

THE HISTORIC POSITION OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO
PALESTINE

Palestine
9. Committee on A.T.C. Conference

9/17/47

A. The Public Record

I. The Balfour Declaration

On April 28, 1918, soon after the issuance of the Balfour Declaration, the Committee, at a special meeting of its Executive Committee, issued a statement in which it expressed its "profound appreciation" at the declaration of the British Government and its willingness to cooperate with that government in the "realization of the Balfour Declaration." Following is the full text of the Committee's statement:

"The American Jewish Committee was organized primarily to obtain for the Jews in every part of the world civil and religious rights, to protect them against unfavorable discrimination, and to secure for them equality of economic, social and educational opportunity. These will continue to be its objects.

"The Committee regards it as axiomatic that the Jews of the United States have here established a permanent home for themselves and their children, have acquired the rights and assumed the correlative duties of American citizenship, and recognize their unqualified allegiance to this country, which they love and cherish and of whose people they constitute an integral part.

"This Committee, however, is not unmindful that there are Jews everywhere, who, moved by traditional sentiment, yearn for a home in the Holy Land for the Jewish people. This hope, nurtured for centuries, has our whole-hearted sympathy. We recognize, however, that but a part of the Jewish people would take up their dwellings in Palestine. The greater number will continue to live in the lands of whose citizenship they now form a component part, where they enjoy full civil and religious liberty, and where as loyal and patriotic citizens, they will maintain and develop the principles and institutions of Judaism.

"When, therefore, the British Government recently made the declaration, now supported by the French Government, that 'they view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object,' the announcement was received by this Committee with profound appreciation. The conditions annexed to this declaration are regarded as of essential

importance, stipulating as they do 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.' These conditions correspond fully with the general purposes for which this Committee has striven and with the ideals of the Jews in America.

"The opportunity will be welcomed by this Committee to aid in the realization of the British Declaration, under such protectorate or suzerainty as the Peace Congress may determine, and, to that end, to cooperate with those who, attracted by religious or historic associations, shall seek to establish in Palestine a center for Judaism, for the stimulation of our faith, for the pursuit and development of literature, science and art in a Jewish environment, and for the rehabilitation of the land."

II. The Mandate

On March 1, 1919 the Committee, through its president, Louis Marshall, joined in a Memorial to President Wilson submitted by the temporary American Jewish Congress which had been elected to represent American Jews at the Peace Conference. This Memorial, signed by Julian W. Mack, Mr. Marshall and Stephen S. Wise, asked that "the Peace Conference recognize the aspirations and historic claims of the Jewish people in regard to Palestine," that Palestine be entrusted to Great Britain as the Mandatory or Trustee, and that the country be placed under the appropriate form of government which "will assure the establishment there of a Jewish National Home and will ultimately render possible the creation of an autonomous commonwealth." The Memorial went on to recite the Jewish rights to Palestine, "the historic home of the Jews."

On March 2, 1919, President Wilson replied to this Memorial

as follows:

"As for your representations touching Palestine, I have before this expressed my personal approval of the declaration of the British Government regarding the aspirations and historic claims of the Jewish people in regard to Palestine. I am, moreover, persuaded that the Allied nations, with the fullest concurrence of our own Government and people, are agreed that in Palestine shall be laid the foundations of a Jewish Commonwealth."

On April 24, 1920 the Supreme Allied Council meeting at San Remo entrusted the Mandate of Palestine to Great Britain, embodying the Balfour Declaration and providing for the establishment of a Jewish Agency as a body to represent Jewish interests in Palestine.

III. The Jewish Agency

In 1929, Louis Marshall, Felix Warburg, Cyrus Adler and other members of the Committee were instrumental in bringing about the enlargement of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, which was reorganized to make it representative of Zionists and non-Zionists alike. (Mr. Marshall died 36 hours after the Constitution of the Jewish Agency was signed). Mr. Marshall, Felix Warburg and Dr. Adler had an abiding interest in the development of Palestine. Although they were not Zionists in the political sense, they did everything in their power to promote the upbuilding of Palestine in conformity with the terms of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate.

IV. The Passfield White Paper

On November 9, 1930 the Committee unanimously adopted a resolution joining with officers of the Jewish Agency in protesting against the British policy as to Palestine as enunciated in the Passfield White Paper of October 20, 1930, which violated the terms of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate.

V. The Partition Proposal

On January 16, 1938, at its 31st Annual Meeting, the Committee adopted a resolution condemning the proposal of the British Royal Commission (announced in July, 1937) to partition Palestine as violative of the guarantees contained in the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate. It also pledged its cooperation to the Jewish Agency to bring about an equitable solution of the Palestine problem and authorized the Executive Committee of the Committee to take all steps necessary to supplement this resolution. Copies of this resolution were sent to the State Department and to the Jewish Agency Executive.

In accordance with the above provisions, the Committee undertook to mobilize public opinion against the partition proposal. It did this chiefly through the publication and wide circulation of three studies on the subject: two by Dr. Karpf and one by Dr. Adler. The Committee also gave wide publicity to the book by Herman L. Weisman, entitled "The Future of Palestine." (In this the Zionist members of the Committee were motivated by the objection that the proposed state was too small, the anti-Zionist members by the objection to the idea of a state).

VI. The Proposed Restriction of Jewish Immigration

Soon after the signing of the Four Power Pact at Munich on September 30, 1938, unconfirmed but persistent rumors spread throughout the world that Great Britain was planning a radical reversal of policy, with possible abandonment of the Balfour Declaration and complete stoppage of Jewish immigration to Palestine. American Zionist and non-Zionist groups took immediate steps to mobilize public opinion and to seek the intervention of the United States Government against the reported British policy. The Committee gave its full cooperation in these steps. It cabled Dr. Chaim Weizmann expressing its hope that the British Government would take no

action contrary to the terms of the Mandate, and requesting him to convey this message to the Colonial Secretary. It instructed Mr. Waldman who was on his way to Europe on general business of the Committee to keep in close touch with the situation. It sent a circular letter to its corporate members, informing them of its concern and of its activities in this crisis. In this letter, dated October 19, 1938, it stated:

"It is the purpose of our Committee, by all legitimate means, to endeavor to keep the doors of Palestine open for immigration of our afflicted brethren and to protect them within the framework of the Balfour Declaration. We are keeping unremittingly at that task."

On October 13, a delegation of Jewish leaders, representative of all sections of American Jewry and including members of national protective, fraternal, cultural, social and economic groups, called on British Ambassador Sir Ronald Lindsay, to whom they submitted a petition appealing to the British Government not to suspend Jewish immigration. On the following day, this delegation waited upon Secretary of State Hull and submitted a plea for American intercession with Great Britain. The Committee was represented by Carl J. Austrian on this delegation.

VII. The MacDonald White Paper

In February 1939, following a series of round-table conferences in London of the British, Arabs and Jews, the British Government decided to establish an independent state in Palestine with the Jews as a permanent minority. While this change of policy was still under consideration, the president of the Committee, Dr. Cyrus Adler, was instructed by its Executive Committee to wire the Secretary of State of the United States expressing the Committee's strong hope "that Palestine will continue to remain open to the immigration of Jews to the extent of its absorptive capacity and that no

steps will be taken which would impede the continued development of the Jewish national home in Palestine."

The publication of the British White Paper on May 17, 1939 confirmed the previously reported change of policy. The Committee joined the Zionist organizations in an official protest to the then British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain; condemning the White Paper. Dr. Adler and Mr. Strook were signatories to this protest on behalf of the Committee.

VIII. The Committee Statement of January 1945

At its 36th Annual Meeting held on January 31, 1945, the Committee adopted a statement of views regarding present and postwar problems of Jews. In the statement the Committee affirmed its "deep sympathy with and our desire to cooperate with those Jews who wish to settle in Palestine." The statement concluded as follows:

"We approve for Palestine an international trusteeship responsible to the United Nations for the following purposes:

- a) To safeguard the Jewish settlement in and Jewish immigration into Palestine and to guarantee adequate scope for future growth and development to the full extent of the economic absorptive capacity of the country.
- b) To safeguard and protect the fundamental rights of all inhabitants.
- c) To safeguard and protect the holy places of all faiths.
- d) To prepare the country to become, within a reasonable period of years, a self-governing commonwealth under a constitution and a bill of rights that will safeguard and protect these purposes and basic rights for all."

NOTE:

The membership of the Committee comprises Jews of all shades of opinion with respect to Palestine - Zionists as well as non-Zionists. One of its Corporate Members, for example, is the president of the Zionist Organisation of America. Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization, has been affiliated with the Committee since 1922, and its president, Mrs. David de Sola Pool, is a member of the Executive Committee of the American Jewish Committee.

B. The Committee's Position on Jewish Nationalism

From the public record of the Committee statements and activities recited above, its position with regard to Palestine and Zionism becomes clear. It has been a strong supporter of a Jewish Palestine from the time of the issuance of the Balfour Declaration to the present. It has considered Palestine far more than a haven of refuge from persecution, in the sense as such countries as Argentina and Canada, for example. It has recognized the peculiar historic claims of the Jews to, and their deep-rooted emotional association with the Holy Land. In the words of its Resolution of 1918 (I, above) it has sought to cooperate in the upbuilding of Palestine "with those who, attracted by religious or historic associations, shall seek to establish in Palestine a center for Judaism, for the stimulation of our faith, for the pursuit and development of literature, science and art in a Jewish environment, and for the rehabilitation of the land." Thus, throughout the past quarter of a century, the Committee's interest has been far more than philanthropic. In addition to lending full financial and moral support for the upbuilding of Palestine institutions and for the purchase of land, it has engaged in political activities on behalf of a Jewishly controlled Palestine. It has opposed every attempt of the mandatory power to restrict Jewish immigration or to abridge or rescind the rights of Jews to Palestine as laid down in the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate. For example, it opposed unequivocally the White Paper of 1939, which seeks to close the doors of Palestine to Jews. It is still opposed to that policy, as witness its most recent declaration (VIII, a, above), in which it goes on record as approving for Palestine "an international trusteeship" in order "to safeguard the Jewish settlement in and Jewish immigration into Palestine and to guarantee adequate scope for future growth and development to the full extent of the

economic absorptive capacity of the country."

Despite the Committee's warm support of a Palestine as described above, it is opposed to Jewish nationalism. Nationalism in the Committee's opinion, is a movement which regards the Jews of the world as distinct from the non-Jews ethnically and, as such, constituting a separate nation, but without a state of its own; which believes that the chief task of this nation is to create such a sovereign commonwealth in Palestine; and which seeks for world Jewry two governing bodies -- one for the purpose of building the Jewish state, the other, for the purpose of serving as a parliament for the entire Jewish people on all matters affecting the relation of Jews to the world about them (World Jewish Congress). Nationalism, furthermore, holds that outside of Palestine Jews are living in Galuth (exile or diaspora), i.e., are a "homeless" people whose existence will never be "normalized" until they have a state of their own.

To this position the Committee has always been opposed. The Committee believes that the promise of a Jewish political nationhood flies in the face of 2,000 years of Jewish history; that it is a denial of the rights won by Jews since their emancipation; that the theory and existence of an international Jewish governing body threatens the status of Jews in democratic countries and is especially odious to American Jews because it is repugnant to the spirit of American democracy. To the extent that Zionism is identified with this nationalist philosophy, the Committee has been opposed to it. The Committee is non-Zionist, i.e., it rejects the nationalist claims of the Zionists, their conception of the diaspora as a mere interlude, an unfortunate accident, and their concept of Jewish "homelessness". The Committee, however, believes that Zionism need not necessarily associate itself with Jewish nationalism (in the universal sense), and that it need not concern itself with the organization of Jewish life and its problems outside of Palestine except for the practical purposes of securing

potential settlers and moral and financial support from the Jews of the world. At the same time the Committee sees nothing inconsistent with Americanism and the ideals of the Jews of America in the movement to settle Jews in Palestine, even if that movement has the goal of eventually creating a Jewish majority in that country and establishing a Jewish state there.

C. Recent Developments

About two years ago, Dr. Chaim Weizmann approached us with a view to enlisting our aid in representations that would ultimately be made at the peace table for a Palestine in which the Jewish population would have the control. In response to this approach, it was decided to explore the possibility, on the part of the Zionists and non-Zionists, to attain ^amodus vivendi on the subject of Palestine.

For this purpose, Zionist leaders and certain individuals, appointed by the late Sol M. Stroock, entered into a series of conferences. After Mr. Stroock's death, Maurice Wertheim took his place as the leader of the non-Zionists in these unofficial conferences. After several months, a tentative formula was devised by Mr. Wertheim and some of his associates, which, in essence, provided that on the one hand the nationalist philosophy should be excised from the Zionist movement, and on the other hand, the non-Zionists ^(and the Committee) should give full support to all measures that would result in the Jewish population of Palestine ultimately becoming a majority, after which a commonwealth Palestine would become a self-governing commonwealth in one form or another.

It appeared as if the majority of the members of the Kirstein Committee, appointed by our Executive Committee to deal with this situation, favored this formula and we had definite indications that the majority of Zionist leaders would find it acceptable. When, however, it was disclosed to other members of the American Jewish Committee, violent opposition was

expressed. In view of this, the Kirsstein Committee, after many meetings, recommended that before attempting to enter into an agreement and joint declaration with the Zionists, the Committee should declare its own position. Such unilateral declaration was made at the annual meeting. A copy of that declaration is attached. At the same time, the General Committee authorized the appointment of a committee on relations with Jewish organizations, headed up by George Medalie, whose particular job it was to be to handle the situation in the future, not excluding possible resumption of conferences with the Zionists.

Shortly prior to our annual meeting, a call was issued by Henry Moskay as President of B'nai B'rith, for a meeting of 50 some odd national organizations selected by him for the purpose of dealing with the subjects of rehabilitation and restoration of the status of Jews in Europe and the problem of Palestine. This meeting resulted in the establishment of what is now known as the American Jewish Conference, which the American Jewish Committee has joined under certain safeguards. The subject of Palestine is likely to be the one controversial subject within the Conference.

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