

Ira Hirschmann Papers  
Box 3  
Unidentified Memo on Conversation with  
David Ben Gurion 2/10/44

P a l e s t i n e .

Question to Churchill in Parliament :- 'What about Palestine?'

Answer :- 'Sir, I have always been a Zionist. These people have made the desert blossom like a rose'.

Churchill

Conversation with Ben Gourion, Telaviv, February 10, 1944.

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Palestine has the unique advantage that here are 500 000 Jews who want and welcome refugees. The Jews in the U.S.A. would not dare to ask England and the United States to open their doors.

a/ Refugees.

The Jews must find a place away from the war. Palestine is unique in the sense that it is the one receptive vehicle. It is for the Palestinians a vital question.

In Russia and the United States, the Jews are relatively safe.

The Jews are a small minority in this section. Our innermost desire is to get more Jews here. Life is organized, and our economy built on a basis of receiving more immigrants. Our agriculture is in a permanent process of expansion. So are we: psychologically and economically.

2 000 Jews recently came in from Yemen. They were quickly fought for among the Palestinians. We need 5 000 workers in our Agricultural settlements. This need is our greatest asset. These workers would have untold difficulties elsewhere. We are waiting for them here.

Bulgaria has 50 000 Jews who are ruined. We will save them from ruination and deadly danger, if we can get them here. Bulgaria will be occupied by Russia. The Jews are lost in Russia; safe, yes, but more torn off from the Jewish people.

We can save them physically, and save their way of life. We can bring in the remnants of what is left from Greece and Yugoslavia at once. We need 100 000 more rooms for people right here now, and 20 000 workers each for a few years.

1 000 Bulgarian Jews are ready to go, but the Germans pressed against them. America enjoys the greatest prestige in the Balkans, except in Bulgaria where they are close to the Russians. The United States Government could put pressure on Bulgaria.

The Turks are unwilling to grant sufficient transit visas.

The first difficulty is in Palestine. Even under the White Paper, they owe us 25 000 permits. England has reasons to delay the arrival of these immigrants. Even 5 000 by the end of March, when the White Paper ends, would be a great help.

It will be humanly impossible to prevent Jews from coming into Palestine. They will swim, they will take very small boats, they will come somehow. Before the war, they were within 5 miles when their boats were confiscated, and they jumped in the water and swam to shore. The Jews hired the boats mostly from Greece, as the Greeks are a seafaring people.

Very great difficulties in the Arab countries. They will say that it is the beginning of Jewish imperialism. In Algiers, Morocco, and Syria the Free French will fear the Arabs. There were many refugees in Iran with certificates to Palestine; the Governments refused to give them transit visas, so that they had to go by way of Bombay, India, to Palestine.

Turkey *s* could do it if she wanted to. She could grant free passage, a greater number to pass through Turkey, and give them a temporary stay in Turkey till the war is over.

The Rumanians are more amenable than the Bulgarians, being more independent of the Gestapo.

Regarding the White Paper, the time limit should be abolished, also the number. Pressure should be used from Washington. *s* Churchill is in favour of the abolition of the White paper, and was against it from the beginning.

b/ Politics.

Palestine is not a temporary place. B.G. speaks as a Zionist of 38 years. In 1906 he came from Russia. Since then, 2 things happened :-

- 1- a change came over the people;
- 2- a change came over the country.

Even flying, one sees a green Palestine, from what was a parched Palestine. Formerly there were green patches only. We were told that the country is poor, with no water, and especially that the Jews cannot cultivate it. It is not a rich country, but one which, when work, knowledge, and some love were applied, responds. We developed 400 000 acres and made it prosperous, planted fruit crops as in California.

Recently, the London Times in several articles by an objective reporter ended by saying :-

'Undoubtedly the Jews, if given a free hand, will develop Palestine as a flourishing link between the Middle East and Europe'.

We are becoming a seafaring people, with our port in Tel Aviv. Hafti, now in Berlin, organized a strike and closed the Port of Jaffa. Overnight, we built the Port of Tel Aviv. Before the war, the Italians had a maritime monopoly in the Mediterranean. Not now. We will develop by agriculture, industry, and the sea.

We have settled 500 000 acres or 1,5 million dunams (1.2 an acre). In Western Palestine there are 27 million dunams. According to the Arabs, only 7 million d. are cultivable. We know that 19 million are cultivable. If we settle another 6 - 9 million d., we will provide for a population of 3 - 4 million Jews, leaving still 14 million d. to cultivate.

The industrial possibilities are great, the limits far away. We have a big hinterland, the whole Middle East to supply. We are sending good to India from our factories, textiles, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, metals, machinery, etc.

We have one great asset - brains. Brains are a curse in America.

Brains are a blessing here.

The main thing needed is a constructive mind. This we have. As an example;-the Government needed stones. The Arabs got 12 Piastres (60 cents) for cutting stone. B.G. went to Ramsay MacDonald, the then Prime Minister, and made a proposition for the Jews to do piece work. The Jews ended up by making 30 Piastres an hour, mainly by organizing a cooperative and providing good machinery.

c/ Organisation of Arabs.

The Arabs fear that their land is becoming non-arabic. The leader do not want the Jews to develop the country. They want it to be an Arab country. The Arab leaders come from the Efendis (land owners). We introduce a higher standard of living and a trade union movement. They do not like it. B.G. does not think the Arabs bear belligerent malice. In 1936, they tried to terrorize, stopping traffic, shooting, etc. It was not safe to go from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. During that period, 15 new settlements were established in Upper Galilee, and a port was built. They thought they would strangle us, but Jews in Palestine are not afraid of being killed. We mobilized 30 000 men. The revolutionists today are a small, unimportant and noisy body.

Talk about the Jewish arsenal is nonsense. The Jews want to meet the Arabs when they approach, with a gun and a machine gun.

d/ The English.

The English are different here from the English in London. Their colonial officials are mediocre 'cops' accustomed to ruling native people. This is the only country in the Empire, where the ruling whites are superior to the English officials. But Jews are Europeans. The English never succeeded in managing white people. Example: America and Ireland, who wrestled their independence from them.

The Americans should be anti-White-Paper, but not anti-British. England simply made a mistake among others, as she did with the Tebeques, etc. Their political moral genius will reestablish itself. The White Paper was simply a

temporary aberration. The great peace of the world is arrived at by the cooperation of England and America.

The attitude of Russia, which opposed Palestine, has changed recently. There are signs of friendship.

The attitude of America is of the greatest importance. If we bring in now 100 000 people, it will be a great relief. We can maintain and build for the present somehow, but we are static and Palestine is dynamic.

Note: The Jews in Egypt contributed 100 000 £ to refugees last year. The limited handful of Jews in Palestine contributed 240 000 £ last year.