

THE CRISIS IN PALESTINE

A JEWISH VIEWPOINT

By Walter Zander

*Dr. Walter Zander, secretary of The Friends of the Hebrew University, has previously contributed to **THE FRIEND** an article on "The Jewish Day of Atonement" (in 1941), and one describing the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus, near Jerusalem, which hopes to be a reconciling influence in Palestine. He now gives a Jewish view on the background to the present unhappy situation in Palestine.*

THERE was a time when it seemed as though the Palestine problem consisted in the Arab-Jewish issue. Later, it became obvious that, in addition, there existed a conflict between the Arabs and the British. Recent months have brought a near-warlike situation between the British and the Jews. But even this is not all. Since the days of Mohamed Ali and the Crimean War the fate of the Eastern Mediterranean was determined by the relations between Britain and Russia; and for nearly a thousand years the Holy Land was the focus, not only of the conflict between Christendom and Islam but of the schism between Eastern and Western Christianity. The impact of these tensions is clearly felt in the country.

It is a tragic feature of the present situation that Britons and Jews alike passionately believe themselves to be right, and emphatically refuse the presumption that they themselves might have given any serious cause for the outbreak of the conflict.

On the Jewish side, the central issue is immigration. For more than 60 years escape from unbearable conditions in the East of Europe was the dominating event of Jewish history; and before the First World War, the number of Jewish immigrants into America from these regions amounted to more than 100,000 yearly. Between the two wars pressure from Poland and Rumania continued, but the doors of the Western world were practically closed. Only a small percentage of the would-be immigrants found admission to the newly-established Jewish National Home. In 1938, a member of the Polish Government declared that not less than three million Jews had to emigrate from that country alone. To-day the Anglo-American Commission estimates that from the whole of Central and Eastern Europe "*as many as 500,000 Jews might wish or be compelled to leave.*" In numbers the problem is reduced to a fraction of its former size, but its urgency is multiplied.

All schemes to settle relevant numbers of Jews in any other country but Palestine have proved hitherto illusory. To dodge this fact is neither realistic nor honest. But there is more at stake than to find a refuge. The age-long longing of

the Jews to return to Palestine, based on religious foundations, and nurtured throughout the centuries by constant prayer, has taken a new and mighty hold of their soul. They feel that an hour of destiny is at hand, and for most of the homeless this destiny is linked indissolubly with Palestine. We witness the rebirth of a people and the immigrants are streaming irresistibly towards their ancient homeland.

The problem on the British side is the ambiguity of her position in Palestine. On the one side there is the Mandate. It contains as an essential element the development of the Jewish National Home, and throughout the years sincere and successful efforts have been made in fulfilment of this task. On the other hand, the possession of Palestine is a final link in a long chain of expansion across Malta, Alexandria and Cyprus-towards the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean. It is of paramount importance for imperial interests, the communications to the East and the exclusion of any Power which might interfere with this lifeline.

In the sphere of civil law no trustee with a personal interest in the trust could ever be admitted. In inter-national relations no such restrictions were considered valid. Such confusion of interests at any time must severely affect the freedom of action of the Mandatory Power. To-day the situation is even more precarious. The League of Nations, from which the Mandate was derived, has ceased to exist, and since neither of the two groups is satisfied with the prevailing state of affairs, the Government is isolated and it is only natural that the circle of barbed wire round the Government buildings is growing bigger.

We Jews on our part have failed in our relations with the Arabs. We have deceived ourselves about the reality of Arab opposition and have been unable to find a constructive solution of the problem. In the words of the Anglo-American Commission, "*the Jewish community in Palestine has never faced the problem*". The fact that the Mandatory Power has not done more to bring about Arab-Jewish reconciliation does not relieve us from our responsibility. We have to realise that mass-immigration - whatever its material benefits for the Arab may be - is an infringement of his political position in the country. Declarations that we seek friendship are not enough under these conditions. They appear meaningless to the Arab who thinks his rights violated. Our need, we feel, is great enough to justify Jewish immigration. But it is our task, not only to reduce the infringement to the absolute minimum and to give every possible guarantee to the Arab, but to offer a just compensation for the infringement of his rights. Such. Compensation may be

found in the material, educational or political sphere. As Mr. Gandhi said nearly ten years ago, "*there are hundreds of ways to deal with the Arabs.*" The principle of a fair compensation once accepted, it should not be beyond the wit of man to find a constructive solution on that basis.

The Anglo-Jewish situation in recent months has deteriorated to a terrifying crisis. But if both parties recognise to what extent their own actions have contributed to bring about the present situation, and if both show a more imaginative understanding of their respective needs, there is still time to make a new beginning.