

CHAPTER II

THE POSITION OF THE JEWS IN EUROPE

1. We are required in paragraph 2 of our Terms of Reference " to examine the position of the Jews in those countries in Europe where they have been the victims of Nazi and Fascist persecution, and the practical measures taken or contemplated to be taken in those countries to enable them to live free from discrimination and oppression, and to make estimates of those who wish or will be impelled by their conditions to migrate to Palestine or other countries outside Europe."

2. In order to fulfil our task within the allotted period of 120 days and on account of the urgency of the problem, we divided into Sub-Committees, which between the 5th and 28th February, 1946, visited the American, British and French zones of Germany and Austria. Sub-Committees also visited France, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Greece and Switzerland. Circumstances did not permit us to go to Hungary, Roumania, Yugo-Slavia, Bulgaria or the Russian zone of Austria, and we did not visit the Russian zone of Germany after we were informed by the Deputy Commander of the Soviet occupation forces that in that area there was no special Jewish problem.

3. There are about 98,000 Jews from other countries—displaced persons—now living in Germany, Austria and Italy, and a small additional number scattered throughout the countries of Europe. We found that the majority of these Jews in the American and British zones of Germany and Austria were living in assembly centres, once known as "camps" where accommodation and maintenance were provided by the military authorities. The Jewish occupants of these centres are not all "displaced persons," that is to say, persons outside their national boundaries by reason of the war. Since the end of the war there has been a very considerable movement of Jews into the American and British zones of Germany and Austria. It is estimated that, so far, some 30,000 have come from Poland. There has also been some migration, though on a smaller scale, from Roumania and Hungary; this shows signs of increasing. Since we left Europe there has been a slight restriction in the movement of migrants generally, but the possibility that there may be a considerable increase in the months to come must be borne in mind.

The officer commanding the American Forces suggested the following as the reasons for the movement into the American zone of Germany: the expectation of generous treatment, the probability of finding relations there, the special activity in America on behalf of Jewish relief, and the feeling that the American zone was on the shortest route to Palestine. Detailed information covering the position of Jews in European countries is given in Appendices II and III.

4. The nature of the accommodation of displaced Jews differed widely in character. In some centres barracks were used; in others, huts, hotels, apartment houses and cottages. For example, in Hohne, commonly referred to as Belsen, in the British zone of Germany, where 9,000 Jews were accommodated, the buildings were barracks formerly occupied by a unit of the German Army. At Bindermickel, in the American zone of Austria, flats built to house workers in the neighbouring Goering factory had been taken over, and in the south of Italy entire seaside villages had been made available for that purpose.

5. In the American and British zones, where the bulk of these persons were found, they were accommodated in separate centres from other displaced

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persons, or segregated voluntarily within a centre. The maximum of self-administration is encouraged and there is usually a centre committee which is responsible for directing group activities and for dealing with complaints. In many centres the occupants have their own courts for dealing with offences and their own police.

6. UNRRA has taken an increasing part in the relief and rehabilitation of these Jews. In the autumn of 1944, it began to operate in Italy, and in February, 1945, took over administrative responsibility for the larger centres in the south of Italy. In the summer and latter part of 1945, it was assisting the Army in the American zones of Germany and Austria. At the end of February last, UNRRA assumed responsibility for the internal administration of Hohne and it now administers other centres in the British and French zones of Germany and of Austria.

Most centres in the United States zones are now operated by UNRRA teams as agents for the Army, which provides the accommodation, food, clothing and medical supplies. Voluntary agencies specially concerned with Jewish persons have been invited by military authorities and UNRRA to give assistance and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency, and the Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad now have representatives in the centres. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee provides specialists to assist with health, welfare and other services such as the supply of Kosher food, clothes, and material for spiritual and educational life. The Jewish Agency furnishes rehabilitation and resettlement services, particularly in regard to problems concerning projected emigration to Palestine.

7. We saw many conditions in the centres that might be criticised, owing to circumstances which were not always within the power of the military authorities to improve. There were lack of furniture, unsatisfactory cooking arrangements, overcrowding and a shortage of beds and bedding. We have no doubt that many of these conditions have been remedied and we saw evidence of the wholehearted effort of our authorities to do everything possible towards the well-being of these unfortunate people. Nevertheless, at the best, most of the centres could not be more than the place in which the occupants were given shelter, food and clothing. While everything possible was being done for their physical needs, there was little that could be done to improve their morale and relieve their mental anguish. Coming from the horrors of Nazi persecution, it was evident that they still felt themselves outcasts and unwanted.

It is perhaps unfortunate in some respects that nearly all of these settlements were in enemy territory. The displaced Jews see around them Germans living a family life in their own homes and outwardly little affected by the war, while they, usually the last surviving members of their families, are living still, as it seemed to them, under restrictions.

8. On the whole, having regard to the many problems with which they have had to contend, we feel that military authorities, UNRRA, and the various relief organisations concerned have every reason to be proud of what they have done to succour these remnants of Nazi persecution. In particular, we would like to pay our tribute to the men and women who are working so often in such depressing circumstances to alleviate the sufferings of these unfortunate people.

9. In the cold print of a report it is not possible accurately to portray our feelings with regard to the suffering deliberately inflicted by the Germans on those Jews who fell into their hands. The visit of our Sub-Committee to the Ghetto in Warsaw has left on their minds an impression which will forever remain. Areas of that city on which formerly stood large buildings are now a

mass of brick rubble, covering the bodies of numberless unknown Jews. Adjoining the Ghetto there still stands an old barracks used as a place for killing Jews. Viewing this in the cold grey light of a February day one could imagine the depths of human suffering there endured. In the courtyards of the barracks were pits containing human ash and human bones. The effect of that place on Jews who came searching, so often in vain, for any trace of their dear ones, can be left to the imagination.

When we remember that at Maidanek and Oswiecim and many other centres a deliberate policy of extermination, coupled with indescribable suffering, was inflicted upon the Jews, of whom it is estimated that certainly not less than five millions perished, we can well understand and sympathise with the intense desire of the surviving Jews to depart from localities so full of such poignant memories. It must also be understood that this happened in what were regarded as civilized communities.

10. There can scarcely be a Jew in Europe who has not suffered in greater or less degree either himself or herself or by the loss of relatives. Many non-Jews of all nationalities also suffered in the concentration camps and many of them died. This must not be forgotten. We are concerned in this Report with the living survivors of European Jewry. We could harrow the feelings of those who read this Report by repetition of accounts we received of German frightfulness. We do not propose to do so. We wish to present a picture of the general situation as we saw it. Few of the older people survived; not many children, for special efforts seem to have been made to destroy them. The majority of the children who survived are orphans. The majority of the remaining survivors are young and middle-aged people. The latter escaped death only by their strong physique enabling them to sustain either the ordeals of forced labour in concentration camps, or the privations accompanying hiding. The young people have had little or no education save that of cruelty. It is not too much to say that they all owe their lives to liberation by the United Nations.

11. These Jewish survivors have not emerged from their ordeals unscathed either physically or mentally. It is rare indeed to find a complete Jewish family. Those who return to their old homes find them destroyed or occupied by others, their businesses gone or else in other hands. They search for relatives, frequently undertaking long journeys on hearing a rumour that one has been seen in another part of the country or in another centre. Such was the system of the Germans that it is difficult for them ever to establish the death of their dear ones. They are faced also with very great difficulties in securing the restitution of their property. In Germany and in Poland, which was often described to us as "the cemetery of European Jewry," a Jew may see in the face of any man he looks upon the murderer of his family. It is understandable that few find themselves able to face such conditions.

12. In Poland, Hungary and Roumania, the chief desire is to get out, to get away somewhere where there is a chance of building up a new life, of finding some happiness, of living in peace and in security. In Germany also, where the number of Jews has been reduced from about 500,000 in 1933 to about 20,000 now, and most traces of Jewish life have been destroyed, there is a similar desire on the part of a large proportion of the survivors to make a home elsewhere, preferably in Palestine. In Czecho-Slovakia, particularly in Bohemia and Moravia, and in Austria, the position in regard to the re-establishment of the Jewish populations is more hopeful. The vast majority of the Jewish displaced persons and migrants, however, believe that the only place which offers a prospect is Palestine.

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13. Whatever the previous position in life of those in the centres, from a Judge in Memel to a young man who by reason of years of persecution has never been able to earn his livelihood, there is the widespread feeling that they have been brought to the same level of mere existence and homelessness. The first sense of happiness, following release from concentration camps and slave labour, has passed. Now they are conscious only of the constraint of their camp life, even though it is under new and more favourable conditions.

14. Work to them is associated with concentration camps and slave labour. Their aim then had been to do as little as they could to assist their persecutors, and now they are unwilling to engage in any activity which is not designed to fit them for a new life in Palestine. Even though they have spent a considerable time in a centre, they still regard themselves as merely in transit to that country and, generally speaking, show little willingness even to assist in improving the conditions in which they are living. Often their days are spent in aimless wandering around. On the other hand, wherever facilities are provided for practical training for life in Palestine they eagerly take advantage of them.

15. We were deeply impressed by the tragedy of the situation of these Jewish survivors in the centres and by the tragedy of their purposeless existence. Many months have passed since they were freed from Nazi oppression and brutality, but they themselves feel that they are as far as ever from restoration to normal life. We consider that these men, women and children have a moral claim on the civilised world. Their pitiable condition has evoked a world-wide sympathy, but sympathy has so far taken the form only of providing them with the bare essentials of food, clothing and shelter. It seems to them that the only real chance of rebuilding their shattered lives and of becoming normal men and women again is that offered by the Jewish people in Palestine. Even though many might be glad to join relatives and friends in other countries, the doors of those countries at present appear to be closed to them. They are resentful because they are prevented from going to Palestine. In the meantime, as time passes, the new ties between those who are sharing this common frustration become stronger and, obsessed by their apparent rejection by other peoples of the world, their firm desire is to remain together in the future. It is this sense of cohesion, born of common suffering, which doubtless accounts for, if it does not wholly excuse, the firm resistance offered to proposals by competent bodies to remove young children to happier surroundings in other countries for careful rehabilitation. Men and women are marrying in the centres in increasing number, and, together with other members of the centre communities, they wait with growing impatience for the time when they can go to the only friendly place they know.

16. If, as we hope, our recommendation for the authorisation of immigration certificates is accepted, the great majority of the Jewish displaced persons whose situation requires urgent action will be provided for and it will be possible to achieve the desirable end of closing the Jewish displaced persons centres and thereby discourage the further migration of Jews in Europe. Jews have wandered through Europe almost as they wish, from centre to centre, zone to zone, and country to country. Such movements have added to the difficulty of tracing relatives, as has the practice, acquired by some during the war, of using various names. They have also imposed a heavy burden on the authorities who have constantly had to improvise reception arrangements. Stabilisation will give sympathetic governments a better opportunity of implementing national schemes of resettlement and will encourage the Jews themselves to give more careful consideration to such

opportunities. Moreover, the resources of the Allied Military Authorities are limited and it is necessary that their commitments in connection with refugees be reduced.

17. We have also been asked to examine "the practical measures taken or contemplated to be taken in those countries to enable them to live free from discrimination and oppression." The governments of the countries we visited expressed their opposition to anti-Semitism, but this is a poison which after years of infection takes time to eradicate. We hope that their efforts will be successful. We would urge also that the United Nations should exert all possible pressure in Germany and Austria to eliminate all trace of discrimination against Jews or resistance to their rehabilitation.

18. Further, a most important practical step that can be taken to assist the Jews in Europe who wish to remain is to secure the speedy restitution of their property. We realise that there are difficulties, but none the less we do not think that all that is possible is being done. Some governments have passed the necessary legislation; others are about to do so or have just done so. Many months have passed since the war has ended and from our inquiries it appears that only a few Jews have yet recovered what is properly theirs.

Further, we think, that the governments of the countries where the Jews were persecuted should themselves provide assistance in the re-establishment of those Jews who seek to remain. This assistance might take the form of providing property in lieu of restitution.

19. Taking into account the possibility that an improvement in the economic and political conditions in Europe may affect the attitudes of those who now see no hope of re-establishing themselves in their countries, we estimate that as many as 500,000 may wish or be impelled to emigrate from Europe.

As described by many witnesses, a factor which has greatly increased the urgent, indeed frantic, desire of the Jews of Europe to emigrate is the feeling that all doors have been shut to them and that there is no exit.

We feel that our recommendations both in regard to the authorisation of certificates for admission to Palestine, and in regard to the relaxation of immigration laws generally as an emergency and humanitarian measure, will not only bring succour to those to whom certificates are granted but also in great measure relieve the feelings of urgency with which the Jews look beyond Europe. They will be encouraged either to resettle themselves in Europe, if that is possible, or wait patiently in their respective countries until their time has come to leave.

CHAPTER III

THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN PALESTINE*

1. The Peel Commission declared in one of the final chapters of its report: "Neither Arab nor Jew has any sense of service to a single State . . . The conflict is primarily political, though the fear of economic subjection to the Jews is also in Arab minds . . . The conflict, indeed, is as much about the future as about the present. Every intelligent Arab and Jew is forced to ask the question 'Who in the end will govern Palestine?' . . . for internal and external reasons it seems probable that the situation, bad as it now is, will grow worse. The conflict will go on, the gulf between Arabs and Jews will widen." The report concluded with a reference to "strife and bloodshed in a thrice hallowed land."

2. It is nine years since the Peel Commission made its report. The recommendations were unfulfilled, but the analysis of political conditions remains valid and impressive. The gulf between the Arabs of Palestine and the Arab world on the one side, and the Jews of Palestine and elsewhere on the other has widened still further. Neither side seems at all disposed at the present to make any sincere effort to reconcile either their superficial or their fundamental differences. The Arabs view the Mandatory Government with misgivings and anger. It is not only condemned verbally, but attacked with bombs and firearms by organised bands of Jewish terrorists. The Palestine Administration appears to be powerless to keep the situation under control except by the display and use of very large forces. Even if the total man-power in police and defence services were only half what it is reputed to be, the political implications would still be deeply disturbing. It reflects the honest fear of experienced officials that tomorrow may produce circumstances in which military operations will be necessary.

3. Official data imply the gravity of the menacing problem. They show that, apart from those convicted of terrorist activity, the number of Jews held on suspicion averaged 450 during most of the year 1945 and was 554 at the end of the year. The aggregate of persons in the whole-time police and prisons service of Palestine in 1945 was about 15,000.

4. The financial tables provide additional evidence of the extent to which the energies and money of the government are devoted to the protection of life and property. About L.P.4,600,000† (\$18,400,000) was spent on "law and order" during the financial year 1944-45 as against L.P.550,000 (\$2,200,000) in health and L.P.700,000 (\$2,800,000) on education. Thus even from a budgetary point of view Palestine has developed into a semi-military or police state. But, pending a substantial change in the relations between the government and the Jews and the Arabs, the prospect of the kind of budget which characterises a settled, civilised, non-garrisoned and prosperous community is dark.

5. Arab political leadership is still in the hands of the small number of families which were prominent in Ottoman times, of which the most notable

* During our visit to Palestine and in the preparation of this Report, we were greatly assisted by the two volumes of the *Survey of Palestine* which the Government compiled at short notice for our use, and which contain a great deal of new statistical and other information.

† A Palestine pound is equivalent to a pound sterling.