

Anthony Crossley MP spoke in favour of the MacDonald White Paper during the House of Commons debate of 22 May 1939; it was adopted a day later by a vote of 281-181, against the efforts of Winston Churchill and other arch-Zionists. See Hansard, [Commons, 22 May 1939](#), columns 1968-76.

They [the Arab Palestinians] have been denied their political aspirations. The hon. Gentleman [Tom Williams MP] asked me two or three specific questions, and I do not wish to answer them at length, but I will answer two of them. He asked me whether I could say that Arabs and Jews had not lived in certain parts of Palestine in happiness together even during the troubles. It is true that there were a few Jewish colonies which were absolutely unmolested throughout the troubles. What were they? They were the old Jewish prewar settlements, and they were not Zionist settlements at all. That is the significant fact, and the true one. He asked me why Arabs had killed Arabs, and I can only answer that by saying that whenever you get a population engaged in what is really civil strife, that sort of thing occurs. There is the analogy of Ireland. The whole of the Irish people were against us after the War. It is no use denying that. The whole of them to a man in the whole of Southern Ireland, except a very few who are known as the Irish loyalists, were against us. The extremists, undoubtedly, gained control and many Irish moderates at that time were killed. But I hope those unhappy days for Palestine are over.

I conceive it as my task to-day to deploy the Arab case in this Debate just as the hon. Gentleman has deployed the Jewish case. I do not believe that there has ever been a Debate in this House when this House would have been more justified in calling to the Bar an Arab speaker to explain the Arab point of view from the point of view of his own countrymen and his own country. I would have liked to have seen Mr. George Antonius called to the Bar. There are no Arab Members of Parliament. There are no Arab constituents to bring influence upon their Members of Parliament. There is no Arab control of newspapers in this country. It is impossible almost to get a pro-Arab letter in the 'Times.' There are in the City no Arab financial houses who control large amounts of finance. There is no Arab control of newspaper advertisements in this country. There are no Arab ex-Colonial Secretaries, who one by one can get up and thunder, as they will, at the Government during this Debate, because of the mistakes they themselves have made in the past. Finally, and I want the Colonial Secretary [Malcolm MacDonald MP] to pay particular attention to this point, to-morrow night there is to be a broadcast. There is to be himself giving the Government point of view. There is to be the hon. Member for the Don Valley (Mr. T. Williams) to advance what is undoubtedly the Zionist point of view although there are many Arab supporters on his benches. There is to be the right hon. Member for Carnarvon Boroughs (Mr. Lloyd George) supporting the Zionist point of view. There will not be a supporter of the Arabs who can advance his

point of view. [HON. MEMBERS: 'The Colonial Secretary.'] No. He has advanced and will advance what I call the compromise point of view.

I congratulate the Minister on the presentation of his case to-day, but if it gives any comfort to hon. Members opposite I may say that I found myself as violently disagreeing with parts of his speech from the Arab point of view as some of them did from the Zionist point of view. There is this to be said about violence in Palestine, that in face of absolute misrepresentation, or lack of representation, the Arabs have had in this House for 20 years, it is a lamentable fact that only violence brought their claims to our attention. I have been consistently and steadily an adviser of moderate methods. The more I advised moderate methods in the past the less I got a hearing. It is a fact that in the first speech I ever made in this House I was interrupted over and over again. I could not put the Arab case across the Floor of the House at that time, when I was practically the only Arab supporter called.

I should like at the outset to try and clear away five fallacies – two about Jews, two about Arabs and one about the Britons. The first fallacy about the Jews is that they are returning to their native land which they occupied in Biblical times. Of the Jewish increase of population of 400,000, only 4,000 have gone to any part of the territory ruled over by the Kings of Judah and Israel. The rest have gone to the country of the Philistines or to the valley of Esdraelon, which was usually subject to Tyre. If my hon. Friend will read his history he will find that, with the exception of King David for 10 years and with the exception of Judas Maccabeas, no King of Judah or Israel ruled any portion of the coast.

Not only are these people not going back to the same land, but they are not the same people. There are four different kinds of Jews. There is the Bagdadi Jew. For example, the First Commissioner for Works. The Bagdadi Jews, who have lived in the utmost harmony with the Arabs, are descended from people who left Palestine in the days of the captivity. People who sat down and wept by the waters of Babylon but after a time ceased weeping and did not return. Then there are the Sephardi Jews, of whom a very good example was Disraeli, one of the finest Prime Ministers this country has ever had. They came via Spain, Portugal and Italy. None of them are Zionists. There was not a more ardent supporter of that class of Jew than the late Edwin Montagu and the present Lord Mancroft. Then there is the Ascenasi Jew, the ordinary modern European Jew who is descended from Tartar and Hittite tribes in Asia Minor and was converted to the Jewish faith in the eighth or ninth century. There is the other kind of Jew whom I need not mention. These facts ought to be made clear, because there is plenty of authority behind them; but even the late Lord Balfour did not understand them.

Let me give a few facts about the Arabs. Let me first take Scandinavia as an analogy. It is very often said of the Arabs that they have this vast Kingdom, these huge fertile

areas. Why cannot they give this little corner away to the Jews. Suppose that after a war the whole of Scandinavia were liberated from a tolerant but rather corrupt rule, let us say, Russia. Suppose we liberated the Norwegians and said that they should live in Norway, that the Swedish Scandinavians should live in Sweden, that the Finnish Scandinavians should live in Finland, but as for the Denmark Scandinavians, surely they could afford their little corner. Therefore we will put Jews there in large numbers. That is an exact analogy. The hon. Member for Gower (Mr. D. Grenfell) compared the Arabs with Australian aborigines and the hon. Member for the Don Valley made deprecatory remarks about them by referring to terrorism and mosquitoes. Certainly, he used strong language about the Arabs.

Mr. T. Williams rose—

Mr. Crossley: No. I should like to proceed with my speech. When I made an interruption during the hon. Member's speech, I was told by him to wait.

Mr. Montague: You have misrepresented the hon. Member.

Mr. Crossley: I do not think that I have misrepresented him. If so, I am subject to correction. I thought he said that we had done this in Australia with the aborigines, and it did not strike me as being a fair comparison with the position of the Arabs. It is true that these Arabs in Palestine have been there for 1,400 years as a settled population of peasant farmers. If ever a people were entitled to look forward to the helpful tutelage of the British Empire it is these people. This brings me to the point about the increase in the Arab population. Has this House ever realised that we brought the war to Palestine and that 300,000 Arabs in Palestine died of starvation during the war in that country—died as the result of the war which we brought to that country. That makes it more and more an obligation on us to see to their future well-being. Since that time we have done much for them in regard to health services. Improvements in this respect are more due to our tutelage and our health services than anything which the Jews have brought to Palestine.

The last fallacy which I should like to clear away is one which is more often said in private than in public, although the right hon. and gallant Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Colonel Wedgwood) has advanced it in public. It is a harsh criticism of the British civil servant in Palestine. I do not believe that a more disinterested, hard-working or honest body of men exists than the British civil servant in Palestine. It is perfectly true that they are all pro-Arab at heart. So is every soldier. They do not go there pro-Arab, but they see the things for themselves and they see that no race of men under the Colonial standard of government in the British Empire has been so harshly or so unfairly treated or has had so raw a deal as the Arabs in Palestine.

My right hon. Friend will not expect me to pass from this subject without mentioning the McMahon correspondence. These are documents of enormous significance. Indeed, the Government have departed some way from their original view of the McMahon correspondence [p. 10]. In the White Paper in which they reported the findings of the Committee which sat upon the question [p. 400], they not only admitted that certain Arab claims had greater force than appeared hitherto but that also the language in which the alleged exclusion was expressed was not so specific and unmistakable as it was thought to be at the time. They say in the last paragraph: [‘]In the opinion of the Committee it is, however, evident from this statement that His Majesty’s Government were not free to dispose of Palestine without regard for the wishes and interests of the inhabitants of Palestine.[’] Those wishes and interests were never taken [sic: p. 59], and that in itself was an injustice. I want to state very briefly the cause of the McMahon correspondence. The first thing that happened was that the Sharif of Mecca laid down certain conditions on which he would wage war against the Turks. He claimed that Arab kingdoms and principalities should be set up all round Arabia, bounded by the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean and the borders of Persia. Sir Henry McMahon was then High Commissioner of Egypt, a friend of mine, and I regret to have to say anything against him. He sent the Sharif’s demand to the Foreign Office, and having received the reply of the Foreign Office he wrote his operative letter, in which he accepted the boundaries of the Sharif of Mecca, subject to certain exclusions. Those exclusions were two: [‘]The two districts of Mersina and Alexandretta and portions of Syria lying to the West of the districts of Damascus, Hama, Homs and Aleppo could not be said to be purely Arab, and should be excluded from the limits demanded.[’] There was this possible exclusion: [‘]As for those regions lying within these frontiers wherein Great Britain is free to act without detriment to the interests of her ally, France.[’] So far as the first exclusion goes, it is at least amazing that no point South of Damascus was mentioned, and I cannot believe that that is a basis of exclusion. As to the interests of France, the Government argument is as follows: It says that France claimed the country in 1915. England contested France’s claim and in 1916 France relinquished her claim. Therefore, in 1917 because France had claimed the country in 1915, Palestine or Southern Syria was specifically excluded from the McMahon correspondence. If the House studies carefully the map they will see that no Arab could consider that to be an honest answer. There is one document which possibly throws some light on this dispute with the French. It is a quotation from Mr. Asquith’s diary about the views of the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Carnarvon Boroughs [Lloyd George]. Mr. Asquith was not at the time aware of the McMahon correspondence because it had not yet been written, but I hope, Mr. Deputy-Speaker, that you will forgive the strength of Mr. Asquith’s language.

[quoting Asquith:] [‘]I have already referred to Herbert Samuel’s dithyrambic memorandum urging that in the carving up of the Turks Asiatic Dominion we should

take Palestine, into which the scattered Jews would in time swarm, back from all quarters of the globe, and in due course obtain home rule. Curiously enough the only other partisan of this proposal is Mr. Lloyd George who, I need not say, does not care a damn for the Jews or their past or their future, but thinks it will be an outrage to let the Holy Places pass into the possession or under the protectorate of agnostic atheistic France.['] That is a quotation from the diary dated 13th March, 1915, and was in fact just before the McMahon correspondence. It may be said that the Government still maintain the McMahon correspondence as being irrelevant. I want to put this before hon. Members. What use did we make of it? We dropped leaflets promising independence to the Arabs as contained in the McMahon pledge. We dropped leaflets in Iraq, on the Yemen, on Saudi Arabia. Did we drop them on Palestine? Yes and surely this should be taken into consideration by His Majesty's Government as being something in the nature of a pledge. There is far more than mere historical interest in these documents. They have for us exactly the same historical interest as the Balfour Declaration has for the Jews, exactly the same, no more and no less, except that they came first. I make this challenge to the Government, that if they want to decide on the rights and wrongs of that correspondence they ought now to submit it to a purely judicial tribunal. The Arabs at any time are willing to see that correspondence submitted to a judicial tribunal. It is interesting to note that when the Lord Chancellor [Frederic Maugham, >400] appeared before the committee which discussed the McMahon correspondence he did a little surprise my Arab friends when he explained at length that he was not there in his judicial capacity but as an advocate of the policy of the Cabinet.

I want to say a few words about immigration. At the end of paragraph 12 [of the White Paper, >410] there is reference to fear on the part of the Arabs of a Zionist immigration into Palestine, and hon. Members opposite will not find many of the workers in Palestine who do not share that fear. The White Paper says: ['If in these circumstances immigration is continued up to the economic absorptive capacity of the country, regardless of all other considerations, a fatal enmity between the two peoples will be perpetuated, and the situation in Palestine may become a permanent source of friction amongst all peoples in the Near and Middle East.['] It is a pity that they have been waiting 20 years and constantly increasing the rancour in that country before they discovered this. Later on, in paragraph 13, it is said: ['It has been the hope of British Governments ever since the Balfour Declaration ... that in time the Arab population, recognising the advantages to be derived from Jewish settlement and further development in Palestine, would become reconciled to the further growth of the Jewish National Home.['] What were the advantages to the Arabs? The Woodhead Report [>376] lays it down that the average holdings for an Arab family was in dunums, or 28 acres, but all the land that is available to-day for an Arab peasant is on average from 50 to 58 dunums or 12½ to 14 acres. In 1931 about a quarter of the agricultural population in Palestine, that is the Arabs, could not subsist on their holdings, now it is a half. The

price of citrus has gone to nothing, trees have had to be cut down, planting is stopped, and indeed many of the old citron growers are completely ruined by the entirely non-commercial over-development of the industry. We may as well face the fact that to many of the Arabs, immigration has meant penury, a dispossession of their land, and they are not by the terms of the Jewish agency leases even allowed to be engaged as were the Hivites of old as hewers of wood and drawers of water. There is no economic case for any further immigration whatever. Then the Government in paragraph 14 say they: [']are conscious of the present unhappy plight of large numbers of Jews who seek a refuge from certain European countries, and they believe that Palestine can and should make a further contribution to the solution of this pressing world problem.['] There again they are putting forward an extraneous argument to which the Arabs have always naturally objected. They say why cannot Palestine be treated solely and simply as a problem to be judged by the criterion of its own wishes?

In 1931 Sir John Hope Simpson reported [^{>233}] that immigration should be drastically limited. In 1933 10,000 people were allowed in, in 1934 30,000, in 1935 42,000 and in 1936 62,000 [sic: >Appendices 12-14], and that was solely for political reasons. Nobody more bitterly hates the policy of the leaders of Germany than I do, but that was done for political reasons in Europe, and does it not justify the fears of the Arabs as to the possibility of an actual Zionist majority? It was also the same with land sales. It may interest hon. Members to know how these sales came about. It may be true that only one-ninth of Palestine belongs to the Jews but that one-ninth is by far the most fertile area of the country, as it happens to be the valleys of Sharon and Esdraelon. How was this land bought? Eighty per cent. of it was sold over the heads of the Arab tenants, who were forcibly dispossessed, and if anyone does not believe there is unemployment in Palestine let him go to the tin shanties about Haifa, where he will see 25,000 unemployed Arabs who have been dispossessed of their land. There is a proverb which says: [']The Fellaah dies in his furrow.['] And too often the fellaah dies in a tin shanty at the end of an alien town listening to the sound of a strange tongue and with hatred seated in his heart. That is not what British rule should bring; but it is what British rule has brought to this country.

I come now to the constitutional point and I would like to draw hon. Members attention to paragraph 9 on page 6 of the White Paper. It says: [']The establishment of an independent State and the complete relinquishment of Mandatory control in Palestine would require such relations between the Arabs and the Jews as would make good government possible.['] No one in this House will quarrel with that statement if it means that if the Arabs commit murder, if their armed bands roam the country and if life and property are not safe, it is therefore right to withhold the reward of self-government. But does that phrase mean – and it is what the friends of the Arabs in this House want to know – that mere Jewish non-co-operation will deny the Arabs what have been admitted

to be their legitimate aspirations? I cannot believe that most hon. Members opposite do not consider it a just aspiration for any subject race to go towards self-government. If so, by what point of logic, by what dictate of reason, by what principle of justice, can the non-co-operation of a minority refuse or cause to be refused the legitimate desires of a majority?

The other constitutional point to which I want briefly to refer is on page 7 of the White Paper, sub-paragraph (6). After so long a process would it not be possible to speed up responsible government a little quicker? Many of these men who have been fighting the battle for independence for 20 years are longing to take part in the responsible government of their country. I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman can recall the old story of Rachel at the Well. I often wonder whether Rachel was really so attractive after 14 years.

Viscountess Astor: It is perfectly possible.

Mr. Crossley: I take that as being so from the Noble Lady, but all the same it would be very desirable if the process could be speeded up because it seems to us that the restoration of peace and order again may be retarded by Jewish non-co-operation and the constitutional conference is summoned only five years after the restoration of peace and order. I have reached the close of my remarks. On the whole it is undoubtedly a compromise. It is not what we want; it does not go nearly as far as we want. It still continues to treat Palestine to some extent as a legitimate oasis for people from other countries, and to that extent it disregards the wishes of the native population. But, nevertheless, this compromise does at least show some regard for truth and honesty to the Arabs. For the first time the Arab case has been recognised. It is not an absolutely honest document. There is a good deal of cant and a certain amount of desire not to blame their own past mistakes or the mistakes of previous Governments in the White Paper, but at least you can see the sepulchre showing through the whitewash for the first time. That is something.

In conclusion, I offer to the Government two truisms and one prophecy. The first of my truisms is, 'Hesitate and you are lost,' and the second – which is indeed more than a truism – is, 'You do not ever right one wrong – the wrong that has been inflicted on the Jews in other countries – by inflicting another, the wrong inflicted on the Arabs.' For that reason, I think it is best, on the whole, if the Government take the White Paper as a basis and act strongly and firmly on it. I will make this prophecy. Sooner or later, the Arabs will get their way in Palestine, if for no other reason than that they have right on their side. I know the Arabs; I have heard them abused, but they are courtly, fine, considerate gentlemen, and they are doing their best for their people. I am certain that if it is sooner, it will not be found that they either misuse their trust or prove to be other than good friends to this country. After all, they desire only to achieve what every

Colonial population which has reached a certain standard of government in every part of the Empire also desires to achieve, and what no party in the House ought to deny to them – legitimate self-government in their own land.