

This document was written in 1914 and 1915 by Herbert Samuel, a leading British Jewish Zionist of the Liberal Party. It expounded his Judeo-philic vision of Palestine as a Jewish commonwealth which would in fact be realised during the British Occupation (1917-1948) but which ignored the indigenous Palestinians who then made up 92% of the population. He distributed it as a pamphlet to fellow members of the British Cabinet, and it did not stand in the way of his appointment by His Majesty's Government as High Commissioner of Palestine from 1 July 1920 until 30 June 1925. Samuel and Winston Churchill were the two most important Britons running the 30-year Zionist Mandate.

“The Future of Palestine” by Herbert Samuel, 1915

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The course of events opens a prospect of a change, at the end of the war, in the status of Palestine. Already there is a stirring among the twelve million Jews scattered throughout the countries of the world. A feeling is spreading with great rapidity that now, at last, some advance may be made, in some way, towards the fulfilment of the hope and desire, held with unshakable tenacity for eighteen hundred years, for the restoration of the Jews to the land to which they are attached by ties almost as ancient as history itself.

Yet it is felt that the time is not ripe for the establishment there of an independent, autonomous Jewish State. Such increase of population as there has been in Palestine in recent years has been composed, indeed, mostly of Jewish immigrants; the new Jewish agricultural colonies already number about 15,000 souls; in Jerusalem itself two-thirds of the inhabitants are Jews; but in the country, as a whole, they still probably do not number more than about one-sixth of the population.

If the attempt were made to place the 400,000 or 500,000 Mahommedans of Arab race under a Government which rested upon the support of 90,000 or 100,000 Jewish inhabitants, there can be no assurance that such a Government, even if established by the authority of the Powers, would be able to command obedience. The dream of a Jewish State, prosperous, progressive, and the home of a brilliant civilisation, might vanish in a series of squalid conflicts with the Arab population. And even if a State so constituted did succeed in avoiding or repressing internal disorder, it is doubtful whether it would be strong enough to protect itself from external aggression from the turbulent elements around it. To attempt to realise the aspiration of a Jewish State one century too soon might throw back its actual realisation from many centuries more.

I am assured that the solution of the problem of Palestine which would be much the most welcome to the leaders and supporters of the Zionist movement throughout the world would be the annexation of the country to the British Empire. I believe that the

solution would be cordially welcome also to the greater number of Jews who have not hitherto been interested in the Zionist movement. It is hoped that under British rule facilities would be given to Jewish organisations to purchase land, to found colonies, to establish educational and religious institutions, and to spend usefully the funds that would be freely contributed for promoting the economic development of the country. It is hoped also that Jewish immigration, carefully regulated, would be given preference so that in course of time the Jewish people, grown into a majority and settled in the land, may be conceded such degree of self-government as the conditions of that day may justify.

It would, no doubt, be necessary to establish an extra-territorial regime for the Christian sacred sites, and to vest their possession and control in an international commission, in which France, on behalf of the Catholic Church, and Russia, on behalf of the Greek Church, would have leading voices. It would be desirable also that the Mahommedan sacred sites should be declared inviolable, and probably that the Governor's council should include one or more Mahommedans, whose presence would be a guarantee that Mahommedan interests would be safe-guarded.

From the standpoint of British interests there are several arguments for this policy, if wider considerations should allow it to be pursued:-

1. It would enable England to fulfil in yet another sphere her historic part of civiliser of the backward countries. Under the Turk, Palestine has been blighted. For hundreds of years she has produced neither men nor things useful to the world. Her native population is sunk in squalor. Roads, harbours, irrigation, sanitation, are neglected. Almost the only signs of agricultural or industrial vitality are to be found in the Jewish and, on a smaller scale, in the German colonies. Corruption is universal in the administration and in the judiciary. The Governors, who follow one another in rapid succession, are concerned only with the amount of money they can squeeze out of the country to send to Constantinople. Under British administration all this will be quickly changed. The country will be redeemed. What has been done in Egypt will be repeated here, and the knowledge of this would make many of the present inhabitants not merely acquiesce, but rejoice, in the change. The British Agent in Egypt recently reported (on the 7th January) that the information of the Intelligence Department there indicated that a large proportion of the population would welcome a British occupation. There have been many previous indications of the same feeling. The Turkish officials are foreigners in the country. Of Turkish population there is none. England should assume control, because by that means she can forward the purpose for which, at bottom, her Empire in the tropics and sub-tropics exists.

2. The British Empire, with its present vastness and prosperity, has little addition to its greatness left to win. But Palestine, small as it is in area, bulks so large in the

world's imagination, that no Empire is so great but its prestige would be raised by its possession. The inclusion of Palestine within the British Empire would add a lustre even to the British Crown. It would make a most powerful appeal to the people of the United Kingdom and the Dominions, particularly if it were avowedly a means of aiding the Jews to reoccupy the country. Widespread and deep-rooted in the Protestant world is a sympathy with the idea of restoring the Hebrew people to the land which was to be their inheritance, and intense interest in the fulfilment of the prophecies which have foretold it. The redemption also of the Christian Holy Places from the vulgarisation to which they are now subject, and the opening of the Holy Land, more easily than hitherto, to the visits of Christian travellers, would add to the appeal which this policy would make to the British peoples. There is probably no outcome of the war which would give greater satisfaction to powerful sections of British opinion.

3. The importance that would be attached to this annexation by British opinion would help to facilitate a wise settlement of another of the problems which will result from the war. Although Great Britain did not enter the conflict with any purpose of territorial expansion, being in it and having made immense sacrifices, there would be profound disappointment in the country if the outcome were to be the securing of great advantages by our allies, and none by ourselves. But to strip Germany of her colonies for the benefit of England would leave a permanent feeling of such intense bitterness among the German people as to render such a course impolitic. We have to live in the same world with 70,000,000 Germans, and we should take care to give as little justification as we can for the hatching, ten, twenty, or thirty years hence, of a German war of revenge. Certain of the German colonies must no doubt be retained for strategic reasons. But if Great Britain can obtain the compensations, which public opinion will demand, in Mesopotamia and Palestine, and not in German East Africa and West Africa, there is more likelihood of a lasting peace.

4. The belt of desert to the east of the Suez Canal is an admirable strategic frontier for Egypt. But it would be an inadequate defence if a great European Power were established on the further side. A military expedition organised from Southern Palestine, and including the laying of a railway from El Arish to the Canal, would be formidable. Palestine in British hands would itself no doubt be open to attack, and would bring with it extended military responsibilities. But the mountainous character of the country would make its occupation by an enemy difficult, and while this outpost was being contested time would be given to allow the garrison of Egypt to be increased and the defences to be strengthened. A common frontier with a European neighbour in the Lebanon is a far smaller risk to the vital interests of the British Empire than a common frontier at El Arish.

5. The course which is advocated would win for England the lasting gratitude of the Jews throughout the world. In the United States, where they number about

2,000,000, and in all the other lands where they are scattered, they would form the body of opinion whose bias, where the interest of the country of which they were citizens was not involved, would be favourable to the British Empire. Just as the wise policy of England towards Greece in the early part of the nineteenth century, and towards Italy in the middle of the nineteenth century, has secured for this country ever since the goodwill of the Greeks and the Italians, wherever they may be, so help given now towards the attainment of the ideal which the Jews have never ceased to cherish through so many centuries of suffering, cannot fail to secure, into a far-distant future, the devoted gratitude of a whole race, whose goodwill, in time to come, may not be without its value.

What are the alternatives?

(a) Annexation by France.- French interests, which in Northern Syria are considerable, in Palestine are small. A French company owns the railway of 54 miles from Jaffa to Jerusalem, but that interest could doubtless be bought out for no large sum. Beyond that there is little. There are French monastic establishments, but few French residents elsewhere. The Egyptian Intelligence Department report, which has already been quoted, is to the effect that a French annexation would be unwelcome to the Jews. If, as the outcome of the war, France recovers Alsace and Lorraine, and obtains the greater part of Syria, including Beirout and Damascus, she ought not to grudge to Great Britain Mesopotamia and Palestine. Her ancient protectorate of Catholic interests in the East would be continued by her leadership in the International Commission which would control the Holy Places.

(b) Internationalisation.- To establish a Government composed of representatives of all the Powers would be to lay the country under a dead hand. Continuous disagreements would be inevitable, and would result in nothing being done for the development of the land and the progress of the people. Besides, a status which was in form international would give an opportunity for the gradual permeation of the country by German influence. Already Germany has been very active in Palestine. She has spent considerable sums of money there with a view to increasing her influence. She has founded a bank, agricultural colonies, schools, hospitals. After the war, shut out, to a great extent, from the Far East and other parts of the globe, she may well concentrate a part of her energies on Palestine. In twenty years' time Egypt's neighbour, ostensibly internationalised, may have become so permeated by German influence as to furnish a strong case for German control, whenever the cumbrous form of government shall have patently broken down, and whenever another revision of the map of Western Asia takes place. An international regime has invariably been a transition stage to something else. While it lasts it is a theatre of intrigue in which some or all of the controlling countries seek to prepare Claims against the day when the change which is foreseen shall come. In this case it may

prove to be a stepping-stone to a German protectorate. Such an eventuality would be as dangerous to France in Northern Syria as to England in Egypt.

(c) Annexation to Egypt.- Incorporation within the British Empire by this indirect method may be found necessary for the sake of conciliating Mahommedan sentiment in India and Egypt. The constitution of a Greater Egypt would probably be very acceptable to Sultan Hussein and his Mahommedan subjects. But this policy would introduce complications in the administration of the country, without, it would seem, advantages sufficient to counterbalance them. Nor is it certain that the arrangement would be preferred by Arabs. In the eyes of the Jews, it would offer a much less strong appeal than would the possibility of the growth of a Jewish State under the direct suzerainty of Great Britain.

(d) To leave the country to Turkey, but with some guarantees for improved government and greater facilities for Jewish colonisation.- To devise such guarantees and to make them effective would be a matter of extreme difficulty, as the whole of the modern history of the Turkish Empire has shown. It is probable that the adoption of such a policy would leave the situation substantially unimproved. Whether it would in any case be practicable would depend upon the disposition, after the war, of the territories to the north and east.

The gradual growth of considerable Jewish community, under British suzerainty, in Palestine will not solve the Jewish question in Europe. A country the size of Wales, much of it barren mountain and part of it waterless, cannot hold 9,000,000 people. But it could probably hold in time 3,000,000 or 4,000,000, and some relief would be given to the pressure in Russia and elsewhere. Far more important would be the effect upon the character of the larger part of the Jewish race who must still remain intermingled with other peoples, to be a strength or to be a weakness to the countries in which they live. Let a Jewish centre be established in Palestine; let it achieve, as I believe it would achieve, a spiritual and intellectual greatness; and insensibly, but inevitably, the character of the individual Jew, wherever he might be, would be ennobled. The sordid associations which have attached to the Jewish name would be sloughed off, and the value of the Jews as an element in the civilisation of the European peoples would be enhanced.

The Jewish brain is a physiological product not to be despised. For fifteen centuries the race produced in Palestine a constant succession of great men - statesmen and prophets, judges and soldiers. If a body be again given in which its soul can lodge, it may again enrich the world. Till full scope is granted, as Macaulay said in the House of Commons, "let us not presume to say that there is no genius among the countrymen of Isaiah, no heroism among the descendants of the Maccabees."

H.S. [Herbert Samuel] January 1915