

CHAPTER V

THE JEWISH ATTITUDE

1. The Committee heard the Jewish case, presented at full length and with voluminous written evidence, in three series of public hearings—in Washington by the American Zionists, in London by the British Zionists, and finally and most massively by the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem. The basic policy advocated was always the same, the so-called Biltmore Programme of 1942, with the additional demand that 100,000 certificates for immigration into Palestine should be issued immediately to relieve the distress in Europe. This policy can be summed up in three points: (1) that the Mandatory should hand over control of immigration to the Jewish Agency; (2) that it should abolish restrictions on the sale of land; and (3) that it should proclaim as its ultimate aim the establishment of a Jewish State as soon as a Jewish majority has been achieved. It should be noted that the demand for a Jewish State goes beyond the obligations of either the Balfour Declaration or the Mandate, and was expressly disowned by the Chairman of the Jewish Agency as late as 1932.

2. In all the hearings, although evidence was given by those sections of the Zionist movement which are critical of the Biltmore Programme, most of the witnesses took the official Zionist line. The Committee also heard the Jewish opponents of Zionism: first, the small groups in America and Britain who advocate assimilation as an alternative to Jewish nationalism; second, Agudath Israel, an organisation of orthodox Jews which supports unrestricted Jewish immigration into Palestine while objecting to the secular tendencies of Zionism; and third, representatives of important sections of Middle Eastern Jewry, many of whom fear that their friendly relations with the Arabs are being endangered by political Zionism.

3. As the result of the public hearings and of many private conversations, we came to the conclusion that the Biltmore Programme has the support of the overwhelming majority of Zionists. Though many Jews have doubts about the wisdom of formulating these ultimate demands, the programme has undoubtedly won the support of the Zionist movement as a whole, chiefly because it expresses the policy of Palestinian Jewry which now plays a leading rôle in the Jewish Agency. Whether this almost universal support for the demand for a Jewish State is based on full knowledge of the implications of the policy and of the risks involved in carrying it out is, of course, quite another matter.

4. The position in Palestine itself is somewhat different. Here, where the issue is not the achievement of a remote idea, but is regarded as a matter of life and death for the Jewish nation, the position is naturally more complex. Palestinian Jewry is riddled with party differences. The number of political newspapers and periodicals bears witness to the variety and vitality of this political life, and, apart from pressure exerted on Jews considered to be disloyal to the National Home, we found little evidence to support the rumours that it was dangerous to advocate minority views. Of the major political parties, Mapai (the Labour Party) is far the biggest and largely determines the official line. Opposed to the Agency's policy are two main groups. On the one side stand two small but important parties: the Conservative Aliyah Hadashah (New Settlers), drawn chiefly from colonists of German and western European extraction, and Hashomer Hatzair, a socialist party which, while demanding

the right of unrestricted immigration and land settlement, challenges the concept of the Jewish State and particularly emphasises the need for co-operation with the Arabs. Hashomer Hatzair, though it did not appear before us, published shortly before we left Jerusalem a striking pamphlet in support of bi-nationalism. Very close to Hashomer Hatzair, but without its socialist ideology, stands Dr. Magnes and his small Ihud group, whose importance is far greater than its numbers. Taken altogether, these Palestinian critics of the Biltmore Programme certainly do not exceed at the moment one-quarter of the Jewish population in Palestine. But they represent a constructive minority.

5. On the other side stands the Revisionist Party, numbering some 1 per cent. of the Jewish community, and beyond it the various more extreme groups, which call for active resistance to the White Paper and participate in and openly support the present terrorist campaign. This wing of Palestinian Jewry derives its inspiration and its methods from the revolutionary traditions of Poland and eastern Europe. Many of these extremists are boys and girls under 20, of good education, filled with a political fanaticism as self-sacrificing as it is pernicious.

6. The Biltmore Programme can only be fully understood if it is studied against this background of Palestinian life. Like all political platforms, it is a result of conflicting political pressures, an attempt by the leadership to maintain unity without sacrificing principle. The Jew who lives and works in the National Home is deeply aware both of his achievements and of how much more could have been achieved with whole-hearted support by the Mandatory Power. His political outlook is thus a mixture of self-confident pride and bitter frustration: pride that he has turned the desert and the swamp into a land flowing with milk and honey; frustration because he is denied opportunity of settlement in nine-tenths of that Eretz Israel which he considers his own by right; pride that he has disproved the theory that the Jews cannot build a healthy community based on the tilling of the soil; frustration that the Jew is barred entry to the National Home, where that community is now in being; pride that he is taking part in a bold collective experiment; frustration because he feels himself hampered by British officials whom he often regards as less able than himself; pride because in Palestine he feels himself at last a free member of a free community; frustration because he lives, not under a freely elected government, but under an autocratic if humane régime.

7. The main complaint of the Jews of Palestine is that, since the White Paper of 1930, the Mandatory Power has slowed up the development of the National Home in order to placate Arab opposition. The sudden rise of immigration after the Nazi seizure of power had as its direct result the three and a half years of Arab revolt, during which the Jew had to train himself for self-defence, and to accustom himself to the life of a pioneer in an armed stockade. The high barbed wire and the watchtowers, manned by the settlement police day and night, strike the eye of the visitor as he approaches every collective colony. They are an outward symbol of the new attitude to life and politics which developed among the Palestinian Jews between 1936 and 1938. As a Jewish settler said to a member of the Committee: "We are the vanguard of a great army, defending the advanced positions until the reinforcements arrive from Europe".

8. The Jews in Palestine are convinced that Arab violence paid. Throughout the Arab rising, the Jews in the National Home, despite every provocation, obeyed the orders of their leaders and exercised a remarkable self-discipline. They shot, but only in self-defence; they rarely took reprisals on the Arab

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population. They state bitterly that the reward for this restraint was the Conference and the White Paper of 1939. The Mandatory Power, they argue, yielded to force, cut down immigration, and thus caused the death of thousands of Jews in Hitler's gas chambers. The Arabs, who had recourse to violence, received substantial concessions, while the Jews, who had put their faith in the Mandatory, were compelled to accept what they regard as a violation of the spirit and the letter of the Mandate.

9. An immediate result of the success of Arab terrorism was the beginning of Jewish terrorism and, even more significant, a closing of the ranks, a tightening of the discipline, and a general militarisation of Jewish life in Palestine. The Agency became the political headquarters of a citizen army which felt that at any moment it might have to fight for its very existence. Deprived, as he believed, both of his natural and of his legal rights, the Palestinian Jew began to lose faith in the Mandatory Power. The dangerous belief was spread that not patience but violence was needed to achieve justice. The position of the moderates who urged self-restraint and a reliance on Britain's pledged word was progressively undermined; the position of the extremists, eager to borrow a leaf from the Arab copy book, was progressively strengthened.

10. Then came the war. Apart from a small group of terrorists, the Jewish community gave more solid support than the Palestinian Arabs to the British war effort. But when the immediate Middle Eastern danger was removed, the old struggle between the moderates and the extremists began again, heightened to an almost unendurable tension by the news from Europe and by such tragedies as the Struma incident. During the war, tens of thousands of Jews learned to fight, either in the British Army or in the Palestine Home Guard. They were with Britain in the fight against Fascism: they were against Britain in the struggle against the White Paper, which they now felt was not only unjust but totally inhuman as preventing the escape to Palestine of men, women and children in imminent danger of death in Nazi Germany and Nazi-controlled Europe. When the war ended and the Labour Government came to power, the White Paper still remained in force. The Jews, who had expected an immediate fulfilment by a Labour Government of the Labour Party programme with regard to Zionism, felt a sense of outrage when no change of policy occurred. The bitterness reached a new peak of intensity, and the position of the moderates became almost impossible. The Jewish Agency frankly stated in public hearing that, after V-E day, it was quite futile for it to attempt to co-operate with the Mandatory in suppressing illegal activity.

11. Any decision on the future of Palestine will be futile and unrealistic unless it is made in full cognisance of the political tension among the Jews in Palestine and the reasons for it. Both in evidence given in public hearings, and in numerous private conversations with leading politicians and with ordinary citizens, we were repeatedly advised that the maintenance by the Mandatory of its present policy could only lead to a state of war, in which the extremists would have the passive support of almost the whole Jewish population and the moderates would be swept from the key positions which they still hold. To use the words of one Jewish leader: "Our present crisis in Europe and Palestine is felt by all of us to be our Dunkirk".