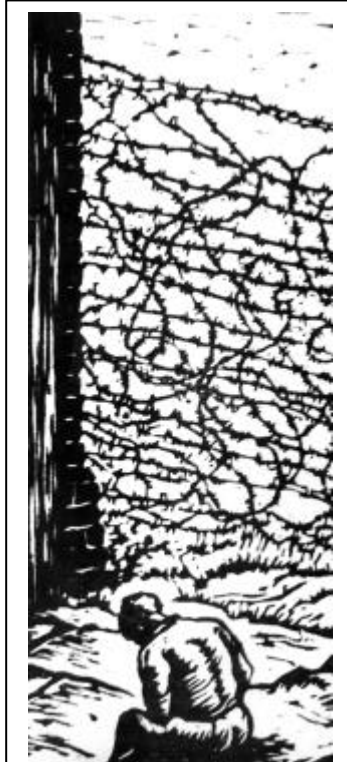


# ***Britain, Zionism & the Holocaust***



Woodcut of Warth Mill, near Manchester, by Herman Fekkenbach, where he and two thousand other Jewish refugees were detained during 1940. The British government threw 27,000 Germans, mostly political exiles and refugees, into detention camps during 1940 .

*By John Smith*

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This is an edited version of a workshop paper written for the Dayschool on Iraq and Palestine which took place in Sheffield on 24 October 1998. I intend to continue work on it; any new sources, comments and criticism will be gratefully received.

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## ***Introduction***

The Nazi Holocaust was the nadir of human civilisation, the most atrocious thing that has ever happened, and yet it occurred this century, in the midst of "European civilisation". The official version of history states that all Germans must share some guilt, and that all Britons can be proud. However, awkward questions keep on emerging, like bloody hands out of the rubble. Questions like *why did British governments from 1933 to 1945 deny Europe's Jews a place of refuge? Why did the British government and its mouthpiece, the BBC, suppress news about mass executions of Jews?*

This article aims to overturn official wisdom and show the truth to be that the *British Empire was an accessory* to the Nazi's murder of six million human beings on account of their so-called "race".

We leave aside, in this article, the mighty contribution which British imperialism made to creating the conditions for the emergence of German fascism in the first place; in particular the post-WW1 extremely punitive and humiliating sanctions and "war reparations" which victorious Britannia imposed on vanquished Germany. The Allies' sea blockade of Germany, which included a total food embargo and even prevented German fishing boats from leaving their harbours, was continued for at least eight months after Germany's signed the Armistice. During this time hundreds of thousands of Germans perished in the post-war famine—some estimates say a million lost their lives.<sup>1</sup>

It has always been too easy for the establishment to criticise Germany for the barbarism of the Holocaust, when Britain's own holocaust lasted for three centuries, against the enslaved and massacred native peoples of five continents. Half a century after the defeat of Germany, it is becoming easier to restore the truth. Now, with world capitalism facing an economic crisis of 1930s-proportions, it is imperative that we understand the true lessons of the Holocaust and of the second world war, or else the post-WW2 refrain "Never Again" will share the fate of the defunct WW1 epithet: "The War to End All Wars".

The Holocaust was the terrible crescendo of a crisis that began fifty years earlier, with the anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia, following the 1881 assassination of Tsar Alexander II. That this event marked a turning point can be seen in

the dramatic rise in Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe from this date: between 1800 and 1880, the average was 3,000 per year. Between 1881-1899 this rose to 50,000 per year; between 1900 and 1914, the exodus of Jewish refugees reached 135,000 per year. During these years, an estimated 46% of the total Russian/Eastern European Jewish population was forced to flee by poverty and persecution.<sup>2</sup>

Until the Russian revolution, the most virulently anti-Semitic regime in Europe was Tsarist Russia, allied with Britain and France in the Triple Entente. One of the first actions of the February 1917 democratic revolution which toppled the Russian monarchy was to annul the 650 different laws limiting the rights of Jews.<sup>3</sup> Although there had been a rise in anti-Semitism in Germany in the 1881-1914 period, there was nothing to suggest what was to come: during WW1, the German Army was regarded as the protector of Poland's Jews, who suffered massacres at the hands of the Tsarist government, blaming them for German successes on the battlefields.

One of the big differences between the first (Tsarist) phase of anti-Semitism and the second (Nazi) phase, is that Jewish refugees in the first phase encountered incomparably fewer difficulties in finding a host country. There is a great deal of evidence that, right up to and even after the decision to implement the "final solution", the fascist regime would have committed mass expulsion in place of mass extermination, were it not for the refusal of the British Empire and the U.S. to allow more than derisory numbers of Jews to enter their countries (this is discussed in more detail below).

If there is one lesson to be drawn from the tragic events of the thirties and forties, it is that *refugees must be able to find a place of refuge!* The chief specific accusation against Britain's WW2 War Cabinet in relation to the Holocaust is that it didn't just stop at passively preventing Jewish refugees from entering Britain or any other territories under its dominion, but that it in fact took the lead in 'sealing the escape routes', consciously and cynically trapping millions in harms way.<sup>4</sup> The first shots fired by British forces in WW2 were at a boat laden with 1,400 Jewish refugees!<sup>5</sup>

Recent events show that history is already beginning to repeat itself. Two notorious examples spring to mind. The closed door which barred the escape routes in the 1930s and 1940s remained closed in the 1990s,

- to the Kurdish civilians fleeing advancing government troops following the end of the so-called "war" against Iraq in 1991. As they approached the Turkish border, their way was barred by British soldiers (wearing

those briefly-fashionable U.N. blue berets) who ordered them at gun-point to get back onto the frozen mountain (hastily reclassified as a "safe haven" by the U.N. Security Council).

- to the millions of Bosnian civilians trapped in the war zone by "Fortress Europe"; when Britain slapped visa restrictions on the Bosnians and itself on the back for evacuating a few dozen Bosnian children, while 95,000 more lay in need of medical attention.

The other main objective of this article is to discover the nature of Zionism and of the Zionist state which was founded in 1948, through the expulsion of all but 133,000 of the 859,000 Palestinians from their homes and villages (creating, *inter alia*, another refugee crisis which has festered for the past half a century).

Fifty years since the formation of the Israeli state, it is remarkable how little celebration there is amongst the Israeli population. The consciousness of the people is in turmoil. The dream of security has turned into a nightmare. The inevitable rise in wealth and power, including military power, of the Arab states, combined with Israel's smallness and the lack of oil reserves of its own, *makes it more and more difficult for the Israeli state preserve its military supremacy, now more than ever reliant on its U.S.-guaranteed monopoly on weapons of mass destruction.*

Since Mordechai Vanunu, who has spent the last decade in solitary confinement in an Israeli prison, revealed their existence, it is no secret that Israel possesses at least 200 nuclear weapons. That Israel also possesses biological and chemical weapons is not disputed. A glimpse of their activity in this area was given recently by the revelation that an El-Al cargo plane which crashed in October 1992 into a public housing project in Amsterdam, killing more than 40 people, was transporting military quantities of a precursor of Sarin nerve gas from a U.S. "chemical factory" to a top-secret laboratory north of Tel-Aviv. Hundreds of those who were near the disaster have since succumbed to mysterious "Gulf syndrome"-type diseases; now they know why.

Israel's protector, U.S. imperialism, is suffering body-blows all around the world—not least in the Middle East region, beginning with its eviction from Iran in 1979 and more recently with its failure to finesse the Saddam regime. The viability of the Israeli economy depends on the relatively enormous amount of "aid" which Israel receives from the U.S., and is highly vulnerable to the "global contagion" which began in Thailand in July 1997 and is now

laying to waste the economies of entire continents. Serious economic crisis will sharply reduce average living standards and increase inequality. The Israeli capitalist government will attempt to solve its crisis through neo-liberal reforms that will sharply increase poverty, insecurity and unemployment amongst Israeli people.

On top of all this, the crisis in the "Peace process" threatens to develop into a military confrontation between Israel and the Arab peoples.

The questions must be answered - what is the nature of the Israeli state?  
What is Zionism?

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<sup>1</sup> If preventing food from reaching a starving civilian population is to be considered a war-crime, then this is another one for Winston Churchill's burgeoning list—as First Lord of the Admiralty, until he was forced put of office by the Gallipoli catastrophe in 1915, he refused to allow the Red Cross to take famine relief through the British Navy's sea blockade to seven million starving belgians. Churchill re-ented the war cabinet as Minister of Munitions in July 1917 and became Secretary of War in January 1918. He was the foremost champion of maintaining a total naval blockade on Germany even though the war had ended. See James Bacque, *Crimes and Mercies*, Little Brown and Company 1997 ISBN 0-316-64070-0 pp9-15

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Ruppin, *The Jews in the Modern World*, (quoted by Abram Leon in *The Jewish Question – A Marxist Interpretation*) compares the refugee total with the estimated population at the mid-point of the 1881-1914 period. The Jewish population was growing rapidly due to an even higher birth-rate than was usual for those times, so even though 46% had left, the numbers of those remaining did not decline.

<sup>3</sup> See Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* Vol 3, p 41

<sup>4</sup> This is the title Wasserstein gives to chapter 2 of his definitive study, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945*.

<sup>5</sup> The boat was called the Tiger Hill, the event took place on 2nd September, 1939, the day after Germany's invasion of Poland. Two refugees were killed (see Wasserstein, p40).

## ***The Origin of Zionism and of its strategic alliance with the British Empire***

Concern for the fate of European Jews never at any point even figured in the priorities of the British Empire. Britain's rulers were infinitely more concerned about their colonial possessions than they were at the fate of the Jews. "***The trouble with Hitler,***" said British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden in a 1942 radio broadcast "***was not that he was a Nazi at home. The trouble with him was that he would not stay at home.***"<sup>6</sup>

Sympathy for Jewish victims of racism played no part in Britain's decision to act as midwife to the birth of a Jewish state in Palestine. To understand Britain's true motives, we must understand something about the nature of the Zionist enterprise.

The first congress of the World Zionist Organisation was convened by Theodor Herzl in 1897, a year after the publication of his book ***The Jewish State***, widely considered to be the founding document of the modern Zionist movement. In it, Herzl declares:

*If His Majesty the Sultan were to give us Palestine, we could undertake to regulate Turkey's finances. For Europe, we would constitute a bulwark against Asia down there, we would be the advance post of civilisation against barbarism. As a neutral state, we would remain in constant touch with all of Europe, which would guarantee our existence.*

An approach to the Ottoman Empire (Turkey) was a logical first step, since Palestine was the part of it. But Turkey was the "sick man of Europe"; France, Germany and Britain circled like vultures waiting for feeding to commence. In 1902, the Zionist movement made a strategic decision to ally their cause with that of the British Empire.

***Britain and Zion - the Fateful Entanglement*** offers a concise and well-documented account of the origins of the alliance between the Zionist movement and British imperialism.

*Herzl's... main interest was in power politics; his main object to make a deal with the Sultan of Turkey, of whose Empire Palestine was a part. Herzl therefore strove to obtain from Abdul Hamid a Charter under which Palestine would become a Jewish Colony subject to the Sultan's sovereignty. In return he claimed that Jewish wealth would resuscitate the moribund finances of the Ottoman Empire....*

*The protracted negotiations with Turkey finally broke down in July 1902. Herzl now changed his tack. He believed that the Turkish Empire would*

*break up unless it was resuscitated by loans from rich Jews. Therefore Zionist attention must be fastened on the Empire most concerned by, and most likely to benefit from, that break-up, the British. If the Turkish Empire broke up, the British Empire was likely to expand itself to protect, indirectly, its Indian and Egyptian interests. On 22 October 1902, Theodor Herzl secured a meeting with Joseph Chamberlain...*

*Between 1895 and 1905, Chamberlain dominated British politics. ... Chamberlain saw the possibilities of Colonial and Imperial development more clearly than anyone else in British politics. By the second half of 1902, with the Boer War won, Joseph Chamberlain was at the height of his power....*

*Herzl's approach to Chamberlain was adroit. Russia's pogroms had stimulated a flow of Russian Jews to London's East End. The consequent economic and social problems had been investigated by a Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, to which earlier in the year Herzl had given evidence. He realised that the British conscience was uneasy at the notion of legally restricting this immigration and pointed out to Chamberlain that it could be diverted to the Middle East. He had already suggested to the German and Russian Governments, as a pro-Zionist argument, that they could solve their 'Jewish problems' by encouraging emigration. To Chamberlain, he emphasised that Jewish capital and labour would make their 'colonies' prosperous, thus lightening the burdens of the British taxpayer..<sup>7</sup>*

From 1902 the quest for an alliance with British imperialism formed the lynch-pin of the Zionists' strategy: Herzl and other Zionist leaders, notably Chaim Weizmann, knew that the British Empire wanted Palestine for its strategic significance to the Suez canal, for passage to the Asian colonies, and as one end of a railroad Britain wanted to build to Mesopotamia (Iraq), to serve as a path to its African colonies. The Zionists finally won Britain's rulers around with words like these, sent by Chaim Weizmann to Lloyd George's War Cabinet in the middle of WW1: *"... we entrust our national and Zionist destiny to the Foreign Office and the Imperial War Cabinet in the hope that the problem would be considered in the light of imperial interests..."<sup>8</sup>*

In the Balfour Declaration of 1917, Lloyd George's War Cabinet's stated its support for the Zionist project of colonising Palestine. This was a key moment, in which fifteen years of hesitation and division within the British state was resolved in favour of making common cause with the Zionist movement. This alliance was founded in the first place on their mutual interest in combating the rising tide of Arab nationalism. With the Balfour Declaration, the Zionist movement became a key part of British imperialism's game-plan for Middle

East: a means of legitimising its military conquest of Palestine, and a parallel police force, useful given Britain's seriously-overstretched military forces. Jewish settler militias, including assassination squads (the 'Special Night Services) who killed their way down lists provided by British Army intelligence, played a key role in the suppression of the 1936-39 Palestinian uprising, the high-point of the Palestinian national struggle until more recent times.

The Zionists were in effect handed the Palestine franchise, but under the strict limitation that their interests must always be subordinate to the greater interests of the British Empire. This was to become the source of friction later on, but this was the deal, these were the terms of the alliance.

*"Received from Major General Sir Louis Bols one Palestine, complete." —* the text of the note handed to the British military commander of "Occupied Enemy Territory (South)" on June 30, 1920 by Sir Herbert Samuel, the commissioner sent by London to run Palestine, newly captured from the defeated Turks.<sup>9</sup> With this action, Palestine was formally annexed to the British Empire. The League of Nations legalised this usurpation two years later, on July 24, 1922—and at the same time it ratified the Balfour Declaration in the name of the world community, giving Britain "the responsibility of setting up a political, administrative, and economic state of affairs in the country such as to insure the establishment of the national home for the Jewish people."<sup>10</sup>

Turkey formally surrendered to the victorious British Empire at the Treaty of Sévres, signed on August 10, 1920. Here, too, Britain insisted upon the ratification of the Balfour Declaration.

Arthur James Balfour was Foreign Secretary in Lloyd George's government formed in December 1916. A distinguished imperialist, he began his ministerial career in 1887 when he was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland. His brutal repression of the political struggle and armed resistance of the Land Leagues and the Republican Brotherhood earned him the nickname 'Bloody Balfour'.

Hardie and Herrman comment:

*What lay behind [Balfour's affinity for Zionism]? The answer, as with so many prominent pro-Zionists, was in Balfour's attitude to Jews as a whole. No action of his speaks louder about this than his responsibility, as Prime Minister, for the Aliens Act of 1905.<sup>11</sup>*

Maxim Rodinson, in his book *Israel, a Colonial-Settler State?*, comments:

*This search for the indispensable backing of the great powers inescapably dictated Zionist policy toward them—to play upon their rivalries; to pressure them to the extent that this was made possible by the electoral or fi-*

*nancial power of their Jewish populations, even when the latter had been only theoretically won to Zionism; or, on the other hand, to play on their anti-Semitism and their desire to get rid of the Jews. It was in this spirit that in 1903 Herzl reached a general agreement on fundamentals with the sinister Plehve,<sup>12</sup> Tsarist minister of the interior and organiser of pogroms, inaugurating a political tradition of converging the Zionist program with that of the anti-Semites (something Herzl proudly admitted)<sup>13</sup>*

Herzl's pact with Russian anti-Semitism was not an isolated event, but part of a pattern, the most grotesque repetition of which was the Haavara ("transfer") agreement between Hitler's Reich and the Jewish Agency to facilitate the emigration of German Jews to Palestine: *"This German measure...virtually favours the consolidation of Judaism in Palestine and speeds up the formation of a Palestinian Jewish state,"* acknowledged a circular-telegram from the German Minister of Foreign Affairs dated June 22, 1937. After discussion of this subject in various levels of the German administration, the staff adviser Clodius noted on January 27, 1938: *"The question of emigration toward Palestine by the Jews of Germany . . . has once more, by decision of the Führer, been settled in the direction of having it continue".<sup>14</sup>*

Of a piece with all this is the Zionists' acquiescence to, and even connivance with, the heinous U.S. and British immigration restrictions which prevented millions of Jews from escaping German occupation.

The stance of the Zionist leaders in the United States was identical to that of their counterparts in Britain. *Socialists and the Fight Against Anti-Semitism*, a pamphlet by Peter Seidman<sup>15</sup>, tells the story of Zionist concurrence with the U.S. government's closed-door policy at the height of the refugee crisis. He cites a survey by David Brody of how the Jewish press in the U.S. dealt with the refugee crisis, which concluded:

*"Almost nothing is to be found in the Jewish literature between 1938 and 1942 expressing significant dissatisfaction with the immigration laws. B'nai Brith Magazine had run periodically editorials on 'the Old America,' when the door was open to all who wished to enter; this might be construed as an implicit criticism of the quota restrictions. After 1938, such editorials no longer appeared. The Annual Reports of the American Jewish Committee made no adverse mention from 1938 to 1942 of the immigration laws. The American Jewish Congress also maintained silence . . . The significant exception to this position was the non-Zionist labour organisations belonging to the Jewish Labour Committee."<sup>16</sup>*

Rabbi Stephen Wise was the most prominent Zionist leader in the U.S. in the run-up to and during WW2. In April 1939, he testified before a congressional hearing on immigration as follows:

*"I want to make it plain, so far as I am concerned, there is no intention whatsoever to depart from the immigration laws which at present obtain. I have heard no sane person propose any departure or deviation from the existing law now in force. I feel that the country and the Congress should not be asked to do more than take care of a limited number of children... After all, we cannot take care of all of them."<sup>6</sup>*

Peter Seidman concluded:

*"...leaders of Zionist and most Jewish organisations in the U.S. raised no significant protests against the policies of the Roosevelt administration that left hundreds of thousands of refugees, Jews and others, to die at the hands of the fascist anti-Semites in Europe beginning in the 1930s.*

*It is ironic that today leaders of these very same Jewish organisations, like the B'nai Brith, are attacking the [U.S.]Socialist Workers Party for being "anti-Semitic" [on account of the SWP's opposition to Israel]. For, in contrast to the policies of the B'nai Brith during the worst campaign of genocidal terror against Jews in the history of the world, the Socialist Workers Party did not stand idly by, but rather engaged, with others, in a struggle to force Washington to admit the refugees."*

More episodes in the story of the Zionist leaderships' policy towards the Jewish refugee crisis, in Britain and on the world stage, are contained in the chapter entitled *"How Britain slammed the door in the face of Jewish refugees"*.

The historical record reveals the political strategy pursued by the Zionists to contain two dimensions:

- the forging of a reactionary alliance with British imperialism to conquer and dispossess the Palestinian people;
- the sealing of a Faustian pact with anti-Semitism—using first the tsarist pogroms, then the U.S. and U.K.'s anti-Jew immigration controls, and then the Holocaust itself to advance the Zionist project of colonising Palestine.

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<sup>6</sup> *Intercontinental Press/Inprecor* June 10 1985 p324

<sup>7</sup> *Britain and Zion - the Fateful Entanglement*, Frank Hardie and Irwin Herrman 1980 pp4-6

<sup>8</sup> cited in *Israel: A Colonial Settler State?*Maxime Rodinson, p47

<sup>9</sup> Jerusalem State Archives, cited in *Churchill and Palestine* by David Lyon Hurwitz, which was published in *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* Winter 1995

<sup>10</sup> *Israel: A Colonial Settler State?*, p55

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<sup>11</sup> *Britain and Zion* p80

<sup>12</sup> cf *Britain and Zion*, p4: "In August 1903, hard on the heels of the pogrom at Kishinev, where some fifty Jews were killed, [Herzl] went to St Petersburg to persuade the anti-Semitic Russian Government to encourage Jewish emigration to Palestine...."

<sup>13</sup> Rodinson quotes from Plehve's agreement with Herzl, in which Plehve promised Zionism "moral and material support on the day certain of the practical measures it takes serve to reduce the Jewish population in Russia." *Israel: A Colonial Settler State?*, p45

<sup>14</sup> Cited in Rodinson, p103; he gives the following as references: L. Hirszowicz, "Nazi Germany and the Palestine Partition Plan" (in *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 1, No. 1, October 1964, pp. 40-65), p. 45f. and *Les Archives secretes de la Wilhelmstrasse*, V, book II, Paris, Plon, 1954, pp. 5, 25-28, 147, etc.

<sup>15</sup> Published by and available from Pathfinder Press

<sup>16</sup> from June 1956 publication of the American Jewish Historical Society quoted in the pamphlet '*Socialists and the Fight Against Anti-Semitism*', by Peter Seidman, Pathfinder Press

<sup>17</sup> *Socialists and the Fight Against Anti-Semitism*, *ibid.*

## ***Zionism and the Russian revolution***

As the WW1 loomed, the Zionist leadership's decision to forge an alliance with Britain faced a big problem. During WW1, Britain fought with Tsarist Russia, then the locus of anti-Semitism [France forming the third colonial power in the "Triple Alliance" fighting Germany's attempt to gain an empire of its own]. The Westminster government refused to put pressure on Russia to halt anti-Jewish violence, bringing it into conflict with liberal and, still more, the socialist Jews who wanted to assert the rights of Jews within the nations where they actually lived, including Russia. In contrast, Zionist leaders saw the Tsarist government as a potential ally, and offered to help it solve its "Jewish problem" if they in return would help the Zionists to colonise Palestine.

In this context, the pro-Zionist faction within the British government gained ground with its argument that support for Jewish colonisation of Palestine would serve three most desirable ends:

- provide a cover for Britain's refusal to pressure the Tsar over anti-Jewish terror
- deflect criticism from Jews in the U.S., which was obstructing the U.S. entry into WW1
- undermine the support of Russian Jews for the anti-war movement.

In February 1917, in the midst of world war, the Tsarist regime collapsed in the face of a popular revolution which placed power in the hands of liberals and reformist socialists. The new bourgeois government attempted to continue the war against Germany—which put them on collision course with Russia's workers and soldiers, the ones who were supposed to do the fighting. As well as to deliver the bourgeoisie to power, the February revolt of the people led to the spontaneous formation of 'councils of workers' and soldiers' deputies' - the soviets. Within these mass democratic organisations, the Bolshevik policy known as "revolutionary defeatism" gained rapid influence, the fundamental premises of which were expressed by Lenin on March 25, 1917:

*The Tsarist government began and waged the war as a predatory, imperialist war for spoliation... The war has been brought about by the clash of two mighty groups of billionaires, the Anglo-French and the German, over the redivision of the world...*

*The groups of capitalists who have drenched the earth in blood over the partition of territories, markets, and concessions, cannot conclude an "honourable" peace. They can conclude only a dishonourable peace, a*

*peace based on the division of spoils, on the partition of Turkey and the colonies. ...*

*What then is to be done?*

*In order to obtain a peace (and particularly, to obtain a really democratic, a really honourable peace), it is necessary that the power of the state should be in the hands not of the landlords and capitalists, but in the hands of the workers and the poorest peasants.*<sup>18</sup>

This political line triumphed and was vindicated by the workers and rural toilers who took power into their own hands, in the second revolution of 1917—the October socialist revolution.

In the period between the two revolutions, the London government and Buchanan, its ambassador in St Petersburg, closely considered whether a pro-Zionist declaration by Britain could affect the course of events in Russia. British policy had already been moving towards Zionism in order to curry favour with Jewish leaders in the U.S., most of whose followers were vehemently opposed to U.S. entry into WW1 on the side of the anti-Semitic Russian regime. The rapid spread of revolutionary, anti-war feelings amongst Russian workers and soldiers increased the British government's alarm that its Tsarist ally might be forced to withdraw from the war.

*Leopold Greenberg [prominent Zionist and editor of the Jewish Chronicle]...on 16 April...submitted to the Foreign Office a report on 'Russian Jews and the Revolution'. In this paper he had recommended a pro-Zionist statement by the Entente as an effective means of influencing Jews in Allied, neutral, and even enemy countries. In particular, he too believed that such a statement might end a campaign by some Russian Jews for Russia to make a separate peace. Lord Robert Cecil, then acting head of the Foreign Office while Balfour was in Washington, sought Buchanan's reaction. The Ambassador replied that there was no great enthusiasm for Zionism among the Russian Jews and that he doubted whether to support it would have any effect on Russian anti-war Jews. 'At the present moment, the less said about Jews the better'...*<sup>19</sup>

Others within the Foreign Office argued differently, e.g. Ronald Graham, Assistant Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office: *'it is certain that our best card in dealing with the Russo-Jewish proletariat is Zionism.'*<sup>20</sup> However, Buchanan's views prevailed: British imperialism had a sober and realistic assessment of how little influence it had amongst Russian Jews, undermined by its refusal to put public or private pressure on the Tsarist government during the previous years of anti-Semitic outrages. Weizmann had urged Britain to make an earlier declaration of support for Zionism, at least in time to influence the

All-Russia Congress of Jews, held in St Petersburg in June 1917, but he was turned down.

The Lloyd George government could not, by peaceful means, combat Bolshevik denunciation of predatory, imperialist Britain, since it was at that very moment preparing to expand the British Empire through new acquisitions, not least of which was to be Palestine. The Balfour Declaration was issued five days before the Bolsheviks' seizure of power on November 7 (October 25 on the Julian calendar). Despite this close coincidence, the War Cabinet had made its decision months earlier, before the nature of the Bolshevik threat could be perceived. *Britain and Zion* gives the following sequence of events:

*On 3 April 1917 [the day of U.S. entry into WWI], at a meeting with Lloyd George ...Sykes received instructions before his departure for the Middle East.... These instructions emphasised, first, 'the importance, if possible, of securing the addition of Palestine to the British area'; second, 'the importance of not prejudicing the Zionist movement and the possibility of its development under British auspices'; and third, 'not to enter into any political pledges to the Arabs, and particularly none in regard to Palestine'. A minute by Ronald Graham, dated 21 April 1917, read: 'The Prime Minister insists that we must obtain Palestine and.... His Majesty's Government are now committed to support Zionist aspirations. ....'<sup>21</sup>*

Although the manner and timing of the Balfour Declaration may have been influenced by events in Russia, it was events in the theatre of war which were decisive in accelerating the evolution in British policy towards Zionism. Four weeks after the Balfour Declaration, on December 9, 1917, General Allenby led his forces into Jerusalem, capturing Palestine for the British Empire.

In the longer run, the Russian revolution did powerfully affect Britain's Middle East policy. The government led by Lenin published all secret treaties. Its publication of the secret Sykes-Picot agreement was a bombshell which revealed the depths of British treachery and deceit: in public promising self-determination to the Arab and Kurdish people in return for a war-time alliance with them against Turkey and Germany, while secretly carving up the whole of the Middle East with the French imperialists. The expression 'Perfidious Albion' has its origin in these events.

The Russian revolution stimulated and greatly strengthened the anti-colonial movements in all the empires, not least in Arabia. Zionism offered itself to Britain more and more not just as a strategy for expanding the British empire, but as a strategy for counter-revolution.

The power of the challenge presented by the Russian revolution comes across well in these memorable words, from the *Declaration by the Central Bureau of Jewish Sections, Communist Party of Russia to the First Congress of the Peoples of the East*, held during the first week of September, 1920, in Baku, Azerbaijan.

*Britain's entire policy on Palestine aims at maintaining power wholly in the hands of the British occupiers and ideologically subordinating the Jewish community, in all countries, to Britain's interests. With the assistance of imperialism's Zionist servants, Britain's policy aims at drawing away from communism a portion of the Jewish proletariat by arousing in it national feelings and sympathies for Zionism... In the name of the Jewish proletariat and the working masses, we therefore most vigorously protest that, on the pretence of national liberation, a privileged Jewish minority is being artificially implanted in the population of Palestine. Such a policy is a direct violation of the rights of the Arab working masses in their struggle for independence and for complete possession of the land and of all the products of their labour.*

*The slogan of the Jewish proletariat, and of every friend of the toiling masses and every fighter for national liberation, must be "Hands off Palestine!"<sup>22</sup>*

In its death-throws, the feudal Tsarist regime indulged in the most extreme anti-Semitic violence. Tsar Nicholas II swallowed the Jewish conspiracy myth hook, line and sinker, giving his public backing to the *pogromschiki* ('those who instigate pogroms'), most notably the Union of the Russian Peoples, otherwise known as the Black Hundreds. Its politics were summed up by one of its proclamations pasted up on walls across Russia:

*"The efforts to replace the autocracy of the divinely appointed Tsar by a constitution and a parliament are inspired by those bloodsuckers, the Jews... All the evil, all the misfortune of our country comes from the Jews."<sup>23</sup>*

Norman Cohn, in his book *Warrant for Genocide*, which is a rich source of meticulously-researched facts on the Russian origins of Hitler's anti-Semitic "theories", comments:

*"The myth of the Judeo-Communist conspiracy was to prove even more potent than the myth of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy. The Russian civil war [which followed the Bolshevik revolution] provided a first indication of its power... The Black Hundreds organisations had formulated their war aim very clearly, and they effectively imposed it on the troops: 'Kill the Jews, Save Russia'.*

*“The enormous massacres of Jews carried out by the Nazis have overshadowed everything that went before, so that few people now are much aware of the prelude which was acted out in Russia between 1918 and 1920. The number of victims was nevertheless very considerable—over 100,000 killed and an unknown number of wounded and maimed.”<sup>24</sup>*

Following the victory of the Red Army in the Russian civil war, the leaders of the Black Hundreds were forced west, where they became a very important ingredient in the incipient Austro-German fascist movement.

Since the collapse of the Stalinist regime in Moscow, the western media has looked back with sympathy and nostalgia to the poor Tsar and his family, who were executed by the wicked Bolsheviks in 1918. Legions of anti-communist commentators conveniently forget that the Tsar was a rabid anti-Semite<sup>25</sup>, and that the execution of the Russian royal family deprived the genocidal counter-revolutionary forces of their figurehead. Although official wisdom proclaims that communism is dead, the opinion-makers still feel the need to falsify the historical record. One reason is that they don't want us to be reminded that Winston Churchill sent British troops to fight on the side of the *pogromschiki*.<sup>26</sup>

[*Note:* The consolidation of the Stalin regime in the Soviet Union signalled the victory of a political counter-revolution in that country. Growing bureaucratism; the pressures of the past expressing themselves in countless ways; the smallness and exhausted state of the Russian working class, which had endured world war, civil war, war against imperialist armies sent to crush the revolution; the untimely death of Lenin; the defeat of the revolutionary workers' movement in Europe and in particular in Germany and Italy—all these are factors which led to Stalinism, in every respect the antithesis of the 1917 socialist revolution. This political counter-revolution overthrew the workers' government and gutted the Bolshevik Party, but did not reverse the overthrow of capitalism—only a German victory in WW2 could have accomplished that.

More detailed discussion of this is beyond the scope of the present article, but these assertions must be made *in order to explain why the Soviet Union, too, refused to welcome Jewish refugees from Nazism. Perfectly consistent with this was the Soviet Union's 1948 U.N. vote in favour of establishing Israel.* I hope to research these issues in a future version of this article.]

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<sup>18</sup> Letters from Afar: How to get Peace, March 25 1917

<sup>19</sup> *Britain and Zion* pp68-69

<sup>20</sup> *Britain and Zion* p63

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- 21** *Britain and Zion* p67
- 22** *To See the Dawn - proceedings of the First Congress of Peoples of the East*, Pathfinder.
- 23** *Warrant for Genocide*, pp120-1 by Norman Cohn, Penguin 1970
- 24** *Warrant for Genocide*, pp133-4
- 25** “[Tsar] Nicholas [II] ... “read with satisfaction how they flogged with whips the bob-haired girl-students, or cracked the head of defenceless people during Jewish pogroms. This crowned black sheep gravitated with all his soul to the very dregs of society, the Black Hundred hooligans. He not only paid them generously from the state treasury, but loved to chat with them about their exploits...” from Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, Vol 1 p57
- 26** E.H. Carr quotes Lloyd George's description of his War Secretary Churchill as being a “zealous and untiring advocate of the policy of intervention”. While the Paris Peace conference was in session in early 1919, behind the scenes Churchill urged the U.S., France, Italy and other capitalist powers to send “volunteers, technical experts, arms, munitions, tanks, aeroplanes etc.” and to “arm the anti-Bolshevik forces” See E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, Vol. 3 p119

## **How Britain slammed the door in the face of Jewish refugees**

*[Note: The bulk of this chapter is made up of extended quotes from works by three authors: from Steve Cohen's pamphlet entitled From the Jews to the Tamils—Britain's Mistreatment of Refugees; from Bernard Wasserstein's definitive study Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939-45, and from Christopher Sykes' Crossroads to Israel. They are, respectively, a socialist, a Zionist and a former M.P. for the Conservative Party. Instead of citing these as sources, I thought the reader would gain more by reading the powerful prose these authors use to present the findings of their investigations.]*

The Jewish refugees of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century encountered relatively few legal restrictions on their emigration to Britain and the U.S. The 1905 Aliens Act, and corresponding U.S. legislation, changed all that.

The Aliens act of 1905 was aimed at halting the flow of Jewish refugees fleeing pogroms launched by Russia's Tsarist regime. Winston Churchill entered Parliament representing North Manchester, having won the support of leaders of Manchester's Jewish community for his stance of opposition to this nefarious law, which provided the foundation for all subsequent U.K. immigration legislation down to the present day. The sincerity of Churchill's pro-refugee stance must be judged against his unbending opposition, during the whole of the rest of his political career, to the entry of any significant number of Jewish refugees into Britain.

Steve Cohen, in his pamphlet entitled From the Jews to the Tamils, Britain's Mistreatment of Refugees, takes up the story.

*The first ever comprehensive immigration controls, the 1905 Aliens Act, were enacted precisely to deny entrance to Jewish refugees fleeing pogroms (massacres) and discriminatory legislation in Russia and Eastern Europe. ...[A] contemporary critic of the Aliens Act, Alfred Zimmern, wrote 'It is true that it does not specify Jews by name and that it is claimed that others beside Jews will be effected by the Act. But this is only a pretence'<sup>27</sup> ... [T]he Act excluded 'undesirable immigrants': ... someone who 'cannot show that he has in his possession ... the means of decently supporting himself' ... the Act did contain an exception for an immigrant 'who proves that he is seeking admission to this country solely to avoid persecution or punishment on religious or political grounds ...As Zimmern wrote 'Everybody in any way acquainted with the situation in the East of Europe... knows that all Russian and Romanian Jews are victims of constant oppression and persecution. If the right of asylum had been preserved intact the Bill would have failed its whole object.'<sup>28</sup>*

*The statistics speak for themselves. Very few Jews were granted asylum ... — 505 in 1906, 43 in 1907, 20 in 1908, 30 in 1909 and 5 in 1910. ...*

*The Aliens Act was amended by the even harsher Aliens Restriction Act of 1914 and repealed by the quite vicious Aliens Restriction Act of 1919. ... The 1919 Act was passed in a wave of anti-German and anti-Jewish hysteria. A typical Parliamentary intervention was made by Sir Ernest WiId when he said 'Anybody who wants to realise what the peril really is has only to walk down the Mile End Road or Whitechapel Road or in the East End of London generally. They will find these places literally infested by aliens.'<sup>29</sup> Throughout the 1920s the Act served a dual function. Firstly it kept out Jews fleeing the continuing persecution in Eastern Europe. Secondly it resulted in the enforced deportation of many Jewish communists...*

*All this pales into relative insignificance compared to the virtual closed-door policy directed against Jews fleeing the Nazi holocaust. In the 6 years following the Nazi take-over in Germany in 1933 until the declaration of war only about 50,000 Jews were admitted into the UK.... The majority of Jews who did manage to gain entry did so only because some members of the Jewish community leadership at a meeting with the Home Secretary on April 7th 1933 agreed that no refugee would become 'a charge on public funds' and the various Jewish refugee committees undertook to financially support refugees.'<sup>30</sup> This burden on the Jewish community in the UK was grotesque and it is no exaggeration to say that it was analogous to the collective financial levies enforced on the Jewish community in Nazi Germany. It is also reminiscent of the 'no recourse to public funds' requirement that has run through every single piece of immigration legislation since 1905.*

*The imposition of a visa requirement on Tamils fleeing persecution in Sri Lanka has a precedent which is now almost forgotten to history. This was the imposition of a visa requirement in May 1938 on nationals of Germany and Austria - that meant on Jews trying to flee Germany and Austria... secret instructions were issued to Consuls and Passport Control Officers in Austria and Germany stating that the main purpose of the visa requirement was to 'regulate the flow into the United Kingdom of persons who... may wish to take refuge there in considerable numbers.' The instructions stated that the ultimate test for admission was 'whether or not an applicant is likely to be an asset in the United Kingdom.' Excluded from those 'likely to be an asset' were 'persons likely to seek employment'.<sup>31</sup>*

*.... the Daily Mail wrote 'To be ruled by misguided sentimentalism... would be disastrous... Once it was known that Britain offered sanctuary to all who cared to come the floodgates would be opened and we would be inundated by thousands seeking a home.'<sup>32</sup> The Express in a leader asked rhetorically 'Shall All Come In?' and stated 'We need to ask, for there is*

*powerful agitation here to admit all Jewish refugees without question or discrimination. It would be unwise to overload the basket like that. It would stir up elements here that fatten on anti-Semitic propaganda. They would point to the fresh tide of foreigners, almost all belonging to the extreme Left. They would ask "What if Poland, Hungary, Rumania also expel their Jewish citizens? Must we admit them Too?"<sup>33</sup>.*

*The mistreatment of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazism is probably without parallel... those Jews who did manage to gain entry ... and many who had lived in the UK for many years without taking citizenship, were interned as suspected 'enemy aliens.' The most notorious internment camp was the Warth Mill camp in Bury near Manchester. Warth Mill was a derelict cotton factory. Here is an extract from an account by one internee of the conditions in the camp: "in the big hall there were 500 people. Two thousand people were housed in the whole building... The building was surrounded by 2 rows of barbed wire, between which armed guards patrolled. ... We were ordered to fetch our beds but found out they were only old boards... There were neither tables nor benches we had to eat standing... There were 18 water taps for some 2000 people to wash. There was a fight about the lavatories. A week later we succeeded to get some lime for the lavatories... The Commandant refused to give any drugs for the sick people without payment. There was one bathtub for 2000 people... The officers took our wallets, the soldiers took our suitcases and they took anything they fancied (novels, books, chocolates, pencils, paper, cigarettes) and distributed the things among themselves in front of us."*

The nadir of the Jewish refugee crisis was reached at the Evian Conference in July 1938, convened by Roosevelt. Christopher Sykes (later a Conservative M.P.) gives a fascinating and insightful account of this wretched affair in his *Crossroads to Israel*:

*Five years after Hitler had risen to power, action was attempted which should have been taken in the first year of his rule... One can say to the credit of Western civilisation that such action was recognised as necessary, but one cannot unfortunately say more.*

*The initiative came from President Roosevelt. In June of 1938 ... he proposed that there should be a meeting of governmental representatives from all the countries of America and Europe except Germany. ... "Such a conference," he said, "would manifest before the non-European world the urgency of emigration, chiefly to Palestine."*

*The British Government took alarm and ... asked that the conference should be confined to representatives of Governments prepared to accept*

*immigrants, that the agenda should deal with refugees and not only with the Jewish problem in Germany, and, most urgently, that the subject of Palestine should not be discussed. Roosevelt agreed to all these conditions.*

*The representatives of thirty-one countries assembled in the Hotel Royal at Evian on the 6th of July. ... [along with] over a hundred organisations, mostly Jewish and all representing distressed minorities...*

*Optimism did not survive for more than a day or two. What came out more and more clearly was that the governments concerned were not prepared to inconvenience themselves for the sake of the Jews or anyone else and that the delegates were not authorised to do more than make edifying speeches in favour of toleration. Some of them did not even trouble to go this far and merely insisted on the danger to themselves of alien immigration, especially when it became clear that the enormous Jewish minority of Poland, reduced to misery by the iniquitous "Government of the Colonels," was also appealing for help. The conference developed "an unfriendly atmosphere of evasions and rationalisations." ...<sup>34</sup>*

*There was only one really striking exception to the negative attitude of the governments assembled at Evian. It was to be found in the conduct of the Dominican Republic. Although in extent not very much larger than Palestine, this state showed the reckless generosity which alone could save the world at such a moment. The Dominican representative, to the surprise and one hopes the shame of the others, conveyed to the Conference the offer of his Government, to receive a hundred thousand Jews from Germany and Austria...*

*The United States agreed to allow Jewish immigrants in to the limit of the legal quota for Germans which amounted to 30,000 a year. ...In the same years Great Britain took in approximately the same number of German Jews as America.*

*...[T]he Evian Conference failed, and with that failure went the doom of millions of innocent human beings... official observers from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy looked on with pleased contempt.*

*The Zionists, who played no part in the conference, were not worried by its failure. They seem to have expected no great result from it, and gave no expression of embitterment when the result turned out to be negative.*

*From the start they regarded the whole enterprise with hostile indifference. Zionist writers scarcely mention it. The fact is that what was attempted at Evian was in no sense congenial to the spirit of Zionism. The reason is not obscure. If the thirty-one nations had done their duty and shown hospitality to those in dire need, then the pressure on the National Home and the heightened enthusiasm of Zionism within Palestine, would both have been relaxed. This was the last thing that the Zionist leaders wished for. As things stood after Evian the outlook for the Jews was black throughout the*

world except (to quote Norman Bentwich again) "for the bright spot of Palestine and the speck of Dominica." The Zionist leaders preferred that it should remain that way. Even in the more terrible days ahead they made no secret of the fact even when talking to Gentiles, that they did not want Jewish settlements outside Palestine to be successful. They did not want Santo Domingo to become more than a speck. They wanted a Jewish Palestine and the Dominican Republic could never be that.

...It is hard, perhaps impossible, to find a parallel in history to this particular Zionist idea which was at the heart of the Zionist accomplishment during the ten years after 1938. That such was the basic Zionist idea is not a matter of opinion, but a fact abundantly provable by evidence. It was an idea in whose reality people outside could not usually believe at first, and which often shocked them when they recognised its existence.<sup>35</sup>

Sykes speaks more in sorrow than anger about Britain's despicable role, but at least he doesn't suppress facts which speak for themselves. For Britain's apologists, these facts are deeply embarrassing; for Zionism, the story of its accommodation with anti-Semitism is nothing less than explosive. This explains why Bernard Wasserstein is able to make an extremely detailed study of British policy, yet exclude an account of the Zionist leadership's connivance with it. When it comes to drawing conclusions, he is unable to make or accept any criticism of the Zionist movement's record. In the final chapter of his book, he criticises Sykes' comments on Zionist acquiescence to anti-Semitic immigration controls. Readers can judge for themselves whether he makes an effective defence:

*Christopher Sykes writes:*

*"The Jewish Agency were determined ... not to budge an inch from their essential principle: the flow of refugees was to come into Palestine and was to be diverted nowhere else: better that they should die than be so used as to enfeeble Zionist resolve."*

*... [A] peculiar inversion of logic leads historians such as ... Mr Sykes to condemn not the British Government but the Zionists for the failure to find Jewish refugees safe havens in places other than Palestine. It is perhaps necessary to state the obvious fact that it was not in the power of the Zionist Organisation to decree that Jews be admitted to British colonies or to the United Kingdom; that power resided in the British Government; we have seen how it was exercised. As for the further allegation by Mr Sykes that the Zionists preferred that Jewish refugees perish rather than permit them to be diverted to destinations other than Palestine, this may be described as a lie within a lie. For not only was there in reality nowhere else that refugees might have gone in substantial numbers, but, as has been shown, the Zionists were in fact prepared to countenance, and indeed to co-operate in, such a diversion of Jewish refugees to safe destinations.<sup>36</sup>*

Wasserstein gives an interesting overview of the British/U.S closed-door policy between 1939 and 1942:

*During the first two years of the war...the German Government was not the primary obstacle to Jewish emigration from Nazi-controlled areas of Europe. Not all Jews, of course, were permitted or able to emigrate. Those incarcerated in concentration camps, prisons, or ghettos had little opportunity of escape... Jews who left Germany were forced to surrender their property and were often subjected to brutal treatment before departure. Some tens of thousands of Jews managed to escape: in 1940 36,945 Jews entered the U.S.A., and 8,398 were admitted to Palestine; a few thousand more reached Argentina, Canada, and other countries. But these numbers constituted only a small fraction of the vast multitudes desperately seeking an escape route from Nazi-dominated Europe. That the great majority of Jews failed to emigrate was primarily due to the extreme reluctance of all countries to admit them. ... in absolute terms the numbers admitted (43,450 in 1939 and 36,945 in 1940) fell far short of the peak years of Jewish immigration between 1899 and 1914 when about 1,300,000 Jews had arrived (out of a total immigration to the U.S.A. in those years of 13,700,000). The main obstacle to larger Jewish immigration was the quota system imposed under American law, which laid down the numbers of immigrants of each national origin to be admitted in any year. The law prevented many applicants from qualifying for admission, and long queues developed for visas several years in advance. In spite of the intense pressure for visas, there was formidable public and congressional opposition to any change in the immigration laws. The interpretation of the law by the State Department was, in general, stringent and restrictive, particularly towards refugees 'likely to become a public charge'. After July 1940 hardly any visas were issued to applicants from Germany.*

*Throughout the war the British and United States Governments continued the futile search among the waste places of the earth for suitable havens for Jewish refugees. Exotic proposals for Jewish refugee settlement in a number of improbable places, among them Northwest Australia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and the Mindanao, area of the southern Philippines, flourished briefly in the official files, and were speedily consigned to the oblivion of the archives. The United States Government was particularly attracted to the notion of large-scale Jewish settlement in Angola; the Government of Portugal (which ruled Angola) betrayed no interest in the idea. A suggestion that Jews might settle in Alaska was similarly discarded.<sup>37</sup>*

Meanwhile, boats laden with Jewish refugees continued to set sail into war zones with nowhere to go. Wasserstein provides ample evidence of British

pressure on Turkey, Romania and other governments to prevent these boats from setting sail. A series of incidents both dreadful and shameful ensued, of typhus and starvation among refugees trapped for months on overcrowded boats, many times being forced to return to their fascist tormentors. A famous example was the *St Louis*, whose passengers endured months of hell on the high seas, were denied permission to enter Britain, the U.S., Cuba, Canada and countless other countries. They were eventually forced to return to German occupied Europe, where many were subsequently to die in concentration camps.

Another such incident was the wreck of the *Salvador* in the Sea of Marmara on 12 December 1940, when over two hundred of the passengers drowned. Among the dead were seventy children. The head of the Foreign Office Refugee Section, T. M. Snow, commented:

*There could have been no more opportune disaster from the point of view of stopping this traffic.*<sup>38</sup>

Wasserstein reports:

*These proceedings in the eastern Mediterranean had not failed to arouse dissension in London both among the Zionists and within the British Government. Weizmann took a surprisingly acquiescent attitude to the Government's actions, apparently concerned by the reports of Gestapo involvement in the illegal immigration traffic, and worried that large-scale immigration might imperil the restricted legal immigration schedules under the White Paper. After discussing the matter with the Colonial Secretary, Lord Lloyd, Weizmann, in a 'painful scene' in the Zionist Executive (as it was described by Mrs Blanche Dugdale, Balfour's niece, who was present), argued that 'they must not have anything to do with this business just for the sake of getting an additional 3,000 people into Palestine-who might later turn out to be a millstone round their neck.'*<sup>39</sup>

In the conclusion to his book, Wasserstein delivers a damning indictment of Britain's overall response to the Holocaust:

*During the first two years of the war, when the German authorities bent their efforts to securing the exodus of Jews from the Reich and from Nazi-occupied territory, it was the British Government which took the lead in barring the escape routes from Europe against Jewish refugees. On the second day of the war an overcrowded hulk, carrying terrified refugees, including women and children, in flight from the terror of Britain's enemies, was fired on by British forces when those on board sought haven on British-held territory (in a country which Britain, under the different exigencies of a previous war, had thought fit to declare their 'national home'). In January 1940 the Colonial Office considered it necessary, in order to pre-*

serve British security in the Middle East, to seek to prevent an American charity sending food to dying families who had been marooned for months on the frozen Danube. The Government of Palestine, in December 1940, after the Patria explosion, was so anxious to get rid of the surviving passengers from the Atlantic, that it was not prepared to delay their deportation for a matter of days in order to isolate typhoid carriers: the result was an epidemic and many deaths. ... The not inconsiderable expanse of the British Empire was found, as one official put it, to have an 'absorptive capacity of nil' when it came to the admission of Jewish refugees. The Labour Home Secretary [Herbert Morrison] considered the danger of anti-Semitism in Britain during the war so menacing as to preclude the admission of any significant numbers of Jewish refugees to the United Kingdom. At the end of the war he urged that refugees from Germany should be compulsorily renationalized as Germans, and he is represented in Cabinet minutes as arguing for their return to Germany on the basis that "anti-Semitism was a lesser threat there than in Britain."

...On 17 December 1942 Eden, in a memorable scene in the House of Commons, read out the Allied declaration condemning the Nazi persecutions of the Jews. In private on 31 December 1942 Eden presided over a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on the Reception and Accommodation of Jewish Refugees at which it was agreed that Britain could not admit more than 1,000 to 2,000 further refugees. It was later agreed that no substantial numbers could be admitted to the Dominions or the colonies.

In response to public concern it was decided to convene an Anglo-American conference in Bermuda to consider the refugee problem. The conference, meeting (privately) in April 1943, was based on an implicit understanding that the United States delegates would not raise the thorny issue of immigration to Palestine, while their British colleagues would avoid the contentious subject of American immigration laws. After 'ten days of agreeable discussion' the British delegates reported to London that 'so far as immediate relief to refugees is concerned, the conference was able to achieve very little'. It is hardly surprising that it was considered imprudent to publish the final report of the conference. The meagre results of the Bermuda deliberations did not deter Eden from pronouncing the conference a 'marked success'. Nor did he shrink from informing the House of Commons on 19 May 1943 that 'if there were the slightest prospect' of refugees reaching Palestine in excess of the thirty thousand vacancies still remaining under the White Paper quota he would be 'willing and eager' to discuss the admission of these larger numbers." The true value of these protestations may be assessed by weighing them against the (non-public) statement handed to the American Ambassador in London in December 1943, when there appeared a possibility of securing the departure of seventy thousand Jews from Romania. The Ambassador was in-

formed that 'the Foreign Office are concerned with the difficulties of disposing of any considerable number of Jews should they be rescued from enemy-occupied territory'. When the fate of Hungarian Jewry hung in the balance in mid- 1944 the attitude of most ministers and officials was similar. In the final year of the war, when escape from Europe again became a practicable proposition for a few of the Jewish survivors, the British Government resumed its practice of earlier years in seeking to prevent the departure of Jews from Europe.

Nor did other aspects of British policy towards Jewish refugees during the war bring greater credit on the Government. The 'fifth column' panic of 1940 led to the needless internment of thirty thousand 'enemy aliens', the overwhelming majority of whom were refugees friendly to the allied cause. ...Pleas to the Government to relax the economic blockade of Axis Europe to permit some food and medical relief to be sent to the ghettos and concentration camps met with little substantial success. The proposal for the bombardment of Auschwitz by the Allies, although favoured by Churchill and Eden, was obstructed by officials in the Foreign Office and the Air Ministry.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Economic Review April 1911

<sup>28</sup> Economic Review April 1911

<sup>29</sup> Hansard 22.10.1919

<sup>30</sup> AJ. Sherman, *Island Refuge* p30

<sup>31</sup> *Island Refuge* p91

<sup>32</sup> *Daily Mail* March 23rd 1938

<sup>33</sup> *Daily Express* March 24th 1938

<sup>34</sup> The Australian delegation stated to the Evian Conference: "It will no doubt be appreciated that as we have no racial problems in our land we are not desirous of importing one." Canada's Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie King wrote "This is no time for Canada to act on humanitarian grounds". Defending his government's part in the abject failure at Evian, he stated that "as far as he was concerned the admission of refugees perhaps posed a greater menace to Canada in 1938 than did Hitler."

Quotes from *None is Too Many (Canada & The Jews of Europe, 1933-1948)* by Irving Abella and Harold Troper. Published by Lester & Dennys, Toronto 1982 ISBN 0-919630-31-6.

<sup>35</sup> *Cross Roads to Israel*, by Christopher Sykes (pp195-201)

<sup>36</sup> Wasserstein, pp346-7

<sup>37</sup> Wasserstein, pp46-7

<sup>38</sup> Wasserstein, p77

<sup>39</sup> Wasserstein, p65



## ***Britain's complicity in the Holocaust***



From the beginning of 1942 Churchill faced growing pressure both at home and from Roosevelt and Stalin to begin rapid preparations for a Second Front (an attack on Germany from the west).

On 6 March 1942 the United States Joint Strategic Committee argued that *“British Isles should be the base area for an offensive to defeat the German Armed Forces”*, and recommended a British-American landing in September 1942.<sup>41</sup> However, the UK

government resisted an accelerated build-up of US troops in Britain, pressed for by Roosevelt, and insisted instead that the North Africa campaign be given priority. However, while the U.S. had little sympathy for Britain’s colonial ambitions, both imperial powers shared a common interest in letting Germany and the Soviet Union slug it out on the eastern Front. Meanwhile, the U.S. had its own colonial war to wage, in the Pacific.

An example of U.S. frustration with the U.K. government is given in the personal notes of Brigadier General Eisenhower, then Deputy Chief of US War Plans Division, in January 1942 *“we’ve got to go to Europe and fight. ... and we’ve got to quit wasting resources all over the world - and still worse - wasting time. If we’re to keep Russia in, save the ME, India and Burma; we’ve got to begin slugging with air at West Europe, to be followed by a land attack as soon as possible.”*<sup>42</sup>

US war secretary Henry L. Stimson described the war for the Mediterranean as *“another diversion in the interests of the British Empire”*. For his part Stalin maintained a constant stream of messages pleading and cajoling Churchill to attack from the West.

This is the context in which Britain received, and suppressed, hard evidence that the Nazis were perpetrating systematic massacres of Jews. Marion Milne, co-producer of a BBC documentary called *“What did you do in the war, Auntie?”*, wrote

*The Holocaust was the best-kept secret of the war. Then its horrors were revealed - apparently for the first time - [in] Richard Dimbleby’s now fa-*

*mous broadcast of 19 April 1945.... New material... reveals that by 1943 the BBC had evidence which conclusively proved Hitler's plan for the "total extermination of European Jewry" ... Despite the evidence... the BBC foreign and home news boards concluded: "It seems desirable to soft-pedal the whole thing".... In wartime, government censors made sure that the BBC would never be able to say anything contrary to official policy. The government line, echoed by the BBC, was to win the war, then save the Jews.... Lord Weidenfeld, a Jewish refugee publisher, adds: "There was nothing ideological or mythological about this. It wasn't deeply instinctive racial hatred. It was expediency."... In reality, the BBC, in line with the Foreign Office, ... maintain[ed] a very British silence on the Holocaust.<sup>43</sup>*

New evidence now puts the moment when Britain knew precisely what was going on to January 1941.

Hundreds of thousands of Europeans tuned in to BBC World Service, expecting a truthful account of the course of the war. Many Jewish communities had yet to fall under Nazi occupation; they would have had a chance to escape had the truth been told. Here we come to the first and most obvious motive for suppressing the truth about the Holocaust. Britain's policy of denying a place of refuge to Jews facing extermination would have been very difficult to maintain had the public known what the government knew.

However, there was another, deeper reason: the War Cabinet was afraid that, unless the truth about the Holocaust was suppressed, such news would intensify public demands for a more rapid Second Front. Britain was determined to postpone active preparations for the Normandy landing until its colonial empire was made safe, which meant waging war for North Africa and Burma, while simultaneously pleading that they weren't ready to begin preparations for war in Europe.

By 1943, with its victory in the war for the colonies, UK imperialism had accomplished the first of its two strategic war aims, even if this victory was to sour soon after the war's end. The other war aim was to prevent revolution in Europe.

WW1 had produced a wave of intense class struggle in all the imperialist countries. No-one knew the truth of the adage that 'war breeds revolution' more than Winston Churchill, who had earlier, in 1918, orchestrated the armies of 22 countries against the Russian Revolution; a few years later he was charged, as Home Secretary, with the responsibility of repressing the 1926 General Strike. Signs were multiplying that WW2 would repeat the experience of WW1. The resistance movements in France, Yugoslavia, Greece were assuming a more and more the form of anti-imperialist struggle; mass strikes

swept Northern Italy in mid 1943; illegal strikes and labour unrest were sharply increasing in both Britain and the US.

The centrepiece of the UK government's strategy to avert revolution was the immense bombing campaign aimed at German civilian targets, in particular working class residential districts.

Securing the Empire and preventing revolution: British imperialism sacrificed the Jews of Europe in pursuance of these lofty aims.

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**41** Second Front Now! p 45

**42** Second Front Now! p 44

**43** From *The Independent*, 9 May 1995, by Marion Milne, co-producer of BBC auto-documentary "What Did You Do In the War, Auntie?"

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## **Note on Sanctions and blockades.**

Total economic blockade of enemy-held territory has long been a cardinal principle of British military doctrine. Today, this method of indiscriminate warfare, predicated on economic supremacy and therefore unavailable to poor nations, is being used with genocidal effect on Iraq. During each of the World Wars, the London government made revealing exceptions to their policy of total blockade. First, in WW1, with Britain desperate to swing U.S. Jews behind U.S. entry into the war, yet unable or unwilling to confront the anti-Semitism of its Tsarist ally...

*With the entry to Turkey into the war, Palestine had become for Great Britain enemy territory and therefore subject to blockade. On 7 December 1914, the American Ambassador in London, Walter Page, requested free passage for an American relief ship, USS Vulcan. Harold Nicolson minuted that a refusal might alienate 'Judeo-American opinion'. Page's request was granted, only for a plethora of others to follow. They were all granted, the Foreign office even going so far as to advise British Jews wishing to aid Palestinian ones to channel their money through American agencies. The French took a very different attitude, suggesting that it should be a condition of raising the blockade that not only the Jews but all the destitute of Palestine should benefit. ...<sup>44</sup>*

By contrast, Britain's War Cabinet restricted food aid to the inmates of concentration camps in the latter half of WW2:

*There is... a painful contrast between the niggardly quantities of food relief which the Ministry of Economic Warfare permitted to be sent to Jews in central and eastern Europe, and the wholesale operation by which the Allies supplied the entire food needs of the population of Axis-occupied Greece between 1942 and the end of the war. As against a total of 4,500 tons of foodstuffs which the International Red Cross was permitted to send to inmates of concentration camps between autumn 1943 and 1945 \$40,000,000 worth of foodstuffs (comprising up to 35,000 tons per month) were permitted to go through the blockade to Greece. The huge disparity between those figures calls for explanation.<sup>45</sup>*

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<sup>44</sup> Britain and Zion p46

<sup>45</sup> Wasserstein, p353-4