

# British Policy in Palestine

by Bezael Sherman

(In order to develop a truly Socialist policy on the Palestine question specifically and the Jewish question generally, the Socialist Review herewith presents the first of a series of discussion articles on this subject. Other opinions are invited. The Review assumes no responsibility for the contents of these articles.—THE EDITOR).

ONLY the Royal Commission headed by the late Lord Peel rose above the soulless bureaucratic shallowness and hardheartedness which characterize British Colonial investigations.

Appointed to investigate the disturbances which broke out in Palestine in April 1936 and continue to the present day, the Peel Commission removed the halo from the Balfour Declaration. With delightful frankness and simplicity the Commission brought the Declaration down from the celestial sphere of international justice to the realm of terrestrial interests. England had no more desire to right the historic wrong which the world committed against the Jewish people, than she had intentions of fighting for the rights of the Arabs to national self-determination. The Balfour Declaration, which promised British aid in the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, aimed to gain for England, in one of the darkest hours in her history, the moral and physical support of the Jews; just as the McMahon pledges of political independence to the Arabs were to have rallied the Arab masses to

chickens, pigs and even cattle, a privilege formerly denied them by most of the *hacendados*.

The United States government is worried about the 11,250,000 bales of "surplus" cotton in which it has invested some \$600,000,000, and on which storage charges are around \$45,000,000 annually. It can think of nothing, however, except to perpetuate, by subsidies, the feudal and uneconomic system under which cotton is grown. Furthermore, it maintains, through its refusal to come to grips with the so-called problem of "under-consumption", an internal market in which people are living in desperate need of food, clothing, and shelter for want of enough income to pay both for legitimate costs and the maintenance of an owning class.

Barring war, into which the United States will attempt to drag Mexico if it engages in another European adventure; barring Fascism, which our own imperialists are helping to advance in Mexico through their oil boycott and their support of counter-revolutionary groups; and barring further pressure against Mexican progress by the Washington government, Mexico will go ahead on its social program. The success of the recently-freed semi-serf and near-slave furnishes an inspiring example which some day may be used to dethrone ailing "King Cotton", and set up a sharecropper and landworker democracy in his place.

the cause of the Allies in the World War. In both cases England scored notable successes.

And what England won in the war she had not the slightest intention of relinquishing after the war was over. Legally England was granted no more than a mandate over Palestine—to be held only until such time as the country was fit for self-government; but Great Britain never regarded Palestine as anything but an integral part of her empire and conducted herself accordingly.

All this the Peel Commission explained with perfect ingenuity. Not that we had to wait for its report to discover the real aims of British policy in Palestine. Twenty years of British rule should have opened the eyes even of the blind.

Since 1920, the Jewish community in Palestine was subjected to four pogrom-attacks—each more violent than the preceding one. Now, if we have learned anything from Jewish history, we learned this: no pogrom occurs in any country whose government does not want it to occur. Surely, British imperialism, which rules over a quarter of the globe, could find a way to cope with the small terrorist bands in Palestine, especially when the Palestinian Jew is not at all ready to be slaughtered without a fight.

The pogroms were never unexpected. The air was charged before each attack. There was ample time to take precautionary measures. But the government did nothing. If it did not actually instigate or encourage the pogroms, it is certainly guilty of criminal negligence—negligence which gave the terrorists the right to claim that the Government was with them. The Peel Commission was quite outspoken on this point. It publicly made the charge that the Palestinian government failed to give Jews the protection to which they were entitled.

Every pogrom resulted in a commission being appointed to determine its causes. And the report of every commission led to some new restriction of Jewish immigration and endeavor in Palestine. In the intervals, the government would sometimes relent in the enforcement of the restrictions without, however, repealing them. They were held as a sword over the head of the Jewish population.

Whenever there was a clash of interests between Arabs and Jews, the government sided with the first. At the same time it tried to appease the Jewish population by granting it some minor concession. It has enacted laws which, in effect, rewarded the terrorists for their attacks on Jews, and attempted to offset it by overlooking slight violations of the same laws by Jews.

Great Britain, while upholding the cause of Arab

semi-feudalism in every important showdown, tried to appear before the world in the role of an impartial arbitrator. This is why Jewish objections to British regulations were, until very recently, never completely ignored. Some people were deceived by this attitude; they—and this includes important Zionist leaders—mistook it for lack of firmness and absence of policy. In reality it was part of British policy in Palestine—not to appear to have a policy. Ostensible lack of decision was the best means of keeping the country in constant turmoil, of setting up one part of the population against the other, and of playing both ends against the middle.

But England has not overlooked something that Zionist leadership has failed to notice for a long time, namely—the coming into being of an Arab nation. She realized that new methods would have to be applied if her rule over the Arab lands was to continue. Before the war, there were only Arab tribes, scattered over a number of countries and forever quarreling with each other. British promises of Arab political independence have certainly contributed to the Arabs' enlisting under the English flag. But after reading the memoirs of T. E. Lawrence, organizer of the "Arab Revolt" against Turkey, one cannot escape the conclusion that British gold played an even more decisive role. The support of the Arab chieftains was simply bought and paid for.

But the situation changed. In the first place, the Arabs who entered the war as tribes, came out of it a people, even if only in embryo. In the second place, a new bidder for Arab cooperation appeared on the scene: Hitlerism-Fascism. A number of Arab states were born. In Palestine, Jewish activity has given accelerated tempo to the process of Arab social differentiation, bringing in its wake a process of Arab national consolidation. Arab land-owners and their servants—the Muftis and intellectuals—put themselves at the head of the national movement in order not to be swept out of power by the social awakening of the Arab toiling masses. Hence the ultra-reactionary character of the Arab Nationalist Movement. Hence, too, the close relationship between the movement and Hitlerism.

That the Arab National Movement has, from its very inception, assumed an anti-Jewish character goes without saying. Jewish settlement spelled the death-knell of the very system upon which the economic and social power of the Arab leaders rested. And they could no more be expected peacefully to accept Jewish development in Palestine than could the French aristocracy be expected to make peace with the French bourgeoisie at the time of the Great Revolution.

England was not unmindful of the *objective* danger of the Arab National Movement eventually turning against herself—and she tried to control its direction. By catering to the anti-Jewish sentiments of the incited

Arab mobs, she hoped to prevent, or at least to retard, the development of the movement into an anti-imperialist force.

This explains why the English government tolerated the pogrom-activities of the Effendis (Arab feudal land owners). Here we also find the explanation for the fact that the government always supported the most reactionary leaders and helped them crush all opposition emanating from more liberal Arab groupings.

British maneuvers in international affairs have also had repercussions in Palestine. To a certain extent British policy in Palestine has become a barometer by which could be ascertained the social climate of the world. Whenever international liberalism gained the upper hand, Jewish effort in Palestine was allowed to proceed unfettered. However, in times of reactionary tides, a pro-Arab policy was pursued by the English Government. Is it any wonder, then, that the "White Paper" coincides with the policy of "appeasement"?

The lines are now becoming visible. On one side we have the Arab nationalist movement headed by fascist elements who are desperately trying to check the cultural and economic growth of Palestine in order to retain an obsolete system. On the other hand there is Jewish upbuilding which is revolutionizing the country. Between them stands England, trying to strike a balance by giving the loaf to Arab reaction and some crumbs to the Jews. She occupies the same position in the world at large; standing between democracy and fascism, feeding bread to the latter and stones to the first.

But what of Zionism and what stand must Socialists now take in relation to it?

A correct answer to these questions is possible only on the basis of the following considerations:

1. To many Jews Palestine represents the glory of their national past. To others it represents a normal national future. But to the vast majority of the more than a quarter of a million Jews who have immigrated into Palestine in the past ten years, and to many more hundreds of thousands of Jews who are waiting for a chance to enter Palestine,—that country means the only escape from an unbearable present. They are not carried to Palestine on the wings of national aspirations or social ideals; they are driven thither by the most brutal persecution in modern history.

2. Socialists must evaluate events and processes from the point of view of their effect on the play of social forces. A movement is progressive if it advances the cause of social liberation; it is reactionary if it is detrimental to that cause.

Proceeding from these considerations I hope to be able to show, in a subsequent article, that it is the duty of true socialists to support the Jewish upbuilding in Palestine.

SOCIALIST REVIEW