# THE BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT AND ISRAEL: 1948-1951

by

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B.A., University of Toronto, 1989

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department
of
History



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

April 1991

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The British Labour Movement and Israel: 1948-1951

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the attitudes of the British labour movement towards the fledgling state of Israel, commencing with the termination of the British mandatory administration in May 1948, and ending with the electoral defeat of the British Labour Government in October 1951. Emphasis is placed on the social, political and economic factors which determined the thought and actions of the various elements of which the labour movement was comprised. The question of relations with Israel are put into the context of the British position in the Middle East in the aftermath of the Second World War. Domestic considerations and the international climate of the post-war world are also discussed.

The term "labour movement" is purposefully chosen. Although the time period examined is one in which the Labour Party held office, the thesis is not intended to deal exclusively with the Parliamentary Labour Party. The labour movement was, and is, a "broad church." The thesis deals with the various elements of this broad church. The chapters have been broken into four major categories, each of which deals with a different element of the labour movement. These are: the Labour Government, the trade union movement, the British Left, and the working class.

Each of these categories has required its own peculiar methodology. The policy of the Labour Government during these years has been fairly well documented, and thus secondary sources form the bulk of the research in this section. These are supplemented by Hansard and contemporary periodical accounts. The trade union movement records indicate the nature and substance of debate at annual conferences, including the annual Trades Union Congress, and these form a significant part of the material in

this section. These records are supplemented by secondary sources, particularly on the post-war economy. The attitude of the Left is deduced from a perusal of various leftist periodicals and newspapers, as well as the parliamentary pronouncements of leftist Labour and Communist members of Parliament. Finally, the section on the working classes incorporates a variety of sources, including representations in the media and contemporary social commentaries.

The conclusions drawn in the thesis are fairly broad. Firstly, it is evident that although the policy of the Labour government towards Israel was generally perceived as negative, it can be seen that considering the constraints under which the government operated, this policy was in fact relatively flexible and accommodating. Secondly, the domestic opposition to the government's "negative" attitude towards Israel came primarily from the left wing of the Labour movement, and was often voiced in the context of an anti-imperial, anti-colonial and anti-cold war critique of the government's foreign policy. Thirdly, it can be seen that the attitudes of the working class toward Israel were affected in quite complex ways by their attitudes, in a collective sense, toward Jews and Arabs.

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## Introduction: Preparing for Withdrawal

When the Labour Party took office in 1945, the Palestine mandate was of vital importance to British imperial interests. Palestine was the nodal point of imperial communications. The port of Haifa was an important terminus for pipelines from Iraq's Mosul oilfields, and was the site of British owned refining operations that were vital to the economic recovery of Britain and Europe.[1] There were several other British industrial ventures in Palestine which, although less important than the refineries, were also significant. Chief among these were the Palestine Electric Corporation and the Palestine Potash Works. Perhaps more importantly, Palestine figured prominently in the defence plans of the British Chiefs of Staff for the Middle East. The key element of British strategy was of course the defence of Suez and Egypt, and the importance of Palestine in this strategy is evidenced by a paper prepared by the Chief of Air Staff for the Cabinet on 15 January 1947:

> In war, Egypt would be our key position in the Middle East, and it was necessary that we should hold Palestine as a screen for the defence of Egypt. In peace, since we had undertaken to withdraw from Egypt, we must be able to use Palestine as a base for the mobile reserve of our

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[1]Middle Eastern oil became increasingly significant to Britain after the war for several reasons. The pre-eminent position of British oil firms in the region was aggressively challenged by American competitors. At the same time European economic recovery as based on Marshall Plan aid required a steady supply of cheap fuel. In the post-war period this supply increasingly came from the Middle East. By 1955, 80% of Europe's oil came from the region, as compared to 19% in 1938. See Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin Foreign Secretary: 1945-1951* (London: Heinemann,1983) , p.36.

troops which must be kept ready to meet any emergency throughout the Middle East.[2]

Moreover, the Arab-Zionist conflict in Palestine, which had fomented under British rule, had become a heavily symbolic matter of special interest to Arabs and Jews throughout the world, as well as to millions of Muslims throughout the Empire. The British government's Palestine policy after the war was thus intertwined with larger questions of foreign and imperial policy such as the Anglo-American relationship, and the new, voluntary Commonwealth relationships that were replacing the Empire.

The Labour government that was to deal with the Palestine question was, at its core, an experienced and fairly conservative group. In the realm of foreign affairs, the formation of policy throughout most of the government's term was largely the responsibility of Ernest Bevin, the curmudgeonly former head of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), whose gruff manners and speech somewhat obscured a clear and shrewdly calculating mind. Mr. Bevin, in consultation with Prime Minister Attlee, more or less carried the Party behind policy which he determined. His policy was based on expertise gained as a member of the war-time coalition government, and on advice from a Foreign Office staff which remained largely unchanged from the previous administrations.[3] It is significant to note that although Prime Minister Attlee created 157 standing committees

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[2] See: F.S. Northedge, " Britain and the Middle East" in Ritchie Ovendale ed. , *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments: 1945-1951* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984), p.167.

[3]Bullock, op.cit., p.21: Mr. Bevin had, along with Mr. Attlee, served on the Cabinet Armistice and Post-War Committee from April to December 1944. See also: F.K. Roberts, "Ernest Bevin as Foreign Secretary" in Ovendale ed., op.cit., pp. 21-42.

and 306 ad hoc committees -- including a Defence Committee -- to debate policy, no Foreign Affairs committee emerged during his government.[4] This reflected not only the trust that the Prime Minister had in Mr. Bevin, but also the complex and secretive nature of foreign policy in general.

In making policy Mr. Bevin had to deal with severe restrictions which limited his freedom of action. Post-war Britain did not possess the resources necessary for the kind of dominant imperial policy which it had imposed in the past. Economically, the country was struggling to recover from the war, and whatever resources were available -- including manpower -- were in demand by industry at home. At the same time, Britain's recovery depended on the raw materials and markets of the Commonwealth and Empire, the securing of which often required a costly military commitment. In order to deal with this situation, Mr. Bevin was forced to enlist the support of the United States. In doing so he compromised the independence of British foreign policy in exchange for U.S. funding and shared responsibility in certain sensitive areas. One such area in which Mr. Bevin hoped the U.S would share responsibility was Palestine. Yet although President Truman did pledge American support elsewhere in the Mediterranean -- for example in Greece and Turkey -- he showed a reluctance to co-operate with Mr. Bevin on the question of Palestine.

During the first three years of the Labour government's term there was an embarrassing and, at times, disastrous lack of co-

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[4]K.O. Morgan, *Labour in Power: 1945-1951* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p.49.

ordination between U.S. and British policy towards Palestine. Mr. Truman's support for the Zionist cause, most notably after the release of the Anglo-American Committee on Palestine's report in late 1946, served to undercut Mr. Bevin's attempts to achieve a compromise solution which would be acceptable to both Palestinian Arabs and Zionists. Having despaired of finding such a compromise singlehandedly, Mr. Bevin decided in early 1947 to refer the question of the mandate to the United Nations in the hope that such action would induce the involvement of other countries in the matter. As the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) deliberated, attempts to co-ordinate British and U.S. policy in the Middle East continued. A series of secret talks between British Foreign Office and U.S. State Department officials, and British and American Chiefs of Staff, were held at the Pentagon from 16 October to 7 November 1947. At these talks the British made it clear that the fundamental emphasis of British policy was the friendly co-operation of the Arab states.[5] Memoranda coming out of these talks suggested that Britain should attempt to maintain its military presence in the Middle East, while U.S. funds would finance the kind of economic development which was essential to stabilizing the region. This agreement was ratified by both sides in December 1947. Significantly, the question of Palestine was left aside by mutual consent during these talks. Thus there was still no agreed, co-ordinated policy between the U.S. and Britain on the most divisive and explosive question in the Middle East.

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[5]Bullock, op.cit., pp. 473-5.

After the U.N. vote to partition Palestine, taken on 29 November 1947, the end of the British mandatory occupation was soon decided. Rather than risk being held accountable by the Arab states for imposing partition, Mr. Bevin chose to withdraw from Palestine altogether. It was his hope that by doing so he would be able to maintain for Britain some sort of role in the region, in accordance with the agreements made at the Pentagon talks. The urgency of this imperative was made the greater by the fact that these events were taking place against the backdrop of the opening stages of the Cold War. In the fall of 1947 the Soviets had withdrawn themselves and their East European satellites from the Paris Marshall Plan talks. There followed a series of Soviet crackdowns in Eastern Europe, most notably the Prague coup of February 1948, and the Berlin crisis in the spring of 1948. In this climate of international tension, the stability and security of the Middle East took on a special importance, as Mr. Bevin pointed out to the Cabinet on 8 January 1948, and to the House of Commons several weeks later.[6]

Mr. Bevin now faced the challenge of negotiating Britain's continued military presence in the Middle East in the context of some very fluid and volatile circumstances. There was the undetermined outcome of the Arab-Zionist war which, most observers knew, was inevitable once British forces withdrew. Many important questions hinged on the outcome of the war. What political entity or entities would succeed the mandate, and what would be their global orientation? Which Arab states would come out of the fighting

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[6]Bullock, op.cit., pp. 516-17: See also: *Hansard*, 22 January 1948, 446: 383-409.

strengthened and which weakened? What would be the effect on Arab nationalism? Most importantly, what would be the effect on the fledgling Arab League, on which the Foreign Office had based its plans for a regional defence arrangement?

This was the situation facing the British Foreign Secretary as the Palestine mandatory administration prepared to withdraw in the spring of 1948. It is not surprising that, given the fluidity of the circumstances in the Middle East, subsequent British policy was seen by some observers as "atonal" and "unharmonic."[7] British policymakers had to react to situations as they arose, and to take into account disparate and yet connected motivations and events. The feeling that policy was imprecise was further fuelled by the fact that Mr. Bevin had to attempt to accommodate the often conflicting interests of the U.S. and the various Arab League states, and in so doing had to be circumspect in the public expression of his policy. However, it is possible to detect some general lines which marked British policy heading into the Arab-Zionist war.

The first such line was the decision to cultivate the British relationship with Transjordan. This seems logical enough given the problems encountered in re-negotiating treaties with both Egypt and Iraq.[8] In March 1948 Britain concluded a treaty with Transjordan which strengthened the military alliance between the two countries.

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[7]Jon Kimche and David Kimche, *Both Sides of the Hill: Britain and the Palestine War* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953), p.111.

[8]Attempts to replace the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty had stalled shortly after the war. A re-negotiated treaty had been signed with Iraq in January 1948, but it was soon repudiated amid nationalist rioting in Bagdad.

Although the impetus for the negotiations came from Transjordan's King Abdullah, Mr. Bevin welcomed the tightening of the alliance for his own reasons.[9] Chief among these was Mr. Bevin's hope that Abdullah would provide Britain with a solution to the volatile situation in Palestine. Mr. Bevin favoured the annexation of Arab Palestine (excluding Gaza and the Galilee) by Transjordan. Such an action would serve several British purposes. The resulting enlarged Transjordan would be economically more viable than the small Arab Palestine state that might otherwise be formed. Such a Palestinian state would in all probability be led by the "radical" Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al Husseini, an event which Mr. Bevin wanted to forestall. Under Transjordanian rule, Britain would be able to maintain its military bases in parts of Palestine. Finally, the size of the Jewish state would be limited, and its influence on the region -- which Mr. Bevin and his advisers suspected of being communistic -- would be contained. Thus, although there continued to be those voices in the Foreign Office who argued for an Egyptian orientation for British policy in the region, and although attempts were made to allay Egyptian concern regarding the strengthening of Abdullah, the Transjordanian relationship emerged as pre-eminent during the next several years.

A corollary to this policy line, given the not-so-secret meetings between Abdullah and the Zionists in the fall of 1947, was the British acceptance of some sort of Zionist state in part of Palestine. It now seems clear that Mr. Bevin did his utmost -- with the occasional prod from Mr. Truman -- to ensure that the Zionist state would in fact come

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[9]Bullock, op.cit., pp. 508-9.

in to existence. Sir John Glubb's account of a meeting Mr. Bevin had with the Transjordanian Prime Minister Tewfiq Abul Huda in February 1948 confirms the Foreign Secretary's concern that the Zionists be given the chance to form some kind of state. At this meeting Abul Huda told Mr. Bevin of Abdullah's plan to occupy the Arab parts of Palestine. Mr. Bevin's reply was that "it seemed like the thing to do", but that the Transjordanians should be careful not to enter those areas of Palestine allotted to the Jews.[10]

As the date for British withdrawal from Palestine got closer, the policy of Mr. Bevin thus took shape. His main objective was to maintain conditions which would allow British military forces and economic interests to operate in the region. Although he accepted the reality and the necessity of the Zionist presence in the Middle East, he saw the Zionists as posing a real threat to this objective. He therefore hoped, and took steps to assure, that the coming war would limit the size and impact of the Zionist state that would result from the partition of Palestine.

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[10]See ibid., p. 509; also Kimche, *Both Sides*, op.cit., pp. 105-6.

# Chapter 1

## The Policy of the Labour Government

By the time the last British High Commissioner of Palestine, Sir Alan Gordon Cunningham, left Jerusalem to the fittingly ominous strains of bagpipe music on 14 May 1948, the broad outline of Mr. Bevin's Middle East policy had been determined. This was a policy which reflected a practical reading of the situation as it then stood. While pro-Zionist critics of Mr. Bevin and his Middle East officials charge that personal inclinations favouring the Arab cause were instrumental in the formulation of British policy, it seems evident that the overriding concern for Mr. Bevin and the Foreign Office was consideration of the *British* position.[11] It is true that British officials in Cairo, Amman and Bagdad did tend to sympathize with the Palestine Arabs, and that Mr. Bevin himself often spoke of the injustice of disregarding Arab grievances.[12] Moreover, the cooperation of the Arab states was the central feature of British regional strategy. Yet at the same time, there was a recognition of certain political realities. One such reality was that the Zionists, backed by the Americans and the Soviets at the United Nations, were a permanent

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[11]On this see: Elizabeth Monroe, "Mr. Bevin's 'Arab Policy'", (London: St. Antony's Papers, 1961).

[12]See for example the dispatches of Sir John Troutbeck, head of the British Middle East Office in Cairo, who likened the Zionists to the Nazis and the Arabs to the Czechs in 1938. Mr. Troutbeck, though, was not the only British analyst with a penchant for making historical analogies. At about the same time as he made this comment -- in June 1948 -- Harold Laski, writing in *Forward* , ironically described the British government's policy toward the State of Israel as an appeasement of the "fascist" Arab governments on the order of another Munich! [See William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East: 1945-1951* , (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) , pp.532-3, and Joseph Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism : 1917-1948* , (London: Frank and Cass co. Ltd., 1983) , p.230].

force in the Middle East. Another was that, as the Cold War became more immediate, Britain was committed to a close, dependent relationship with the pro-Zionist Truman administration in the U.S. British policy had to find ways to adjust to these realities.

In this context, British support for Transjordanian occupation of the Arab parts of Palestine had been recommended by several important bodies. The Chiefs of Staff thought Transjordan as good a "screen" for the defence of Egypt and the Suez Canal as was Palestine. The Transjordanian Arab Legion was furthermore considered the best equipped and trained Arab force in the region. Abdullah was considered by Middle East experts the most stable and co-operative Arab ruler, and the only one who seemed willing to accept partition as inevitable. Although encouraging Abdullah's ambitions in Palestine would certainly have a disruptive effect on the already skewed relations within the Arab League, many British officials felt this to be the best option open to them. James Cable, the British envoy in Amman, noted in November 1947:

> [Abdullah's] acquiescence and his appropriation of Arab Palestine would undoubtedly be resented by Syria, the Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, and might well cause some deterioration in our relations with those countries. On the other hand his action would command at least the tacit approval of Iraq. It would establish in a central and strategic position a state stronger than Transjordan as it now exists, but bound to us by ties not merely of friendship and obligation but also of dependence. The alternative, as Sir Alec Kirkbride points out, would be a puny Arab Palestine dominated by the unreliable Mufti...[13]

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[13]Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.104.

But British plans for Abdullah went beyond the occupation of the West Bank only. Bernard Burrows, the head of the Eastern Department, revealed the extent of British hopes in a Foreign Office minute in February 1948:

> It is tempting to think that Transjordan might transgress the boundaries of the U.N. Jewish state to the extent of establishing a corridor across the southern Negeb joining the existing Transjordan territory to the Mediterranean at Gaza. This would have immense strategic advantages for us, both in cutting the Jewish state, and therefore communist influence, off from the Red Sea and by extending up to the Mediterranean the area in which our military and political influence is predominant and by providing a means of sending necessary military equipment etc. into Transjordan other than by the circuitous route through Aqaba.[14]

Thus, at the outset of the war, the British Foreign Office hoped to see the Zionist state, which they clearly viewed with great suspicion[15], reduced in size and influence by Transjordanian occupation of certain key parts of Palestine. The most important territory from the British point of view was the southern Negeb. The determination to keep the Negeb in friendly Arab hands formed the basis of British strategy during the war.

Mr. Bevin's agreement with Prime Minister Abul Huda in February 1948 was a British acknowledgement that the Zionists would be allowed to form some sort of state without undue interference from

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[14]Ibid., pp.139-40.

[15] It was suspected in British Foreign Office circles that the Jewish state would be a "spearhead of communism." This conviction was largely based on the fact that many of the Jewish immigrants to Israel immediately after the war came from eastern bloc countries where they had presumably been indoctrinated by the communists, and where they had had little exposure to democratic ideas. For examples see the memos of Eastern Department head Bernard Burrows to London ca. June 1948 in Louis, op. cit., pp.539-40.

British allies. Meetings between British Arab Legion and Haganah officers had provided tacit agreements to control the fighting along the Transjordanian border, and particularly in Jerusalem. Such agreements, however, were not made known to the American government prior to the beginning of the war.[16] It is likely that Mr. Bevin did not want these arrangements to become public. In any case, the failure to disclose this information, coupled with the aggressive pronouncements of Abdullah (made for the benefit of the Arab League) created a dangerous misunderstanding between the U.S. and Britain. On 17 May, U.S. delegates to the Security Council submitted a resolution invoking Article 39 of the U.N. Charter and calling for sanctions against aggressors in the Arab-Israeli war, whom they identified as the Arab states. In the event the resolution received less than the requisite seven votes, with Britain abstaining.[17] The incident revealed the strain on Anglo-American relations which the Palestine war could cause. More importantly, the question of taking sides in the conflict threatened to jeopardize the flow of American money slated to finance British and European economic recovery. With the Truman administration facing a Senate and House of Representatives reluctant to part with money for Marshall Plan aid, the prospect of a Congressional inquiry into allegations that some U.S. money to Britain was being diverted to arm the Arab states posed a further complication for Mr. Bevin.[18]

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[16]Shlaim, *Colluston* , op.cit., p.175.

[17]Alan Bullock, op.cit., p.564.

[18]See *Daily Herald*, 22 May 1948, p.1

Steps were taken to smooth over this potentially troublesome area. On 24 May, a top secret message was sent to U.S. Secretary of State Marshall informing him of the meetings between British and Haganah officers, and of the orders given to British officers in the Legion to refrain from attacking Jewish territory.[19] The following day a meeting of the Cabinet Defence Committee was summoned in London, to which the U.S. Ambassador Lewis Douglas was invited. Mr. Douglas was briefed on the British reading of the situation in Palestine, and the Middle East in general, by the Chiefs of Staff and by Mr. Bevin. He came away impressed by the logic of the British position, particularly as regarded the importance of maintaining good Anglo-Arab relations. At the same time he was made aware of the British willingness to work to secure Arab acceptance of a Jewish state, provided the Zionists agreed to several vital concessions. Moreover, both Mr. Douglas and the British agreed to an arms embargo on the entire region in order to avert the possibility of escalating the conflict. Having coordinated policy to this extent, British representatives put forward a resolution to the Security Council on 27 May calling for a cease-fire and a general arms embargo, and two days later the resolution was passed.[20]

The main concession which Mr. Bevin had impressed upon Mr. Douglas was that of the Negeb. This area had been allotted to the Jews under the November 1947 U.N. Partition Plan, but at the outbreak of

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[19]Shlaim, op.cit., p.247.. See also Sir Alec Kirkbride, *From the Wings* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1976), pp.35-6.

[20]See Bullock, op. cit., p565.

hostilities was largely controlled by Egyptian forces. Another concession spoken about was the Zionist recognition of both Jaffa and Acre as Arab towns. These two towns were in the middle of areas in which the Zionists were strongly entrenched, and they were likely to quickly fall into Israeli hands. Both were potentially important coastal towns which were, in addition, of great symbolic importance because of their large Arab populations. British objectives were thus to revise the frontiers proposed in the November Partition Plan in such a way as to make them acceptable to the Arab states, and, in so doing, to gain the acquiescence of those states to the foundation of Israel.[21]

By the time the truce voted by the U.N. came into effect on 11 June, a concerted Anglo-American effort had been set in motion to achieve these objectives. At meetings in Washington in early June between a British team led by Harold Beeley, and U.S. State Department officials, agreement was reached on the need to revise the partition lines to give the Arabs the Negeb in exchange for western Galilee.[22] As the truce came into effect, the U.N.-appointed mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte of Sweden, presented proposals for a settlement which very closely resembled this Anglo-American line. Although Count Bernadotte had been appointed at the behest of the U.S. and Britain, there is little evidence to suggest that he was acting

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[21]See minute from Harold Beeley written on 17 June 1948, in Louis, op. cit., p.534.

[22]Joseph Heller, "Failure of a Mission: Bernadotte and Palestine, 1948" , *Journal of Contemporary History* , v.14, #3 (July 1979), pp.515-32: pp.519-20.

on advice from these two countries at this stage.[23] Never-the-less, his proposals were undermined by their close resemblance to the official British position, which only served to confirm Zionist suspicions that the Count was a British "stooge." Furthermore, the Zionists had captured much of the Galilee during the first round of fighting, a fact which weakened Bernadotte's proposals even more. Given the strategic and mystical attachment of the Zionists to Jerusalem and the Negeb, the proposals were difficult for them to accept, a fact which Mr. Bevin had realized from the outset. What Mr. Bevin perhaps misjudged was the extent to which the Arab states also mistrusted the mediator's proposals, which implied approval of some form of partition. Both Arabs and Zionists used the truce period to strengthen their military position in the hope of presenting the U.N. with a *fait accompli* which would make the Bernadotte proposals obsolete. In the event, the Zionists did this rather better, and when fighting resumed on 8 July, Zionist forces quickly captured the rest of Galilee, thus removing a key source of leverage which might have been used to get them to relinquish their claim on the Negeb.

The Bernadotte proposals had taken place against the backdrop of growing tension in Europe. Several days after Bernadotte had broached his proposals, Mr. Bevin and General Marshall announced their intention to defy the Soviet blockade of Berlin, which had begun in mid-June. The maintenance of Britain's strategic position in the Middle East was therefore especially important at this time. On 18

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[23]Ibid.: Heller points out that several such schemes were being discussed at the time in various circles, including similar proposals between Count Bernadotte and Zionist moderate Nahum Goldman.

August Mr. Bevin told the Cabinet Defence Committee that "a decisive struggle for power would take place in the next 6 to 9 months" between the Soviets and the western world.[24] If war was to come the British ability to hold the western position in the Middle East might be decisive. For this reason the 'strategic corridor' through the Negeb connecting British bases in Egypt and Transjordan was vital. Toward securing this end, Mr. Bevin suggested a revised version of the Bernadotte proposals to the Cabinet on 26 August.[25] This plan called for recognition of the *de facto* situation, with the Zionists keeping their gains in west and central Galilee and Jaffa, in exchange for southern Palestine and several other concessions. At the same time Mr. Bevin assured Ambassador Douglas that British and Arab *de jure* recognition of the State of Israel would shortly follow acceptance of this scheme by all parties concerned.[26]

According to Mr. Bevin's biographer, Alan Bullock, it was this proposal of Mr. Bevin's which provided the impetus for the revised plan which was presented to the United Nations in the name of Count Bernadotte on 20 September. This suggestion is bolstered by the fact

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[24]Bullock, op. cit., pp.594-5.

[25]Ibid., pp. 596-7.

[26]While Mr. Bevin was willing to make such assurances privately, there was no public indication that the legitimacy of Israel would be recognized, although this seemed implicit in the Bernadotte proposals. Christopher Mayhew, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, told the House of Commons on 22 September 1948: "The acceptance of the report of the Mediator does not involve recognition, either by this country or by any Arab State which might agree to accept the report. Our position...[is] that during the period of the truce, for us to recognize the provisional Government of Israel would, in effect, be a form of political intervention unwise in the existing circumstances of the truce. We must know before we recognize the State of Israel what precisely it is that we are recognizing." *Hansard*, 22 September 1948, 460: 1006.

that the U.N. mediator secretly met with British and American representatives on the island of Rhodes from 13 to 15 September to discuss certain aspects of the plan.[27] Regardless of where the impetus came from however, Zionist opinion regarded the Bernadotte Plan, as it came to be known, with suspicion. It was enough that Britain supported the proposals to make them unacceptable to the Zionists. The Israeli socialist paper *Al Hamishmar* wrote of the British endorsement: "What seems good in the eyes of Bevin cannot be good for Israel."[28] As for Count Bernadotte, his association in Zionist eyes with British and American imperial interests was enough to make him a target. On 17 September, three days before his proposals were presented to the U.N., he was assassinated by Zionist terrorists in Jerusalem.

The main nub of the Bernadotte Plan was the Negeb for Galilee proposal. In addition there were provisions to internationalize Jerusalem, and to make Haifa and Lydda 'free' sea and air ports respectively. A Conciliation Commission comprised of representatives of three nations was to be set up to take over from the U.N. mediation team in an attempt to implement these proposals. For reasons already mentioned, the Plan was acceptable to neither the Zionists nor the Arabs. On the other hand, the American representative expressed U.S. support for the Plan on 21 September, a significant point given the

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[27]See Louis, op. cit., pp.549-50: Sir John Troutbeck headed the British delegation, Robert McClintock the American.

[28]*Jewish Agency Digest of Press and Events* , #1(221), 30.9.1948.

necessity of a concerted Anglo-American effort in getting the acceptance of both sides in the conflict.

Mr. Bevin now turned his attention to persuading the Arab leaders to accept the Plan as the "least disadvantageous solution." At the third meeting of the U.N. General Assembly in Paris between 21 September and 12 November he met with the heads or Foreign Ministers of the Turkish, Iraqi, Lebanese and Egyptian governments, and stressed the imminent Soviet threat, and the growing strength of the Zionist forces.[29] The important thing now, he implored, was to limit Zionist expansion through a quick and decisive fixing of the frontiers. In the meantime, Mr. Bevin hoped that the United States would bring similar pressure to bear on the Israelis to accept the Bernadotte Plan.

At this point two events intervened to further upset Mr. Bevin's policy. On 15 October an Israeli offensive shattered the truce that had been imposed on 18 July after the second round of fighting. In the intervening period the Zionists had bolstered the number of troops they had in the field to some 100,000 , and had re-armed with Czech weapons which filtered through the U.N. embargo. In seven days of fighting the Israelis drove the Arab forces entirely out of Galilee in the north, and out of much of the Negeb in the south, capturing the strategic town of Beersheba. Israel had once again answered the British attempt to strip her of the Negeb with a *fait accompli* . In addition to this blow, Mr. Bevin received another when the American President re-iterated his support for the November 1947 Partition

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[29]Bullock, op. cit., pp.605-10.

Plan as opposed to the Bernadotte modifications, further pulling the rug out from under the British Foreign Secretary's initiative. Several reasons can be cited for Mr. Truman's action. The Israelis had made a good case at the U.N. for keeping the Negeb on the grounds that the area was one of potential oil and mineral wealth, as well as an important outlet to to the Red Sea, and thus was crucial to the future development of the state.[30] There were, as well, the domestic political considerations that Mr. Truman had to face with an election looming on 4 November. Finally, there was the advice that Mr. Truman was getting from people such as James McDonald, the U.S. representative in Tel Aviv, who claimed that although the Bernadotte Plan might further British strategic interests, it would "entangle the situation and sow dangerous seeds of bitterness."[31]

Mr. Bevin now faced a formidable list of complications. The U.S. either refused or was unable to rein in the Israelis. Britain's credibility and influence with the Arab League states was rapidly waning, and the League itself was in a state of disunity which further threatened the

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[30]See: *Middle East Journal*, v.2, #4, p.78.

[31]James McDonald, *My Mission in Israel: 1948-1951* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1951), pp.72-82.

British position.[32] The Soviet bloc was doing all it could to thwart British initiatives at the U.N. Removing the Israelis from the Negeb diplomatically in these circumstances seemed next to impossible. Yet Mr. Bevin continued to pursue a strategy of getting the belligerent parties to accept a solution dictated by the U.N., rather than accepting the Israeli desire for direct bi-lateral negotiations between the individual states. It was the feeling in Foreign Office circles that such negotiations would give the Israelis an advantage due to their superior position on the ground, as well as jeopardizing the position within the Arab League of any Arab rulers -- such as Abdullah -- who might be willing to cut a deal with the Zionists.[33] In conjunction with China, Britain put forth a joint proposal to the U.N. General Assembly late in October calling for both Arab and Israeli forces to withdraw to the positions in the Negeb which they had held on 14 October, prior to the fighting. The Negeb was to become a demilitarized zone while negotiations took place to decide its fate. Economic sanctions were to be imposed on whichever side refused to evacuate. On 4 November, after study by a 7-nation sub-committee, the Anglo-Chinese proposal was adopted.

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[32]Members of the Arab League had fallen to bickering over who would lead the Palestine Arab movement. On 22 September Nokrashy Pasha announced support for a Husseini-led Palestine Government in Egyptian-held Gaza, only to be threatened by Transjordan. He was shortly afterward persuaded by the British Ambassador in Cairo to modify his support. Meanwhile the British candidate to lead the Palestine Arabs, Abdullah, seemed only interested in Jerusalem and the West Bank of the Jordan, and not the Negeb. In any case the British initiative to have these territories officially united with Transjordan was defeated in the U.N. on 3 December 1948 by an unlikely coalition of the Soviet bloc, Israel and the remaining Arab League states! (See Bullock, op. cit., pp.646-7, and *Jewish Agency Digest* , op. cit., #1(221) 30.9.1948, and #3(223) 29.10.1948).

[33]Shlaim, *Collusion* , op.cit., pp.277-8.

Yet events once again contrived to rob this initiative of its effectiveness. Firstly, the teeth were removed from the proposal by an American modification calling for consultation before any sanctions were imposed. Secondly, another modification made at the last minute by Dr. Ralph Bunche, the acting U.N. mediator who had taken over from Count Bernadotte, allowed the Israelis to maintain their local garrisons in Beersheba, while removing their mobile forces.[34] The Israelis had in effect been allowed to remain in the Negeb during the negotiations.

The extent to which British policy was affected by the need for U.S. co-operation is further illustrated by the following sequence of events. On 18 November, Mr. Bevin's Under-Secretary, Hector McNeill, submitted a five-page position paper to the U.N. Political Committee calling for full implementation of the Bernadotte Plan by a three-nation Conciliation Committee. [35] Two days later, in a letter to Israeli President Chaim Weizmann, President Truman confirmed support for Israel's right to be consulted about the future of the Negeb.[36] Several days after this, Harold Beeley told the Security Council that in the interests of Anglo-American harmony, Britain was withdrawing her demand for full implementation of the Bernadotte Plan. [37] On 11 December the U.N. General Assembly did approve the

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[34]See Jon Kimche, *Seven Fallen Pillars: The Middle East, 1945-1952*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953) pp.270-80, and *Jewish Agency Digest* , op.cit., #5(225) 12.11.1948.

[35]*Jewish Agency Digest* , op.cit., #7(227) 26.11.1948.

[36]Ibid., #8(228) 3.12.1948.

[37]Ibid., #9(229) 10.12.1948.

setting up of a Conciliation Commission comprised of the United States, France and Turkey. But in securing the necessary two-thirds vote in the Assembly, the Commission's terms of reference had to be watered down to include neither the Bernadotte Plan nor the November 1947 Partition Plan.[38]

While continuing to work for a diplomatic solution through the American representative on the Conciliation Commission, Mr. Bevin also prepared to unilaterally limit Zionist expansion into southern Palestine. This was clearly a mark of desperation on his part. At the time of the Israeli offensive in October he had warned U.S. Secretary of State Marshall that Britain might be forced to enter the fighting should the Israelis attack Transjordan or Egyptian territory. [39] At the same time, Britain had, according to Israeli sources, begun to bolster its forces in Transjordan adjacent to the southern Negeb.[40] The tension that was thus building nearly exploded when, on 22 December, the Israelis moved to clear the remaining Egyptian forces out of the Negeb. Within days the Egyptians were forced to fall back on the Sinai and into the Gaza strip area. The British reaction at the U.N. was predictably strong.[41] But this time, it did not stop there.

In communications with the United States, Britain threatened to invoke the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty and intervene on the Egyptian

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[38]Ibid., #11(231) 24.12.1948.

[39]Louis, op. cit., pp.556-7.

[40]*Jewish Agency Digest* , op. cit., #5(225) 12.11. 1948.

[41]Ibid., #13(233) 7.1.1949: On 29 December the British delegate moved a Security Council resolution calling for a cease-fire and a falling back to pre-aggression lines.

side should the Israelis advance continue further into Egyptian territory. This came as somewhat of a surprise to the Egyptians, who had no intention of invoking a treaty which they then felt was invalid, or of inviting more British troops into Egypt.[42] In the event the Americans did respond with a strongly worded warning to the Israelis not to impinge on Egyptian territorial integrity, and this did indeed check the Israeli advance such as it was. Never-the-less, the following weeks represented the high point of tension between Israel and Britain. British reconnaissance flights of the Egyptian-Israeli frontier were stepped up. [43] On 7 January 1949 five RAF planes were shot down by Israeli forces while flying over the Sinai desert. For several days the rhetoric in the British press suggested the imminence of an Anglo-Israeli conflict.

Yet although the tension was real, the situation probably seemed more volatile than it actually was. Despite requests by Abdullah, Sir Alec Kirkbride, and Sir John Glubb, that the Arab Legion be given money and arms in order to defend their position in the West Bank and the route to Aqaba, the arms embargo on Transjordan was not lifted.[44] Egypt requested a cease-fire on 7 January, and on 13 January armistice talks between Israel and Egypt began on the island of Rhodes. The successful reining in of the Israelis by the U.S. had

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[42]Kimche, *Seven Pillars* , op. cit., p.283.

[43]The British were later to claim that these were conducted with the full knowledge of the U.S. and Dr. Bunche, but both of these denied any such knowledge. See *Jewish Agency Digest* , op.cit., #15(235) 21.1.1949., and #16(236) 28.1.1949.

[44]Shlaim, *Collusion* , op.cit., pp.337-8: Mr. Bevin tried in vain to convince Secretary Marshall of the necessity of loosening the embargo in the interests of Transjordan's internal stability.

convinced even the most Arabophile of Mr. Bevin's advisers -- such as Sir John Troutbeck -- that the Israelis were not about to invade Egyptian or Transjordanian territory.[45] Moreover, as advisers such as Hector McNeill reminded Mr. Bevin, Britain was in no position to act unilaterally and had to consider the policy and wishes of the U.S. So it was that on the same day that the Rhodes talks began, the British Ambassador in Washington, Sir Oliver Franks, was dispatched by Mr. Bevin to explain British actions to President Truman, and to try once again to convince him of the necessity of the strategic corridor through the Negeb.[46]

Despite Sir Oliver's efforts neither the President nor U.S. State Department officials shared the British concern for keeping the southern Negeb contiguously Arab, although the State Department officials were more sympathetic. Unlike the British, the Americans did not see the Israeli state as inevitably uncooperative, communist or even neutral. Where the British Middle East officials took the most pessimistic view of the Zionists, U.S. officials tended to take the opposite view. They were less concerned about reaching some sort of strategic rapprochement with Israel over movement across the Negeb, and tended to view the British attachment to the Arab corridor as "emotional" rather than realistic.[47] There was a sense in early 1949 that, given the American unwillingness to understand the British concern on this point, British policy would have to be adjusted to

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[45]Louis, op. cit., pp.566-7.

[46]*Jewish Agency Digest* ,op.cit., #15(235) 4.1.1949.

[47]Louis, op. cit., pp.566-7.

accommodate Israeli occupation of the Negeb all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba. One final incident had to be played out, however, before the British hope of an Arab southern Negeb would be relinquished.

In March, a Foreign Office-orchestrated attempt to claim the southern Negeb for Transjordan led to a somewhat muted show-down between Israeli and British-enforced Transjordanian forces near the port of Aqaba. [48] The incident ended in a stand-off, with the Israelis claiming yet another *fait accompli* and occupying a narrow strip along the Gulf of Aqaba between the Egyptian Sinai and Transjordan.

This final set-back came after Mr. Bevin had already taken steps to formally acknowledge the permanent Israeli presence in Palestine. On 18 January, Mr. Bevin announced in the House of Commons that the Government would release all Jewish detainees of military age on the island of Cyprus.[49] This announcement was followed eight days later by a House of Commons debate in which the Government strongly intimated that British recognition of Israel was imminent. Mr. Bevin began the debate by giving the Government's version of the history of the Palestine question over the previous several years. He emphasised the Government's need to consider the impact of its Palestine policy on other parts of the Empire and Commonwealth. He therefore asserted that although the principle of *de facto* recognition of Israel was accepted, there still remained the questions of coordinating such a move with the other countries of the Commonwealth -- especially

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[48]See Kimche, *Seven Pillars* , op. cit., pp. 280-1, and *Daily Herald* , 11 March 1949, p.1 and 21 March 1949, p.1.

[49]*Jewish Agency Digest* , op.cit., #16(236) 28.1.1949.

Pakistan, India and Ceylon -- and of settling the final frontiers of the new state. He did indicate however, that the Government might be ready to force the issue in order to resolve the situation in the Middle East:

> Now that armistice talks are at last proceeding the Government have considered whether the time has come when *de facto* recognition might contribute to peace and a settlement.[50]

Several days after this debate, the British Government did officially extend *de facto* recognition to the State of Israel. The process of normalizing official relations between the two countries had thus begun.

On 6 February 1949, Sir Alexander Knox Helm became Britain's first official representative to Israel.[51] In a somewhat euphoric mood, the Israeli press speculated about a secret agreement in the works between Mr. Bevin and Mr. Weizmann that would allow Britain to re-occupy bases in Palestine in the event of war, in exchange for *de jure* recognition.[52] Although there remained outstanding questions still to be settled, such as the frontier with Transjordan, the repatriation of Arab refugees, and the administration of Jerusalem, the opening of official channels of communication was a significant improvement in the relations between the two countries. Yet there remained distrust

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[50]*Hansard*, 26 January 1949. 460: 944.

[51]His status would soon be upgraded to that of Minister and head of the British Legation, although as the Government was quick to point out, this did not constitute British *de jure* recognition of Israel. See *Times*, 14 May 1949, 4e.

[52]*Jewish Agency Digest*, op. cit., #19(239) 18.2.1949.

on both sides. From a British perspective, Israeli expansionism had still to be checked, and the Arab League remained the chosen instrument for checking it. This much was made evident at the Palestine Conciliation Commission (PCC) conference of the Arab States and Israel in Lausanne, beginning on 27 April. Although the conference continued until 15 September, it soon became apparent that nothing much would be settled there. The Arab States refused to talk with the Zionists, and the Conciliation Commission was forced to communicate with each side separately. In the midst of this charade, the Israelis sought separate, private talks with Abdullah. The King, acting on advice from Sir Alec Kirkbride and the U.S. charge d'affaires in Amman, Mr. Wells Stabler, rejected the Israeli offer at the end of May.[53] Mr. Bevin, and his friends in the U.S. State Department, still hoped to pressure the Israelis to be more cooperative, and to get a settlement that would not split the Arab League and force the British to take sides. Getting Mr. Truman's co-operation for such a strategy, however, once again proved difficult. Late in May, the State Department sent a strong official note to Israeli Prime Minister Ben Gurion pressing him to be more conciliatory. The impact of the letter was softened, however, by the intervention of James McDonald, and of Mr. Truman himself, who more or less withdrew the threat.[54]

With the Arab League in disarray after losing the war, and the U.S. President undercutting his initiatives, Mr. Bevin had gradually to face the fact that bilateral negotiations and agreements might be the

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[53]Shlaim, *Collusion* , op.cit., pp.469-75.

[54]McDonald, op.cit., Chapter xvi, pp.165-74.

only way of solving the regional problems satisfactorily. Bilateral negotiations had taken place secretly before and during the war. [55] But by the summer of 1949, Mr. Bevin was prepared to contemplate bringing such negotiations into the open. On 19 July 1949, he met with the Israeli Minister in London, Dr. Eliash. As Dr. Eliash concluded in his report to Tel Aviv, the Foreign Secretary seemed anxious to dispel his image as a "sworn enemy" of Israel.[56] He claimed to hold similar positions to those of the Israelis on the pressing questions of the refugees and Jerusalem. Israel favoured settling the refugees in the Arab countries to which they had fled. In any case, they would not contemplate repatriating large numbers of refugees until peace settlements were finalized. With regard to Jerusalem, Israel favoured the partition of the city between themselves and Transjordan.[57] In both cases the Israeli solutions, which Mr. Bevin professed to agree with, involved direct negotiation and open agreement between Israel and Transjordan.

The impact that such open agreements would have on the British position in the Middle East was part of the focus of debate at a conference of regional officials convened in London two days after the talks with Dr. Eliash. The purpose of this conference was to thrash out a "post-Palestine" British policy. Although for the first time the

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[55]Talks between the Israelis and the Transjordanians had taken place with the full knowledge of the British Foreign Office. See Kirkbride, op.cit.

[56]Bullock, op. cit., p.713.

[57]For more on the Israeli aspect of this question see: Uri Bialer, "The Road to the Capital -- The Establishment of Jerusalem as the Official Seat of the Israeli Government in 1949" in *Studies in Zionism* , v.5, #2, pp.273-297.

Israeli side was represented by a British official, Sir Knox Helm, the delegates concentrated on taking stock of the situation in the Arab countries. The main problem, as Mr. Bevin noted, continued to be the instability of the Arab states. This instability had been exacerbated by the Arab-Israeli war. Abdullah now effectively, if not officially, administered much of central Palestine, and as such he had inherited a large population of destitute refugees. The Egyptian reverses in the war had contributed to popular unrest which had led to the assassination of Nokrashy Pasha by members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The situation in Syria, although being manipulated by the Americans, was also shaky.[58] Moreover, the British client regimes had used the Zionist challenge to obscure the pressing need for social reform in their own countries. Mr. Bevin therefore stressed the need to promote economic reform and development in the Arab countries in order to stabilize them politically.[59]

What Mr. Bevin had in mind was a version of President Truman's Point Four program for the Middle East. In planning such a program, the complications arising out of the Arab-Israeli war had to be considered. The question of the refugees, and of the West Bank and Gaza remained obstacles to Arab unity and to peace in the region, and peace was vital if Israel was to be enlisted in some sort of regional

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[58]See, for example, Avi Shlaim, "Husni Za'im and the Plan to Resettle Palestinian Refugees in Syria", *Journal of Palestine Studies* , v.15, #4 (Summer 1986), pp.68-80.

[59]See Bullock, op. cit., pp.713-5: Mr. Bevin spoke with the passion of a devoted socialist on this point: "[Reform was necessary because the old regimes, which we were forced to support, would not stand up to revolutionary conditions and would be swept away. These regimes were greedy and selfish and had not allowed any of the wealth which they had made out of the war and out of the oil to benefit the poorer classes."

economic arrangement. Despite his assurances to Dr. Eliash, Mr. Bevin seemed convinced that the Israelis would have to compromise on several points, although he was vague as to how such compromises were to be elicited. Israel would have to repatriate two to three hundred thousand Arab refugees, and agree to the official annexation of the West Bank by Transjordan. [60] The Middle East officials themselves were split as to whether the Anglo-Egyptian relationship was more important than an Israel-Transjordan settlement which might jeopardize Arab unity and the British position in Egypt. [61] In the event it was resolved to encourage a Transjordan-Israel settlement rather quietly, so that Egyptian and Arab League opinion would not be offended.

This decision reflected the delicacy of Mr. Bevin's position. There was a strong mutual distrust between Israel and the British Foreign Office. At the same time the Foreign Secretary had to consider the strong Arab nationalist feeling. Both these points were evident in remarks made by Mr. Bevin to the Cabinet in August. He noted that Britain must help the Arab countries advance in order that they might resist the economic and political domination that British officials believed Israel would impose. Such domination would present the danger of Israel "imposing her own ideas of neutrality on the Arab world."[62] He went on to say:

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[60]Louis, op. cit., p.578.

[61]Ibid., p.579: Sir Ronald Campbell and Sir John Troutbeck argued for the primacy of good relations with Egypt; Alec Kirkbride, Sir Hugh Dow and Sir Knox Helm advocated the opposite view.

[62]Ibid., pp.580-1.

> It would be too high a price to pay for the friendship of Israel to jeopardize, by estranging the Arabs, either the base in Egypt or Middle Eastern oil.[63]

These sentiments notwithstanding, relations between Britain and Israel continued to improve throughout 1949 for several reasons. The signing of armistice agreements between Israel and the five enemy Arab League states between February and July took some of the pressure off of the British position. Moreover, direct talks regarding a separate settlement between Israel and Transjordan got under way in November. Henceforth these negotiations, although they at times made manifest the mutual suspicion which the British and Israeli governments felt for each other[64], tied the interests of the two countries more closely together. This fact was made evident when the U.N. General Assembly voted to place Jerusalem under a full international statute in December. Britain, along with the U.S., did its best to block this vote, which in the event was carried by a group comprised of the Muslim countries and the Soviet states.[65] Commenting on the British actions at the U.N., Mr. Ben Gurion wrote:

> ...in this dispute with the U.N., Britain is our ally, implicitly, without the need to talk to us. She will stand behind Abdullah and, willy-nilly, behind us...[66]

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[63]Bullock, op. cit., pp.713-4.

[64]For example one of the main sticking points for the Israelis in these negotiations was the extension of the Anglo-Transjordan military treaty into the annexed West Bank. The British did not want to concede this point for fear that this would give the Zionists the green light to expand up to the Jordan. See Shlaim, *Collusion* , op.cit., pp. 525-33.

[65]*Times*, 10 December 1949, 4a.

[66]Shlaim, *Collusion* , op.cit., p.536.

This same cooperation continued to hold into the new year. With the armistice agreements holding, the question of Israel faded somewhat from public view. But the British government continued to manoeuvre behind the scenes. On 24 April 1950, Transjordan officially annexed the West Bank. Three days later, Kenneth Younger, the Minister of State, announced to the House of Commons the Government's recognition of the validity of the annexation, and the extension of the Anglo-Transjordanian treaty to the entire area of what was henceforth officially to be known as Jordan. In deference to Israeli opinion, however, British military personnel would not be stationed in the West Bank during peacetime. In addition, Mr. Younger announced the Government's *de jure* recognition of Israel.[67] Both of these recognitions carried important provisos. It was noted that the frontiers of either state were still subject to any revision which might be made in the process of achieving a final peace settlement with the other states in the region. As well, the Government was only prepared to extend *de facto* acceptance of the current situation in Jerusalem, which had been partitioned by Jordan and Israel. Both of these provisos were clearly attempts to soften the negative impact which these announcements were bound to have in the rest of the Arab world.

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[67] See *Hansard*, 27 April 1950, 474: 1137-1139. The distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* recognition should be clarified here. De facto recognition involves the official acknowledgement of a fact, as when Mr. Bevin told the House that "Israel was a fact that had to be faced." De jure recognition is the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of a fact, i.e. of the legal right of a country to exist. The change from *de facto* to *de jure* recognition usually involves certain diplomatic formalities such as the upgrading of representatives' credentials (e.g. from Minister to Ambassador). More importantly, it represents an increased commitment to the integrity of the state thus recognized.

Having achieved at least part of his objectives, Mr. Bevin was now anxious that the status quo be maintained. The lifting of the U.N. arms embargo in August 1949 presented a threat to this status quo. While it was necessary to continue supplying the Middle East states with weapons for internal security and defence, the prospect of fuelling a continuation of the Arab-Israeli conflict had to be avoided. On 25 May 1950, Britain, the U.S. and France signed a tripartite agreement which committed them to take concerted action -- both in and outside of the U.N. -- against any violation of the *de facto* frontiers of the six Arab League states and Israel. This agreement allowed each of the signatories to continue supplying any of the states in the region with weapons while at the same time guaranteeing the frontiers, and the equilibrium, that had by then been established.[68]

At this point, the suspicious views of the Foreign Office establishment were being steadily challenged by the officials who now liaised with Israel. Global developments also contributed to a re-evaluation of British policy. In June 1950, fighting broke out in Korea, once again exacerbating the Cold War. British officials in Israel reported that the reaction there had been to draw closer to the United States in recognition "that their [Israel's] future survival was bound up with the west."[69] Such points of view on the part of Middle

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[68]For Britain this meant that important arms shipments to Egypt and Iraq could continue. The shipment of arms and military machinery to these countries was the Foreign Office's way of i) propping up friendly regimes, ii) attempting to retain favour, and iii) cancelling some of the Sterling balances held by these countries in British banks. See, e.g., *Hansard*, 30 July 1951, 491: 1013-1018.

[69]Louis, op.cit., p.618: This statement came from the annual report made by the British embassy in Israel for the year 1950, The report was prepared by J.E. Chadwick.

East officials were fairly unprecedented, and they were bound to have an influence on Foreign Office attitudes in London. Moreover, according to James McDonald, by late 1950 some British experts had come to believe that the Arab League had "outlived its usefulness" for Britain, in large part because of the anti-British feeling that Arab nationalists were using it to foment.[70] This kind of attitude was behind the unofficial overtures at military cooperation, made by some British statesmen to Israel as 1950 drew to a close.[71]

By the time of Mr. Bevin's retirement in March 1951, British policy had come from viewing Israel as a threat to British aspirations in the Middle East, to seeing Israel as a possible pillar of western collective security. In mid-January 1951, Sir William Strang, the new Foreign Office Under-Secretary, had talks with Dr.Eliash in London regarding the political background to possible Anglo-Israeli military cooperation. The British were interested in bases in Gaza and within Israel, as well as some sort of corridor to Jordan.[72] In February, the British Commander in Chief in the Middle East, Sir Brian Robertson, paid a "courtesy visit" to Israel while on a tour of the neighbouring Arab states. The *Times* speculated that a regional defence pact was being discussed.[73] A regional defence pact was indeed a long-held British objective. Mr. Bevin's successor as Foreign Secretary, Herbert

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[70]McDonald, op.cit., p.209.

[71]Shlaim, op.cit., pp.597-8: Shlaim cites communication between Richard Crossman and Israelis in December 1950, as well as suggestions made by Sir Thomas Rapp, the new head of the British Middle East Office in Cairo.

[72]Ibid., pp. 598-9.

[73]*Times*, 20 February 1951, 4c.

Morrison, told this to the House in the summer of 1951. Noting the success of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, he said:

> What we have in mind is to do something similar for the Middle East. The problems there are, of course, different from those in Europe, and we cannot, therefore, apply exactly the same pattern. We have to work out an arrangement which will fit.[74]

The British strategy during Mr. Bevin's stewardship of foreign policy was to base such an arrangement on the Arab League. By the summer of 1951, this strategy was being re-thought, as a report by the Israeli official Reuven Shiloah indicated. After meeting with British officials in August, in the wake of the assassination of Abdullah, Shiloah noted:

> In the Foreign Office no appreciable change has taken place yet, they do not hate us as much as they used to, but there is a desire to appease the Arabs. In army circles the attitude is better... they are angry with Egypt, they know that the Arabs are of no military value, they talk about Israel and Turkey in one breath, but it has not come yet to a fundamental change of attitude.[75]

There was also a good deal of lingering Israeli animosity towards the British Government. This point was underscored by the fact that Mr. Shiloah spoke with Mr. Churchill, not with Mr. Morrison, about a joint Anglo-Israeli operation to recapture the Suez Canal should Egypt take it over.

None-the-less, Anglo-Israeli relations in the summer of 1951 were marked by an increased cordiality. Mr. Morrison himself could be considered a supporter of Zionism based on some of his speeches. In July, he expressed the opinion to the House that the Government's

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[74]*Hansard*, 30 July 1951, 491: 976.

[75]Shlaim, *Collusion* , op.cit., p.612.

good relations with Israel should not pose a threat to its relations with the Arab world.[76] In a sense this was true. The problems that plagued Mr. Morrison in the final months of the Labour Government -- with Iraq as well as Egypt -- were not primarily caused by an Arab backlash against Britain's acceptance of the Zionist state. Other factors, such as new oil revenue sharing schemes and Arab nationalism, were by far more important. None-the-less, there were instances in which Britain was pulled into conflict with the Arab states because of the existence of Israel. The most important such example was the Egyptian imposition of a blockade on all Israeli bound shipping through Egyptian territorial waters, including the Suez Canal. As much of the blocked shipping sailed under the British flag, and often carried crude oil to the British refineries at Haifa, this blockade was bound to antagonize Britain and draw the Government closer to Israel, although the principle of freedom of passage through the Canal was probably more important to the Government than were the specific grievances of Israel. An example of the friction that this blockade caused was the seizure of the British cargo ship the *Empire Roach* on 1 July. The ship was detained for several days and searched by Egyptian soldiers at the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba, before being released somewhat the worse for wear.[77] This incident was seen as an outrage in Britain, and

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[76] Outside of the House he was even more effusive. Upon greeting a Labour Party delegation returning from Israel, for example, he had spoken of Israel as "one of the greatest experiments in the whole of the civilized world." See: *Jewish Agency Digest* op.cit., v.ii #19(289) 3.2.1950.

[77] *Times*, 12 July 1951, 6a.

figured prominently in the criticisms that the Government faced regarding the British position in the Middle East.

The Labour Government handled such incidents with restraint for the most part, a fact which greatly irritated its Conservative critics. None-the-less, Mr. Morrison did at times have strong words of warning for the Arab states. An example of this was his speech on foreign affairs in the House of Commons on 30 July 1951. Noting the importance of the Suez Canal to western security, he said:

> We invite Egypt's partnership as an equal in this common effort to make the world safe.... If Egypt rejects that invitation, we cannot allow that to prejudice the fulfilment of our international responsibilities.[78]

It is therefore apparent that by the time the Labour Government fell in October 1951, its position on the Middle East had changed considerably. The improvement in Anglo-Israeli relations which marked the last stages of the Government's term represented a significant change from the policy formulated at the Foreign Office three and one half years earlier. At that time British policymakers expected to have problems dealing with the Zionist state. They anticipated that the Zionists might upset the foundations of friendship with the Arab regimes on which British strategy for the Middle East rested. British policy, therefore, sought to limit the size and influence of the Zionist state. Only after a series of setbacks, both military and diplomatic, did this British policy give way to grudging acceptance of the frontiers which Israel was able to establish. Even with this acceptance, Britain made sure -- through the extension of the Anglo-

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[78]*Hansard*, 30 July 1951, 491: 974.

Jordanian treaty to the annexed West Bank, and the tri-partite agreement of May 1950 -- that Israel's frontiers were finally limited. Moreover, throughout these years, the Foreign Office optimistically pursued the friendship of the Arab states, and this fact hampered the building of friendly Anglo-Israeli relations.

As British relations with the Arab states deteriorated however, the foundation for a shift in British policy was laid. The performance of the Israeli military, and the weakness and disunity of the Arab League, made British policymakers think twice about the basis of British policy in the Middle East. Towards the end of the Labour Government's term, the beginnings of a shift towards an openly Israeli orientation for British Middle Eastern policy could be detected.

Despite the strained Anglo-Israeli relations through much of this period however, British policy was never antithetical to the foundation of the Zionist state. On the contrary, the arrangements that were made with Abdullah prior to the British withdrawal, and subsequent British efforts that culminated in the Jordanian annexation of the West Bank, actually helped facilitate the partition of Palestine. The Bernadotte Plan, which bore the stamp of Mr. Bevin, implicitly recognized the existence of the Jewish state, and Mr. Bevin made great efforts to gain Arab acceptance of the Plan. Thus, although the state that Britain recognized in February 1949 was not the one that Foreign Office officials had envisioned or desired in the months leading up to withdrawal, it seems clear that British policy had long recognized and approved the existence of the Zionist state.

# Chapter 2

## The Trade Unions and the Labour Right

The attitude of the trade union movement towards Israel in the years 1948 to 1951 reflected the practical nature of trade union concerns. The trade unions in general measured their position with respect to the State of Israel according to a sober appraisal of the effects that Anglo-Israeli relations would have on the lot of the British worker. Thus, like the Labour Government, with whom they were closely connected, the trade union movement's position altered significantly over this period as circumstances in the Middle East evolved.

Judging by the composition of the Parliamentary Party throughout the six years of Labour's term, the political influence of the trade union movement was not as great as it had been before the war. Only thirty-five percent of the M.P.s elected in 1945 were trade union sponsored, compared with a figure of fifty percent for the minority Government of 1931.[78] In the election of February 1950, this same figure of thirty-five percent remained constant.[79] Many of the major figures in the Government -- Prime Minister Attlee, Hugh Dalton, Stafford Cripps, Herbert Morrison, Emanuel Shinwell and Chuter Ede among others -- were not trade union men. Yet despite the obvious post-war trend towards fewer union sponsored candidates, the trade

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[78] Eugene J. Meehan, *The British Left Wing and Foreign Policy* (New Jersey, 1960), p.33. For the actual numbers in 1945 Parliament see Table 1.2 below.

[79] 49th Labour Party Conference, *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party of 1950* (London: Transport House, 1950), p.5.

unions did continue to exercise a great deal of influence on the Government and the labour movement.

The voting power of the trade unions at the annual Labour Party conference was a major reason for this continued influence. Table 1.1 illustrates the extent of this power:

*Table 1.1: Number of Organizations and Voting Power at 1950 Labour Party Conference'* [80]

| Organization | Number | Delegates | Votes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Trade Unions | 69 | 567 | 4,998,000 |
| Socialist Societies | 4 | 4 | 10,000 |
| Co-operative Societies | 1 | 6 | 34,000 |
| Constituency Labour Parties | 588 | 606 | 992,000 |
| Federations | 17 | 17 | 17,000 |
| Totals | 679 | 1,200 | 6,051,000 |

In addition to these votes at conference, trade union representatives exercised a decisive influence on the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Party, and were prominent consultants on such government bodies as the National Joint Advisory Council and the Economic Planning Board. Moreover, the strength of the unions grew significantly under the conditions of full employment which prevailed after the war. Union membership rose from 7,875,000 in 1945 to 9,234,000 in 1950. At the same time, the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1946 removed the restraints placed upon the unions by the 1927 Trade Union Act.[81]

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[80]See: ibid., p.74.

[81]Sidney Pollard, *The Development of the British Economy, 1914-1980* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), p.261: Pollard notes that unemployment rarely exceeded 2% throughout these years, despite the post-war demobilization. With respect to the 1946 Trade Union Act, one of the key changes under the Act was the legalization of "contracting out" practices, which enabled the unions to collect dues more easily than they had previously. For more detail see: Martin Harrison, *Trade Unions and the Labour Party Since 1945* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1960), Chapter 1.

The influence that the trade union movement thus wielded is generally seen as a moderating one. In part this is because ideology played a less important role for the trade union movement than did practical economic concerns. For this reason, the movement is often pictured as a monolithic force of the labour right. It is possible, of course, to point out exceptions to this assertion. Several unions were consistently critical of government policy from a left-wing perspective.[82] The Labour Party newspaper, the *Daily Herald*, often carried warnings of Communist activity within specific unions, particularly at the branch level.[83] Moreover, the concept of a monolithic trade union movement is somewhat belayed by the voting pattern of the trade unions at Party conferences. In the first ten years after the war, the trade union vote was roughly divided between 2.8 million votes regularly cast in support of the NEC, 1.8 million votes against NEC policy and from a left-wing perspective, and 1 million unpredictable votes.[84] In the main, however, radicalism within the union movement merely reflected the energies of a minority of activists.

The prevailing direction of the trade union movement was largely determined by the handful of huge unions that controlled the

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[82]The Electricians Trade Union(ETU), Construction Engineering Union(CEU), Fire Brigades Union(FBU) and National Union of Vehicle Builders(NUVB) are examples of left-wing unions. See: Harrison, op.cit., p.206. The Union of Foundry Workers, to cite another example, issued a statement critical of Mr. Bevin's foreign policy in June 1948. See: *Daily Worker* , 12 June 1948, 6d.

[83]For example, see *Daily Herald* , 19 January 1948, p.3: A warning about Communists within the Post Office Engineering Union, made by the union's National Executive Council.

[84]Alan Bullock, op.cit., p.551.

Trades Union Congress (TUC).[85] In the years 1948 to 1951, the leaders of these unions came from the right-wing of the labour movement. The three most important TUC leaders were William Lawther of the NUM, Vincent Tewson, and Arthur Deakin of the TGWU. They threw the support of the TUC behind a Government that was also considered to be on the labour right. A good example of this partnership was the concerted Government/TUC campaign to purge the party and the unions of Communists after 1948. It was this campaign to which Mr. Churchill referred when he remarked in the House of Commons that "the Foreign Secretary, supported by the trade union movement and by the ... Labour Party, has not hesitated or failed to draw an impassable line between the professional Communist adept and other human beings."[86]

As Mr. Churchill's remarks indicated, the Foreign Secretary in particular enjoyed the support of the TUC, in large part because of his past affiliation with the TGWU. This is evidenced by the opening remarks which Mr. Lawther made at the 1948 Party conference:

> ...we as Trade Unionists say to our Trade Union colleague, the Foreign Secretary, that despite all the attacks that have been made we still have memories of the part that he

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[85]The six largest unions -- the Big Six -- were: TGWU, National Union of Mineworkers(NUM), Amalgamated Engineering Union(AEU), National Union of General and Municipal Workers(NUGMW), Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers(USDAW), National Union of Railwaymen(NUR).See: Harrison, op.cit., Chapter iv.

[86]*Hansard*, 26 January 1949, 460: 946 . In November 1948, the TUC issued a statement called "Defend Democracy" which urged unions to stop Communists from filling key positions or acting as union delegates.

has played in this movement, and ... we say to him that he has the backing of his fellow trade unionists.[87]

The record of back-bench rebellions in the House of Commons throughout the Government's first term confirms Mr. Lawther's assertion. As Table 1.2 shows, trade union sponsored M.P.s were less likely to vote against the Government than were independent or co-operative society sponsored M.P.s:

*Table 1.2: Labour Party Discipline and Sponsorship 1945-50*[88]

| Rebellious % out of number of revolts (39 in total) | 0% | 1-10% | 11-30% | 31%+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Co-op sponsored M.P.s (22) | 14 | 41 | 37 | 9 |
| Trade Union sponsored M.P.s (96) | 32 | 50 | 17 | 1 |
| Non-sponsored M.P.s (222) | 26 | 39 | 27 | 9 |

Although there were exceptions to this tendency -- as, for example, in the case of conscription, when the rebellious group was comprised of a cross section of the Party -- with respect to Mr. Bevin's Palestine policy, the pattern held firm. The revolts over Palestine policy were almost entirely dominated by non-sponsored M.P.s.[89] On this question in particular, the Foreign Secretary had the support of the trade union movement.

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[87]47th Labour Party Conference, *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1948* (London: Transport House, 1948), p.184.

[88]Taken from Robert J. Jackson, *Rebels and Whips: An Analysis of Dissension, Discipline and Cohesion in British Political Parties* (Glascow: Macmillan, 1968), p.82. The rebelliousness of the Co-op sponsored M.P.s can perhaps be explained by the ideological awareness of the Co-operative movement as a whole. In any case, as there were only 22 Co-op M.P.s, their record is less significant than the other two categories represented in Table 1.2.

[89]Ibid., p.81.

This fact reflected the similar concerns which the trade union movement shared with Mr. Bevin. For the trade unions, foreign and colonial policy was mainly to be judged by the economic returns that it brought the British worker. If Mr. Bevin informed the TUC that the well-being of the British worker depended upon friendly Anglo-Arab relations, then he could certainly expect their support in pursuing a policy that cultivated that friendship. Similarly, as circumstances in the Middle East evolved to the point that mutually beneficial Anglo-Israeli economic relations had been opened, both the Government and the trade unions showed a willingness to establish closer connections with the Israeli state.

Before exploring this development, it may be useful to briefly outline the economic circumstances that prevailed in 1948, and how these applied to Government policy in the Middle East. The sale of overseas assets and the taking out of loans to finance the second World War had left Britain with a large balance of payments deficit. By 1948, this deficit was being smartly reduced by Chancellor of the Exchequer Cripps' determined emphasis on boosting productivity, decreasing imports and increasing exports. The export drive in particular was successful: exports increased by 77% in real terms between 1946 and 1950.[90] This increase, however, was offset by the large Sterling balances that Britain owed as a result of the war. These balances were held frozen in British banks, and their release greatly dissipated the economic gains made by Britain in these years. Much of these balances was owed to Middle East countries such as Egypt and Iraq.

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[90]Pollard, op.cit., pp.240-1.

The problems which these Sterling balances presented required the Government to follow certain economic imperatives.

Chief among these was the continuance of the export drive, which was necessary to enable Britain to improve its balance of payments and to meet its Sterling obligations. This in turn required an increase in production, and a reduction in the price of British exports so that they might be more competitive. Both of these objectives were relevant to the British position in the Middle East. In order to achieve them, a ready supply of cheap energy was necessary to fuel British industry. As the factory closures caused by the coal shortages of the winter of 1946-7 showed, oil would have to be the basis of that supply.[91] Most of that oil came from the Middle East. Moreover, in order to save desperately needed dollars, Britain was forced to undertake the refining of crude oil itself rather than buy refined fuel from the United States. British refineries in Haifa thus played an important role in the British economy.[92]

In addition to being a source of cheap oil, the Middle East represented a very important market for British exports. This was especially important as the Government desired to stem the conversion of Sterling into dollars that would have occurred had traditional Sterling bloc trading partners in the region gone elsewhere with their business. For these reasons, Britain's position of pre-

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[91]See Trevor May, *An Economic and Social History of Britain: 1760-1970* (Essex: Longman Press, 1987), p.381: The forced closures cost an estimated 20% of exports lost, and boosted unemployment figures to 2 million.

[92]Pollard, op.cit., p.255.

eminence in the Middle East was supremely important, as Mr. Bevin told the Labour Party conference in 1950:

> We have great interests in the Middle East; we have built up great undertakings there, and we have done great work which -- as Lancashire with her cotton trade and others know -- depend upon the maintenance of the status quo in the Middle East.[93]

It is this economic context which largely determined the Government's attitude and policy towards Israel. The military imperatives that the Government stressed in the Middle East followed from the imperative to preserve the economic advantages that Britain and its western allies enjoyed in the region. The establishment of the State of Israel would clearly have an effect on the status quo, and as we have seen, Mr. Bevin believed that this effect would jeopardize British interests. In addition, important British enterprises had been left behind in Palestine, such as the Haifa refineries and the Palestine Potash Company. These were matters which the Government had to consider before Anglo-Israeli relations could be normalized.

Private British enterprise did not have these worries. Thus, Anglo-Israeli trade began to flourish much sooner than did official relations. As early as November and December of 1948, deals were being made to bring Israeli citrus to London in exchange for industrial machinery and materials.[94] The prospect of trade between the two countries played a significant role in the Government's decision to

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93 Labour Party Annual Conference1950, op.cit., p.147.

94*Jewish Agency Digest* , op.cit., #7(227) 26.11.1948.

recognize Israel in early February 1949. Voices had not been lacking to point out to the Government that the friction that existed between the two countries hampered British business opportunities in Israel. Mr. Crossman noted in the House of Commons on 26 January 1949 that several lucrative opportunities in Israel, including telephone and truck sales, had gone to non-British firms because of the Government's refusal to recognize the state.[95]

Following recognition, the volume of Anglo-Israeli trade continued to increase. The Israeli paper *Haboker* wrote on 8 February 1949: "...economic circles in Britain have for some months evinced a desire to 'forget the past.'"[96] The following day, the Israeli government completed its first contract with a British firm, Imperial Chemical Industries, for the minting and supply of a "considerable quantity of coins."[97] Trade statistics for the first nine months of 1949 (January to September) showed that more than half of Israel's 8.2 Million I. Lire export total went to Britain, while Israel imported 5.9 million I. Lire worth of goods from Britain, second only to the total imported from the United States.[98] Figures like these were significant given the importance of the export drive, and certainly encouraged the Government to enter negotiations to settle the outstanding financial matters which stood between the two countries.

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[95]*Hansard*, 26 January 1949, 460: 991.

[96]*Jewish Agency Digest*, op.cit., #19(239) 18.2.1949.

[97]*Times*, 9 February 1949, 4e.

[98]*Jewish Agency Digest*, op.cit., v.ii #13(283) 23.12.1949.

Several aspects were involved in these outstanding matters. Firstly, there were the British assets in Palestine, both privately owned and those belonging to the previous British administration. The British government was concerned about the possible confiscation of such property by Israel. Secondly, there were the debts incurred by the previous administration in Palestine. The question here was who would pay these debts. These matters were complicated by the substantial Israeli Sterling balance which had been held frozen in British banks since the beginning of the 1948 war.[99] This balance represented a trump card for British negotiators, and the release of it was subject to agreement on the settling of the other outstanding matters.

The connection between the Sterling balance and these other matters was made clear by the pattern of negotiations that got under way on 4 May 1949 in London. On 10 May, the *Times* reported that members of the London Advisory Committee of the Palestine Corporation entertained members of the Israeli delegation.[100] At this meeting, assurances may have been given regarding the continued integrity of British enterprises in Israel. In any case, an interim agreement was announced on 27 May whereby Israel would be allowed to draw a specified amount of its Sterling balance on a monthly basis

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[99]The Israeli balance was estimated at various times as being between 25 and 30 million pounds. When the final release of the balance was agreed upon, the figure announced was 13 million pounds, which would have put the original balance at about 20 million pounds. See below.

[100]*Times* , 10 May 1949, 7b.

for a period of six months.[101] Shortly thereafter, official Anglo-Israeli negotiations over the fate of British property in Palestine began. The British claims, which ran into the "many millions of pounds", were countered by Israeli claims arising out of costs incurred as a result of the "activity of British forces in Palestine, including the Arab Legion and the Transjordanian Frontier Force."[102]

While these negotiations carried on through the summer, the Israeli government continued to give assurances that British enterprises in Israel would not be nationalized. On 21 August the Dead Sea potash works were handed back intact to the Palestine Potash Company by the Israeli military, which had occupied the works since the end of the Mandate. Although there was criticism from Israeli sources regarding the insufficient exploitation of the Dead Sea resources by the British company, the Israeli government denied having plans to nationalize the company.[103] Similar assurances were given regarding Consolidated Refineries Limited in Haifa, a subsidiary of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. These assurances succeeded in restoring somewhat the confidence of British investors, as can be seen by the annual report of the Palestine Electric Corporation, which

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[101]Ibid., 31 May 1949, 9c: The agreement allowed for a monthly withdrawal of 700,000 pounds, in addition to up to 1,750,000 pounds to pay for oil supplies, and another 1 million pounds to deal with outstanding Sterling commitments. The agreement was to run from May to October 1949.

[102]Ibid., 1 July 1949, 4f.

[103]Ibid., 25 August 1949, 3a.

called for an increase in capital investment to help meet the increased demand it anticipated in Israel.[104]

Despite the confidence expressed by British businessmen, however, the financial discussions dragged on into the fall of 1949, with little progress being made. The interim Sterling agreement ran out at the end of October, and British officials indicated that they were inclined to negotiate further before extending the agreement. The Israelis warned that without an extension they might be forced to decrease their imports from the Sterling area.[105] This warning was one of the few points of leverage which the Israelis had, and it was not ineffective. On 10 February 1950, a new agreement was reached to replace the one that had lapsed in October.[106] Both the *Palestine Post* and the *Times* noted that the fact that Israel had agreed to spend much of the money either in Britain -- for the purchase of rail supplies -- or within the Sterling bloc -- for the purchase of oil -- was probably a deciding factor in the negotiations.[107] This arrangement was followed on 30 March by a financial agreement settling the outstanding claims of both governments.[108]

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[104]Ibid., 2 September 1949, 9c.

[105]Ibid., 30 November 1949, 3e.

[106]Ibid., 13 February 1950, 6e: This agreement released 3 million pounds, plus an additional 435,000 pounds/month to pay for oil supplies from the Sterling area, plus 500,000 pounds/month for each month that had passed since the last agreement had ended.

[107]See ibid., and also: Jewish Agency Digest, op.cit.,v.ii#21(291) 17.2.1950.

[108]See *Times*, 31 March 1950, 10c: British claims were assessed at 11,400,000 pounds, Israeli claims at 7,684,000 pounds. The balance of 3,716,000 pounds was to be paid by an immediate 1,118,000 pounds, with the remainder spread out over a 15 year period with an interest rate of 1%.

The agreement regarding claims did not completely settle the future of the British industries in Israel, nor did it settle the matter of the remainder of the Sterling balance. Talks on these points continued through the year. On 12 June 1950, the economic adviser to the Israeli government, David Horowitz, met with officials of the British government in London to discuss the future of Consolidated Refineries. On 28 June, an announcement was made by Israeli spokesmen to the effect that the Haifa refineries would re-commence operations within three months.[109] In December there followed a series of agreements, including a pact establishing air services between the two countries, and an agreement regarding patents.[110]

These agreements were completed in the course of continued negotiation between Mr. Horowitz and Sir Stafford Cripps regarding the remaining Sterling balance. On 20 January 1951, these negotiations finally yielded a settlement. The British government agreed to release the remainder of the Sterling balance to Israel over the course of the next two years. In return the Israeli government agreed that the repatriation of funds in Israel belonging to former British residents "would continue within reasonable limits."[111]

These series of agreements served to normalize Anglo-Israeli economic relations, and were an acknowledgement that British

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[109]*Middle East Journal* , v.4, #4(October 1950), p.472.

[110]The agreement on patents specified that: "...the time for making belated applications for U.K. patents or industrial designs with priority based on a corresponding application in Israel on ar after 15 May 1947 may be extended until a date no later than 31 January 1951." See: *Times* , 20 December 1950, 5c.

[111]See *Times* , 22 January 1951, 6d; and *Middle East Journal* , v.5, #2(Spring 1951) p.206.

economic interests had become more closely intertwined with those of Israel. This fact not only reflected the trade between the two countries, but also their common problems with the Arab states. The Egyptian blockade of Suez, and the Iraqi refusal to pipe oil to Haifa hurt both the British and Israeli economies, and inevitably led them into a closer economic partnership.

The movement of the British government with respect to economic relations with Israel was mirrored by the attitudes of the trade union movement. In the opening stages of the Arab-Israeli war, the trade unions agreed with the Government's logic regarding the need for good Anglo-Arab relations, and refused to consider a policy which would alienate the Arab states. This attitude can be seen in a statement issued by the National Council of Labour, a body comprised of TUC, Labour Party and Co-operative Society leaders, on 15 April 1948. The statement re-iterated the Government's position that a solution could not be forcibly imposed on an unwilling people, a reference to the partition plan which the Palestine Arabs opposed.[112]

The British trade union leaders, like Mr. Bevin, were concerned with the economic and military consequences for Britain should the Israeli state come under the influence of immoderate forces, either of the extreme left or of the extreme right. British pro-Zionists sought to assure both the Government and the TUC leaders that this would not happen. Mr. Rossette, the Poale Zion spokesman who represented the Zionist case at Labour Party and TUC conferences, stressed the moderate, trade unionist nature of the Israeli leadership, and the

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[112]See Labour Party Annual Conference 1948, op.cit., Appendix II, p.233.

common interests that this leadership shared with the trade union movement in Britain.[113] None-the-less, there was a real suspicion during the opening stages of the fighting of the moderate Zionists' ability to control the extremists.

The first Israeli elections of January 1949 were an important turning point in allaying this suspicion. The results of the elections, wrote the *Times* , showed that Israel had been made "safe for socialism."[114] By this they meant that Israelis had chosen a safe socialism, one that would not disturb its relations with the west. The big winner in the elections was Mr. Ben-Gurion's Mapai Party. Mapai was aptly described by U.S. Ambassador McDonald as the Israeli version of the Labour Party in that their power base rested on the Histadrut, the Israeli version of the TUC.[115] Mapai's forty-eight seats in the 120 seat Israeli Knesset did not give them a majority, but they did hold the initiative in forming a coalition which could exclude both the Communists and the extreme right Herut Party of Menachem Begin. The poor showing of the Communists, who gathered only four seats, was especially encouraging to those who wished to see a moderate Israeli administration.

The Israeli elections helped open the door to a moderation of the British government's position, which in turn led to a softening of the British trade union position. At the Labour Party conference in the spring of 1949, Hugh Dalton noted the special closeness that was

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[113]Ibid., pp.162-3.

[114]*Times* , 27 January 1949, 4c.

[115]McDonald, op.cit., pp.122-5.

possible between the trade union movements of both countries. He also revealed that an invitation had been made by the Histadrut to the NEC to send a delegation to visit Israel.[116] This visit was made in January 1950, and included several TUC representatives. On its return, Prime Minister Attlee sent a cordial message to the Histadrut noting that the visit had "done much to maintain the friendly relations between Britain and the new State of Israel."[117]

The British delegation's visit was reciprocated by a Histadrut delegation in December 1950. The 1951 TUC Annual Conference report noted the visit. The Histadrut delegation, which had included a member of the Israeli government, had toured several British industrial and agricultural locations, as well as visiting with British government officials. The TUC report expressed the sentiment that the visit would "cement a constructive friendship between our two movements."[118] The friendship of which they spoke was further evidenced by the reception which the Israeli representative in London, Dr. Eliash, gave for members of the Histadrut delegation on 4 December. Present at the reception were several prominent TUC men, including Sir Vincent Tewson.[119] It seems clear that the improvement of Anglo-Israeli relations, which by this time was made manifest by the economic arrangements between the two

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[116] 48th Labour Party Conference, *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1949* (London: Transport House, 1949), pp.199-200.

[117] Labour Party Conference 1950, op.cit., p.26.

[118] 83rd Trades Union Congress, *Proceedings of the Annual Trades Union Congress1951* (London: Transport House, 1951), p.219 (Paragraph 243).

[119] *Times* , 5 December 1950, 6b.

governments, was paralleled by the cordiality of relations between the trade union movements of both countries.

Subsequent events throughout 1951 to the end of the Labour Government's tenure of office, served to reinforce this trend. The Israeli elections of August 1951 once again returned Mapai as the strongest party in the Knesset.[120] Trade relations between the two countries continued to flourish. And the prospect of "immoderate" regimes causing trouble for Britain had been realized in the Arab states, not in Israel.

Thus, for very similar reasons to those of the Government, the British trade union movement's attitude towards Israel underwent an appreciable change during the first three years of the state's existence. Concerned primarily with the repercussions of British foreign policy on the British economy, the trade union leaders at first showed a cautious attitude towards the Israeli state for fear of upsetting the Arab states of the Middle East, as well as out of suspicion of the immoderate tendencies that the Israeli government might have. Once the stability and moderation of the Israeli government had been established, and Anglo-Israeli trade began to flourish, the trade union movement joined in the Government's efforts to facilitate close and mutually beneficial relations between the two countries.

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[120]Ibid., 10 August 1951, 3e: Mapai did lose some ground, but the big beneficiary of this were the business-oriented General Zionists; Herut and the socialist Mapam parties lost ground, while the Communists stayed roughly the same.

# Chapter 3
# The Left

Although Mr. Bevin had the support of the majority of the labour movement for his policy towards Israel, he did encounter criticism from certain quarters. As these critics were not completely aware of the behind the scenes machinations and intricacies of Mr. Bevin's foreign policy, they criticized what they perceived to be an anti-Israeli policy designed to maintain British imperial influence in the Middle East. Such criticism of Government policy was both varied and complex.

The unexpected Labour landslide of 1945 brought a large number of first time M.P.s to Westminster. This group differed significantly from their more experienced colleagues in several ways. The newcomers tended to be younger, better educated, from a professional rather than trade union or working class background, and independently sponsored.[121] This new group outnumbered the returning M.P.s by a three to one margin, although their power within the Government was circumscribed by the relegation of most of them to the Labour backbenches. None-the-less, these backbenchers gave the Labour Party during these years a distinctly different character than it had previously had. The newcomers tended to be more devout ideologues than their trade unionist colleagues, and many were thus spokesmen for a left-wing point of view. It was from this young left-

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[121]See Hugh Berrington, *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons:1945-1955* (Toronto: Pergamon Press, 1973), p.32.

wing that Mr. Bevin encountered the most criticism for his foreign policy in general, and his Palestine policy in particular.

The connection between left-wing criticism of Mr. Bevin's foreign policy, and his Palestine policy, is illustrated by the pattern of Labour back-bench rebellions in the first three years of the Government's term. On 1 July 1946, forty backbenchers joined in condemning the Government's "stern" handling of the Zionists in Palestine, and called for the relaxation of Jewish immigration quotas.[122] The same forty M.P.s were among a group of fifty eight that signed an amendment condemning Mr. Bevin's "pro-American" foreign policy, brought by Mr. Crossman before the House of Commons on 18 November 1946. This rebellion against the Foreign Secretary was described as a clear "break between the predominant trade union membership of the Party and a minority group of doctrinaire socialists."[123] The majority of M.P.s who voted against the Government's Palestine Bill of March 1948 were comprised of members of this doctrinaire socialist group. The Bill, which made provisions for the British withdrawal from Palestine, presented M.P.s with a forum for protesting the Government's handling of the Palestine issue. Of twenty nine Labour M.P.s who voted against the Bill on the final reading on 10 March, twenty four had signed the Crossman amendment. Of the remaining five, four were Jewish M.P.s, and one,

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[122]*Times*, 2 July 1946, 4a, 8b.

[123]James L. Godfrey, "British Foreign Policy and the Labour Party: 1945-1947", in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 47 (April 1948), p.140: In the event, the amendment was withdrawn, but not before over a hundred Labour M.P.s abstained from the first vote on it.

Seymour Cocks, was a radical critic of Mr. Bevin's. It seems clear that the Left used the Palestine Bill to express their feeling that "the Government's measures in Palestine were ... part and parcel of their overall foreign policy."[124]

The Government's policy towards Israel after withdrawal continued to draw criticism from this same left-wing group. In late May 1948, during the first round of fighting, William Gallacher, an outspoken Communist critic of the Government, badgered the Prime Minister for assurances that Britain would not take action to prejudice the Israeli position.[125] Similar attacks in the House of Commons against the Government continued throughout the fighting. The culmination of such criticism came with the abstention of some fifty Labour M.P.s on an adjournment vote brought by Mr. Churchill on 26 January 1949 in protest at the Government's refusal to recognize Israel. The Communist *Daily Worker* gleefully reported that over twenty more Labour M.P.s had written Prime Minister Attlee that they had only voted with the Government out of loyalty, and not because they approved of Government policy.[126]

After the Government's recognition of Israel, there were no more instances of Labour backbenchers voting against the Government on this issue, particularly as the diminished Labour majority after the February 1950 election made necessary a tighter Party discipline. Yet criticisms of the Government's Middle East policy, particularly with

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[124]See Berrington, op.cit., p.71.

[125]*Daily Worker*, 1 June 1948, 1a.

[126]*Daily Worker*, 28 January 1949, 1b.

regard to the arming of the Arab states, and the reluctance to force the opening of the Suez Canal to Israeli-bound shipping, continued to be voiced from the left-wing Labour backbenches. As a number of these backbenchers were prominent journalists, their views were also expressed outside of the House in a variety of leftist publications.

The back-bench criticism of Mr. Bevin's perceived anti-Israel policy was mirrored by criticism from within the Cabinet. Here too there was a tendency for the criticism to come from the Left. The most vocal of Mr. Bevin's Cabinet colleagues was Aneurin Bevan, who, despite being kept busy by the Health portfolio, continually pressed Mr. Bevin to be more accommodating towards Israel.

The generally pro-Israel attitude of the left-wing within the Parliamentary Labour Party was matched by the attitude of the far Left on the fringes, as well as outside of, the Party. As George Orwell noted shortly after the 1945 election, "almost all shades of radical opinion are 'pro-Jewish' on the Palestine issue."[127] On the far Left, this pro-Jewish attitude translated into a pro-Israeli attitude in the initial stages of Israeli independence, although this attitude was tempered somewhat by the unfolding of subsequent events. Nonetheless, there was an undeniable unanimity of opinion on the British Left with respect to Israel throughout the period from 1948 to 1951.

This unanimity was remarkable given the ideological diversity of the British Left. Moreover, the Left had by no means been united on

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[127]George Orwell, "The British Election", in *Commentary* , 1 (November, 1945) , p.66.

the question of Zionism prior to the war.[128] Observers of the period draw from this post-war alignment of opinion the conclusion that pro-Zionist sympathies were merely a temporary emotional response to the holocaust. Miles Kahler typifies this attitude when he writes: "[Mr. Bevin's attempt] to maintain the Empire of prestige in the Mediterranean did arouse Labour back-bench opposition, though the question of Palestine drew support from Zionist sympathizers rather than an anti-colonial nexus."[129] In his study of the British left-wing and foreign policy, Eugene Meehan also places the issue of Palestine/Israel in a special category, claiming that "the line of reasoning that occurred was an isolated phenomenon."[130] Similarly, Francois Furet, in an essay on doctrinaire Marxist attitudes toward Israel, ascribed the stance of the far Left immediately after the war to emotional, rather than doctrinal reasons.[131] Furet noted that the image of the oppressed Jew fit nicely into conventional modes of thinking, and that once Israel had established itself as a powerful force -- he places this emergence in 1956 -- this stereotypical image gave way to a more ideologically consistent Marxist approach.

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[128]See Joseph Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism: 1917-1948*, (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1983): Gorny documents the relationship between the Zionist and British labour movements, and shows that it was not always convivial, especially prior to the 1939 White Paper restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine, which seemed to galvanize the two movements against the British government.

[129]Miles Kahler, *Decolonization in Britain and France: The Domestic Consequences of International Relations*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) , p.236.

[130]Eugene Meehan, op.cit., p.173.

[131]Francois Furet, "Israel and the French Left: The Misunderstanding" in: *In the Workshop of History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

This emotional hypothesis is attractive in its simplicity, and there is indeed an undeniable element of truth in it. The Left obviously felt a great deal of sympathy towards the victims of fascism, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the war, when tens of thousands of Jewish refugees languished in Displaced Persons camps throughout Europe. Regardless of what they felt was the best solution for Palestine, most left-wing British observers felt that the settling of these refugees was a moral imperative, and Palestine seemed to many the only realistic place to do so.

But there are several points which argue against too heavy a reliance on the emotional hypothesis. The British Left did not feel particularly culpable for the rise of fascism in Europe, having done their part to defeat it. Furthermore, the perception in Britain of the contestants for Palestine was by no means one-sided. If the image of the hopeless Jewish refugee was sentimentalized, so too was the image of the much-abused Arab peasant; it is a matter for debate as to which of the two images most captured the sympathy of the British public. Ironically, the most persistent left-wing critic of the government's pro-Arab Palestine policy, Labour M.P. Richard Crossman, summed up that policy in 1948 as "a triumph of passion over reason", precisely the description of the Left's pro-Zionist attitude made by subsequent scholarship.[132] Moreover, the refugee problem in Europe was no longer an issue after the establishment of the state of Israel, and yet left-wing support for the Zionists continued

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[132]R.H.S. Crossman, "The Role Britain Hopes to Play" in *Commentary* , 5 (June 1948) pp.493-7.

throughout the remaining years of the Labour government's term. Finally, the Israeli military successes of 1948 put to rest the image of the Zionists as underdogs long before 1956.

Given the centrality of Palestine in the post-war imperial equation, the shifting strategic realities in the region, and the diversity of ideological background and opinion on the British Left, the emotional explanation for the pro-Zionism of the years 1948-1951 is overly simplistic. The confluence of opinion on the Left with respect to Israel must therefore be explained with reference to a combination of ideological, emotional and circumstantial reasons.

In order to address the complexity of this question it is necessary to differentiate between the diverse ideological strains represented on the British Left at this time. Doctrinal variegation on the British Left has been broken down in a variety of ways. C.A.R. Crosland has distinguished twelve main categories on the Left.[133] Eugene Meehan divides the Left rather more succinctly into four main groupings. For the purposes of this paper, I shall divide the Left into two major groupings -- democratic socialists and communists -- with notable subdivisions within each. In the democratic socialist group I will place moderate intellectual socialists of the old I.L.P. type, and Fabians. In the communist grouping I will place fellow travellers, as well as Marxist ideologues. In some cases, these groups shared common reasons for supporting the Zionist cause. In other cases, the reasons for adopting a pro-Zionist position were based on a quite different rationale.

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[133]C.A.R. Crosland, *The Future of Socialism*, (London: J.Cape, 1961), pp.81-7.

The intellectual democratic socialists were represented by young back-bench M.P.'s such as Michael Foot, Ian Mikardo, Barbara Ayrton-Gould and Richard Crossman, and by such periodicals as the *New Statesman and Nation* and the *Tribune*. Sympathy for the Jews of Europe was an important factor in the pro-Zionist position of many of these men and women. At times, before the war, some socialists had argued against Zionism on the grounds that Judaism was not a national delineation. The experience of the holocaust seemed to change this way of thinking. In 1947, Mr. Crossman wrote:

> The Jewish problem really exists. It cannot be argued out of existence by liberal generalities. My natural inclination as an Englishman and a Socialist was to say that it was 'reactionary' to admit that an American Jew was anything but an American.... Many progressives ... desire instinctively to solve the Jewish problem by denying its existence and treating the Jewish people simply as a religious community.[134]

The horrors of Nazism seem to have given rise to the determined practicality which is indicated in this statement. Democratic socialist elements in Britain seemed prepared after the war to jettison ideological rigidity -- never a strong characteristic of British socialism in any case -- in favour of a humane assessment of the plight of world Jewry.

There was, however, more to the pro-Zionism of the democratic socialist Left than just a sympathetic attitude for the Jews of Europe, particularly after 1948. The pro-Zionism of this group also reflected a desire to encourage what they viewed as progress in the underdeveloped parts of the world, as well as a desire to place the

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[134]From R.H.S. Crossman, *Palestine Mission* as quoted in Gorny, op. cit., p.231.

relationships which had characterized the British Empire on a new and more equal footing. In this context, the Zionists were not pictured as a threat to the indigenous peoples of Palestine, but rather as their benefactors. Moreover, a modern State of Israel was seen as a more stable and progressive partner in the new relationships which socialists envisioned for the Middle East.

The progressive influence of Israel was a constant theme in the literature and pronouncements of the socialist Left throughout this period. There was more than a hint of nineteenth century utopian enthusiasm in the pictures conjured up by pro-Zionist socialists. Writing in the *New Statesman* on 15 January 1949 after returning from a recent visit to Israel, Mr. Crossman noted: "Israel has emerged as the one constructive force in the Middle East, a twentieth century socialist state in the midst of the Middle Ages." As a modern socialist state, Israel would be a source of benefit and leadership to the entire region. Mr. Crossman predicted that a flood of illegal Arab immigrants would enter the new state in search of a better standard of living, one which he claimed was already enjoyed by the Arabs within Israel. "Seventy thousand Arabs who remained in Israel" he noted, "have been granted full Jewish wage rates and have put forward four Party lists for the [upcoming] elections."[135] At the 1949 Labour Party conference, Bernard Finlay spoke of Israel as a "great socialist experiment" which would "surely stir the surrounding Arab countries from that feudalistic inertia which for centuries has enabled a handful of sheiks and pashas

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[135]*New Statesman and Nation*, 15 January 1949, v.37, pp. 47-8.

to batten on the misery and abject poverty of the masses."[136] This kind of rationale became especially important after the Arab-Israeli war was over and the Government's attention also turned to matters of economic development. In the summer of 1951, Barnett Janner, speaking about the Government's development schemes for the Middle East, noted:

> The Middle East needs twentieth century man with all his scientific and philanthropic resources, as has been demonstrated ... in the young and growing State of Israel .... those of us who believed in the Zionist cause were believing in something which was of tremendous advantage to the Middle East.[137]

There was inherent in this line of thinking the implication that the Arab peoples of Palestine and the Middle East in general could still benefit from the tutelage of the more "advanced" western industrial civilization. This implication was especially apparent in the argumentation of the Fabians. Writing in a Fabian pamphlet on the question of Palestine prior to the British withdrawal, James Parkes noted that the Arab population of Palestine was entitled to "the development which we desire for the 'common man' of every country."[138] He implied that this development would be better facilitated by the Israelis than by the ruling Arab elites. Moreover, there was a sense in Fabian pronouncements that there was no moral justification in holding back development for the sake of maintaining

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[136] Labour Party Conference 1949, op.cit., p.194.

[137] *Hansard* , 30 July 1951, 491: 1026.

[138] James Parkes, "A Possible Way Out", in Fabian Colonial Bureau, *Palestine Controversy* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1947), p.12.

the lifestyles of a relatively small indigenous Arab peasant population. H.N. Brailsford typified this thinking when he wrote: "No one would maintain the right of a sparse and backward people to monopolize a country capable of sustaining a higher civilization and a more numerous population."[139] The perception among a good number of individuals on the socialist Left in Britain, whether or not it was true, was that the Zionists had settled on largely uncultivated and desert lands and had developed them admirably.

The utilitarian nature of these arguments also applied to the global outlook of democratic socialists. The development of the poorer regions of the world was seen as essential to global stability. Writing in a Fabian publication shortly after the war, Arthur Creech-Jones, the Colonial Secretary, noted the inter-connectedness of world politics in the new post-war order:

> The backward areas menace the rest of the world if they remain undeveloped with low standards of living, with disease rampant and the people weak and ignorant. In that condition they would be a continuing cause of friction among the imperial powers. Their development is necessary for the larger security of the world.[140]

The contribution that Israel, as a modern industrial and socialist state, could make to the development of the Middle East was not only considered important for the sake of the Arab and Jewish masses, it was also seen as essential to the stability of the region and of the world.

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[139]H.N. Brailsford, "Solution for Palestine: A British View" in *Commentary* , 4 (February 1946) , pp. 51-5.

[140]Rita Hinden ed., *Fabian Colonial Essays*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1945), p.10.

In this line of argumentation, democratic socialists showed a similar concern to that of the Government. Both Mr. Bevin and most of his socialist critics were, by 1948, agreed on the threat to world peace posed by an unstable Middle East that would be susceptible to Soviet infiltration. What they differed over was the best policy to arrest such infiltration. As we have seen, Mr. Bevin suspected the Zionists of having a dangerously Communist orientation. At the very least, he feared that Israel's pronounced neutrality would adversely influence the neighbouring Arab states. Democratic socialists on the other hand, argued that Israel was likely to have a pro-western orientation for several reasons. Firstly, the notion that Jewish refugees from eastern Europe would be inculcated with communist notions and sympathies was refuted on the grounds that Jews had fled from those countries to escape Communism, not to spread it. Mr. Crossman noted in the House of Commons in January 1949 that Zionists had Left Russia to be "real Jews, not emigre Russians."[141] Secondly, economic dependence on the United States made it unlikely that Israel would tilt into the Soviet orbit. Moreover, observers who had travelled to Israel in the weeks leading up to the first elections of January 1949 reported "little or no Russian influence in this country, which ... is Socialist rather along TUC lines."[142] The subsequent elections served to confirm this analysis. For many socialists, an alliance with Israel thus seemed a better insurance for British interests than the Government's Arab League policy. This point

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[141] *Hansard*, 26 January 1949, 460: 989.

[142] *Times*, 11 January 1949, 4b.

was made repeatedly during the course of the summer of 1951, when the Government found itself facing problems in Egypt and Iraq.

Another argument against the Arab League policy was the inadequacy of the Arab military forces in the 1948 war. On the first official day of the war, the *New Statesman* noted that Britain and Israel were "the only two nations in the Middle East possessing modern military force." The Zionists were pictured as zealous idealists fighting for their home, in contrast to the decadent "upper class" Arab leadership that had "fled the country when the threat of war became acute and left it to foreigners to wage the war."[143]

In this scenario, not only were the Zionists more competent and progressive, they were also representative of the legitimate, indigenous nationalism which had arisen as a response to the exploitation of European imperialists and their feudalistic proxies in the Arab world. In more recent times, Zionism has been reappraised as a form of European colonialism, but during this period the Zionists were seen as opponents of traditional British imperialism.[144] Mr. Crossman expressed this sentiment during the Anglo-Israeli wrangle over the Negeb in January 1949:

> Who is the imperialist? Is it the man who wants to preserve a desert for purely military considerations, or the man who wants to populate the desert and make it happy and fertile? Who is the imperialist in the real old fashioned sense of the word? .... Because [the Zionists] want to build a port [on the Gulf of Aqaba] so that they can

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[143]*New Statesman and Nation*, 15 May 1948, v.35, p.36.

[144]See, for example, Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial Settler State?* (New York: Monad Press, 1973).

> bring in their fish and ship their potash they are called aggressors.[145]

These anti-imperial reasons for supporting Zionism also played a prominent role in the argumentation of the far Left. Among the most prominent people in this category within the Labour Party were Koni Zilliacus, D.N. Pritt, John Platts-Mills, and Sydney Silverman. Not all of these men survived the purges of 1948 and 1949. Mr. Platts-Mills and Mr. Zilliacus, for example, were expelled from the Party in 1948. They continued, however, to voice their opinions, either as independent M.P.s, or in such publications as the *Daily Worker* and *Labour Monthly*.

During the months leading up to the British withdrawal, the *Daily Worker* was particularly pro-Zionist and critical of the Government's policy in Palestine. Articles and editorials in the first half of 1948 continually pictured the surrounding Arab states as uncompromising aggressors encouraged by British and American imperialists. Agreements such as the Anglo-Transjordanian and Anglo-Iraqi treaties were given as evidence of a British attempt to shore up traditional partnerships with reactionary Arab regimes. These regimes were the tools of British imperialism not only against the Zionists, but also against the Arab masses. An editorial in the *Daily Worker* on 15 May 1948 summed up this line of thought:

> The feudal leaders of these Arab States are ... not independent agents. The last word rests with London and Washington, to whom they are bound by colonial ties. It is, moreover, a fact that the Arab masses do not want to fight the Jews, as has been demonstrated by the ineffective

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[145]*Hansard* , 26 January 1949, 460: 993.

military resistance offered by the Palestinian Arabs to Hagana.[146]

According to an article written in the summer of 1948 by the *Daily Worker* correspondent in Israel, the war was being fought by everyone except "those very Arab people of Palestine who are supposed to be fighting the Jews." He went on to say:

> There are Iraqi fascist bands, reluctant Syrian and Lebanese regulars, professional Transjordanian Legionnaires, Egyptians, Britishers, a few German Nazis, Anders Poles and even Yugoslav Royalists.... But the Arab people of Palestine have either fled from the towns to the neighbouring states under the threats of their own leaders, or they can be seen from any road in Israel, working in their fields and exchanging their produce with their Jewish neighbours.[147]

The idea expressed here was that the real enemy of the Arab masses was not Zionism but rather European imperialism and Oriental feudalism.

The communist Left pictured the Zionists as allies of the Arab masses in the struggle against western imperialism for two main reasons. Firstly, there was the initial perception, shared by the British Foreign Office, that the Zionists would have a pro-Soviet orientation. Secondly, it was thought that even if Israel did not gravitate into the Soviet orbit, the effect that its presence would have on the Middle East as a whole would be conducive to the furtherance of communism and anti-imperialism.

The first line of reasoning was important mainly to the fellow travellers on the communist Left. The perception that Soviet-Israeli

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[146]*Daily Worker*, 15 May 1948, 1a.

[147]Ibid., 28 June 1948, 2a.

relations would be close was supported in the early stages of Israeli independence by the Soviet endorsement of partition and the sympathetic aid which the Soviets gave the Zionists during the war, both within the U.N. and outside of it.[148] In October 1948, the Arab and Jewish wings of the Communist Party in Palestine united and issued a joint statement condemning the war as a British instigated attempt to split the working classes along national lines.[149] This was taken as a further sign that Communist influence within Israel was gaining force.

The enthusiasm of fellow travellers for Zionism was greatly weakened, however, by the subsequent course of Israeli politics. The Israeli elections of January 1949 were a great disappointment to the communist Left. The talk of incorporating Israel into some sort of western regional military alliance, which began to surface in the communist press as early as February 1949, also undermined communist support for Israel, especially as Mr. Ben-Gurion refused to give assurances to the Israeli Communists that Israel would not join such an anti-Soviet bloc.[150] The Israeli position regarding the Korean war was another proof that Israel had developed an openly pro-western stance. The effect of these developments on the far Left

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[148]Much of the weaponry which Israel acquired during the fighting came from Czechoslovakia.

[149]See *Jewish Agency Digest* , op.cit., #3 (223) 29.10.1948.

[150]See the *Daily Worker* , 19 February 1949,1a: The paper reported that a NATO-type alliance was being discussed which was to include Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Greece and Syria. There was also the intimation that some sort of agreement would be ironed out at the Rhodes armistice talks then taking place between Egypt and Israel in order that both countries might be able to join such an alliance. Also, regarding the Ben-Gurion refusal to give assurances of Israeli neutrality, see: *Middle East Journal* , v.4 #3 (July 1950), p.339.

could be seen by the lack of reporting on Israel in the communist press after the first Israeli elections. Aside from the explanation that events elsewhere pushed Israel somewhat to the side, this conspicuous silence must also have reflected a sense of disappointment and embarrassment on the part of fellow travellers.

The second line of reasoning was one that doctrinaire Marxists followed regardless of their attitude towards the Soviet Union. For one thing, the Arab-Israeli war, by exposing the weakness of the ruling Arab regimes, helped to de-stabilize those regimes and encourage nationalist elements in the Arab states. This idea was expressed in a *Labour Monthly* article in February 1949:

> The military and diplomatic collapse of the British-sponsored Arab League and discrediting of its reactionary feudal puppet rulers quickens the anti-imperialist consciousness of the Arab masses to recognize their true enemy, not in the Jewish people of Israel, but in imperialism.[151]

Moreover, there was a Marxist conviction that the level of civilization the Zionists would introduce to the region would be conducive to revolutionary progress. In this respect Marxists concurred, strangely enough, with the analysis of the conservative British Foreign Office.

Part of the pan-Arab policy of the Foreign Office through the 1940's was based on the assumption that the "Islamic ethic", as Sir Hamilton Gibb called it, was hostile to communism.[152] Bernard Lewis, writing in 1953, echoed this sentiment. Although he acknowledged

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[151] *Labour Monthly*, v.31 (February 1949), p. 38.

[152] Elie Kedourie, "Pan-Arabism and British Policy" in Walter Laqueur, ed., *The Middle East in Transition*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958), p.109-10.

that the authoritarian and collectivist nature of Islamic society, coupled with the anti-western mood then prevalent in the Near East, looked to be an ominous combination, he argued that the devout religiosity of Muslims would inevitably be at odds with Marxist communism.[153] Marx too saw Islamic societies as unresponsive to communist revolution, and would undoubtedly have thought the Zionist community in Palestine a more fertile revolutionary ground.

For Marx and Engels the historical process leading towards a communistic social order was one of linear progression. The process known as "modernization" led from a feudal to a bourgeois, and thence to a proletarian dominated social order. Marx's evaluation of Islamic society must be seen in the context of this linear model. He saw Islam as a religion which reinforced the feudal order, and thus as an impediment to historical progress.

The separation of the religious and the public or political spheres was an integral aspect of the passage from a feudal to a bourgeois social order. Thus, the intrusion of Koranic law into every aspect of life was seen by Marx as the matrix which held the Oriental feudal social structure together. As Shlomo Avineri points out, for Marx "modernization [was] ... not a question of the availability of economic means, but of societal mores conducive to it."[154] The societal mores of an Oriental theocracy were not conducive to modernization. Marx maintained that in order to create the kind of

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[153]Bernard Lewis, "Communism and Islam" in ibid., pp.311-24.

[154]Shlomo Avineri, "Marx and Modernization" in *Review of Politics*, 31(1969), pp.172-88, p.186.

social climate necessary for the progression from a feudal to a bourgeois society, the grip of Islamic law would have to be released. This would entail a drastic social transformation: "If you supplant the Koran by a civil code" he wrote, "you must occidentalize the entire structure of Byzantine society."[155]

As this quotation suggests, Marx viewed such a progressive social transformation as being the result of external influence. Oriental societies had to be "occidentalized" or "westernized." Without external intervention, feudal societies lacked "the means -- or the institutional urge -- to change and modernize."[156] For this reason, Marx and Engels viewed with favour any intervention into Oriental society which aided the course of progress, regardless of methods or motives. For example, Engels wrote of the French conquest of Algeria in the 1880's:

> [It] is an important and fortunate fact for the progress of civilization .... the modern *bourgeois* , with civilization, industry, order, and at least relative enlightenment following him, is preferable to the feudal lord.[157]

In the same way, the Zionists were seen as preferable to the Arab feudal lords. It must be noted that at the outset of its independence, British Marxists did not anticipate that Israel would be as influenced by religious Zionists as it subsequently was. None-the-less, Marx's views on the bourgeois nature of modern Judaism would

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[155]Quoted in Walter Laqueur, *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), pp.293-4.

[156]Avineri, op. cit., p.184.

[157]Quoted in Horace Davies, "Nations, Colonies and Social Classes: The Position of Marx and Engels" in *Science and Society*, 29 (1965), pp.26-43; pp.29-30.

have greatly dispelled the contradiction of supporting a Jewish theocracy, and not supporting an Islamic one.

Moreover, there was a strain of Marxist thought that held that Zionism was also integral to the preparation of the Jewish community for revolutionary progress. The principle theoretician of this line of thought was Ber Borochov (1881-1917), who held that only through the normalization of the Jewish social structure was it possible to achieve a revolutionary Jewish proletariat. This normalization process was only possible, argued Borochov, in a Jewish state in which Jews assumed all the roles within the society, including that of workers.[158] In this theory, as in the theory of the effect of Zionism on Arab society, the idea of stages of development is primary. A certain stage had to be reached first before the next stage became possible. Thus, whether or not the Israeli government was socialist mattered less to Marxists than did the level of progress that the Zionists had achieved.

It was in this context that doctrinaire Marxists criticized the British government's policy of building and depending on "reactionary" Arab coalitions to the detriment of the new Israeli state. In their eyes, this was a policy which identified British interests with the forces of feudalism in the Middle East, and not with the forces of progress. If the policy of Mr. Bevin was meant to safeguard the interests of the British worker, this only reflected V.I. Lenin's assertion that imperialism would co-opt the labour movement just as it had enslaved the bourgeoisie. E.J. Hobsbawm expressed this when he noted that concessions granted to labour by "the great firm of the British Empire"

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[158]See Nathan Weinstock, *Zionism: False Messiah* (London: Ink Links Ltd., 1979).

had led "the right wing leaders of the movement into more active collaboration with business and empire, until in 1945 they actually took over responsibility for it." Thus it was, he continued, that:

> ...a colonial undersecretary rejected colonial industrialization, because 'it is no part of our purpose to set up everywhere small Lancashires,' and a Foreign Secretary explained that British workers' standards would decline without the dollars from Middle Eastern oil and Malayan rubber.[159]

It is apparent, then, that the somewhat rare confluence of opinion on the British Left with respect to Zionism and the state of Israel in the immediate post-war years was a more complex matter than is often stated. Democratic socialists argued that the more modern Israelis would lend stability to the Middle East by helping to develop the region. Moreover, they would make more reliable allies in a post-imperial defence system. Marxist ideologues gave their support to a Zionist movement which promised to further the dialectical process in the Middle East. Finally, socialists, Marxists and fellow travellers were all critical of what they saw as the Government's attempt to maintain its imperial position in the Middle East by supporting regressive elements.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the various arguments used by the British Left to criticize the Labour government's position on Israel in the years 1948-1951. Firstly, the policy towards Israel pursued by Mr. Bevin was criticized by the Left in the context of an overall critique of his Middle Eastern and colonial policy, contrary to

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[159]E.J. Hobsbawm, "Trends in the British Labour Movement Since 1850" in *Science and Society*, 13 (1949), pp.289-312; pp.311-12.

what Mr. Kahler and others imply. Secondly, a pro-Zionist policy was regarded as being practical, as well as being ethical and idealistic. And thirdly, the pro-Zionism of Marxist ideologues can indeed be seen to be consistent with fundamental Marxist doctrine. Although there is no question that the holocaust created a highly emotional climate in Britain which the Zionists attempted to exploit, the support of the British Left for the new state of Israel was based on a more varied and complex foundation.

# Chapter 4
## The Rank and File

Of the various elements that made up the labour movement in 1948, by far the largest was the number of anonymous Labour voters and supporters that are grouped collectively here as the Labour rank and file. It was also the least influential group in determining Government policy towards Israel. Although individuals could become politically active at the union branch or Constituency Party level, their suggestions rarely influenced the policy direction taken by their union or local Party executives.[160] This was especially so with respect to matters of foreign policy. Never-the-less, the opinions of the rank and file are significant if only because they formed the majority view within the labour movement.

Because of the size and variety of this grouping, it is difficult to discern a uniform attitude among the rank and file on any subject. This is particularly the case with a subject such as Israel, which had so many different aspects that need to be considered. Moreover, the topic of Israel was not the most popularly discussed issue during most of the period considered here. The 1948 war brought the topic of Palestine to the fore, but it is probable that attitudes toward Israel were primarily formed in the aftermath of the war, when the Zionist state became established. Representations of Israel in the labour press both expressed and formed the opinions of the rank and file, and therefore it is instructive to examine these representations. Attitudes

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[160]See Harrison, op. cit., pp.179-80.

toward Israel were also bound together with attitudes toward Jews and Arabs in general, and the connections between these attitudes must also be considered.

The question of who comprised the rank and file of the labour movement is almost as difficult to answer as is the question of what their opinions were regarding Israel. The constituency of the Labour Party broadened considerably in the first few years after the Second World War. A large number of lower middle class voters, mainly comprised of returning soldiers and residents of the sprawling suburbs, swung over to Labour in 1945.[161] This swing made it difficult to generalize about the working class nature of the average Labour voter. Moreover, the characterization of working and middle class became harder to make in post-war British society. The income levels of low echelon white collar workers and a significant number of blue collar workers overlapped more during this period than had been the case before the war. More importantly, a greater number of white collar workers identified themselves with the working class. This can be seen by the dramatic growth in numbers and influence of white collar unions in the late 1940's and 1950's, as well as by polls which indicated that forty three per cent of the British population in 1950 considered themselves to be working class, whereas only twenty nine per cent considered themselves middle class.[162]

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[161]Harry Hopkins, *The New Look* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1963), p.39: Hopkins cites John Bonham's study entitled *The Middle Class Vote*, which was based on Gallup Poll material.

[162]*New Leader*, 27 May 1950, p.13.

This type of class consciousness reflected the impact of war-time propaganda, and the immediate post-war program of austerity that the Government was forced to undertake. It was the Labour Party's mixed fortune to have benefitted from the "fair shares for all" collectivism of this period. In subsequent years, Labour would unfairly be identified with restrictive measures which, while useful in times of crisis, were thought to be unnecessary in times of affluence. At this time, however, the egalitarianism of the war was still pervasive. It was this egalitarian mood which set the context for the popular response towards Israel, and towards Jews and Arabs in general.

The Jewish community in Britain was not in itself a numerically influential part of the labour movement. There were, however, some influential Jews within the Labour Party. The 1945 election saw 26 Jewish Labour M.P.s returned to Westminster. This was a greater number than had ever been elected before, and was furthermore remarkable because no Conservative or Liberal Jewish M.P.s succeeded in being elected.[163] Among these twenty six were many names who would continue to play important roles in the Party for years to come: Barnet Janner, Harold Lever, Marcus Lipton, Emanuel Shinwell, Lewis Silkin, Ian Mikardo, Sydney Silverman, and Maurice Edelman are examples. Yet only two of these Jewish M.P.s were elected in ridings with substantial Jewish populations. Moreover, although most of the ridings with a large concentration of Jewish voters returned Labour M.P.s in 1945, there is no conclusive evidence that the Jewish vote

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[163]Geoffery Alderman, *The Jewish Community in British Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp.126-7: Two other Jewish M.P.s reached the House of Commons: Mr. Piratin, a Communist, and Mr. Lipson, a rebel Conservative.

went as a bloc to Labour.[164] The Labour Party's 1944 pronouncement in favour of Zionism did no doubt attract some British Jews to Labour, but other factors may have overridden this consideration in the minds of many Jewish voters.

The most important factor in this sense was class identification. Most of the Jewish immigrants that had come to Britain as refugees from 1933 to 1945 were well educated professionals. They tended to identify with the middle rather than the working class.[165] Despite the fact that anti-semites among the British middle class felt threatened by Jewish immigration and rallied within the Conservative Party, many British Jews also saw their interests as best served by the Conservatives rather than by Labour. In the years after the war, this trend continued as the Labour Party soon disappointed the hopes of Zionist sympathizers, and as anti-semitism, which had previously been a primarily middle class phenomenon, spread among the British working class. Thus British Jews were, for the most part, not considered an integral part of the self-identified working class which comprised the rank and file of the labour movement.

This fact was an important aspect of the working class anti-semitism of the immediate post-war period. Anti-semitism, like fascism, is of course not a simple phenomenon to explain. There are a number of sociological, psychological and political theories which make for interesting discussion, but ultimately one is hard pressed to make generalizations that fit the various circumstances under which

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[164]Ibid.

[165]Ibid., p.119.

anti-semitism has arisen. It is thus important to regard the anti-semitism in Britain after the war in the particular context in which it arose. The post-war period was one of low unemployment. Therefore the upsurge of anti-semitism among the working class was definitely not a response to the competition posed by Jewish immigrants for scarce jobs. In fact, it was during the period discussed in this paper that the immigration of West Indians began in earnest in response to a shortage of workers in Britain.[166] Working class anti-semitism was rather a reflection of the popular opinion that, at a time of imposed austerity and collective sacrifice, Jewish people were not doing their fair share.

As we have noted, the post-war period was one in which being considered working class was a source of some pride to a substantial number of the population. The working class was considered the backbone of the post-war reconstruction effort. In this context, the predominantly middle class nature of Jewish identification was somewhat of a liability. Jews were stereotyped as quintessentially bourgeois. They were considered selfish and undisciplined; in Mr. Bevin's own words, "queue jumpers."[167] There are a number of examples of the ways in which this stereotype took hold in the popular imagination.

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[166]See May, op.cit. : In June 1948, the arrival of the *Empire Windrush*, carrying 492 passengers from the West Indies, marked the beginning of West Indian immigration. By 1951, the black population in Britain had risen to 200,000, double the number in 1931.

[167]See Bullock, op.cit., pp.182-3: In 1946, Mr. Bevin had warned that Jewish "queue jumping" in the Displaced Persons camps might lead to an anti-semitic backlash; his own statement was taken by many as an anti-semitic remark.

During this period the slang expression 'spiv' was coined to describe those who shirked work, made illicit profits on the black market, and took undue advantage of government social programs. The most notorious spiv of the time was Sydney Stanley, a Jew who later emigrated to Israel. Mr. Stanley received a great deal of media attention, particularly when he arrived in Israel, and thus became somewhat of a symbol of the ills that threatened British society.[168] Another story, printed in the *Daily Herald* on 8 January 1948, was also indicative of the stereotypical image of Jewish people perpetuated in the media. The story was of a suit brought against a public school by the parents of a Jewish boy who complained of being harassed by anti-semitic prefects because of his bad posture. Spokesmen for the school replied that certain "standards of conduct" were expected of every student regardless of his ethnic origin, the implication being that the boy's parents were asking for preferential treatment.[169] Stories such as these created an image of Jews as con artists and complainers, and such an image was entirely out of keeping with the mood of the times.

Representations such as this greatly contributed to the anti-semitic and fascist upsurge of this period. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, one would have expected a certain amount of sympathy towards Jewish people. In Britain, however, popular interest in the plight of the Jews of Europe was lukewarm. By the end of the Nuremberg trials in September 1946, writes Gerald Hopkins, "the

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[168]Both the *Times* and the *Daily Herald* reported Mr. Stanley's arrival on 10 May 1949.

[169]See *Daily Herald*, 8 January 1948, p.3.

British newspaper reader had quickly wearied of this long-winded over-rhetorical drama and it was firmly relegated to the inside pages."[170] By 1947, the fascist British League of Ex-Servicemen and Women, led by Sir Oswald Mosely, were provoking almost weekly anti-semitic riots in the east end of London and in other such working class neighbourhoods where there were a significant number of Jewish residents.[171] Although recent scholarship tends to view the fascist movement at this time as a reflection of a small minority of the population, there was a very real concern voiced by elements within the labour movement regarding the possible spread of such ideas among the working class. At the Labour Party conferences of 1948 and 1949, delegates implored the Government to impose legislation banning fascist marches and meetings. The most ominous aspect of the fascist movement which concerned these speakers was the use of anti-semitism to gain a popular appeal. At the 1948 Party conference, Mr. Bernard Finlay noted: "Whilst the Jews have been the first to go to the gas chambers and concentration camps, Trade Union leaders and Socialists have followed closely on."[172]

A three part series on the fascist movement in Britain written by Dudley Barker and carried in the *Daily Herald* in October 1949, offered some interesting insights into the movement. Firstly, Mr. Barker estimated that there were approximately six thousand fascists in Britain, only fifteen hundred of whom were visibly active. He noted

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[170]Hopkins, op.cit., p.49.

[171]Ibid., p.50.

[172] Labour Party Conference 1948, op.cit., p.179.

that most of the active members were in London, and characterized these as "frustrated adolescents, street corner bullies and a sprinkling of elderly officers, incensed dowagers and bright young things." This was not exactly a portrait of the stout rank and file of the labour movement, and Mr. Barker concluded that a fascist threat, if it came, would not come from this lot.[173] None-the-less, Mr. Barker noted that "Jew baiting" was the stock-in-trade of the fascist meeting, and this indicates that anti-semitism was one aspect of the fascist platform that had some popular appeal.

Another important factor in the rise of British anti-semitism was the course of events in Palestine. Mr. Barker noted that fascist hecklers at Jewish meetings continually invoked the Palestine troubles of the post-war period. This kind of linkage was one that British governments in the past had sought to avoid. Prior to the Second World War, British official policy had been to separate the Jewish question in general from the issue of Zionism. Similarly, the question of Arab nationalism was separated from the question of Arab Palestine.[174] It is somewhat doubtful if this kind of symmetrical separation was ever as possible for the man and woman on the street as it was for officials at the Foreign Office. In any case, while the Labour Government continued after the war to attempt to dissociate the Jewish question from Zionism, this separation was clearly no longer possible in a popular sense.

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[173]See the *Daily Herald*, 24, 26 & 28 October 1949.

[174]See: Gabriel Sheffer, "The Images of Arabs and Jews as a Factor in British Policy Towards Palestine" in *Middle Eastern Studies*, v.1 #1 (1980), pp. 105-128.

As we have seen, many observers on the socialist Left were greatly affected by the holocaust. The example of Mr. Crossman was given in the last chapter. Another such example is that of Harold Laski, the brilliant Chairman of the Labour Party NEC in 1945. An anti-Zionist prior to the war, he became convinced after the Holocaust that Zionism was the best solution to the problem of anti-semitism. On a popular level, many British Jews also became more ardent supporters of Zionism after the war. Zionism was adopted by them almost as a symbolic protest against Gentile oppression. Thus, the connection between Zionism and Jewish issues in Britain during this period became unavoidable.

The overall impact of events in Palestine on the Labour rank and file during this period is very difficult to measure. Some events, such as terrorist acts for example, evoked fairly predictable responses. With other events, however, it is harder to ascertain how people responded. The task of measuring public opinion is complicated by the fact that contemporary observers had differing analyses of how working men and women felt about Israel. Given the fact that, at this time, these men and women formulated opinions largely on the basis of information given them in the Labour press, an analysis of the tenor of this reporting offers the best hope of gauging rank and file opinion.[175] Perhaps the best source in terms of identifying the ideas

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[175]Television did not begin to take off until 1955, at which time the popularity of newspapers began to decline drastically. Regarding the working class, the most popular newspaper was the *Daily Mirror*, with a circulation of approximately four million. I have not looked at this source because of the difficulty in obtaining it, as well as the fact that it did not necessarily reflect the opinions of the labour movement exclusively. See: T.O. Lloyd, *From Empire to Welfare State* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), Chapter xi.

circulating among the politically active members of the labour rank and file is the *Daily Herald.* This newspaper was the official organ of the Labour Party and the trade union movement, and had a circulation estimated in 1949 at about two million readers.[176]

During the months leading up to the British withdrawal, the *Herald* was filled with stories of violence in Palestine. By early 1948 this was nothing new. The cycle of terrorist bombings and reprisals had been escalating since early 1946. In this cycle, the Zionists had on balance come off the worse in terms of British public opinion. The King David Hotel bombing in 1946 is perhaps the best known atrocity committed by Zionist extremists, but other such bombings continued to nauseate the British public. On 5 January 1948, for example, the *Herald* reported a bombing in Jaffa perpetrated by the Stern Gang, in which many Arabs -- including, it was noted, women and children -- were buried under the rubble.[177] By virtue of acts such as these, the two Zionist terrorist groups, the Stern Gang and the Irgun, had by this time managed to alienate a large proportion of the British public. Thus, when British troops were accused by the Irgun of responsibility for setting off a bomb in the Jewish sector of Jerusalem in February 1948, the credibility of such accusations was doubted. The *Herald* reported that British soldiers were attacked by irate mobs in the wake of the bombing, and suffered about twenty casualties.[178] A Stern Gang reprisal the following week killed a further twenty eight British

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[176]See *The Draughtsman*, March 1949, v. xxxii, #3.

[177]*Daily Herald* , 5 January 1948, p.1.

[178]Ibid., 23 February 1948, p.1.

troops.[179] When two British men accused in the bombing were brought to trial in Jerusalem in August 1948, the *Herald* reported that the court-room was "filled with Irgunists and members of the Stern Gang", and that the men were being defended by Jewish lawyers.[180] The report brought into question the fairness of the trial. This could not have failed to evoke a sense of outrage among the readership of the paper.

Although the Irgun and Stern Gang would later prove to be without much influence in Israel, their exposure in the press led to an over-estimation of their power prior to the end of the Mandate.[181] This obviously had a damaging effect on British public opinion toward the Zionists. The effect that the reporting of the Arab-Israeli war had on this negative opinion is somewhat debatable. The President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Professor Brodetsky, claimed in March 1949: "The British people have been fed with propaganda about the aggressiveness of the Israelis."[182] On the other hand, the *Times* noted, in February 1949, that Arab propaganda exaggerating the size of the Arab forces attacking Israel could not have been better calculated "to mobilize foreign sympathy for the Zionists."[183] A study

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[179]Ibid., 1 March 1948, p.1.

[180]Ibid., 18 August 1948, p.1.

[181]See Kimche, *Seven Fallen Pillars*, op.cit., pp.233-4: Kimche notes that the *Times* correspondent in Amman wrote, in April 1948, that the Irgun controlled the Zionist headquarters in Tel Aviv. In Kimche's view, this statement was preposterous, and yet was widely believed not only in Britain but also in the Arab countries.

[182]*Daily Herald*, 29 March 1949, p.5.

[183]*Times*, 11 February 1949, 5f.

of the reporting in the *Herald* reveals that both pro and anti-Zionist sentiments could be found in the labour press.

The terrorist atrocities of the Irgun and Stern Gangs have already been mentioned. But side by side with these there appeared stories of the fighting leading up to the British withdrawal which put the Zionists in a more favourable light. Some examples demonstrate this point. On 2 January 1948, there was a story about the Zionist shooting of two Nazi officers who were reportedly commanding Arab guerrillas. This story once again indicated the connection being drawn between the Zionist cause and the Holocaust. On 21 January 1948, the *Herald* reported an Arab attack on a small Jewish settlement near Acre led by the notorious Fawzi el-Kaukji -- known to the British from his role in the revolt of 1936-9. The Jewish settlers were reported to have put up a valiant defence, fighting from the battlements of a Crusader castle until British help arrived. On 17 February 1948, there was a story of the threat to the U.N. partition plan posed by intransigent Arab leaders. The story warned of the danger to the future of the U.N. should "powerful Arab interests" be allowed to overturn the decision of the General Assembly. The reporting in the *Herald* at this time generally described the Arabs as the aggressors, and the British forces as fighting vigorously to keep the Arabs from gaining advantage before the official war started. This angle might have fostered a greater Anglo-Zionist empathy, although it might also have made Zionist atrocities and complaints against the British Mandatory administration all the more galling.

At the outset of the official war, the *Herald* reported the imminent success of the Arab forces. On 20 May 1948, Arab forces

were said to be on the verge of capturing Jerusalem. The fighting was described as "not heavy," which perhaps indicated a desire to accustom the readership to a Zionist defeat. At this point the paper warned against the dangers of partisanship in the struggle, by which they primarily meant the partisanship that the U.S. might show towards the Zionists. In an editorial on 26 May, W.N. Ewer defended the Government's policy of selling arms to the Arab states under "legitimate" treaty obligations. As the official organ of the Labour Party, the *Herald* was obviously supportive of the Government and its policy during the war, and this seems to be the case among the rank and file as well.

As the fighting continued through the summer, it became apparent that the Zionists were not losing the war after all. A number of articles by F.G.H. Salusbury grudgingly admitted this fact. On 25 August, Mr. Salusbury claimed that Jewish forces in the field outnumbered the Arabs by three to one, and that only the cease-fire had saved the Arabs from being totally routed. He went on to say that neither Arab nor Jew "should triumph unjustly at the other's expense." This was a concern which was not voiced in the paper during the early stages of the war, when the Arabs were reportedly triumphing. As such, this has to be seen as a reflection of a sympathetic attitude towards the Arabs.

There were, however, pro-Zionist voices in the pages of the *Herald* as well. An article by Maurice Fagence appeared on 10 November 1948, in which the war was declared "all over but for the shouting." He went on to note that the Arabs of Palestine would be better off in a socialist Jewish state, for reasons which have already

been explored in an earlier chapter of this thesis. Thus, although the *Herald* was loyal to the Government line, both pro-Arab and pro-Zionist perspectives were presented throughout the war.

It is difficult, therefore, to generalize about the effect that the reporting of the war had on labour rank and file opinion. In January 1949, Labour M.P., H.N. Smith claimed in the House of Commons that the majority of working men and women viewed the Zionists as bullies and aggressors.[184] This statement came in the aftermath of the Israeli shooting down of the RAF aircraft on 7 January 1949, and therefore at the height of Anglo-Israeli tension. In response, Mr. Crossman conceded that perhaps this assertion was true because of the identification that British people might have with the indigenous Arab population of Palestine. Such identification was evident in some correspondence published in several working class publications.[185] At the same time, however, Prime Minister Attlee remarked that there was a popular tendency to view the Arabs in terms of their "upper class" leadership and not, as he contended the Government viewed them, in terms of the "ordinary cultivator of the soil."[186] Furthermore, after the revolt against the Government's Palestine policy on 26 January 1949, no disciplinary action was taken against the rebellious Labour M.P.s because, as the *Manchester Guardian* noted, "such action might offend a substantial body of Labour

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[184]See *Times* , 27 January 1949, 6d.

[185]See, for example, *The Draughtsman* , v.xxxi, #10 (October 1948), pp.69-70: A letter signed "from an Arab sympathizer" noted that even if the Zionists had improved the land of Palestine, that in itself did not give them title to its ownership.

[186]*Jewish Agency Digest* , op.cit., #17 (237) 4.2.1949.

supporters."[187] Given this divergence of opinion, it is evident that opinion on both sides of this issue was not much altered by the reporting of the war.

The conclusion of the war, however, and the moderation of the British Government's position in the early months of 1949 greatly affected the public perception of Israel. The victory of the moderate Zionists in Israel also placated British opinion. An article in the *Quarterly Review* in April 1949 noted:

> Since the termination of the Mandate ... the terrorist bodies have been dissolved or joined the Israeli Army as orderly elements, and there has been an appreciable abatement of anti-Jewish feeling in this country.[188]

With Israel established as a fact and British soldiers no longer being blown up by Zionist terrorists, the Labour press turned its attention to sympathetic descriptions of the situation in Israel. An example of this kind of reporting was an article in *The New Dawn*, the trade journal of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. This journal had not mentioned Israel since the beginning of hostilities in May 1948. In June 1951, however, it ran an article lauding the "unique experiment" in socialism being tried by the Israelis.[189] Similar articles appeared in the *Daily Herald* and in the *Times* .

Articles such as these describing the austerity of Israeli life, and the hard working pioneering ethos of the Israelis were bound to strike

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[187]*Manchester Guardian*, 28 January 1949, as cited in Jackson,*Rebels and Whips*, op.cit., p.72.

[188]Author undetermined, "The Plague of Anti-Semitism" in *The Quarterly Review*, v.287 #580 (April 1949) , pp.175-188, p.185.

[189]*The New Dawn*, 9 June 1951, v.5, #12 (New Series), pp.368-9.

a favourable chord with the British working class, particularly given the mood of these times. This image of the Israelis contrasted sharply with the stereotypical image of British Jews, a fact that worked in favour of the Zionists. The theory of Ber Borochov, that Jews needed to live in their own state in order for their social life to be normalized, was echoed in remarks made by Israeli leaders and their British friends in these years. Mr. Weizmann was quoted as saying:

> We are welcoming the debris of Jewish communities throughout the world. The first generation may be a liability, but the second will build Israel.[190]

Mr. Morrison, speaking at the 1948 Labour Party conference, noted that the Jews in Israel were "a new type, away from their minority conditions, upstanding, self-reliant."[191] And Mr. Crossman, quoting Mr. Ben-Gurion in the House of Commons in January 1949, stated:

> When you go back to London you may think of Whitechapel and then think of us and believe we are the same, but we are not. We are the people who decided that Whitechapel was not good enough for us, who decided to be real men. Think of us like yourselves and ask what you, a Britisher, would do in our position and you will get it right.[192]

There was thus a certain confluence of opinion between anti-semites and Zionists. Both regarded Jews in the diaspora as distorted and somewhat depraved human beings. And both felt that the best solution to the so-called Jewish problem was the separation of Jews into their own state. Part of the fascist program for dealing with Jews, for example, was to send them to the National Home. In this way, the

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[190]Quoted in McDonald, op.cit., p.176.

[191] Labour Party Conference 1948, op.cit., p.164.

[192]*Hansard* , 26 January 1949, 460: 988.

anti-semitism that was so prevalent in Britain dovetailed with the increasing Anglo-Israeli cordiality that was felt among all sectors of the British populace from early 1949 onwards.

At the same time, the perception of Arabs in Britain was also affected by events in Palestine and the Middle East, though not necessarily for the better. The ignominious Arab defeat in the 1948 War may have elicited sympathy from some quarters, but it also reinforced traditional British opinion of Arabs as unreliable, incompetent and poorly led.[193] By the summer of 1950, the British public was perceiving Arab nationalism, and not Zionism, as the main threat to British interests in the Middle East. 'Outrages' such as the blocking of the Suez Canal and the nationalization of Anglo-Iranian Oil holdings in Iraq took over centre stage. The attitude towards the Arabs was reflected in the following quotation from an article in the *Daily Herald* in July 1951, following the assassination of Abdullah:

> There is little hope for these peoples unless they can find rulers with the will and the courage to stamp out the terrorism and corruption which makes national independence a mockery.[194]

This quote implies that, whereas the Israelis had found the strong leadership to suppress the extremists within their own ranks, the Arab peoples had not, and were therefore irresponsible and not yet ready to take over their own affairs.

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[193]See, for example, P.S. Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement : 1914-1964* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1975).

[194]*Daily Herald*, 21 July 1951, p.1.

Thus, for the Labour rank and file, the respective images of Israelis and Arabs were affected by the course of events in the first three years of Israel's existence. The image of the Zionists took on a romantic aspect as the State of Israel became established. The Zionists were portrayed in the labour press as militarily competent and determined to set up a state run on egalitarian, socialistic principles. These were considered admirable qualities in British working class circles. The Arab peoples, on the other hand, were portrayed as immoderate and feudalistic, descriptions that were definitely not considered admirable.

The admiration for Israel that was expressed in the Labour press, and that no doubt reflected the feelings of a good part of the Labour rank and file, coincided with a marked increase in working class anti-semitism. There was a definite connection between this anti-semitism and working class attitudes toward Israel, but this was by no means as straightforward a connection as one might perhaps have expected. British anti-semitism was at first fed by Zionist atrocities against British occupying forces in Palestine. But as these British forces withdrew, the terrorist atrocities were rapidly forgotten. In subsequent years, Zionism was held out as a solution to the so-called 'Jewish problem' in Britain by both British Zionists and anti-semites. Anti-semitism, therefore, by no means translated into an anti-Zionist or anti-Israel feeling in Britain. In fact, quite the opposite seems to have been the case.

## Conclusion

## The Labour Movement And Israel

The attitudes of the various elements of the British labour movement toward the new State of Israel in the years 1948 to 1951 were by no means uniform. This was so for several reasons. The labour movement itself was comprised of a number of quite disparate elements whose opinions on a variety of issues were difficult to reconcile. These various elements were arrayed at varying proximity to the locus of power, which during these years was exercised by a Labour Government. The practical issues that those in power had to consider carefully were much less important to elements within the movement who were not preoccupied with the business of governing. Even among the extra-Governmental elements within the labour movement, the issue of Anglo-Israeli relations was approached with much different objectives and priorities in mind. It is therefore necessary to break down the British labour movement into its component parts, in order to identify and understand the attitudes that developed with respect to Israel during these years.

The situation in Israel and in the Middle East was quite fluid during this period, as indeed was the situation throughout the world. One of the main characteristics of labour movement opinion and policy, therefore, was the degree to which it adjusted to changing circumstances. This was especially the case with the Labour Government's policy towards Israel. The Government's task was of course the most difficult because it had to deal with Israel in the context not only of the Middle East as a whole, but also of the Cold

War, Anglo-American relations, and the transformation of Empire to Commonwealth. The economic situation in Britain and in Europe had also to be considered, particularly as the Government had to reconcile what was necessary, in terms of foreign policy, with what was possible.

The complicated nature of foreign affairs was summed up by Ernest Bevin, the popular if much-beleaguered Foreign Secretary during most of this period, at the Labour Party Conference of 1949:

> In foreign affairs you are dealing with nearly sixty States, all of equal status and all with different points of view, and with all of whom you must get agreement. Your course cannot be decided just by vote of a conference like this. It must take into account racial, economic and political considerations, and, most difficult of all, the different stages of development that exist in the world.[195]

It is not surprising, therefore, that Mr. Bevin and his professional Foreign Office staff set the outlines of British foreign policy during this period without the sort of Cabinet or committee input that was a feature of other aspects of Government policy. There was a clear conviction on the part of the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister, that foreign policy was too complex and delicate a matter for extensive public or even Cabinet discussion.

The predicament that faced Mr. Bevin with respect to Israel was an example of just how complex the British position could get. In the years leading up to the British mandatory withdrawal in May 1948, Mr. Bevin had struggled to reconcile the conflicting interests of Palestinian Arabs and Zionists. The decision to withdraw was an admission of defeat on this particular aspect of British policy.

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[195] Labour Party Conference 1949, op.cit., p.187.

Withdrawal did not, however, mean an abdication of British interests in the Middle East. The Suez Canal, Egyptian cotton, crude oil, and markets for British exports were important foundations of British post-war economic recovery. In addition, the Middle East figured prominently in the military plans of the Chiefs of Staff in any future world conflict. Given the international climate of the period, this military consideration was as important as were the economic considerations. Thus, Mr. Bevin had to find a way to maintain British influence and power in the region after British troops had been withdrawn from Palestine.

In order to do this he deemed it vital that friendly Anglo-Arab relations be maintained. It was Mr. Bevin's hope that the future defence of the Middle East could be based on a collective defence arrangement built on a friendly and cooperative Arab League. The existence of the Zionists in Palestine was seen in this context as a grave threat to Anglo-Arab relations. Moreover, the bitterness that had developed between the Zionists and the British Government in the years after the war had left a legacy of mutual suspicion and distrust. It seemed natural, therefore, for the British Government to follow a policy course which was pro-Arab and anti-Zionist.

There were, however, other factors that Mr. Bevin had to consider. The most important one was the British need to cultivate strong and friendly relations with the United States. The backing of the American President for the Zionists made it necessary for Mr. Bevin to swallow the existence of at least some sort of Zionist state in Palestine. As the withdrawal date approached, therefore, a British policy was formulated whereby the Zionists would, with British and

Transjordanian collusion, be allowed to set up a state in part of Palestine. It was Mr. Bevin's hope, at this point, that the size of the Zionist state would be limited both by this agreement and by any fighting that might ensue after the British withdrawal. He was most particularly hopeful that the Negeb desert would fall into Arab hands. At the same time, his agreement with King Abdullah of Transjordan acknowledged the British acceptance of some sort of Zionist state in Palestine.

The course of the Arab-Israeli war presented further complications for Mr. Bevin. The Zionists were able to establish control over a larger part of Palestine than British officials had anticipated. Mr. Bevin's efforts over the course of the war centred on getting the Israelis to relinquish the Negeb and Jerusalem in exchange for peace. In these efforts he was continually frustrated by Israeli *fait accomplis* in the field, and by inopportune statements made by President Truman reinforcing Zionist intransigence. When the Government finally extended recognition to Israel in February 1949, it accepted that the frontiers the Zionists were able to establish were facts that had to be faced.

Labour Government policy towards Israel grew more cordial in the following thirty three months. The Foreign Office under Mr. Bevin still regarded good relations with the Arab states as the primary concern of British policy in the region. But these relations grew more and more strained through 1950 and 1951. The result was to draw Britain and Israel closer together. This trend was not hindered by the replacement of Mr. Bevin by Herbert Morrison at the Foreign Office early in 1951. Although the Zionists remained suspicious of the

Labour Government, Mr. Morrison was considerably more sympathetic toward Israel than was Mr. Bevin.

One important aspect of the improvement in Anglo-Israeli relations over the course of this period was the establishment of close trading links between the two countries. Anglo-Israeli trade faced several obstacles, most notably the question of British property in Israel left behind from the period of the Mandate, as well as the question of large Israeli Sterling balances held frozen in British banks. These issues were cleared up once relations between the two countries had been normalized, and subsequent trade agreements established mutually beneficial economic relations between the two countries. This economic aspect was an especially important consideration for the British trade union movement, which played an important part in establishing harmonious Anglo-Israeli relations through 1950 and 1951.

Another important consideration for the trade union movement, which was generally on the right of the labour movement during this period, was the moderation of the Israeli government. The suspicion that Israel would join the Communist camp was proven false after the first elections of January 1949, and this served to reassure the Labour right. In general, the trade union movement backed Mr. Bevin's policy, and reflected the changes and adjustments made by the Government during this period.

The Government's policy did, however, draw criticism from the left-wing of the labour movement. The Left perceived Government policy to be anti-Zionist, particularly during the opening stages of the establishment of Israel. During these years, the British Left was

overwhelmingly pro-Zionist, and tended to criticize Government policy from this perspective. This criticism was voiced both inside the House of Commons and in the left-wing press. Although subsequent scholarship has often attributed the pro-Zionism of the Left in these years to emotional and guilt-ridden feelings stemming from the Holocaust, it can be seen from the argumentation of many pro-Zionists that their attitude towards Israel rested on a considerably more complex reasoning. Although the various elements on the British Left had different reasons for supporting Israel, the Government's perceived anti-Israel policy was condemned in the context of an anti-imperial and anti-Cold War critique.

The British Left was largely comprised of intellectuals and ideologues. As such they could not have been further in spirit from the rank and file of the labour movement. The attitudes of this amorphous group are quite difficult to identify, but it is possible to speculate as to their opinions on the basis of an analysis of the kind of information they were receiving in the Labour press. It can be seen that, with regard to Israel, the rank and file might have come out of the 1948 war with views very nearly unchanged from the ones they would have had before the war. For many this would have meant a rather derogatory view of the Zionists based on the record of terrorist atrocities committed by Zionist extremists immediately after the Second World War. In subsequent years, however, the image of Israel might well have improved under the influence of normalized Anglo-Israeli relations, and a press campaign lauding the egalitarian achievements of Israeli society.

The egalitarian image of Israeli society would have struck a favourable chord with the British working class, given the collectivism of the post-war period. By contrast, the stereotypical images of both Jews and Arabs fostered negative feelings. In both cases, Israel benefitted from this contrast. British anti-semites took the image of the sturdy Israeli as proof that the 'Jewish problem' in Britain could be solved through Zionism. The image of the Arab peoples, reinforced by the outcome of the Arab-Israeli war and unrest in the Arab states, was one of incompetence, immoderation and political immaturity.

This analysis of British labour movement attitudes toward Israel would almost certainly not apply to the British labour movement of a decade later. By that time, not only had events in the Middle East changed, but events throughout the world had also altered the situation. Ideological revisions were made on the British Left. The British economy was in a different state. The Holocaust and the Second World War were further in the past. The Palestinian refugee problem had grown. The State of Israel had developed along lines that were perhaps unexpected. All of these factors point out the very complex set of circumstances that determined the relationship between the labour movement and Israel during these first three and a half years.

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