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PALESTINE A Decade of Development

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PHILADELPHIA

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TEXT OF PREMIER'S LETTER ON PALESTINE

New York Times, February 14, 1931, by Jewish Telegraph Agency

LONDON, Feb. 13.—The following is the full text of Premier MacDonald's letter today to Dr. Chaim Weizmann, clarifying the British policy on Palestine:

Dear Dr. Weizmann:

In order to remove certain misconceptions and misunderstandings which have arisen as to the policy of his Majesty's Government with regard to Palestine, as set forth in the White Paper of October, 1930, and which were the subject of a debate in the House of Commons on November 17, and also to meet certain criticisms put forward by the Jewish Agency, I have pleasure in forwarding you the following statement of our position, which will fall to be read as the authoritative interpretation of the White Paper on the matters with which this letter deals.

It has been said that the policy of his Majesty's government involves a serious departure from the obligations of the mandate as hitherto understood; that it misconceives the mandatory obligations, and that it foreshadows a policy which is inconsistent with the obligations of the mandatory to the Jewish people.

His Majesty's Government did not regard it as necessary to quote in extenso the declarations of policy which have been previously made, but attention is drawn to the fact that, not only does the White Paper of 1930 refer to and endorse the White Paper of 1922, which has been accepted by the Jewish Agency, but it recognizes that the undertaking of the mandate is an undertaking to the Jewish people and not only to the Jewish population of Palestine. The White Paper places in the foreground of its statement the speech I made in the House of Commons on the 3d of April, 1930, in which I announced, in words that could not have been made more plain, that it was the intention of his Majesty's Government to continue to administer Palestine in accordance with the terms of the mandate as approved by the Council of the League of Nations. That position has been reaffirmed and again

made plain by my speech in the House of Commons on the 17th of November. In this speech on the 3d of April I used the following language:

"His Majesty's Government will continue to administer Palestine in accordance with the terms of the mandate as approved by the Council of the League of Nations. This is an international obligation from which there can be no question of receding.

"Under the terms of the mandate his Majesty's Government are responsible for promoting the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which might 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.

"A double undertaking is involved, to the Jewish people on the one hand and to the non-Jewish population of Palestine on the other; and it is the firm resolve of his Majesty's Government to give effect, in equal measure, to both parts of the declaration and to do equal justice to all sections of the population of Palestine. That is a duty from which they will not shrink and to discharge of which they will apply all the resources at their command."

DECLARATION IS REAFFIRMED

That declaration is in conformity not only with the articles but also with the preamble of the mandate, which is hereby explicitly reaffirmed.

In carrying out the policy of the mandate the mandatory cannot ignore the existence of the differing interests and viewpoints. These, indeed, are not in themselves irreconcilable, but they can only be reconciled if there is a proper realization that the full solution of the problem depends upon an understanding between the Jews and the Arabs. Until that is reached, considerations of balance must inevitably enter into the definition of policy.

A good deal of criticism has been directed to the White Paper upon the assertion that

it contains injurious allegations against the Jewish people and Jewish labor organizations. Any such intention on the part of his Majesty's Government is expressly disavowed. It is recognized that the Jewish Agency have all along given willing coöperation in carrying out the policy of the mandate and that the constructive work done by the Jewish people in Palestine has had beneficial effects on the development and well-being of the country as a whole. His Majesty's Government also recognize the value of the services of labor and trades union organizations in Palestine, to which they desire to give every encouragement.

A question has arisen as to the meaning to be attached to the words "safeguarding the civil and religious rights of all inhabitants of Palestine irrespective of race and religion" occurring in Article II, and the words "insuring that the rights and position of other sections of the population are not prejudiced" occurring in Article VI of the mandate. The words "safeguarding the civil and religious rights" occurring in Article II cannot be read as meaning that the civil and religious rights of individual citizens are unalterable. In the case of Suleiman Murra, to which reference has been made, the Privy Council, in construing these words of Article II said "It does not mean . . . that all the civil rights of every inhabitant of Palestine which existed at the date of the mandate are to remain unaltered throughout its duration; for if there were to be a condition of the mandatory jurisdiction, no effective legislation would be possible." The words, accordingly, must be read in another sense, and the key to the true purpose and meaning of the sentence is to be found in the concluding words of the article, "irrespective of race and religion." These words indicate that in respect of civil and religious rights the mandatory is not to discriminate between persons on the ground of religion or race, and this protective provision applies equally to Jews, Arabs and all sections of the population.

RIGHTS NOT TO BE IMPAIRED

The words "rights and position of other sections of the population," occurring in

Article VI, plainly refer to the non-Jewish community. These rights and position are not to be prejudiced; that is, are not to be impaired or made worse. The effect of the policy of immigration and settlement on the economic position of the non-Jewish community cannot be excluded from consideration. But the words are not to be read as implying that existing economic conditions in Palestine should be crystallized. On the contrary, the obligation to facilitate Jewish immigration and to encourage close settlement by Jews on the land remains a positive obligation of the mandate and it can be fulfilled without prejudice to the rights and position of other sections of the population of Palestine.

We may proceed to the contention that the mandate has been interpreted in a manner highly prejudicial to Jewish interests in the vital matters of land settlement and immigration. It has been said that the policy of the White Paper would place an embargo on immigration and would suspend, if not indeed terminate, the close settlement of the Jews on the land, which is a primary purpose of the mandate. In support of this contention particular stress has been laid upon the passage referring to State lands in the White Paper, which says that "it would not be possible to make available for Jewish settlement in view of their actual occupation by Arab cultivators and of the importance of making available suitable land on which to place the Arab cultivators who are now landless."

The language of this passage needs to be read in the light of the policy as a whole. It is desirable to make it clear that the landless Arabs, to whom it was intended to refer in the passage quoted, were such Arabs as can be shown to have been displaced from the lands on which they can establish themselves, or other equally satisfactory occupation. The number of such displaced Arabs must be a matter for careful inquiry. It is to landless Arabs within this category that his Majesty's Government feels itself under an obligation to facilitate their settlement upon the land. The recognition of this obligation in no way detracts from the larger purposes of development which his Majesty's Govern-

ment regards as the most effectual means of furthering the establishment of a national home for the Jews.

PROBLEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

In framing a policy of land settlement it is essential that his Majesty's Government should take into consideration every circumstance that is relevant to the main purposes of the mandate. The area of cultivable land, the possibilities of irrigation, the absorptive capacity of the country in relation to immigration, are all elements pertinent to the issues to be elucidated, and the neglect of any one of them would be prejudicial to the formation of a just and stable policy.

It is the intention of his Majesty's Government to institute an inquiry as soon as possible to ascertain inter alia what State and other lands are, or properly can be made, available for close settlement by Jews under reference to the obligation imposed upon the mandatory by Article VI of the mandate. This inquiry will be comprehensive in its scope, and will include the whole land resources of Palestine. In the conduct of the inquiry provision will be made for all interests, whether Jewish or Arab, making such representations as it may be desired to put forward.

The question of the congestion amongst the fellahen of the hill districts of Palestine is receiving the careful consideration of his Majesty's Government. It is contemplated that measures will be devised for the improvement and intensive development of the land, and for bringing into cultivation areas which hitherto may have remained uncultivated, and thereby securing to the fellahen a better standard of living without, save in exceptional cases, having recourse to transfer.

In giving effect to the policy of land settlement as contemplated in Article XI of the mandate, it is necessary, if disorganization is to be avoided, and if the policy is to have a chance to succeed, that there should exist some centralized control of transactions relating to the acquisition and transfer of land during such interim period as may reasonably be necessary to place the development scheme upon a sure foundation. The power contemplated is regu-

lative and not prohibitory, although it does involve a power to prevent transactions which are inconsistent with the tenor of the scheme. But the exercise of the power will be limited and in no respect arbitrary. In every case it will be conditioned by considerations as to how best to give effect to the purposes of the mandate. Any control contemplated will be fenced with due safeguards to secure as little interference as possible with the free transfer of land. The centralized control will take effect as from such date only as the authority charged with the duty of carrying out the policy of land development shall begin to operate. The High Commissioner shall, pending the establishment of such centralized control, have full powers to take all steps necessary to protect the tenancy and occupancy rights, including the rights of squatters, throughout Palestine.

NO PROHIBITION IS IMPLIED

Further, the statement of policy of his Majesty's Government did not imply a prohibition of acquisition of additional land by Jews. It contains no such prohibition, nor is any such intended. What it does contemplate is such temporary control of land disposition and transfers as may be necessary not to impair the harmony and effectiveness of the scheme of land settlement to be undertaken. His Majesty's Government feels bound to point out that it alone of the governments which have been responsible for the administration of Palestine since the acceptance of the mandate has declared its definite intention to initiate an active policy of development, which it is believed will result in a substantial and lasting benefit to both Jews and Arabs.

Cognate to this question is the control of immigration. It must first of all be pointed out that such control is not in any sense a departure from previous policy. From 1920 onward, when the original immigration ordinance came into force, regulations for the control of immigration have been issued from time to time, directed to prevent illicit entry and to define and facilitate authorized entry. This right of regulation has at no time been challenged.

But the intention of his Majesty's government appears to have been represented as being that "no further immigration of Jews is to be permitted so long as it might prevent any Arab from obtaining employment." His Majesty's Government never proposed to pursue such a policy. They were concerned to state that, in the regulation of Jewish immigration, the following principles should apply: viz., that "it is essential to insure that the immigrants should not be a burden on the people of Palestine as a whole, and that they should not deprive any section of the present population as a whole, and that they should not deprive any section of the present population of their employment." (White Paper 1922.)

In one aspect, his Majesty's Government have to be mindful of their obligations to facilitate Jewish immigration under suitable conditions, and to encourage close settlement by Jews on the land; in the other aspect, they have to be equally mindful of their duty to insure that no prejudice results to the rights and position of the non-Jewish community. It is because of this apparent conflict of obligations that his Majesty's Government have felt bound to emphasize the necessity of the proper application of the absorptive capacity principle.

That principle is vital to any scheme of development, the primary purpose of which must be the settlement both of Jews and of displaced Arabs on the land. It is for that reason that his Majesty's Government have insisted, and are compelled to insist, that government immigration regulations must be properly applied. The considerations relevant to the limits of absorptive capacity are purely economic considerations.

NO STOPPAGE OF IMMIGRATION

His Majesty's government did not prescribe and do not contemplate any stoppage or prohibition of Jewish immigration in any of its categories. The practice of sanctioning a labor schedule of wage-earning immigrants will continue. In each case consideration will be given to anticipated labor requirements for works which, being dependent upon Jewish or mainly Jewish

capital, would not be or would not have been undertaken unless Jewish labor was available. With regard to public and municipal works failing to be financed out of public funds, the claim of Jewish labor to a due share of the employment available, taking into account Jewish contributions to public revenue, shall be taken into consideration. As regards other kinds of employment, it will be necessary in each case to take into account the factors bearing upon the demand for labor, including the factor of unemployment among both the Jews and the Arabs.

Immigrants with prospects of employment other than employment of a purely ephemeral character will not be excluded on the sole ground that the employment cannot be guaranteed to be of unlimited duration.

In determining the extent to which immigration at any time may be permitted it is necessary also to have regard to the declared policy of the Jewish Agency to the effect that "in all the works or undertakings carried out or furthered by the Agency it shall be deemed to be a matter of principle that Jewish labor shall be employed." His Majesty's Government do not in any way challenge the right of the Agency to formulate or approve and endorse this policy. The principle of preferential, and indeed exclusive, employment of Jewish labor by Jewish organizations is a principle which the Jewish Agency are entitled to affirm. But it must be pointed out that if in consequence of this policy Arab labor is displaced or existing unemployment becomes aggravated, that is a factor in the situation to which the mandatory is bound to have regard.

His Majesty's government desire to say, finally, as they have repeatedly and unequivocally affirmed, that the obligations imposed upon the mandatory by its acceptance of the mandate are solemn international obligations from which there is not now, nor has there been at any time, any intention to depart. To the tasks imposed by the mandate, his Majesty's government have set their hand, and they will not withdraw it. But if their efforts are to be successful, there is need for coöperation, confidence, readiness on all sides to ap-

preciate the difficulties and complexities of the problem, and, above all, there must be a full and unqualified recognition that no solution can be satisfactory or permanent

which is not based upon justice, both to the Jewish people and to the non-Jewish communities of Palestine.

RAMSAY MACDONALD.