

# "Balkanization" of Palestine

• by Hayim Greenberg

WE STILL do not know the complete contents of the report to the Government now being prepared by the Royal Commission. The report will not be made public until at least a week after the coronation, and any number of important changes may still be made in it before that date. However, there is very little doubt left that the Commission is planning to propose a radical revision in the political status of Palestine. In fact, there is information to the effect that a partition of Palestine into independent Arab and Jewish units will be proposed. The Actions Committee of the Zionist Organization, which just met in Jerusalem, naturally gave much of its time to the consideration of the plan and just as naturally rejected it.

It is not hard to guess what line of reasoning the Commission is pursuing. It does not consider itself called upon to act as impartial arbiter between the contending parties. Nor does it consider itself a juridical tribunal whose function it is to discover the kernel of truth in the whole ravel of claims and complaints and then issue its verdict according to the law and accepted principles of justice. The Commission must be aware that its task is a *political* one. If it would, or could, speak frankly, it would have to admit that it is itself a party to the controversy. It would have to admit that it is a party representing the interests of the British Empire, and that, therefore, it regards the Palestinian problem first and foremost from the standpoint of England's benefit. England, the members of the Commission must reason, has involved itself to no small extent in Palestine. The Jews charge that the Government has failed to keep its promises, its international pledges, its fundamental obligation to guarantee

the safety and security of the population; the Arabs accuse the Government of duplicity and of pursuing a policy of encouraging the Jewish "invasion." The two contenders in Palestine cannot meet together; the Arabs are rebellious and create a state of anarchy in the land; the air is pregnant with dangers of war and certain Arab groups are ready to ally themselves (some have already done so) with the enemies of the empire; to adopt stringent measures against the Arab opposition is, perhaps, too risky a business; at the same time to hesitate to enforce the necessary measures would result in a continued loss of face and might create the impression that the empire is weakening. A noted British statesman is reported to have recently characterized England's predicament in the following brief but eloquent formula: "We don't want to shoot, the Jews musn't shoot, and the Arabs—shoot."

This situation, the Commission reasons, cannot be permitted to continue much longer. A way out must be found.

And that way out is: divide—once and for all, delimit the boundaries between what is Jewish and what is Arab, and define how and where the interests of the empire will be guaranteed in Palestine.

The Commission's reasoning is undoubtedly based on numerous precedents, established in recent years. Of the three countries declared as "Class A Mandate Territories" after the War, two have already had their status revised. England has renounced its mandate over Iraq. The country has become politically independent, and has, under the sponsorship of England itself, been granted a seat in the League of Nations. France has

given up its mandate over Syria and the territory has been divided into two sovereign Arab states. A greater measure of independence had to be given also to Egypt, over which Great Britain has, at least nominally, relinquished its protectorate. Palestine alone remains a mandated territory, and it becomes increasingly more difficult to preserve the present exceptional status of the country. It, therefore, becomes necessary to assay the tried and proven course, to diminish the scope of England's mandatory powers (retaining jurisdiction only over the holy places, and reserving Haifa as some sort of oriental Gibraltar). The land itself has to be divided either into a number of Jewish and Arab cantons, or into two parts, one Arab and one Jewish, each with its own autonomous government, *a la* Syria-Lebanon.

The cantonization project, which, by the way, is not a new proposal, involves too many complications and certain inescapable administrative difficulties. It is clear in advance that its execution will encounter the most stubborn resistance from both Jews and Arabs. There is every indication that the Commission is more favorably disposed towards the plan to divide Palestine into two national-autonomous states. Such a set-up, the Commission probably reasons, would give to both peoples the consciousness of political sovereignty thus creating the basis for pacification and neighborly good-will between them. At the same time, it would not be at all detrimental to the Asiatic interests of the Empire, if there existed a Jewish buffer-state between the sea and the chain of Arab lands on the route to India. It matters not whether this Jewish state would become a British dominion, or whether it would nominally remain outside the Empire; to safeguard its own interests it would have to consent to playing the role of a strategic base for Great Britain in the Near East.

We are as yet in the dark as to how the Commission plans to carry through this division. To date, it has not yet made public a new political map of Palestine, and it is still impossible to say how it will define the boundaries of the Jewish State. The British press informs us simply that Jerusalem and Haifa, together with a number of other places, are to be considered neither Jewish nor Arab, but rather as "international" (in other words, about 120,000 Jews who live in those cities are to be deducted from the population of the autonomous Jewish *yishuv*), and that the Jewish territory, with Tel Aviv as its capital, should be "big enough" to eventually absorb about a million Jews. As far as its conception of the absorptive capacity of the Jewish State goes, the present Commission manifests more imagination and a greater objectivity than some of the other Commissions previously sent to Palestine. Indeed, one Commission even warned that Palestine is already so overcrowded that there is

hardly room there for even "one more cat." And now we are told that in one single segment of Western Palestine (Transjordan is, of course, excluded) room can be found for a population of at least a million. As regards the economic absorptive capacity of the country, the present Commission is, therefore, certainly more "liberal" than any of its forerunners.

However, should Jewish 'maximalists' protest that we cannot be content with even a million Jews in Palestine, then we can readily guess at the answer with which the Commission may be forearmed. "What grounds have you to claim that a million Jews is not enough?" The Commission can reply: "Has England ever promised you more than a million? Was there ever any talk of numbers when the mandate was accepted? Don't you remember that in 1917 we declined to heed the demand of your representatives that the Balfour Declaration should state, that we undertake to transform Palestine into the Jewish National Home, for that would have meant in effect that we recognize your right to the *whole* land? Have you forgotten that we undertook only to facilitate the establishment of a Jewish National Home *in* Palestine, that is, on a certain, though as yet undefined section of the land? And if not the whole of Palestine as the Jewish Homeland, but only a Jewish Home in Palestine, then who says that a million Jews are too few? Consider Estonia, an independent state in Europe. How big is its population? Not much more than a million. And yet Estonia is a nation enjoying self-government, its own economy and its own culture. It even has a political voice in the League of Nations. The recently established state, Lebanon, which is in such close proximity to Palestine, has a population of not more than 600,000. And if you take the Western Hemisphere, then the Republic of Paraguay in South America has less than a million population, and Panama not even a half million. When the Armenian state was founded it had less than 600,000, and now that it is a federated part of the Soviet Union, and a number of Armenian refugees from Turkey have settled there, its population is still not quite 800,000. There are yet smaller national states: the German republic on the Volga has only a half-million, and Iceland, which is in every respect a sovereign state (it is united with Denmark only through the throne) has a population of only 115,000. The proposed division of Palestine is not only in consonance with the terms of the Mandate, it goes even farther. We give you more than you were promised. We give you your own Jewish army, and on the fortieth anniversary of the first Zionist Congress, we permit you the consummation of Herzl's dream of a *Jewish State*. What more can you ask?"

It would be futile at the present moment, and

in the confines of this discussion, to debate the *juridical* correctness of such an argumentation. For us Palestine is not just a mooted juridical problem or an exercise in logic. Comparisons with other countries and with other peoples can hardly console us. Ours is a homeless people of close to seventeen million, and we must have a home for millions, a center for great masses. We cannot say how many Jews will be forced in the next few decades to turn to Palestine for the rehabilitation of their lives; nor do we know how many other Jews, who are not being driven by persecution and hunger, will nevertheless feel an inner need to identify their own lives and the lives of their children with the Jewish national environment of Palestine. Similarly, we cannot predict how many Jews Palestine will eventually absorb. But one thing is clear to us, and this requires no special investigation: the number of Jews who are seeking and the number who will find the solution to their life-problems in Palestine, is not a million, but an *indeterminate number of millions*, and that in an undissected Palestine there is room for—again—an *indeterminate number of millions*. That is why we demand more. That is why we *must* demand more. And all comparisons with Estonia are meaningless, because beyond the borders of that country there are no millions of scattered and degraded Estonians, deprived of land and oppressed beyond endurance.

The geographic-economic organism of Palestine has already been cut once—in 1923—when we were told that the obligations of the Mandate towards the Jewish National Home did not pertain to Transjordan. The approximate 26,000 square miles of integral Palestine were cut to only 10,100 square miles. The greater, more fertile and least populated section of the country was arbitrarily barred to Jewish immigration and colonization. We were placed in a position, at the time, whereby we were forced half-heartedly to agree to that unsatisfactory arrangement. Inwardly, however, though we do not shout from the housetops that we will not be satisfied with less than a "Jewish State on both sides of the Jordan", we have not renounced our right to the Transjordan. Nor did the British Government ever announce that the greater part of Palestine would be closed to us forever. Whenever interrelations about this question were made in Palestine or at the sessions of the Mandates Commission in Geneva, the Government never declared that our status as regards Transjordan is irrevocable. The Government of Transjordan, on the contrary, has negotiated with us more than once concerning the possibilities of land transactions and even colonization in the neglected but fertile parts of the country.

When we consider the contents of the new

plan however, we cannot escape the painful impression that it proposes to bar to us forever not only Transjordan, but also that section of Cisjordan which will not be included in the confines of the Jewish "state". The remaining 10,100 square miles can easily be reduced to 4,000 or 3,000, and perhaps even less. It is quite natural that those circles in England who may now be ready to divide Palestine into two separate parts, simultaneously propose that the Arab part in Cisjordan should be united with Transjordan into *one* state. In this way, Transjordan will be sucked into the whirlpool of narrow nationalistic ambitions that have been rampant in recent years in the western part of Palestine, and all our hopes that we may still be able some day to penetrate into Transjordan may be shattered for good, or at least for a long time to come.

Ratification of the Commission's alleged proposal to divide Palestine, would, therefore, mean that we renounce all claims and aspirations ever to settle either in the Arab part of Cisjordan or in Transjordan. In other words, we ourselves would perpetually limit the Jewish *yishuv* in Palestine to no more than one million.

We cannot say what alternative proposal the Commission may offer us, if we make clear our absolutely negative attitude towards its projected division of Palestine. (After all, it would be impossible to carry through the plan of dividing Palestine and establishing two separate states without our approval and that of the Arabs, who will also have something to say on the matter). However, long before we learn what could be the consequences of our unwillingness to accept the Commission's proposal, we have every ground to decline the "favor" and the "honor". We are sufficiently elastic and amenable to negotiations. We know that compromise is often an unavoidable adjunct of *Real-politik*, and the agencies of Zionist politics are as ready now as they were formerly to negotiate both with England and with the Arabs in regard to certain modifications of Palestine's status. We are amenable to all sorts of treaties, of a temporary or more permanent nature, whereby could be created the basis for Jewish-Arab cooperation and which would contain guarantees to satisfy even the most skeptical Arabs that their vital interests will not suffer in any form, because of Jewish mass-immigration and colonization, or from the potential Jewish majority in the country. But we cannot agree to "crystallize" the status of Palestine. We must not permit either England or any of the other international factors, who are in any way concerned with the Mandate or with the Jewish problem at large, to decide for themselves that they have already fulfilled their obligations to us and that by the "Balkanization" of Palestine they have solved the world-wide Jewish problem.