

Facts Behind Partition

• by Abraham Revusky

THE REPORT of the Royal Commission urging the partition of Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish State on some of its territory was a great disappointment to every sincere friend of the Jewish National Home.

The report is based primarily on the assumption that the badly strained Jewish-Arab relations, which have been the cause of bloody clashes during the last few years, cannot possibly be improved through voluntary agreements. The partition of Palestine which would divide the two nations territorially and insure them limited but autonomous spheres of development seemed to be the logical conclusion.

Though fundamentally opposed to the partition scheme proposed by the Commission, one is not impressed by the "historic" arguments usually brought forward against it by bourgeois Zionists. In spite of all our historic rights to Palestine, we are not justified in rejecting the partition scheme *in toto* unless we see certain possibilities for improving our relations with the Arabs. If there is no hope of alleviating the Arab fears of future Jewish domination and weakening if not completely abolishing Arab resistance to Jewish immigration, we must accept the partition plan, bargaining, perhaps, for minor improvements. Only by sincerely believing in the possibility of establishing, at some future date, better relations with the Arabs, can we refuse to surrender the prospects of a bi-national state on both sides of the Jordan for the temporary advantages which may be gained through the partition scheme.

Our belief in the possibility of a future understanding with the Arabs is based partly on the fact (freely conceded by the Royal Commission, too) that Jewish immigration to Palestine has actually improved the economic conditions of the Arab masses. Still more important is the fact that the present Arab opposition to Zionism, although it is largely rooted in growing Arab nationalism is largely the result of foreign influences. Foremost among these foreign forces are the great powers

interested in undermining the British Empire and using, therefore, every opportunity to create disturbances in such a strategically situated country as Palestine. The second important factor in the Arab propaganda against Zionism are Christian missionaries who professed to be alarmed at the possibility of Jewish control of the Holy places, although Jews never had the slightest intention of assuming it. Arab resistance was further encouraged by European anti-Semites who opposed the Jewish National Home because of sheer hatred of everything Jewish. Quite recently the anti-Jewish struggle in Palestine was actively supported by Fascist Italy whose leaders saw in Palestine's turmoil an excellent opportunity to undermine Great Britain's strength in the East and thus weaken the greatest obstacle to Fascist-Nazi domination of the European continent.

The activities of the Comintern in Palestine, which acted in this case, unconsciously perhaps, rather as a tool of Russian national policy as a Great Power, than in pursuit of its own communist principles, also assumed a pronounced anti-Zionist character. Although the actual importance of this pseudo-communist propaganda was greatly exaggerated in certain Jewish circles, the fact remains that Moscow's influence in Palestine was exercised in the same direction as that of Rome and Berlin.

The strangest and most important factor in the Palestine situation is the encouragement given Arab resistance to Zionism by influential sections of the local British administration and by ruling circles in London. From the very beginnings of British rule in Palestine, Jews discovered to their dismay that the Colonial Office in London was a hotbed of opposition to their Zionist aspirations. Instead of promoting the Jewish "close settlements on land" prescribed by the Mandate, the British rulers of Palestine granted the best state lands, in the district of the Beth Shaan, to Arabs. Resenting this action, Jews pointed out that they were not opposed to distribution of land among the poor Arab fellaheen who had cultivated the

soil before and were morally entitled to possess the minimum of land required for intensive agriculture; they protested, however, the squandering of the best lands among a few Effendi families who presented nebulous legal claims, but had no intention of cultivating the granted land by the sweat of their brow.

Instead of encouraging Jewish mass immigration which would permit a quick upbuilding of the National Home, the British rulers devised various restrictions which were made more rigorous every year. The number of immigrants was determined twice a year by a "schedule" allegedly built on the absorptive capacity of the country. As time went on, this "absorptive capacity" supposedly based on economic factors only, was systematically adjusted to the strength of the Arab movement at the given moment. Even tourists going to Palestine were required to deposit a substantial sum to insure their early departure from the country.

Another means of combatting Jewish expansion was to make land purchases by Jews as difficult as possible. The otherwise reactionary bureaucrats of Palestine's administration adopted almost Socialist principles in their zeal to protect Arab tenants whose well-being might be affected by Jewish land purchases. Owners of uncultivated tracts of land, on the other hand, were granted freedom from taxation in order to enable them to hold on to their land indefinitely, avoiding the necessity of selling it to land-hungry Jews.

Jewish participation in public works and in the general administration of the country was reduced to a level much lower than the one to which they were entitled according to their numbers and the taxes paid by them. In most cases this was achieved through the exceedingly low compensation for all kinds of government work. Policemen, railroad workers, letter carriers, watchmen, laborers on public highways, and lower clerks receive wages based on the lowest Arab standard of living, although the government, owing mainly to taxes paid by Jews, has a considerable surplus in its treasury.

Another device calculated to hamper Jewish development in Palestine was strict adherence to the trade provisions of the mandate which made Palestine a dumping ground for subsidized industries in other countries. True, Great Britain found a way to circumvent similar free trade provisions in its other mandated territories. Besides, it is quite probable, that the League would give a sympathetic hearing to a British demand for a reasonable amendment of these provisions, which though originally motivated by good intentions, proved later to be out of place in the present highly protectionist world. In spite of this, the abnormal trade-status required by the Mandate was nowhere adhered to as rigorously as in Palestine where the whole success of the Jewish National Home is

greatly dependent on the industrialization of the country. On the other hand, Great Britain refused to grant Palestine any preference for its most important citrus exports. English duties on Palestine's oranges, and even more on grapefruits, are so high that Palestine's planters are unable to get the most modest returns on their invested capital unless they exploit the cheapest Arab labor.

In addition to all these economic measures intended to strangle the development of the Jewish National Home, many influential British politicians, especially among the reactionary die-hards, directly encouraged Arab resistance to Zionism as a means of getting rid of an obligation which did not seem to them to be in accordance with the old established routine of British imperialism.

It would, of course, be unfair to put all the blame on England and to absolve Jewish leadership and the Jewish people at large from any responsibility for the present situation in Palestine. In a spirit of honest self-criticism, Jewish leaders should admit that they laid too much stress on political promises and failed to avail themselves of the great economic opportunities opened to them immediately after the War. Nor can it be denied that some Zionist leaders, for the sake of a catchy phrase, were too often inclined to exaggerate the scope of their own aspirations, thus engendering an uneasy feeling even among those Arabs who were originally inclined to view Jewish aspirations with an open mind.

But even conceding our share in the comedy of errors which finally resulted in a bloody tragedy, we cannot absolve England from the main responsibility for the present crisis. There is not the slightest doubt in our minds that if England had faithfully fulfilled the obligations assumed under the Mandate, we would now have in Palestine not 425,000 Jews, but at least double that number, and if such were the case, anti-Jewish riots would be less likely to occur, and the chances for a Jewish-Arab reconciliation would be much greater. In any event we resent the British investigators' verdict on the impossibility of a Jewish-Arab peace. England, which from the beginning, built up its Palestine policy on the principle of "*divide et impera*" and any power who has consistently discouraged all efforts towards a Jewish-Arab understanding, has no moral right to make such a broad statement.

Besides, does not such a verdict give strong support to anti-Semitic theories that, because of his pernicious traits, the Jew must always arouse the resentment of his neighbors? We do not accuse the members of the Royal Commission of anti-Semitism. We concede, in all fairness, that many parts of their Report show a genuine appreciation of Jewish efforts and much sympathy for Jewish suffering throughout the world. The fact remains, however, that their verdict, though not

intentionally, fits admirably into the anti-Semitic conceptions of the irreconcilability of Jews and Gentiles and the necessity of separating them as much as possible.

We believe that even now, after all that has happened in Palestine, it is still possible to establish better relations between Jews and Arabs if only England would honestly fulfill its Mandatory obligations instead of using its masterful tricks to avoid them. With so many examples in history, of seemingly hopeless national quarrels which came to an end when a basis for honest understanding was reached, we refuse to give up all hope for Jewish-Arab reconciliation. We cannot, therefore, accept the basic principle of the Royal Commission's report and must reject its practical conclusions.

Since its publication the partition plan has been rejected by every important Zionist body which has had an opportunity to discuss it. Even before the plan was published such rejection was pronounced by the Actions Committee at its meeting in Jerusalem and by the American Zionists at their convention in New York. Later strong resolutions condemning the proposed partition have been adopted by the Labor Party of Palestine and by many Zionist groups throughout the world. We must, however, admit that the number of actual supporters of the partition plan among the Zionists is much greater than appears on the surface. Many Zionist leaders who, in public, express the sharpest opposition to the plan of partition are, privately and *sub-rosa*, working for its realization. The Jewish press is flooded with hints that if the partition is rejected, something worse may happen. Another method of creating sentiment in favor of the partition is the suggestion that after it is accepted in principle, we would still be able to gain through negotiations a substantial extension of the limits proposed by the Royal Commission. A third argument is the assertion that after the establishment of the proposed "Jewish State", it would still be possible to expand our colonization beyond its frontiers.

Let us analyze, as briefly as possible, all these three arguments. How far are they in accordance with the reality? Let us first consider the possible alternatives to the partition scheme. The Royal Commission itself mentions some of them. One is confining the Jewish immigration to 12,000 a year, which is the theoretical difference between the Jewish and Arab natural increase. The other is further restrictions of land sales to Jews. The third is the enlargement of the Advisory Council by representatives, elected or appointed, of both nations.

After mentioning these alternatives, the Commission itself rejects them as impossible. Why? It offers several reasons, but omits the most important. All these palliatives would be a clear

violation of the terms of the Mandate and would, therefore, arouse the greatest resentment among the Jews all over the world. If, however, a Jewish State, even a small one, is established, many Jews (at least the Commission believes so) will be contented and, England, in any case, will be in an unassailable legal position. After all, the Balfour Declaration did not promise more than "the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine . . ." The Jewish State fits admirably into the words, if not into the spirit of this famous document.

Should the partition plan not go through, and Palestine remain undivided under a British Mandate, England could not venture too far in its restrictions of Jewish immigration and land purchases. On the contrary, the whole logic of the situation would drive her at least to maintain public order in the territory of the Mandate. After future development will have proven that the riots of 1936 did not achieve their deeper political purpose, it would be senseless from the point of view of the British administration to assume a mild attitude towards efforts to repeat them. That the British can prevent such attacks, or, at any rate, stop them, before they become a habit, is convincingly proven by the present tranquility in Palestine now after the publication of a Report containing so much explosive powder . . . This tranquility is the most convincing answer to those naive persons among us who believe that poor England was helpless in the face of the last anti-Jewish attacks.

As long as Jewish lives are safeguarded, at least for several years, many of us would prefer even strict limitation of Jewish activities in the whole of Palestine to temporary greater possibilities in one separated part of it. Legal limitations may end sooner than definitely established frontiers.

In any case one cannot believe that the limitations and restrictions which may be expected in the event Palestine remains undivided, would be as drastic as those mentioned by the Royal Commission. They represent the maximum of evil; it is quite probable that the logic of the situation would drive Great Britain to a more faithful interpretation of its mandate obligations.

No less flimsy is the argument that if we give our formal consent to the partition, we will be able substantially to enlarge the frontiers of the Jewish State by subsequent bargaining. This argument seems to be the strongest drawing card in a present straw vote on the acceptance or rejection of the report: the most popular answer has been: "to accept, but with larger frontiers for the Jewish State."

A cool analysis of the situation will convince us that if we accept the partition plan in principle, the prospect of obtaining larger frontiers will prove to be an illusion. The moment we give up our

broader claims, based not only on history but also to an even larger extent on the dynamics of Palestine's development; the moment we are ready to consider the Palestine imbroglio from a static point of view, as a problem of dividing a common inheritance between two peoples who are definitely unable to live in one house, the partition scheme cannot be considered unfair to the Jews. Taking cognizance of the present relation of forces only, and rejecting everything that happened in the past and which will probably happen in the future, the offer just made us by the Royal Commission is quite generous. On what basis may we claim the "Negev" (the southern, semi-desert part of Palestine) if by accepting partition in principle we admit the solution of Palestine's problem on the basis of crystallization? After all there are also Arabs to bargain with.

A sober analysis of the situation brings us to the conclusion that with the exception of minor adjustments (for instance, the inclusion of the Daganias and a slight extension of the Jewish frontier to the South) the general shape of the Jewish State will have to remain as it is, if accepted.

This is why the slogan of an acceptance of the plan but with larger frontiers is doubly misleading: it may create in London a wrong impression of the actual sentiment among the Jewish masses, and it may encourage the latter to a false conception of the intentions of England.

It is possible that England may decide to partition Palestine even against Jewish and Arab wishes. Most legal minds are interpreting the decisions of the British government in this sense. Of course a Jewish State forced upon us as a *fait accompli* is something else than a state involving a solemn renunciation of the historic aspirations of Jewish people in the whole of Palestine.

Let us also say a few words about the acceptance with "mental reservation" advocated by certain Zionist writers: "Let us accept what is being offered and hope for something better in the future." This idea was best expressed by a British Labor deputy at a Jewish meeting in London. The good man, remembering his Bible, advised his Jewish listeners to follow the example of our forefather Jacob. "Take Leah, and seven years from now you may get Rachel."

There is only one little flaw in this analogy. Rachel waited for Jacob and did not marry anybody else. Had that not been the case, his chances would not have been quite as bright.

As a matter of fact, the whole report of the Royal Commission is based on the idea of creating a *strong* Arab State which would stand on its own feet economically, and would not have to pray clandestinely for a future Jewish immigration.

Not only will future Jewish immigration be prohibited in the rest of Palestine outside of the Jewish State, but conditions will be created that will make such an immigration economically superfluous. The \$10,000,000 grant of the British treasury to the Arab State, together with the yearly Jewish subventions and, still more important, the large sums of money which will have to be paid to Arab landowners and tenants who will prefer to leave the Jewish State and settle in the Arab one, will be used for finding water and developing irrigation facilities in the Arab state and, in general, for the creation of a stronger, more modern agricultural base for its economic well-being.

With the influx of the wealthy Arabs from the Jewish section and a probable immigration of Arabs from the desert, the Arab State of "Falastin" will be put on an incomparably stronger basis than the present state of Trans-Jordania. If England was able to close Trans-Jordania to Jewish immigration in spite of the actual starvation among its Arab peasants and the great craving of the larger landowners there to sell some land to the Jews, in order to obtain cash for making the rest profitable, how much easier will it be to keep closed the gates of the much stronger and richer Arab State which will be created by the partition. Besides, the agriculturists of the new Arab State will have a comparatively easy access to the markets of Jewish Palestine. The Report recommends tariff preferences between both parts of Palestine and our own economic future will force us to accept this suggestion.

Finally, we must not minimize the force of Arab nationalism which will unquestionably be cultivated in the new Arab state. That state will not be dependent on Jewish immigration for its very existence, and unless it is, no Jewish immigration will be allowed.

In other words we may be forced to accept the homely Leah. But let us forget our dreams of the glamorous Rachel; they will only disturb our domestic peace.

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