

1939

Dear Dad:

I thought I would write you my impressions on Palestine while they were still fresh in my mind, though you undoubtedly, if I know the Jews, know the "whole" story. It is worth while looking at it in its entirety.

In discussing Palestinian questions one naturally goes back to before the war. Palestine was at that time under Turkey, inhabited by Moslem Arabs with a scattering of Christians. There were also a few thousand Jews, though at that time the Zionists' movement had not assumed great proportions. During the war, the British government, desiring both the assistance of the Jews and the Arabs, made separate promises to both, one in the MacMahon, the other in the Balfour declaration. The terms in the MacMahon letters guaranteeing an independent Arabic state were quite vague and the territorial delineation was equally vague. The Balfour declaration was also indefinite, giving with one hand what he took back with the other. In considering the whole question now, it is useless to discuss which has the "fairer" claim. The important thing is to try to work out a solution that will work, not try to present a solution based on these two vague, indefinite and conflicting promises. This is my objection to the White Paper. It theoretically presents a good solution, but it just won't work. Returning to the background from 1922 when mandate was given favoring the establishment of a national home for the Jews, the situation has been difficult, however, it really assumed serious proportions during the depression and the growth of the refugee problem. With the coming of these new Jewish immigrants, new capital poured into Palestine. This capital, while economically a poor investment as it only brought in a fraction of a percent on the original, nevertheless enabled the Jews to acquire about 15% of the land which included the most fertile. The Arabs naturally objected to the Jewish encroachment. They felt that the Jews, if permitted, would dominate in their country numerically as well as economically. The British endeavored to settle the situation and sent out several commissions. A partitioning plan was presented in 1936 which advocated the break up of Palestine into two independent states, with Jerusalem and those cities such as Haifa with an approximately equal Arabic and Jewish population, and incidentally the territory through which the oil from Iraq flows; all this was to be under British control. Because of the difficulties that this presented, because both sides refused it, because of the fact that it would leave two small states which would not be able to subsist independent of England, and lastly, and probably most importantly, because Mussolini objected to this change in the Status quo, this plan was



not put through. In 1939 a conference was held in London in which the two groups tried to reconcile the differences. As this was impossible the British government stated that it felt free now to present its own solution. This they did in the White Paper which was rejected by both sides. The Jews were particularly angry as they saw all hope of their Zion's state disappearing and their indignation was increased by the fact that the problem had a religious as well as an economic background. They felt that the Jews were now fated to be a minority and that now that the immigration was going to be limited they felt that the Zion's movement might collapse and that the funds which were pouring in any support of this would be stopped, bringing economic disaster, for these funds are the only method by which Palestine can come anywhere near balancing her exports and imports.

The Arab's objections to the White Paper are: (1) the objection to the indefiniteness of the period that the British government will hold control, as the formation of an independent state depends on Jewish cooperation, something they believe impossible; and (2) they say that there is no provision for an elected assembly under their own leadership which has been the first step in Iraq towards the formation of an independent state. They also want all immigration stopped; they feel that the Jewish problem is not their problem. They also fear that while there are 450,000 Jews in Palestine, only 250,000 of them have become citizens. Why, therefore, should they be entitled to be counted as members of the state?

However, while these are for purposes of publication the chief objections of the two groups, there are fundamental objections which, while they are not stated publicly, are nevertheless far more important.

On the Jewish side there is the desire for complete domination, with Jerusalem as the capital of their new land of milk and honey, with the right to colonize in Trans-Jordan. They feel that given sufficient opportunity they can cultivate the land and develop it as they have done in the Western portion. The Arab answer to this is incidentally, that the Jews have had the benefit of capital, which had the Arabs possessed, equal miracles could have been performed by them. Though this is partly true, the economic set up of Arabic agricultural progress with its absentee landlords and primitive methods of cultivation, could not under any circumstances probably have competed with the Jews. However, this very fact lies in the background of the Arabic objection



to the Jews. They realize their superiority and fear it.

The political angle of the Arabic objection to the White Paper is that it does not permit the return of the Grand Mufti, the religious and political leader made, incidentally, that, by the British, who is now in exile in Syria. He naturally wishes to return and therefore is unwilling to compromise and, as the minority group of Arabs, composed of about 100,000 Christians and moderate Moslems, constitute a weak opposition at the present time, it looks as if the situation will continue.

I see no hope for the working out of the British policy as laid down in the White Paper. As I said above, theoretically it sounds just and fair, but the important thing and the necessary thing is not a solution just and fair but a solution that will work. As the British interest must and will be naturally safeguarded, and bearing in mind the pressure that has been given privately by the Arab states and publicly by the various Jewish organizations to the press and radio, it seems to me that the only thing to do will be to break the country up into two autonomous districts giving them both self-government to the extent that they do not interfere with each other and that British interest is safeguarded. Jerusalem, having the background that it has, should be an independent unit. Though this is a difficult solution yet, it is the only one that I think can work. This is a development of the British proposal of 1936 favoring partition. At present, situation still seems to be difficult as far as outrages and bombings. There were 13 bombs set off my last evening there, all in the Jewish quarter and all set off by Jews. The ironical part is that the Jewish terrorists bomb their own telephone lines and electric connections and the next day frantically phone the British to come and fix them up. Incidentally I have become more pro-British down there than I have been in my other visits to England as I think that the men on the spot are doing a good job. This roughly, in fact very roughly, is an outline of the situation. It will be interesting to see it develop and see what form the solution takes, as a definite solution has not been found yet. I thought Dansig was a tough problem, but I have never seen two groups more unwilling to try and work out a solution that has some hope of success than these two groups.

The sympathy of the people on the spot seems to be with the Arabs. This is not only because the Jews have had, at least some of their leaders, an unfortunately arrogant, uncompromising attitude, but they feel that after all, the country has been Arabic for the last few hundred years, and



they naturally feel sympathetic. After all, Palestine was hardly Britain's to give away. The question is further complicated by the fact that both groups are split among themselves. There is the strongly orthodox Jewish group, unwilling to make any compromise, who wished to have a government expressing this attitude, there is the liberal Jewish element composed of the younger group who fear these reactionaries, and wish to establish a very liberal, almost communistic form of government, and there are the in between who are willing to make a compromise. There are even further lines cutting these groups, but they do manage to present a united front now; if and when they get their claims, then the breakup will start. As for the Arabs, while most of them are heartily sick of the whole business which is playing hell with their economic life, yet so strong is the hold of the Mufti by reason of his religious grip and because of the strength of the new nationalism, that it's going to be extremely difficult to effect a solution without bringing him back. He of course feels that if the Arabs accepted the White Paper he would be all through, as the Paper calls for the Arab officials to be appointed by the British during the transition period, and they will naturally appoint Arabs that will be in their camp. That is why they insist on an elected assembly, although considering the general standard of the country, it would naturally be a farce. That is what makes the whole situation so impossible. All three sides have such great interests all in a great measure conflicting, and all three sides having great means of putting on pressure. Poor Malcolm McDonald. Thus as I have said, the only thing to do now that a theoretically fair and good solution has been presented and is failing, after a period of time, they can say that they have done the best they could under the circumstances and then arbitrarily force the partition plan to be accepted.

Leaving now for Bucharest. Love to all,

JACK