

NAKBA

The Process of Palestinian Dispossession



The Mandate Years

After WWI, the occupation by Allied powers of the territories that had formed part of the Ottoman Empire - officially designated the "Occupied Enemy Territory Administration" - was given international legitimacy by the League of Nations in 1922 when it issued Mandates to the Allied occupiers. Palestine remained under the control of the British without the consent of the Palestinians. In theory, the Mandatory powers were in place to assist local populations in the administration of their lands until ready to govern themselves independently. In practice, the Mandatory system was simply colonialism under another name.

The "civilizing mission" comes to Palestine

"To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by people not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the wellbeing of such people form a sacred trust of civilization ... The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations ... and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League."

- Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations



Palestine remained under British control until 1948, by which time Palestine's political infrastructure had been systematically dismembered, its people weakened, and waves of Zionist immigrants allowed to appropriate land, organize and arm.

Throughout the Mandatory period, Palestinians attempted to negotiate with the British to persuade them to fulfill their responsibilities towards the long-established population of Palestine. As early as 1918, a Palestinian delegation led by Musa Kazem al-Hussein presented a petition to British Military Governor Sir Ronald Storrs protesting the pro-Zionist policies of the British. Musa Kazem would later lead the Arab Executive Committee and the delegations it sent to several conferences in London in order to represent the Palestinian cause.

Turning the British to the Zionist Campaign

"Zionist colonization... can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power that is independent of the native population - behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach. What need, otherwise, of the Balfour Declaration? Or of the Mandate? Their value to us is that an outside Power has undertaken to create in the country such conditions of administration and security that if the native population should desire to hinder our work, they will find it impossible. And we are all of us demanding... that this outside Power should carry out this task vigorously and with determination."⁶ With these words, Zionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinski expressed the entire Zionist strategy, unchanged since the days of Herzl.



Ze'ev Jabotinski

In the early years of the WWI, Russian chemist Chaim Weizmann insinuated himself into British political circles by assisting the British Admiralty to increase their production of explosives for the war effort. In doing so, he formed close ties with Lord Arthur Balfour, the First Lord of the Admiralty whose name would forever be associated with the scheming duplicity and Zionist agenda that shaped British policy. Balfour would later refer to Weizmann as "the man who made me a Zionist."⁷ The extent of his commitment to Zionism can be seen in a letter to Lord Curzon in 1919:



Chaim Weizmann and Arthur Balfour

"In Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country... The four Great Powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism, be it right or wrong, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land."⁸



Herbert Samuel, Winston Churchill and David Lloyd-George

Powerful friends within the British establishment would prove crucial in laying the foundations for active British sponsorship of the Zionist goal. Securing the support of high-level politicians such as Herbert Samuel (who would, by no coincidence, become the first High Commissioner for Palestine under the British Mandate), Mark Sykes, Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George, he prepared to bend British policy towards a Zionist agenda.



Herbert Samuel arrives in Jaffa to assume his position of British High Commissioner for Palestine, 27 March 1920

⁷ Meyer W. Weisgal (ed.), *Chaim Weizmann, Statesman, Scientist, and Builder of the Jewish Commonwealth*. New York: Dial Press, 1944, p. 131.

⁸ Doreen Ingrams. *Palestine Papers, 1917-1922: Seeds of Conflict*. New York, 1973.

⁶ Ze'ev Jabotinski, *The Iron Wall*, 1923.