

BALFOUR AND PALESTINE

A legacy of deceit

by

Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Nutting, Bt.

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(Tel: 01·373 8414)

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One of the most shattering and shaming indictments of British Foreign policy ever framed has recently come to light in a collection of state documents compiled by Doreen Ingrams and entitled "Palestine Papers 1917-1922, Seeds of Conflict" (John Murray, 1972). As the Foreword very properly reminds us, 'the (Palestine) conflict began not in 1948 but in 1917' with the publication of the Balfour Declaration, and to understand the intensity of the hatred which exists today between the Arabs and Israel, it is necessary to go back to that crucially important watershed in the history of the Middle East. But Mrs Ingrams does a lot more than merely recall how the eviction of the Arabs of Palestine to make way for the creation of the Israeli state began more than half a century ago. Letting the record speak for itself, she also lays bare the cynicism with which British Ministers at that time committed themselves to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, with a total and deliberate disregard for the rights and interests of the Arabs who then numbered 92 per cent of the country's population.

Until now even those best informed on the history of Palestine since the First World War have been inclined to give Balfour and his colleagues the benefit of the doubt about their ultimate intentions. They have accepted that to the British Government of the day the Balfour Declaration meant no more and no less than it said, when it proclaimed that Britain would help to establish a 'national home' for the Jewish people in Palestine without prejudice to the rights of the existing Moslem and Christian Arab population. Consequently there has arisen a widespread idea that Ministers both then and in later years must have been duped by the wily Zionist Movement, led by Dr Chaim Weizmann, who had intended from the outset that Palestine should become a Jewish state. And the fact that, after twenty years of British rule in Palestine, the 'national home' became the Jewish state of the Zionists' dream, and in so doing dispossessed all but a handful of Arab inhabitants of their homes has been attributed to weakness rather than duplicity on the part of Balfour and his successors.

No longer can anyone be under such an illusion. For the Government of the day stand condemned out of their own mouths and writings of conniving at and furthering every Zionist design from the issue of the Balfour Declaration onwards. In document after document of the State Papers which Mrs Ingrams has brought to light the sordid proof is revealed that Balfour and his colleagues knew exactly what the Zionists were up to and that, with the honourable exceptions of Lord Curzon and Edwin Montagu, they had every intention of helping them to fulfil their aims. Worse than this, the Government deliberately set out to deceive the Arab majority in Palestine as to their real intentions with promises and guarantees that they had 'nothing to be frightened about'¹ and that Britain would 'never consent' to a Jewish Government being set up to rule their land.²

As early as 1915 we now learn that Sir Herbert Samuel, a dedicated Zionist who was later to become the chief executive of the British mandatory government in Palestine, was expressing the hope that Jewish immigration would ensure that in due course a Jewish majority would prevail and rule over the country.³ True there was, until the 'Outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917 little inclination on the part of the British Cabinet to support Samuel's aspirations, although Balfour and other leading Ministers had apparently already declared their sympathy for Zionism.⁴ But when the seat of power in Petrograd was seized by the Bolsheviks, among whose leaders were several prominent Jews, and it became evident that Germany was actively promoting the Bolshevik cause in order to winkle Russia out of her war-time alliance with Britain and France, the British Government suddenly awoke to the importance of Zionism to the Allies' war effort. Sir Ronald Graham, an Assistant Under-Secretary of State in the Foreign Office whom Weizmann was to describe as being most helpful to the Zionist cause,⁵ sent a memorandum to the Permanent Under-Secretary saying that 'We ought to secure all the political advantage we

1 Statement by Mr Winston Churchill, Colonial Secretary, to House of Commons 14.6.21.

2 Speech on King's Birthday 3.6.21 by Sir Herbert Samuel, British High Commissioner in Palestine.

3 PRO. CAB 37/123/43.

4 PRO. FO 371/3058

5 Weizmann, 'Trial and Error' p. 231.

can out of our connection with Zionism and there is no doubt that this advantage will be considerable especially in Russia: Ministers, he suggested, should now 'meet the wishes of the Zionists and give them an assurance that His Majesty's Government are in general sympathy with their aspirations'. To which suggestion, Balfour responded by inviting Weizmann and Lord Rothschild 'to submit a formula'⁶

Four months later, on October 4, 1917, when the Cabinet were considering the Zionist formula, Balfour informed his colleagues that 'the German Government were making great efforts to capture the sympathy of the Zionist Movement' and suggested that Britain should promote the establishment of 'a Jewish national focus in Palestine'. After further discussion the Cabinet duly agreed to this proposal and, on November 2, Balfour issued his famous declaration in the form of a letter to Lord Rothschild stating that 'His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country'.⁷ Whereupon, to exploit the propaganda advantage of this British flirtation with Zionism, leaflets were dropped over German and Austrian territory and pamphlets circulated to Jewish soldiers in the armies of Germany and her Central European allies, proclaiming that 'the hour of Jewish redemption has arrived. . . . The Allies are giving the Land of Israel to the people of Israel. . . . Will you join them and help to build a Jewish homeland in Palestine? ... Stop fighting the Allies who are fighting for you, for all the Jews An Allied victory means the Jewish people's return to Zion'.⁸

Such a claim was of course far beyond the actual terms of the Balfour Declaration. But, as we now know, it was no more than the author of the declaration himself intended. And, as the Cabinet minutes of that

⁶ PRO. FO 371/3058.

⁷ PRO. CAB 23/4

⁸ Aharon Cohen, 'Israel and the Arab World', p. 124.

period show, Balfour envisaged an outcome far beyond what the guarded language of his letter to Lord Rothschild actually said. For when he and his colleagues were discussing the wording of the declaration on October 31, Balfour made it very clear that, in his judgment, the Jewish national home would become a Jewish state as 'a matter for gradual development in accordance with the ordinary laws of political evolution'.⁹ Which choice of words was to be echoed in the proposals 'regarding the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine', which the Zionist Organisation made to the Foreign Office prior to the Versailles Peace Conference in November 1918. Moreover, as Weizmann was to admit several years later, both Balfour and his Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, had no hesitation in telling the Zionist leader that in using the phrase 'national home' in the declaration, 'We meant a Jewish state'.¹⁰

It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that Lord Curzon made no impression on Balfour when he warned him that Weizmann 'contemplates a Jewish state, a Jewish nation, a subordinate population of Arabs, etc. ruled by Jews; the Jews in possession of the fat of the land and directing the Administration', and that he was 'trying to effect this behind the screen and under the shelter of British trusteeship'.¹¹ Curzon's warning was ignored, as was also his protest that, on historical grounds, the British had 'a stronger claim to parts of France' than the Jews had to Palestine, considering that their connection with the land had 'terminated 1,200 years ago'.¹²

Likewise Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India and himself a Jew, was brushed aside when he argued that the system of Government under the British mandate discriminated against the Arabs in favour of the tiny Jewish minority.¹³ For, as is all too evident from the Cabinet documents of this period, the British Government never intended to allow the Arab majority any voice in shaping the future of their own

⁹ PRO. CAB 23/4.

¹⁰ PRO. CO 733/15.

¹¹ PRO. FO 800/215.

¹² PRO. FO 371/5245.

¹³ PRO. FO 371/5124.

country. 'The weak point of our position', Balfour wrote to Lloyd George in February 1919, 'is of course that in the case of Palestine we deliberately and rightly decline to accept the principle of self-determination'.¹⁴ If the existing population were consulted, he added, they would 'unquestionably' return an anti-Zionist verdict. And in reply to Curzon, Balfour stated quite categorically that 'in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country The Four Great Powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land'.¹⁵ More remarkably still, in the same memorandum he discounted the reassurances which had been given to quieten Arab suspicions regarding British intentions by saying 'In short, so far as Palestine is concerned, the Powers have made no statement of fact which is not admittedly wrong, and no declaration of policy which, at least in the letter, they have not always intended to violate'.¹⁶ (Small wonder that Curzon should have said of Balfour that he was 'the worst and most dangerous of the British Foreign Ministers' with whom he had ever dealt, a man who 'never looked ahead', who trusted in his extraordinary 'mental agility . . . to extricate himself from any complication however embarrassing', and who, despite 'his scintillating intellectual exterior, had no depth of feeling, no profound convictions and strange to say (in spite of his fascination of manner) no real affection?'¹⁷)

So there we have it from the author of the Balfour Declaration himself. Every pledge given to the Palestinian Arabs regarding the future of their country was to be 'violated' as a deliberate act of policy. The solemn promise of independence which was given by Sir Henry McMahon in 1915 when High Commissioner in Cairo and which secured the support of the Arab armies of Emir Feisal against the Turks in World War I was to be cynically ignored. So too was the Anglo-

¹⁴ PRO. FO 371/4179.

¹⁵ PRO. FO 371/4185

¹⁶ PRO. FO 371/4185.

¹⁷ Kenneth Rose, 'Superior Person, a Portrait of Curzon and his Circle in late Victorian England', p. 380.

French declaration of November 1918, pledging that the Arabs in the territories to be liberated from Turkish rule would be free to choose their own form of government, which had been issued as a reassurance to those who feared that the Balfour Declaration would cancel out McMahon's undertaking. And any Arab objections to these breaches of faith were to be dismissed as the voice of prejudice of the corrupt 'effendi' class of land-owners who had no claim to represent the people of Palestine. This even though Sir Gilbert Clayton, Britain's leading Arabist of the time and Chief Political Officer to the British army in the Middle East, pointed out that such an argument was not a fair statement of the facts and that not only were the effendis 'worthy representatives of their class but (that) fear and dislike of Zionism has become general throughout all classes. . . ' .¹⁸

At the same time both the British Government and the Zionists did everything possible to conceal their true intentions. A Zionist commission, headed by Weizmann, was sent to the Middle East to pull the wool over the eyes of the Arabs and in particular to secure the co-operation of Emir Feisal, whose authority among his Arab fellows was thought to be paramount, in the policy of large-scale Jewish immigration into Palestine without which the Jews could never have hoped to realise the Zionist aim of ultimately ruling the country. Weizmann's tactics were modelled on those laid down by a leading Zionist, Max Nordau, as long ago as 1897 who, speaking to a Zionist conference in Basle, had emphasised the need to 'find a circumlocution that would express all we meant, but would say it in a way so as to avoid provoking the Turkish rulers of the coveted land'.¹⁹

Using every possible 'circumlocution', Weizmann set about the task of winning Feisal's and the Arabs' confidence. 'It is not our aim', he told a meeting of Arabs and Jews in Jaffa in May 1918, 'to get hold of the supreme power and administration in Palestine, nor to deprive any native of his possession'.²⁰ Rumours and sayings to this effect were, he said, 'false and unfounded'. All that he wanted, and his fellow Jews

¹⁸ PRO. FO 371/4179.

¹⁹ Christopher Sykes, 'Cross Roads to Israel', p. 24.

²⁰ PRO. FO 371/3383.

throughout the world agreed completely about this, was that Jewish immigrants should be 'comfortably accommodated' in a land which could 'contain many times the present number of its inhabitants'.

On another occasion Weizmann also assured his Arab listeners that 'a Jewish Government would be fatal' to his plans and that it was simply his wish 'to provide a home for the Jews in the Holy Land where they could live their own national life, sharing equal rights with the other inhabitants'.²¹ He had, he added, 'no intention of taking advantage of the present conditions caused by the war by buying up land', but rather to 'provide for future immigrants by taking up waste and crown lands of which there were ample for all sections of the community'.

Likewise, to Feisal himself Weizmann denied categorically that the Zionists intended to set up a Jewish Government. All that they wanted to do was to help in developing the country 'without encroaching on other legitimate interests'.²²

To all this the Arabs willingly agreed that 'both Moslems and Christians shall treat their compatriots the Jews as they treat one another, so long as the Jews regard and respect the rights of these two religions, thus confirming their words by their actions'.²³ And they added that 'We thank Great Britain who will guarantee the rights and safety of all the three peoples and deal with them with equality'. Feisal too wholeheartedly welcomed 'Jewish co-operation', which he accepted as 'essential to future Arab ambitions'.²⁴ And at the end of that same year 1918, on his way to the Versailles conference, he had a further meeting with Weizmann in London. The result of this encounter was the signature by both men of an agreement by which Feisal agreed to the immigration of Jews into Palestine, provided that the rights of Arab peasants and tenant farmers were protected. Feisal added a codicil, which both he and Weizmann also signed, saying that the agreement was subject to the Arabs obtaining the independence which Britain had promised them and that, if the smallest modification or departure from

21 PRO. FO 371/3394.

22 PRO. FO 371/3398.

23 PRO. FO 371/3383.

24 PRO. FO 371/3398.

this objective were to be made, he would not be bound by a single word of the agreement.²⁵

In fact, as Balfour admitted to Lloyd George and Curzon within weeks of allowing the signature of this agreement and codicil, the British Government had no intention of allowing 'self-determination' for the Arabs of Palestine. Far from granting them the independence which had been repeatedly promised over the previous two years, Britain was not 'even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants'. Rather was she about to govern the country under a League of Nations Mandate in the full knowledge that, in the course of time and after sufficient numbers of Jews had migrated to Palestine to gain an effective foothold, a Jewish state would be proclaimed as 'a matter for gradual development in accordance with the ordinary laws of political evolution'.

But no word of these intentions was of course to be allowed to reach the ears of the Arabs, who were to be lulled into believing, with the credulous Feisal, that Jewish 'co-operation' would help them to fulfil their aim of independence and that Britain would 'guarantee the rights and safety' of all the peoples of Palestine and 'deal with them with equality'. No less determined than the Zionists' leader to deceive the Arab majority in Palestine, the Foreign Office said, in a telegram sent early in 1918 to Sir Reginald Wingate, the High Commissioner in Cairo, 'it is most important that everything should be done to allay Arab suspicions regarding the true aims of Zionism'.²⁶ And when an Arab delegation visited London in August 1921 to seek assurances regarding their future, a senior Colonial Office official, Sir Hubert Young, still further spelled out to Ministers the deceptions which they were practising on the inhabitants of Palestine. In a memorandum for the Foreign Secretary he wrote that, although the general strategic idea was 'the gradual immigration of Jews into Palestine until that country becomes a predominantly Jewish State', it was 'questionable whether we are in a position to tell the Arabs what our policy really means'.²⁷

²⁵ Christopher Sykes, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

²⁶ PRO. CAB 27/23

²⁷ PRO CO 733/14

And to the same Arab delegation Sir Herbert Samuel, as the High Commissioner in Palestine, was no less ready to dissemble than Weizmann had been in his encounters with Feisal. Having earlier proclaimed in a public speech that 'the British Government 'has never consented and will never consent' to the establishment of a Jewish Government,'²⁸ he assured the delegation that the British Government would carry out the measures with which they had promised to protect the rights of the non-Jewish population of Palestine. 'I can well understand', he went on, 'that there are many people in this country who have doubts whether the Government will really carry into effect these safeguards. They have been accustomed to Governments which say one thing and do another. This is not the way of the British Government. If it gives guarantees, those guarantees will be put into force.'²⁹

Yet, as Samuel knew perfectly well, more than two years earlier Weizmann had made it crystal clear to Ministers in London that his aim was to establish in Palestine a Jewish Commonwealth, with some four to five million Jewish immigrants within a generation, in order to 'make Palestine a Jewish country'.³⁰ And although such an aim was in flagrant contradiction of the 'safeguards' which the High Commissioner insisted would be applied to protect Arab rights and interests, Balfour and his colleagues accepted without contradiction Weizmann's assertions that there was no conflict between his policy and the Declaration's pledges to the non-Jewish communities.

Only Curzon and Montagu raised any objections. Curzon protested that 'the Zionists are after a Jewish State with Arabs as hewers of wood and drawers of water'. The Palestine mandate, he claimed, had been 'drawn up by someone reeling under the fumes of Zionism' and 'the poor Arabs are allowed to look through the keyhole as a non-Jewish community'.³¹ But Curzon's objections to the terms of the man were no more heeded than his earlier protests against Balfour Declaration on which the

²⁸ Speech on 3.6.21 by Sir Herbert Samuel.

²⁹ PRO. CO 733/4.

³⁰ PRO. FO 371/3385.

³¹ PRO. FO 371/5199.

mandate was based. I were brusquely brushed aside in favour of the argument recorded in the Cabinet minutes of August 18, 1921, that Arabs had no prescriptive right to a country which they failed to develop to the best advantage'.³² And the only result which Carson's remonstrances obtained was the transfer responsibility for Palestine affairs from the Foreign Office over which he presided, to the Colonial Office, then under direction of Mr Winston Churchill, an avowed supporter of the Zionist cause.

From then on the Zionists' fortunes prospered even more strongly than before and their leading British adherents, to be found in nearly every key position from the Cabinet down through the Colonial Office to the British mandatory government in Palestine. Samuel, a Zionist of long standing had of course already been appointed High Commissioner, in which capacity he was being assisted by Sir Ronald Storrs Civil Governor of Jerusalem, who had from 1918 confirmed himself as being yet another 'convinced Zionist'.³³ Now others no less biased in outlook were promoted to posts of critical importance. Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, a former Chief Political Officer in Palestine whom Weizmann had described as 'an ardent Zionist'³⁴ who would go out of his way to serve the cause whenever he could do so, was appointed Military adviser to the Middle East department of the Colonial Office for the next three years. Hubert Young, who had served as a Political and Staff Officer in the Middle East during the war and who showed himself to be no friend of the Arabs, was promoted to be head of the same department. And although T. E. Lawrence was also roped in by Churchill as an expert on the Arab world, it was by now a very different Lawrence to the man who had fought with Feisal's armies against the Turks. For at this point he had become thoroughly disenchanted with the Arab cause. Not only did he make the astonishing claim in an unpublished memoir that Britain had emerged from her Middle East involvements 'with clean hands', but as one of his first acts on joining Churchill's team, he advocated arming the Jewish

³² PRO. CAB 23/24.

³³ PRO. FO 371/3398.

³⁴ Weizmann, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

immigrants in Palestine against the native Arab population.³⁵

With such a group of pro-Zionist and anti-Arab Ministers and officials directing the government of Palestine both at home and on the spot, it is scarcely surprising that British policy discriminated at almost every turn against the Moslem and Christian majority in the country. While the Arabs were denied any democratic system of representation, the Zionists were allowed to establish a Commission and later an Agency of their own in Palestine. And despite vehement Arab protests, the Zionist Commission became within a few months, in the words of General Bols, the Chief Administrator under Samuel, an 'Administration within an Administration', which rendered 'good government impossible' and brought home to the Arabs that 'privileges and liberties are allowed to the Jews which are denied to them'.³⁶ But when Bols went on to suggest that, in the interests of peace and justice, the Zionist Commission be abolished, all that he achieved was his own immediate dismissal and eventual transfer to the governorship of Bermuda. Thereafter all warnings that the Arab majority would not suffer much longer the discriminatory treatment being meted out to them were received with derisive comments from officials such as Meinertzhagen to the effect that 'it is again suggested that we give way to the Arab Bogey and again ask the Zionists to renounce the Balfour Declaration'.³⁷ Far from conceding anything to the Arabs' appeal for equal treatment, it was held in Whitehall that what were needed were yet stronger measures by the Palestine Administration to show who was master in the land.

The nearest that the mandatory authorities got to allowing the Arabs any form of representative institutions was to establish at the end of 1920 an Advisory Council of ten official and ten non-official members. But Samuel insisted that the Council's non-official element, no less than the official members who were all Government servants, should be nominated by him and not elected by the communities whose interests they were supposed to represent. Even worse than this, the

35 PRO. CO 733/17A.

36 PRO. FO 371/5119.

37 PRO. CO 537/852

system of representation among the non-official members, with four Moslems, three Jews and three Christians making up the total of ten, put the Arab Moslems in a minority although they then numbered some 80 per cent of the total population. And as Edwin Montagu protested to his Cabinet colleagues, the composition of the Advisory Council constituted 'a monstrous and flagrant violation of the principles to which I understood His Majesty's Government were committed, (namely) that the Government of Palestine should be composed of the various races therein living in proportion to their numbers'.³⁸

Apart from this travesty of democracy, the Arabs, whether Moslem or Christian, were not allowed any representative institutions, although the Jewish minority had been permitted early in 1920 to hold elections for a Jewish Assembly to deal with matters affecting their community. For as Samuel reported home in November of that year, 'there is a possibility that the Moslem and Christian communities might wish to establish assemblies of their own . . . (whose) activities might conflict with the policy in relation to Palestine adopted by His Majesty's Government'.³⁹ Any elected body of Arabs would, it was felt, 'undoubtedly prohibit further immigration of Jews'⁴⁰ and so 'bar the way to the execution of the Zionist programme'.⁴¹ And as Churchill claimed in his statement to the House of Commons on Palestine policy on June 14, 1921, to stop future immigration would be to accept the proposition that 'the word of Britain no longer counts throughout the East and the Middle East'.

Churchill seemed to have forgotten the undertakings given to the Arabs of Palestine, from the McMahon pledge of 1915 onwards, when he spoke about the value of 'the word of Britain'. Likewise, when he issued the first of many White Papers on Palestine a year later, and denied that it had ever been British policy to allow Palestine to become a wholly Jewish state,⁴² Churchill equally overlooked the fact that, both

38 PRO. FO 371/5124

39 PRO. FO 406/40

40 PRO. CAB 23/24

41 PRO. FO 371/6372.

42 Cmd. 1700 H.M.S.O.

in Cabinet and at meetings with Weizmann at which he himself was present, Balfour and Lloyd George had made it clear that, in their view, the Jewish national home would develop into a Jewish state. And even if his memory had played him false in these respects, it is difficult to believe that he intended readers of his White Paper to take seriously his statement that the Government had always regarded Palestine as part of the territory 'lying to the west of Damascus' which had been specifically excluded from McMahon's promise of independence to the Arabs. For, as every schoolboy knew, Palestine lay to the south and not the west of Damascus, and as every member of the wartime Government, including Churchill, must also have known, the point of McMahon's reservation was purely to protect the claims of France to Lebanon and had nothing whatever to do with Palestine.

What makes it even more inexcusable that the Colonial Office should have forgotten or ignored these truths when presenting their Palestine policy to Parliament is the fact that, three months before the issue of the White Paper, Churchill was forcefully reminded of Britain's obligations to the Arabs during the course of an official visit to Palestine. At a meeting in March 1921 with a deputation of Moslems and Christians of the Haifa district, he was told that the Arabs had not hated the Turks and trusted the British because of any national prejudices, but because they craved that independence which the former had denied them and the latter had promised as a reward for shedding their blood in the cause of the Allies. Yet now it seemed that the Arabs' reward was to see Palestine denied independence and 'isolated for a thought-out purpose'. Consequently, the deputation continued, 'the Arabs' belief in England is not what it was'. And in a concluding appeal which was to have prophetic significance, they warned the Colonial Secretary that 'If England does not take up the cause of the Arabs, other Powers will. From India, Mesopotamia, the Hedjaz and Palestine the cry goes up to England now. If she does not listen, then perhaps Russia will take up their call some day For though today Russia's voice is not heard in the councils of the nations, yet the time must come when it will assert itself'.⁴³

43 PRO. CO 733/2.

But England failed to 'listen' to the cry of the Palestinian Arabs. Churchill insisted in replying to the deputation that the fulfilment of the Balfour Declaration would be 'good for the Arabs who dwell in Palestine'. And when the Arabs continued to object and to suspect that Britain's promises to them were not going to be carried out, his successor at the Colonial Office, the Duke of Devonshire, brushed aside their protests, telling his Cabinet Colleagues that 'Considering what they (the Arabs) owe to us, they may surely let us have our way in one small area which we do not admit to be covered by our pledges, and which in any case, for historical and other reasons, stands on a wholly different footing from the rest of the Arab countries'.⁴⁴

So the discriminations continued. Tens of thousands of Jews from Europe were allowed to migrate to Palestine and by the middle thirties the Jewish proportion of the population had risen from 8 to 30 per cent. More threatening still, large tracts of land were bought up by the Jewish Agency from Lebanese and Syrian landlords now living under French rule, who found it difficult and sometimes impossible to obtain the necessary passports and permits to visit their tenant farms. And as the land was parcelled out among the new Jewish settlers, the former Arab tenants were evicted, sometimes with only a few pounds compensation, often with none.

Deprived of any constitutional means of appeal or protest, the Arabs in 1936 resorted to violence in an attempt to force their British rulers to honour their guarantees and to 'deal with them with equality'. But to no avail. The Arabs were still denied any effective system of representation and, although commissions of enquiry were sent periodically to Palestine to make proposals for a settlement, the best that they offered was a partition arrangement under which 60 per cent of the cultivable area was to be awarded to the Jewish 30 per cent of the population.

After three years of continuous bloodshed and revolt, the British Government finally sought to make amends for the injustice and discrimination perpetrated under the mandate. But by then it was too late. The famous proposal in the White Paper of 1939 for the

⁴⁴ PRO. CAB 24/159.

establishment, after a ten-year transition period, of an independent bi-national state in Palestine was still-born. Any hope of resolving the issue by such a device was immediately overtaken by the outbreak of World War II. And when peace was restored six years later, Britain was far too exhausted to dispense her rule in the area any longer.

Consequently, although Ernest Bevin, like a latter-day Curzon, strove to prevent further injury being done to the Arabs, the Zionists were able to realise their aims and those of Balfour and Lloyd George thirty years before. Britain bowed out of Palestine in 1948 and, within the next twenty years, out of the whole of the Middle East. And just as the wise men of Haifa had warned Churchill in 1921, Russia took over as the champion of the Arabs in the search for justice for those who had been evicted from their homes to make way for the State of Israel.

Today, as we are constantly reminded by such grisly crimes as the massacre of Israeli athletes at Munich and the counter-massacre of Palestinian refugees in camps across the borders of Lebanon and Syria, the conflict between Zionist and Arab is as far as ever from being resolved. To delve into the past and to read from the State Papers of fifty years ago how a British Cabinet violated every pledge to their war-time Arab allies cannot of itself bring about a settlement. Too much has happened since the Balfour Declaration was issued and too many Jewish roots have been put down in the soil of Palestine to put back the clock to 1917. Any solution, to be viable and acceptable, must take account of modern facts as well as ancient claims. But whatever the ultimate terms of settlement might be, the archives which Mrs Ingrams has unearthed demonstrate beyond any doubt that our present and future Governments, as successors of Balfour and his colleagues, have an inescapable obligation to help in resolving the problem and removing the injustice which their predecessors cynically and deliberately visited on the Arabs of Palestine. The fact that Britain has meanwhile withdrawn her military presence from the Middle East and no longer presumes to tell complaisant Arab rulers what to do cannot mean that we are entitled today to wash our hands and abdicate all responsibility for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. For as the record reveals, the seeds of this conflict were sown, not accidentally or under duress, but intentionally by Ministers who knew that what they were

doing was as dishonest as it was unjust, yet who went on doing it, come what might.

As in Ulster, so equally in what was once called Palestine, we cannot escape from our past. And if we can no longer impose our will in the Middle East as we did fifty years ago, we still have an obligation, in concert with the other powers involved, to seek a settlement which will finally redeem our honour and vindicate our name.

The Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding

AIMS AND OBJECTS

We believe that the need for mutual understanding and sympathy between the people of Britain and the people of the Arab world was never more vital than at the present time.

Britain and the Arabs have a long tradition of respect and friendship; they have much to admire in each other's way of life and the principles to which both peoples adhere.

We have sympathy for the aspirations, achievements and rights of the Arab peoples, especially the Arabs of Palestine, for whose administration Britain was responsible until 1948, and whose case must not be permitted to go by default.

In a changing world, British opinion can contribute much to relieving the tensions and causes of distress in the areas concerned in the Middle East by demonstrating understanding and a concern for justice, and by urging appropriate action.

CAABU was formed in the summer of 1967. Membership is open to all who subscribe to its general aims. These involve hostility towards none, but only a sincere desire to see that neither force nor prejudice nor emotion, but only justice, should form the basis of British policy towards the problems of the Arab world.