

## THE SITUATION IN PALESTINE AND THE NEAR EAST

By I. Rennap

Conditions in Palestine go from bad to worse. The citrus industry, the mainstay of Palestine's economy and on which are dependent tens of thousands of Arab and Jewish workers with their families, is in a state of chaos. As a result of the war, only half of the crop can be exported; while attempts to convert the remainder into by-products "afford only a slight palliative." The fruit must be picked, otherwise the trees will rot. So the Jewish growers have threatened a "picking strike" unless the bankers grant them cash advances to cover the cost of this work.

The banks can hardly do this when practically all the growers are unable to meet existing commitments . . . (the Jewish Telegraph

Agency of November 28 reports that "to-day there is hardly a citrus grower who is solvent.")

It is the workers who suffer most; for citrus offers the largest sphere of employment for both Jewish and Arab workers. Unemployment is shooting up, and strikes become more and more frequent. In Telaviv a number of "sit-in" strikes have been conducted.

The small trader and business man is also suffering, as well as the workers and peasants. The Jerusalem correspondent of the Jewish Times (November 23) writes that to stand outside the public buildings in Jerusalem is to see a continual stream of deputations of all kinds; deputations of small industrialists who have lost their export markets through the war and who are having their bank credits restricted; deputations of traders who have been hit by the crisis and who demand some kind of debt alleviation; deputations of unemployed and immigrants who cannot be absorbed; and so on.

But the economic crisis which has hit Palestine and the neighbouring countries as a result of the war is merely an aspect of important new developments in the Near East. The intrigues and negotiations recently carried on by the Palestine Arab leaders on the one hand and the British Government with its puppet Arab rulers on the other, indicate that British and French imperialism are doing their utmost to drag the Arab world into support of their war aims; while the support which the Zionist leaders are giving to the war aims of British imperialism makes abundantly clear that these leaders are attempting to repeat what they did in the last imperialist war, namely to drag in a section of world Jewry, with their aspirations for freedom from persecution, into the vortex of conflicting imperialist power politics.

Through its puppet Egyptian and Iraqi governments the British Government has brought pressure to bear on the Arab Higher Committee to swing them over into line with British war aims. The result of the negotiations between the Mufti's representative and the Egyptian and Iraqi Ministers is that the Mufti is making a bid "for reconciliation with the British Government and a return to Palestine" (from which he was expelled in 1937).

The Mufti had probably banked on Italy coming into the war on the side of Germany which would have brought the war into the Mediterranean. This would have given him the opportunity of leading a revolt against Britain and France with Axis support. But this prospect faded for the time being. Moreover, the Mufti appears to have been double-crossed by his former allies. A secret agreement existed between him and the Nazi government whereby the Mufti would be made the head of a united Palestine-Syrian state under the benevolent protection of the Third Reich. But it has been reported that Von Papen, Nazi ambassador to Turkey, "offered" the Turkish Government Palestine, Syria, the Mosul oil fields and even Iran in an attempt to woo Turkey away from the Allies.

The Mufti may have realised that he has backed the wrong horse, that on balance, in the present situation, he can get more from British imperialism. Hence the report that he is prepared to accept the White Paper, which the Arab Higher Committee rejected at the time of its issue. In so doing the Mufti and his clique become the tools of Britain and France, who seek to drag the Arabs of Palestine behind them to further their war aims in the Near East. Like the puppet

Arab kings these Palestine leaders have now degenerated into agents of the British government and are a danger to the Arab struggle for national liberation.

But Britain, even with the support of these Arab reactionaries, will not get Arab support so easily. The Arabs in the whole Near East have not forgotten the way the Palestine revolt was crushed. Syria, since the suppression of the Constitution and the ceding of the Sanjak of Alexandretta against the wishes of the Syrian nationalists, is still a hotbed of anti-imperialist feeling. And above everything the declaration of the Indian people who refuse to fight in an imperialist war, as well as the economic dislocation, will have big repercussions among the Arab peoples and give a tremendous impetus to the liberation movements.

It is within this setting of the second imperialist war and the perspectives thus opened up for impending revolutionary movements in the Near East that we must to-day consider the position of the Yishuv in Palestine. Is the line taken by Weizman of giving Zionist support to British war aims in the interests of the half-million Jews in Palestine, whose right to live their own national life in Palestine no progressive can deny?

Weizman, in pledging Zionist support to Britain, appears to have forgotten what "reward" British Imperialism gave the Zionist leaders for their services in the last war. After using Weizman for twenty years as a buffer against Arab national aspirations with the resultant bloodshed and conflict between the two peoples, British imperialism kicked Zionism aside when it became necessary to make some gesture of appeasement to the Arabs and when Zionism was no longer able to further the aims of British policy in Palestine.

This, in essence, was the policy formulated by the White Paper which aroused such a storm in the Jewish world. Never has there been expressed such anti-imperialist feeling. Yet to-day Weizman has placed the Yishuv on a war footing and at the service of Britain in the hope that this time Britain will truly be "grateful" and Palestine may yet become a Jewish state.

What does this mean objectively? In view of what has been said before, of the impending colonial movements in the Near East, Weizman's policy means that the Yishuv may become the gendarme of British reaction against the Arab struggle for national liberation. Already there is apprehension among the Arabs at the *Jewish Defence Force* raised by the Jewish Agency, and which they fear may be used against them to restore "law and order." Such a policy means the destruction of the Yishuv and all that it has created. This policy must be fought tooth and nail in the interests of the Yishuv and all Jews. Nothing could be more repugnant and dangerous to Jewry than a section of an oppressed people, like the Jews, being used as a tool to strangle the struggle for national liberation of another oppressed people in the interests of Britain's imperialist strategy.

But there are with in the Yishuv more far-seeing and saner elements who realise what Weizman's policy may lead to. They realise that the Yishuv has everything to lose if a real understanding is not reached with the Arabs. Such an individual is *Khalvariski*, a veteran Zionist leader and an authority on Arab problems, who for years has opposed Weizman's policy and worked for an understanding with the

Arabs. In an interview with the correspondent of the *Jewish Times* (November 28) this Jewish leader declares that even now, in spite of the war, it is not yet too late to reach an understanding. He complains that the present Zionist leaders have admitted their past mistakes in respect of their Arab policy, but they still refuse to change it. He says further that loyalty to Britain and dependence on Britain's "gratitude" in return for services rendered, will bring the same results as those after the last war. There remains one task . . . *an immediate understanding with the Arabs.*

Among other constructive proposals he puts forward Arab-Jewish peasants' organisations and co-operatives to bring together the Jewish and Arab peasants to defend the common interests of peasants as a whole. He proposes that the Jewish Agency should set up credit institutions to render assistance to the Arab peasant so that he should be able to take advantage of the superior technique of the Jewish colonist. Particularly does he speak of the necessity of *joint Arab-Jewish workers' organisations*. These are only the outstanding proposals among others aimed at bringing the two peoples together. And he adds significantly that the actual cost of putting these proposals into operation are but a fraction of the cost of the damage sustained during the three years of unrest in Palestine.

Khalvariski's proposals might have come out of *Koel Haam* (Voice of the People), the organ of the illegal *Communist Party of Palestine*, which has always worked for Arab-Jewish friendship, whereby the economic and cultural advantages which the Arabs would gain from the Yishuv would guarantee a prosperous future for both peoples and open up prospects for any further Jewish settlement in Palestine.

Yet Khalvariski is not a communist. He is a Zionist, but different from the Weizmans in that he realises where Weizman's policy has led and is now leading the Yishuv, and is honest enough to put forward his own constructive alternative. In this he has the support of many more progressive elements within the Yishuv.

The Yishuv, as well as world Jewry, which should have the interests of half a million Jews in Palestine at heart, must make its choice: either the Weizman's recruiting sergeant policy which makes the Yishuv into an instrument turned against the Arab national movement, which in the course of the development of this imperialist war will shake the Near East, or the policy of the more far-sighted leaders like Khalvariski and others, which would lay the firm foundation of friendship and co-operation between the Arab and Jewish working people.

This would be the first step which would cement the future and security of the Yishuv with the cause of national freedom from imperialism and war for all the peoples of the Near East. For only within a free and liberated East is there a future for the Yishuv as well as those Jews in Eastern Europe who aspire to start life anew in that part of the world.