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**Britain, Palestine and the Creation of Israel;  
How Britain Failed to Protect its Protectorate**

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## **Britain, Palestine and the Creation of Israel; How Britain**

### **Failed to Protect its Protectorate**

#### **Abstract:**

This article will consider the role of the British as protectorate of Palestine and their actions in the creation of the state of Israel. It will focus primarily on the work of the Anglo-American Commission and the MP Richard Crossman, who was appointed to the commission and was determined to find an answer to the problems within the region. It will consider the relationship between the British government and the interested parties in the dispute as well as outlining the actions of the British government and the motivations which lay behind them. It will conclude that the British government found itself in 1945 in an extremely difficult position and despite its best efforts it was unable to please all of the interested parties. Instead, Britain pursued a policy of damage limitation, souring relations with Israel and leaving the nation to fend for itself in 1948.

#### **Article:**

The conflict over the conflicted territory of Israel (or Palestine as it was previously) has been a thorn in the side of the whole region for generations, and has been used as justification for terrorism, both within the region and globally. However, over time, the history of this conflict has begun to be forgotten with the focus on the new battles to be fought. The newest battle is about to take place at the UN General Assembly where the Palestinian authority are expected this month (September 2011) to seek official recognition as a state, without the need for a peace agreement with the Israelis. This action is being supported by several Arab states, including the newly liberated Egypt,

which has a long standing peace agreement with Israel. Obviously this is hugely problematic for the USA, long-standing ally of the Israelis, who have threatened to veto the Palestinians plans for official recognition. The Arab Spring, which has swept several dictators from power, hopefully to be replaced by democratically elected governments and representatives, has affected Israel's relationships with many of its neighbours, and led to further instability in the region. It is the light of these events, that this article traces the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and specifically the role of the British government in the collapse of the Palestinian state, and the creation of the Israeli state in 1948.

The study of the role of the British government in the creation of Israel is often overlooked, as it falls between the cracks of British political history and Israeli and Middle Eastern history. The role of the British government in the reshaping of the Middle East in the immediate post-war period is often mentioned in passing in studies covering British post-war foreign policy, often being described rather disparagingly. Rhiannon Vickers judged this period of diplomacy in her 2004 book on Labour foreign policy as a "failure", a view shared by many other specialists.<sup>1</sup> A few select publications focus on this issue in greater detail. Among these Joseph Gorney's book *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-48* and William Roger Louis' *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945-8* are perhaps the most comprehensive, but as their titles suggest, the remit of the publications are far more expansive than the period 1945-8.<sup>2</sup> This article will add to the limited existing literature and fill a gap within it by focusing on the period 1945-8 and specifically the activities of the British government in relation to Palestine and Israel.

In order to provide a comprehensive and insightful account of events, the role of one particular individual will be focused on. By focusing on one individual and his actions, rather than the wider Zionist community, this article will highlight the role of a

key individual on the Anglo-American commission, and after, in pressing the British government into action, not wholly successfully. Richard Crossman MP, better known for his disruptive political behaviour and tell-all Cabinet diaries, was appointed to the Anglo-American Commission in 1945. The commission was asked to consider the likely repercussions of issuing a further 100,000 Palestine entry certificates to displaced European Jews. The wider, less publicised role of the Commission was to make recommendations on the future of Palestine in the light of the proposed high levels of immigration and the viability of a Jewish homeland in the area by partitioning the Palestinian state. Crossman became, as a result of his time and travels on the commission, a life-long supporter of the state of Israel and the Zionist movement, arguing that a two state solution was the only resolution to the region's difficulties. He was also personally particularly devoted to Chaim Weizmann, the first President of Israel, keeping a photo of him on his desk in his home. He was a member of the Labour Friends of Israel group and was one of many Labour MPs who fought very hard to persuade British governments, regardless of their political persuasions, to adopt a more pro-Israeli policy, participating in debates in the House of Commons and writing articles on Israel for various publications periodically throughout his career. This article will focus on his role on the Anglo-American Commission and Crossman's observations of the views and activities of the key members of the Attlee government, especially Attlee and his Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, who Crossman labelled "murderers".<sup>3</sup> Strong words, undoubtedly reflecting his own frustration with the situation in the Middle East and his ultimate inability to help resolve it.

### **Britain's role in Palestine**

The Zionist movement became increasingly vocal and strong, particularly in the United States, during the inter-war period. The movement demanded a Jewish homeland, with the location of this being accepted by many Zionists to be in the modern day location of Palestine in the Middle East. Palestine was a predominantly Islamic area, although immigration, predominantly of European Jews, was an ever-increasing problem for the state. Jews, desperate to flee persecution and violence, travelled to Palestine to, hopefully, find security within what they considered to be *their* historic homeland. They did not find it, being viewed with suspicion by the Palestinian government, fearful of being evicted from their own nation. Britain had been granted colonial rights over Palestine at the end of First World War after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and was therefore protectorate of the state, a difficult position to be in.<sup>4</sup> This meant Britain was charged, by the now defunct League of Nations, to preserve Palestine and ensure its security. A question mark existed in some minds as to whether Britain was simply charged with protecting Palestine from external forces, or increasingly, internal tensions. Following the end of the Second World War and the discovery of Nazi atrocities levelled at the Jewish community, the calls for a Jewish homeland began to receive a more favourable response from politicians, particularly in the US which had a vocal Jewish electorate in certain key areas, such as New York, keen to see the US government defend and protect their religious brethren. With the end of the Second World War, increasing numbers of European Jews travelled to Palestine to resettle in their “homeland” as they desperately wanted to leave the site of such violence and hatred, regardless of the post-war peace, and the governing authority – Britain – had difficulty responding to the issues involved.<sup>5</sup>

The British government traditionally held a fairly pro-Arab stance, primarily due to the vitally important oil trade which existed between Britain and the Arab states and the close relationships built during Britain’s Empire building and its role as a Great power.<sup>6</sup> There had, however, been fairly mixed messages from the British governments

on the issue of Palestine since the final years of the First World War, due to the changing political environment surrounding Palestine and the various factions within the three main political parties in Westminster. The Balfour declaration of November 1917 was published while Britain was still fighting in World War One, with the intention of finding favour with the USA, who had joined the allies in April of that year. It indicated that the British government favoured the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. However, this declaration was directly contradicted by the 1939 McDonald white paper, issued by the Conservative government, which committed the British government to retain Palestine in its current, predominantly Islamic, form. Again, this declaration was an attempt to win friends, in this instance, friends in the Middle East in the forthcoming war, where the support of the Jewish community was taken for granted. While there was a great deal of confusion on the issue with different messages being sent at different times, relations between Britain and many Middle Eastern countries, such as Transjordan, were good, although relations with Egypt were difficult at this time.

Due to the unpopularity within the Middle East of increasing Jewish immigration and concerns over its impact, British foreign policy had generally resisted this measure as much as possible, instead favouring European resettlement of displaced European Jews. This policy was undermined for several reasons. The first reason was the pressure which was put on the British forces in Palestine. As displaced European Jews began to enter Palestine, often illegally, the demands for equal rights and an independent Jewish-governed homeland became harder to ignore.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, the USA, now Britain's main ally and post-war superpower, had a large and very powerful domestic Jewish population which demanded nothing less than a Jewish homeland in Palestine at the earliest opportunity. This internal pressure on the American government meant that Britain could expect constant pressure from the American administration concerning the future of Palestine.<sup>8</sup> To add further confusion to the situation, different British announcements

had promised different outcomes. The Balfour declaration had committed Britain to establishing a Jewish homeland, while the 1939 white paper on Palestine had firmly supported the status quo in the region.<sup>9</sup> Both sides in the conflict could point to a declaration from the Palestinian protectorate supporting their cause, putting the British in a very difficult position, largely of its own making. This was the situation which the Labour government found itself in when it entered power in 1945.

The Labour Party, prior to winning the general election in 1945, had pledged its support to increasing Jewish immigration into Palestine, inevitably leading to a Jewish state within the Middle East. Of the Attlee cabinet, a large number, including numerous high profile members, supported the establishment of such a state, including Herbert Morrison, Stafford Cripps, Hugh Dalton, Hugh Gaitskell and Aneurin Bevan. Of this group, two specific sub-groups can be identified, both putting forward different solutions to the problem. The first group, including Morrison, supported a bi-national one state solution, made up of Palestinians and Jews with a multi-national force keeping the peace. The second group, which included Bevan and, following the Anglo-American Commission, Crossman, argued that Palestine needed to be partitioned into two separate countries, as the two sides would not be able to co-habit peacefully.<sup>10</sup> How this should practically be achieved was the subject of much wrangling and no settled policy was agreed. Both these groups agreed that the Jewish population needed to be recognized and have a stake in government in some form.

Upon entering government, it became clear that either of these policy “solutions” would cause severe upset amongst Middle Eastern states at a time when Britain could not afford to alienate potential allies. Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Secretary, concluded that by drawing America into consultation on the issue of Palestine, this might force the American administration into taking a more realistic stance, forcing them to recognize Britain’s difficulties and pressures, rather than simply putting forward their own solution

with no thought for the consequences the British may face.<sup>11</sup> As Crossman himself pointed out in 1946, Bevin “had been determined to drag the Americans off the side-line on which they have been ‘rooting’ for twenty years.”<sup>12</sup> After some consultation, Truman agreed to a joint Anglo-American Commission to consider the primary issue, the proposed granting of 100,000 certificates to European Jews to enter Palestine, a key step towards the creation of a Jewish state. William Roger Louis argued that “the British intended to demonstrate [during the Anglo-American Commission] to the Americans that the refugee problem was so great that its solution could not be found in Palestine alone, but rather in the acceptance of Jewish displaced persons in other countries, not least the United States, something the American Administration were unwilling to accept.”<sup>13</sup> The figure of 100,000 does not appear to have had any particular significance, although some surveys had placed the figure of displaced European Jews at 100,000. However, other surveys had placed the figure much higher and the figure seems to have been arbitrarily set.

### **The Anglo-American Commission**

The conflict in Palestine was not an issue Crossman was interested in until 1945, when Bevin instructed him to join the Anglo-American Commission. During the Second World War he had worked producing propaganda for the British, aided by his ability to speak fluent German (taught to him by his first wife, Zita, a German Jew) and his academic background. It seems clear that Bevin wanted the Commission members to approach the issue without preconceptions or predetermined ideas. At the very least, he wished the Commission to have the appearance of neutrality. Hector McNeil, Bevin’s Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS), indicated to Crossman that he had been chosen for the commission specifically because of his lack of public statements on the future of

Palestine.<sup>14</sup> It could be argued that Bevin gave Crossman this role in order to test his abilities, perhaps with a future governmental position in mind.<sup>15</sup>

After travelling across Europe, the Middle East, and including a brief visit to the USA, with the Anglo-American Commission for much of 1946, Crossman found himself in a difficult position. Crossman was seeking an answer to the problem, not a convenient or expedient solution, and he believed an essential component of that was to establish peace in the region, allowing British troops to return home. In accordance with his personal views, he suggested to the Anglo-American Commission that not only should the 100,000 entry certificates be issued to displaced Jews, the partitioning of Palestine and the creation of a Jewish state should also be recommended. The proposal would have thrilled the Truman administration and Zionist supporters, but would have horrified and angered the leaders of the Arab states and their supporters. This was hardly a peaceful compromise, nor a course of action that the British government would be keen to institute. Luckily for Crossman, the majority of the Commission members did not accept this view, and instead Crossman concurred with the majority recommending the issuing of the 100,000 certificates but falling short of advocating a Jewish state in the region. If he had been placed on the Commission to represent the British pro-Arab stance, he was a bitter disappointment for the British government. While he certainly proved himself capable, he did not prove himself loyal, a fact which damaged his career prospects immeasurably. As he wrote to Attlee following the publication of the commission's report "when we were appointed, no indication was given to us whatsoever that you desired us to push responsibility on to America. If I had been told that this was your wish, I would of course have declined to serve on the committee unless the British government had persuaded the American government *in advance* to promise to help carry out the report if unanimity were achieved."<sup>16</sup>

When Bevin received the report and learnt of its contents, he concluded that he simply could not accept its recommendations, but instead announced he would use it as a basis for discussion, “perhaps a timetable, in return for concessions from the Jews toward the Arabs.”<sup>17</sup> The stumbling block was not primarily over the entry certificates, although that was a contentious issue. The issue which the British government was deeply concerned about was relating to armed terrorist gangs in Palestine, particularly the Jewish armed groups, such as the Irgun. The Attlee government wanted these groups disarming before the issuing of immigration certificates was agreed so as not to be seen to be pandering to armed terrorist groups, while the report did not make this a pre-requisite.<sup>18</sup> Crossman naively believed that before he set out for the overseas Commission hearings, Bevin had promised the group that a unanimous report would be implemented and its recommendations accepted by the British government, regardless of what those recommendations were. “At a lunch given to the committee in London, the Foreign Secretary stated unequivocally that, if the committee reached unanimity, he himself would carry the report into effect.”<sup>19</sup> By using all of his skills to establish a unanimous report, and by personally supporting partition, he believed that Chaim Weizmann would be able to control the Zionist movement, leading them down a moderate path, bringing an end to any violence and extremism. The British government would be able to begin bringing troops home in the near future, once the new arrangements were in place as they would not be required in a partitioned (and therefore peaceful) region. His optimism was misplaced and he seems to have been overly confident in his own skills and abilities. Crossman was to be bitterly disappointed if he believed he and his colleagues had found a solution to this intractable problem in the space of eighteen months.

The Labour government did not respond positively to the proposals of the commission and this was compounded by Truman’s almost immediate call for the British

government to implement the recommendations of the commission. Truman went even further and recommended the establishment of a Jewish state in the near future, something the commission had stopped short of. This went down well with the US domestic Jewish electorate and placed the pressure firmly back on the British government, exactly what the Commission had been established to avoid. Without the disarming of the Jewish terrorist groups, the Attlee government refused to agree to the issuing of the 100,000 entry certificates. This left the situation in stalemate, with the work of the Commission being largely divisive and not providing the peaceful solution that had been hoped for.

The motives of Bevin, the Foreign Secretary, have been widely viewed as anti-Semitic, but there appears to be little evidence of this and his biography, Alan Bullock, insisted that Bevin was very keen for a peaceful solution to be found to the problems within the Middle East, particularly in Palestine. As Bullock explained “British policy is not to be explained in personal terms of an ‘implacable hatred’ of the Jews on Bevin’s part which, despite his angry reproaches at Jewish hostility towards the British, there is no reason to believe he felt.”<sup>20</sup> Crossman indicated that the main issue was the unwillingness of the British establishment to relinquish its power and authority within the region. He argued that the Colonial Office was standing in the way of a solution, arguing that the plans of the British government were “a Colonial Office concoction designed in the true tradition of that office to avoid finality. It retains all the keys of power in British hands and even if the Jews and Arabs were prepared to work, it maintains that uneasy equilibrium between that two communities.”<sup>21</sup>

As well as the primary issues in the region, Bevin also appears to have been concerned about a secondary issue; Britain’s defence capabilities in the region. The Labour government believed that it was essential to have a military base in the Middle Eastern territory, and with rocky Anglo-Egyptian relations over the renegotiation of their

1936 Treaty, Palestine was a possible location for an alternative base. This meant that any territorial partition would be difficult for British military planning in the region. This division between the Labour government's official position and the personal views of the numerous Zionist supporters in the party put the government in a very tricky position. Crossman's membership of the Anglo-American commission and his criticism of the government's response to its report essentially established his credentials within the Zionist community and he became one of a fairly large group within the Labour Party who supported the Zionist movement and the state of Israel after its creation. He was, however, not popular with the Prime Minister or the Foreign Secretary, for obvious reasons.

In this period, despite his unpopularity, Crossman's views were not particularly radical or rebellious. He was, in fact, supporting the policy which the Labour Party had adopted on Palestine and the Zionist calls for a Jewish homeland in the Middle East prior to 1945, a solution which was supported by many other Labour MPs. Crossman referred to this in a letter to Attlee, noting that "the Labour government, which has consistently supported Zionism and denounced the white paper [of 1939], cannot go back on its word in the face of this unanimous report without causing the very bloodshed you are so anxious to avoid, and also performing what must be a deeply dishonourable action."<sup>22</sup> The situation may have been compounded by the fact that Bevin had very little knowledge of foreign policy when he became Foreign Secretary in 1945, having been Minister of Labour in the coalition government during the Second World War.<sup>23</sup> This meant that he did not necessarily know or accept the policies which, as the Labour government's Foreign Secretary, he and the party were committed to, instead committing the Labour government to the policies espoused by the previous Conservative government, whom he and Attlee had worked so closely during the wartime coalition.<sup>24</sup> This led to a gradual change in certain policy areas, leaving the party

and its previously accepted foreign policies behind, some of which had already become unworkable in light of developments following the Second World War. Crossman's burgeoning reputation as a troublemaker was due, in large part, to his blatant unwillingness to adhere to the party line, even if that party line had moved since the entry of the party into power and his unwillingness to keep quiet on the issue.

British foreign policy in Palestine was unsurprisingly heavily influenced by Bevin's personal views. While he does not appear to have been anti-Semitic, as discussed above, he concluded that Zionism was a religious sect, as opposed to a developing nation. This was a crucial distinction and many supporters of Zionism, including Crossman considered this perception incorrect, even dangerous. In 1961, Crossman recounted on American television a conversation he had with Bevin concerning the definition of Zionist. He stated that Bevin had told him that the Jews were a religious group, not a nation. "Mr Bevin, you may well tell me this, but these people are going to fight like a nation.' 'Well,' he said to me 'then they aren't Jews.' I replied; 'You'll find out in the end, Mr Bevin, that if you treat them merely as a religion and mistake their nationhood, they will throw you out.' And they didn't behave just like a religion."<sup>25</sup> This difference of opinion on the nature of Zionism and Judaism may have been at the root of the difficulties within the party over the future of Palestine and the displaced European Jewish population.

This change in policy inevitably led to difficulties between the backbenchers and the Labour front bench, and Crossman, particularly in foreign affairs, does not seem to have shied away from this conflict. In fact, he appears to have relished it. It may be that in bringing himself into conflict with the front bench and Bevin in particular, he was earning himself a reputation he desired – that of a principled rebel who was not afraid to fight his own party if necessary in pursuit of a specific policy resolution. In reality, Crossman was beginning to look like something of a traitor and a double-crosser to

certain key elements of the party. In a letter to Attlee, Bevin stated that “nothing I can say will make him [Crossman] alter his ideas about Palestine which derive from his lack of judgement and his intellectual arrogance.”<sup>26</sup> At the 1947 Labour Party Conference in Margate, Bevin’s reference to being “stabbed in the back” was firmly directed at Crossman. Twenty years later, Attlee commented “Oh, Crossman! He was up to anything, I think. There is always that lunatic fringe.”<sup>27</sup> In a similar vein eight years later, Harold Wilson, one of Crossman’s closest political friends, noted that “Dick died as he lived, a bloody juvenile delinquent.”<sup>28</sup> Hardly glowing reviews.

### **UN Referral and Britain’s withdrawal**

In 1947 the situation in Palestine was referred to the United Nations, which was comprised of 51 nations at this time. This appears to have been done for a number of reasons, the most obvious reason being that the British government felt that they could not agree with the decisions which the Anglo-American Commission had reached despite pressure from the USA and increasing violence in Palestine. Something had to be done, but no course of action was easy or without difficulties. The British government had tried and failed to find a solution which would be satisfactory to all and now the problem was to be referred to the council of countries within the fledgling UN. However, Crossman believed that this referral to the UN was simply a first step in the process. “Even more important, he [Bevin] should state that, whatever UNO [United Nations Organisation] decides, British officials, policemen and troops will be withdrawn *by a definite date*.”<sup>29</sup> This UN referral had the benefit of forcing countries that had made difficult and often unrealistic demands of the British government, particularly the United States, to become involved on a more practical level with the situation. It was again hoped by the British government that this would highlight Britain’s difficulties and that a

more realistic policy could be drawn up. Even after the issue had been referred to the UN in 1947, Crossman was still calling in the *New Statesman* for Bevin to “(1) decide, (2) act, and (3) get out.”<sup>30</sup> While Crossman favoured the creation of a Jewish state, his first priority seems to have been the safety of British troops, unsurprising considering he was a British MP.

The UN Commission eventually concluded that mass Jewish immigration into Palestine should begin immediately and that a Jewish homeland should be created as soon as feasibly possible, leaving Britain in a very difficult position. As the occupying force Britain would have to implement a policy which she did not support, and in doing so would almost certainly have incurred the anger and hostility of the Arab states which she had tried so hard not to upset. However, it was unthinkable for Britain to stand in the way of the implementation of the UN resolution. Bevin and the wider British government were deeply committed to the UN organisation, being one of the founder members, and such resistance would have been extremely damaging for the fledgling organisation. Bevin in particular was eager to avoid the UN becoming a “talking shop” as the League of Nations had been in the inter-war period. Bullock indicated that Bevin had not viewed the League of Nations “as a complete failure, and [he] now thought they could advance to world government at a single step” via the United Nations.<sup>31</sup> If Britain did not comply with the wishes of the UN, that still left them with the question of what exactly Britain should do.

This dilemma led Britain to take an unusual decision. Bevin and Attlee concluded that by removing British troops from Palestine, the British could not be held responsible by the Arab nations for the creation of a Jewish homeland. Additionally, this removal of troops would allow the creation of a Jewish homeland, if the Jewish population were militarily strong enough to resist the Arab invasions which would inevitable occur when the British forces were removed. It was unclear what that would mean for the resident

Islamic population. If the Jewish population were not militarily strong, the Arab states would regain control of the area, although what that meant for the resident Jewish community was unclear. Either way, the situation would be resolved without Britain having to take any positive action, or at least that was the hope, although this attitude should precious little concern for the impact on residents of Palestine. Very few individuals in Britain believed that Israel would ever be created as it was assumed that the Arab forces would overpower them even before the state had been established.

Crossman indicated that this false belief had led Britain and the Labour government to make bad decisions in the region. "Starting from the fatal illusion that the Arab armies could easily overwhelm the Jews, our Palestine policy has been based on the foundation of a myth, buttressed by prejudice which now threatens to destroy our whole Middle East position."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, while Britain did not actively encourage the creation of Israel and took action to make its creation more difficult, it could not be accused of actively resisting such action.

With the removal of British troops from Palestine the immediate dilemma in Britain was no longer over whether the state of Israel should be allowed to develop. The embryonic Israeli forces were forced to fight as soon as the state of Israel came into being in 1948. Despite predictions to the contrary, these forces were not overrun and Israel survived this initial test of strength. Crossman, writing in 1949 stated that even the people of Israel were surprised by their success but still wary of the future. "They still feel it is a miracle that they have won, and can conceive no desire but peace. But Egyptian, Iraqi and Syrian armies [all incidentally members of the UN] still stand on the soil allocated to Israel by UNO [United Nations Organisation]. In this tiny country, one feels the presence of the invader everywhere, hemming in."<sup>33</sup> From this point onwards, with no military presence in the country, the key issue for Britain was concerning arms sales to the region. The arms industry in Britain was, and is, a crucial export industry

which generates huge amounts of revenue. In the economic situation of the late 1940's Britain did not really have an economy which could stand the refusal of lucrative arms deals, regardless of where these came from, particularly when these orders were placed by states which had generally remained friendly to Britain. When the Arab states placed large arms orders to fight the Israelis, whom the United States armed, Britain accepted these orders, driving another wedge between itself and Israel. Crossman remained a keen supporter of Israel after its creation in 1948, but wrote fairly infrequently on the matter, probably due to his preoccupation with other issues and his belief that once Israel had been created, and had not been overrun by Arab armies, his main aim had been achieved and Israel could now function as a nation, and turn itself to the problems and concerns which face other, more established, nations.<sup>34</sup> During the 1956 Suez crisis, when France, Britain and Israel colluded to try and retake the Suez Canal from the Egyptians, Crossman was surprisingly quiet on the subject, and in 1967 during the Six Day War he remained quiet publically. At this time, however, he was a high profile member of the Wilson government and was involved in numerous other domestic issues.

Crossman could be described as a lifelong supporter of Israel, but perhaps something of a fair-weather friend. In 1960 he took part in a series of lectures in Israel. The three lectures considered the contribution of Weizmann and the birth of Israel, Ernest Bevin and the view of the Labour government to the difficulties in Palestine, and finally the future for the newly created Israel. This was the most complete and comprehensive writing which Crossman had done on the issue of Israel since his activities on the Anglo-American commission. It was only in his last lecture that he considered the future of Israel. He indicated that Israel was similar to how he had envisioned it before its creation in 1948. He also outlined that while the new state had features which he had not anticipated, these were almost wholly positive. Using militarism as an example, he explained that neutrality was "unsuited to the Israeli

temper”.<sup>35</sup> Unsurprisingly, bearing in mind the speaker and his audience, the final lecture on the future of Israel was overwhelmingly positive and, even bearing his environment in mind, this lecture shows that he held the state of Israel generally, and Weizmann more specifically, in very high esteem. He only began writing about Israel again briefly after his retirement in 1970, but this was cut short by his cancer diagnosis and death in 1974.

## **Conclusion**

It is curious that in such a popular academic area as the history of the creation of a post-war country, particularly one with the political, geographical and religious significance of Israel, the activities and motives of the protectorate state are so easily dismissed as misguided or even “anti-Semitic”. The period is often focused on from a variety of angles, but very rarely are the motives of the British government given serious consideration. While the post-war Attlee government was certainly a Labour government, sometimes even a “socialist” government, in this area of foreign policy, party politics and socialist thinking were not evident within the government’s policy. Instead, the policies of the government were determined by circumstance and big personalities. The established party policy of the Labour Party was support for a Jewish homeland in the area of the Middle East occupied by Palestine, achieved through some form of partition within the country or a managed co-habitation. This policy was changed in the immediate post-war period due to a number of very valid reasons – the need for a military base in the Middle East in the light of declining Anglo-Egyptian relations, the necessity to maintain existing good relations with several Arab states, some of whom supplied (and continue to supply) Britain with oil, a desire not to be seen surrendering to terrorism (such as the bombing of the King David Hotel in July 1946 by the Irgun) and international pressure. However, the international pressure, applied in large part by the USA, was simply irresistible if

Britain wanted to maintain good relations with the superpower. This vacillating position was extremely problematic and the Anglo-American Commission was Bevin's solution to the deadlock. It seems very likely that Bevin's aim was to bring home to the Americans the impossible situation the British faced in the hope of giving them a way out of the complications without alienating the Americans.

Richard Crossman was, however, far more interested in finding a solution to this intractable problem, than providing a convenient exit strategy for his political masters, something which would cost him dear in career terms. He concluded, as had several Labour Cabinet members, that Palestine had to be formally partitioned to create a Jewish state, although the Anglo-American Commission was unwilling to go this far in their conclusions, meaning that the geographical details of such a plan were not considered in detail. Instead, they took a step down the path to partition by recommending the issuing of a further 100,000 entry visas for displaced European Jews. The dismay which Crossman felt upon the rejection of the Commission's findings was representative of the wider disappointment felt by the Zionist movement and the supporters of its cause. The tension within the region simply could not be contained and the British government were forced to refer the issue to the UN, and then relinquish the protectorate mandate of Palestine, with the state of Israel being forged through war instead of negotiation. The British government washed its hands of Palestine and Israel, and while this did not damage relations with Arab states and the USA in the longer term, this was certainly not Britain's "finest hour".

Crossman's role within the Anglo-American Commission provides us with a window into the activities of the commission and the views of the British government during this very difficult time. While biography and the study of individuals as a means of study has been traditionally derided and criticised, it is an invaluable way of focusing on key elements of political history, many of which have been skimmed over or forgotten by

more traditional methods of study. The status of Israel within the on-going unrest within the Middle East, and more recently the wider world, is of massive interest to both the academic community and the public at large, and as a young nation, the circumstances in which Israel was created and the views of those responsible for that have new importance and resonance. It is important to note that the difficulties which the British government faced in relation to the partitioning of Palestine have striking similarities to some of the current problems which are being faced in the region. Unfortunately, while Crossman believed that he had found the problem to the Gordian knot of the Middle East, history has shown that his solution was not enough to bring the peace to the region which many have craved for nearly 60 years.

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- <sup>1</sup> Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World*, Vol. I (Manchester and New York, 2004), 165.
- <sup>2</sup> Joseph Gorney, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-48* (London, 1983). William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945-8* (Oxford, 1984).
- <sup>3</sup> Janet Morgan, ed., *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman* (London, 1981) 326. Entry for 6<sup>th</sup> May 1954.
- <sup>4</sup> Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World*, Vol. I (Manchester and New York, 2004), 166.
- <sup>5</sup> David Sanders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role: British Foreign Policy Since 1945* (Basingstoke, 1990) 97.
- <sup>6</sup> Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World*, Vol. I (Manchester and New York, 2004), 167.
- <sup>7</sup> David Sanders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role: British Foreign Policy Since 1945* (Basingstoke, 1990) 78/9.
- <sup>8</sup> Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary 1945-51* (London and New York, 1983) 46-7.
- <sup>9</sup> Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary 1945-51* (London and New York, 1983) 44-5.
- <sup>10</sup> Joseph Gorney, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-48* (London, 1983) 214-221.
- <sup>11</sup> Bullock describes Bevin's achievement as having "brought the Americans off the sidelines and involved them in finding a solution to the problem." Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary 1945-51* (London and New York, 1983) 179.
- <sup>12</sup> Richard Crossman, "Americans, Jews and Arabs," *New Statesman* 32 (13<sup>th</sup> July 1946): 22.
- <sup>13</sup> William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945-8* (Oxford, 1984) 392-3.
- <sup>14</sup> Richard Crossman, *Palestine Mission* (London, 1947) 12.
- <sup>15</sup> Hector McNeil indicated that the government wanted to "try you [Crossman] out". Richard Crossman, *Palestine Mission* (London, 1947) 12.
- <sup>16</sup> National Archive PREM 8/302, *Mr Crossman MP Sent Memo on the Palestine Report on the Anglo-American Commission following the interview with the Prime Minister 1946*. Letter from Crossman to Attlee dated 7<sup>th</sup> May 1946. Italics replace underlining in original document.
- <sup>17</sup> Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary 1945-51* (London and New York, 1983) 305.
- <sup>18</sup> Richard Crossman, *Palestine Mission* (London, 1947) 197. For more details of this see Chapter 8 "After the Report".
- <sup>19</sup> Richard Crossman, *Palestine Mission* (London, 1947) 197.
- <sup>20</sup> Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary 1945-51* (London and New York, 1983) 306.
- <sup>21</sup> Richard Crossman, "The Case for Partition", *New Statesman* 32 (14<sup>th</sup> September 1946): 184.
- <sup>22</sup> National Archive PREM 8/302, *Mr Crossman MP Sent Memo on the Palestine Report on the Anglo-American Commission following the interview with the Prime Minister 1946*. Letter from Crossman to Attlee dated 7<sup>th</sup> May 1946.
- <sup>23</sup> Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary 1945-51* (London and New York, 1983) 78-9.
- <sup>24</sup> Bevin did have some limited experience of overseas relations due to his Trade Union links with overseas unions in both East and West. For further information on the career of Bevin as Foreign Secretary, a key publication is Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary 1945-51* (London and New York, 1983).
- <sup>25</sup> Crossman Papers, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick Library, MSS.154/3/BR/3/12-32. *The Open Mind*, transcript of a television show which Crossman took part in, entitled "How Vital is Zionism for American Jewry?" On NBC television, Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> January 1961.
- <sup>26</sup> National Archive PREM 8/302, *Mr Crossman MP Sent Memo on the Palestine Report on the Anglo-American Commission following the interview with the Prime Minister 1946*. Letter from Bevin to Attlee dated 27<sup>th</sup> September 1946.
- <sup>27</sup> *Clem Attlee: The Granada Historical Records Interview*, (1967) 39.
- <sup>28</sup> Bernard Donoughue *Downing Street Diary: With Harold Wilson in No. 10* (London, 2005) 271. Entry for 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1975.
- <sup>29</sup> Richard Crossman, "A Date for India – Why not for Palestine?+" *Sunday Pictorial* (23<sup>rd</sup> February 1947) as quoted in *New Statesman Special Edition* 33 (February 1947): 10.
- <sup>30</sup> Richard Crossman, "A Date for India – Why not for Palestine?" *Sunday Pictorial* (23<sup>rd</sup> February 1947) as quoted in *New Statesman Special Edition* 33 (February 1947): 10.

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<sup>31</sup> Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary 1945-51* (London and New York, 1983) 110.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Crossman, "How it Looks in Palestine," *New Statesman* 37 (15<sup>th</sup> January 1949): 47.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Crossman, "How it Looks in Palestine," *New Statesman* 37 (15<sup>th</sup> January 1949): 48.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Crossman, "How it Looks in Palestine," *New Statesman* 37 (15<sup>th</sup> January 1949): 113.

Crossman discussed in his third lecture the issue of Israel gaining NATO membership and its external alliances.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Crossman, *A Nation Reborn: The Israel of Weizmann, Bevin and Ben-Gurion* (London, 1960) 118.