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Britain, Palestine and the Jews

The Evolution of the 1939 Palestine White Paper 1891-1939

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Ladies and Gentlemen, I feel very honoured to be asked to speak to you this evening. I should like to dedicate this lecture to the Hebrew writer and poet Berl Pomerantz, who published his first volume of poetry in Warsaw in 1935, his second in 1939, and who on the eve of war unsuccessfully applied to the British authorities for an entrance visa to Palestine, and who perished at Nazi hands in the woods of White Russia in December 1942.

I should like to begin with a general survey of the themes, attitudes and policies which culminated in the Palestine White Paper of May 1939. Under this British government policy, the Jews were to be forced to become a permanent minority in any future independent Palestine state, and were also to be forced to accept the land regulations of February 1940, which effectively closed more than three-quarters of the land of mandated Palestine to hitherto legal Jewish purchase.

I will try this evening to look back to the period even before the First World War, in order to get some idea of the arguments that affected policy makers, and to see what knowledge they possessed of the state of affairs in Palestine. The British Foreign Office records show that the question of Jewish immigration to Palestine, and of Arab objections to that immigration, was known even before the First World War, during the days of the Turkish rule. For example, on 16 July 1891, and I am sure this is not the earliest example that could have been found, the British Consul in Jerusalem informed his superior in Constantinople: 'I have the honour to report, that, news having been spread here that large numbers [of Jews] were about to come to Jerusalem, the leading Moslems of this city telegraphed to His Highness the Grand Vizier, praying that the entry of such Jews into the Country should be prohibited, as, not only was the labour market over-stocked, but also the Moslems themselves would be greatly the sufferers, as, the European Jews being skilled in all different kinds of Trades, the Moslems could not compete against them'. The result of this particular protest, not of course permanent, was: 'I have received from His Excellency [a communication] stating that the settlement of Jews in Palestine has been forbidden and that they will only be allowed to visit Jerusalem temporarily'.

When, in October 1914, Britain and Turkey found themselves at war, the question immediately arose, as one of government policy, what should be the future of Palestine, and, were it to become a British possession, should some form of Jewish settlement there be encouraged under British rule. One of the very first comments on this was a cautionary one, and bore directly upon the problem of the Arab presence and attitudes. It came from Herbert Samuel, a member of the Liberal Cabinet, and a Jew, who, writing to his colleagues on 22 January 1915, cautioned them as follows: 'If the attempt were made to

place the 400,000 or 500,000 Mohammedans of Arab race under a Government which rested upon the support of 90,000 or 100,000 Jewish inhabitants, there can be no assurance that such a Government, even if established by the authority of the Powers, would be able to command obedience. The dream of a Jewish State, prosperous, progressive, and the home of a brilliant civilization, might vanish in a series of squalid conflicts with the Arab population. And even if a State so constituted did succeed in avoiding or repressing internal disorder, it is doubtful whether it would be strong enough to protect itself from external aggression from the turbulent elements around it'. Samuel added: 'To attempt to realise the aspiration of a Jewish State a century too soon might throw back its actual realisation for many centuries more'.

It was not Samuel, however, but his fellow Liberal, and fellow Jew, Edwin Montagu whose arguments against the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine were, when the matter came before the Cabinet again, both strident and persistent. But it was Samuel who had drawn attention not only to the numerical situation, as it then existed, but also to the problem of those 'turbulent elements' outside Palestine, those very outside Arab pressures which were in 1939 to bring the original national home policy to ruin. If I could quote from part of Montagu's contribution to the debate, a Cabinet memorandum circulated on 16 March 1915, some of whose arguments were used most powerfully in the late 1930s by others. 'There is no Jewish race now', wrote Montagu, 'as a homogeneous whole. It is quite obvious that the Jews in Great Britain are as remote from the Jews in Morocco or the black Jews in Cochin as the Christian Englishman is from the Moor or the Hindoo. The President of the Local Government Board [Herbert Samuel] visiting Morocco could not, I am sure, say for certain by appearance, whether an individual was a Moor or a Jew'. Montagu continued: 'How would the Jews occupy themselves? Agriculture is never attractive to ambitious people and the Jews in the main have long emerged into quicker, less pastoral pursuits. I cannot see any Jews I know tending olive trees or herding sheep. Literature! Are there any great or even remarkable Jewish literary men of today? It is hardly worth transplanting one third of the Jewish peoples of the world for the sake of Zangwill!' Montagu was also scathing about the Hebrew language, writing: 'The Jewish community, which it is hoped to restore to Palestine, would have no common tongue. Hebrew to the vast majority of Jews is a language in which to pray but not a language in which to speak or write. Those who are most familiar with it are the least well educated and the least likely to found a state. Few people who advocate a Jewish nation in Palestine could conduct two minutes conversation in Hebrew'.

The Zionists, who were pressing the British government for some form of Jewish entity in Palestine, knew and fully understood what Montagu's type of

attitude meant for their aspirations, and so, during the summer of 1917, they pressed, while drafting a declaration for the Jews, for some specific reference to statehood. Some pressed for statehood; others, such as Sokolow, urged caution, but it is interesting that the leading non-Jewish Zionist of that group, Herbert Sidebotham, noted on 11 July 1917: 'By a Jewish State is meant a state composed not only of Jews, but one whose dominant national character . . . shall be as Jewish as the dominant national character of England is English'. And it was the young Zionist Harry Sacher who that same day wrote to Sokolow: 'We must control the *State* machinery in Palestine; if we don't the Arabs will. Give the Arabs all the guarantees they like for cultural autonomy, but the State must be Jewish'.

During the autumn of 1917 it appeared to the Zionists that none of their hopes would be fulfilled. The fighting on the western front, culminating in the battle for Passchendaele, had come to dominate the government's time and thinking. And it is interesting that when the Cabinet took up again, in October, the question of a possible declaration to the Jews, their reasons were prosaic and strategic. The war was going badly for the allies. The battle for Passchendaele was at its disastrous height, and the developments since the Russian Revolution of February had cast a question mark over the whole future of the war effort. It is significant that one of Balfour's principal advisers, Ronald Graham, minuted on 24 October 1917: 'I understand that consideration by the War Cabinet of the assurance to be given by His Majesty's government to the Zionists is again being postponed. I beg respectfully to submit that this further delay will have a deplorable result and may jeopardise the whole Jewish situation. At the present moment uncertainty as regards to the attitude of His Majesty's government is growing into suspicion, and not only are we losing the very valuable cooperation of the Zionist forces in Russia and America, but we may bring them into antagonism with us and throw the Zionists into the arms of Germany . . . We might at any moment be confronted by a German move on the Zionist question and it must be remembered that Zionism was originally if not a German at any rate an Austrian idea'. Graham continued: 'Information from every quarter shows the very important role the Jews are now playing in the Russian political situation . . . almost every Jew in Russia is a Zionist, and if they can be made to realise that the success of Zionist aspirations depends on the support of the Allies and the expulsion of the Turks from Palestine, we shall enlist a most powerful element in our favour . . . The moment this assurance is granted the Zionist Jews are prepared to start an active pro-ally propaganda throughout the world. Dr. Weizmann, who is a most able and energetic propagandist, is prepared to proceed himself to Russia and to take charge of the campaign'.

Basing himself almost entirely on this letter of Graham's, Balfour set out similar arguments to the War Cabinet on 31 October 1917, explaining to his

colleagues that what he proposed did not, as he put it, 'involve the early establishment of an independent Jewish state, which was a matter for gradual development in accordance with the ordinary laws of political evolution'.

Although it was nowhere stated in the Balfour Declaration, that, as Balfour had told the War Cabinet, his declaration might involve the establishment of an independent Jewish state, British policy makers began nevertheless to wonder how they could reconcile the Arab numerical superiority in Palestine with Britain's promise to the Jews of a national home which, with immigration, might over the years lead to a majority Jewish population.

It was Arnold Toynbee and Louis Namier who pointed out, in a joint Foreign Office memorandum on 19 December 1917, that: 'The objections raised against the Jews being given exclusive political rights in Palestine on a basis that would be undemocratic with regards to the local Christian and Mohammedan population is certainly the most important which the anti-Zionists have hitherto raised, but the difficulty is imaginary. Palestine might be held in trust by Great Britain or America until there was a sufficient population in the country fit to govern it on European lines. Then no undemocratic restrictions of the kind indicated would be required any longer'. This argument was to become the policy enshrined in the minds, if not always in the utterances, of successive British governments between 1917 and 1930, that somehow one might hold the ring, and not allow the Arabs the representative institutions they were seeking, until such a time as the Jews were a majority, whereupon those representative institutions would favour a Jewish majority State. Nor was the territorial discussion within the Foreign Office in any sense limited, in those years, to the sort of mini Palestines which in the late 1930s became the enthusiasm of cartographers in several government departments. Thus Arnold Toynbee wrote in a Foreign Office minute on 2 December 1918: 'It might be equitable to include in Palestine that part of the Arabah or Jordan trough - between the lower end of the Sea of Galilee and the upper end of the Dead Sea - which lies east of the Jordan stream. The Arabah is a sub-tropical district, at present desolate, but capable of supporting a large population if irrigated and cultivated scientifically. The Zionist have as much right to this no-man's land as the Arabs, or more'.

The question which was uppermost in the minds both of the pro- and anti-Zionist during 1919, and which again was to have a 20 year life of discussion and puzzlement, was that of the Jewish right to immigration. Dr. Weizmann was very clear in his own mind that he must establish a particular right of the Jews to uninterrupted immigration. Indeed, Article 4 of his agreement with the Emir Feisal of 3 January 1919 began: 'All necessary measures shall be taken to encourage and stimulate immigrations of Jews into Palestine on a large scale, and as quickly as possible to settle Jewish immigrants upon the land to close settlement and intensive cultivation of the soil'.

I come now to another factor in the background; a factor which is a very difficult one with which to deal, yet one which without doubt sometimes thrusts itself into the foreground of this subject, and which certainly bedevils the White Paper discussions of 1939. That is the question of individual prejudice. If I could read from the diary of a British official in Palestine in 1919, a man who was totally devoted to the reconstruction and rebuilding of Jerusalem as a modern city with parks and gardens and sanitation and water, and was a devotee of the Zionist garden cities as far as planning and construction was concerned. He wrote in January 1919: 'I have not met one Zionist yet whom I would really trust for a wise and sane constructive policy. I have met many cranks, and odds and ends of people. The wise Jews are lukewarm or hostile. There is something factitious, journalistic, about the whole movement that puts it on a level with other "isms" where some kernel of a good idea is exploited for the benefit of unbalanced mediocrity. Walking down the streets of Jerusalem, an American friend pointed to the anaemic idle slum population drifting past her, and said to me: "These people have not got the proper material for the making of a State". Further the Jew is unthinkable without the bargain, he bears the brand of that mean fellow Jacob upon his brow, and with all the nobility of his convictions, and the grandeur of his Messianic idea one would not trust him, *qua* Zionist, not to exploit the Holy Land commercially in his own and his tribe's interest'. Five months later similar views were expressed by the British Ambassador in Paris, Lord Bertie of Thame, who wrote in his diary on 1 June 1919, after a conversation with Edmund Rothschild: 'He does not realise that a Jew State in Palestine would be the gathering together there of all the scum of the Jewish populations of Russia, Poland, Germany, Hungary and what has been the Austrian empire'.

It was the terrible anti-Jewish persecutions in the Ukraine during 1919, in which 100,000 Jews were butchered in circumstances of grim barbarity, that caused in those sympathetic to Zionism a realisation that the Balfour Declaration did imply the possibility of the immigration to Palestine of Jews who could go nowhere else; not merely a national home for those few thousands of Jews who somehow chose, by reason of a peculiar Zionist philosophy, or religious instinct, to go to Palestine, but for those hundreds of thousands who had nowhere else to go at a period when the immigration laws of most European countries, and even the United States, were becoming more severe, and when the scale of the persecution was becoming far greater, in the Ukraine for example, than it had been in the same Ukraine under the Czars. It was Smuts, in a speech which is normally quoted because it ends with a statement of his faith in a 'great Jewish State' in Palestine, who said, in a part of that same speech which is less frequently cited: 'From those parts of the world where the Jews are oppressed and unhappy, where they are not welcome by the rest of the Christian population, from those parts of the world

you will see yet an ever increasing stream of immigration towards Palestine'.

It was under the impetus of the post-war persecutions that within both the Foreign and Colonial Offices an understanding of the implications to Britain of the pledge to the Zionists had begun to gain ground. Nor was it always unsympathetic. On the last day of December 1919, E. Forbes Adam, a Foreign Office official who was to die prematurely a few years later, wrote: 'it is thought that eventually some three (3) million instead of the present 60,000 Jews may be able to settle, and that hope and self-respect may be given to a large part of Eastern Jewry who can never actually go to live in Palestine'. Yet even the relatively small influxes of Jews, noticeably from southern Russia, provoked the first of a series of increasingly strong and ultimately violent protests from the Palestinian Arab leadership. It was now the British government which had to deal with these protests, nearly all of which took the same form. If I can quote from a petition presented to the Colonial Secretary by the Haifa Congress of Palestinian Arabs, a petition dated 14 March 1921: '1. We refuse the Jewish Immigration to Palestine. 2. We energetically protest against the Balfour Declaration to the effect that our Country should be made the Jewish National Home'.

The Colonial Secretary who received this petition was Winston Churchill. In his reply, he stated the case for the Zionists in a way that no subsequent Colonial Secretary was to do. 'It is manifestly right' he told the Palestinian Arab leaders on 28 March 1921, 'that the Jews, who are scattered all over the world, should have a national centre and a National Home where some of them may be reunited. And where else could that be but in the land of Palestine, with which for more than 3,000 years they have been intimately and profoundly associated? We think it would be good for the world, good for the Jews, and good for the British Empire'. The Arab protest continued, and the violence that followed Churchill's visit was severe. Arab violence in Jaffa in May led to the British High Commissioner in Palestine, Sir Herbert Samuel, ordering an immediate temporary suspension of Jewish immigration. If I could quote from a report from the Senior Naval Officer in the Eastern Mediterranean, Captain Seymour, sent to the Admiralty on 10 May 1921: 'Further immigration of foreign Jews into Palestine has been prohibited as a temporary measure and this has given satisfaction to the Arabs'.

The suspension of immigration, made on the authority of Sir Herbert Samuel, did not entirely impress the Colonial Office, and a telegram was drafted for Churchill by one of his senior advisers, Major Young, which was despatched to Samuel on 14 May 1921: 'The present agitation is doubtless engineered in the hope of frightening us out of our Zionist policy . . . We must firmly maintain law and order and make concessions on their merits and not under duress'. Churchill himself was confronted, on 15 August 1921, in London, by a Palestinian Arab delegation, which protested at the idea of

Hebrew becoming the official language together with English and Arabic, when only 7% of the population knew Hebrew. Churchill replied: 'All that is implied in the policy of the British government to support the Zionist movement. You are forgetting all that. You are letting it pass out of your mind. I told you from the beginning that was the declaration, that the Jews are to be encouraged to go to Palestine and found there a home for themselves. I told you that'.

Despite Churchill's firm words, the doubts had been sown in the minds of the policy makers, and although the total prohibition of Jewish immigration, as the Arabs continued to demand, was never for Churchill a matter of practicable or acceptable policies, the idea of some limit to Jewish immigration was discussed between Samuel and the Colonial Office, a limit based on what was described by Samuel as 'the economic absorbtive capacity of Palestine'. This idea of some limit took shape, and during 1922 it became government policy, to the dismay of the Zionist leaders, who were very quick to spot any whittling away of what they believed was the carte blanche for immigration which they had been granted by the Balfour Declaration.

In the Cabinet of 18 August 1921, there was actually a discussion as to whether Britain might not give up altogether the whole concept of the Balfour Declaration, and accept that an Arab majority would mean an Arab government. As any Arab government would clearly prevent Jewish immigration, it was argued, there could therefore never be a Jewish State, so why embroil oneself from the start in the whole dilemma. But the Cabinet decided to continue with the Balfour Declaration, for, as the minutes of the discussion recorded, 'stress was laid on the following consideration, the honour of the government was involved in the Declaration made by Mr Balfour, and to go back on our pledge would seriously reduce the prestige of this country in the eyes of the Jews throughout the world'. Nevertheless, also in the conclusion: 'It was not expected that the problem could be easily or quickly solved, especially in view of the growing power of the Arabs in the territories bordering on Palestine'. So here once more was this concept, first raised by Samuel in 1915, that non-Palestinian Arab forces would have eventually an important say in the future of the British promise to the Jews.

There was one final upsurge, before the mandate was itself finalized, of pro-Zionist activity on behalf of the British government. This took the form of the question of the development of the natural resources of Palestine. The Zionists had long pressed for the right to have a monopoly over all electrical and water power developments. In a formal communication from the Foreign Office to the United States government on 29 December 1921 it was stated that 'so far as Palestine is concerned, Article 11 of the mandate expressly provides that the administration may arrange with the Jewish Agency to develop any of the natural resources of the country, in so far as these matters

are not directly undertaken by the Administration. The reason for this is that, in order that the policy of establishing in Palestine a national home for the Jewish people could be successfully carried out, it is impractical to guarantee that equal facilities for developing the natural resources of the country should be granted to persons or bodies who may be motivated by other motives'. It was on this basis that the Rutenberg Concession was granted, as a monopoly, to the Zionists.

One of those in the Colonial Office whose task it was to give effect to this policy was Churchill's principal adviser on Middle East affairs, John Shuckburgh, who minuted on 17 January 1922: 'I admit that the electrification of any portion of the railways in Palestine may at first sight appear premature. It may be well asked why the needs of Jaffa and Jerusalem cannot be served by a form of traction which is deemed sufficient for the infinitely heavier traffic between, let us say, London and Liverpool, or Paris and Marseilles. The answer is that in this, as in all matters relating to Palestine, we stand under the shadow of the Balfour Declaration. The Rutenberg concession has always been regarded as the more practical example of the policy of setting up a National Home for the Jews. It is so regarded by the Zionists themselves'. And Shuckburgh went on to point out: 'We are always trying to divert the attention of the Zionists from political to industrial activities, and preaching to them from the text that their best chance of reconciling the Arabs to Zionist policy is to show them the practical advantages accruing from Zionist enterprise. For these reasons we support and encourage Mr Rutenberg's projects'.

This was, of course, a private communication. The Zionists remained suspicious, however, that in the debate surrounding the Rutenberg Concession there had been hostility, not only from individual members of the Colonial Office, but from the general body of British official opinion. They felt confirmed in their fears when, three weeks later, in the House of Lords, the Duke of Sutherland made a formal pronouncement about what, for the Zionists, was the central theme, immigration. 'As regards immigration', he said, 'the obligations imposed on His Majesty's government by the conditions under which Palestine was entrusted to them, make it necessary for them to initiate a policy of strictly controlled and selected Jewish immigration, up to the economic absorbtive capacity of that country'. Here then, by 1922, were the contradictory strands and themes, the conflicting intentions and prejudices, which were to characterize British policy towards the Jews and Zionism for the next 25 years.

Undercurrents of hostility towards the idea of the Jews being in charge of their own affairs had always existed, in different degrees of intensity, not only among the policy makers, but also among the general community, sometimes finding forceful expression. When Lawrence of Arabia sent Rudyard Kipling

a proof copy of his volume on the Arab revolt, asking Kipling to read the proofs, Kipling replied on 20 July 1922: 'I may as well warn you that, if you are pro-Yid, and think that the present cheap hell in Palestine is "Statesmanship", I shall turn the whole thing back in your hands and refuse to touch it'.

During the late 1920s the construction and the enthusiasm of Zionist activity in Palestine seemed in some ways to blanket all the difficulties. Yet at no point did Zionist enterprise proceed without opposition. One reads many accounts, for example, of the opening of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in April 1925, but one reads few accounts of the boycott that same day by Arabs protesting against the Hebrew University, of their boycott of Balfour, or of their refusal to allow Balfour to visit either the Dome of the Rock or the Cathedral Church of St. George, yet this was a type of protest which was repeated in many different ways on almost every similar occasion.

It was after the Arab attacks of 1929 on the ancient Jewish communities in Hebron and Safed that the British began to find the weaknesses in their own earlier policy, to see the contradictions, and to begin to place the success of Zionism in terms of a possible Jewish majority and a Jewish State — to place this possible success further and further from their own thinking, further and further from their own legislation.

In the conclusions of the Shaw Report, which examined the riots of 1929, a quite different tone can be seen to that of 1921 and 1922. For example: 'the claims and demands which from the Zionist side have been advanced in regard to the future of Jewish immigration into Palestine have been such as to arouse among Arabs the apprehension that they will in time be deprived of their livelihood and pass under the political domination of the Jews . . . There is incontestable evidence that in the matter of immigration there has been a serious departure by the Jewish authorities from the doctrine accepted by the Zionist Organization in 1922 that immigration should be regulated by the economic capacity of Palestine to absorb new arrivals . . . We recommend therefore that His Majesty's Government should issue at an early date a clear and definitive declaration of the policy which they intend to be pursued in regard to the regulation and control of future Jewish immigration into Palestine'.

This was not an easy period for the Zionists. From 1927 their own immigration hopes had begun to fade, and for three consecutive years more Jews left Palestine than entered it, so that regulations for the restriction of immigration seemed to take on an almost academic flavour. But in January 1933, with Hitler's coming to power in Germany, the situation was transformed, and it became a question not merely of some academic ratio of Jews and Arabs, or some subtle form of legislative and administrative arrangement whereby two sides would be kept in balance, but of what to do physically with tens of thousands of individual refugees desperately seeking

some haven — seeking it in Palestine, and seeking it in Britain and elsewhere.

The first Cabinet Committee to discuss this question of refugees met on 7 April 1933. It concluded: 'So far as Palestine is concerned the number of Jewish refugees who could be allowed to enter the country is strictly conditioned by what the country can absorb. The matter is strictly one for the High Commissioner, but there is no reason to suppose that room could be found in Palestine in the near future for any appreciable number of German Jewish refugees'. In answer to another question that had been raised during Cabinet Committee, it was decided that: 'The number of refugees who might be transmigrated to the Colonies generally, must be treated as negligible'. Of course, there could be no question of the Jews, whether Zionists or not, accepting this sort of reasoning, and strong pressures began to be applied, creating equally strong counter-pressures and counter-moves. Thus, when the President of the Royal College of Physicians, Lord Dawson of Penn, spoke to the Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare on 23 November 1933 about the possibility of German Jewish refugee doctors being allowed into Britain, according to Hoare's note of the conversation, Lord Dawson told him that 'the number that could usefully be absorbed or teach us anything could be counted on the fingers of one hand'.

Not all non-Jewish observers were unsympathetic; indeed, on 12 November 1935 a senior member of the British Mandate Administration in Palestine, Eric Mills, having completed a tour of Central Europe and Germany, wrote to the Chief Secretary in Jerusalem: 'While before I went to Germany I knew that the Jewish situation was bad, I had not realised as I now do, that the fate of German Jews is a tragedy, for which cold, intelligent planning by those in authority takes rank with that of those who are out of sympathy with the Bolshevik regime, in Russia: or with the elimination of Armenians from the Turkish empire. The Jew is to be eliminated and the state has no regard for the manner of his elimination'.

While the British government still maintained its attitude that Palestine was not a suitable place for any substantial number of Jewish refugees, the Palestinian Arabs launched their revolt of 1936, in which they made it clear that they were bitterly opposed to the idea of Palestine being made, as they saw it, a dumping ground for European refugees and for European consciences. In 1937, following the Arab riots, a Royal Commission headed by Lord Peel recommended, as a possible solution, the partition of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, with Jerusalem excluded from either. But those in Britain who had watched the Zionist enterprise sympathetically from the start regarded Partition as a breakdown of Britain's Balfour Declaration pledge of a Jewish National Home in Palestine. In evidence to the Peel Commission, Lloyd George stressed that it had always been his intention that once the Jews became a majority they should have the

full powers and responsibilities of statehood. Churchill also gave evidence to the Peel Commission, on 12 March 1937. During the questioning he was asked what the contemporary view of eventual Jewish statehood had been, in 1917. He replied:'The conception undoubtedly was that if the absorbtive capacity over a number of years and the breeding over a number of years, all guided by the British government, gave an increasing Jewish population, that population should not in any way be restricted from reaching a majority position'.

The pressures on the British government to reject this kind of argument were enormous. Arab hostility, either to a mini-Jewish state as proposed by the Peel Commission, or to any form of continuing Jewish immigration which could create the possibility of a Jewish majority, this hostility had become so intense that the Arab states beyond Palestine, whose intervention had been anticipated with some trepidation earlier, now intervened in the guise of 'moderators' of Palestine Arab opinion. The British government made use of this Arab intervention to edge towards a new policy, one which would involve the fastening of permanent minority status upon the Jewish National Home in Palestine. The British negotiations with Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the Yemen were the cause of censure by the League of Nations, which did not see why outsiders should be involved in Mandate affairs which were strictly between Britain and the League of Nations. British policy was defended by the Colonial Secretary, William Ormsby-Gore, who told the Permanent Mandates Commission, on 30 July 1937, of how the situation had changed since 1919, when 'we were in mandatory control of Iraq, France was in mandatory control of Syria, we had a Protectorate in Egypt'. Ormsby-Gore continued: 'That had all been changed, and the significant fact noted by the Royal Commission is the enormous interest which the neighbouring Arabic-speaking countries take in the affairs of Palestine . . . . Iraq is now a sovereign, independent State, a Member of the League. The French mandate over Syria is being transformed, and partition is to take place there into two sovereign States. British power in Egypt has gone, and Egypt is now completely self-governing . . . . In those circumstances, how long can we go on adhering to the mandate in Palestine of seventeen years ago? And more than that: we have ample evidence that it does not stop at the Arab world. We have had an Imperial Conference this year and the principal Indian delegate was a Punjab Mohammedan, an elected member of the Council of State in India. He, as is recorded, made a strong plea on the Arab side and for the Arab case'.

Returning from the Permanent Mandates Commission, Ormsby-Gore informed the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, that as far as the League of Nations was concerned, Palestine was still, 'the chief place where persecuted Jews from Germany, Rumania and Poland can find a place to live'. But this was not to be the view of the British government. Beginning in

March 1938, at the very moment when the German annexation of Austria intensified the Jewish refugee problem, the British Cabinet came more and more to the view that on political, imperial, strategic, and even, ultimately, as they saw it, on moral grounds the pressure and arguments, not only of the Palestinian Arabs, but indeed of the Arab states surrounding Palestine, could not be ignored. Malcolm Macdonald, the new Colonial Secretary, informed his colleagues on 8 March 1938, as the Cabinet minutes recorded: 'The Palestine Arabs had proved very difficult. The representatives of the neighbouring Arab States had supported the Palestine Arabs in public, but in private they had indicated that they are prepared to contemplate the immigration of 50,000 Jews over a period of five years, provided that the Arabs were in a position to veto the continuance of Jewish immigration after that date'.

During the spring of 1938 the concept of continuing Jewish immigration up to a certain point, followed by an Arab veto on all future Jewish immigration, became the 'moderate' stance, and as such was quickly approved by those who sought a 'compromise' solution which would not alienate Arab or Moslem opinion. The pressure from India also continued. Lord Lothian, having returned from a visit to India, reported to the Colonial Office on 9 March 1938, as Ormsby-Gore informed Lord Halifax, that: 'On partition, the Moslems argued against the separation of any part of what had been Moslem territory from its neighbours, and the creation of any Jewish state. In general, the Indian attitude is that no Moslem could submit to Palestine, and especially Jerusalem, being handed over to Jewish rule . . . They failed to see why the Jews were unwilling to be in the same position in Palestine as they were in London or under the Turkish Empire which had always befriended them in times of Christian persecution in the past'.

Arab immigration into Palestine was never challenged by British policy makers at this time, even though Arabs from Syria, Trans-Jordan, the Hedjaz, Egypt and Iraq were raising the population of Palestine by the same numbers as were the Jewish immigrants. In arguing that it was the would-be Jewish immigrants alone who should be prevented from going to Palestine in large numbers, the Foreign Office introduced at this period a new concept, that Zionist expansion was a future danger to British policy. An example of this new attitude is the argument put forward by G. W. Rendell, of the Foreign Office, on 19 April 1938, during the discussion of whether or not some of these new Jewish refugees driven from their homes by the German annexation of Austria, and by the apparently imminent danger in Poland and Czechoslovakia, should be allowed a place in Palestine. Rendell wrote: 'Is there not a grave risk that the desire of the Central European Jews to immigrate into this little country will increase the friction between it and the whole Arab world, and that we shall in a no doubt well-intentioned anxiety to

fulfil our somewhat ill-defined pledges to Jews, merely expose them to perils even worse than those which they already suffer? Can the proposed Jewish State remain static? Can it possibly refrain — subject as it will be to every form of pressure to receive a continually increasing number of new immigrants — from trying to expand politically or economically into the Arab hinterland?'

Of course, there were voices raised in favour of opening Palestine to the growing refugee pressures. But they were not voices within the government, and it is hard to find, in the mass of official papers and comments, many notes of compassion, and certainly no note of anguish. Yet among those writing to Cabinet Ministers were some who felt very strongly indeed, and it was one of these, Leopold Amery, himself a former Conservative Minister in the second Baldwin government in the twenties, who wrote to Malcolm Macdonald on 30 May 1938: 'There is no real comparison between the quite natural resentment of the Arabs at seeing the character of their country changed, though with material advantage to themselves, and the agony of Jews of Central Europe, for whom there is really no other serious alternative city of refuge'. Amery was a personal friend of the Zionist leaders and of many individual Jews, Zionist and non-Zionist. He knew well that the question of refugees was central both to Zionist and to Jewish concern. Yet the government were reluctant to recognise how desperate the needs were, or rather, glimpsing how desperate they were, were unwilling to consider themselves, despite their Palestinian responsibilities, and despite their Imperial responsibilities, as being involved at all in the unfolding tragedy of European Jewry. Thus the Governor of Kenya, on 18 June 1938, sent a very curious communication to the Colonial Office, in which, while in favour of the settlement of perhaps a few Jewish families in Kenya, he added: 'I would not object to the carefully regulated influx of Jews of the right type, i.e. Nordic, from Germany or Austria for agricultural settlement in reasonably small number . . . in small groups of a size not too large to become part of the general economic and social life of our community'. Any Jewish 'enclave' as such, the Governor stressed, 'would be an undesirable feature in a colony which . . . should be developed on lines predominantly British'.

It was in October 1938, following the occupation of the Sudetenland by Hitler, and the further refugee tragedies which that annexation created, that the British government began, on an almost weekly basis, to discuss the future of Palestine in relation to the refugees, and it was Neville Chamberlain who pointed out, on 24 October 1938, to his Cabinet colleagues, that 'Palestine had become a Pan Arab question'. It had therefore become necessary, he said, to invite to the forthcoming conference in London of Jews and Arabs what he described as the 'Arab Princes'.

The Arab States gained further British government approval at this time by showing sympathy to Chamberlain's policy of appeasement towards

Germany. Thus Lord Halifax told his Cabinet colleagues on 19 October 1938, à propos of the Munich crisis: 'One of the most satisfactory features of the recent crisis had been the attitude of the Egyptian Government which had responded admirably in every way. He thought that the attitude adopted by the Egyptian Government was a complete justification (if justification was required) for the concessions we had made to the Egyptian Prime Minister when he visited this country in the summer'. Simultaneously with their much-appreciated support for Britain's appeasement policy, the Egyptians were also pressing Britain for a permanent restriction of Jewish immigration into Palestine. The extent to which the Arab protests against Jewish immigration were being artificially stirred up by political activists, was well known to the British government, as is made clear by a report from the Criminal Investigation Department, dated 1 November 1938. According to this report, the Mufti and followers 'have steadily consolidated their position . . . A complete "Jihad" (Holy War) has not yet been proclaimed, although Jihad has been preached in many village mosques in Palestine, Syria and Iraq. The more religious-minded seriously regard rebel activities in a religious light and the belief is growing in Arab circles in Palestine, that in the event of the British Government declaring a policy which is adverse to Arab interests, a complete Jihad will be declared by the more prominent religious leaders of Islam'.

Such were the pressures, and the threats. So effective were they, that some months before the Conference of Jews and Arabs summoned in London took place, the decision was reached at Cabinet level that an Arab solution would have to be found for Palestine. Thus Lord Halifax told the Cabinet on 14 November 1938 — I quote from the official minutes — that he thought that 'The government would shortly be confronted with a very difficult decision, namely, was it not to be regarded as fundamental to obtain a settlement with the Arabs?' Malcolm Macdonald, speaking immediately after Halifax, told his colleagues: 'The government had to choose between its commitments to the world of Jewry and its commitments to the world of Islam. In spite of the adversities which it was now suffering, the world of Jewry remained extremely influential. For example, there were said to be 3 million Jews in the United States. On the other hand, the British Empire itself was to a very considerable extent a Moslem Empire, some 80 millions of our fellow subjects in India were Moslems. From the defence point of view it was literally out of the question that we should antagonise either the Moslems within the Empire or the Arab kingdoms of the Near East. This might very well mean that we could not contemplate even a distant future in which there could be a Jewish majority in Palestine'.

Underneath this strategic and Imperial decision that the Arab view must prevail, and that in addition it must be an Islamic-Arab view and not merely a Palestinian-Arab view, there was another under-current of thought which was

emerging in the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office. This was an attitude of mind towards the desperate Jews of Europe which was, to say the least, not charitable. Thus Roger Makins minuted within the Foreign Office on 15 November 1938: 'the pitiful conditions to which German Jews will be reduced will not make them desirable immigrants'. The Zionists were now told that instead of Palestine, some other territorial solution would be found for them, possibly in British Guiana. Although the Zionist leaders were not privy to those inter-departmental communications which showed how small was the number of Jews for whom these other havens were designed, nevertheless they were fully aware of the absurdity, and, as they believed, of the hypocrisy of these proposals. As Chaim Weizmann himself wrote, on 20 November 1938, to one of the leading Liberal supporters of Zionist aspirations, Sir Archibald Sinclair: 'All the fancy "territorialist" projects are useless. It is merely dangling false hopes before the eyes of tortured people. It needs millions untold and years of labour before all these exotic countries could receive an appreciable number of refugees . . . We could easily now take into Palestine 50,000 people if they would let us. We could employ them and all the untold money which is being spent on giving these people temporary shelter could be used effectively for settling them permanently in Palestine. But they don't let us, and here is the tragedy!'

The tragedy had some grim aspects. At the begining of December 1938 the Zionists pressed for visas for some 10,000 Jewish children to be allowed admission into Palestine. The question of these visas was discussed in the Cabinet on 14 December 1938, when Malcolm Macdonald told his colleagues: 'There were homes available for all the 10,000 children and there was no doubt that these children could be received in Palestine without causing injury to anyone's interest.' There were, however, other 'points' to be considered. In the first place, he pointed out, the High Commissioner at Jerusalem and the British representatives in the neighbouring Arab States had all said that, if these 10,000 children were allowed to enter Palestine, 'we should run considerable risk that the Palestinian Arabs would not attend the conference, and that, if they did attend, their confidence would be shaken and the atmosphere damaged'. The Secretary of State for India, Lord Zetland, in supporting Macdonald, added that he was 'satisfied that the admission of these 10,000 children to Palestine at the present time would have a very adverse effect on Moslem opinion'.

Late in 1938, the Secretary of State for Air, Sir Kingsley Wood, told the Cabinet that 'it was the view of the Air Staff, if another crisis should find us with a hostile Arab world behind us in the Middle East, that our military position would be quite untenable' — and the conclusion of the meeting, as stated bluntly by Lord Halifax was that 'the forthcoming negotiations of the London Conference must be conducted so as to ensure that the Arab States will be friendly towards us'.

This was the brief that was given to Malcolm Macdonald at the end of December. Yet he did not like carrying it out, and when he presented his conclusions to the Cabinet in January 1939 his memorandum was full of expressions of genuine sympathy for Zionist aspirations and for the plight of the Jewish refugees. Indeed, when one studies the memorandum in its final form, and sees how it evolved before it became a final document, it is clear that different Colonial Office draftsmen inserted different points. Under the final Macdonald proposals, the Jews were never to become more than 42% of the total population of Palestine. Macdonald's memorandum was discussed by the Cabinet extensively, and it was altered. The 42% ultimate Jewish maximum was reduced to 33%. Macdonald's request that the Arab veto on Jewish immigration insisted upon by Saudi Arabia, Iraq and the Yemen should not come into force for ten years, was turned down, and the veto was delayed for only 5 years. If I could read from three passages of this memorandum:

1) 'We cannot accept the contention that all Jews as such have a right to enter Palestine'. Yet in the original mandate it was stated that the Jews were in Palestine 'as of right and not on sufferance'.
2) 'We cannot avoid an eventual clash, if we continue to carry out the Balfour Declaration, between the forces of persecuted, desperate, brilliant, constructive Jewry in Palestine and the widespread pan-Arab movement which is rallying to the defence of its weakest brethren the Arabs of Palestine'.
3) 'Arab detestation of the Jewish invasion into Palestine being what it is, it would be wholly wrong to suggest that this large Arab population should one day in their own native land and against their will come under the rule of the newly arrived Jews'.

These paragraphs became the basis of the government's policy, and, simultaneously with fixing an upper limit to Jewish immigration, the pressures mounted to prevent Jews from getting to Palestine by 'illegal' methods. At the same time, many other possible outlets for Jewish immigration were searched out. Historians can dispute as to whether these attempts to find alternative havens were serious, or even feasible, but they did take place, and attempts were made to seek the opinions of Colonial Governors as to the possibility of Jewish settlement elsewhere. Indeed, there was even an attempt made to see whether large-scale Jewish immigration to the Soviet Union might be possible. But, as Lord Halifax was informed by the British Consul in Moscow on 21 January 1939: 'Despite the absence of any anti-semitic policy on the part of the Soviet Government, an infinitely larger number of Jews have been executed in the Soviet Union in the last two years

than in Germany under the Nationalist Socialist regime, while an equal if not larger number have been placed in the Concentration Camps'. This ruled out the Soviet Union.

At the beginning of 1939 an attempt was made to persuade Dr. Weizmann to make a unilateral declaration abandoning Jewish aspirations for a majority in Palestine. This attempt was made at the suggestion of Lord Halifax, and with the support of the Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence, Sir Thomas Inskip, who played an important part in the question of Jewish refugee policy during the winter of 1938/1939. Even Malcolm Macdonald came to accept the view, as he told the Cabinet on 27 January 1939, that: 'If we could now persuade the Jews to make a unilateral declaration as had been suggested by Lord Halifax the whole atmosphere might be changed for the better'. Macdonald was afraid, however, that even if Dr. Weizmann were prepared to entertain such a declaration 'his constituents would not for a moment allow him to make it'. Nevertheless, Macdonald agreed that a strenuous effort should be made to persuade Weizmann 'to give favourable consideration to this declaration'.

During the Cabinet of 27 January 1939, Lord Zetland, the Secretary of State for India, pressed for the immediate passing of the 33% maximum Jewish population in Palestine, despite repeated Zionist objections. Zetland told the Cabinet that he was constantly being urged by the Indian Moslems to support the Arab claims in Palestine. The Minister of Health, Walter Elliot, declared that he attached 'greater weight to the United States than to Arabia at the present moment' but Zetland warned that 'this problem of Palestine was not merely an Arabian problem, it was fast becoming a pan-Islamic problem. If the Conference failed to reach any agreement or ended in what was regarded as a substantial victory for the Jews, serious troubles in India must be apprehended'.

New arguments emerged during February and March, each one of them less favourable either to the original concept of the Balfour Declaration, or towards the Zionist hopes of a Palestine open to all those refugees who sought haven there. The principle behind these arguments was summed up clearly by Malcolm Macdonald when he told his Cabinet colleagues at the Cabinet of 27 January that: 'He was satisfied that we could not afford to forfeit the confidence and friendship of a large part of the Moslem world. If we lost that now we would lose it for a long time, whereas if we reached a settlement in Palestine along the lines proposed, Jewish criticism in America would not have any permanent effect on Anglo-American relations'.

While these discussions were being finalised, several territorial requests were being made, not only of British Governors and High Commissioners, but also of foreign governments. There was even a short time during which President Roosevelt put forward the thought that the Portuguese might be

persuaded to open Angola to Jewish settlement, but it was the Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, Sir Alexander Cadogan, who pointed out that in view of the lack of population in many of the British Colonies it would not be very tactful for Britain to take any part in pressing the Portuguese to open their Colonies instead. Cadogan believed in an alternative solution. On 8 February 1939 he wrote in a Foreign Office minute for Lord Halifax: 'Are we really trying to find a place for them in e.g. Northern Rhodesia? It would help enormously towards an "Arab" solution of Palestine if we could at the same time offer an alternative "home" elsewhere'. But no such alternative home could be found. Nor could the pressure of American Jewry act as a counter weight, however that pressure was expressed. Indeed, American Jewish pressure had the exact reverse effect on the policy makers that pan-Islamic and Indian Moslem pressure had. Thus Lacy Baggally, a Foreign Office official, minuted on 8 February 1939: 'If Jewish immigration into Palestine is not stopped we shall be heading for trouble. We cannot hope to please both the Jews and Arabs. If our solution displeases the Jews, they will let off a lot of hot air — particularly those in the U.S.A. If our solution displeases the Arabs they are likely to act'.

This sentiment not only became one of the main contemporary justifications for British policy, it was even put to the Zionists, being explained to Dr. Weizmann on 14 February 1939, at the first meeting of the Round Table Conference, by Malcolm Macdonald. Weizmann expressed his scepticism of the enormous powers of the Arabs to destroy the British Empire. In his experience, Weizmann told Macdonald, 'those who knew the Arabs best knew them to be of mercurial temperament and did not paint so alarming a picture of Arab solidarity'. It was Lord Halifax who, at that same meeting, set out the philosophical view to Weizmann. 'There was a contest' Lord Halifax explained, 'between the profoundest philosophies of human life. Their discussion must enable them to see lucidly how necessary it was for the Jews to reconcile administrative necessity and fundamental spiritual claims and rights. He would suggest that the Jews should of their own free will dispose of their rights by offering terms of conciliation and by the long view of their own problem be satisfied that all parties must give freely in order to reach a solution'.

The Zionists did not understand this concept of the disposal of fundamental rights. They were deeply shattered when the 33% maximum for the eventual Jewish population of Palestine became official British policy. They did not believe it when Malcolm Macdonald told them honestly, and to their face: 'If you will accept this agreement, there might be some hope of a limited measure of Jewish settlement not only in Palestine and Transjordan but also in Iraq and possibly even in Egypt.' The pressures which the British government now exerted were upon each of the European governments, not to allow Jewish

refugees to proceed to Palestine. Each European government through which Jews tried to proceed was informed that the British government regarded this procedure with alarm. The British Minister in Bucharest, Sir Reginald Hoare, in a telegram which was to set the pattern for future British policy, informed Malcolm Macdonald on 24 February 1939: 'Our Consuls have been instructed to warn Shipping Agencies but I have little doubt that this exodus of Jews will continue. We must ourselves take effective police and naval measures to prevent the smuggling of unauthorised refugees into Palestine either from the High Seas or over land.' Measures were taken, and these measures were to a certain extent successful, so much so that Lord Halifax was informed by the King's Private Secretary, Sir Alexander Hardinge, on 28 February 1939, while the London Conference was still in session: 'The King has heard from Lord Gort that a number of Jewish refugees from different countries were surreptitiously getting into Palestine, and he is glad to think that steps are being taken to prevent these people leaving their country of origin'. Perhaps inspired by this royal interest, the Foreign Office telegraphed to the British Ambassador in Berlin on 2 March 1939 that 'There is a large irregular movement from Germany of Jewish refugees who, as a rule, set out without visas or any arrangements for their reception, and their attempt to land in any territory that seems to them to present the slightest possibility of receiving them. This is a cause of great embarrassment to His Majesty's Government and also, it appears, to the American Government, and the latter have expressed a wish that you should join American Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin in bringing situation to the attention of appropriate German Authorities and requesting them to discourage such travel on German ships'.

At the London Conference, the representatives of Iraq, the Yemen, Trans-Jordan and Saudi Arabia now applied their maximum pressure. It took the form, as it had done earlier, of urging 'moderation' upon the Palestinian Arabs, who were demanding an immediate veto on Jewish immigration. The pan-Arab States were able to persuade the Palestinian Arabs that as, under the new British policy, the total Jewish population would never exceed 33% of the whole, a veto could easily be deferred for 5 years on all those Jews above an initial 75,000 who would be allowed in between 1939 and 1944. Despite Jewish protest, the Cabinet now took the view that it was the Jews who should have made some compromise agreements with the Arabs in the past. The current impasse arose, Lord Halifax told his Cabinet colleagues on 22 March 1939, 'through no fault of the Arabs but through failure of the Jews to co-operate with the Arabs', and on the following day, when the White Paper was finalised, Malcolm Macdonald informed his colleagues: 'We must not enable the Jews to hold up constitutional progress by refusal to co-operate with the Arabs'. This was an exact reversal of the Foreign Office and Colonial Office attitude of twenty years before. Dr. Weizmann, leaving England on March 24,

wrote to Neville Chamberlain: 'Never before have I left England with so heavy a heart. A cloud hangs over the relations between the Jewish Agency and British ministers. Through all the ups and downs of more than 20 years I have found support in the thought that, to quote Lord Balfour's words "We are partners in the great enterprise" which means life or death to my people.'