestine boundaries, by agreement with Egypt or Transjordan. Nor should we close our minds to another possibility, namely of throwing open Libya or Eritrea to Jewish settlement. But we should seek to win the full sympathy and support of the American and Russian Governments for the execution of the Palestine policy.<sup>1</sup>

The opening two sentences had been only slightly altered but now the Nazi atrocities are explicitly named as justification. The reason for population transfers is now Jewish need rather than Arab wickedness and also, somewhat baldly, on the grounds that this would help 'to promote a stable settlement'. The re-settlement of displaced Arabs is now to be 'carefully organised and generously financed', but now the 'Arabs' are reminded that they have 'wide territories' and are warned that they must not seek to exclude Jews from Palestine. Such changes represented nothing more than minor tinkering.

The two meetings did nothing to shake Dalton's hold on developments: 'it all goes wonderfully well and there is hardly any opposition. I am amazed at the facility with which it has practically all gone through'.<sup>2</sup> In March he framed his final redraft for submission to the NEC and, with Noel Baker dined with Weizmann and Bakstansky. Typically he almost revealed to them his efforts on their behalf: 'I all but tell them that I have drafted a very hot paragraph for the Labour Party on post war Palestine. I hint as much on leaving'.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Dalton Papers 7/10 pp. 53-68.

2 Dalton Diaries 22 Mar. 1944.

3 Ibid., 22 Mar. 1944. Noel Baker had continued to voice his support for Zionism, see eg ZR 5 Feb. 1943.

On 14 March Dalton's draft was finally passed by the Sub Committee. Once again discussion does not seem to have been too rigorous: 'Phil and Harold Clay, the two likeliest critics, came in late when we have finished this item'.<sup>1</sup> When the printers preparing proofs of the document were bombed, thus necessitating a delay of two weeks before the NEC could meet, Dalton commented revealingly that 'this is rather a pity for it is likely to be more closely examined than it might have been today, run through with other items'.<sup>2</sup>

The special meeting of the NEC finally took place on 5 April. To Dalton's disgust there was a good deal of criticism from 'pro Germans' - 'obviously (a) pre-arranged attempt at sabotage'.<sup>3</sup> A lengthy discussion took place, and each paragraph was considered in turn. This may have resulted in the two small changes made in the Palestine section. The sentence suggesting Jewish colonisation on Eritrea and Libya was finally deleted. Secondly, Syria was added as a country to be approached to revise its boundaries. Again Dalton recalled Laski's initial pleasure on reading the paragraph: 'indeed HJL had embarrassed and surprised me at the first meeting by saying how wonderful he thought it all was, and nearly weeping over my Palestine paragraph'. Laski was nevertheless among those who pressed for a redrafting of the document, but Dalton drew the

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1 Int Sub 14 Mar. 1944, Dalton Diaries 14 Mar. 1944.

2 Ibid., 22 Mar. 1944.

3 NEC 5 Apr. 1944, Dalton Diaries 8 Apr. 1944.



consolation that 'one result of this further delay is that it will not now be possible to get this document out much more than a month before the Conference. This I think will suit me all right'.

The document therefore returned to the Sub Committee and finally, on Dalton's insistence, was passed unanimously. 'It has been a long struggle of successive reviews, compromises and consultations, but it is not such a bad document in the end'. The International Post War Settlement was published at the end of April.<sup>1</sup> As amended, the Palestine section now read:

'Here we have halted half way, irresolute between conflicting policies. But there is surely neither hope nor meaning in a 'Jewish National Home' unless we are prepared to let Jews, if they wish, enter this tiny land in such numbers as to become a majority. There was a strong case for this before the war. There is an irresistible case now, after the unspeakable atrocities of the cold and calculated German Nazi plan to kill all the Jews in Europe. Here too in Palestine surely is a case, on human grounds and to promote a stable settlement, for transfer of population. Let the Arabs be encouraged to move out as the Jews move in. Let them be compensated handsomely for their land and let their settlement elsewhere be carefully organised and generously financed. The Arabs have very wide territories of their own; they must not claim to exclude the Jews from this small part of Palestine, less than the size of Wales. Indeed, we should examine also the possibility of extending the boundaries by agreement with Egypt, Syria and Transjordan. Moreover, we should seek to win the full sympathy and support both of the American and Russian Governments for the execution of this Palestine policy.'

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<sup>1</sup> see The Times 24 Apr. 1944.

### (3) Reactions to the Policy

The 1944 Annual Conference was scheduled for May but, doubtless to the great annoyance of Hugh Dalton, rocket attacks on London caused postponement until December. There was therefore a considerable time for comment and criticism of the NEC's proposals.

One of the first to react was Oliver Stanley, the Colonial Secretary. As Dalton later recounted to Morrison, Stanley found the Palestine paragraph particularly disturbing, and visited Dalton on 26 April to tell him so. It seemed to Stanley to be 'Zionism plus plus'.<sup>1</sup> His chief criticism was unsurprising, but very relevant. 'He is afraid that it may do harm in Palestine, both by encouraging the Jews to believe that the next British Government, which they think may well be a Labour Government, will do everything for them, and equally be unsettling to the Arabs'. He very much hoped that it would not be greatly played upon in Labour Party propaganda; Dalton assured him that this was unlikely, and tried to convince Stanley that it was simply a natural expression of Labour Party opinion, both inside and outside Parliament. He at least seems to have enjoyed the meeting. As he told Morrison 'I tried to look innocent and admitted no personal responsibility'.<sup>2</sup>

Stanley's visit anticipated a storm of protests from Arab organisations. Early the next month the party received telegrams from the Palestine Arab Party and the

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<sup>1</sup> Dalton Diaries 26 Apr. 1944.

<sup>2</sup> H. Dalton to H. Morrison, 28 Oct. 1944 (Dalton Papers 8/1 p. 99).



Palestine Arab Workers Society,<sup>1</sup> the first communications from Arab representations since 1939. Their harsh language and quaint phrasing made little impression on Middleton and Gillies, and were not referred to the Sub Committee.

Most Arab protests were directly towards the Colonial and Foreign Offices. They mainly came from Palestinian organisations, though later protests included one from Nahas Pasha, the Egyptian Prime Minister, which was given some publicity.<sup>2</sup> Colonial Office officials echoed Stanley's forebodings but were forced to restrain their irritation: 'I do not however see how we can prevent the discussion from taking place, ill advised though it be'.<sup>3</sup> There were also disturbing reports on the reaction in Palestine. A telegram from the High Commissioners reported that:

'feeling among the Arabs has been sharply stimulated during the past months by various manifestations of Jewish political activity and in particular the reported resolution of the British Labour Party... the Arab population, which had been inclined to regard Zionist propaganda abroad with little more than irritation, are now thoroughly alarmed at what they read as this new manifestation of its effectiveness. They are genuinely shocked at the disregard that the chosen representatives of a large section of the British public could show in contemplating the removal of Arabs from their homes in Palestine in favour of the Jews'.<sup>4</sup>

Robin Hankey at the Foreign Office could at least draw a shred of comfort from the uproar: 'it is in a way a relief to see that the Eastern Department and the War

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1 Telegrams 3 Apr. 1944, 11 Apr. 1944 (LP/Int/5(d)).

2 Communications in CO 733/463 75872 and FO 371/40136 E3117, E3554, E 3780, The Times 11 Aug. 1944.

3 Minute, 12 May 1944 in CO 733/463 75872/120.

4 Telegram 695 of 29 May 1944 (ibid.).

Office are not left to be the only voices crying in the Labour wilderness and that there is an Arab case over Palestine, and that we may run into big trouble if we completely disregard it'.<sup>1</sup>

The Times had voiced some disapproval of the Palestine proposals but Tribune and the New Statesman although full of criticism for the general program, were silent on this issue.<sup>2</sup> The Zionist Review, on the other hand welcomed 'a bold and courageous plan for the solution of the Palestine problem'.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless in stressing that 'transfer (of population) is not a pre-requisite of large scale Jewish immigration though no doubt it is true that it might simplify Arab-Jewish relations' the paper did give an indication of the considerable concern the proposal had caused amongst Labour Zionists, and one correspondent commented on the newspaper's obvious reticence on the subject.<sup>4</sup> This drew further comment from the editor, Dr. Levenberg, who stressed the voluntary nature of the proposals and noted that Ben Gurion had expressed himself 'deeply grateful to the Labour Party's vigorous stand'.

The Advisory Committee was naturally far from happy at the proposals. Barred from participation in the policy making process, and faced with a virtual fait accompli, a special meeting was hurriedly arranged in the House of

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1 Minute, 12 May 1944 in FO 371/40136 E3117.

2 The Times (24 Apr. 1944) felt the proposal for population transfers was 'altogether too light hearted'. Tribune 28 Apr. 1944, New Statesman and Nation 29 Apr. & 6 May 1944.

3 ZR 28 Apr. 1944, see also New Judea Apr. 1944.

4 Letter Hans Cappel, ibid., 5 May 1944. Other correspondents had fewer doubts, see eg N. Goldenberg, ibid., 12 May 1944.



Commons for 10 May.<sup>1</sup> Bentwich opened the meeting, which resolved to draw the attention of the NEC to the unfortunate implications' of the policy. The suggestion causing most concern was that of population transfers, which Leonard Woolf, in a pamphlet published later that year, described as an example 'of the folly of believing that spectacular settlements are desirable and feasible'.<sup>2</sup>

On 16 May the NEC agreed to refer the matter back to the Sub Committee.<sup>3</sup> But once again the Zionists' contacts inside the party had not let them down, and by 15 May Locker had written to Gillies arguing that 'it would be wrong to take out the transfer clause now that it has appeared; its removal might be interpreted as an admission that the Labour Party's proposals involved an injustice to the Arabs'.<sup>4</sup> He explained that in the opinion of the Jewish Agency such transfers might take place but were not a prerequisite for large scale Jewish immigration. He shrewdly quoted the views of Bentwich, who had recently written that under certain circumstances 'transfer of population might

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1 Imperial Advisory Committee Minutes, 10 May 1944. Among those present were Ben Riley, Bentwich, Reid and Rita Hinden.

2 Woolf, with some perspicacity, saw the Palestine problem as a test case for the United Nations, see L.S.Woolf, The International Post War Settlement (Fabian Publications, Sept. 1944) p. 19.

The Committee also asked Bentwich to prepare a memorandum on social and economic developments. This was finally published in October, when its usefulness in the conflict with the Sub Committee was long passed. See 'Economic Approach to Palestine' by N.Bentwich (LP/ImpAC/2/276(a)).

3 NEC 16 May 1944.

4 B.Locker to W.Gillies, 15 May 1940 (Dalton Papers 7/10 p. 83).

be a means of solving the conflict'.

Thus, wrote Locker, the operative words were 'should be encouraged'. The solution was not an amending of the paragraph, but that a spokesman should, in the name of the NEC clarify the statement to conference. He was also able to point to the public support given by Greenwood who, although suggesting that 'the Arabs themselves may find a strengthening of their sparse population in, say, Iraq by an influx of their kinsfolk from Palestine advantageous to their own areas', had stressed that this was a matter for full agreement. New Judea hoped that any 'misapprehension' had thereby been dispersed and that there would be no further attempt to make 'anti Zionist capital out of the imaginary desire on the part of the Zionists, or of the Labour Party, to carry out a policy of enforced emigration of Arabs from Palestine'.<sup>1</sup>

Locker's letter evoked a useful response from Gillies, who circulated notes to Dalton and Dallas which clearly indicated the unease of Labour Zionists:

'I understand that the recommendation (of the Advisory Committee)...was strongly influenced by the criticism of Prof.N.Bentwich...be that as it may, I think that the paragraph cannot be redrafted at this stage. This is also the opinion of Berl Locker, who as far as we are concerned, expressed the views of the TU and Socialist movement in Palestine. Locker thinks the phrase 'let the Arabs be encouraged to move out as the Jews move in' is unfortunate. He calls for an emphatic, clear statement that no measures of compulsion will be used under any circumstances. AG has, he says, already given this explanation at one of their meetings'.<sup>2</sup>

Locker continued his campaign by visiting Dalton, by

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<sup>1</sup> Speech at May Day meeting of Poale Zion, see Jewish Labour June and New Judea June-July 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum in LP/Int/5(d).



now well known as the author of the document. Again he insisted that encouragement did not mean compulsion. 'He argues against our giving way - which we have no intention of doing. I ask him to send me further points.'<sup>1</sup>

It was therefore not surprising that when the Sub Committee met on 20 June it decided to let the paragraph stand. As Dalton noted in his diary 'we decide to ignore the suggestions from various quarters that we should go back on our proposal for voluntary emigration of Arabs from Palestine'.<sup>2</sup> For Dalton and his colleagues 'the terms of the paragraph as drafted makes it clear...that no compulsion was contemplated'. But no mention appears to have been made of the need for a clarifying statement to Conference.

Once the offending sentence had been accepted by the Sub Committee and published the Advisory Committee, or anyone else, stood little chance of altering it. Once the paragraph appeared the Zionists had no choice but to attempt to block any threat of alteration. Weizmann nevertheless later noted that 'my Labour Zionist friends were like myself greatly concerned about this proposal. We had never contemplated the removal of the Arabs, and the British Labourites, in their pro Zionist enthusiasm, went far beyond our intentions'.<sup>3</sup> In Palestine 'the quasi Government was embarrassed by the suggestion that the Arabs be encouraged to move out of the country',<sup>4</sup> though most Palestine Jews nevertheless welcomed the statement most

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1 Dalton Diaries 25 May 1944, B.Locker to H.Dalton, 7 June 1944.

2 Int Sub 20 June 1944, Dalton Diaries 20 June 1944.

3 C.Weizmann, op.cit., p. 535.

4 Hurewitz, op.cit., p. 216.

warmly, with the exception of the bi-nationalists.<sup>1</sup> But although the call for freer immigration, and the spirit behind the declaration was applauded, most Zionists would certainly have preferred a less idiosyncratic declaration on the lines of the Biltmore Declaration.<sup>2</sup>

In July came further criticism of the policy from within the Labour Party with the publication of a pamphlet of the Parliamentary Peace Aims Group.<sup>3</sup> The analysis of the Palestine problem was a clear indication that its author was the Group's Secretary, Richard Stokes:

'It is difficult to understand why Palestine has found a prominent place in Party policy. The policy outlined is a contradiction of the principles enumerated for the benefit of the occupant of the Colonial Empire. Zionism is a controversial matter even among Jews. Is the Labour Party as a whole to be committed to being pro Zionist and anti Arab? The suggestion that the Arabs should be cleared out of Palestine is a dangerous one, and will be resisted by the teeming millions of India and the Middle East'.

The one undoubted result of Stokes' comments was the resignation of a leading member of the Group, Sidney Silverman. The passage, he believed, was 'so thoroughly irresponsible in its approach as to discredit the seriousness of any other matter with which (the pamphlet) deals'.

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1 eg Tribune 5 May 1944 for a critical letter from a member of Hashomer Hatzair. Other correspondents disagreed; one saw the resolution as 'not only the first but the sole act of real practical help offered to the Jewish and to the Zionist cause since 1933' (ibid., 19 May 1944).

2 The program, adopted at a Zionist Conference at the Biltmore Hotel, New York, in May 1942 demanded free immigration, authority to the Jewish Agency to develop the country, and the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish Commonwealth.

3 Parliamentary Peace Aims Group, Labour and the Post War Settlement (London, July 1944). For the Group see Burridge, op.cit., pp. 30-1, 41, 55, 120, 168.



He claimed that the group had received no notice of the passage and suspected that it 'was initiated by a single member to cover his own personal view with the Group's authority'.<sup>1</sup>

With the annual conference drawing near Locker (with Shertok) again visited Dalton, who advised them to back up his declaration by urging a variety of organisations to submit resolutions.<sup>2</sup> Four affiliated bodies did so and one, from the City of Leeds Labour Party, was chosen as suitable for NEC support, provided that the phrase 'Free Jewish Commonwealth' was replaced by the conventional 'National Home for the Jewish People'.<sup>3</sup> Though the NEC still hesitated to give official support for a Jewish State, it had nevertheless approved a resolution which spoke 'free choice' of the 'existing population' - 'of remaining and sharing in the benefits which Jewish colonisation brings in its wake, or be assisted to participate in the development of the vast reserves of underdeveloped land in the neighbouring Arab countries'.

Following the postponement of the annual conference the policy had once more to be approved for presentation. At the meeting of the Sub Committee on 14 November Dalton found that 'no one else has done anything and my draft

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1 ZR 13 Oct. 1944. It is certainly unlikely that the pro Zionist Chairman Rhys Davies would have given his approval to the passage.

In the latter half of 1944 came the resurrection of the Jewish Dominion of Palestine League, led by Lord Strabolgi. Allegations in the Zionist Review that the League had links with the Revisionists led to an acrimonious correspondence in the paper, though Ian Mikardo, a member of Poale Zion, came to the League's defence, see The Times 7 Nov. 1944, ZR 1, 8, 15, Dec. 1944, 5 & 19 Jan. 1945, 2 Feb. 1945.

2 Dalton Diaries 14 Nov. 1944. See ZR 1 Dec. 1944 for a conference organised by Glasgow Labour Party and Poale Zion welcoming the proposals.

3 Policy and International Sub Committees, 14 Nov. 1944.

holds the field. Moreover, as we go through it, my colleagues swallow it whole'. Of his two likeliest critics. Clay did not attend and Noel Baker ('as usual') arrived late. Noel Baker did nevertheless suggest that in relation to Palestine there should be some reference to the Mandate. This might at least have given the paragraph greater balance, but Dalton successfully resisted the suggestion.<sup>1</sup> The document was passed by the NEC on 22 November.

Conference began in London on 11 December. The International Post War Settlement was adopted by an overwhelming majority but there was, to the chagrin of the Zionists, no consideration of the Leeds resolution, and no official statement emphasising that population transfers would be entirely voluntary.<sup>2</sup>

Arthur Creech Jones later noted that, though he had supported the principles of the Biltmore program, he had opposed that of the Labour Party 'because it was too extravagant, unjust and impracticable'.<sup>3</sup> In a draft of a book on Palestine - left incomplete at his death - he was concerned to explain the nature of Labour Conference decisions concerning Palestine 'whose significance cannot be overrated'. In his view:

'delegates too often cast their votes in ignorance of many of the facts concerning the matter on which

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Resolutions, all of which called for a Jewish Commonwealth, came from Poale Zion, City of Leeds LP, Central Leeds DLP and Liverpool LP. A covering note from the City of Leeds had in fact referred to the 'uselessness of the IPWS'.

1 Dalton Diaries 14 Nov. 1944.

2 LPACR 1944, p. 139, see 'Ruth' in ZR 22 Dec. 1944.

3 Creech Jones to E.Monroe, n.d. (CJ 32/6/34).



they are making policy. Conference is not constituted for careful study, deliberation and consideration. Delegates are often subject to pressure groups and propaganda, often they are not 'delegates' in the proper sense of the word. In the case of Palestine, Zionist activity among constituency parties, affiliated organisations and delegates did not contribute to calm reflection. The Arab case was never understood or discussed or publicised'.<sup>1</sup>

But this was the view of the former Labour Colonial Secretary responsible for Palestine. During the war Creech Jones, a member of the British Association for a Jewish National Home,<sup>2</sup> was active, both in Britain and America, in support of Zionist aspirations. There is little indication that he made an effort to ensure that the Palestinian Arab case was fairly stated. A speech in 1941 to the Anglo Palestine Club indicates that, whatever his knowledge of the subject, his feelings and prejudices were precisely those which underlay Dalton's declaration:

'the Arabs had a vast territory over which they could roam and it occurred to him that they had not made particularly good use of the areas in which they had roamed. After all, with such a vast territory, it seemed to him no small advantage to the Arabs that a portion of that territory should be given to an energetic people in order that they might bring about the economic changes on which the general well being of the Arab people would depend. He was a firm believer in the Zionist cause and was convinced by what he had seen and by talks he had had with Jews and Arab alike that a national home founded by the Jews was not only a blessing to the Jewish people themselves but a colossal blessing to the Arab people and a contribution to the stability and peace of the world'.<sup>3</sup>

The following year two international labour organisations passed pro Zionist declarations, moderately worded.

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1 CJ 32/2/50.

2 In 1945 he added his name to a strongly pro Zionist pamphlet published by the Association, see British Association for a Jewish National Home in Palestine, Palestine 1917/1944 (London, 1945).

3 Speech by Creech Jones at the Anglo Palestine Club, ZR 30 May 1941.

The Conference of European Socialists despite the participation of the Bund urged 'the civilised world (to)... guarantee to the Jewish people the full opportunity for the achievement of their national home'.<sup>1</sup> At the World Trade Union Conference the view of Asfour, representing the Arab Workers Society, found little support, and the skill of Locker helped ensure the passing of a similar resolution.<sup>2</sup>

Harold Laski was now in the forefront of Zionist activity within the Labour Party. Concerned that the party should reaffirm its policy on immigration into Palestine, in April he persuaded the NEC to publish a declaration urging the Government 'to reverse present unjustified barriers on immigration and to announce, without delay, proposals for the future of Palestine in which it has the full sympathy and support of the American and Russian Government'.<sup>3</sup> Addressing a May Day rally organised by Manchester Poale Zion Laski admitted that 'he was now firmly and utterly convinced of the need for the rebirth of the Jewish nation in Palestine'. He felt, he said 'like a prodigal son returning home'.<sup>4</sup> Greenwood was also forthright in his opinions, and, unusually for a senior Labour

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1 The Times 3 May 1945, New Judea Feb-Mar. 1945. For the analysis of the Bund see London Delegation of the Central Committee of the Jewish Workers' Union Bund in Poland, Some Jewish Problems, (London, 1945).

2 'Report of the World Trade Union Conference, 1945' p. 238 Preuss, op.cit., p. 143. The resolution did speak of 'respecting the legitimate interests of other national groups and giving equality of rights and opportunities to all its inhabitants'.

3 Int Sub 18 Apr. 1945, NEC 25 Apr. 1945. Laski was doubtless prompted by the changes in the climate of opinion since the assassination of Lord Moyne.

4 ZR 11 May 1945.



politician, wrote of the building by the Jewish people of a 'Commonwealth' in Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

On 21 May Conference assembled for the last time during the war. From the Histadrut came thanks for the party's efforts throughout the war. On 22 May Rosette spoke briefly on the Jewish tragedy.<sup>2</sup> Dalton wound up the debate on 'Let us Face the Future'. 'I begin by picking up small points...but make an impromptu peroration 10 minutes long. The Conference rises at this and I have to rise and bow and make the V sign'. His speech included a short defence and reiteration of his views on Palestine. It was, he said 'morally wrong and politically indefensible to impose obstacles to the entry into Palestine now of Jews who desire to go there...If we are to get an agreement (there should be) consultation with those two Governments (of the USA and USSR) to see whether we cannot get that common support for a policy which will give us a happy, free and prosperous Jewish State in Palestine'.<sup>3</sup> It could not have been put more clearly.

Labour and Liberal<sup>4</sup> pronouncements on Palestine prompted Hammersley, the Conservative Chairman of the

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1 May Day message to the Palestine Labour Movement, ZR 4 May 1945.

2 LPACR 1945, p. 100.

3 Ibid., p. 104. Dalton Diaries 22 May 1945.

4 A Liberal resolution had called for the reversal of the White Paper policy and the carrying out of the Mandate obligation. Moved by Geoffrey le Mander and opposed by Dingle Foot, the resolution was overwhelmingly carried, Hurewitz, op.cit., p. 214, ZR 23 Feb. 1945.

Parliamentary Palestine Committee, to write to the Colonial Office asking for suggestions on something definite to say on the subject. After some discussion a draft was prepared: 'the new Government will clearly have to review the whole problem in the light of the conditions which will exist in the new phase into which we are entering'. In striking contrast to the stance adopted by the Labour Party was the opinion voiced in a minute of 9 June: 'I cannot help thinking that for many Parliamentary candidates complete ignorance, provided they do not commit themselves, is the best safeguard. They can always express the utmost zeal in studying the question when they are returned'.<sup>1</sup>

#### E. Policy Making: As Participants in Government

The process of policy making resulting in the adoption of The International Post War Settlement was the public side of the Labour Party's involvement in planning for the future of Palestine. But the Labour Party was also a party of Government, and for five years its leaders, in their role as Cabinet Ministers, had been involved with the Palestine problem from a wholly different perspective. In discussions of the post war Labour Government's handling of the Palestine problem the crucial influence of Labour Minister's wartime experience is often forgotten, and indeed several striking divergences from declared party policy began to emerge well before the arrival of Ernest Bevin at the Foreign Office.

As has already been noted, with the entry of the Labour



Party into the Coalition Government Labour ministers were quick to assure their Zionist friends that the balance of opinion within the Government had tilted significantly in their favour. When the Foreign Office proposed a statement pledging the continuation of the White Paper policy after the war Attlee affirmed in Cabinet his opposition to the White Paper, and that he was 'not yet satisfied that it would be desirable to reaffirm that policy at present'.<sup>1</sup> The following year Churchill noted that the Labour Party would 'never agree to the pro-Arab solutions which are the commonplace of British Service circles'.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, as Cohen has written 'the White Paper remained the basis of British rule in Palestine during the first three years of the war - if only because Britain could not be certain that it would still be in their hands at the end of the war'.<sup>3</sup> Consideration of a fresh policy effectively began with Churchill's minutes of 18 April 1943 and a surprisingly large number of ministers hastened to submit memoranda.

A typically terse submission came from Clement Attlee,<sup>4</sup> who felt strongly that 'we cannot afford to leave our position where it is'. In Cabinet he argued that 'it (is) important to begin consideration of a long term policy without delay, in order to be in a position to implement it immediately after the war'.<sup>5</sup> and urged that a Cabinet

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1 CAB 65/7, 15 Oct. 1940.

2 Wasserstein, op.cit., p. 32.

3 Cohen, op.cit., p. 160.

4 WP(43)266 of 23 June 1943 in CAB 66(38).

5 CAB 65/39, 2 July 1943 cited in Cohen, op.cit., p. 165.

Committee be set up to consider the Palestine problem and the 'international Jewish and Arab problems'.

Attlee nevertheless had nothing of Dalton's breezy optimism about future developments in Palestine. He gloomily - and accurately - predicted that 'there is every possibility of our being faced with violent action by either or both Jews and Arabs. We should have then the thankless task of keeping order and will be blamed by both sides'. Significantly the Deputy Prime Minister now believed that the Zionist movement in Palestine had fallen under the control of 'reckless fanatics'. He contended that after the war millions of Jews would 'desire and be obliged' to live in gentile lands, and commented disparagingly that 'none but a visionary imagines that Palestine can absorb all the Jews, even if they are willing to go'.

Attlee's attitude was clearly not that of the vocal majority of his party. The views of Stafford Cripps were no more representative of party opinion. He also dwelt on the 'unbalanced and emotional attitude of American (and to some extent British) Zionists towards Palestine'. He called for a United Nations Conference on Jews in the post war world and though he urged that Palestine be treated as part of the wider Jewish problem felt that the longer the conference lasted the less interest Jewry would have in 'irreconcilable Zionism' and the greater would be the attractions of post Nazi Europe. Indeed he felt there was a chance that 'the economic and social prospects in Europe will compare so favourably with the prospects in an overcrowded Palestine that there might well be a net outward



balance of immigration from that country'. His views constituted a profound misreading of the attitude of the Zionist movement and the mood of world Jewry.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, although in his memorandum he advocated a bi-national state in a larger federal grouping, the following year a pro Zionist visitor noted that Cripps, whilst dismissing the idea of mass Jewish immigration, now advocated some form of partition 'which would give the Jews a focal point, and at least a spiritual home'.<sup>2</sup>

The Cabinet agreed to set up a Cabinet Committee. Churchill was left to choose its personnel which, when announced, caused considerable gloom in the Foreign Office, for all except the Colonial Secretary had voted against the White Paper in 1939. As Chairman The Prime Minister selected Herbert Morrison, who had led the attack of the Labour Party in Parliament.<sup>3</sup> Of equal significance was the fact that the Committee was directed to take as its starting point the proposals of the Peel Commission for a scheme of partition.

The Committee met for the first time on 4 August.<sup>4</sup> It was at once clear that partition, strongly advocated by Amery, would find considerable support. Morrison seemed less enthusiastic: 'the Chairman...said that Palestine was

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1 WP(43)265 of 1 July 1943 in CAB 66(38).

2 Meinertzhagen, op.cit., p. 192 entry for 25 May 1944. A relation of Cripps, he erroneously believed him to be a member of Cabinet Committee.

3 On 17 July the Zionist Review paid tribute to the late J. Jagger, MP 'a true friend of Zionism' who had been Morrison's Parliamentary Private Secretary.

4 CAB 95/14, 14 Aug. 1943.

already a small country and to partition it as it stood would create two States even smaller'. He suggested 'readjustments' over a larger area, including Transjordan - a view being expounded within the Labour Party by Hugh Dalton.

But from this point Morrison seems to have confined his role to that of a neutral Chairman. Though as Chairman and representative of Labour he took his full share of responsibility for the decisions of the Committee, he did not seek to impose his views as party spokesman and friend of Zionism. From this point onwards the views of the Committee and of the Labour Party began to diverge.

With the divergence came a certain confusion. On 25 October Attlee and Churchill met Weizmann.<sup>1</sup> When the Prime Minister asserted that Attlee and his party were committed to partition the Labour leader nodded in approval. Attlee certainly could not speak for his party. There was a commitment to overturn the White Paper. But there was no commitment on partition, and the feeling within the party still remained overwhelmingly hostile to the idea.

In the month that followed the Cabinet Committee met on four further occasions. Thus, whilst the Labour Party Sub Committee considered and accepted a plan for territorial expansion and a possible transfer of population, a Cabinet Committee with a Labour Chairman overruled the objections of the Foreign Office and passed a scheme of partition.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cohen, op.cit., pp. 166-7.

<sup>2</sup> CAB 95/14, 10 Dec. 1943.



Churchill approved the plan, despite the opposition of the Chiefs of Staff, but there was a general agreement that no announcement would be made until the end of the European War.

There was now a growing realisation that the future of Palestine was again coming under official consideration, and interested MPs began to stir themselves accordingly. The Parliamentary Palestine Committee was re-established and among the new officers were Barnett Janner and Creech Jones.<sup>1</sup> Weizmann told MPs that partition was unacceptable, as it would not be final and could only lead to further difficulties.<sup>2</sup> In March the Colonial Secretary received a delegation from the Parliamentary Arab Committee, and later in the year from a group of MPs representing Zionist views. Only the latter included Labour MPs.<sup>3</sup>

In March Weizmann dined with Dalton and Noel Baker, and Dalton hinted of his draft on Palestine.<sup>4</sup> Churchill had told Weizmann that 'we agree so completely that there is nothing to discuss. I am on your side. The Labour Party is on your side. What more do you want?' What the Zionist did want was confirmation of the rumours that the Cabinet had discussed the question of Palestine. Dalton advised him

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1 The Times 13 Nov. 1943, ZR 19 Nov. 1943. Creech Jones became Vice Chairman and Janner Secretary. The changes were necessitated by the deaths of Wedgwood and Cazalet. See 'Dugdale Diaries' 27 Oct. 1945 for a dinner which attracted 30 MPs and Peers.

2 Notes of meeting, 8 Feb. 1944 in CO 733/463 75872/90.

3 Meetings 23 Mar. & 19 Oct. 1943 in CO 733/463 75872/129 & 190. See ZR 16 May 1945 for the formation of a 'Middle East Committee' under the Chairmanship of Sir Edward Spears.

4 Dalton Diaries 8 Mar. 1944, see above p. 259.

not to take these rumours too seriously. 'Much of this was only a desultory five or ten minutes exchange of banalities, resulting in nothing even faintly approaching a 'decision'.' The reverse was the case. On 25 January the Cabinet had given its general approval to the scheme of partition as the best that could be devised, and resolved not to be moved by the inevitable opposition the scheme would arouse.<sup>1</sup>

In August the Cabinet decided to reopen consideration of Palestine. On 19 September the Committee reassembled and considered a Memorandum from Eden entitled 'The Case Against Partition'. A week later Eden attended the Committee to put the case in person, but to no avail.<sup>2</sup> Morrison summed up: partition was the lesser of two evils, and the Committee would not depart from the principles of its first report. That afternoon his colleague Dalton was visited by Locker and Shertok, who were worried that the Government might be contemplating some new form of partition. 'I say I don't think this at all likely'.<sup>3</sup>

A month later Weizmann visited Dalton and made further enquiries about the rumours of partition. Dalton had finally ceased denying their veracity, but he reassured the Zionist that the Labour Party would certainly oppose partition. This at least was true. Many important Labour figures had publicly stated their party's opposition, in

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1 CAB 65/45, 25 Jan. 1944.

2 CAB 95/14, 19 & 26 Sept. 1944.

3 Dalton Diaries 26 Sept. 1944.



particular Arthur Greenwood.<sup>1</sup>

Dalton advised Weizmann to visit Herbert Morrison, and himself wrote to his colleague urging him to arrange a meeting.<sup>2</sup> He recounted how he had been 'pushing (the Zionists') barrow for them through the NEC and into a paragraph, with which they were delighted...'.

Dalton repeated his belief that there was a real chance of 'doing the right thing by the Jews' and of beginning a real economic revival in the Middle East. 'But, if so, it is essential there should be no backsliding in the meantime.' Dalton explained that Weizmann was now entirely opposed to partition, but feared that some friends of the Jews might now be considering the idea. In Dalton's opinion 'it would be in direct conflict with the Labour Party's recent declaration. I wanted to expand and not contract the boundaries of the Jewish National Home'.

This was probably a rather unsubtle attempt - with the reference to 'friends of Jews over here, who in the past have opposed it (who) might now be leaning towards it' - to shift Morrison from his position as a spokesman for partition within the Cabinet. Although Morrison's Secretary reported that an appointment had been fixed with Weizmann, there is no record of the meeting.<sup>3</sup> But by now

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1 In Jewish Labour he had recently written 'we certainly will not favour the diminution of the area of Jewish development in Palestine by partitioning the country', ZR 16 June, 1944.

2 H.Dalton to H.Morrison, 28 Oct. 1944 (Dalton Papers 8/1 p. 99).

3 Letter dated 2 Nov. 1944 in ibid., p. 101.

the two Labour Ministers could have no doubts that the policies of Government and Party were in complete contradiction. By the autumn, despite Dalton's obfuscations, the Zionists must have realised this. There was in fact no certainty that a General Election would follow the defeat of Germany. Attlee and Dalton, for example, were prepared to consider prolonging the coalition after VE Day.<sup>1</sup> The Labour Party might therefore have found itself committed as participants in the Government to a scheme of partition whilst equally committed as a party, to opposing it.

Zionists helped ensure that this would not happen. On 6 November the Minister Resident in the Middle East, Lord Moyne, was assassinated by Jewish terrorists. On Churchill's orders Cabinet discussion of the Committee report was postponed. But the problem of the White Paper remained, and the immigration quota steadily neared completion. Stanley urged Morrison to reconvene the Committee, but the tide was now running against partition. The new Minister Resident produced a fresh plan, a modification of the existing position, but before the Cabinet could consider the matter further the war in Europe ended, and shortly afterwards a General Election was called.

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<sup>1</sup> Burridge, op.cit., p. 114.



## CHAPTER VI

The Reckoning 1945 - 1949A. Labour Triumph and Zionist Disappointment

Following the election of 1945 it was noted that the foreign policy proposals of the two major parties were 'remarkably similar'.<sup>1</sup> But - though Liberal and Commonwealth Parties cautiously supported Zionist aims - on the question of Palestine there was an obvious difference of opinion between the main protagonists.

Soundings by Jewish organisations did reveal that not all on the left were in agreement. Ellen Wilkinson, for the Labour Party, naturally answered that the party was strongly in favour of the National Home. But James McNair of the ILP gave a very circumscribed message of support, whilst the spokesmen of the Communist Party referred inquirers to a publication which included a violent attack on the Zionist movement.<sup>2</sup>

The election was fought overwhelmingly on matters of domestic policy. Blanche Dugdale noted that Eleanor Rathbone was the only candidate to mention the plight of refugees in her election address.<sup>3</sup> Sir Edward Spears was nevertheless moved to assure his electors that '30 million Arabs will be watching with keen interest and even anxiety the result of the election in Carlisle', an idea suitably

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<sup>1</sup> R.B. McCallum & A. Readman, The British General Election of 1945 (London, 1947) p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> ZR 6 July 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., McCallum & Readman, op.cit., p. 228.

ridiculed in the Zionist Review.<sup>1</sup>

Several letters in the paper echoed the advice of a correspondent who urged Jews to vote 'in favour of the candidate whose party most unequivocally advocates the abrogation of the White Paper and the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine'.<sup>2</sup> An editorial on 29 June, whilst admitting that 'there are friends of Zionism in all parties' made a similar plea.

Poale Zion naturally threw itself into the campaign with gusto, Nathan Jackson, the party secretary, leading the fight as Labour candidate for Glasgow Cathcart. An election fund was apparently well supported. At the Annual Conference in June all members were urged to campaign for the Labour Party - 'but such work should not be done anonymously; each candidate must be made to understand the Jewish question and the place of Poale Zion in the movement as a whole'.<sup>3</sup> One absentee from the campaign was Abba Eban. He had been urged by Laski to stand as Labour candidate in Farnborough, but preferred fully to devote his energy to the Zionist cause.<sup>4</sup>

Poale Zion's manifesto quoted not the relevant section of the Labour Party's program, about which Poale Zion had certain reservations,<sup>5</sup> but Dalton's speech to the 1945

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1 ZR 20 July 1945. The paper replied with a burst of doggerel: 'Millions of Arabs will be dejected, if Brigadier Spears isn't elected. So come on Carlisle - face the problem. Dare we upset a single Moslem?'

2 Ibid., 15 June 1945.

3 Ibid.

4 Eban, op.cit., p. 56.

5 Before the Anglo American Committee of Enquiry Jackson took some care to distance himself from the proposals (PRO 30/78 9).



Conference in which he declared for a Jewish State. But the Labour Party did not shy away from its own pronouncements. The Handbook for Speakers included an abridged version of the declaration and retained reference to population transfers. During the campaign Poale Zion members worked hard for Labour candidates, who were in turn quick to speak at meetings arranged by Zionists.<sup>1</sup> Poale Zion also published a book on Labour Zionism, which included a wide selection of pro Zionist declarations and speeches emanating from the Labour Party.<sup>2</sup>

The election results were announced on 26 July, and by 11.00 it was becoming clear that the Labour Party had won an overwhelming victory. In 1929 six Labour MPs had been Jews, and in 1935 five. Now, of the 393 Labour MPs, no fewer than 26 were Jews. There remained not one Jewish MP in either the Conservative or Liberal Parties, merely the anti Zionist Independent Daniel Lipson and the Communist Phil Piratin.<sup>3</sup>

This was largely a sign of the political times. The new PLP experienced a large influx from the middle class professions, and in this area Jews were relatively numerous. The Jewish contingent within the PLP included

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1 For example, a meeting organised by East London Poale Zion, with speeches from Dreen, Rosette, W.J. Edwards (Whitechapel) and Frankel (Mile End), ZR 29 June 1945.

2 Levenberg (ed), op.cit. Middleton provided the introduction. Several leaflets, in English and Yiddish, were also produced.

3 The full list was H. Austin, L. Comyns, J. Diamond, M. Edelman, B. Janner, G. Jeger, S. Jeger, H. Lever, B. Levy, J. Lewis, J. Mack, M. Lipton, I. Mikardo, H. Morris, M. Orbach, S. Segal, E. Shinwell, L. Silkin, J. Silverman, S. Silverman, L. Solley, G. Strauss, B. Stross, M. Turner-Samuels, D. Weizmann, L. Wilkes.

four doctors, three journalists and eleven lawyers. Many were young first generation British Jews, whose political views had been shaped by the events of the 1930s. Six represented Lancashire constituencies, and a further nine won seats in or near London. Several held seats in the East End, but more recent areas of Jewish concentration, such as Willesden and Stoke Newington now returned Jewish MPs. At Willesden David Weizmann had defeated the Conservative pro Zionist, S.S.Hammersley.<sup>1</sup>

It is nonetheless unlikely that any Jewish MP owed his election either to his Jewishness or his Zionism. The majority of Jewish electors had doubtless given their support to the Labour Party, but as a factor influencing the party's victory its Zionist pledges were of negligible importance. Indeed, in one of the few areas in which Jews still formed a significant minority - Mile End - the Zionist Dan Frankel had been defeated by Piratin, the Communist candidate.

The PLP now included two leading Zionists in Sidney Silverman, Chairman of the British Section of the World Jewish Congress, and Barnett Janner. Poale Zion in particular could take much satisfaction in the membership of the new Parliament. Although Nathan Jackson had been defeated five party members had been successful - Harold Lever, J.D.Mack, Ian Mikardo, Maurice Orbach and Sidney Silverman. Of these Mikardo was the brother in law of Maurice Rosette, Silverman the founder of Liverpool Poale Zion and Lever the brother of the Chairman of the Manchester

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<sup>1</sup> Wedgwood's seat at Newcastle under Lyme had passed, on his death in 1943, to a committed Zionist, J.D.Mack.



branch.<sup>1</sup> Orbach and Mikardo were subsequently to join the Executive of the WJC British Section. But it is perhaps surprising to note that even in 1945 not more than half of the Jewish MPs could be accounted Zionists.

More important was the evident sympathy of the great majority of Labour MPs for the Zionist cause. An election questionnaire circulated by Poale Zion and the Zionist Federation had drawn a large number of statements of support from Labour candidates. The Zionist Review printed the names of 72 Labour MPs who had expressed support for their party's Palestine policy and claimed that 'among the large number of replies received from Labour candidates there were only a few whose statements are vague and unsatisfactory'. A sign of the times was the presence on the list of Lester Hutchinson, who before the war had on two occasions attacked Zionism at party conferences. The composition of the new House of Commons could give the Zionists nothing but confidence.<sup>2</sup>

Although Silverman believed his Jewish activities had been a factor in his failure to achieve office<sup>3</sup> the composition of the new Government gave the Zionists grounds for cautious optimism. As expected three leading Zionist supporters, Greenwood, Morrison and Dalton took important posts though all were to deal with domestic matters. For

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1 ZR 27 July 1945. Herbert Butler, MP for Hackney South, was not Jewish but 'could converse readily in Yiddish...an asset in (his) constituency', Bellamy and Saville (eds), op.cit., Vol. IV, (London, 1977) pp. 49-50.

2 ZR 3 July 1945. Several anti Zionist Conservatives had been defeated; most remaining Conservatives 'expressed their preparedness to follow the lead of Mr. Churchill'.

3 E. Hughes, Sidney Silverman: Rebel in Parliament (London, 1969) p. 90. Three Jews - Shinwell, Silkin and Strauss - joined the Government.

some the choice of George Hall as Colonial Secretary was less propitious; Blanche Dugdale referred to him in disgust as 'that old fool'.<sup>1</sup> Certainly he had not been found particularly sympathetic during the war. In a report of an interview with Professor Coupland, it was noted that Hall had 'made some hostile remarks about the Jews and said that they were 'grasping''.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand Creech Jones, a proven friend of Zionism, who became Hall's Under Secretary, apparently informed Locker that he had 'stipulated that he should be consulted on all Palestine matters'.<sup>3</sup>

To many people the choice of Ernest Bevin as Foreign Secretary came as a surprise. Dalton had confidently expected the post, and Bevin apparently hoped for the Treasury. Zionists optimistically recalled certain favourable comments Bevin had made and his intervention on their behalf in November 1930, even though he had acted with an eye to the fortunes of the Labour Party and his own Union. Of more significance were the efforts of Bevin on behalf of Zionists during the war. Weizmann later wrote that 'my personal contacts with Mr. Bevin had been unfortunate; that is where Jewish matters had been concerned' but in 1940 Bevin had been 'the only man who understands (our) problems and is willing to take action'.<sup>4</sup> Bevin had apparently known little of the Palestine problem - he had

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1 'Dugdale Diaries' 3 Aug. 1945.

2 Interview, Prof. Coupland and Namier, 30 Aug. 1942 (L.Stein Papers Box 123).

3 'Dugdale Diaries' 3 Aug. 1945.

4 Weizmann, op.cit., p. 540. JA Executive Minutes, 30 Dec. 1940.



never seen the White Paper of 1939 - but was more than willing to offer novel suggestions: that all land in Palestine should be nationalised, or that an Indian Moslem be made High Commissioner 'as a pleasing compliment for the Arabs'.<sup>1</sup> In March 1944 Bevin discussed the Palestine problem with Dr. Goldstein, President of the Zionist Organisation of America. The record of the interview gives an important insight into his opinions before he became personally embroiled in the problem.<sup>2</sup>

For Bevin Zionism was a good thing 'because it gave the Jews status'. He vowed that 'if he should be in office when the time came he would see that justice should be done to the Jewish people'. He added, after a pause, 'and the Arabs'.

Further comments were less encouraging. Bevin regretted that the problem of the Balfour Declaration had not been settled during the last war. It was not, he felt, the time to make 'declarations which cause trouble' - which was exactly what his party was then about to do. Though he would like to 'settle the question' he was 'damned' if he would allow British blood to be shed for either Jew or Arab. This was to remain uppermost in Bevin's thoughts. To Weizmann he was to insist that 'I cannot bear English Tommies being killed. They are innocent...I do not want any Jews killed either, but I love the British soldiers. They belong to my class. They are

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1 Interview, Coupland and Namier, op.cit.

2 Notes of meeting, 16 Mar. 1944, ibid.

working people...'.<sup>1</sup>

Bevin also resented that the Jews were only concerned with their own problems, for he himself was an internationalist. Moreover he felt worried about the question of the dual loyalty of Jews, to a Jewish Palestine and to their native land. Gluckstein attempted to reassure Bevin, and to explain the Zionist case more fully, but Bevin's views were clearly strongly held. That such opinions were voiced eighteen months before he became Foreign Secretary suggests that his reaction then was not simply that of a pugnacious politician suddenly confronted with a new problem and overwhelmed with professional advice.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to examine in detail the nature and formation of British policy towards Palestine during the next four years. This has been done by a number of authors, and the recent opening of Cabinet papers has allowed a more detailed and accurate description to be made.<sup>2</sup> The intention is to consider the reaction of groups within the Labour Party, and of groups associated with it, to the Palestine policies of the Labour Government. This will entail some consideration of Government policy, and an attempt will be made to indicate the reaction of individuals within the Government to the course to which they were committed. Critically important were the developments of the early months when, as Zionists saw it, the Government took its first steps towards turmoil and

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<sup>1</sup> Bethell, op.cit., pp. 215-6.

<sup>2</sup> More recent works include Bethell, Gilbert and Cohen op.cit., see also M.J.Cohen, 'Why Britain Left: The End of the Mandate', in The Weiner Library Bulletin, Vol. XXXI, 1978 pp. 74-86.



betrayal.

On 22 August Attlee reconstituted the Palestine Committee of the Cabinet. Some writers have suggested that the situation was now one of inexperienced Labour Ministers confronting a novel problem with no knowledge or previous guidance other than the stream of party declarations.<sup>1</sup> Thereupon, it is argued, they were bombarded with detailed memoranda from departments and embassies stressing that Britain's entire position in the Middle East rested on the maintenance of the White Paper policy, advice which decisively shaped the Government's course of action.

This picture is overdrawn. In many ways the emphasis should be on continuity rather than novelty. Though Dalton's role in forming party policy might suggest otherwise, senior Labour Ministers had already considerable involvement with the Palestine problem. George Hall and Herbert Morrison had been particularly concerned during the war and several other leaders, through their work in Cabinet and War Cabinet, were now aware of many of the issues involved. Though M.J.Cohen may be correct to question 'whether the Labour ministers in Churchill's Coalition felt the full responsibility for the decisions of the Cabinet in which they sat',<sup>2</sup> it is less in doubt that wartime experience was the basis from which Labour Ministers approached their task.

The new Committee first met on 6 September and Morrison began by summarising the work done by the Committee during

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<sup>1</sup> Especially J.Kimche, Seven Fallen Pillars (London, 1950) pp. 156-7.

<sup>2</sup> Cohen, op.cit., p. 183.

the war.<sup>1</sup> Hall then concentrated on the problem of Jewish immigration. A decision would soon be needed as only 3,000 of the 75,000 immigration certificates allowed under the White Paper still remained, and these would be exhausted by November. Hall blandly proposed that the White Paper quota be adhered to whilst a long term policy was being formulated, although the Arabs would be approached to allow further immigration.

The Labour Party had opposed the White Paper for six years, and had promised to remove it at the first opportunity, yet the committee had remarkably few qualms in endorsing Hall's proposal - Bevin merely questioned the terminology used. Dalton's contribution was significant. In expressing great sympathy for the Jews, and regret that settlement should be held up by the 'intransigence of a backward local population' he was voicing beliefs which had inspired the party declaration. He also suggested, somewhat disingenuously, that in his view pressure of opinion and party statements 'that had from time to time been made' should not be overlooked. But his retreat was immediate. 'He quite recognised', he said - apparently for the first time - 'the need for taking into account Arab feeling and the importance of avoiding civil outbreaks in Palestine'.

The recommendations of the Committee were reported to the Cabinet on 11 September.<sup>2</sup> Morrison stressed the need

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1 CAB 95/14, 6 Sept. 1945.

2 CP(45)156, 11 Sept. 1945 in CAB 129. At the second meeting of the Committee Morrison commented that he did not believe the problem of European Jewry to be 'fundamentally less troublesome than it was before the German persecution', CAB 95/14, 10 Sept. 1945.



for the tightest security: 'we were unlikely to escape criticism whatever policy we adopted'. The Cabinet thereupon adopted the Committee's suggestions with only a few minor alterations. The approved memorandum bluntly recommended that party policy should for the present be waived: 'we consider that the balance of advantage lies in the temporary maintenance of the White Paper policy'.

By the time the Cabinet next came to discuss Palestine, early in October<sup>1</sup> agitation for a relaxation of the White Paper policy had risen sharply, not least in America where President Truman had made a much publicised request for the immediate entry of 100,000 refugees into Palestine. With Parliament shortly to reassemble some announcement would soon be needed. Truman's request evidently provoked disagreement within the Cabinet, some members feeling that it would lead to an 'explosion' in Palestine, others that immediate relief for Jewish refugees was needed. Now, at last, some members strongly urged that any statement of policy should at least be dissociated from the White Paper.

It was at this point that Bevin asked leave to introduce some 'revised proposals', based on the immediate establishment of an Anglo American Commission to examine both the steps which could be taken to alleviate the plight of Jewish refugees and 'how much immigration into Palestine could reasonably be allowed in the immediate future'. Bevin presented detailed recommendations the following week and on 13 November, following American agreement to participate, the Cabinet approved a statement which Bevin presented to the House of Commons that

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<sup>1</sup> CAB 128, 4 Oct. 1945.

afternoon.

The appointment of the Commission gave Britain both a much needed breathing space and the opportunity of involving the United States in the Palestine problem. Cabinet records for this period indicate how great was Bevin's desire for America to behave 'responsibly', and to become an active partner rather than a critical bystander. This was not a new wish of Bevin's. In 1944 he had enquired of Dr. Goldstein 'whether the United States would like to take over the Mandate; the British have had enough of such things'. He hoped that the United States would 'go with Britain' to solve the problems of peace, but feared she might 'do the same as in 1918'. At the first meeting of the Palestine Committee Bevin argued that it should be the long term policy of the Government to associate the United States with policy in Palestine. In later years Creech Jones claimed that the idea of involving America 'was probably never absent from Labour thoughts'.<sup>1</sup> Certainly the party declaration had stressed the need for the sympathy and support of the United States.

The period before Bevin's announcement was a time of considerable apprehension for Zionists and their supporters in the Labour Party. Ben Gurion had been quick to warn against undue optimism<sup>2</sup> and there had been some concern that Bevin's statement on Foreign Affairs on 24 August had contained no reference to Palestine. As early as 24 August the Histadrut was complaining to the Labour Party that a decision limiting immigration within the framework of the

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<sup>1</sup> Creech Jones to E. Monroe, n.d. (CJ 32/6/31).

<sup>2</sup> Speech reported in ZR 10 Aug. 1945.



White Paper appeared to be imminent.<sup>1</sup>

In the Zionist Review a visiting American union leader opined that 'the partition of Palestine is in the making' and as rumours of an impending announcement grew the paper urged Ministers to remember their own pledges, and warned them not to underestimate the strength of the Yishuv. A selection of party resolutions and declarations were published, and the editor asked if it was 'conceivable that this unhappy people should receive a mortal blow from the Labour Government'.<sup>2</sup>

In an effort to persuade the Government to revoke the White Paper Zionists contacted individual ministers known to be sympathetic<sup>3</sup> and a fresh campaign was mounted within the Labour Party. Poale Zion urged members to protest to Minister, the Government and Transport House; it also brought its case before the NEC, now chaired by Harold Laski. In a move which reflected that growing unease within the party at the lack of Government action the NEC decided to appoint a delegation to interview the Zionists and a meeting took place on 5 October with Locker, Shertok and Jackson.<sup>4</sup> The Zionists naturally recalled party pledges and stressed, as a first step, the need for the immediate admission of 100,000 refugees. When Ayrton Gould asked what the consequences would be if the White Paper

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<sup>1</sup> Telegram 28 Aug. 1945 in LP/Int/5(b).

<sup>2</sup> ZR 14, 21 7 28 Sept. 1945. Three weeks later the editorial was entitled 'A New Munich?'.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see notes of the delegation to Noel Baker in FO 371/45419 E9009, 28 Sept. 1945.

<sup>4</sup> Poale Zion appeal in LP/Int/5(b), Jewish Labour News 27 Sept. 1945 for resolution of Poale Zion Executive, NEC 26 Sept. 1945.

policy were maintained she was answered by Laski: 'the position is that there are no circumstances in which the Jewish people will accept the White Paper. In the event of the continuation, all means will be taken to avoid its consequences'.

The NEC delegation were clearly sympathetic, but somewhat embarrassed. Clay argued that 'resolutions are not always drafted in precisely the same way as policy that has got to be worked out. It is the broad principles and spirit that must be kept in mind'. One measure of the NEC's concern was their decision to seek an interview with Government Ministers. According to Kingsley Martin Laski now believed that the Government had decided to repudiate party promises. To Frankfurter he described his meeting with Ministers as part of an attempt to organise 'an internal opposition to fight the Attlee-Bevin betrayal'. He spoke of 'having it out' with the Cabinet, to find Cripps a supporter of Bevin, Morrison 'uneasily neutral' and only Dalton and Bevan 'really helpful'.<sup>1</sup> In fact what evidence there is suggests something less than the major confrontation Laski so gleefully described.

On 22 October the delegation met Attlee, Bevin and Hall for a two hour discussion.<sup>2</sup> Ayrton Gould and Alice Bacon gave their view 'as Labour members who had given pledges to their constituents in the light of declarations of policy made by Party Conferences and by members of the Executive'.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, op.cit., p. 214, 'Dugdale Diaries' 20 Oct. 1945: 'Dalton is chief among our friends'.

<sup>2</sup> Notes (taken by Laski) in NEC minutes.



Laski outlined the NEC's wishes: to carry out party policy of abandoning the White Paper, to relieve Jewish suffering in Europe, and to promote the economic development of Palestine and the Middle East in general.

All three Ministers replied at length, but did not reveal details of the Government's proposals. Laski warned that he would, if necessary, call a special meeting of the NEC to consider their plan but assured them, somewhat disingenuously, that this 'implied no criticism of the Government but was merely a fulfillment of our obvious duty to consider the relation of the proposals to our policy'. This, according to Laski, the Prime Minister accepted. Attlee for his part pledged that the proposals would be built upon the party policy of abrogation of the White Paper and the fulfillment of the Mandate.

The Prime Minister's promise was aimed at more than just the NEC. In a clear attempt to still the rising tide of criticism and speculation Attlee offered a verbatim note of the conversation, and a press statement. Yet this was turned down by Laski, who gave the diplomatic explanation that 'this was a 'family' discussion and it would be unfortunate if we were to give the impression that the Government was under examination by the Party at a stage when no proposals were before it for discussion'.

In fact had details of Attlee's statement been released they would doubtless have been received by Zionists with scepticism rather than relief. One month before Greenwood had unofficially informed Locker of the recommendations of the Palestine Committee<sup>1</sup> and there was still a

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<sup>1</sup> 'Dugdale Diaries' 20 Sept. 1945.

profound conviction that betrayal was imminent.

Throughout October messages and resolutions flooded into the Government protesting against any continuation of the White Paper. Zionist organisations in Britain and Palestine protested both to the TUC and the Labour Party. The Histadrut implored the party to refrain from 'implementing anti semitic policy pregnant with the gravest consequences', and warned of determined resistance. Jewish organisations throughout Britain made their protests known and, urged by Poale Zion, a number of local Labour Parties condemned any 'breach of faith'.<sup>1</sup>

When Parliament reassembled Weizmann addressed a large gathering of Labour MPs, chaired by David Grenfell, and the Manchester Guardian noted that the meeting had drained the Chamber of all but a dozen Labour back benchers.<sup>2</sup> The Times reported that the meeting was likely to encourage further representations to the Government. A number of MPs hoped to raise the question at a meeting of the PLP before any Government announcement. Tribune argued that such consultation was essential, since 'the deepest concern exists within the PLP about the rumours of changed policy which have reached it'. It saw the issue as epitomising the need to keep the Government on course.<sup>3</sup> In the House of Commons Labour MPs condemned the Government's procrastination.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Communications in LP/Int/5(b), including those from Brixton, South Hackney and South Islington DLPs, ZR 5 Oct. 1945.

2 Manchester Guardian 12 Oct. 1945, The Times 10 Oct. 1945 estimated 130 MPs were present, ZR 12 Oct. 1945 guessed at 150. See also Hurewitz, op.cit., p. 232, Brodetsky, op.cit., p. 259.

3 Tribune 12 Oct. 1945.

4 eg Silverman and McGovern in HC Deb. Vol. c. 785-9, 2 Nov. 1945.



Labour MPs were much in evidence at public meetings organised by Zionists and their sympathisers. Members sought both to urge the Government immediately to abrogate the White Paper, and to assure the Zionists that this would be done. Ian Mikardo, for example, told his audience that 'the Government is ruled by the authority of the rank and file, and would fulfil its pledges'. Early in November a large public demonstration marked the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration where speakers included Barnet Janner, Berl Locker, David Grenfell and Barbara Ayrton Gould.<sup>1</sup>

It is likely that opinion within the Labour Party was an influential factor propelling Bevin towards his 'revised proposals'. For many Cabinet Ministers, as the meeting of 4 October revealed, the prospect of any continuation of the White Paper was highly embarrassing, and after the stark recommendations of the Palestine Committee Bevin's suggestion did provide a welcome alternative and a reasonable answer to parliamentary and party criticism. The change also enabled Attlee to mollify the NEC and claim that party pledges would be honoured.

When Bevin announced his plan in Parliament the thrust of his thinking was quickly apparent. He asserted that 'we cannot accept the view that the Jews should be driven out of Europe, and should not be permitted to live again in these countries without discrimination and contribute their ability and their talent towards rebuilding the prosperity of Europe'. He was convinced that 'Palestine, while it may make a contribution, does not by itself provide sufficient

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<sup>1</sup> ZR 12 Oct., 9 Nov. 1945.

opportunity for grappling with the whole problem'.<sup>1</sup>

Some care had been taken to ensure that the plan received a friendly reception from the Opposition. Bevin's private secretary had explained the Government's plan to Eden four days earlier, but in the event the plan miscarried and the Conservative spokesman, Oliver Stanley, 'instead of giving the statement general support, as AE asked him to do, reserved his position and asked for a debate'.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless Bevin was apparently 'elated by the reception of a very full house', and this may have encouraged him to reply to Janner's intervention with the words 'I will stake my political future on solving the problem'. But those who later used this claim to ridicule the Foreign Secretary tended to ignore his qualification: 'but not in the limited sphere presented to me now'. His attempt to involve the United States was clearly an attempt to break free from this 'limited sphere'.

It has been claimed that much of the goodwill Bevin generated in the Commons was dissipated during his press conferences that evening. To the American press he was 'truculent and defensive',<sup>3</sup> whilst two comments to British correspondents aroused anger among Zionists: he felt that certain schemes for developing Palestine seemed to combine '80% propaganda with 20% of fact' and he used the language of war time Britain to urge the Jews not to try to get 'to the head of the queue'. Yet according to Jon Kimche, then

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1 HC Deb. Vol. 415 c. 1927, 13 Nov. 1945.

2 P. Dixon, Double Diploma: The Life of Sir Pierson Dixon (London, 1968) pp. 197-8.

3 Ibid., p. 198.



joint editor of Tribune, 'eighty experienced and therefore cynical newspapermen listened to him, nearly all of them deeply moved, and convinced that here was a man who meant business and would bring a new refreshing touch to the handling of the Palestine problem'.<sup>1</sup>

Though according to one report Jewish Agency members felt that 'it might have been worse'<sup>2</sup> for most Zionists Bevin's statement came as a great disappointment. The Zionist Review argued that 'if the complete reversal by the Government of the official Labour policy in regard to Jewish immigration and settlement in Palestine is not a breach of faith, what is?'.<sup>3</sup> The Zionist Federation published an Open Letter to Mr. Bevin from Berl Locker enumerating Labour pledges and Zionist grievances and ridiculing Bevin's reported claim that the declaration of 1944 was simply the result of 'enthusiasm'.<sup>4</sup>

Although many within the Labour Party felt that much more could have been done for the refugees<sup>5</sup> following Bevin's statement friends of Zionism within the party tended to rally round the leadership and to defend the proposals. In Parliament Silverman's reaction was to congratulate Bevin on his statement and 'for the spirit in

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1 The Times 14 Nov. 1945. Again his words were taken out of context. Kimche, op.cit., p. 158.

2 'Dugdale Diaries' 12 Nov. 1945.

3 ZR 16 Nov. 1945.

4 B.Locker, An Open Letter to Mr. Bevin (London, 1945).

5 See Tribune 23 Nov. 1945 and ZR 21 Dec. 1945 for a resolution of Manchester City Labour Party proposed by the secretary of the local Poale Zion.

which it was made', and to welcome the co-operation of the United States.<sup>1</sup> At meetings and demonstrations demands were still made for the entry of Jewish refugees, but now Labour spokesmen professed the belief that a breakthrough had been achieved.

Notable among these was the Chairman of the party, Harold Laski. In an article for the American press he insisted that Jewish condemnation of Bevin's statement was misguided. The wiser path was to await the Commission's report.<sup>2</sup> Middleton counselled caution and a careful reading of Bevin's statement. To a large rally in Stoke Newington he claimed that 'the great bulk of the Labour Party adhered to the party's declared policy, and he firmly believed that the gates of Palestine would be opened'. 'The Labour Government' he said 'could not do away with a situation which had developed in Palestine by 25 years mal-administration'.<sup>3</sup> Taking a somewhat different line Mikardo conceded that the statement had been a bitter blow, but claimed that there were real hopes for a reversion of Government policy'.<sup>4</sup>

In correspondence to Palestinian friends Rita Hinden, the Secretary of the Fabian Colonial Bureau, sought in the same way to give reassurance. She described the 'endless goodwill' on the part of many Labour Ministers: 'but they seem to have found themselves in an infinitely more ticklish position than they anticipated'. Labour leaders,

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1 HC Deb. Vol. 415 c. 1934, 13 Nov. 1945.

2 ZR 7 Dec. 1945.

3 Ibid., 14 Dec. 1945.

4 Ibid., 21 Dec. 1945.



she claimed, had found it 'literally impossible' to adopt a Zionist policy at once, but swore 'until they are blue in the face' that the only way they could move towards the goal was the roundabout way chosen'.<sup>1</sup> To Judah L. Magnes she wrote that 'at the same time I am not at all dissatisfied with this statement as a general approach, and most of the progressive and thinking socialists here feel that it is absolutely right that the problem should be recognised as a world problem and the Americans brought in'.<sup>2</sup> Early the following year she assured Magnes that 'all my friends in the Labour movement here...assure me that it would present just the opportunity we want - not to get a Jewish State, but to secure a Jewish National Home and continued immigration'.<sup>3</sup>

The party organisation swung dutifully behind the Government. To an impassioned telegram from the Histadrut the new Secretary, Morgan Phillips, replied that his party understood and sympathised with the Zionists' disappointment but believed that the new approach was the best way to find a solution which would be fair to both parties.<sup>4</sup> Poale Zion received a similar rebuff when Locker requested a further meeting with the NEC to discuss Bevin's statement. At a meeting of the International Sub Committee, at which more than half of the members were Cabinet Ministers, the Secretary was instructed to inform Locker that the

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1 R.Hinden to B.Torcker, 13 Nov., 12 Dec. 1945 (FCB 176/6/36&7).

2 R.Hinden to J.Magnes, 30 Nov. 1945 (FCB 176/6/74).

3 R.Hinden to J.Magnes, 10 Jan. 1946 (FCB 176/6/79).

4 M.Phillips to Histadrut 30 Nov. 1945 (LP/Int/5(b)). Similar replies were sent to other Jewish organisations. See also GC 28 Nov. 1945.

Committee was 'generally in agreement' with Bevin's statement, and that no useful purpose could be served by further discussion before the Commission began work.<sup>1</sup>

Ben Gurion was clearly correct in considering the Government's proposals to be 'a very clever document, from the point of view of keeping the Labour Party quiet'.<sup>2</sup> The announcement was sufficient to silence, for a time, the criticism of Zionist supporters within the Parliamentary Party, and to answer the many party members who hoped for a reasonable settlement for the Jewish survivors in Europe. Many shared Bevin's annoyance with the intervention of President Truman: 'as unhelpful as all such lofty moral gestures made by people who refrain from accepting responsibility'.<sup>3</sup> Amidst the excitement of the first months of a majority Labour Government and the beginnings of the important domestic program, it was enough that something constructive was seen to be done, and that members could argue that party pledges were being honoured.

Inside the Cabinet, as within the party at large, there was a willingness to let Bevin have his head, and to tackle the problem in his own way whilst others got on with their own important tasks. As Dalton later admitted 'I would like to be able to assert that when President Truman made his original request I supported it, and urged it on my colleagues in the Cabinet. But I confess I did not do this nor, if I remember rightly, did any of my colleagues.

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1 Int Sub 20 Nov. 1945. Dalton, Morrison, Bevan and Shinwell were present.

2 'Dugdale Diaries' 13 Nov. 1945.

3 Tribune 28 Sept. 1945.



We were all greatly preoccupied with a multitude of other problems. And we wished to give Bevin's method, of the negotiators approach, a fair chance'. Dalton, whom the Zionists looked to as a leading friend in the Cabinet, positively welcomed Bevin's new proposal: 'I was myself attracted by the proposal of an Anglo American Committee of Enquiry'.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, as well as the presence of a large minority of keen Zionist supporters within the PLP, and the overwhelming sympathy that existed for Zionist aspirations, there existed a small minority who could be identified as anti Zionists. Chief among this group was Richard Stokes, who continued his efforts in Parliament and in the press to counter what he saw as the malignant influence of Zionism within the party.<sup>2</sup> In the Debate on the Address he had clashed with Barnett Janner and warned of the danger of civil war in the Near East if any attempt were made to modify the White Paper.<sup>3</sup>

Stokes was joined in Parliament by Thomas Reid, elected MP for Swindon. On 17 October the Secretary General of the Arab League met Labour MPs in the House of Commons<sup>4</sup> and an attempt had been made the previous month to mobilise anti Zionist feeling within the PLP. Over the names of five MPs an appeal was made to all Labour members who were

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1 H. Dalton, 'High Tide', op.cit., p. 186.

2 eg '100,000 Homeless Jews for Palestine? No says Richard Stokes MP', Daily Herald 18 Oct. 1945.

3 HC Deb. Vol. 412 c. 299-300, 20 Aug. 1945.

4 The Times 18 Oct. 1945.

invited to form a Palestine Committee 'to go much deeper into the subject'.<sup>1</sup> George Mansur, once more active in London, appears to have had a hand in circulating the appeal, and the memorandum which accompanied it.<sup>2</sup>

Once again Stokes argued that Palestine had been promised to the Arabs during the First World War and, more saliently, that large scale Jewish immigration must prejudice the Arab position. The White Paper, he believed, should remain. 'No responsible official known to any of the signatories of the document in any of these (Arab League) countries now considers any serious deviation from the White Paper practical politics'. Stokes also attacked various 'misconceptions': that anti Zionism could be equated with anti semitism, and that the Balfour Declaration had implied anything more than a cultural home. He claimed that by 1944 35,000 Jews in Palestine had applied to the authorities to be allowed to return to Europe after the war. Above all the solution to the Jewish problem was not to be found in Palestine.

The Zionist Review poured scorn on the appeal,<sup>3</sup> and certainly the time was not as yet propitious for a campaign of this sort, though it did not escape the notice of the Government that not all Labour MPs lent a friendly ear to Zionist demands. But after 13 November all sides had perforce to await the findings of the Anglo American Commission.

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1 The signatories were Harry McGhee, Phillips Price, Thomas Reid, Richard Stokes and Ernest Thurtle (Stokes Papers, Box 51).

2 See Mansur's secretary to M. Phillips, 29 Sept. 1945 (LP/Int/5(d)). The Zionist Review (11 May 1945) reported the reopening of the Arab Bureau in May 1945.

3 ZR 5 Oct. 1945.



B. 'Our Worst Headache'

Among the Labour MPs considered for membership of the Anglo American Commission were Patrick Gordon Walker and Thomas Reid. Bevin proposed that a Trades Council representative be appointed, but one of his first choices was Richard Crossman. From Hector McNeal Crossman gathered that a major consideration was that he had no known commitment to Zionism. It was made clear that this was to be his chance to impress the leadership and stake his claim to junior office.<sup>1</sup>

When the Commission arrived in London an early witness was Nathan Jackson of Poale Zion. He argued that Jewish needs demanded a Jewish State 'whether you call it that or not'. He was pressed by Crossman on the question of Jewish 'double nationality', but could parry queries about future of the Arab population by quoting Cripp's remark that 'there are wide dominions in which the Arabs can live in safety and happiness; not so the Jews'. This was however the voice of Sir Stafford in 1938.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps surprisingly a hearing was granted to Thomas Reid. Though he stressed that he spoke as an individual at least one committee member believed that he represented his party. Reid believed Jews should be offered refuge in countries other than Palestine, which should become an independent state in the near future. He dismissed his party's pledges as 'highly overplayed' and hurried through party conferences: 'I think the average member who attended these conferences had about as much knowledge of

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1 FO 371/45354 E8801, Crossman, op.cit., pp. 11-12.

2 See above p.199 PRO 30/78 9.

the Palestine problem as I have of the moon. These resolutions were put forward and accepted because nobody objected, as far as I can remember'.<sup>1</sup>

In private conversation Laski naturally offered a different interpretation. The decisions, he insisted, were the result of careful study and represented 'the mature opinion of Labour Party members. He regarded them as absolutely binding.'<sup>2</sup> He himself submitted a memorandum rejecting both partition and a Jewish State. Bi nationalism under continued Mandatory or Trustee supervision was the only solution. He was thus in disagreement with the Government, the Commission - which rejected his ideas - and the majority of the Zionist movement.<sup>3</sup>

Sidney Silverman, as Chairman of the WJC British Section also addressed the Commission, as did a witness from the reformed Jewish Dominion of Palestine League, whose Chairman was the Labour peer Lord Strabolgi. For the Communist Party Phil Piratin and Jack Gaster called for independence for Palestine and equal rights for its inhabitants.<sup>4</sup>

On 28 January Bevin entertained members of Commission at the Dorchester Hotel. Several members of the Commission were to claim that Bevin, in an impromptu speech, vowed to

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1 PRO 30/78 10.

2 B.C.Crum, Behind the Silken Curtain (New York, 1947) pp. 54-5.

3 Martin, op.cit., p. 215, Eastwood, op.cit., p. 97. He did gain some support from Brailsford, in his introduction to the Fabian Colonial Bureau's publication The Palestine Controversy: A Symposium (London, 1945). James Parker gave the Jewish case, but since Reid declined to put the Arab view this, rather strangely, was left to Sir Edward Spears.

4 PRO 30/78 7,12,13. For the resolution of the Communist Party the previous year see Arab News Bulletin 20 Dec. 1945.



do all he could to implement a unanimous report.<sup>1</sup> But according to Creech Jones

'a doubt lingered however in the minds of some of us present at the lunch whether EB had slipped into some polite pleasantries. Would he really accept a report which would further inflame the passions already aroused in the Middle East? Would he be party to opening the gates of Palestine to solve the problem of European refugees?'.<sup>2</sup>

Bevin had joked with the Commission that they were removing responsibility for Palestine from his shoulders for 120 days and most Labour MPs were equally willing to devote their energies to other matters.<sup>3</sup> Some did continue their efforts through the medium of Parliamentary Questions and whilst this often took the form of a tit for tat between Labour pro and anti Zionists members of various points of view could unite to demand the chance of a full debate. But when Eleanor Rathbone sought to organise 'members believed to be sympathetic to the Jewish side of the Palestine problem' and conduct a systematic campaign of questions she evoked little response.<sup>4</sup>

When the House reassembled after Christmas Silverman complained that the postponement of a debate amounted to a breach of faith<sup>5</sup> but there was considerable annoyance that the subject was finally tacked on to the end of a long debate on Foreign Affairs and 'most members showed their

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1 The Times 28 Jan. 1946, Crossman, op.cit., p. 66, Crum op.cit., p. 61, J.G.MacDonald, My Mission to Israel 1948-1951 (London, 1951) p. 21.

2 Notes in CJ 33/2/59/

3 In December Silverman had elicited from Bevin a public statement explaining his reference to 'Jewish Home' in his speech of 13 November, The Times 17 Dec. 1945.

4 M.D.Stocks, Eleanor Rathbone (London, 1949) p. 328.

5 HC Deb. Vol. 418 c.308-9, 24 Jan. 1946.

sense of the uselessness of the discussion by staying away'.<sup>1</sup>

Silverman, who opened the debate, was concerned that the Government should give a sympathetic reception to any interim recommendations the Commission might make. Both he and Ayrton Gould concentrated on the need for swift relief for Jewish refugees. Three Labour back benchers made maiden speeches. From Reid came a long historical exposition designed to show that the setting up of a Jewish state would be contrary to the Mandate. Harry Morris and Squadron Leader Segal on the other hand reflected the bitter disappointment of British Zionists at Bevin's statement.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from this inconclusive debate the Palestine problem claimed little attention until May 1946. Poale Zion continued to organise protests and demonstrations but at a large meeting of the PLP on 28 March at which the Government's critics raised many questions of foreign policy the subject of Palestine was ignored.<sup>3</sup>

The Commission's report reached the Government at the end of April.<sup>4</sup> It rejected the idea that Palestine alone could solve the refugee problem or that the country should become either an Arab or a Jewish State. Of the ten recommendations one urged the entry of 100,000 refugees into Palestine. This was not, as most British delegates - and

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1 New Judea Mar-Apr. 1946.

2 HC Deb. Vol. 419 c.1366-1429, 21 Feb. 1946.

3 The Times 28 Mar. 1946, ZR 5 Apr. 1946.

4 Cmd. 6808, Report of the Anglo American Committee of Enquiry Regarding the Problem of European Jewry and Palestine (London, 1946).



the British Government - had wished, made conditional on Jewish disarmament, though there was an appeal to the Jewish Agency to co-operate in the suppression of terrorism. The report - a clear compromise - was signed by all members. A committee of senior officials immediately began to examine the report and within two days had reported that 'the adoption of the policy...would have disastrous effects on our position in the Middle East and might have unfortunate repercussions in India'.<sup>1</sup>

But Bevin's attitude was evidently not that of a man guided entirely by his officials. In Cabinet he declared his belief that the threat of violence in the Middle East had been exaggerated and that 'if the situation were skillfully handled in consultation with the US Government it might be possible to bring about a reasonable settlement on the basis of the Committee's recommendations'.<sup>2</sup>

On 1 May Attlee announced to the Commons that the Government intended to co-operate with the United States in finding a solution. But relations between the two Governments were becoming strained. The previous day news had reached the Government of a fresh demand by President Truman for the immediate entry of 100,000 refugees. Attlee, by way of reply, now linked such a step with the surrender of arms by the Jewish community and the assistance of the Jewish Agency in combating terrorism,<sup>3</sup> a condition which, despite considerable pressure from the British Government,

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1 CAB 128 27 Apr. 1946.

2 Ibid.

3 HC Deb. Vol. 422 c.195-9, 1 May 1946.

had been rejected by the Committee.

On 8 May Truman urged that talks with Jews and Arabs on the basis of the report should begin immediately. Two days later the Cabinet agreed that such consultations might lead to an 'uproar' in the Middle East and must therefore be proceeded by a consideration by British and American officials of the financial and military implications of allowing 100,000 Jews to enter Palestine. A week later Bevin reported optimistically that the United States 'now seemed to be willing to remove this question from the realm of propaganda and to study its practical implications on a businesslike footing'.<sup>1</sup>

The following month, as official talks continued, the Government continued to hope that the practical co-operation of the United States could be secured. On 11 July a joint committee of experts began work in London, the British team being led by Herbert Morrison, and after a fortnight reached agreement on a scheme of provincial autonomy which would divide a Federal Palestine into Zionist, Arab and Central Government districts - a scheme which had in fact been rejected by the Cabinet Committee in 1944. The plan allowed for the immediate transfer of 100,000 refugees.

But events in Palestine were now increasingly overshadowing the talks. On the night of 16 June the Haganah<sup>2</sup> damaged or destroyed eight bridges on the frontiers of Palestine. Four days later the Cabinet gave its approval to an attempt 'to break up the illegal organisations', and on

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<sup>1</sup> CAB 128 16 May 1946.

<sup>2</sup> The unofficial Jewish defence force, largely controlled by Labour Zionists.



29 June a massive military and police operation resulted in the temporary detention of over 2,500 people, including many leaders of official Jewish organisations. Though the complicity of certain Jewish leaders in terrorist activity was by now clearly established as an attempt to curtail terrorist outrages 'Operation Agatha' was a failure, brought home in terrible fashion by the destruction of part of the King David Hotel on 22 July with the loss of 91 lives. The two day debate in the Commons at the end of July, when Morrison outlined the recommendations of the 'Experts' Report was overshadowed by the news of the outrage, and the Government was now bitterly aware that Zionist pressure had brought about the rejection of the report by President Truman. As Dalton noted in his diary 'our worst headache in these last days has been Palestine'.<sup>1</sup>

During this period, as the prospect of a negotiated settlement retreated and violence in Palestine escalated certain changes became apparent in attitudes within the Labour Party. On the one hand came the first signs of serious disquiet within the Parliamentary Party which reflected the bitter disappointment of British Zionists and soon took the form of an acrimonious conflict between Zionist supporters and the Government. At the same time there developed a more general feeling of irritation and disgust within the party at the demands of the Zionists, the increasing terrorist outrages, and the role of the American Government. Though the gulf between the two

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1 'Dalton Diaries' 1 Aug. 1946.

groups gradually widened there were those - including a number of Ministers - who shared both concern at the course of Government policy and anger at the pressures to which it was subjected. Finally, Zionists within the party found themselves both in growing opposition to the Government's policies and subject to considerable criticism from their fellow Zionists.

There had been considerable criticism within the party at the Government's reception of the Committee's report. Tribune condemned Attlee's statement as 'equivocal and obscure' and doubted whether British strategy in the Middle East would be threatened by the admission of 100,000 refugees.<sup>1</sup> David Grenfell and James Middleton, the former party secretary, represented a widespread feeling within the party when they joined with several former Conservative Ministers to urge acceptance of the report and swift action to relieve the sufferings of the Jewish survivors.<sup>2</sup>

Labour Zionists were able to press their case at the International Socialist Conference, held at the end of May, and in numerous contacts with party members, which included a well attended meeting with Labour MPs in the House of Commons.<sup>3</sup> At this stage Poale Zion was still able to

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1 Tribune 3 & 10 May 1946. From 1945 to 1948 Jon Kimche, a moderate Zionist, was joint editor of the paper. He contributed many pieces on Palestine and helped break the news of General Barker's infamous order of the day, see D.Hill (ed.), Tribune 40 The First Forty Years of a Socialist Newspaper (London, 1977) p. 58, Eban, op.cit., p. 63. The Foreign Office naturally disliked his activity; in 1948 one official minuted 'Kimche...now seems not only to be anti British but pro Communist', 8 Oct. 1948 FO 371/68525 E13107.

2 The Times 20 May 1946.

3 ZR 25 May 1946 for meeting addressed by Shertok and Locker. For the extensive Jewish lobbying see The Times 9 June 1946.



mobilise considerable popular support within the Labour Party for their cause, and a joint Poale Zion/Labour Party Conference in Liverpool attracted 300 delegates from 60 Divisional Labour Parties.<sup>1</sup> On 8 July a large demonstration took place in Trafalgar Square<sup>2</sup> to protest against the arrest of Jewish leaders in Palestine, and at a conference that evening presided over by Barnett Janner speakers included Sidney Silverman and Barbara Ayrton Gould.

To the conference Ayrton Gould declared that 'she had always believed in a Labour Government, but on the Jewish issue she was bitterly disillusioned. They of the PLP were not going to stop until justice was done for the Jewish people'. Already the External Affairs Group had urged the acceptance of the Commission's report<sup>3</sup> and following Operation Agatha efforts were made to express pro Zionist concern within the PLP more forcibly. When Attlee announced details of the operation Sidney Silverman demanded an adjournment debate on the subject that evening, and having gained the support of 41 members his request was granted.<sup>4</sup>

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1 ZR 21 May 1946, speakers included Mikardo and Braddock. See ibid., 19 Apr., 10 May 1946 for May Day Rally and demonstration in East London, 22 & 29 Mar. 1946 for earlier joint meetings in Leeds and Manchester.

2 Organised by the Zionist Federation, The Times 8 June 1946, Brodetsky, op.cit., p. 265.

3 Crossman, op.cit., p. 203.

4 HC Deb. Vol. 424 c. 1801, 1 July 1946. Crossman claims that 'we had no time to warn those who were likely to support us of our intention. We had to reckon on the spontaneous support of whoever happened to be in the House', Crossman, op.cit., p. 202. Pickthorne was the only Conservative, and only Member not 'more or less Zionist in sympathy' to support the demand, c. 1886.

Silverman opened the debate by denouncing the operation as 'plain naked war upon the Jewish National Home'.<sup>1</sup> From the Labour back benches he was joined in his attack by Ayrton Gould, Michael Foot, Barnett Janner and Richard Crossman, who seconded the motion. Crossman, whose experiences on the Committee of Enquiry now drew him rapidly towards the Zionist camp, pleaded for a swift implementation of the recommendations, and he warned that 'the policy now being prosecuted by the Government is decidedly dangerous and can lead this country into something approaching disaster'. The Government was in effect seeking to reimpose the White Paper upon the Jewish community and in a futile attempt to disarm the Haganah was undermining the position of moderate Zionists. 'There is only one way of smashing the resistance movement. That is to liberate it by smashing the conditions out of which it has grown'.<sup>2</sup>

Though the debate had no effect on Government policy it served notice that the silent acquiescence from its back-bench supporters could no longer be counted upon. Shortly after the debate a number of pro Zionists joined together as an informal group 'to keep a watch on the crisis'.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly the Government could no longer expect annual conferences to be the scene of such friendly unanimity as for so many years had been the case. But it came as an

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1 HC Deb. Vol. 422 c.1860, 1 July 1946.

2 Ibid., c.1867, 1871-2, see also New Statesman and Nation 11 May 1946

3 Crossman, op.cit., p. 203. Among its members were Crossman, Silverman, Foot, Ayrton Gould, Janner, Grenfell and Lang.



unpleasant surprise in June to hear Harold Laski, in his Chairman's address, demand that Jewish refugees should not become 'the victims of hesitancy or timidity in Downing Street' but should immediately be permitted to enter Palestine. One remark was particularly pointed: 'A British statesman who sacrifices the Jews who escaped from the tortures of Hitler to the Arab leaders does not understand the elementary principles of the socialism he professes'.<sup>1</sup>

Two days later a composite resolution was moved by Nathan Jackson of Poale Zion which called for immediate action to remove barriers to immigration and land purchase, and which quoted once again the party's war time declarations. Jackson urged the party to 'stand firm by a 30 year tradition' and his seconder pleaded with Bevin to take action: 'you have risen to your exalted position upon a reputation in the movement of integrity and fairness. Do not hesitate to do what is right now'.<sup>2</sup>

Though Crossman, who made what Tribune considered to be the most impressive speech heard from the floor<sup>3</sup> echoed demands for immediate implementation of the report, the last word was left to Ernest Bevin. In a typically rambling but aggressive contribution which caused widespread anger in Zionist circles and considerable diplomatic embarrassment in America<sup>4</sup> he warned that the admission of

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1 LPACR 1946, p. 107.

2 Ibid., pp. 153-5.

3 Tribune 16 June 1946.

4 LPACR 1946, pp. 165-6. There was particular anger at his remark 'I hope I will not be misunderstood...if I say that...they did <sup>not</sup> want too many Jews in New York'. 'Dugdale Diaries', 12 June 1946, New Judea June 1946.

100,000 Jews into Palestine would necessitate the sending of a further division of troops. This, he declared, he would not do, nor could he countenance an 'exclusively racial state' in Palestine. He still saw as his goal the reintegration of the Jewish survivors into the European communities.

Poale Zion, bowing to reality, withdrew the resolution rather than face overwhelming defeat.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the anger and dismay his remarks had caused amongst Zionist supporters within the party it was clear that nothing had been done to shake Bevin's confidence or shift his attitude in any way. From the conference as a whole the Foreign Secretary, secure in his position and with the block votes of the trade unions to call upon, had in practical terms 'emerged triumphant'.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore there was now developing within the party a body of opinion which reflected many of Bevin's own opinions and which served as a counter to the mounting criticism of his opponents.

Within the House of Commons the small group of anti Zionist Labour MPs now made a further attempt to rally support. Following publication of the Anglo American Report Stokes and Price had circulated to certain members details of a plan proposed by Thomas Reid whereby Britain and America would accept 60,000 refugees and summon a Round Table Conference. A meeting held on 28 May to promote the

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1 The resolution might have been successful had it not - albeit quoting Dalton in 1945 - referred to a Jewish State.

2 E.J.Meehan, The British 'Left' and Foreign Policy 1945 - 1951, Unpublished thesis, University of London 1954.



scheme was poorly attended and the campaign was evidently abandoned,<sup>1</sup> but its leaders took every opportunity in the Chamber to indicate that party opinion was not unanimous and that the Government was not without active friends on its backbenches. In the debate on 1 July Philips Price intervened 'to show that I am a backbencher who is going to give the fullest possible support to the Government in the action which has been taken'. For Thomas Reid Palestinian Jews were not fighting for liberty but to impose a policy by force: 'If, as has been stated my hon Friend the Member for Nelson and Colne (Silverman) this is a war, I ask hon members who started the war?'.<sup>2</sup>

Of great significance was the growing anger at Zionist violence and American 'interference' among members who until then had shown little interest in the Palestine problem. James Glanville, for example, had interrupted Silverman's defence of the Jewish Agency with the comment 'they kill British soldiers'.<sup>3</sup> and when the Labour Zionist Teddy Kollek spoke at the House of Commons shortly after the explosion at the King David Hotel he found the meeting crowded with members who subjected him to 'a very tough grilling'.<sup>4</sup> Labour MPs now reflected the mounting concern of their constituents at the casualties being inflicted on

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1 Stokes Papers op.cit.

2 HC Deb. Vol. 474 c. 1895, 1903, 1 July 1946. M. Philips Price, My Three Revolutions (London, 1969) pp. 284-6. For Reid see speech reprinted in T. Reid, 'Should a Jewish State be Established in Palestine?', Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society 1946, Vol. 33, pp. 161-177.

3 HC Deb op.cit., c. 1861.

4 Kollek, op.cit., p. 64.

the British army. On 31 July S.N.Evans warned the House that 'for the first time in my experience ordinary, decent working men are talking in their pubs and clubs, at the barber's and at work, about the lot to which our lads are being subjected in Palestine at this moment'.<sup>1</sup>

It was becoming clear that the party's pro Zionist spokesmen no longer spoke with the tacit approval of the majority of their colleagues. Whatever the bitterness of the Zionists and their supporters and the volume of protest generated they were more than balanced by the mood of anger and irritation within the PLP, which fortified a natural inclination to close ranks and support a Labour Government in its difficulties.

It was also evident that the Government could rely upon the support of the NEC and the party organisation, despite an understandable concern at the course of events. A resolution from Poale Zion condemning the arrests in Palestine drew no response, and Harold Laski failed to persuade the National Council of Labour to register a protest. Though there was sufficient concern to prompt the holding of unofficial discussions with the Government when Hall appeared before the NCL he was evidently able to assure members that progress was being made in the negotiations and after some discussion it was decided simply to await publication of the Government's proposals.<sup>2</sup>

The attitudes now developing within the Labour Party as

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<sup>1</sup> HC Deb. Vol. 426 c. 1056, 31 July 1946, see Tribune 5 July 1946.

<sup>2</sup> NCL Minutes 3 & 25 July 1946. The Labour Party Liaison Sub Committee had earlier held talks with Attlee.



a whole were reflected in the reactions of Government Ministers to the growing difficulties. In Cabinet Bevin's policies were invariably approved, though the more pro Zionist Ministers made some effort to voice their concern and to suggest modifications to the Foreign Secretary's proposals. On 29 April, for example, several Ministers argued unsuccessfully that the Government should not dismiss the possibility of bringing the matter before the Security Council of the United Nations.<sup>1</sup>

There is also the suggestion during this period that certain Ministers were once again changing their ground on the idea of partition as a long term solution. In July this was raised in Cabinet, though dismissed as 'inexpedient' after strong opposition from several Ministers, in particular Shinwell, the Minister of Fuel and Power.<sup>2</sup> The proponents of partition, most probably Bevan and Dalton, evidently now felt partition to be in the best interests of both Britain and the Jews. This had not been their view some eighteen months before. The attraction of the scheme now was that the Jewish Agency, which it was pointed out would thereby 'bear the whole cost', could immediately arrange for as much immigration as it wished. Certain Labour leaders, we might recall, had undergone a similar change of heart in the pre war years as the prospect of a pro Zionist solution had grown similarly more remote.

But the apprehension of the Zionists' friends within the Cabinet was of little significance. Neither Dalton nor

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1 CAB 128 29 Apr. 1946.

2 CAB 128 11 July 1946.

Morrison, for whom 'fishing in Bevin's territorial waters' was particularly inexpedient<sup>1</sup> could, even had they so wished, have mounted a serious challenge to Bevin's policy. Outside the Cabinet Creech Jones, having earlier been promised consultations on all matters concerning Palestine, now found that 'I was too preoccupied with the other major tasks of the Colonial Office...to follow as closely as I would have liked and in any case questions of Palestine from the start of the Government were taken at top level'.<sup>2</sup>

The only Junior Minister decisively to affect developments in Palestine was the Under Secretary of State for Air, John Strachey. According to his biographer:

'One day, Crossman...came to see Strachey. He had heard from his friends in the Jewish Agency that they were contemplating an act of sabotage, not only for its own purpose but to demonstrate to the world their capabilities. Should this be done, or should it not? Few would be killed. But would it help the Jews? Crossman asked Strachey for his advice, and Strachey, a member of the Defence Committee of the Cabinet, undertook to find out. The next day in the smoking room of the House of Commons, Strachey gave his approval to Crossman. The Haganah went ahead and blew up all the bridges over the Jordan...A few days later the Foreign Office broke the Jewish Agency's codes. Crossman was for several days alarmed lest he and Strachey might be discovered.'<sup>3</sup>

This remarkable incident was an indication of the depth of commitment to the Zionist cause which might still be felt by members of the Government. It was also an unprecedented breach of trust which directly threatened the

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1 Donoghue & Jones, op.cit., p. 434.

2 Notes in CJ 33/2/52. Brodetsky (op.cit., p. 168) recalled that 'I spoke to Silkin...about helping us against the Bevin policy, but the Bevin hold on the Labour Party was too strong for him to do anything'.

3 H.Thomas, John Strachey (London, 1973). Crossman did not subsequently refute the story.



lives of servicemen in Palestine. If the story is true then Strachey and Crossman must bear an awesome responsibility for the breakdown of order in Palestine, for the Jewish operation was to lead directly to 'Operation Agatha' and thence to the attack on the King David Hotel.

The anger of Ministers at the outrage, brought home by the presence of Sir John Shaw at a Cabinet meeting still 'very shaken after being blown up'<sup>1</sup> served only to dampen criticism of Bevin's policies and markedly to reduce the support Zionists enjoyed within the Cabinet. Though some did urge in Cabinet that the 'pathological state of mind' among Jewish survivors of the holocaust should not be forgotten<sup>2</sup> in the words of Jon Kimche 'a deep bitterness against all Palestinian Jews' now prevailed, 'even among the Ministers who had favoured Zionism. Anyone who was at that time in close touch with the Labour movement and with its members in the Government could not fail to sense this transformation'.<sup>3</sup> This was reinforced by the fact that Bevin's anger with the behaviour of the American Government was increasingly shared by his colleagues, almost without exception. On 1 August Dalton noted in his diary in disgust: 'just when it seemed that we had got an agreed solution...Truman has cold feet and is running out of the agreement'.<sup>4</sup>

There was also an annoyance at the criticism now

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1 Dalton Diaries 1 Aug. 1946. Shaw was Chief Secretary of the Palestine Government.

2 CAB 128 23 July 1946.

3 Kimche, op.cit., p. 160.

4 Dalton Diaries 1 Aug. 1946.

levelled at the Government from within the Labour Party. Whilst the Government consistently sought to restrict or delay debate in the House of Commons the attitude of certain Labour backbenchers made this no easy task. During July the Chief Whip made efforts to secure agreement from all sides to postpone the holding of a debate until after the recess. On 22 July he reported that whilst the Conservative Party was pressing for a two day debate a confidential discussion with Opposition leaders of the Government's policies might serve to restrict the scope of the debate. But Attlee in reply acknowledged that 'it would be extremely difficult to communicate to the Opposition in confidence information on a matter of this kind on which certain Government supporters might not be in agreement'<sup>1</sup> and in the event the debate ranged wide over the whole Palestine question and the Government's performance.

For Laski and Crossman, two of the Government's most irritating critics, the anger of Attlee and Bevin was perfectly clear. When Laski, holidaying in Italy, intervened in the case of the Jewish immigrants at Le Spezia<sup>2</sup> he was able to extract a promise from the Foreign Secretary that the refugees would be admitted into Palestine. But the British Ambassador reported that Laski's press statement had been ill received and it is unlikely that, as Laski believed, Bevin bore him no ill will for his

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<sup>1</sup> CAB 128 22 July 1946.

<sup>2</sup> 1200 young Jews, seeking to reach Palestine illegally, were intercepted and placed under guard on the schooner Fede, and thereupon began a hunger strike and threatened to sink the vessel.



intervention.<sup>1</sup> There was certainly fury when, as Attlee and Bevin saw it, Laski abused his position as Party Chairman to mount an insulting personal attack at the annual conference.

When Crossman had complained to Dalton of the attitude of the Palestine Government and the reaction to his report the Chancellor confessed that he found Crossman's opinions 'rather refreshing'. This was certainly not the reaction of Attlee and Bevin. According to Crossman the Prime Minister had berated him for 'letting us down' and producing a report 'grossly unfair' to Britain.<sup>2</sup>

At a meeting with Attlee on 7 April Crossman was criticised for failing to involve America in a sufficiently constructive manner and for placing new financial and economic burdens on the country. In July Crossman, together with Michael Foot, published a strong attack on the Government's policies entitled A Palestine Munich?<sup>3</sup> and he was only with difficulty dissuaded from publishing his letter of reply to the Prime Minister in his book Palestine Mission. Bevin, commiserating with the Prime Minister, confessed that 'nothing I can say will make (Crossman) alter his ideas about Palestine which derive from his lack

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1 H.Laski to E.Bevin FO 371/52519 E3898, for details see The Times 6 Apr. 1946, Bethell, op.cit., pp. 229-30, Martin, op.cit., p. 174, J.& D.Kimche, Secret Roads: The 'Illegal' Immigration of a People, 1938 - 1948 (London, 1954), pp. 137-8.

2 Dalton Diaries 15 May 1946, R.Crossman, A Nation Reborn (London, 1960) p. 69.

3 R.H.S.Crossman and M.Foot, A Palestine Munich? (London, 1946). Excerpts were printed in ZR 19 July 1946.

of judgement and his intellectual arrogance'.<sup>1</sup>

But if the course of events was causing friction within the Labour Party, and between the Government and its critics, the position of British Labour Zionists was also becoming increasingly difficult. Though Poale Zion continued to expand,<sup>2</sup> though Labour Zionists pleaded, lobbied and organised meetings they found themselves both isolated within the Labour Party and criticised by their fellow Zionists for their alleged ineffectualness.

Naturally every effort was made by Labour Zionists to voice their feelings of disappointment and betrayal, epitomised by Silverman's bitter cri de coeur:

'Your enemies can take your life; your enemies can take your property; they can take your house; they can take your livelihood; they can take everything from you - breath itself - but only your friends can inflict upon you the last refinement of cruelty, of raising hopes,<sup>3</sup> every morning which they disappoint every night'.

Clearly relations between the Labour Zionists and the wider British Labour movement were becoming, as Tribune warned,<sup>4</sup> increasingly uneasy. It was now a measure of the Zionists' isolation that even among their gentile friends in the Labour Party their central demand for a Jewish State

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1 E.Bevin to C.Attlee, 27 Sept. 1946 (PREM 8/302). Both Bevin and Attlee tried unsuccessfully to persuade Crossman to moderate his arguments; Bevin reported 'I have no hope of anyone persuading Crossman to alter his line of arguments or to omit any passages he is bent on inserting, however dangerous they may be to HMG'.

2 Affiliated membership had risen to 2,000; eight new branches were formed in the course of the year, see LPACR 1946, p. 67, ZR 25 Jan. 1946.

3 HC Deb. Vol. 426 c, 163, 1 Aug. 1946.

4 Tribune 21 June 1946.



found little support. Though some, including Crossman, were now found giving their support to the idea of partition, both Crossman and Laski had opposed at the annual conference the demand contained in Poale Zion's resolution that Palestine become a Jewish State, and were instrumental in the resolution's withdrawal. Tribune admitted that such an extreme Jewish demand could no longer be justified<sup>1</sup> whilst G.D.H.Cole argued that although British commitments could not honourably be evaded 'it is equally outside our power to help the Jews make Palestine a predominantly Jewish country at the cost of a head on conflict with the League of Arab States'.<sup>2</sup>

But as a party whose aspiration had been so firmly tied to the Labour Party and the prospect of a sympathetic Labour Government Poale Zion was now subjected to considerable criticism from within the Zionist movement. Attacks came from both Revisionists and 'General Zionists'. By February one Poale Zionist was complaining 'let us be quite clear as to what is the 'crime' that Poale Zion are accused of having committed. They obtained a pledge from the Labour Party when they were in opposition and now they, Poale Zion, are being held responsible for the non honouring of the pledge by the Labour Government. This...misrepresentation would do credit to our enemies, not to our

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1 Ibid., 10 May 1946.

2 G.D.H.Cole, G.D.H.Cole on Labour's Foreign Policy (London, April 1946) p. 41. The Arab News Bulletin (3 May 1946) thought it 'unedifying' that the Arabs' only hope lay in Britain's 'inability to continue to inflict injustice with impunity'.

colleagues'.<sup>1</sup>

Such criticisms did not diminish. In April what the Zionist Review termed 'a demagogic campaign...against Jewish members of the Labour Party' took place in the correspondence columns of the Jewish Chronicle. The contributors wholeheartedly condemned the weakness of Zionist political efforts in Parliament. Several writers believed it the duty of Jewish MPs to withdraw their support from the Government on the Palestine issue and this view had already been voiced in the paper's editorial column.<sup>2</sup>

The Labour-orientated Zionist Review naturally replied in kind: 'it is...incredibly stupid and politically dishonest to blame Zionist members of the Labour Party for the failure of the Government, so far, to implement previous pledges to the Jewish people'. The fact that, as the paper saw it, there could be no return to the White Paper, should be seen as a 'token of promises made' which, though small, 'could hardly have been achieved but for the devoted work of enlightenment carried out by pro Zionist members of the Labour Party'. The paper suspected Revisionist machinations lay behind the campaign.<sup>3</sup>

But even within Labour Zionist circles there was criticism of a leadership which, it was claimed, had pinned undue hopes on the goodwill of the Labour Party and the friendship of its leaders. Much of this was directed at

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1 ZR 8 Feb. 1946.

2 Jewish Chronicle 7 Dec. 1945.

3 ZR 17 May 1946, see M. Leifer, Zionism and Palestine in British Opinion and Policy 1945 - 1949, Unpublished thesis, University of London, 1959, p. 89.



Berl Locker, who had worked for so many years as Zionist emissary to the party. Teddy Kollek later explained that 'my real doubts about Locker, whom I liked personally, were precisely because he pinned his hopes on Creech Jones and Labour. It was obvious who the real leaders were...Ernest Bevin was not our friend and he did not pretend to be. Throughout that year in London I found myself in sharp conflict with all the naïve supporters of the Labour Party'.<sup>1</sup> A similar view was later expressed by Abba Eban.<sup>2</sup> But whatever the recriminations now taking place within the British Zionist movement in practice its ability to influence either the Labour Government or Party had evaporated with disconcerting speed.

C. 'A Number of Us Have Been Shouting for Partition'.

On 20 September 1947 the Cabinet resolved to surrender the Mandate and to withdraw British troops and administration from Palestine. The growing problem of illegal Jewish immigration, the breakdown of British rule in Palestine and the unremitting pressure from across the Atlantic<sup>3</sup> had finally created in the minds of Government Ministers an overwhelming desire to lay down their responsibilities and to extricate British forces at the earliest opportunity. But though no voice was raised in Cabinet opposing the plan

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1 Kollek, op.cit., pp. 62-3.

2 Eban, op.cit., p. 25 'He was small, perky, cheerful, mercurial and idealistic, but unformidable. His private virtues were his public defects. He was too amiable and genial to take politicians by storm'.

3 Cohen, 'Why Britain Left' op.cit., pp. 74 ff.

there had been during the previous year a number of attempts by certain Ministers to challenge aspects of Bevin's course of action.

The first phase of the London Conference opened on 9 September 1946, but without the participation of the Jewish Agency. The Morrison-Grady plan was duly rejected by the Arabs, who proposed the creation of a Unitary State, and the Conference was adjourned at the beginning of October. Two days later Creech Jones, 'a Zionist of the pre Biltmore mould',<sup>1</sup> replaced Hall as Colonial Secretary. Until then 'excluded from all Cabinet discussion regarding the refugees, Zionism, Palestine and the Arabs', he now found 'the whole of the internal situation of Palestine put into my lap'.<sup>2</sup>

He immediately opened negotiations with the Zionists with the aim of regaining their co-operation in Palestine, and in return for a condemnation of terrorism Jewish leaders detained since Operation Agatha were released. But now came what for Bevin and Attlee seemed the ultimate manifestation of American unreliability and of Truman's susceptibility to electoral pressure; ignoring Attlee's plea for delay Truman released a statement, designed to bolster the Democratic Congressional campaign, which again called for the admission of 100,000 Jewish refugees. Bevin, thrown into one of his 'blackest rages' later made no effort to hide his anger and his belief that the intervention had ruined the prospect of a successful outcome to

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<sup>1</sup> Creech Jones, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Creech Jones to J. Callaghan, 30 Nov. 1961 (CJ 32/3/14).



the London Conference.<sup>1</sup>

The Conference was due to reopen in the New Year, and on 14 January the Cabinet discussed the schemes which might be submitted by the British Government.<sup>2</sup> The previous day Norman Brook, the Cabinet Secretary, unable to ascertain the line Bevin would take, submitted his own memorandum to the Prime Minister which succinctly stated the view of the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence:

'It is an essential requirement of our strategic plans for the defence of the British Commonwealth that we should retain our present position in the Middle East. For this purpose we must be able to maintain military forces in Palestine. And, to ensure that the forces stationed there can be used to full advantage, we must retain the friendship of the neighbouring Arab peoples'.<sup>3</sup>

He therefore urged support for the Arab plan, 'plus safeguards for minorities'. This too was Bevin's view, though the plan might be amended to permit further Jewish immigration. The Morrison-Grady plan, he felt, was no longer possible, as it had been rejected by both sides. Though he had 'no very violent objection to partition', he argued that it would be rejected by the Arabs and would necessitate the consent of the United Nations: 'I cannot conceive of the British Government, even aided by the United States, being able to carry partition with the requisite majority'.<sup>4</sup>

For the first time there was significant opposition to Bevin's line. Creech Jones later explained how, on

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1 F.Williams, Ernest Bevin. Portrait of a Great Englishman (London, 1952) p. 260. HC Deb Vol. 433 c. 1907-8. 23 Feb. 1947, LPACR 1947, pp. 177-8.

2 CAB 128, 15 Jan. 1947.

3 CAB 21/2243, 14 Jan. 1947.

4 CP(47)30, 14 Jan. 1947 in CAB 129.

becoming Secretary of State, 'I immediately urged what my liberal and my Jewish friends had hoped might be the line of advance - partition',<sup>1</sup> and he now argued his case in Cabinet. Whereas the Arab plan would only perpetuate what he termed 'the present state of tension' a scheme of partition was the only practical solution. It would command more general acceptance, and should the UN reject the idea it would fall to them to propose an alternative. Indeed the Cabinet, in discussion, felt that 'a combination of skilfull debating and tactical manoeuvres' might even secure the necessary majority.

Several senior Ministers now hastened to follow his lead. Dalton and Bevan stressed the need for an early solution. For Dalton it was now clear that the two sides would not work together, and since Zionists insisted on an area under their control partition was the only solution. Bevan concurred, warning that if the opportunity were lost extremists would gain the upper hand. He also took the view that a friendly Jewish State would provide a safer military base than could be found in any Arab State. With this Alexander, Minister of Defence, naturally took issue, but he too favoured partition. The final contribution came from Shinwell, who confessed that he had now abandoned his hope that Jews in Palestine would follow 'a policy of assimilation'. The Government should thus do everything to ensure that partition would be acceptable to the UN.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Creech Jones to Callaghan, op.cit.

2 Shinwell had aroused Bevin's anger two months before by publicly criticising his policy in Germany and the Middle East, see F.Williams, A Prime Minister Remembers (London, 1961) pp. 179-80. See Shinwell's caustic remarks in E.Shinwell, I've Lived Through it All (London, 1973) pp. 185-6.



In his diary Dalton summarised the meeting:

'On Palestine a number of us have been shouting for partition - Creech Jones is very good on this and much more decisive than his predecessor. EB and the PM try to tangle up the merits of various solutions with hypothetical conclusions of who would vote for this or that solution at the UN. I have been trying to keep these distinguished and have been urging that partition is the least objectionable of all policies and that, if we decide on this, we should then go on to consider how the local and political obstacles can be overcome. The present state of things cannot be allowed to drag on. There must be a Jewish State - it is no good boggling at this - and even if it is quite small, at least they will be able to let lots of Jews into it - which is what they madly and murderously want!'<sup>1</sup>

Creech Jones circulated a memorandum in support of his position<sup>2</sup> and discussion was resumed on 22 January. Again supported by Shinwell, Creech Jones, whom Dalton noted approvingly was 'getting much stronger and firmer on all this'<sup>3</sup> argued for partition, but Bevin skilfully parried his colleagues' arguments by securing agreement that a final decision on the scheme to be brought before the United Nations should await the final round of negotiations.<sup>4</sup>

By now the opposition Bevin was encountering had become common knowledge,<sup>5</sup> but within a fortnight this threatened to evaporate. On 7 February, having now participated in the negotiations for the first time, Creech Jones reported that 'the longer he examined the detailed implications of partition, the more he was impressed by the practical

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1 Dalton Diaries 17 Jan. 1947.

2 CP(47)32, 16 Jan. 1947 in CAB 129.

3 Dalton Diaries 27 Jan. 1947.

4 CAB 128, 22 Jan. 1947.

5 'Dugdale Diaries' 10 Feb. 1947, Tribune 31 Jan., 7 & 14 Feb. 1947.

difficulties' - of delineating the frontiers, of securing the assent of the UN, and of maintaining order in 'conditions of rebellion'. With his support Bevin was now able to gain the approval of the Cabinet to put forward one further proposal; an independent Unitary State would be established after a five year period of Trusteeship, during which 96,000 refugees would be admitted.<sup>1</sup>

Their critics acquiesced with manifest scepticism. In Cabinet it was pointed out that the proposals were again based on the hope of Jewish-Arab co-operation, of which there was not the slightest prospect. In his diary Dalton was particularly scathing:

'EB goes doddering round and round with the Arabs and Jews and nothing ever happens except a long and rising series of outrages in Palestine...he has now discovered, as a result of this long drawn conference that the Arabs want an Arab State and the Jews want a Jewish State'.<sup>2</sup>

The 'Bevin plan' was rejected by both sides. On 14 February the Cabinet, burdened with the problems of a freezing winter and the mounting fuel crisis, resolved to refer the problem to the UN, but without making any recommendations of their own. It was hoped that the very act of referral would produce 'a more reasonable frame of mind' among the antagonists.<sup>3</sup>

Once again Dalton affirmed his belief in partition: the Cabinet was assured that this remained a possibility. The most forthright critic was John Strachey, who argued

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1 CAB 128, 7 Feb. 1947.

2 Dalton Diaries, 5 & 24 Feb, 1947.

3 CAB 128, 14 Feb. 1947.



that both for strategic and moral reasons the 'just claims' of the Zionists should be supported. But this was no more than a gesture in the face of the united front of Attlee, Bevin and Creech Jones, and Bevan was no more successful the following week when he urged that Jewish immigration be substantially increased during the interim period whilst the UN considered the problem.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that the Cabinet was now heartily sick of the problem, which diverted ever more attention from the growing domestic difficulties. The distasteful and humiliating interceptions by the Royal Navy of refugee ships, the steady loss of life and the seeming ineffectualness of the large numbers of troops in Palestine produced an increasing impatience both with Bevin, whom Dalton considered had 'wasted' more than a year,<sup>2</sup> and with the authorities in Palestine. In March the Cabinet showed considerable irritation that the imposition of Martial Law, which had been urged by the Chiefs of Staff, had produced such meagre results, and demanded a comprehensive plan to cope with the situation in the coming months.<sup>3</sup>

The overwhelming desire was now to be rid of the problem at almost any cost. This feeling was shared by Bevin. In February, according to Bethell, Bevin was only with difficulty dissuaded by his officials from pledging, in advance, Britain's acceptance of any UN recommendations.<sup>4</sup>

In this instance Bevin's officials evidently had their way, for when the Cabinet discussed the question in April

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1 Ibid., 18 Feb. 1947.

2 Dalton Diaries 24 Feb. 1947.

3 CAB 128, 20 Mar. 1947.

4 Bethell, op.cit., p. 312.

the Minister of State reported that Bevin now considered that any commitment in advance was inexpedient. This drew criticism from a number of his colleagues who argued that, although Britain could not commit herself to carry out whatever plan the UN might wish, the initial submission carried with it the implication that the Assembly's recommendations would be accepted. But these critics were once again in a clear minority.

In May 1947 the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) was appointed, to visit Palestine and make recommendations; the report was completed at the end of August. It recommended that the Mandate be terminated and Palestine granted independence, and the majority of members supported partition. The initial reaction of Creech Jones, despite his earlier second thoughts on the subject, was that Britain should accept and implement the majority report. In this he was strongly supported by Greenwood, who had maintained close links with Locker and his colleagues.<sup>1</sup> But Greenwood was now in the twilight of his career; Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary were resolved that the Mandate should be surrendered and that Britain should play no part in implementing the majority report. Furthermore the anger of Ministers at Zionist atrocities had risen sharply during the summer.

On 30 July terrorists had hung two British sergeants and boobytrapped the ground over which their bodies were suspended. The atrocity produced a wave of anger and

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<sup>1</sup> A.Greenwood to Creech Jones, 15 Sept. 1947 (CJ 32/3/9). See Kimche, op.cit., p. 165 for the shock felt by Ministers at the recommendations of the UNSCOP report.



revulsion throughout Britain.<sup>1</sup> For at least one Cabinet Minister this was the final straw. 'After that', Hugh Dalton later wrote, 'I went absolutely cold towards the Jews in Palestine, and didn't care what happened to them in their fight with the Arabs'.<sup>2</sup> Colleagues undoubtedly shared his sense of fury and frustration, and the threat the terrorists posed to Ministers' own safety brought home the problem in a very personal way, as security arrangements impinged ever more in their lives.<sup>3</sup> There was now, according to Kimche, 'an angry, almost emotional attitude in the Cabinet towards the Palestinian Jews and their Zionist supporters who added so many difficulties to those which were already besetting the Cabinet'.<sup>4</sup>

The Cabinet decision to surrender the Mandate was taken at the end of September. For Attlee there was a close parallel with the position in India; both he and Bevin felt that 'salutary results would be produced by a clear announcement that HMG intended to relinquish the Mandate'.<sup>5</sup> The only critics now vocal were Shinwell and Bevan, who expressed uncertainty - real or contrived - that the intention was genuine. Shinwell hoped that the proposal 'was being put forward seriously and not merely as a

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1 See below p. 350.

2 Dalton, 'High Tide', op.cit., p. 190.

3 eg Dalton Diaries, 26 July 1947, Donoughue & Jones, op.cit., p. 420, B.Bell, Terror Out of Zion (Dublin, 1979) pp. 178, 308-9.

4 J. & D. Kimche, 'Both Sides', op.cit., p. 28.

5 CAB 128, 20 Sept. 1947. To Creech Jones, Pethick Lawrence had drawn a different parallel; 'your job in Palestine and mine in India are twins of insolubility', Gupta, op.cit., p. 298.

threat to induce the contending forces to agree', whilst Bevan urged that strenuous efforts be made 'to convince all concerned that they did not wish to retain forces in Palestine for independent reasons'. Bevin was indeed serious. When Noel Baker reported that the Air Staff wished to retain bases in Palestine, Bevin's reply was 'tell them if they want to stay, they'll 'ave to stay up in 'elicopter'.<sup>1</sup>

There was a general sense of relief that the end appeared to be in sight. Bevin had described as 'manifestly unjust to the Arabs' the UNSCOP majority report. Bevan and Shinwell, having urged acceptance of the report inside the party organisation,<sup>2</sup> now bowed to the inevitable and held their peace. They did make one further effort when the question of United Nations enforcement of the plan was raised. Shinwell felt that if other countries were willing to co-operate in enforcing partition Britain should lend its support. Bevan argued on similar lines, but was strongly opposed by Dalton and Cripps, both particularly aware of the financial burden involved. Creech Jones' contribution was now confined to a brief endorsement of Bevin's proposals, whilst Morrison evidently remained silent, as he had apparently done throughout the year.

Until January 1947, despite occasional reservations, Cabinet Ministers had shown a willingness to 'give Bevin's method...a fair chance'.<sup>3</sup> After September Bevin's policy

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1 Dalton Diaries 20 Sept. 1947.

2 See below p. 354.

3 Dalton, 'High Tide' op.cit., p. 150.



faced no serious challenge until January 1949. Only at certain times in 1947, in a period of great uncertainty and mounting crisis, was Bevin's direction significantly contested but even then his critics were ultimately unsuccessful.

#### D. Reactions Within The Labour Party.

In the Zionist Review of August 1947 Leonard James, a Labour Party member, outlined the probable reactions within the party to the impending UNSCOP report. Partly because, as it transpired, his premise was wholly incorrect - that Bevin would oppose any call for withdrawal - but also because the distinction he drew was between the reactions of the PLP and the 'rank and file' his analysis, though not without perspicacity, gave a curiously misleading picture of the divisions within the party.<sup>1</sup> But divisions undoubtedly existed, and had become markedly more apparent during the previous year. It is therefore necessary to examine the various strands of opinion, and the effect on Government policy.

The feelings of Zionists within the Labour Party are naturally the most easy to assess: profound disappointment and bitter suspicion of the Government's intentions. A rapid expansion of Poale Zion took place in the final years

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1 ZR 28 Aug. 1947.

of the Mandate,<sup>1</sup> but it owed nothing to the policies of the Government, little to its links with the Labour Party, and almost everything to the growing excitement and concern over Jewish prospects in Palestine, where Labour Zionists played the leading role.

The party continued to protest, to lobby and to propagandise. At International Socialist Conferences Labour Zionists enlisted considerable support, and at the Commonwealth Labour Conference in September 1947 Morgan Phillips faced much criticism.<sup>2</sup> But though Poale Zion remained a focus for Zionist sympathisers within the Labour Party no longer were its protests received with the sympathetic concern of previous years.<sup>3</sup> Partly as a result senior Zionists now took some care to distance themselves from the Labour Party; for example, Bakstansky, General Secretary of the Zionist Federation, withdrew in the course of the year from the party's panel of prospective parliamentary candidates.<sup>4</sup>

For Zionist Labour MPs the position was even more difficult. In Parliament Silverman and Janner - 'a veritable MP for (Jewish) Palestine'<sup>5</sup> - continued, in their

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1 ZR 2 May 1947, referred to a doubling of membership in the previous year, though numbers affiliated to the Labour Party rose only to 2,200. By 1949 there were some 8 London and 6 provincial branches (Zionist Yearbook 1951 (London, 1951), the first year of publication, lists 17 and 8 respectively). By mid 1949 there were also 5 London and 3 provincial Young Poale Zion branches (Darkenu (organ of YPZ) passim) and ZR 2 July 1948 refers to a Zionist Womens Labour Organisation affiliated to the party.

2 ZR 7 Nov. 1946 for resolution. 'Report of the Conference of British Commonwealth Labour Parties, 1947' p. 40.

3 See below p. 347.

4 Bakstansky, a member of the Fabian Society though not, it seems, of Poale Zion, had been sponsored by Laski and Middleton, NEC 18 Sept. 1947.

5 Goodman, op.cit., p. 83.



different styles, to condemn terrorism but also to plead, at the eleventh hour, for a conciliatory policy towards the Yishuv and for 'the opening of the doors of Palestine', which Janner believed would break the hold of extremists.<sup>1</sup>

But there was no sign that such a policy would be forthcoming. On 18 February Bevin announced in Parliament that the problem was to be submitted to the United Nations. A week later in debate his tone was anything but friendly to the Zionist cause. His remark that the Mandate had provided 'for what was virtually an invasion of the country by thousands of immigrants'<sup>2</sup> and his ill disguised bitterness with American and Zionist pressures was particularly resented.

The Foreign Secretary had been subjected to frequent interruptions from his own backbenches, and ensuing contributions suggested that a number of hitherto non-Zionist Jewish MPs now found themselves siding more and more with their Zionist colleagues. Bevin was criticised by Harold Lever and Marcus Turner-Samuels, whilst Bem Levy, congratulating Bevin on 'the best exposition of the Arab case that I have ever heard', confessed that, though he had never been a Zionist, 'the Foreign Secretary has gone some way towards converting me'.<sup>3</sup>

Outside Parliament Laski now made little effort to contain himself. In April he referred to Bevin's handling of the problem as 'a betrayal' and 'an outrageous blot on the record of the Labour Government'.<sup>4</sup> He continued his

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<sup>1</sup> HC Deb. Vol. 432 c.1313, 31 Jan. 1947.

<sup>2</sup> HC Deb. Vol. 433 c.1901, 25 Feb. 1947.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., c.1952.

<sup>4</sup> Speech at a Labour Zionist meeting, New Judea April 1947).

efforts within the NEC and, not surprisingly, his relations with certain Ministers deteriorated still further. In May 1947 he referred in a letter to 'angry and futile correspondence...with CRA; bitter recriminations with EB'<sup>1</sup> and though the same month he expressed great gratitude for Creech Jones' 'helpful frankness', by the 1950 election he evidently felt unable to speak on behalf of the Colonial Secretary because of his part in the Palestine crisis.<sup>2</sup>

Among the Zionists' gentile supporters a similar feeling of anger and disillusion prevailed, though opinions differed widely about the means of achieving a solution. Ayrton Gould, for example, felt that a Unitary State should still be attempted, in which Jews and Arabs 'could very well solve their differences in the future, as they have in the past',<sup>3</sup> whereas Crossman continued to urge an orderly scheme of partition.

But when Crossman urged the Government to announce that 'whatever happens, we will have our troops and administrators out by a certain date',<sup>4</sup> he was now articulating a demand which served to unite many Zionist sympathisers with the increasingly vocal group of left wing critics who opposed the Government's whole approach to foreign policy.

In October 1946 twenty MPs, in an 'Open Letter' to the Prime Minister, had complained that 'in Palestine and the Middle East the pledged policy of the Labour Party has been

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1 Martin, op.cit., p. 216.

2 H.Laski to Creech Jones 13 May 1947, 30 May 1950 (CJ 32/2/3&4).

3 HC Deb, op.cit., c.1985.

4 Ibid., c.1985.



sacrificed to the needs of Imperial defence'.<sup>1</sup> Among the signatories were many who had not hitherto expressed strong opinions on the subject of Palestine; now what was seen as a squandering of resources in a misguided attempt to assert Britain's presence in the Middle East became a part of the larger demand for a more 'Socialist' foreign policy and for an independent 'middle way' between the competing super-powers.<sup>2</sup> Thus in May 1947 Keep Left, a pamphlet issued over the names of twelve dissident MPs, demanded a timetable for the withdrawal of British troops from Palestine, and this was echoed in the memorandum sent to Attlee in July.<sup>3</sup>

The Palestine crisis now impinged on the 'left's' conflict with the Government in two ways. On the one hand, as James commented in relation to the UNSCOP report, the issue 'served as ammunition in the hands of (those) who are not primarily concerned with Palestine but with obtaining a change of policy'.<sup>4</sup> On the other the manifest and bloody failure of Bevin's attempt to find a settlement generated considerable anger which made inter party disagreements the more decisive; these were exacerbated by specific aspects of the Government's policy, in particular the imposition of Martial Law and the often violent interception of refugee ships. As one historian has observed: 'much of the heat

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1 A.Gould and others, Private and Confidential (London, Oct. 1946) p. 2.

2 For the 'left' and their opposition to Bevin see Rose, Meehan, op.cit.

3 R.Crossman, M.Foot, I.Mikardo and other Keep Left (New Statesman Pamphlet, London May 1947) p. 46. All three leading signatories were strongly pro Zionists. Gupta, op.cit., p. 314.

4 ZR 29 Aug. 1947.

generated against Ernest Bevin on the 'left' stemmed, directly or indirectly, from Britain's policy in Palestine'.<sup>1</sup>

In the leading journals of the 'left', Tribune and the New Statesman and Nation the Government's policies provoked incessant criticism. The latter carried a number of articles by Arabs or their sympathisers,<sup>2</sup> but the prevailing voice was undoubtably that of Richard Crossman. Tribune still weaved an uncertain course, but had finally accepted the necessity of partition. In January it condemned the idea of referring the question to the United Nations and in a series of front page articles continued to castigate the Government. 'Palestine', it believed, 'is becoming a dangerous sore to the Labour Government as Spain became a fatal sore to Napoleon'.<sup>3</sup>

But, as Rose has observed 'one of the few things upon which Kingsley Martin (editor of the New Statesman) and Ernest Bevin would have agreed was that the periodical had no influence whatsoever on the Government's foreign policy', and Tribune was no more effective.<sup>4</sup> And, with one exception, this assessment is equally true for the 'left's' opposition to the Government's Palestine policy during 1947.

Indeed the growing identification of the 'left' with pro

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1 Meehan, op.cit., p. II, especially when certain members of the 'left' suggested that Bevin was antisemitic, see Driberg cited in ibid., p. 240, and later Crossman, 'Nation Reborn' op.cit., p. 69, Mikardo, quoted in C. Mayhew & D. Adams, Publish it Not...The Middle East Coverup (London, 1975) p. 26.

2 eg Edward Atiyah, New Statesman and Nation 12 Jan. 1946, 31 Jan. 1948.

3 Tribune 25 Apr. 1947.

4 Rose, op.cit., p. 440.

Zionist sentiment within the party was undoubtedly one reason for the support the Government in its difficulties could still rely upon. For many backbenchers the criticisms of the 'left', on whatever subject, were viewed with impatience and irritation as a mischievous attempt to 'rock the boat'. Crossman, a leading spokesman both of the 'left' and of the gentile pro Zionists, was particularly suspect. In February 1949 John Mallalieu, himself a critic of the Government, admitted that

'Dick sometimes seems about as much at home in a Labour Party meeting as a chronic inebriate would be at a Methodist Conference...One moment he will argue for. The next moment he will argue against. At best, that gives him a reputation of being clever. At worst, it gives him a reputation for insincerity. Either way he has become 'untrustworthy' and, when he rises to speak, the bristles of the party meeting rise with him. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, if it comes to a choice between Bevin and Crossman, their colleagues will thumbs down on Crossman without raising their eyes from the local paper'.<sup>1</sup>

This antipathy occasionally turned to outright hostility; Lord Boothby recalls, at the height of the Palestine crisis, sitting with Crossman in the Smoking Room of the House of Commons, and the pair 'being cut left, right and centre'.<sup>2</sup>

The troubles besetting the Government in February 1947 induced a further feeling of solidarity with the hard pressed Ministers. Barnett Janner well appreciated that the fuel crisis could only work against the Zionists' interests, both in distracting the Cabinet's attention 'and

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<sup>1</sup> Tribune 4 Feb. 1949.

<sup>2</sup> R. Boothby, Recollections of a Rebel (London, 1978) p. 208.



by making our friends in the Labour Party more unwilling to embarrass the Government'.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly when Bevin and Creech Jones defended their decision to refer the problem to the United Nations to a packed meeting of the PLP, those that argued party policy had been shamefully abandoned were given short shrift; the Foreign Secretary, 'after a powerful speech, which was reported to have been accepted as completely convincing by most of his colleagues', gained 'a great ovation'.<sup>2</sup> The decision was overwhelmingly welcome to most MPs - Tribune had noted that Churchill's earlier suggestion had drawn loud applause from the Labour benches<sup>3</sup> - and the majority had no inclination to criticise.

Just as the crisis pushed a number of Jewish and non Jewish MPs further into the pro Zionist camp, so the number of actively anti Zionist members increased. For Stokes, a pro Arab member of long standing, although the decision was to be regretted, Bevin's speech was for the first time 'a moderately fair case for the Arabs',<sup>4</sup> but now several MPs came to the fore as impassioned critics of Zionist behaviour. Chief among these was Norman Smith, MP for Nottingham South.<sup>5</sup>

In November 1946 Rita Hinden warned Magnes that 'this tactic of playing off the Americans against the British is

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1 'Dugdale Diaries' 10 Feb. 1947.

2 The Times 20 Feb. 1947.

3 Tribune 9 Aug. 1946.

4 HC Deb. Vol. 433 c.1977, 25 Feb. 1947. Stokes, with Reid, unsuccessfully urged Jamaal Huseini to co-operate with UNSOP (Stokes Papers).

5 See below pp. 350-1.

a thoroughly wrong one. It is alienating an enormous amount of public sympathy...'.<sup>1</sup> Among the bulk of Labour MPs such sympathy had almost entirely evaporated. In this they accurately represented the feelings of the majority of party members, now above all 'heartily sick of the whole business'.<sup>2</sup>

The attitude of the General Council typified popular feeling. When the Histadrut requested an intervention on behalf of Jewish refugees it received a striking rebuff. The Council took the view that 'the onus of responsibility for the situation should be thrown on the Palestine Jews', and the Zionists were blandly advised to work for a peaceful settlement with the Arab population.<sup>3</sup>

The NEC, though less forthright, was in practice no more receptive to the interventions of Poale Zion. In September 1946 a resolution on the question of illegal immigration drew no response, and when the following year Laski reported that Poale Zion had complained about Bevin's remarks in Parliament and was seeking urgent talks between the British and Palestinian Labour Parties, the matter was first deferred, then dropped.<sup>4</sup>

But if Zionist requests to the NEC could be quietly ignored it seemed that there was no chance of avoiding sharp criticism at the Annual Conference. Of the six resolutions received on the subject, two simply asked that

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1 R.Hinden to J.Magnes, 1 Nov. 1946 (FCB 176/6).

2 ZR 29 Aug. 1947.

3 GC 18 Dec. 1946, TUC Report, 1947, p. 205.

4 Int Sub 17 Sept. 1946, NEC 26 Mar. 1947.

responsibility be handed over to the United Nations, but three from the traditionally pro Zionists local parties of Hackney North, Manchester Exchange and Leeds Central, called for the immediate honouring of party pledges on immigration and land purchase. This was echoed by Poale Zion, which requested action in line with the party's war-time promises, several of which were restated in its resolution.

When the NEC discussed the agenda Laski suggested that Creech Jones should reply; Laski made it clear that should Bevin repeat his 'intolerable' performance of the previous year he himself would demand to be heard. Attlee, whose irritation with his colleague can well be imagined, insisted that Bevin would have to answer, and the NEC decided the Poale Zion should be asked to withdraw their resolution on the grounds that the matter was now under consideration by the United Nations. Laski could only urge Creech Jones to suggest to Bevin a moderate line of approach which would include a concession to Jewish refugees in the Cyprus camps.<sup>1</sup>

Events did not work out as planned. Poale Zion declined to withdraw, whilst Bevin seems to have made little effort to speak on the lines obligingly suggested by Creech Jones.<sup>2</sup> To the conference Rosette concentrated on the 'scandalous' position of refugees after two and a half years of a Labour Government, and urged a message of hope

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<sup>1</sup> NEC 23 Mar. 1947, H.Laski to Creech Jones, 9 May 1947 (CJ 32/2/3).

<sup>2</sup> Draft in FO 371/61927 E4743.



to rally moderate Jewish opinion.<sup>1</sup>

But by the time Bevin came to speak the ground had already partly been cut from the Zionists' feet by a fellow Jew, Henry Solomons of Hammersmith South. His amendment had urged further attempts at Jewish-Arab co-operation and though unhappy at disagreeing with his co-religionists suggested that the United Nations declare that Palestine would not come under the control of any one community. Bevin, arguing somewhat disingenuously that 'if there had been only 100,000 refugees going in, I could have settled it', was thus able to support Solomons' line, and his call for the withdrawal of the resolution.<sup>2</sup>

Rosette still declined to withdraw his resolution, only to hear Crossman, by the procedural device of successfully moving the 'previous question', prevent any vote being taken. Better, he later explained, for the resolution to be defeated by a friend than by the overwhelming vote of Conference.

Though Crossman believed that a separate debate on the subject might have culminated in a vote of more than 1 million for the resolution and denied that 'the failure to approve the resolution meant that the majority of delegates favoured Mr. Bevin's policy',<sup>3</sup> his action certainly suggested that he had - almost certainly correctly - no great confidence in the mood of delegates. The result of his idiosyncratic behaviour was, against the

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1 LPACR 1947, pp. 153-5. See also ZR 30 May 1947 for appeal to delegates from Locker.

2 LPACR 1947, pp. 155, 166.

3 ZR 6 June 1947.

Zionists' wishes and doubtless to their annoyance, to deny dissidents any chance to express their feelings, and through the action of the Zionists' 'friend' to spare the party the indignity, for the first time, of rejecting a pro Zionist resolution, the bulk of which was a record of its own pledges. It was presumably both to spare the party's humiliation and to hide the present isolation of the Zionists that Crossman took his unusual step.

The Zionists' position became increasingly threatened when the news broke of the hanging of the two sergeants. Already certain Jewish synagogues had been subject to attacks; now anti Jewish riots took place in certain cities, and one local paper carried a nakedly inflammatory anti semitic editorial.<sup>1</sup> For the first time public opinion became of significant importance in the Government's thinking; the demand was above all for the evacuation of British troops.

Labour MPs were deeply concerned both by the outrage and by the anti semitic reaction it produced. Crossman and Edelman had an appeal for the apprehension of the culprits broadcast on Palestine radio,<sup>2</sup> but it was evident that two conclusions were being drawn. For Tribune the tragedy was the result of 'a breakdown of Social Democracy' through the blind and foolish policy of a Labour Government'. For Norman Smith 'the fanatical dream of a Jewish National State...foisted on refugees by Zionist fanatics' had caused

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<sup>1</sup> see D. Leith 'Explosion at the King David's Hotel', in M. Sissons and P. French (eds.), Age of Austerity 1945-1951 (Penguin Edition, London, 1964) pp. 71-2, and reports in ZR 10 Jan., 2 May & 8 Aug. 1947.

<sup>2</sup> see HC Deb. Vol. 441 c.2330, 12 Aug. 1947.

a regrettable but understandable reaction among the British people.<sup>1</sup> And though few would express their feelings in such terms, the attitude of the PLP was of bitter dismay directed primarily at the Zionists. 'It was in this atmosphere that Locker came to plead to a handful of Labour members the case of the Exodus. Not even his eloquence could arouse much sympathy'.<sup>2</sup>

On one aspect all sections of the party could unite - the need for a speedy withdrawal from Palestine. For the 'left' this had long been a strand in their opposition to Bevin; with their demand, if not the analysis and motives which lay behind it, there was now an overwhelming agreement.

When the Conservatives demanded a debate Morrison's initial reaction had been that it would do no good. In fact it had a profound effect on the Government. From all sides speakers stressed the urgent need for withdrawal, the most telling speech coming from Harold Lever:

'I confess also to a measure of surprise that the House is allowing the Government on this issue to get away so lightly with two years of planless, gutless and witless behaviour which has not only cost us treasure in terms of money, but uncountable treasure in manpower and loss of life, all in order to prove that we are master of a situation of which we obviously are not a master, and all for some obscure reason made plain not to our troops, not to the people of Palestine, and certainly not to us.'<sup>3</sup>

For Ministers, themselves sickened by the outrage, this 'unique all party concensus' was seen as 'a clear manifestation of the national will'.<sup>4</sup> For almost the first time

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1 Tribune 8 Aug. 1947, letter ibid., 29 Aug. 1947.

2 ZR 8 Aug. 1947. The Exodus was the most notorious of intercepted refugee ships.

3 HC Deb. Vol. 441 c.2340, 12 Aug. 1947.

4 Cohen, 'End of the Mandate', op.cit., p. 80.



attitudes within the Labour Party had a clear effect on Government policy.

If party opinion played a part in persuading the Government to accept one key recommendation of the UNSCOP report, it also helped convince the majority of Ministers that British troops (with or without assistance) should play no part in enforcing a solution, and thus in their resolve not to back the majority recommendation for a scheme of partition. As Kimche noted sadly, Creech Jones' announcement of the Government's decision was greeted with 'approval and relief by the entire British Press, with the exception of the Manchester Guardian!', and was received by most Labour MPs in a similar manner.<sup>1</sup>

A number of critics had already voiced their disapproval of 'Bevin's curious decision to lay the whole issue solemnly before the UN without making any British proposal'.<sup>2</sup> There was now a feeling that the UNSCOP report demanded a positive reaction from the Government; this, as has been noted, was the view of a minority of Cabinet Ministers, and for the first time an effort was made to further their point of view through the party organisation.

At a meeting of the International Sub Committee on 16 September - chaired by Laski - members unanimously decided to recommend the NEC to declare the report 'the nearest approach to party policy on the subject'.<sup>3</sup> The low turnout at the meeting - for whatever reason - and the presence of

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1 Tribune 3 Oct. 1947.

2 Ibid., 18 Apr. 1947.

3 Int Sub 16 Sept. 1947.

Bevan and Shinwell, suggests a premeditated plan to challenge the Foreign Secretary's anticipated line. The decision was communicated to Cabinet Ministers, and Laski made every effort to enlist support, urging Dalton that a similar decision by the Cabinet would 'lift a heavy load off the shoulders of the party'.<sup>1</sup>

Yet again his efforts were futile. At the Cabinet meeting the arguments of Bevan and Shinwell were ignored, and four days later the NEC, with the Prime Minister in attendance, simply deferred the recommendation. Laski had succeeded only in publicising once again a difference of opinion within the party.<sup>2</sup>

#### E. Backbench Revolt

On 26 September Creech Jones announced to the United Nations Britain's intention to withdraw from Palestine. Two months later, to the manifest surprise and anger of certain Ministers,<sup>3</sup> the General Assembly voted to approve the UNSCOP partition plan. On 14 May - one day earlier than planned - the last British High Commissioner left Palestine; the State of Israel was proclaimed that day and Arab forces from the neighbouring States entered Palestine.

Between September 1947 and January 1949, when Britain recognised, de facto, the State of Israel, the main focus of opposition inside the Labour Party to the Government's policies lay within the PLP, and this section will

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1 H.Laski to H.Dalton, 19 Sept. 1947 (Dalton Papers, 9/3 32).

2 NEC 23 Sept. 1947, see eg report in ZR 26 Sept. 1947.

3 Creech Jones later complained of 'the scandal of the partition vote' (CJ 32/6/35).

primarily examine the arguments and actions of the Government's backbench critics. The two day debate in mid December 1947 gave a clear indication of the nature of the disagreements.

The main concern of pro Zionist speakers - who included Crossman, Silverman, Janner, Mikardo and Austin - was that the Government should do all in its power to assist the United Nations and to facilitate the work of the Commission appointed to co-operate in the implementation of the decision in the transitional period. For William Warbey, MP for Luton, the issue was 'a test case for the world, and for this country in particular, of whether or not the United Nations is going forward to be a genuine and effective world organisation, or whether it is going the same way as the League'.<sup>1</sup>

Warbey also called for a United Nations force - in which Britain should if necessary participate - to enforce its chosen solution. Though fewer members gave this proposal their support, it was to be a second area of disagreement between the Government and certain backbench critics. Crossman had earlier indicated a third: the need to prevent 'illegal arms' reaching Palestinian Arabs and to ensure that Britain's ally Transjordan remained 'really neutral'.<sup>2</sup>

These comments did not pass unchallenged from backbench colleagues - indeed the debate was chiefly remarkable for

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1 HC Deb Vol. 445 c.1252, 11 Dec. 1947.

2 Ibid., c.1242.



the disagreements and recriminations on the Labour benches. For Stokes, Reid and Philips Price the UN decision was violently partisan, and one which seriously discredited the organisation; Reid argued that 'purely on legal grounds, we are not in the least bound to carry out the advice of the UNO'.<sup>1</sup>

In being able to link their cause squarely with the authority and future of the United Nations pro Zionist MPs had an undoubted advantage, one which enabled them to enlist the support of several colleagues, like Sir Richard Acland, hitherto little interested in the question. In Parliament and in the press the critics continued to press their case<sup>2</sup> and their views found some support among Ministers.

On 5 February it was argued in Cabinet that failure to contribute to any international force which might be set up would be 'inconsistent with our professed support for the United Nations' and that the abstention of the British delegate might well be 'misconstrued'. But other Ministers argued strongly that the main burden would necessarily fall on Britain, and the Cabinet agreed that abstention was the only possible course.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore the Government continued to baulk at any gradual transfer of authority to the United Nations Commission, which was not permitted to enter Palestine before 1 May.

On 16 February, in answer to a question from Warbey, the Government again refused to be drawn on the question of

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1 Ibid., c.1305.

2 See esp. letter from Warbey and others in The Times 30 Dec. 1947.

3 CAB 128 5 Feb. 1948.

a United Nations force.<sup>1</sup> It was now clear that the passing of the legislation required to terminate the Mandate would be accompanied by considerable backbench criticism, and with it the possibility of a revolt in the division lobbies.

During February the Foreign Affairs Group of the PLP held several meetings on the subject, and passed two resolutions. The first expressed concern at the Government's refusal to allow the Commission to enter Palestine any earlier than a fortnight before the end of the Mandate, and disquiet at the export of arms to Arab States pledged to resist partition; the latter had continued to arouse the concern of backbenchers and also of certain Ministers.<sup>2</sup>

The Group had for some time been convinced of the need for a 'UN (Armed) Police Force', and it now felt that events in Palestine had conclusively proved their case. There was still time, it believed, for the creation of an ad hoc force, indeed this would be 'a decisive test for the whole future of the UNO', and should be supported by the Government.

The Foreign Affairs Group originated in the decision to establish, in October 1945, eleven backbench policy groups in order to allow 'initiative and individuality full scope'.<sup>3</sup> But, as Morrison's biographers comment, Bevin 'resented any

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<sup>1</sup> HC Deb. Vol. 447 c.824, 16 Feb. 1948.

<sup>2</sup> C.Johnson to E.Bevin, 24 Feb. 1948 (FO 371/68535 E2930). In Cabinet certain Ministers argued that 'it was unfair to enforce a rigid control over the import of arms for use by the Jews in view of the ease with which the Palestine Arabs could obtain arms', (CAB op.cit.).

<sup>3</sup> Rose, op.cit., p. 458.

interference from the Group, and was never on good terms with it'.<sup>1</sup> The first Chairman, Seymour Cocks, now an ardent pro Zionist, had resigned in disgust at the futility of his job. His successor was John Hynd; 'unlike Cocks he was an inconspicuous chairman, like Cocks he was politically impotent'.<sup>2</sup> But in this instance Bevin was forced to take some notice of the Group's resolutions, since they were expected to come before the full PLP.

There was now developing what the Manchester Guardian termed an 'Order Paper Battle on Palestine'. It also referred to a 'cold war' among Labour members.<sup>3</sup> A motion urging co-operation with the United Nations attracted some support, but was countered by an amendment expressing full support for the Government. When Crossman and five colleagues tabled a motion urging that military stores in Palestine be handed over to an international force, Price and Ernest Thurtle responded by inviting the Government to make it plain that conscripts would not be forced to serve in any such force, 'bearing in mind that the Government has repeatedly declared that it does not believe in the wisdom of that policy'.<sup>4</sup>

Forty of the Government's critics had already sent a

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1 Donoghue & Jones, op.cit., pp. 358-9.

2 Rose, op.cit., p. 465. In his introduction to S. Rolbant, Hierlings of the Desert: Transjordan and the Arab League (London, 1948) Cocks noted that he was 'a whole-hearted supporter of the cause of Israel to which, when I first entered the House of Commons, practically every member of the PLP was pledged, and rightly so', but see above pp. 82-3, 101.

3 Manchester Guardian 11 Mar. 1948.

4 Ibid., The Times 23 Feb. 1948.



telegram to Trygve Lie, Secretary General of the United Nations, again expressing the view that Palestine was a test case for the organisation. The Security Council should take all steps to deal with threatened breaches of the peace. 'We on our part are urging the British Government to carry out obligation laid upon it by the General Assembly and also to terminate all military assistance to the Arab States'.<sup>1</sup>

When the PLP met on 10 March in special session, immediately before the second reading of the Palestine Bill, the Government's critics were resoundingly defeated. In a meeting 'full of good argument on both sides' Creech Jones defended the Government's policy which was approved by 97 votes to 21. The two resolutions from the Foreign Affairs Group were then discussed, and they too fell, though the second, suggesting an ad hoc UN force, received 40 votes.<sup>2</sup>

But the critics were not the least deterred from continuing their campaign in the House. Sir Richard Acland felt that the Government was undermining the authority of international law and Benn Levy condemned the Government's attitude to the UN Commission and the supply of arms to Arab countries. Warbey, now a leading spokesman for the dissidents, then moved a reasoned amendment, which declined to give the bill a second reading on the grounds that

'in making provision with respect to the termination of His Majesty's jurisdiction in Palestine, (the bill) fails to make provision for the independence of Jewish and Arab States in Palestine as provided by the United Nations decision, for the orderly

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1 Ibid., 28 Feb. 1948. One Liberal MP also signed the telegram.

2 Manchester Guardian op.cit., The Times 11 Mar. 1948. The voting was 96/30 and 90/40.

transfer of such jurisdiction to the United Nations Commission, or for consequential and connected matter'.<sup>1</sup>

With the Conservatives happy to abstain, the amendment was defeated by 240 votes to 30. The result of the division, The Times believed, 'was very nearly in accordance with the Government's estimate of the strength of the internal opposition'.<sup>2</sup>

The critics continued their efforts during the committee stage, to no greater effect. An amendment to ensure jurisdiction for Palestine was transferred to the United Nations was negatived by 114 votes to 17, and a similar amendment dealing with property transfers fell by 148 votes to 12.<sup>3</sup>

In all thirty seven Labour backbenchers had voted, on one or more occasions, against the Government. The list of those who opposed the Government, and of those who signed the telegram to Trygve Lie, indicates the extent to which the revolt was an alliance of Jewish and left wing backbench MPs. Thirteen Jews - of a backbench total of twenty five - had voted for the second reading amendment, and Berrington calculates that of the 30 who entered the lobby twelve were drawn from what he terms the 'Left or Ultra Left' and twelve from the 'Central Left'.<sup>4</sup>

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1 HC Deb. Vol. 448 c.1363-6, 10 Mar. 1948. This was a combination of two motions tabled earlier, see Daily Herald 10 Mar. 1948.

2 The Times 11 Mar. 1948.

3 HC Deb. Vol. 448 c.2499-500, 2935-8, 19 & 23 Mar. 1948. There were possibly a number of Labour abstentions. Two Conservative amendments were defeated: no Labour backbenchers cross voted.

4 H.Berrington, Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons 1945-1955 (Oxford, 1973) pp. 70-1.

It has also been noted that the revolt was dominated by university educated MPs first elected in 1945.<sup>1</sup> The fact that few, if any, were in receipt of union sponsorship serves as a reminder that the critics, for all their sound and fury, remained a small minority opposed both by long standing Arab sympathisers but also by the bulk of orthodox MPs whose sympathies primarily lay with the sufferings of British troops in Palestine and with the tribulations of Ernest Bevin and his colleagues. The critics had been roundly defeated in the party meeting - the continuation of their campaign provoked much anger - and for the majority of MPs even the call for support for the United Nations (especially if this necessitated the use of British troops) did not outweigh their natural loyalty to the Government. As Harold Roberts had earlier commented 'it would take a great deal to goad me into severe criticism of the Government' on the question of Palestine.<sup>2</sup> For Roberts and most of his colleagues the point had not yet been reached.

Within the NEC there was similarly no desire to add further to the Government's difficulties. On 23 March Laski had circulated a note warning of the dangers of anti Jewish pogroms in the Middle East and urging 'financial magnanimity' and a 'determined moral leadership for peace' through co-operation with the United Nations. The only result was to prompt the NCL - with the approval of Bevin -

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1 R.J.Jackson, Rebels and Whips (London, 1968) p. 71.

2 HC Deb. Vol. 445 c.1297, 11 Dec. 1947.



to issue a statement reiterating the Government's policy and urging upon both sides the need for restraint and joint consultations.<sup>1</sup>

On 12 March Tribune noted that the reaction of most party members was now to heave a sigh of relief that the party's difficulties on this question seemed nearing an end; a more appropriate reaction, the paper suggested, was one of shame in 'the striking betrayal of our friends'. This was certainly the view of their friends in Poale Zion even if the Zionists readily acknowledged the help of

'those members of the PLP and of the Labour movement...who have remained firm to their Socialist principles and to the pledge of the Party on the Palestine question despite the Government's breach of faith with the Jewish people'.<sup>2</sup>

A number of MPs replied in kind by sending messages of support to Poale Zion and indeed Attlee had to step in to dissuade Bevan from doing likewise.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand there remained dissatisfaction in Zionist circles that not all Jewish MPs in the Labour Party had actively opposed the Government's policy, and that Jewish Ministers felt able to remain in the Government; when Lord Nathan left the Government in May 1947 it was widely but quite erroneously believed that he had resigned as a protest.<sup>4</sup> Although Labour MPs continued to speak at Poale Zion rallies and

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1 Int Sub 16 Mar. 1948, NEC 23 Mar. 1948, LPACR 1948, p. 3. Bevin suggested the addition of the words 'and urge both sides to stop fighting' (FO 371/68503 E4509).

2 Resolution adopted at 1948 conference, ZR 12 Mar. 1948.

3 Correspondence in FO 371/68630 E2884. Attlee had earlier prohibited unauthorised Ministerial statements on Palestine.

4 Hyde, op.cit., p. 221.

meetings, the only significant opportunity for the Zionists to draw attention to their cause came at the Labour Party Conference.

Though Poale Zion's resolution had now been overtaken by events and was withdrawn, with the State of Israel only five days old Rosette made a notable contribution. 'I have waited', he said, 'for two thousand years to make this speech'.<sup>1</sup> The choice of Herbert Morrison to reply prompted some speculation that efforts had been made to avoid 'another Bevin indiscretion'.<sup>2</sup> Certainly Morrison made a conciliatory speech, regarding delegates with his pre war experiences in Palestine, and promising that 'if our Government can do anything...to terminate that unhappy bloodshed...you can be sure that Ministers will take every opportunity to do so'.<sup>3</sup>

Of Britain's Palestine policy in the ensuing months. one authority has written

'the unintentioned effect...(was) to increase Israeli territory by about a third, to expose the military weakness and political instability of the Arab League, and to secure for HMG the distrust and suspicion of Israel...and the bitter rancour of the Arab States which they had failed effectively to assist'.<sup>4</sup>

Bevin's general policy was primarily inspired by the wish to minimise the harm done by the conflict in Palestine to Britain's relations with the Arab States; critics

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1 LPACR 1948, p. 162.

2 Ian Mikardo in Tribune 28 May 1948.

3 LPACR 1948, p. 164.

4 J.Marlowe, The Seat of Pilate: An Account of the Palestine Mandate (London, 1959) p. 262.

within the Labour Party tended to concentrate on two aspects of this policy - British aid to the Arab combatants and the failure to recognise the State of Israel.

Rosette had complained that the Transjordanian Arab Legion 'which is now attacking Socialist settlements, is officered and commanded by Britons and subsidised by the British Government. The British officers should be withdrawn immediately and the subsidy discontinued'.<sup>1</sup> Warbey had already criticised the quantity of British arms that Palestinian Arabs had managed to acquire<sup>2</sup> and now Britain's involvement with the Arab legion was the target of sustained criticism. The issue had been raised by Warbey and Lyall Wilkes in their pamphlet Palestine...The Stark Facts and the Way Out,<sup>3</sup> and in a widely quoted letter to The Times Wilkes complained that

'every tank and aeroplane now being used by the Arabs has been supplied by the United Kingdom and the British Air Mission is still functioning in Iraq; British missions are now working, training and re-equipping the Arab armies in Saudi Arabia and Iraq; the Arab Legion (is) now subsidised by us with £2 million a year and is commanded by 38 British officers'.<sup>4</sup>

In Parliament Cocks pressed for the return of all war material supplied to Transjordan.<sup>5</sup> When, facing similar

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1 LPACR 1948, p. 162, see also Histadrut telegram in ZR 28 May 1948.

2 Debate on the Adjournment, HC Deb. Vol. 448 c.168-78, 1 Mar. 1948.

3 W.Warbey and L.Wilkes, Palestine...The Stark Facts and the Way Out (London, 1948). The pamphlet, 'A Tract for Labour MPs and Others', had also urged a swift evacuation and support for the United Nations.

4 The Times 25 May 1949.

5 HC Deb. Vol. 450 c.204-5, 27 Apr. 1948.



criticism from Janner and Levy Bevin, in a typical indiscretion, remarked that 'the Arabs are not in this House' he provoked a further torrent of abuse.<sup>1</sup> But though the Foreign Affairs Group also urged the Foreign Secretary to seek to restrain the Arab Legion<sup>2</sup> Bevin was not without supporters. Certain MPs, in particular Philips Price, were quick to meet Zionist complaints with counter allegations of their own, and Bevin could on occasion appear to hold the middle ground between rival extremists: 'pay your money and take your choice', he commented at one stage.<sup>3</sup>

Though the question generated much ill will within the PLP nothing Bevin's critics could say or do had any effect on the Government's policy. But the second major issue during this period - the failure of Britain to give recognition to Israel - was to culminate in a humiliating and mishandled seeming volte face by the Government.

The United States, in 'a final coup de grâce to the British'<sup>4</sup> had extended de facto recognition on 14 May. Rosette of Poale Zion, and several local Labour Parties, urged the British Government to follow suit.<sup>5</sup> But when the Cabinet met on 27 May, though it was pointed out that considerable embarrassment might be caused if, as seemed

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1 Ibid., c.376, 28 Apr. 1948. For example see Austin's interjection: 'is there any truth in the report that Glubb Pasha and Bevin Pasha are shortly to exchange jobs?', ibid., c.672, 31 Mar. 1948.

2 Details in FO 371/68562 E7655.

3 HC Deb. Vol. 451 c.188, 26 May 1948.

4 H.Sachar, Europe Leaves the Middle East, 1936 - 1954 (London, 1974) p. 526.

5 LPACR op.cit., eg resolution from Hackney North in FO 371/68666 E7686.

likely, many Commonwealth Governments granted recognition, Bevin made it clear that he did not intend to do likewise 'at any rate until the picture had become more settled'.<sup>1</sup>

Bevin continued to oppose recognition during the following months on the grounds that to do so would jeopardise the efforts of the United Nations to negotiate a military truce and a lasting settlement. This was certainly not the view of his critics in Parliament, who throughout the summer urged Bevin, as they saw it, to accept reality by extending recognition and by seeking to reduce Arab hostility to play a positive role in the search for a permanent peace. On 10 June Harold Lever argued in a debate on the adjournment that

'recognition of the State of Israel is necessary, both in the interests of this country and in the interests of peace. It is perfectly clear that peace in Palestine at the end of the truce is possible only on the basis of recognition...it was the courage and firmness of the Jewish people in Palestine that saved the situation and made possible again a United Nations solution of the whole problem. Since then the State of Israel has been recognised by half the world. How much longer has Britain to lag behind?'.<sup>2</sup>

By September Harold Laski, appealing 'as a Socialist to Socialist Ministers' was arguing that 'the key to peace lies in Downing Street'. Only the recognition of Israel, he believed, could prevent 'the re-birth of Nazism' in the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> But if many agreed with Laski that the

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1 CAB 128, 27 May 1948.

2 HC Deb. Vol. 451 c.2660, 4, 10 June 1949. Mayhew has described answering Lever in a near deserted House faced by a 'wide awake, well informed, passionate, attentive and aggressive...group of 20 or 30 pro Israeli members', Mayhew & Adams, op.cit., p. 16.

3 ZR 3 Sept. 1948.

success of Israel in defeating the combined Arab armies was a heroic triumph for the progressive forces in the Middle East, for others recognition would only give sanction to military conquest. The most bitter reaction was that of Norman Smith, who believed that 'the State of Israel is obnoxious and odious to most working men' and, answering a plea for recognition from Woodrow Wyatt, argued in The Times that

'the new State was conceived in violence and born in crime...we cannot forget that justice has never overtaken the criminals who bloodily hanged two British sergeants...Wyatt's pragmatistical arguments are odious to many of his parliamentary colleagues'.<sup>1</sup>

But Bevin's Palestine policy was fast approaching its nadir. In December Israeli troops advanced deep into Egyptian territory. On 29 December the Security Council ordered an immediate cease fire; Britain now issued an ultimatum to the Israeli Government and threatened to employ her forces in accordance with the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, and the Defence Committee of the Cabinet agreed to send British troops to the Transjordanian port of Aqaba. On 7 January 1949 came what was for many the final manifestation of the failure of Bevin's policy. Four British fighter aircraft flying over the Israeli frontier were shot down by the nascent Israeli air force.

In the British press criticism of the Government's handling of the crisis now mounted rapidly. Within the Labour Party there were several potentially serious repercussions. Early in December certain Labour MPs had tabled a motion calling for the recognition of Israel<sup>2</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> HC Deb. Vol. 459, c.9, 6 Nov. 1948, The Times 22 Oct. 1948.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 3 Dec. 1948.



on 17 January dissident backbenchers met to discuss their tactics. It seemed clear that the meeting of the PLP the following day would be the scene of a major assault on the Government's policy.<sup>1</sup> Should the critics continue their efforts in the Commons the Government might face a serious challenge, for Churchill had given notice that his party would, if necessary, enter the division lobbies in opposition to the Government's Palestine policy.

There was also disquiet within the Government. Attlee received notice that various Junior Ministers were now deeply concerned at the course of events, and were seeking an urgent meeting.<sup>2</sup> Several Cabinet members including Cripps, were convinced of the need for a change of course. Bevan contemplated resignation; Hugh Dalton, though he evidently warned Bevan against such a step<sup>3</sup> and wrote to Attlee warning him of the danger, also gave notice that he would press in Cabinet for a change in policy without which, he was now convinced, 'we shall run into very heavy trouble soon in Parliament and outside'.<sup>4</sup>

'Blaming the Jews', Dalton admitted, was 'very easy, very natural and very legitimate'. He also gave vent to an all embracing bitterness now felt by many Ministers, sympathising with Bevin in

'the difficulties which the conceited, faithless Jews, despicable and gutless Egyptians, untrustworthy British advisers and long international delays, hesitations and evasions of responsibility have placed him'.

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1 Ibid., 18 Jan. 1949.

2 A.Blenkinsop to C.Attlee, 16 Jan. 1949 (Attlee Papers), Blenkinsop was Parliamentary Secretary at Bevan's Ministry of Health.

3 M.Foot, Aneurau Bevan Vol. II 1945 - 1960 (London, 1973) p. 90.

4 H.Dalton to C.Attlee, 13 Jan. 1949 (Dalton Papers 9/7).

But, he argued, 'the Jews have beaten the Arabs - contrary to all 'expert' advice we got, both military and diplomatic - and it is no good refusing to face the consequences of this'. There was a real danger of another Chanak crisis, when Lloyd George fell 'never to rise again'.

Attlee was not best pleased. In a terse reply, in which he placed full responsibility for the débâcle on the shoulders of President Truman, he pointed out certain 'omissions' in Dalton's analysis which was, he believed, an invitation 'to throw over not only the Arabs, but also the UNO'.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless following a long Cabinet discussion on 17 January Dalton noted in his diary 'we greatly pushed EB towards recognition'.<sup>2</sup> The meeting was dominated by Bevan. In the course of a long and indignant outburst he reminded his colleagues of his long held doubts about relying on the 'unstable and reactionary Governments of Arab States'. Events had proved that British policy should from the first have been based on the friendship of the Jews. Furthermore, he argued, the policy persuaded had been inconsistent 'with the spirit, if not the letter' of traditional party policy. De facto recognition could no longer be withheld.<sup>3</sup>

His comment on party policy touched a nerve, and several colleagues hurried to contradict him. Government policy had in fact been consistent with the party's support

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1 C.Attlee to H.Dalton, 14 Jan. 1949 (ibid).

2 Dalton Diaries 17 Jan. 1949.

3 CAB 128, 17 Jan. 1949.

for a National Home. The truth was that 'policy must take into account the change in circumstances since the war, and also the new demands of the Zionists for the recognition of a separate Jewish State'. Despite this reservation Bevin was instructed to give his policy a 'new impulse' by according de facto recognition. To give Bevin time efforts were to be made to postpone Parliamentary discussion, but the Cabinet hoped that an announcement could be made before any debate 'otherwise the impression might be created that the Government had changed their policy in response to Parliamentary pressure'.

The following day, in answer to a Private Notice Question from Churchill, Bevin addressed the House. There had been speculation that his statement would precipitate a Conservative Vote of Censure and a major revolt by Labour backbenchers, but in the event Bevin, 'with his back to the wall and highly suspicious of the bricks',<sup>1</sup> was at his most conciliatory and included a promise that Jews of military age would be released from the Cyprus camps. The House, 'sensibly but uneasily', agreed to a one week delay before debating the subject, though Labour MPs gave Arthur Henderson, Secretary of State for Air, a rough time when he announced details of the aircraft losses; Henderson's own performance was particularly inept.<sup>2</sup>

The peak of the crisis seemed to have passed. The Zionist Review noted that 'the anti Bevin storm is on the decline', which it ascribed to party loyalty, fears among

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1 J.P.W.Mallalieu in Tribune 21 Jan. 1949, HC Deb. Vol. 460 c. 35-42, 18 Jan. 1949.

2 Ibid., c.164-84 Henderson was the son of the former party leader.



the critics that Bevin's resignation might lead to an even less agreeable Foreign Secretary and, above all, to an anticipated change in policy. Most Cabinet Ministers, the paper believed, now favoured recognition of Israel.<sup>1</sup>

Yet no sooner had the crisis successfully been cooled than Bevin bade fair to bring it to the boil again. He had earlier gained Cabinet support for an initiative designed to secure the recognition of Transjordan by the United States and to enable him to announce that - finally - a common understanding on Middle Eastern policy had been reached. On 24 January he reported his failure and urged that 'in the circumstances (he) thought it would be a serious mistake... to proceed forthwith to accord recognition to the Government of Israel'.<sup>2</sup> He therefore proposed to announce to Parliament simply that consultations were taking place.

At least one Minister was outraged at the decision. Gaitskell recorded Bevan's fury that the Foreign Secretary, as Bevan saw it, was now seeking to evade the decision of the Cabinet to recognise Israel. At a dinner held by Cripps, 'Nye came out quite openly against Bevin and seemed to be anxious to start an intrigue to get rid of him. While nobody else joined in, I think most of us felt fairly critical'.<sup>3</sup> Yet it was certainly an indication of the continued authority of Bevin and Attlee that the Foreign Secretary's recommendation was agreed to, despite the

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1 ZR 21 Jan. 1949.

2 CAB 128, 24 Jan. 1949.

3 P. Williams, Hugh Gaitskell: A Political Biography (London, 1979) p. 165.

hostility or unease of most senior colleagues who, in their acquiescence, had ensured that a Parliamentary crisis could not now be avoided.

On 18 January the International Sub Committee had recommended the NEC to send a deputation to Bevin 'for information on the Palestine situation', and on the morning of the debate in Parliament the NEC, showing their concern at the course of events, instructed Griffiths, the Chairman, to intervene if necessary.<sup>1</sup> The PLP also met prior to the debate. At the previous meeting discussion had been deferred, but now Bevin was wholly unsuccessful in, as The Times put it, persuading 'those Labour members who are opposed to him on this issue to change their point of view.'<sup>2</sup>

J.P.W.Mallalieu later described Bevin's speech:

'No one expected Bevin to give an impressive Parliamentary performance, and for the most part we got the usual chunks of undigested and indigestible manuscript. However, we could have hoped that the speech would contain some suggestion that a policy which had alienated Soviet Russia and the United States, both Jew and Arab, needed a little readjustment. That hope was not fulfilled, and the restiveness in the Chamber showed the Whips that matters were going badly.'<sup>3</sup>

Though Crawley, Harrison and Norman Smith (who again denounced Zionism as 'an inherently wrong thing', repugnant to working class Englishmen and espoused only by 'certain fanatical Jews')<sup>4</sup> gave Bevin some support, the two effective

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1 Int Sub 18 Jan. 1949, NEC 26 Jan. 1949.

2 The Times 27 Jan. 1949.

3 Tribune 27 Jan. 1949.

4 HC Deb. Vol. 460 c.947, 26 Jan. 1949.

speeches were delivered by Churchill and Crossman. For the former, the 'astonishing mishandling' of the problem meant that, for the first time, it was the duty of his party to oppose the Government in the division lobbies.<sup>1</sup> His pro Zionist sentiments were certainly not those of the majority of his supporters, but his colleagues now perceived the opportunity severely to embarrass, and perhaps to defeat, the Labour Government.

Crossman then made possibly the best speech of his career, 'heavily biased in favour of the Jews, almost violently abusive of Bevin, yet pitched on an emotional and moral note which rang clean through prejudice and distrust into the secret heart of the Labour movement'.<sup>2</sup> Even for his critic Aidan Crawley, it was 'one of the most moving and brilliant pieces of partisan advocacy I have ever listened to'.<sup>3</sup>

Crossman had made it clear that he could not support the Government when the House divided. Attlee, who wound up the debate, notably failed to dissuade those whose loyalty was also in doubt. In an ill tempered speech he sought to defend his Foreign Secretary's reputation, and made it clear that he felt the coming division was simply an opportunistic manoeuvre by the Conservative Party.

The Conservatives had prepared for the debate by sending out a three line whip; the Government whip,

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1 Ibid., c.1001.

2 Tribune op.cit.

3 HC Deb. op.cit., c.1014. Silverman and Segal also made brief contributions.



following the usual practice for an adjournment debate, was only two line. When the House divided only 283 Labour MPs supported the Government, whose majority of 90 was one of the lowest it had secured on a major issue of policy. Only one backbench Jew (J.Diamond) voted with the Government; one, Dr. Segal<sup>1</sup> voted with the Conservatives. But at least 50 backbenchers ostentatiously abstained, and many others who supported the Government did so with reluctance, having already written to Attlee to express their disquiet.<sup>2</sup>

Gaitskell believed that the fall of the Government had been at serious risk,<sup>3</sup> and The Times reported that 'most of those who backed Mr. Bevin in the lobby seemed relieved to know that the majority had not been even smaller'.<sup>4</sup> Relief was followed by recrimination. Thomas Hobson, MP for Wembley North, wrote to Attlee to convey the 'deep resentment' of many of his trade union colleagues. The critics, he felt, had put Zionism before Socialism, and had shown a contemptuous disregard for party loyalty in an attempt to enforce a minority viewpoint.<sup>5</sup> For Attlee such feelings were 'thoroughly justified'. But there could be no question of disciplining the large number of rebels; the

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1 Segal had not been one of the more prominent critics, though in the course of 1948 he had several disagreements with Bevin on the subject of the Cyprus refugees, see FO 371/68525 E12804, 68563 E7746, 68571 E9351.

2 HC Deb. op.cit., c.1059-64, Jackson, op.cit., p. 71.

3 P.Williams, op.cit.

4 The Times 27 Jan. 1949.

5 T.Hobson to C.Attlee, 27 Jan. 1949 (Attlee Papers).

Manchester Guardian noted that 'such an action might offend a substantial body of Labour supporters'.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand the backbench revolt quickly subsided, 'leaving only the crushed hopes of some MPs who had predicted that <sup>the</sup> King would ask Morrison or Cripps to form a Labour Government with Lord Mountbatten as Foreign Secretary'.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless for the Government the episode had been a major humiliation; one reason for the collapse of the backbench rebellion was the Government's immediate retreat. On 30 January de facto recognition was granted to Israel;<sup>3</sup> on 4 February Tribune noted that this had 'already changed the atmosphere to a remarkable extent'. But the Government had thus fallen into the very trap it had sought to avoid, of seeming to give way because of political and parliamentary pressure. The sorry episode was an appropriate end to the Labour Government's unhappy handling of the Palestine problem.

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1 Jackson, op.cit., p. 402.

2 Rose, op.cit., p. 402.

3 De jure recognition was given in April 1950.

### Conclusion

The history of the Labour Party and the question of Palestine before 1945 is a history of a growing attachment to the cause of Zionism. Laqueur has noted that 'being a latecomer among national movements, Zionism was very much a movement in a hurry, forever racing against time'.<sup>1</sup> But it was the Zionists' good fortune that their breakthrough into public and political acceptability came at a time when the Labour Party was beginning to assume the posture of a major political party and to expand its interests beyond those of a small working class pressure group.

The official attitude of the Labour Party was shaped in the immediate post war years. Zionism had gained widespread approval in liberal circles, and moderate Socialists throughout Europe were now revising their earlier hostility to Jewish nationalism. For Labour politicians, recoiling from the sufferings inflicted upon European Jews during and immediately after the First World War, Zionist aims now seemed comparable to their own. As Wedgwood commented 'Zionism is now doing for the Jews what the Labour Party seeks to do for the British working class - creating self confidence and corporate self respect'.<sup>2</sup>

In seeking to gain the public approval of moderate British Socialists left wing Zionists were primarily faced, not at this stage by the assertion that Arab rights were in jeopardy, but by the ideological analysis which portrayed

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1 Laqueur, op.cit., p. 593.

2 Wedgwood, 'Seventh Dominion', op.cit., p. 123.



their movement as misguided distraction from the common Socialist struggle. This was met by the argument that, whilst bourgeois Zionism would create capitalist exploitation in Palestine, the real alternative was Socialist Zionism, whose adherents had as their aim not only the ending of anti semitism and persecution in Europe but also the successful prosecution of the class struggle in Palestine, and who therefore stood shoulder to shoulder with Socialists of all nations, and fully deserved their support. This view gained the acceptance of moderate European Socialists - 'Palestine', as represented by Labour Zionists, taking its place within the LSI - successfully overcame the doubts which had existed within the British ILP, and secured institutional recognition by the affiliation of Poale Zion to the Labour Party.

Though the Labour Zionist analysis of the question of Palestine gave British Socialists the tools with which to defend their support for Zionism, personal and emotional factors were the key to the Labour Party's attachment to the Zionist cause. For many party members a memory of the plight of Jewish refugees arriving in England and a knowledge of the poverty and alienation of large sections of the Jewish community complimented their intellectual approval of Zionism. For some the potent references of the 'New Jerusalem' to be built in Palestine struck a religious chord and matched their vision of the Socialist transformation to be wrought in Britain. Though Socialist Zionists had gained only limited support within the Jewish working classes they won the personal friendships of many

Labour politicians and their descriptions of the pioneering activities of Labour Zionists in Palestine were a decisive factor in the winning of interest and approval.

During the 1930s the visits of Labour politicians to Palestine, and the glowing reports they brought back of Jewish work and of Jewish Labour organisations, served both to dispel any lingering ill will resulting from the actions of the Second Labour Government, and to lay the foundations for the remarkable closeness which existed between Labour Party politicians and Labour Zionist leaders during the decade. Renewed Jewish persecution in Europe, the rise of Fascism at home and abroad, and even the Arab rebellion in Palestine, all had the effect of increasing popular support for the Zionist cause, which Labour Zionists made every effort effectively to mobilise, whilst Government policies enabled the Labour Party to assume the role of the defender of the Zionist - and indeed of the Jewish - cause. Despite the propagandising of Arab spokesmen no comparable developments took place to increase sympathy or understanding for the cause of the Palestine Arabs.

It is true that during this period the left wing analysis of Palestine, having since 1920 found little support outside the Communist Party, was now to be heard once again within the Labour Party. But it gained few converts - even the links of the ILP were with minor Zionist parties - and was, in fact, no more acceptable to Palestinian nationalists than to most Labour Zionists. The

only people to argue the 'Arab case' within the party in the way in which Arab spokesmen wished it to be argued<sup>1</sup> were the small disparate group of - predominantly right wing - critics in the Imperial Advisory Committee and the Parliamentary Party.

Labour Party leaders, on the other hand, and the majority of members closely involved in policy making, either ignored or disparaged the idea that natural justice or a belief in the self determination of subject peoples might lead to support for an independent Arab dominated Palestine or for restrictions on Jewish immigration and colonisation. Though, they agreed, the Arab standard of living was deplorably low, the solution lay in the abjuring by the Arab working classes of their reactionary feudal leaders and in their co-operation with Jewish Labour organisations which, it was argued, were doing everything possible to assist Arab workers and promote the Solidarity of Labour.

It was therefore almost inevitable that, as even Tribune later guardedly admitted, 'the Labour Party before 1945 underestimated Arab nationalism',<sup>2</sup> and wholly failed to appreciate that 'the essential nature of the Arab Jewish conflict' was of two contending political movements, on what was, from the start, 'a collision course'.<sup>3</sup> This basic misunderstanding lay at the heart of Labour Party attitudes, shaped certain party reactions - for instance towards

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1 Susan Lawrence, for example, believed that the 'real' Arab case was the demand for greater public spending on welfare services.

2 Tribune 7 Mar. 1947.

3 B.Wasserstein, The British in Palestine: The Mandatory Government and the Arab-Jewish Conflict 1917 - 1929 (London, 1978) pp. 7,236.



partition in the 1930s - underlay most policy statements, and explains something of the bitterness and confusion within both Government and Party after 1945.

In fact Labour Party views on Arab nationalism and the conflict in Palestine were shaped primarily by Labour Zionists. Through personal contacts, in resolutions, declarations and political surveys submitted to the party, in comments - often requested by Labour Party officials - on Arab submissions, assurances were repeatedly made that only through full support for the Palestine Jewish Labour movement<sup>1</sup> and opposition to reactionary Arab political demands could a peaceful settlement to the Palestine problem be achieved.

Though many Zionists similarly ignored and misunderstood the basic conflict of interests in Palestine several Labour Zionist leaders had no illusions. But though, for instance, Arlosoroff commented in 1921 that 'an Arab movement...really exists' and Ben Gurion warned his colleagues that 'it is possible to resolve the conflict between Jewish and Arab interests only by sophistry'<sup>2</sup> they could not afford to disillusion their Labour Party friends, lest any resulting reappraisal prove unfavourable to their political aims. Thus such comments as that of Morrison that 'no enduring divergence of interest exists between the Jewish and Arab population in Palestine'<sup>3</sup> were published

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1 Party officials often tacitly appeared to accept the view that the Histadrut spoke for all workers, both Jewish and Arab, in Palestine.

2 Caplan, op.cit., pp. 187,75.

3 From Morrison's speech to the 1930 Annual Conference, quoted in Levenberg & Podro (eds), op.cit., p. 20.

with approval. But to encourage so facile an interpretation was to invite the disillusion and recrimination of Labour Ministers when the party took office.

The influence of Labour Zionists can be most clearly observed in the processes of policy making. It was here that their uniquely intimate links with the Labour Party bore specific fruit. On the one hand Poale Zion, the only affiliated group seeking to influence a specific issue of foreign policy, was able to submit resolutions to the Annual Conference and to gain the attention of the NEC, whilst the institutional links of Mapai and the Histadrut ensured that complaints and recommendations were received, in marked contrast to those from Arab organisations, with much sympathy. This was made the more certain by the friendships that existed with numerous NEC members, and with Middleton and Gillies. These personal links also brought specific advantages, including the chance to comment on certain Arab communications, advance warning of Arab interventions and, on several occasions, of unfavourable recommendations submitted by the Imperial Advisory Committee.

Though it is unlikely that direct Zionist intervention significantly influenced the drafting of Webb's first tentative declaration, from thenceforth there was scarcely a resolution or statement of policy which was not initiated or shaped by Labour Zionists. Before 1945 the majority of successful Annual Conference resolutions had either been submitted by Poale Zion or had been drafted by the NEC after consultation with Labour Zionists. In 1930 the concern of

the NEC and of party officials at the possible electoral repercussions of the Government's policy was brought to a head by Poale Zion pressure; Labour Zionists also largely determined many Labour reactions to issues in the 1930s, in particular towards the proposed Legislative Council and the plan to partition Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

If during the Second World War the Labour Party drew back from including in official statements the demand that Palestine become a Jewish State, several prominent party members, most noticeable Hugh Dalton, showed no such hesitation. Indeed it was perhaps the public declarations of party leaders which gave the Zionists most encouragement, and made subsequent allegations of betrayal almost impossible to refute.

It is, however, certainly true that Zionists - despite assurances to the contrary - were excluded from the policy process which brought forth the Palestine paragraph contained in The International Post War Settlement. It proved essentially to be the work of one man, and the plethora of meetings belie the extent to which Dalton's original draft remained fundamentally unaltered and unchallenged. With the support of Harold Laski he could easily brush aside suggestions - that the Mandate be mentioned or that a separate Committee be formed - of which he disapproved. Impatient of delay or prolonged discussion, Dalton hustled his post war policy through the party machine, and with it his paragraph on Palestine.

Though Dalton's policy, careless and idiosyncratic as it

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<sup>1</sup> Though, from the Zionists' point of view, the party sometimes overreacted,



was, was undoubtably an accurate reflection of the strength of pro Zionist sentiment within the party it was not, despite the call for free immigration, the declaration the Zionists had hoped for. But still less did it please the small group of Arab sympathisers or the experts of the Imperial Advisory Committee. The influence of the Committee in the years between 1930 and 1945 had contrasted most unfavourably with that of the Labour Zionists; their recommendations, which might at least have served to widen the scope of the debate within the party and forced a greater consideration of the issues involved, had been almost invariably ignored by the pro Zionist NEC, and their belated intervention in the summer of 1944 was predictably ineffective.

For much of the Mandate period Labour politicians did not hold office. The party played a minor part in encouraging the Government to accept the Mandate and to honour the Balfour Declaration, and in opposing subsequent criticism from within the Conservative Party. During the 1930s, as successive Governments searched for an acceptable solution to the problem of Palestine, the Labour Party had the satisfaction of helping to defeat certain specific proposals. But when the Government embarked upon the course which was to lead to the 1939 White Paper, the party was in practice powerless to assist its Zionist friends beyond promising that a Labour Government would reverse the policy and honour its pro Zionist pledges; this was reaffirmed and embellished during the war.

The policies that were actually pursued by the 1945 Labour Government are well known; so too is the reaction

of disillusioned Zionists. But the mutual misunderstandings and recriminations that ensued, particularly within the Labour Party, might in part have been avoided if, firstly, some of the lessons of 1930 had been properly understood and, secondly, if steps had been taken to bridge the gulf that had grown between party expectations and the attitudes, prompted by their wartime experiences, of certain Labour Ministers.

The Second Labour Government's handling of the problem of Palestine could give the party little satisfaction. Having stumbled into a political crisis largely of their own making a combination of the fear of American pressure, parliamentary uncertainty, and a strikingly inopportune by election provoked a humiliating retreat. Although the party had expressed its support for Zionism for more than a decade the shallowness of its leaders commitment and understanding of the issues involved could be gauged by the speed in which opinions changed when faced with the immediate problem.

The sudden need to deal with a crisis in Palestine as a Government, and squarely to face the dual obligations of the Mandate came as a profound shock. Passfield, whom his nephew had described in September 1939 as 'sympathetic' seemed the following month to be 'a tired man and particularly apathetic to Zionism'.<sup>1</sup> Though his Under Secretary, Drummond Shiels, evidently admitted to Weizmann in March 1930 that 'he didn't see why one shouldn't really make

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<sup>1</sup> Meinertzhagen, op.cit., p. 140.

Palestine a National Home for the Jews and tell it frankly to the Arabs'<sup>1</sup> by June he was expressing his anger at the Zionists' activities and their influence on Members of Parliament.<sup>2</sup> For MacDonald the Palestine issue soon became the source of irritation and a cause of his mounting pessimism.

The influence brought to bear from within the Labour Party was overwhelmingly hostile to the Government's policy, and the party's traditional support for Zionism rapidly became a further source of embarrassment to the Government. Though party officials strove to mollify Zionist opinion and shared something of Ministers' irritation with Zionist methods and motives, by emphasising party political considerations and helping to channel party discontent they played a part in inducing the Government to change course.

But as the crisis subsided there was little effort within the party to analyse the reasons for the Government's alarming performance, other than a tendency to blame the Civil Service and the Palestine Administration. Though the débâcle of 1931 did provoke some reappraisal of the functioning of the party and its leaders, it also became tempting to ascribe any mistake and failure of the Government to those leaders - MacDonald, Snowden, Thomas - now discredited and banished from the party. This reaction affected the Palestine issue: MacDonald and Passfield had betrayed first the Jews and then the party. In both cases

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1 Flapan, op.cit., p. 140.

2 Rose, op.cit., p. 13. Gupta, (op.cit., p. 191) notes that 'Shiels (was) always sensitive to backbench Labour opinion...'.



it was left to Henderson to pick up the pieces.<sup>1</sup>

If for the Arabs events seemed to show that the Zionists could determine a Labour Government's policy as easily as it could manipulate party sympathies, within the Labour Party the belief quickly developed that next time, with new leaders and in changed circumstances, things would be different, and the Government would not stray from the chosen path. The crisis provoked neither an understanding of the fundamental cause of the conflict in Palestine nor an appreciation of the various considerations which would necessarily influence a future Labour Government. Labour Zionists for their part soon returned to praising the party as the bulwark of Zionist aspirations and as the surest friends of Jewish development in Palestine. By common consent the upheavals of the past were forgotten and a measure of mutual self deception served only to store up trouble for the future.

The Second World War began with the Labour Party in almost complete opposition to the White Paper policy; in the wake of the Jewish massacres and the ungenerous treatment of Jewish refugees to consider restrictions on immigration into Palestine now for many became unthinkable and immoral. Feelings of frustrated anger, and perhaps shared guilt, brought a determination that a post war Labour Government would make amends. This determination

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<sup>1</sup> More recently this argument has been turned on its head: 'As for MacDonald, his conniving with the Zionists preceded his conniving with the leaders of the Tory and Liberal parties, and the betrayal of Sidney Webb preceded the betrayal of the Labour Party', D. Watkins, Labour and Palestine (Labour Middle East Council, London 1975) p. 14.

was naturally encouraged by Labour Zionists who helped direct attention to the role that Palestine might play as a solution to the Jewish problem.

There was, partly as a result, an almost total submergence of the Arab case. Arab representations to the party ceased between 1940 and 1944 and events during the war helped damn their case in the eyes of many; they must not now act as 'Dog in the Holy Manger'. By taking the 'broad view' - of the extensive Arab lands when compared with 'poor little Palestine', of the benefits the whole area might receive through Jewish investment and initiative - particular Palestinian Arab grievances and frustrations could be ignored, and population transfers advocated.

After 1940 the left wing analysis which saw Zionism as an agent of British Imperialism was little heard within the Labour Party. Indeed the identification of the left wing of the party with the cause of Zionism stemmed largely from wartime experiences. Thus Tribune now argued that 'those who say Palestine offers no solution...must be prepared to offer a reasonable alternative'. In a progressive, prosperous Middle East, the paper believed, 'Jewish colonisation in Palestine could be fitted in without real difficulty'.<sup>1</sup>

But the difficulties of pursuing a pro Zionist course were now being impressed upon Labour Ministers, on many of whom four years in Government had a profound effect. George Hall, the future Colonial Secretary, was much involved with the problem during the war and fully appreciated the view

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1 Tribune 17 Nov. 1944, 25 May 1945.

of the Foreign Office, which at one stage he represented at a meeting of the Palestine Committee. Both Attlee and Cripps in their memoranda to the Cabinet expressed opinions born of a perspective far from that of the Zionists or of their party. Initial concern for the Jewish plight and sympathy for Zionist demands gradually turned to irritation and pessimism about the situation in Palestine. In particular Ernest Bevin's early helpful interventions on the Zionists' behalf later gave way to expressions of criticism and some belligerence. When Churchill noted in June 1945 that Zionism 'has few supporters. Even the Labour Party now seems to have lost its zeal',<sup>1</sup> he can have been thinking, not of the Labour Party as a whole, but of his Labour colleagues in the Government.

Yet though Hall was evidently perturbed at the policy adopted by his party, and made some effort to ensure that Arab protests were forwarded,<sup>2</sup> there was remarkably little concern about the potential consequences of the divergence between party and leaders. Dalton, the author of the party's program, seemed if anything amused at the situation, of which the confusion he helped spread about the respective attitudes of the Labour Party and the Government towards partition was only a symptom. That party supporters should blame the unsympathetic attitude of the Coalition Government towards Zionist aspirations on the influence of

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1 In a letter, not sent, to Weizmann, cited in Gilbert, 'Exile', op.cit., p. 273.

2 Minute 24 May 1944 in CO 733/463.75872.



Conservative Ministers was natural. That Labour Ministers, whose concern was increasingly with the prospects of chaos in Palestine and the erosion of the British position in the Middle East, should continue to associate themselves without demur with the Labour Party's pro Zionist declarations was foolhardy. Having done nothing to contain party expectations they had subsequently little justification for complaining at the dissatisfaction and unrest that their policies caused.

The Labour Government, in the early months of office, came close to approving a continuation of the White Paper policy. Indeed, it was only Bevin's last minute suggestion of a 'fresh approach' - the appointment of an Anglo American Commission - that enabled criticism from within the party to be met and Ministers to argue that party pledges were being honoured. But Ministers found it difficult to deny that the course of action pursued during the following years was not in practice a repudiation of traditional party policy. They might argue that the necessary American co-operation had not been forthcoming - but this had not previously been expressed as a sine qua non. The Zionist demand that Palestine become a Jewish State was condemned as a significant new factor, irreconcilable with practical policies - but several Ministers, including Dalton and Greenwood, had earlier supported such a call. To claim that post war developments precluded the adoption of a pro Zionist policy was disingenuous, since the nature of the problem had been fully apparent before 1945, and served to highlight their own failure to qualify

party policy and to moderate party expectations.

Although this work has concentrated on the reactions within the Labour Party, and the various factors shaping Government policy have not been analysed in depth, it has been argued that the policies pursued must be seen in the light of the previous experiences and attitudes of Labour Ministers in the Coalition Government. Significantly the leading critic within the new Cabinet, Aneurin Bevan, had not previously held office and was not involved in the making of policy other than as a Cabinet Minister. He, and a number of his colleagues, made sporadic efforts to alter certain aspects of Bevin's policy but, despite much unease within the Cabinet, critics within the Government could achieve no significant shift in Government policy. Disgust at the upsurge of Jewish terrorism and bitterness at American behaviour served to reduce the level of criticism; in their unflinching commitment to the Zionist cause Bevan and Strachey were very much the exception.

Though most MPs and party members soon became concerned at the course of the Government's policies and at the bloody conflict in Palestine, serious criticism was chiefly to be heard only from Poale Zion, whose interventions to the NEC and at party conferences were now to little effect, from certain Jewish MPs, from a number of constituency parties and from a group of, primarily left wing, back-benchers. Though certain MPs might have conspicuous success in demonstrating their opposition in Parliament it soon became clear that there would be no repeat of events in 1930, when party pressure played a major part in

inducing the Government to change course.

For most Labour MPs, hitherto sympathetic to the Jewish cause, the rising death toll in Palestine and the apparent intransigence of the Zionist leaders became powerful factors prompting support for the hard pressed Government. Some came to manifest bitter hostility towards Zionism, and in general the criticisms of their colleagues aroused not sympathy but irritation. The Government was able to gain the support of the majority of the PLP for its policies; only when MPs of all parties united to demand a speedy withdrawal from Palestine and when finally the Conservative Party decided to vote against the Government and thus facilitated a Labour revolt, did backbench Labour opinion significantly influence Government policy.

The NEC had voiced some concern about the Government's intentions in October 1945 but thereafter, despite the efforts of Harold Laski, remained largely obedient to the wishes of Government Ministers. Though speeches by Zionists and their friends at party conferences caused embarrassment, and sometimes deep resentment, the Government could not be seriously challenged and - thanks in part to Crossman - it was never necessary to call upon the trade union block votes in order to defeat an unwelcome resolution.

According to Leifer, 'the Zionists had been overwhelmed and even embarrassed by the Labour Party's declarations. Is it any wonder, therefore, that they were disillusioned and aggrieved?'.<sup>1</sup> Of Zionist disillusion there can be no doubt.

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<sup>1</sup> Leifer, op.cit., p. 269.



From Dalton's jovial irresponsibility to Creech Jones' one sided enthusiasm, the Labour Party had showered their Zionist friends with generous declarations of intent and promises of assistance, which had encouraged the belief that 'the next (Labour) Government (would) do everything for them'<sup>1</sup> but which were not fulfilled. In this party spokesmen had misled both themselves and their friends. Yet perhaps it was the Labour Party which had been overwhelmed. For in so successfully presenting their case within the Labour Party, in shaping attitudes and influencing policy, the Zionists had inevitably encouraged the adoption of a partisan and incomplete analysis of the Palestine problem, which neither enabled a balanced approach to conflict in Palestine to emerge nor adequately prepared the Labour Party for the realities of Government.

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<sup>1</sup> Comment made by Oliver Stanley, Dalton Diaries 26 Apr. 1944.

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