

PALESTINE ROYAL COMMISSION

Notes of Evidence taken on Thursday, 7th January, 1937

FORTY-NINTH MEETING (Public)

Present:

The Rt. Hon. EARL PEEL, G.C.S.I., G.B.E. (*Chairman*).

The Rt. Hon. Sir HORACE GEORGE MONTAGU RUMBOLD, Bt., G.C.B., G.C.M.G., M.V.O. (*Vice-Chairman*).

Sir EGBERT LAURIE LUCAS HAMMOND, K.C.S.I., C.B.E.

Sir WILLIAM MORRIS CARTER, C.B.E.
Sir HAROLD MORRIS, M.B.E., K.C.
Professor REGINALD COUPLAND, C.I.E.

Mr. J. M. MARTIN (*Secretary*).

In Attendance:

Mr. L. Y. ANDREWS, O.B.E.
Mr. P. G. HEATHCOAT-AMORY.

Witness:

Mr. D. BEN-GURION, Chairman of the Executive of the Jewish Agency.

4527. *Chairman:* You have sent us in a précis of the points upon which you wish to address us. The first one is the attitude of Zionism towards the Arabs?—Yes.

4528. And you have put under that the meaning of the Jewish Home. Would you like to make your statement on those lines?—When I receive the invitation to give evidence I was rather embarrassed. I knew I had very little to add to the comprehensive evidence given by the representatives of the Jewish Agency, especially Dr. Weizmann, therefore I want to limit myself to a few fundamental questions which have arisen during this enquiry. A great deal has been heard about the benefit which had accrued to this country from Jewish work, the improvement of agriculture in Palestine, the provision of more work, better sanitary conditions, better education and so on. It is not the virtue of the Jews that brought this about and brought benefit to the country, but it is inherent in our work. Our aim cannot be accomplished in Palestine without a creative constructive work in agriculture, industry, education, etc. The welfare of the whole country is our deep concern for moral, economic and political grounds. But I want to remove a possible misunderstanding which may arise in such a discussion. The benefit which is accruing to the country from our work is not the reason and the justification of our being here and of the Jewish National Home. We are here in our own right. We regard the Jewish National Home as an end in itself. We claim to be here and to assure our future here because it is our own right and it is justified in itself, whether it benefits others or not.

4529. When you say whether it benefits others, do you mean whether it benefits the other side?—It is not in order to benefit others. I say that it is a fact that it must benefit others, because it is a creative work.

4530. You say it must?—Yes, in its nature it must benefit the whole country, otherwise we cannot be here.

4531. *Sir Horace Rumbold:* But the benefits conferred on the other race are incidental to the establishment of the Home?—Yes, it is not the main purpose and our work is in itself its own justification.

4532. *Sir Laurie Hammond:* I understand Mr. Ben-Gurion to say they are not here as philanthropists: but as of right?—Yes. It is an end in itself and we regard ourselves, the Jewish people, as entitled to live and to be free for our own sakes. Our right in Palestine is not derived from the Mandate and the Balfour Declaration. It is prior to

that. I believe it was said by the Chairman of the Royal Commission, or perhaps one of his colleagues, that the Mandate is our Bible.

4533. *Chairman:* Did I ever go as far as that?—It may be it was one of your colleagues. We should be glad to hear you say it; but I say on behalf of the Jews that the Bible is our Mandate, the Bible which was written by us, in our own language, in Hebrew, in this very country. That is our Mandate. Our right is as old as the Jewish people. It was only the recognition of this right which was expressed in the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate. It is stated in the Mandate that it recognises the right of the Jewish people to reconstitute their National Home.

4534. *Professor Coupland:* In the preamble?—In the preamble. It is not a new thing. It is not the establishment of a new historical fact.

4535. *Chairman:* You think it is, in fact, stated more clearly in the Bible than in the Mandate?—I say it is more strong and it was recognised in the Mandate that our right was not created in 1917 or 1922. It was recognised that we had a historical connection with Palestine and there are also other grounds for reconstituting and re-establishing our National Home and not merely establishing a new thing, only re-establishing a thing which we had, which we held and which was our own during the whole history of the Jewish people.

4536. *Sir Horace Rumbold:* The right derived from the Bible, would not that take you as far as the reconstitution of the Jewish National State?—I will come to that later. I am not a lawyer and I do not wish to speak in legal terms. I will speak in terms of commonsense and of history. I say we are here as of right and I believe all those people, first of all the British people and then other European nations and the United States of America, which endorsed the action of Great Britain, for them too, the Jewish National Home was an end in itself. It was not in order that the Jews should benefit Palestine, but it was to solve the Jewish problem. It was to remove a grievance, a historical grievance of the Jewish people against the whole Christian world for many centuries. There were attempts, very worthy and sincere attempts, by civilised people during the last century to remove the grievance of the Jewish people, their persecutions and their sufferings, by giving them equal rights in England and France and other countries; but it proved to be no solution, because it did not take away the root of our troubles and the root is that we are in every country a minority at the mercy of the majority. This majority may

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treat us rightly and fairly, as in England and in France, and it may be otherwise, as in Germany, but we are always at the mercy of others.

4537. I do not want to interrupt you, but this has all been fully stated by Dr. Weizmann?—I said at the beginning I did not want to repeat what he said, but I only wish to make clear this point that we are here of our own right and for ourselves, although we are benefiting the country. We do not intend to create in Palestine the same intolerable position for the Jews as in all other countries. It means a radical change for the Jewish people otherwise there is no need for a National Home. It is not to give the Jews equal rights in Palestine. It is to change their position as a people. I want to say one word on why we are here in Palestine. It is not because we once conquered Palestine. Many people have conquered a country and lost it and they have no claim to that country, but here we are for two reasons unprecedented in history. The first is this—Palestine is the only country in the world that the Jews, not as individuals but as a nation, as a race, can regard as their own country, as their historic homeland, and the second reason is there is no other nation—I do not say population, I do not say sections of a people—there is no other race or nation as a whole which regards this country as their only homeland. All the inhabitants of Palestine are children of this country and have full rights in this country, not only as citizens but as children of this homeland, but they have it in their capacity as inhabitants of this country. We have it as Jews, as children of the Jewish people, whether we are here already or whether we are not here yet. When the Balfour Declaration was made there were 60,000 Jews here. It was not only the right of those 60,000. Now we are 400,000 and it is not only the right of these 400,000. It is because we are the children of the Jewish people and it is the only homeland of the Jewish people that we have rights in this country. We are returning to Palestine and we gladly and without qualification admit one very essential limit and that limit is the rights of the inhabitants of Palestine not to be injured. Nothing shall be taken away from them which they need for their existence and for their well-being. We came to add, not to take away. We came to create. We may and we will come and we are entitled to come as long as the Jewish problem is not solved as long as there is need for Jews to come to Palestine and there is a place for them in Palestine without displacing others. We are not buying a National Home; we are not conquering it. We are re-creating it. This is the great importance which Jewish labour and self-work play in our national movement. As a child cannot be bought of another woman, a mother must give birth to her child, so the people itself must give birth to, must create by its own effort, by its own work, its country, its homeland. That is why we insist that our work in Palestine, the fields which we are ploughing, the factories in which we are working, the houses we are living in, must all be done by ourselves; otherwise we shall not be entitled to call it ours, ours in the sense in which a people calls a land its own land. Now I come to the question of Sir Horace. If Palestine is our country, it is not to the exclusion of other inhabitants; it is also their country, the country of those who are born here and have no other homeland, and we can come in without any limit except the limit not to displace the existing inhabitants. It means a complete solution of the Jewish problem; it means making the Jewish people masters of their own destiny as any other free independent people—then why a home and not a Jewish State? Sometimes it is also asked why does it say "in Palestine" and not "Palestine as a National Home". First of all, I would say the programme of our movement, when it was first formulated—not created, for it

existed throughout our history—but when it was first politically formulated at the first Zionist Congress in Basle in 1897—we used almost the same words as are used in the Balfour Declaration, to create in Palestine a homeland for the Jewish people. It was formulated in the German language, *Heimstaette*.

4538. That does not mean homeland?—A home secured by public law, a home for the Jewish people in Palestine. *Heimstaette* is a peculiar word in German.

4539. *Sir Horace Rumbold*: You can speak of "mein Heim" in German and it is the equivalent of an English "home"?—I say that we used the expression at that time "in Palestine." We did not say "Palestine as a National Home." We did not say to make in Palestine a Jewish State. We did not say it at that time and we do not say it now and I will tell you why. There are three reasons. Our aim is to make the Jewish people master of its own destiny, not subject to the will and mercy of others, as any other free people. But it is not part of our aim to dominate anybody else. If Palestine were an empty country we could say a Jewish State, because the Jewish State would consist of Jews only and our self-government in Palestine would not concern others. But there are other inhabitants in Palestine who are here and, as we do not want to be at the mercy of others, they have a right not to be at the mercy of the Jews. It may be the Jews would behave better, but they are not bound to believe in our goodwill. A state may imply, though not necessarily, it may imply—since there are two nationalities—domination of others, the domination by the Jewish majority of the minority, but that is not our aim. It was not our aim at that time and it is not our aim now.

4540. *Sir Laurie Hammond*: Not your aim to dominate?—Not our aim to dominate anybody else, but to be free ourselves. Not to be dependent upon others and not to dominate others.

4541. *Chairman*: That is why you want a Mandate to keep you out of temptation?—No. We said that before there was a question of a Mandate; it was before the War, in 1897. This was the formula we used. I am explaining why.

4542. I follow?—Because we take into consideration the fact that there are non-Jews in Palestine and it was not our aim and we do not need to dominate them. A state may imply a wish to dominate a minority, the wish to dominate others. The second reason is that a state means a separate political entity not attached to any other state-unit. A Jewish National home may also mean that, but not necessarily so. On the contrary, we should like this country to be attached to a greater unit, a unit that is called the British Commonwealth of Nations. For the solution of the Jewish problem, for our free national future, it is not necessary that Palestine should constitute a separate State and we should be only too glad if in the future, when the Jewish National Home is fully established, Palestine shall be eternally and completely free, but that it should be a member of a greater unit, that is the British Commonwealth of Nations. There is a third reason why we do not use the formula of a Jewish State. There are Holy Places in Palestine which are holy to the whole civilised world and we are unwilling and it is not in our interest that we should be made responsible for them. We recognise that they should be placed under a higher supervision, under some international control or a mandatory or some other international body, as is laid down in the Mandate. These are the three reasons why we do not use this term which may be misunderstood but otherwise there is no difference between a National Home for the Jewish people and what is ordinarily meant by a Jewish State, except that there is one advantage in a National Home. There is something

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more in a National Home for the Jewish people than in a Jewish State and I will show you what it is. If we say Jewish State, if those three reasons did not exist—it is an empty country and we do not want to be attached to a greater political unit and there are no Holy Places—and we said a Jewish State, it would be less than a National Home to the Jewish people. Why? A Jewish State, as in the case of any other state, would mean the sovereignty of the people of that state at any given time. They may decide without giving any reasons who shall or shall not come into that state. But when Great Britain and all other European Powers recognised the right of the Jewish people as a whole to return to their country and to reconstitute their National Home here, it was the right of all the Jews—not only the Jews who happened to be here when the Jewish State might be ready and they might refuse arbitrarily to let in other Jews. There is no such right. The Palestinian Jews, however numerous they may be and however they may by virtue of their numbers dominate the country, have no right to refuse to admit other Jews as long as there is a place in this country. A National Home for the Jewish people is, in that respect, a much larger conception than a Jewish State.

4543. *Sir Horace Rumbold*: You mean there might come a moment when, if there was a Jewish National State, they might say "We have enough people here, we do not want any more of you"?—Yes, without giving any reason for it, but they cannot do it, when there is a National Home for the Jewish people.

4544. *Chairman*: They would have the power without giving reasons for it?—While this home is maintained by international law they must give reasons for it; even if it were a Jewish Government they must give reasons. They would not be able to refuse arbitrarily other Jews, because it is the right of every Jew all over the world. It means that the size of the National Home is in no way related to the number of people who are in Palestine. It is related to two things, to the need of the Jewish people in the world, how many Jews are in need to return to Palestine, and it is related to the objective possibilities of Palestine. As long as there is a Jew in the world who must come back and is willing to come back and as long as a place can be made for him without displacing one of those already here, he can come here. Only these two considerations may, according to our view, determine the size of the Jewish National Home. It may be said that this need is a new one, the need for a large return of Jews to Palestine, that it is a novel fact, created by the present conditions in Germany, Poland and so on. That is not correct historically. As far back as the first Zionist Congress and at all the subsequent Congresses before the War the main feature of our Congresses was a report on the terrible position of the Jews in a great number of countries. The menace to the Jews, even in countries where they enjoyed equal rights, was always taken into consideration by the pre-War Congresses. Their main feature was an address on the Jewish position in the world by the famous Jewish writer Max Nordan. In 1902 a Royal Commission was set up in England to examine the question of alien immigration and Dr. Herzl was invited to give evidence before that Commission. That was our first contact with a British Royal Commission in the history of our Movement. He said at that Commission, which was in 1902, and you will find it in a Command Paper, "The solution of the Jewish difficulty is the recognition of the Jews as a people and the finding by them of a legally recognised home, to which Jews in those parts of the world in which they are oppressed would naturally migrate," and when the offer was made by Mr. Chamberlain at

that time to settle Jews in Uganda it was also not meant as a spiritual centre. Uganda cannot be meant as a spiritual centre for the Jews, but it was meant as a place to which Jews who were unable to remain where they were could come. Then when the Balfour Declaration was made, one of the authors of the Balfour Declaration and a Member of the War Cabinet, General Smuts, before the new immigration started after the War, made a declaration, "I have no doubt in my mind that the whole of Israel will return to Palestine, yet more and more it will become the national home of the Jewish people. From those parts of the world where the Jews are oppressed and unhappy, where they are not welcomed by the rest of the Christian population, from those parts of the world you will yet see an ever-increasing stream of immigrants to Palestine." That was said in 1919.

4545. We have had a great deal of evidence about what General Smuts said and that kind of thing? I do not want to check you.—I have finished with that point.

4546. Compatibility of Jewish and Arab national aspirations?—I am coming to that. This has a bearing on the question of our attitude to our Arab neighbours. We never ignored the existence of the non-Jewish population. We never ignored the existence of the Arab National Movement. We believe, and what we have done up to now in Palestine has proved our belief to be true, that our work in Palestine, which was undertaken for the salvation of the Jewish people, will, by its inherent nature, be of great benefit not only to the non-Jewish population of Palestine, but to the neighbouring countries and to the whole of the Near East. We welcome the fact that the peoples of Iraq, of Egypt, and now of Syria have attained their independence, not only on moral grounds, not only because we are Zionists, and so we appreciate a national movement and are able to respect it and to sympathise with it, but also from a deeper sense of self-interest. In order to have a National Home we must have a very strong and numerous Jewish community in Palestine—I am not able to say how many we shall have in the future—and it is essential for our existence and for our development that the countries around us should be happy and developed and prosperous. We believe the benefit we are conferring on the country—and it is only necessary to take a short tour in Palestine to see the benefit of the Jews to the whole country—will also accrue to those peoples in the neighbouring countries to Palestine who are now achieving their independence. It is unfortunate that here among our Arab neighbours there is only a political national movement. I am not blaming anybody, I have no right to blame anybody; every people has the right to arrange its own movement as it likes, but there is a very essential difference between our national movement and the national movement of the Arabs here. Our movement is mainly constructive. We are not engaged in agitation, but in creative work. We had to do it in order to achieve our aim; we had to reclaim land, to increase its productivity, build cities and factories, create artistic and scientific institutions, and so on. Our Arab neighbours were engaged in their work, in purely political work. Now we are happy to see that our neighbours in Syria, in Iraq, and in Egypt, having achieved their independence, cannot now blame a foreign Government for their troubles, and they also are facing constructive problems. They are now responsible for their own country and for their own people and they cannot put the blame on the British or on the French, but they have themselves to solve their own problems, and they will have also to engage in the same constructive work as we are doing here. I believe that they, and, after them, our Arab neighbours in Palestine also will more appreciate the

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beneficial nature of our constructive work and they will see that not only is there no conflict of interests between the Jewish people as a whole and the Arab people as a whole but that their interests are complementary. We need each other. We can benefit each other. I have no doubt that at least our neighbours around us in Syria, Iraq, and Egypt will be the first to recognise that fact and from them this consciousness will also spread in Palestine amongst our Arab neighbours here, because there is no essential conflict. We have never had a quarrel with the Arabs on our side, neither with the Arabs in Palestine nor the Arabs in other countries. On the contrary. We came to this country with the consciousness that, besides saving ourselves and freeing and liberating our own people, we had also a great civilizing task to achieve here, and that we could be of great help to our Arab neighbours here and in the surrounding countries, and I believe we have proved it by our

work. The stronger we get, the greater our community becomes in Palestine, the greater our colonisation work, the more developed our scientific institutions become, the more will be recognised by our neighbours abroad and here the blessing of our work and the mutual interest which exists historically between the Jewish people which is returning to its country, returning with the tradition of European culture, with the blessing of European culture, and the Arab peoples around us, who also want to achieve not only formal political independence, but are also interested in achieving an economic, intellectual, spiritual, and cultural renaissance, and it is our belief that a great Jewish community, a free Jewish nation, in Palestine, with a large scope for its activities, will be of great benefit to our Arab neighbours, and from the recognition of this fact will come a lasting peace and lasting co-operation between the two peoples.

4547. *Chairman*: I understand you wish to make some further points in a private sitting?—Yes.