

BRITAIN PROVOKED DISUNITY IN PALESTINE

By Louis Harap

THE flat failure of the British mandate over Palestine is unequivocally affirmed by both the majority and minority reports of the Special UN Committee on Palestine. All are agreed that the mandate must be abrogated. However, the majority recommendation that Britain should be entrusted with seeing Palestine through the transitional period (or joint Anglo-American supervision) is fraught with danger. This proposal shows that the full significance of the British colonial technique has not been grasped in all quarters. Imperialist Britain has forfeited her right to supervise such an interim period; and there is no reason to suppose that she will change her tactics, even under UN auspices.

The rapprochement of the Arab and Jewish peoples is not likely to be nourished under British or Anglo-American supervision. For the deterioration of the relations of the two peoples is directly attributable to Britain's deliberate tactic of "divide and rule" over three tragic decades. She has fomented discord in every department of political and economic life, because, to retain absolute control over Palestine, British imperialism has had to appear as a self-denying maintainer of peace between antagonistic peoples. Where reconcilable differences existed, Britain has converted them into apparently irreconcilable interests. It can be proved that Britain has facilitated her control and dominance by instigating this antagonism at every point of Arab-Jewish relations. This tactic has diverted the Jews and Arabs from solving in common their national problems by draining off their attention with artificially stimulated conflicts. In the words of the Palestine Communist Party memorandum to UNSCOP (July 5, 1947), Britain "has succeeded in fomenting hostility on national lines around such problems as immigration, fear of national domination, purchase of land, employment in government service and public works, import policy, industrial and agricultural development, taxation, education and health services."

Whenever possible, Britain has moved in on attempts of the Jews and Arabs to reach agreements and engage in common action. If these efforts had not been frustrated by Britain, the two peoples would now be much closer to agreement on the joint administration of Palestine.

But let us get down to cases.

Even before the mandate Britain prepared the ground for conflict by the two peoples over claims to Palestine. During World War I the British High Commissioner in

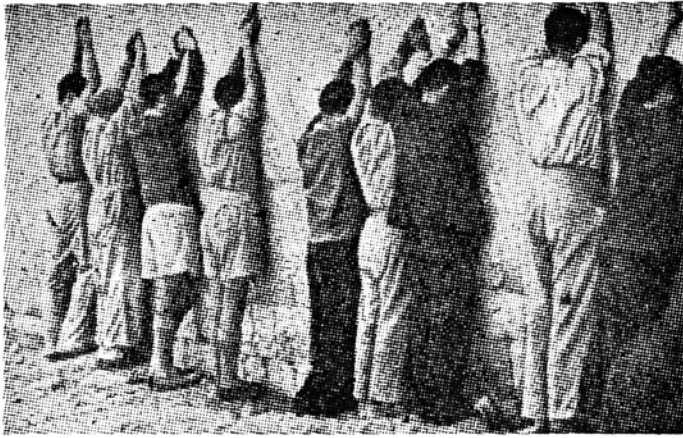
Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, promised Sherif Hussein in 1915 that Britain would help set up an independent Arab Federation, including Palestine, in return for Arab military aid against the Germans. In 1916 the secret Sykes-Picot agreement was concluded between Britain and France for the division of the Arab countries into spheres of influence between them. In 1917 the Balfour Declaration promised Palestine to the Jews as a national homeland. Thus both Arabs and Jews could point to an agreement with Britain which each claims as legal basis for Arab and Jewish states, respectively. The ground for Jewish-Arab antagonism had been laid.

Frustrated Agreement

Never once has Britain in official declarations of Palestine policy stated that it favored national understanding between the two peoples on the basis of political and national equality and the legitimate national aspirations of both peoples. On the contrary, Britain has frustrated wherever possible any attempts by the two peoples to reach political agreement. Documentary evidence exists to show that Britain nullified such attempts ever since she became the mandatory power. In March 1922 official representatives of the Arabs and the Jewish Agency met to reach an amicable agreement and recognition of mutual rights. The British asked Dr. Weizmann to postpone the negotiations until the mandate was ratified. After ratification was completed, negotiations were resumed. But these negotiations were abrogated, as was brought out before the Royal Palestine Commission of 1937, following Dr. Weizmann's report on the negotiations to the British Ambassador in Rome. (See M. Medzini, *Ten Years of Palestine Policy* (in Hebrew), pp. 231-234.)

Further evidence of Britain's deliberate effort to frustrate Arab-Jewish agreement comes from the *Palestine Diary* (1938) of Colonel, (later Brigadier) F. H. Kisch, head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department and chairman of the Zionist Executive from 1923 to 1931 and who died in 1943. In an entry dated April 3, 1923, Col. Kisch reported a conversation with Riad El-Sulk (later Lebanese Prime Minister from 1943 to 1944) as follows: "Riad repeated his opinion, already expressed in Egypt, that the Government are not sincere about the elections and that they do not wish to see a rapprochement between Jews and Arabs. I cannot believe this to be the case, but undoubtedly the Government have acted, and are acting, as if it were true." A footnote to another entry, dated February 21, 1923, described Ernest T. Richmond, high British official who served

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**Imperialism carries on in Palestine—
Jews searched in raid by British police.**

in Palestine intermittently between 1918 and 1937, as one who "came to be regarded by Jews and moderate Arabs as identified with the policy of the Mufti." Under this date Col. Kisch quotes Ragheb Bey Nashashibi of Jerusalem as follows: "Ragheb Nashishibi (who) told me, apropos of the Legislative Council elections, that in matters affecting Arab participation the High Commissioner is guided by the advice of Richmond 'who makes all cooperation with the Jews impossible'."

In 1928 a meeting was held between Jews and Arabs at which the Arabs agreed to show their good will by promising not to adopt any resolution at the seventh Arab congress against the Balfour Declaration, an unprecedented move for Arab congresses. Although the Arabs kept their promise, Jewish Agency representatives cut off negotiations with the Arabs following a hint from high government sources that they should do so.

Division by Indirection

But the British did not in every case need to intervene directly to break down negotiations for cooperation between Jews and Arabs. British policy at various times seemed to favor the maximum objectives now of the Jews, now of the Arabs. With British hints in the background, the Jewish Agency has persistently refused to accept offers of agreement with the Arabs on immigration and stabilization of their political relations from 1919 onwards, because the Agency was depending on the ambiguities of the Balfour Declaration and on the British mandate to grant the maximum Zionist demand—a Jewish state over all of Palestine.

In 1943, for instance, Arabs offered the Jewish Agency a plan for immigration up to parity with the Arabs in a few years and a bi-national state that would join a federation with neighboring countries. But the Agency rejected this offer because of promises of the British and because of sentiments expressed by our own Republican and Democratic parties in this pre-election year. Both parties made

large promises to the Jews. And the ruling Arabs for their part have more recently refused to come to any understanding with the Jews because British repressions against the Jews since the end of the war seemed to hint to them that they might gain their maximum objectives with the help of British imperialism.

Nor can we forget that the United States has played its part in this imperialistic tactic of setting one people against the other. Bartley Crum, in his *Behind the Silken Curtain*, tears away the veil. Crum tells of a confidential State Department file made available to him on his way to the Anglo-American Palestine inquiry. "According to this file," says Crum, "since September 15, 1938, each time a promise was made to American Jewry regarding Palestine, the State Department promptly sent messages to the Arab rulers discounting it and reassuring them, in effect, that regardless of what was promised publicly to the Jews, nothing would be done to change the situation in Palestine."

Another British tactic is to encourage the most reactionary elements among the Jews and Arabs, which is sure to increase tension between the two peoples. The appointment of the violently anti-Jewish Haj Amin el-Husseini as Grand Mufti of Jerusalem in 1921 is a flagrant example. In 1920 this Husseini had been sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for inciting anti-Jewish riots, but he had been pardoned. In the elections for Grand Mufti in 1921, Husseini received only nine votes, while three other candidates received 18, 17 and 12 votes, respectively—and yet Husseini received the office, presumably by British edict. Another instance of partiality to extremist Arabs is the case of Salah Hassan Shukri, mayor of Haifa in 1920, who was respected by both Arabs and Jews. In that year Shukri sent a message of congratulations to the new High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel. Pressure from reactionary Arabs caused the British to have him removed from office for sending this message.

The British have also contrived to frustrate any tendency to cooperation on the government level. For instance, the municipality of Jerusalem was governed by an Arab-Jewish body, but the British instigated antagonistic demands on the part of the two groups until the British stepped in, dissolved this joint body and set up municipal rule by British officials. On the other hand, the British have been careful to generate antagonism by promoting friction, as in the case of the Jewish quarters which were kept by the British on the common border of Jaffa and Tel Aviv in the Jaffa municipality. Thus Jews were incited against Arabs, while the Arabs were incited against the Jews by including an Arab village in the Tel Aviv municipal area. This experience should awaken us to the dangerous proposal in the UN majority report that the Arab city of Jaffa be included in the Jewish zone.

Disrupting Arab-Jewish Labor Unity

As might be expected, the British have acted to prevent the organization of joint Arab-Jewish trade unions, certainly one of the basic forms of understanding between the

two peoples. In June 1930 the "Workers' Brotherhood," a society of Jewish and Arab workers, was organized to promote cooperation between workers of both groups and to combat national hatred. The paper published by the society and the society itself were soon suppressed by the British. The British have tried to keep Jewish and Arab workers apart by giving preferred voice to purely Arab unions. Some Arab workers have been informally connected with the Histadruth through the *Brit Poale Eretz Yisrael* (Palestine Workers' Brotherhood). In a 1933 strike at the Neshet Cement Works, the government arbitrator ruled that the employers were not obliged to recognize this union, although it was the authorized representative of the Arabs employed there. When this union tried in the next few years to improve the conditions of 500 Arabs employed at the Port of Haifa, high British sources made it known that they would accede to demands made by a "pure" Arab union.

In a labor dispute in 1943 at the Awad Metal Works in Jaffa the majority of the Arab workers were members of the Palestine Workers' Brotherhood. But the government arbitrator demanded that the nationalist Palestine Arab Workers' Union negotiate on behalf of the Arab workers, although not one worker belonged to this union. In 1945 Arab strikers at the American-owned Colony Hotel who were members of the union connected with the Histadruth, were told that their demands would be granted if they severed their Histadruth connection, and the government arbitrator refused to deal with them.

Unfortunately the Histadruth is itself a jimcrow organization and has thus played into the hands of the British divide and rule policy. Histadruth leaders have themselves on occasion threatened locals with expulsion if they cooperated with Arab unions in joint actions, as was the case in the joint strike at the Migdal Zadek Quarries at Tel Aviv this year. Despite these threats of expulsion, the Jewish workers struck with the Arabs. But the British act against even jimcrow Arab locals of the Histadruth, as in the cases mentioned above. The cynical British attitude towards Jewish-Arab labor cooperation was illustrated by a statement by the Palestine Director of the Department of Labor, Graves. In a press interview in 1946 Graves was asked what the government was doing to encourage Arab-Jewish cooperation. He replied that he didn't know what the government should do about it.

Incitement to Violence

This policy of keeping the Jews and Arabs apart and antagonistic does not stop at administrative action, but extends to direct incitement of violence. The Royal Palestine Commission of 1937 (Peel Commission) came out explicitly on this point. "If one thing stands out clear from the record of the Mandatory administration," said its report, "it is the leniency with which Arab political agitation was treated, even when carried to the point of violence and

murder." Evidence submitted to the Shaw Commission of 1930 testified to the fact that the first riots in Palestine in 1920 were instigated by high government officials. When Arab violence was directed against Jews the government somehow was unable to prevent its development. But in 1933, when the Arabs directed their violence against the British and consciously refrained from molesting Jews, the actions were put down promptly and ruthlessly.

There is no law in Palestine which in any way prohibits or punishes incitement of one group against the other, while any criticism of the government is severely censored. On the contrary, incitement is encouraged by the government by their leniency towards reactionaries. Individuals working for cooperation between the two peoples, especially Arabs, are even molested by the police. An important move was made in 1946, for instance, by Fawzi Darwish el-Husseini, cousin of the ex-Mufti, towards forming an Arab-Jewish rapprochement group. The group was to open a clubhouse in Jerusalem, but several days earlier Husseini was murdered. The police presumably made a routine investigation, and the murderers have not yet been discovered, after the police ruled politics out of the investigation. The only possible conclusion is that crimes against Arabs who seek inter-national understanding are exempt from punishment.

The record of British incitement is long. A few years ago Arabs and Jews were aroused against each other after an incident in Kfar Gileadi. The government sent Arab soldiers to fight Jewish refugees on the Syrian border, thus arousing bad blood. When the pro-nazi Mufti returned in 1946 to the Middle East under mysterious circumstances, Arab reactionaries were greatly encouraged. They formed aggressive military organizations, such as "Najada" and "Futuwa." When these organizations failed to grow as anticipated, the Mufti sent an Egyptian reserve officer to Palestine to act as commander. This officer was permitted to enter the country and organize the forces. An Arab fascist "Green Shirts" leader, Ahmed Hussein, arrested during the war for pro-fascist activities, was allowed to tour Palestine and make inciting speeches.

Most recently the hanging of the two British sergeants by the Irgun set off a wave of Arab-Jewish violence. Arab and Jewish newspapers and organizations in Palestine accused the British of having a hand in provoking this violence. A few months ago a *Palcor* news report told that a Jewish constable arrested an Arab making an anti-Jewish speech to a group of Bedouin Arabs. The constable soon discovered that the "Arab" was actually a Briton in Arab dress, who was released immediately on being turned over to the British. Another incident was reported by Clifton Daniel in a *New York Times* dispatch of August 19, 1947. Wrote Daniel: "A mid-afternoon report by the Palestine Public Information Office to the effect that two Syrian Arabs had been kidnapped by four armed men was later denied by the same office as based on 'false information.' The government's haste in publicising such unconfirmed reports of incidents involving Arabs and Jews contrasts

with its reluctance to say anything about the behavior of the British forces. It has been 17 days since the British security forces attacked Jews in Tel Aviv and killed five, and a promised report has not yet appeared."

If the British had the least interest in friendly relations between the two peoples of Palestine, one would suppose that they might have tried to stop the two-year old Arab boycott. Actually they have done nothing to stop it. They have encouraged it by their passivity. In fact, the boycott is to the narrow economic advantage of the British, since the Food Ministry records that in 1946 British food export

to the Middle East had grown fivefold. And a British trade commission visiting Syria said at a press conference in Damascus recently: "If you continue to boycott Zionist products, we are sure you will achieve your national aims."

We have given only a few instances of British instigation of Arab-Jewish antagonism. The history of British rule in Palestine is in fact the history of such provocation. The evidence of the unfitness of the imperialist British regime to supervise an interim period of settlement of the Palestine problem is overwhelming. A supervisory body can serve only under collective United Nations auspices.
