

THE IMPACT OF THE JEWISH UNDERGROUND UPON ANGLO JEWRY:

1945-1947

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**M.Phil Thesis : 2003**

A Jew...is someone who chooses to share the fate of other Jews, or who is condemned to do so.

**Amos Oz**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank all those who assisted and contributed to the writing of this thesis. In particular, I am grateful for the help and encouragement of my supervisor Dr. E. Rogan, who has patiently read the entire manuscript more than once, and made extremely helpful suggestions for improving it.

I reserve my greatest thanks to my parents, whose kindness and generosity have made my post-graduate studies possible. This thesis is the only tangible product of my studies and I hope it lives up to their high expectations.

Finally I would like to thank the help and support of my friends and family, some of whom have read and made constructive comments on extracts of the manuscript, and all have put up with my at times tedious preoccupation with researching and writing. Needless to say, for any shortcomings that remain, I alone am responsible.

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## GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

AJA	Anglo-Jewish Association
BOD	Board of Deputies of British Jews (The Board)
DP	Displaced Persons
JC	Jewish Chronicle Newspaper
LEHI	Lohamei Herut Yisrael (Freedom Fighters of Israel), also known as the Stern Gang and Stern Group
URM	United Resistance Movement (Tenuat Hameri Ha'iu)
VE Day	Victory in Europe Day
WZO	World Zionist Organisation
Betar	Revisionist Youth Movement
Chevrot	Communities
Davar	Jewish newspaper in Palestine
Haganah	(Defence) Jewish Defence Force
Haganah-Bet	Haganah splinter group which became the Irgun
Havlaga	Restraint, guiding ideological force of the Haganah
Histradut	General Federation of Jewish Labour
Irgun Zvai Le'umi	National Military Organisation
Jewish Agency	Palestinian Jewish public body for the development of the Yishuv
Palmach	The crack motorised field-force within the Haganah
Vaad Leumi	Yishuv National Council
Voice of Israel	Secret Haganah Radio Station (Kol Yisrael)
Voice of Fighting	Secret Irgun Radio Station
Zion	
Yishuv	Jewish community living in Mandate Palestine

## INTRODUCTION

The history of the Middle East, and in particular the modern history of the Middle East, has been punctuated by claims and counter claims of defining moments, a propensity that has led the value of such statements to gradually diminish over time. A striking exception to this trend, however, has almost universally been identified as 1948, the year that the disputed territory of British Mandate Palestine was partitioned and the Jewish state of Israel attained its independence.<sup>1</sup> This thesis in seeking to examine the history of Mandate Palestine in the crucial years between the end of the Second World War in 1945, and the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 therefore very much falls into the wider body of literature that deals with this specific, ‘defining moment’ in modern Middle Eastern history.

As could be expected with a historical event that is regarded to be of such importance, a tremendous amount of literature has been written and published specifically focusing on the tumultuous birth of the modern Jewish state. Accordingly, and quite appropriately, there have also been a significant number of works examining the international dimensions to partition and Israel’s independence. This area of scholarship has included Arab and Palestinian tracts, internationalist histories, which have appraised the role of the United Nations, and finally works that have specifically focused on the roles and decisions of the United States, Soviet and British governments,<sup>2</sup> the main non-regional protagonists involved in negotiations on the ‘Palestine Question’.

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<sup>1</sup> E. Rogan and A. Shlaim (ed.), *The War for Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, H. Wilson, *The chariot of Israel: Britain, America, and the State of Israel* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981).

More specifically with regards to the objective of this thesis, within accounts of the United States' diplomatic engagement with the post-war Middle East there have been detailed examinations of the part played by the Jewish community in the United States in influencing US foreign policy,<sup>3</sup> as exemplified by a number of enquiries into the relationship between President Harry Truman and prominent American Jews such as David Niles and Abe Feinberg. Whilst the question of the amount of influence wielded by American Jewry over US foreign policy remains open, the real significance of such literature in terms of this thesis lies in its very existence.

A casual comparative glance at the literature concerning Britain's role and the Palestine Question reveals a glaring omission of an account of the experience of Anglo-Jewry during this period. That the same issue has been deemed worthy of research in terms of American Jewry, begs the question, why by the same logic, no such appraisal has been conducted of Anglo-Jewry. Indeed, if it is considered that it was Britain who was the Mandatory power at the time, and as such, the state directly responsible for Palestine's governance, and that both before and after the Second World War the Zionist movement centred its lobbying on the British government, the omission of a historical account of the position of Anglo-Jewry is all the more remarkable.

The nature of the historical and close linkage between the Zionist movement and Britain is indicated in a memorandum submitted to the British government by the Jewish Agency in 1930:

‘No Jew can fail to be deeply conscious of the ties binding the Jewish people to the Power to which it owes the Declaration of November 2, 1917 [the

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<sup>3</sup> See M. Urofsky, *We are one! : American Jewry and Israel* (New York: Anchor Press, 1978), p.165.

Balfour Declaration]...Great Britain has long been honourably distinguished in Jewish eyes, alike for her disinterested championship of distressed and persecuted Jewish minorities, and for her sympathetic understanding, dating back to a period much earlier than the Declaration of 1917, of Jewish national aspirations. On both grounds, Jews throughout the world have an attachment and a regard for Great Britain which have become an established tradition'.<sup>4</sup>

Having exposed the historical deficiency with regard to the relationship between the post-war history of Mandate Palestine and Anglo-Jewry it becomes prudent to select a single issue with which to explore the dynamic. Towards this end, there appears no more interesting question than examining how the anti-British actions of the Jewish underground, three armed Jewish militant organisations operating in Mandate Palestine, impacted upon Anglo-Jewry.

Such a question represents an enticing prospect due to the unique and remarkable position Anglo-Jewry was placed in following the end of the Second World War. At this juncture in world history, Anglo Jewry, like all other sections of British society, was mobilised, having fulfilled their patriotic duty as British citizens to take up arms and fight Nazism.<sup>5</sup> Correspondingly, Anglo-Jewry suffered military and civilian casualties in the war effort. The contribution of these 'regular' British Jewish soldiers, officers and civilians was supplemented by a number of Jewish refugees who had fled Nazism to Britain and joined the fight against Germany. Finally, with the exception of the extremist Stern gang, Palestinian Jewry also joined

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<sup>4</sup> As quoted in the editorial of the *Jewish Chronicle*, July 26 1946, p.10

<sup>5</sup> There were 26,000 Jewish men fighting in Jewish units of the Allied army. *Manchester Guardian*, November 29, 1945, p.6.



the Allied Armies, 'laying down their lives in Asia, Africa and Europe'.<sup>6</sup> On this level of appraisal, therefore, Anglo-Jewry's commitment to Britain and British society appears unquestionable and absolute, a loyalty indicated in the editorial of the *Jewish Chronicle* (JC) following VE Day:

'The Jewish people has never wavered in its allegiance to the Allied cause and its causality list in this war has been proportionally far greater than any other peoples...'<sup>7</sup>

If it is possible to point to the Second World War as exemplifying the extent of Anglo-Jewry's assimilation and contribution to British society, it is equally possible to use the war to expose the emergence of strains and complications in this relationship. In the closing months of the Second World War, the shocking discovery of the Nazi death camps and the disclosure of the virtual annihilation of European Jewry, confirmed in the most catastrophic circumstances, the validity of Zionism's call for an independent Jewish state. As Dr Weizmann announced when addressing the World Zionist Conference in London in August 1945:

'The European tragedy stood out as a fearful vindication of the truth of Zionist teaching. What happened to our people in Europe had not and could not have happened to any other people on the face of the earth who were secure in the possession of a country of their own. The Jewish people will not achieve its

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<sup>6</sup> As quoted in Chaim Weizmann's speech to the World Zionist Conference in London August 1945. *Manchester Guardian*, August 2, 1945, p.3.

<sup>7</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, May 11 1945, p.8.

“freedom from fear” save by the re-establishment of its statehood in Palestine’.<sup>8</sup>

In the years leading up to the war Anglo-Jewry’s outmoded ‘aristocratic’ leadership had vainly sought to stem the ‘progressive’ doctrine of Zionism from becoming part of Anglo-Jewish identity. Ignoring the ‘Jewish dukes’ warning, Anglo-Jewry’s ‘conversion’ to Zionism, gave rise to the issue of ‘dual allegiance,’ whereby, Anglo-Jewry was perceived to have split loyalties between Britain, its country of residency and citizenship, and the Zionist’s ambition of an independent Jewish state. It is this fascinating and complicated issue of ‘dual allegiance’ that forms the very crux of this thesis. At its heart lies the question of how a minority community in Britain coped with the extremely difficult issue of ‘dual-loyalty’ and equally importantly, how British society behaved in response.

With this as an objective, it is a seemingly natural development to examine the area where the strain was greatest, and in the context of Mandate Palestine this was unquestionably the sustained campaign of violence mounted by the Jewish underground against the British mandatory forces. Put in the very broadest terms, this thesis is therefore concerned with two questions. Firstly, on a general level, how pro-Zionist Anglo-Jewry responded to a British government committed to an antagonistic anti-Zionist foreign policy; and secondly, on a more focused level, how the relationship between Anglo-Jewry and British society was affected by the violent anti-British activities of the Jewish underground in Mandate Palestine. The issues arising from these two questions are both enthralling and complex, and it is the

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<sup>8</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, August 3 1945, p.1. For a complete transcript of the speech see *Manchester Guardian*, August 2 1945, p.3.

ambition of this thesis to chart for the first time the history of Anglo-Jewry through the prism of unfolding events in Mandate Palestine.

The central argument of this thesis is two fold. The first level directly pertains to the issue of 'dual allegiance'. It will be argued that from the very inception of Zionism, Anglo-Jewry was concerned with facing the charge of disloyalty and conscious of 'jeopardising' its position in British society. This theme will be shown to exist from the arrival of political Zionism in Britain through to the acute strains of the post-War years, when an avowedly pro-Zionist Anglo-Jewish community was faced with a British government that was non-committal to Zionism, and seemingly insensitive to the plight of Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) in Europe.

The second level of argument builds on the first, contending that the anti-British activities of the Jewish underground tested the bounds of Anglo-Jewry's dual allegiance to its very limits. The Jewish underground's violence will be demonstrated to have provoked hostility against the Anglo-Jewish community from wider British society that culminated in little publicised anti-Jewish riots in 1947.

Collectively the two arguments present a thesis that Anglo-Jewry's commitment to Zionism made British Jews vulnerable to the accusation of split-loyalties and, capitalising upon this vulnerability, the anti-British activities of the Jewish underground led to an increase of anti-Semitism in Britain. It is therefore asserted that the activities of the Jewish underground had a profound impact upon Anglo-Jewry, exposing the community to anti-Semitic discrimination, hostility and ultimately violence.

In structural terms this thesis will be presented over five chapters, the first two will be contextual, and the remaining a historical account, beginning with the end of the Second World War and ending in the summer of 1947.

Chapter one will examine the history behind Britain's engagement with Palestine and chart the formation and re-formation of British policy towards its Mandate. Additionally, there will be an exposition of the doctrine of political Zionism and an account of its ascent in Britain. Linking these two issues together, there also will be an overview of Anglo-Jewry's five leading institutions and their transformation from an antagonistic to a supportive stance towards Zionism.

Chapter two will be principally concerned with examining the representative bodies of Palestinian Jewry, and in particular, the Jewish underground. The chapter will begin by addressing the issue of terminology, followed by an exposition of revisionist Zionism. The remainder of the chapter will be concerned with accounting for the histories, ideologies, structures and activities of the three armed factions which collectively make the Jewish underground. It will be demonstrated that Jewish militancy began as a defensive anti-Arab force, which in the years leading up to and including the Second World War, evolved, in the face of British opposition to Jewish immigration to Palestine, into anti-British organisations.

The remaining three chapters will offer an analytical account of the history of the British Mandate following the conclusion of the Second World War and its effects upon Anglo-Jewry, using readily discernable major events as breaks between chapters. As such, the third chapter will begin with the election of the new Labour government in Britain in July 1945 and an examination of Anglo-Jewry's political stance towards the election. There will be an account of the high hopes both Anglo and Palestinian Jewry had of the new Government, and a detailed examination of the

formation of British policy towards Mandate Palestine, culminating in the November 1945 announcement to maintain the status quo, as prescribed under the 1939 White Paper. In parallel, there will be an account of the formation of the United Resistance Movement (URM) in Palestine and an account of its activities. It will be argued the disappointment wrought by the British announcement in November 1945 led to a flare of sporadic anti-British activity in Palestine perpetrated by all three of the Jewish underground organisations. This violence will be assessed through the prism of the Anglo-Jewish community, gauging attitudes from within the community and also the reaction of British society in response.

The fourth chapter will begin with an account of the King David Hotel bomb attack and its political fall-out in Mandate Palestine, appraising the reaction of the British government, Anglo-Jewry, and wider British society. It will be argued that following the King David Hotel bomb attack, the constitution of the Jewish underground changed, as indicated by the Haganah's withdrawal from the URM. It will additionally be argued that the previous delicate yet identifiable soft line towards the Jewish underground maintained by Anglo-Jewry was abandoned in favour of an outright condemnation of violence as a political tool. British society will be demonstrated to have for the first time acted in an overtly hostile manner towards Anglo-Jewry, establishing an unequivocal connection between events in Palestine and in Britain.

Following on from the King David Hotel bomb, chapter four will offer an exposition of the Irgun's export of violence from the Middle East to Europe, as encapsulated in the bombing of the British Embassy in Rome on 31 October 1946.<sup>9</sup> It will be demonstrated that in the wake of the Rome Embassy bombing there was a

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<sup>9</sup> J. Bowyer Bell *'Terror out of Zion'* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), p.181

period of media hysteria in Britain, fuelled and encouraged by Irgun propaganda, with speculative reports proclaiming an imminent attack, by the Jewish underground, on mainland British targets. The chapter will end charting the evolution of the Jewish underground's violence into an international context and assessing how this impacted upon Anglo-Jewry.

The fifth and final chapter will begin by examining the internal dynamics of the Jewish underground and the fragmentation of the URM. As a result of the Rome Embassy bombing and Irgun reprisal floggings of December 1946, Anglo-Jewry will be shown to have been increasingly vulnerable and faced unprecedented levels of hostility. Simultaneously Britain's control over Palestine will be shown to have weakened, leading to a draconian showdown against the Irgun and LEHI, which culminated in the execution of Irgun members in July 1947. It will be argued that Britain's decision to execute captured Irgun members provoked the Irgun into hanging sergeants Cliff Martin and Mervyn Paice in reprisal. The 'Irgun murders' will be shown to be the climactic events of Jewish underground activity. It will be argued the effect of the hangings upon Anglo Jewry was profound, testing dual allegiance to its limit and resulting in anti-Jewish demonstrations and rioting across Britain. These events will be offered as irrefutable evidence that the activities of the Jewish underground in Mandate Palestine had a direct and discernable impact upon Anglo-Jewry.

Although the Jewish underground continued to operate in Palestine until the creation of Israel in May 1948, the executions of the summer of 1947 will be the final events examined. August 1947 represents a sensible end to this thesis because thereafter, Jewish underground activities moved away from anti-British activities towards anti-Arab activities, a process sped along by the United Nation's November

1947 vote in favour of partition. Correspondingly, the impact of the Jewish underground upon Anglo-Jewry waned after August 1947.

Having outlined the parameters of this thesis it is now appropriate to discuss its methodology. Due to the absence of any previous material on the subject of Anglo-Jewry and the Jewish underground, British newspapers from the period will be used as the main documentary resource. Using newspapers in this way is beneficial as it means the main body of research will be from primary sources, and since so little has been published on the subject, any findings are necessarily original. Scholarly reliance on newspapers, however, is not without its shortfalls. The function of a newspaper, aside from the obvious provision of information, is to offer analysis of current affairs. Whilst it is undoubtedly the case that contemporary newspapers are far more analytical than their somewhat stilted and terse 1940s equivalent, all the newspapers reviewed, as a matter of course, have an editorial line and therefore a political stance.

In order to minimise the effect of this political ‘bias’, a cross section of newspapers have been selected including *The Times* to represent ‘the establishment’ and the *Manchester Guardian* to represent ‘the left’. Historians regard the editorial line of *The Times* during the 1940s as ‘identifying not so much with the Conservative interests as with the ministerial mind’,<sup>10</sup> which ideally complements the non-conformist editorial line of the *Manchester Guardian*. Where necessary, wider publications have also been used, including local media. It is hoped that collectively all these sources represent as wide a spectrum of political opinion as possible.

As for Anglo-Jewish publications, finding a ‘representative’ sample poses a far more difficult challenge, since only one mainstream publication exists, which is

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<sup>10</sup> S. Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain* Vol. ii (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), p.570.

the *Jewish Chronicle*. Although upon first appearance this appears a serious limitation, as will be elucidated upon in chapter one, it is possible to regard the JC's transition from a hostile position to a pro-Zionist stance as indicative of a wider change in attitude within Anglo-Jewry.<sup>11</sup> Importantly therefore, the editorial line in the JC can be regarded as an accurate reflection of the attitudes of mainstream Anglo-Jewry. Additionally, where possible, criticisms raised in the letters pages regarding articles published in the JC will be used as evidence of dissenting or differing opinion, along with internal memoranda from leading Anglo-Jewish institutions.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, the purpose of this thesis is to charter the intriguing political triangle between the British government, the Jewish underground and Anglo-Jewry. The central issue that emerges from this relationship is the problem faced by Anglo-Jewry of "dual allegiance". Between 1945 and 1947 Anglo-Jewry will be shown to have been afflicted by an agonizing 'clash of interests' between on the one hand its deep rooted and unyielding allegiance to Britain, the country to which the community owed its residence and citizenship, and on the other hand, its sympathy for the increasingly violent national struggle of its fellow Jewish Zionists against British control in Palestine. Setting a trend that has clear resonance in a contemporary context, the sad conclusion of anti-British violence abroad in Mandate Palestine will be shown to have been the victimisation and vilification of a minority community in Britain.

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<sup>11</sup> For a detailed treatment of this subject see D. Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry, 1841-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> See for example the "Hebrew and a Jew" letter exchange. *Jewish Chronicle*, July 13 1945, p.6. and *Jewish Chronicle*, July 25 1945, p.14.



## CHAPTER 1

### **The Seeds of Conflict: Britain, Palestine, Anglo-Jewry and Zionism.**

‘The claim to be Englishmen of the Jewish persuasion – that is English by nationality and Jewish by faith – is absolute self-delusion’.<sup>13</sup>

As with any historical account, determining a precise date to begin is an extremely vexing prospect. In the case of this thesis, the parameters of assessment, as outlined in the title, are from the end of the Second World War (in Europe) in May 1945 until August 1947. However, to begin abruptly in May 1945, with a total disregard of the ‘pre-history’ of the many complicated issues under discussion, would necessarily result in a superficial evaluation of what are in fact, highly complex dynamics, events and relationships. It is therefore the purpose of this chapter to provide the first part of a contextual framework for the remainder of the study. Whilst avoiding the temptation to delve too far back into the annals of history, there will be an outline of the seminal events in Britain’s relationship with Mandate Palestine in the years leading up to the period under scrutiny.

Developing upon this introductory theme, this chapter will serve to examine the constitution of Anglo-Jewry—one of the two central variables under scrutiny—and the emergence of the issue of ‘dual allegiance’. Accordingly, the character of Anglo-Jewry, its leading organisations and institutions will be appraised; an evaluation that will include an account of the demographic composition of the Jewish community and an analysis of the Board of Deputies of British Jews (BOD), the Anglo-Jewish Association (AJA), the *Jewish Chronicle* newspaper and the leading

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<sup>13</sup> Dr Moses Gaster 1916, as cited in G. Shimoni ‘The non-Zionists in Anglo-Jewry’ *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* xxviii.i (1986), p.110.

synagogal bodies. In particular, there will be a focus upon the emergence of political Zionism in Anglo-Jewry, and how the ascendancy of its values served to shape the politics of the British Jewish community. The growth and popularisation of Zionism in Anglo-Jewry will be juxtaposed against the formation of British foreign policy towards Mandate Palestine, a process which will be shown to have gradually moved towards pitting the interests of Anglo-Jewry and the British government against each other, resulting in the emergence of the issue of dual allegiance.

### **The First World War and the Levant**

The background to direct British colonial intervention in the Levant is a matter of extreme controversy. As David Fromkin remarks, ‘official accounts of what they [Britain] were doing in the Middle East were works of propaganda’.<sup>14</sup> Without becoming unnecessarily embroiled in this historical debate, it can unequivocally be said that through such accords as the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, that Britain and France, predicting the collapse of the Ottoman Empire as part of a wider Allied victory over the Axis powers, firmly regarded themselves as the ‘natural’ guardians-to-be of the Levant.

In terms of the specific concerns of this thesis, the salient corollaries of the First World War were the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the demarcation and partition of Palestine and Trans-Jordan by the British at the 1921 Cairo Conference,<sup>15</sup> and Britain’s official recognition by the League of Nations on 24 July 1922 as the Mandatory power of the two territories.

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<sup>14</sup> D. Fromkin, *A Peace to end all Peace* (London: Phoenix Press 2000), p.15

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.502-505.

With the end of seven centuries of Ottoman Rule in the Middle East, British colonial cartographers immediately set about the process of nation-building, using sextants and rulers to divide up the largely borderless region. As part of this process, the state of Trans-Jordan was created, and *ipso facto*, by designating the River Jordan as its westerly border, the modern Mandate state of Palestine was de-aligned in the remaining thin strip of land between Lebanon and Syria in the north and Egypt in the south.

The regulatory limits of a suzerain's power over its mandate were outlined on June 28 1919 under Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations. It stipulated that mandatory power was to apply:

'To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by people not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world...

The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations who by reason of their resources, their experiences or their geographical position can best undertake this responsibility...

The character of the mandate must differ according to the stage of the development of the people...Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering

of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such a time as they are able to stand alone...'<sup>16</sup>

In reality, despite the convoluted prose and supposedly legally binding nature of the charter, the justificatory pledge that Mandate 'tutelage' was a benevolent short-term measure to allow recently created states an opportunity to prepare themselves for full independence, was a political ruse. In the 'new world order' that followed the First World War, the British government was well aware that the 'naked colonialism' of the 'Great Game' was no-longer acceptable. Consequently, quasi-colonialism in the form of Mandates became the new *modus operandi* of imperial rule.

British governance over Palestine was the very epitome of this new style of imperialism, with the British government publicly declaring the short-term nature of its presence in the territory, while privately incorporating Palestine into a grand long-term strategic arrangement. Britain's presence and extreme reluctance to withdraw from Palestine as late as in 1948 vividly attests the British government's real intent.

In addition to providing the pretext for British intervention in the Levant, the First World War was also crucial in shaping Britain's post-war foreign policy to the region. During the war, in an attempt to coalesce both Arab and Jewish support behind the British and wider Allied war effort, conflicting and contradictory promises and commitments were made by the British government to both parties regarding the future status of the post-war Levant.

Mandate Palestine lay at the very heart of this diplomatic malady; the consequence of a British policy that was comprehensively fudged. Britain's eagerness

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<sup>16</sup> Article 22 Covenant of the League of Nations (June 28 1919).

to garner support for the Allied war effort from as many quarters as possible, led to a diplomatic situation in which the British quite literally ‘promised the world’ as an incentive to any potentially willing ally, and in so doing, seemingly pledged Mandate Palestine twice, to both Jews and Arabs.

Through negotiations with the Arab Muslim leader Sherif Hussein ibn Ali, the Arabs were ‘promised’ in exchange for raising an Arab army against the Ottomans, ‘a Arab state or confederation of Arab states in the areas of the Middle East which neither Britain or France exercised direct control’.<sup>17</sup> Under the Sykes-Picot Agreement neither Britain nor France had explicitly staked their claim upon mainland Palestine, rather, Britain had merely requested control of the coastal land and ports near Acre and Haifa.<sup>18</sup> Although the British position was later to alter, in early negotiations, Palestine appeared, by default, to be destined for the Arabs.

Knowingly or otherwise of Britain’s revisited stance *vis-à-vis* the future status of Palestine, the British reversed their position in 1917, making a carefully worded proclamation in favour of Jewish aspirations to settle in the territory. In the now famous letter between Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour and Lord Rothschild, Britain pledged on 2 November 1917 that:

‘His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of

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<sup>17</sup> Fromkin, ‘*Peace*’, p.192

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.192

existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by the Jews in any other country'.<sup>19</sup>

Disregarding the semantics of whether a 'national home for the Jewish people' amounted to a pledge to create a Jewish state in Mandate Palestine, or merely a Jewish dominion, the Balfour Declaration seemingly committed Britain at the close of the First World War to a foreign policy that was conciliatory to the interests of the world Zionist movement. This position was later reiterated and ratified in the April 1920 San Remo Peace Conference,<sup>20</sup> in the 1922 draft Mandate<sup>21</sup> and in the 1922 Churchill White Paper.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Birth of Jewish Nationalism: Herzl and Political Zionism**

The history of the emergence of Zionism is extremely well documented and in the main part extraneous to this study.<sup>23</sup> Accounting for how Zionism emerged as the foremost rallying cry and political doctrine of Anglo-Jewry, however, is clearly highly important towards the overall objective of this thesis.

The political doctrine of Zionism is widely regarded as owing its genesis to Theodor Herzl and the publication of *'Der Judenstaat'* (The Jewish State) in 1896.<sup>24</sup> Herzl premised his work upon the assumption that despite significant advances in Jewish assimilation and emancipation in Western Europe, Jews would never enjoy

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<sup>19</sup> A. Shlaim, *'The Iron Wall'* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p.7.

<sup>20</sup> S. A. Cohen, *'English Zionists and British Jews'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp.20-21.

<sup>21</sup> D.Cesarani, *'Zionism in England 1917-1945'* Unpublished D.Phil (Oxford University, 1986), p.44.

<sup>22</sup> The 1922 White Paper emphasised that 'the Jews were in Palestine of right and not on sufferance'. M.Gilbert, *'Israel a history'* (London: Doubleday, 1998), p.50.

<sup>23</sup> See for example, Walter Laqueur's comprehensive treatment of the subject in W. Laqueur, *'A History of Zionism'* (London: The Trinity Press, 1972).

<sup>24</sup> Modern scholarship holds that unbeknown to Herzl, Jewish thinkers such as Leo Pinsker in his work *Autoemanzipation* (1882) pre-date Herzl in their political Zionist writing.

full equality with their compatriots. Citing the undisguised anti-Semitism of the Russian Empire, which was brutally displayed in the widespread pogroms of the 1880s, and the more subtle anti-Semitism of Western Europe, as evidenced in the 1894 Dreyfus Affair in supposedly egalitarian France, Herzl wrote: ‘The nations in whose midst Jews live are all covertly or openly anti-Semitic’.<sup>25</sup>

Herzl’s proposed solution to the ‘Jewish problem’ was the creation of an independent Jewish nation<sup>26</sup> by extracting the victimised Jewish communities of Europe and Russia and relocating them to form an independent Jewish state. Despite offering no suggestion as to where the Jewish state would be formed, following the publication of *Der Judenstaat* a Jewish national political movement, mainly based in Eastern Europe, emerged in support of its arguments. During this period Herzl’s ideology was refined and developed and consensus reached that Palestine should form the territory of the future Jewish homeland. This decision was officially endorsed at the sixth Zionist Conference, in Basle Switzerland in 1903<sup>27</sup> and was based upon the extension of the central messianic Judaic yearning for a ‘return to Zion’ that is enshrined in Judaism, and the ancient historical connection Jews hold with the biblical kingdom of Israel.<sup>28</sup> Zionism consequently became the nationalist political movement for advancing the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.

Reflecting Herzl’s European bourgeois background, Zionism, as outlined in *Der Judenstaat*, was a highly class conscious doctrine. As Walter Laqueur comments:

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<sup>25</sup> As cited in Laqueur, ‘Zionism’, p.91

<sup>26</sup> Shlaim, ‘Iron Wall’, p.2.

<sup>27</sup> The 1903 Basle Conference represents a watershed following the angry rejection of a British proposal for a temporary Jewish state in Uganda. Hereafter, the mainstream Zionist movement refused to consider any territory other than Palestine to form a Jewish state. Laqueur, ‘Zionism’, pp.127-129.

<sup>28</sup> Shlaim, ‘Iron Wall’, p.2.

‘Herzl did not want to compel anyone to join the exodus [to Palestine]. If any or all of French Jewry protested against his scheme because they were already assimilated, well and good; the scheme would not affect them. On the contrary they would benefit, because they, like the Christians, would be freed of the disquieting and inescapable competition of a Jewish proletariat, and anti-Semitism would cease to exist.’<sup>29</sup>

In account of Herzl’s conception of class, Zionism was expected to appeal to the impoverished Jews of Eastern Europe and Russia. Correspondingly, Herzl did not anticipate Western European Jewish communities, such as Anglo-Jewry, to depart *en masse* to Palestine. Rather, Herzl believed Western European Jews would agree with his ideology, and fund his grand vision for the relocation of their Eastern European brethren to Palestine.

### **The Structure of Anglo-Jewry**

In the years immediately preceding the First World War, the character of Anglo-Jewry fundamentally altered. In the same way that it is possible to cite the pogroms in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century as the driving force behind the inception of the Zionist movement, so too can the pogroms be isolated as the casual factor behind the transformation of Anglo-Jewry. The Russian pogroms prompted a mass wave of westward bound Jewish immigration. Since Britain had liberal immigration laws, many of the immigrants settled in the United Kingdom.

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<sup>29</sup> Laqueur, ‘Zionism’, p.91



Consequently, in a relatively short period, Anglo-Jewry burgeoned from an estimated population of 60,000 in 1880 to 300,000 by 1914.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the significant alternation in the size of the community, the addition of hundreds of thousands of ostensibly working class Eastern European Jewish immigrants, necessarily also impacted upon Anglo-Jewry's social composition. Whereas before the arrival of the Eastern European immigrants, Anglo-Jewry had been upwardly socially mobile, enjoying the freedoms and benefits of emancipation, and attaining previously impossible professional and social success, the sheer number of new Jewish immigrants meant that once again, Anglo-Jewry was predominantly poor and working class. This extreme class stratification had important ramifications upon Anglo-Jewish politics, and in particular, its attitude towards Zionism.

As with any community, Anglo-Jewry developed a number of communal representative bodies. The official leading representative organisation of Anglo-Jewry was the Board of Deputies of British Jews (BOD), which was founded in 1760 and charged with the responsibility of tackling the day-to-day issues of Anglo-Jewry's relations with its gentile environment.<sup>31</sup> During the nineteenth century the BOD evolved into a prestigious institution, with direct access to the highest levels of British politics, and an illustrious membership list that included philanthropists, wealthy merchants and Jewish politicians. Despite its supposed function as a representative body, by the First World War, the BOD was almost exclusively made up of the

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<sup>30</sup> H.Pollins, *Economic History of Jews in Britain* (Toronto: Associated Uni Presses, 1982), p.134

<sup>31</sup> Cohen, *English Zionists*, p.19

gentrified ‘grand dukes’<sup>32</sup> of Anglo-Jewry, drawn from well-established and Anglicised families.

In addition to the BOD, Anglo-Jewry maintained four other important institutions. The Anglo-Jewish Association (AJA), founded in 1871, was the principal channel of political and educational aid to distressed Jewish communities overseas.<sup>33</sup> In account of this remit, the AJA developed into the quasi foreign affairs bureau of British-Jewry. The majority of AJA members, and in particular its senior officers, were either also members of the BOD or close acquaintances of BOD members. Consequently, the two organisations often operated in tandem, sharing information and combining committees.<sup>34</sup> Collectively, the AJA and the BOD were the premier, elitist Anglo-Jewish institutions, and as such, the conservative mouthpieces of the Jewish aristocracy.

The United Synagogue and the Federation of Synagogues were the two leading Anglo-Jewish religious institutions. The United Synagogue was the long established bastion of Jewish orthodoxy in Britain, whereas the Federation was ‘the umbrella organisation that united, in uneasy partnership, numerous immigrant Orthodox *chevrot* (communities) in the East End [of London].’<sup>35</sup> Irrespective of affiliation, the power and influence of the United and Federation Synagogues was skewed by an overpowering lay leadership. As David Cesarani comments:

‘Due to the erastianism in the British synagogal system, the lay leadership...was of perhaps greater significance than the clerics themselves...

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<sup>32</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, July 18 1947, p.13.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.19-20.

<sup>34</sup> For example, in 1919 Lord Swaythling reconstituted the Joint Foreign Affairs Committee, officially binding the offices of BOD and the AJA after they had been briefly separated during the Balfour Declaration debacle.

<sup>35</sup> Cohen, *‘English Zionists’*, p.9.

The Anglo-Jewish ministry was not a powerful force and despite Hertz's [Chief Rabbi 1913-1946] efforts to raise the prestige of the clergy and increase the scope of its activities it remained lame. It was widely felt that the average rabbi was little more than a synagogue secretary and not a spiritual leader – or a leader of any kind.<sup>36</sup>

Both the United and Federation Synagogues were dominated by their national Presidents and Honorary Offices, who, as was the case with the BOD and AJA, were drawn from the Anglo-Jewish establishment.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, irrespective of the opinions of individual rabbis, and indeed the Chief Rabbi, the United and Federation Synagogues remained largely reactionary bodies.

The final important institution of Anglo-Jewry was the *Jewish Chronicle* (JC) newspaper. Established by Isaac Vallentine in 1841,<sup>38</sup> the self proclaimed “Organ of Anglo-Jewry” was, by the end of the nineteenth century, the leading Anglo-Jewish periodical. Published once a week on a Friday, the JC's circulation was ‘50 per cent higher than for [sic] any other Jewish title,’<sup>39</sup> an accomplishment which granted the paper an unrivalled status both within and without of the Anglo-Jewish community.<sup>40</sup>

From its inception, the JC sought an independent and enlightened editorial line, which was critical of ‘the wealthy and powerful upper crust of London Jewry’ that it accused of being ‘too influential’.<sup>41</sup> In this sense, the JC was typical of the non-conformist liberal age in which it was founded, acting as a ‘watchdog over the

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<sup>36</sup> Cesarani, ‘Zionism’, p.62

<sup>37</sup> Often the Presidents and Honorary Officers were also prominent members of the BOD and AJA. For example Lord Nathaniel Rothschild was president of the United Synagogue and Sir Samuel Montagu (made Lord Swaythling 1907) was president of the Federation.

<sup>38</sup> Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle*, p.10.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.69

<sup>40</sup> The high level of esteem and respect for the *Jewish Chronicle* is indicated in the Government's decision to delay publication of the Balfour Declaration ‘so it could be made known to the world first of all in the *Jewish Chronicle*’. Ibid., p.125

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.17

community and providing virtually the only communal forum in which unfettered debate could take place concerning their operation'.<sup>42</sup>

In view of the constitution of Anglo-Jewry's leading five institutions, it is possible to characterise the British Jewish community at the beginning of the twentieth century as dominated by an insular oligarchy of wealthy London 'grand dukes', with the JC representing the only respected progressive force within the community. The arrival of Zionism in Britain served to reinforce this caricature, dividing the community between progressive Zionist and reactionary anti-Zionist elements, and in so doing, precipitating an internal community revolt that led to the Jewish aristocracy being ousted and its replacement by middle class Zionists.

### **Dual Allegiance: Anglo-Jewry and Zionism**

'The allegiance and loyalty of British Jews are, and will remain, an undivided allegiance and loyalty to Britain'.<sup>43</sup>

Zionism for different yet related reason was anathema to the Anglo-Jewish establishment and religious bodies. The notion, as Zionism demanded, that Judaism should be regarded as a reason for separate nationality or racial 'otherness', directly conflicted with the rationale of Jewish emancipation. Arguably, the *raison d'être* of the Jewish establishment was their enlightened belief that they were as English or British as any other Briton. Religion, it was argued, was a private matter of no significance to an individual's citizenship. Neville Laski, President of the BOD between 1933-1939, epitomized such a stance, announcing that he was:

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.248.

<sup>43</sup> AJA statement as cited in G. Shimoni 'The non-Zionists in Anglo-Jewry' *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* xxviii.i, 1986, p.106.

‘An Anglo-Jew, who put his British citizenship first and regarded himself as separated from the rest of the [British] community only by his religion.’<sup>44</sup>

Zionism’s call for an independent Jewish state in Palestine was therefore rejected outright by the Jewish establishment. At the centre of this opposition lay the issue of dual allegiance. The Jewish establishment feared that Zionism’s demand for Jews to be treated as a separate nation would bring into question Anglo-Jewry’s allegiance to Britain.

Notwithstanding the Jewish establishment’s domination over the leading two synagogal bodies, the Anglo-Jewish religious authorities independently rejected Zionism. The central Judaic belief in ‘the return to Zion’ would seemingly encourage a conciliatory religious stance towards Zionism. The political and secular nature of the Zionist movement, however, set it dramatically at variance to the religious establishment. Indeed, the Orthodox religious establishment regarded Herzl’s pronouncements as profoundly heretical, since it was believed that Jews would return to Zion only after the arrival of the Messiah. Zionist attempts to pre-empt the exclusive prerogative of the Almighty were therefore, robustly challenged.

As could be expected, the single institution within the Anglo-Jewish establishment that did endorse Zionism was the JC. Following the acquisition of the newspaper by Leopold Greenberg ‘a leading English Zionist’ in January 1907,<sup>45</sup> the JC became the foremost literary defender of Zionism in Britain, providing extensive coverage of international Zionist events and editorial support against the more

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<sup>44</sup> Cesarani, ‘Zionism’, p.198.

<sup>45</sup> Cesarani, ‘*Jewish Chronicle*’, p.103.

reactionary Anglo-Jewish institutions. Such an approach proved popular with Britain's immigrant and middle class Jewish communities who were far more receptive to Zionism than their citizenship and class-conscious Jewish overlords.

As was the case with the international Zionist movement, the 1917 Balfour Declaration was a 'milestone' in Anglo-Jewish history.<sup>46</sup> As international Zionist lobbying, led by Chaim Weizmann, began to have a favourable effect on the British government during the First World War, the Jewish establishment, under the auspices of the hybrid BOD and AJA 'Conjoint Foreign Committee', launched a counter anti-Zionist campaign. At the heart of the Jewish establishment's opposition was the issue of 'dual-allegiance' generated by the pervasive fear that a British pronouncement in favour of Jewish statehood would jeopardise over a century's work to attain full Jewish emancipation and equality.

Yet, overriding the debate on Anglo-Jewish status and citizenship was an even greater internal struggle between the growing number of un-represented pro-Zionist British Jews, and the anti-Zionist Jewish establishment. The turning point in this relationship was the BOD's narrow vote in favour of censuring the actions of the anti-Zionist Conjoint Foreign Affairs Committee.<sup>47</sup> For the first time, the Jewish establishment's claim to represent mainstream Anglo-Jewry was successfully challenged.

The minutiae of Zionist and anti-Zionist lobbying resulted in a 'much-diluted'<sup>48</sup> version of the Balfour Declaration, under which the rights of Jews living outside of Palestine were explicitly protected, and a statement in favour of Jewish statehood was replaced with a pledge towards a 'Jewish home'. The revised Balfour

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<sup>46</sup> Cohen, *English Zionists*, p.243.

<sup>47</sup> The Zionists won by fifty-six votes to fifty-one with six abstentions. *Ibid.*, p.243.

<sup>48</sup> Fromkin, *Peace*, p.297

Declaration consequently appeared to represent a victory for the anti-Zionist lobby, and many Zionists were disappointed with the final statement.<sup>49</sup>

The anti-Zionists' 'victory', however, proved hollow. Following the British Government's ratification of the Balfour Declaration after the war, and its adoption of a favourable stance towards Zionism, the Jewish establishment found itself in an extremely awkward position, whereby, opposing Zionism would necessarily place the anti-Zionist lobby at odds with the government. For the Jewish establishment such a position was unacceptable, since it amounted to Anglo-Jewry being 'unpatriotic', ironically, the situation they had originally sought to avoid through opposing Zionism. Consequently, during the 1920s, despite the formation of the elitist and explicitly anti-Zionist 'League of British Jews', the BOD adopted a 'lukewarm' 'patriotic' stance towards Zionism, under which the BOD became an affiliate of the Jewish Agency<sup>50</sup> in 1924.<sup>51</sup> The BOD justified its 'support' for the Mandate on the grounds that it was:

'The patriotic duty of an English Jew rather than any enthusiasm for a particularly Jewish national policy which inspired a particularly Jewish allegiance'.<sup>52</sup>

Britain's decision to reassess its policy towards Mandate Palestine in the wake of the August 1929 riots culminated in the October 1930 Passfield White Paper, which attributed the Arab rioting to Jewish immigration. Under the 1930 White Paper Jewish immigration to Palestine, which had previously been allowed to progress

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<sup>49</sup> Tellingly, the only Jew in the cabinet Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India, was one of two ministers to vote against the Balfour Declaration. *Ibid.*, pp.294-5.

<sup>50</sup> The Jewish Agency was the main organ of Palestinian Jewry charged with negotiating with the British Mandatory power and World Jewry. Gilbert, *'Israel'*, p.50

<sup>51</sup> Cesarani, 'Zionism', p.463.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.44-5.

freely, was slowed, and Jewish development curtailed.<sup>53</sup> Outraged by the British government's actions, the Zionist Federation of Great Britain organised popular demonstrations against the government and launched the successful Palestine Emergency Fund. The JC fronted the campaign 'dubbing the Passfield White Paper as "A Great Betrayal"'.<sup>54</sup> The BOD, meanwhile under the Presidency of Osmond d'Avigdor Goldsmid, feared the re-emergence of the dual-loyalty issue, and assiduously tried to avoid direct criticism or confrontation with the government. In so doing, the Jewish establishment once again demonstrated how out of touch it was with popular Anglo-Jewish opinion. Zionism was clearly in ascendancy in Britain and the Jewish establishment appeared virtually powerless to prevent it.

In reaction to the level of Jewish disquiet over the Passfield White Paper, Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald repudiated the restrictions on immigration in a letter to Weizmann.<sup>55</sup> Yet, in spite of this Zionist 'victory', little tangibly had changed in terms of the composition of Anglo-Jewry's leading institutions. The BOD and the AJA remained opposed to Zionism, and despite Chief Rabbi J. H. Hertz's favourable disposition towards Zionism, the rabbinate remained in the grip of its anti-Zionist lay leadership. Internally, however, Anglo-Jewry had fundamentally changed. Zionism was increasingly regarded as an integral part of Anglo-Jewish identity. Equally, in the politically charged atmosphere of the 1930s, the Jewish community was increasingly politicised and far less prepared to accept the dictatorial and unrepresentative rule of the traditional Jewish elites.

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<sup>53</sup> Gilbert, *'Israel'*, pp.64-66.

<sup>54</sup> Cesarani, *'Jewish Chronicle'*, p.132.

<sup>55</sup> Laqueur, *'Zionism'*, pp.493-494.



## Anglo-Jewry's Conversion

The combined effect of the election of the Nazi Party in Germany, the rise of the violently anti-Semitic British Union of Fascists Party in the UK, and the April 1936 anti-Jewish riots in Palestine catalysed support for the Zionist movement in Britain. Reflecting this trend, the pro-Zionist bloc within the BOD steadily grew throughout the 1930s. By the mid-1930s, the Zionist dominated the BOD's important Palestine Committee allowing them to propose pro-Zionist policy with a good chance of seeing it passed.<sup>56</sup>

The nature of British Zionism was, as Herzl had prophesied it would be amongst Western European states, dominated by campaigns to raise funds to support the immigration of Europe's persecuted Jewish communities to Palestine, rather than the direct immigration of British Jews to Palestine. What was not however anticipated was the urgent need to assist the flight of German Jewry from the grips of Nazism. Although, Zionism had been slow to take hold in Britain during the 1920s, by the 1930s, even without the endorsement of the BOD, and with the added distraction of domestic fascist instigated anti-Semitic violence, Anglo-Jewry was playing a significant fundraising role in support of World Zionism and the nascent Yishuv in Palestine.

The pro-Zionists' gradual accrual of support at the BOD resulted in their first telling victory in January 1938, with the successful passage of the Board Dominion Resolution. Under the resolution, for the first time it became the official policy of Anglo-Jewry to support the call for the establishment of an independent

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<sup>56</sup> Cesarani, 'Zionism', p.209.

Jewish State in Palestine, as a Dominion to the British Empire.<sup>57</sup> As had earlier been the case during the years of 'Patriotic Zionism,' critics of the resolution were made to appear as anti-Imperialists.

Following the Dominion Resolution the anti-Zionists' position within the BOD became untenable. President Neville Laski, however, did not resign until November 1939.<sup>58</sup> In the interim, the British government published the May 1939 White Paper on Palestine, which restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine to 75,000 over the next five years,<sup>59</sup> having identified Jewish immigration as the primary cause of the 1936-39 Arab riots.<sup>60</sup> Despite Anglo-Jewry's outrage at the White Paper, Laski doggedly refused to criticise the government on the basis that it would provoke the return of the dual-loyalty issue.

Following Laski's resignation, Professor Selig Brodetsky, a leading British Zionist, was elected unopposed as BOD president on 17 December 1939. The importance of Brodetsky's election as President of the BOD cannot be overstated. The Zionist's capture of the BOD, although unquestionably the culmination of a long process, fundamentally altered the character and politics of Anglo-Jewry. With the Board of Deputies, Anglo-Jewry's most revered and important institution, in the Zionists' control, over a hundred years of the Jewish establishment's reactionary and paternalistic rule ended. For the first time since the composition of Anglo-Jewry had altered, following the influx of a new generation of Jewish immigrants at the turn of

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<sup>57</sup> Cesarani, *'Jewish Chronicle'*, p.161.

<sup>58</sup> Matters were exacerbated by Laski's ill-timed publication of his book *'Jewish Rights and Jewish Wrongs'* in which 'he presented the non-Zionist case that a Jewish State was undesirable and placed Jews in a dilemma of dual allegiance' D.Cesarani, *'Zionism in England 1917-1945'* Unpublished D.Phil (Oxford University 1986), p.235.

<sup>59</sup> Laqueur, *'Zionism'*, p.528.

<sup>60</sup> A move that was regarded by Zionists as amounting to a repudiation of the Balfour Declaration and a particular cruel blow in the context of the intensifying anti-Jewish actions in Nazi Germany.

the twentieth century, the BOD finally became, at least on the issue of Zionism, representative of the political beliefs of Anglo-Jewry.

The BOD's 'conversion' to Zionism, paved the way for similar changes in the other important Anglo-Jewish institutions. This process was significantly advanced by the Nazis' attempt to eradicate European Jewry during the Second War, an event which was regarded as confirming in the most horrific terms, Herzl's prognosis regarding the status of European Jewry, and the need for an independent Jewish state. By the end of the Second World War, in addition to the BOD and the JC, both synagogal bodies moved to a position of supporting Zionism. Anti-Zionism within Anglo-Jewry still persisted<sup>61</sup> mainly in the form of the 'Jewish Fellowship,' however, it had only 1,500 members<sup>62</sup> and was marginalized by the mainstream Jewish community.<sup>63</sup> Such was the change in the attitude of Anglo-Jewry regarding Zionism that even the AJA, the very bastion of Jewish anti-Zionism reversed its stance, after the war, appointing Leonard Stein, the former political secretary of the World Zionist Organisation, as its president and submitting a memorandum to the Government in favour of 'a settlement doing justice to Jewish rights and needs in Palestine'.<sup>64</sup>

At the end of the Second World War in May 1945, Anglo-Jewry, both in terms of popular sentiment and official institutional policy, was avowedly pro-Zionist, advocating Jewish statehood in Palestine. Such a stance had tremendous implications upon the charged issue of dual allegiance. British Jews, like their compatriots, had

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<sup>61</sup> Sir Edward Spears, famously continued his anti-Zionist campaign after the end of the Second World War, going so far as to work for the Arab case, see R. Miller, 'Sir Edward Spears' Jewish Problem' *The Journal of Israeli History* xix.i (Spring 1998), pp.41-59.

<sup>62</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, January 31 1946, p.6.

<sup>63</sup> In July 1943 the BOD disbanded the Joint Foreign Committee with the AJA and in so doing further distanced itself from the AJA's anti-Zionism.

<sup>64</sup> When questioned by the Anglo-American Committee in January 1946, the AJA was recorded as having an 'odd mixture of opinions' towards Zionism with Stein announcing 'some of its members Zionist and some are the opposite. *Manchester Guardian*, January 31 1946, p.6.

fought and died defending Britain against Nazi tyranny during the war. However, on the question of Palestine, and in particular the 1939 White Paper, Anglo-Jewry's opinion clashed directly with that of the government. Following the Zionist's capture of the BOD, the elected representatives of Anglo-Jewry were far more vocal and forceful in their criticism of the government, especially against the virtual halt on Jewish immigration to Palestine as decreed by the 1939 White Paper.

It was therefore the issue of immigration that was to form the fault line between Anglo-Jewry and the British Government in the final years of the Mandate,<sup>65</sup> a confrontation, which inevitably brought into question the issue of dual allegiance. The actions of the Jewish underground in violently opposing the White Paper and British rule in Palestine, added a complicated dimension to this already delicate relationship, serving to test the durability of Anglo-Jewry's dual allegiance to its very limits.

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<sup>65</sup> Nachmani, 'British Policy in Palestine After World War II' Unpublished D.Phil (Oxford University, 1981), p.6.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **The Jewish Underground: Zionists up in arms**

Political violence has long been a feature of Palestinian politics, stretching as far back as British Mandatory rule over the territory.<sup>66</sup> The purpose of this chapter is focus on the Jewish underground; one of the main sources of political violence in the Mandate period, and in so doing, develop on the contextual framework of the previous chapter by analysing the second crucial variable of this thesis. Specifically, this chapter serves to account for the histories of the three leading Jewish underground organisations: the Irgun, LEHI (also known as the Stern Gang or Stern Group) and the Haganah.

The chapter will begin by defining and classifying Jewish political violence in Mandate Palestine. There will be an appraisal of revisionist Zionism, the offshoot of mainstream Zionism, which served as the ideological foundation of the Irgun and LEHI. This will be followed by a more focused evaluation of the individual ideologies, structures, memberships and leaderships of the three Jewish underground organisations. Finally, this chapter will also serve to chronicle Jewish underground activities in the in the pre-war period, including an account of the assassination of Lord Moyne, and the British authorities' response.

#### **Terrorists or Underground?**

The first obvious question to raise when addressing the issue of Jewish political violence in Mandate Palestine is which term to use in order to describe the organisations involved. For the purposes of this thesis these organisations will

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<sup>66</sup> The first serious incident of violence to occur following the establishment of the British administration was the Arab anti-Jewish riots in Jerusalem, which began on 4 April 1920. Fromkin, *'Peace'*, p.447.

collectively be referred to as the ‘Jewish underground’. This is the term most often used to describe the militant Palestinian Jewish organisations, both at the time of their operation,<sup>67</sup> and in subsequent studies. The notion of combining three distinct organisations under a single appellation is, not without its faults, particularly since within the bounds of political violence—the common feature binding the organisations in the Jewish underground—there is a considerable gradation of activities.

Before addressing the question of ‘military equivalency’, it is first prudent to tackle the equally vexing issue of ‘terrorism’. Use of the term ‘Jewish terrorism’ to describe the activities of the Jewish underground in Mandate Palestine is not without precedent, having been employed in works such as Edward Horne’s *A Job Well Done*.<sup>68</sup> However, the appropriateness of using such a politically charged term in academic work is questionable. The limitations are amply displayed by the selected literature that refers to the activities of the Jewish underground as ‘terrorism,’ which typically, like Horne’s book, are partial, less scholarly works, written with a political agenda or a vested interest.<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, addressing the issue of ‘terrorism’ is an essential part of any account of the Jewish underground. The problem of ‘terrorism’ as a political concept, is, as Walter Laqueur notes, that:

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<sup>67</sup> See for example *The Times*, September 26 1945, p.5 special feature on ‘The growth of Jewish underground groups’.

<sup>68</sup> E. P. Horne, *A job well done* (England: Eastwood, 1982).

<sup>69</sup> Horne’s work, *A job well done* is the ‘official history’ of the Palestinian Police Force, based on Horne’s personal account, and as such, is highly susceptible to idealism, providing a less than objective account of political violence in the Mandate.

‘It [terrorism] is complicated, and what can be said without fear of contradiction in one country is by no means true for other groups at other times and in other societies’.<sup>70</sup>

The nebulous nature of terrorism has rendered all attempts to find consensus on a definition unsuccessful, and it is for this reason that it is advisable where possible to seek alternative terminology.

Rejecting the term ‘terrorism’ to describe the activities of the Jewish underground, is not, it must be stressed, an apology for the actions of the Jewish underground, or to deny that the extra-systemic actions of the Irgun and LEHI in particular, were anything but acts of terrorism. The campaign of political violence these two organisations waged against the British and latterly the Palestinian Arab population, which included numerous bombings and shootings, incontrovertibly amount, even in the absence of an agreed concise definition, to acts that would be commonly regarded as terrorism.

By tackling the issue of terrorism in the context of the Jewish underground, the second question of ‘equivalency’ naturally arises. Implicit to the above exposition of the question of terrorism and the Jewish underground is the exclusion of the Haganah from the account. This was quite deliberate, and premised on the basis that the Haganah’s use of political violence was far more restrained, systematic and calculated than the often-indiscriminate tactics employed by the Irgun and LEHI. These subtle different shades of militancy and violence are immediately lost if all three organisations are classified by the imprecise term of ‘terrorist’. Moreover, as

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<sup>70</sup> Laqueur, *Terrorism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), p.134.

will be later explored, the relationship between the Haganah and the Irgun and LEHI was in a constant state of flux between strategic collaboration and a policy of hostility in coordination with the British. This fluid situation would presumably entail classifying the Haganah as ‘at times terrorist’, whereas, irrespective of the level of cooperation with the British, the Haganah was always involved in non-violent underground activities, such as coordinating the illegal transfer of Jewish immigrants to Palestine.<sup>71</sup>

The ‘special’ status of the Haganah invites one final semantic question as to whether the Haganah should be classified as a Jewish underground organisation at all? In the view of old Zionist historical tracts, to as much as classify the Haganah in the same category as the Irgun and LEHI amounted to a significant historical outrage. By virtue of the Haganah’s officialdom, attained through its association with the Jewish Agency, and when juxtaposed against the extremism of the Irgun and LEHI, Zionist historians consider the activities of the Haganah as being a world apart from what they regarded as the terrorist activities of the revisionist Zionist organisations. To an extent this is a valid approach, especially considering the vacillations in the Haganah’s use of violence. However, such accounts deliberately gloss over the more malign clandestine activities of the Haganah,<sup>72</sup> which warrant its classification as part of the Jewish underground, alongside the Irgun and LEHI.

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<sup>71</sup> On this subject see I. F. Stone, *‘Underground to Palestine’* (London: Hutchinson, 1978).

<sup>72</sup> As D.A. Charters cites, quoting M. Sirkin, ‘One cannot draw the line between various kinds of violence’. D.A. Charters, *‘The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-47’* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), p.45.



## **Underground Ideology: Revisionist Zionism**

Within the broad umbrella of the ‘Jewish underground’ there was a fundamental ideological difference between the ‘twin’ revisionist organisations of the Irgun and LEHI and the Haganah. Whereas, the Haganah was ideologically committed to Herzl’s mainstream Zionism and the politics of the Jewish Agency the Irgun and LEHI evolved as offshoots of revisionist Zionism.

Revisionist Zionism emerged out of the dissatisfaction felt by certain sections of the Zionist movement with official Zionist policy in the 1920s. Ever since its inception, the Zionist movement had been highly factious. The worst internal factionalism ameliorated during the post-Balfour Declaration honeymoon of the early 1920s. However, exasperation and disillusionment soon returned when the expected quick advances in the Zionist project failed to materialise. Chaim Weizmann and the Zionist Executive were the chief target of Zionist dissatisfaction, standing accused of being indecisive, ‘leaning excessively towards the British and opting for a new ‘miniature Zionism’.<sup>73</sup>

One of the leading and most vocal critics was Vladimir (Zeev) Jabotinsky, a young Russian intellectual Zionist activist, who resigned from the Zionist Executive in 1923 in protest against ‘what he regarded as Weizmann’s fatal policy of renunciation and compromise’.<sup>74</sup> In the same year Jabotinsky founded *Batar*, a breakaway Zionist youth movement in Riga, Latvia. Soon after, Jabotinsky formulated the new Zionist ideology of revisionism, which rather than being a major new ideological departure, amounted to a reconfiguration of traditional Zionist doctrine.

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<sup>73</sup> Laqueur, ‘Zionism’, p.339

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.345.

Revisionist ideology was codified in the 1926 Revisionist Programme. In essence the ideology was simple, remaining true to the basic tenants of Zionism but with three crucial adaptations. The first revision pertained to the size of the territory designated for the Jewish state, the second to the tactical approach of Zionist politics and the third to Jewish security in Palestine. On the issue of territory, Jabotinsky declared that the Balfour Declaration explicitly prescribed a Jewish state on both west and east banks of the River Jordan, to form a congruous Jewish entity stretching from the Mediterranean to Iraq, including the land designated as Trans-Jordan. Regarding the Zionist movement's tactical approach, Jabotinsky demanded the end of mainstream Zionism's practise of gradualist diplomacy in favour of an unequivocal declaration that the objective of Zionism was Jewish statehood. Finally, Jabotinsky called for the immediate establishment of a Jewish army in Palestine, if necessary under British command, in order to protect the Yishuv from Arab attack.

With its forthright and far-reaching demands acting as its core philosophy, revisionist Zionism was a maximalist movement, in stark contrast to the restrained and compromising character of mainstream Zionism. In this sense revisionist Zionism was far more predisposed to militarism and extremism. However, with the exception of his demand for the formation of a Jewish army, Jabotinsky expressed little interest in militarism. Instead, he sought to imbue the revisionist movement with his own democratic and pluralist values. Indeed, for most his life, rather than adopting firebrand revolutionary politics, Jabotinsky maintained a great reverence and respect for Britain and British politics, believing well into the 1930s that Britain would honour its commitment to the Jews, and in the politics of a 'just cause'.

The revisionists' ideological shift in the 1930s away from mild socialism towards free enterprise economics placed Jabotinsky's movement on a further level of opposition to mainstream Zionism, and opened the movement to the charge that it was fascist. In the charged political atmosphere of the 1930s, such an accusation is not surprising, especially since the *Betar* youth wing of revisionism had taken to adopting the militarism that was typical of right-wing movements of the day.<sup>75</sup> Although there were certainly Jewish fascist sympathisers within revisionist ranks, Jabotinsky resisted their attempts to steer the movement in a more rightwing direction.

The revisionist movement quickly grew in the 1920s, with a particularly strong appeal in the downtrodden Eastern European Jewish communities, who sought a 'quick fix' to their perilous plight. Revisionism also proved popular in Mandate Palestine, attracting support from the politically impatient elements of the Yishuv who craved independence from Britain and full Jewish statehood. Revisionism's direct, candid and simple style of politics, quickly became the movement's defining feature, eclipsing its ideological appeal which remained based upon a commitment to a greater Jewish state on both banks of the Jordan, the call for the formation of a Jewish army and latterly a quasi religious adherence to Jewish orthodoxy.<sup>76</sup>

As was the case in Jewish communities around the world, revisionism successfully spread to Britain, where there was 'a ready response amongst groups of English Zionists alienated from the mainstream Zionist movement'.<sup>77</sup> The movement expanded slowly but steadily throughout the 1920s under the auspices of the Union of

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<sup>75</sup> Betar activities included 'solemn processions, parades, banners and flags, rituals, patriotic poetry, uniforms, and training camps'. Its members in training camps dotted throughout Europe, 'handled weapons, fired on rifle ranges, learned to fly, march and sail'. Ibid., p.19

<sup>76</sup> In 1935 Jabotinsky synthesised Revisionism with Jewish Orthodoxy in what is believed to be an attempt to attract Eastern European religious support for the movement rather than a genuine ideological re-evaluation. Laqueur, 'Zionism', p.365.

<sup>77</sup> Cesarani, 'Zionism', p.81

Zionist Revisionists, eventually attaining enough support to first send delegates to the English Zionist Federation Annual Conference in 1929 and later in the same year to the World Zionist Organisation (WZO) congress.<sup>78</sup> Revisionist membership reached a peak in Britain in the early 1930s, when the movement's gains amounted to 'a headache for the British Zionist Federation, which felt the need to combat their [the revisionist's] propaganda'.<sup>79</sup> Jabotinsky's decision to secede from the WZO in 1931 had a profound effect upon revisionism in Britain, sending the movement into a spectacular decline<sup>80</sup> from which it only began to recover in 1938, under the new name of the 'New Zionist Organisation'.

Ignoring the fall in British support for revisionism during the mid-1930s, it is significant that revisionism was able to amass any support amongst Anglo-Jewry, since much of the movement's activities, both in the UK and internationally, were focused upon bringing about a speedy British retreat from the Mandate. That revisionism enjoyed a degree of success in Britain is indicative of the movement's commitment to democratic practises and the benign nature of its carefully constrained maximalist politics. Whilst Jabotinsky was banned from entering Palestine in 1930<sup>81</sup> on the grounds of his 'extremist views',<sup>82</sup> he was granted permission to live in England, where he resided in the late 1930s and established the headquarters of the revisionist movement in London.<sup>83</sup> Britain's readiness to grant Jabotinsky residency and allow him to base his movement in London is therefore a clear indication of the British authorities' lack of concern with the revisionist Zionist movement.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., pp.83-84.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.314.

<sup>80</sup> Jabotinsky's decision to break Zionist unity by leaving the WZO was presented by the British Zionist Federation as an unforgivable act of treachery, a propaganda coup, which precipitated the decline in revisionist fortunes in Britain.

<sup>81</sup> At the time he was promoting revisionism in South Africa.

<sup>82</sup> Laqueur, 'Zionism', p.355.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.369.

## The Formation of the Jewish Underground

The first significant development towards the establishment of an armed Jewish force in Palestine<sup>84</sup> was the formation, at Jabotinsky's insistence, of Jewish battalions, called the 'Jewish Legion' within the British army in the First World War, who assisted Allenby's British Expeditionary Force in repelling Ottoman forces from Palestine in 1917.<sup>85</sup> In 1919, much to Jabotinsky's consternation, the temporary British administration disbanded the Jewish legion,<sup>86</sup> and in so doing, assumed the role as guarantor for the security of both Jewish and Arab communities living in Palestine.

Following the 1920 anti-Jewish riots in Jerusalem, Jabotinsky's fear that the British would offer inadequate protection to the Jewish community in Palestine was seemingly proven correct. In response to the bloodshed, the *Histradut* (the General Federation of Jewish Labour),<sup>87</sup> decreed that a countrywide Jewish defence organisation was required to protect the Yishuv from Arab attack. The Haganah (Defence) organisation was founded in March 1921 to fulfil this role, with Jabotinsky at its head. From the very outset it was a clandestine organisation, since the British authorities refused to sanction such a body.<sup>88</sup>

The stated objective of the Haganah was 'to safeguard the national and social content of popular defence in this country'. The word 'defence' in this statement is pivotal. The very name of the Haganah is the Hebrew word for 'defence', and it was

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<sup>84</sup> Ad hoc Jewish defence forces had existed before 1914 to protect Jewish settlements but these were largely uncoordinated local organisations. Charters, *Jewish Insurgency*, p.43.

<sup>85</sup> Fromer, *Peace*, pp.445-446.

<sup>86</sup> Bowyer Bell, *Terror*, p.17.

<sup>87</sup> Founded in 1920 as the leading Zionist body in Palestine.

<sup>88</sup> Gilbert, *Israel*, p.47.

with the explicit aim of developing a defensive force for the Yishuv that the Haganah was created. Accordingly, the guiding ideological force of the Haganah was '*havlaga*' (restraint), a policy that reflected the philosophy of the *Histradut* Union that founded the Haganah, and which was awash with pacifist left wing ideologists. Implicitly, as a defence force, the Haganah was established as an anti-Arab, as opposed to anti-British, militia. This position, with the exception of the illegality of the Haganah's status, was easily maintained, as long as British policy remained conciliatory to Zionism, as it was throughout the 1920s.

Within months of the formation of the Haganah, the May 1921 Arab riots erupted, and a wave of violence swept across Jewish settlements and Jerusalem.<sup>89</sup> Using weapons illegally smuggled from Europe, the Haganah played a leading role in repelling attacks on Jewish settlements, successfully establishing itself as the Yishuv's defence force. Following this 'baptism of fire', the Mandate enjoyed a prolonged period of quiet, and Jewish immigration was allowed to progress unhindered. The lull in violence was used as opportunity for the Haganah to develop, which it did in terms of organisation, training and the procurement of arms. The quiet also generated a sense of complacency, and some of the Yishuv's leaders began to question the need for a national defence organization.

The return of serious rioting to Palestine in the summer of 1929<sup>90</sup> served to both reinforce the need for a Jewish defence organisation, and also precipitated significant internal changes in the Haganah. Shortly after the rioting began, the Haganah was seconded from the *Histradut* to the Jewish Agency, and thereby became the official, although still illegal, defensive organisation of the Yishuv. The rioting caught the leadership of the Yishuv and the Haganah, off guard, with forces 'stretched

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>90</sup> For a detailed treatment of the 1929 rioting see Bowyer Bell '*Terror*', pp.2-7.

to the limit in both Jerusalem and Tel Aviv'.<sup>91</sup> In the reorganisation that followed the worse of the violence, Avraham Tehomi was appointed district commander of Jerusalem. Tehomi's appointment brought order and discipline to the Haganah, but with it, a heightened militarism that worried many in the Jewish Agency leadership. Tehomi was known to have contacts with the revisionist movement and spoke out in favour of the Haganah changing from a defensive to an offensive strategy. In April 1931, Tehomi and a number of his close associates seized an arms cache and seceded from the Haganah to form a new underground organisation.<sup>92</sup>

### **Haganah-Bet: The Origins of the Irgun**

Tehomi's splinter group adopted the name "Irgun Zvai Le'umi" (National Military Organization), but for reasons of secrecy the organisation was more commonly referred to as Haganah-Bet (the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet). The Haganah-Bet was initially 'tiny, comprising of three hundred members and a handful of old arms'.<sup>93</sup> Reflecting Tehomi's own political beliefs, Haganah-Bet aligned itself with Jabotinsky's revisionist movement,<sup>94</sup> and its ranks were soon swelled by a large influx of Jabotinsky's *Betar* youth movement activists, leading to false assertions that it was a fascist organisation.

Ideologically, Haganah-Bet embraced revisionism, promoting, on a non-socialist platform, its 'principle objective of establishing an independent Jewish state, incorporating both Palestine and Trans-Jordan'<sup>95</sup> through open and free immigration to Palestine. Like the Haganah, Haganah-Bet was founded as a response to Arab

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>92</sup> Charters, *Jewish Insurgency*, p.46.

<sup>93</sup> Bowyer Bell, *Terror*, p.23.

<sup>94</sup> A status officially ratified in a deal between Tehomi and Jabotinsky in 1936.

<sup>95</sup> Charters, *Jewish Insurgency*, p.47.

violence, rather than opposition to British rule in Palestine, and despite its illegal status and advocacy of free Jewish immigration to Palestine, at its inception it bore no grudge against the British.

The divergence between the Haganah and Haganah-Bet's military strategies became apparent during the serious and sustained Arab uprising of 1936-38. As both organisations held a common objective in protecting the Yishuv they coordinated together, and shared military intelligence. As the fighting intensified, the ideological differences between the two organisations began to impact upon their military tactics. Under the political guidance of the Jewish Agency, the Haganah remained resolutely committed to its policy of *havlaga*, employing a purely defensive military strategy, designed to repel Arab attacks on Jewish settlements. Such self-restraint, however, was increasingly challenged within Haganah-Bet ranks. With its members swelled by 'radical' *Betar* activists, and in the face of heightened Arab anti-Jewish violence, which seemingly went unchecked by the British security forces, militants within Haganah-Bet began to exert pressure on the political and military leadership of the organisation to abandon the pacifist strategy of self-restraint, and adopt an offensive strategy, with the ultimate aim of establishing a Jewish state by armed force.

### **The Creation of the Irgun**

On 23 April 1937, Haganah-Bet split, with the majority of its members following Tehomi, who had become 'convinced by Ben Gurion's thesis that self-restraint was a vital policy if Jewish immigration was to be continued and civil war averted,' and decided to rejoin the Haganah.<sup>96</sup> About 1,500 revisionist Haganah-Bet

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<sup>96</sup> J.Heller, *The Stern Gang* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p.31



members rejected Tehomi's decision and chose instead to maintain their own independent organisation, which was re-named the *Irgun*.<sup>97</sup> Jabotinsky was appointed the Irgun's supreme commander, and endorsed the new organisation's programme, which included a clause that declared: 'the fate of the Jewish nation will be decided by armed Jewish force on the soil of the homeland'.<sup>98</sup> Having previously resisted the temptation to sanction the use of political violence, Jabotinsky signalled a fundamental ideological reversal announcing:

'If the rioting continues and it is characterised by a tendency to attack Jews, do not exercise self-restraint,'<sup>99</sup>

On 14 November 1937 the Irgun committed its first 'offensive' action, killing a number of Arabs in Jerusalem in reprisal for the deaths of five Jews near Kiryat-Anavim.<sup>100</sup> The attack was approved by Jabotinsky, and as such, represented a significant departure in revisionist politics, even though military actions were thereafter suspended. Despite Jabotinsky's decision to 'cross the line' regarding self-restraint, he remained resolutely pro-British, and refused to contemplate the demand of more extremist factions within the Irgun to widen hostilities to include anti-British actions. The relationship between the Haganah and the Irgun, meanwhile, deteriorated to a point where the two organisations began kidnapping rival members.

Irrespective of internal Yishuv feuds, violence in Palestine continued throughout 1938, during which time Irgun member Shlomo Ben Josef was executed

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.32

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p.38.

by the British for shooting at an Arab bus,<sup>101</sup> ‘the first Jew to be hanged in Palestine by the British’.<sup>102</sup>

The publication of the McDonald White Paper on 17 May 1939, which restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine to 75,000 Jews over five years, and repudiated much of the Balfour Declaration, in addition to the British authorities’ heightened efforts to repress the Irgun, who, in one particularly bad atrocity in July 1938, killed 21 Arabs by placing a bomb in a Haifa market, set the Irgun and the British authorities on a collision course. Extremists within the Irgun began to vocally agitate against the British and gravitated towards Avraham Stern, an Irgun maximalist with a long history of radicalism. Jabotinsky was unyielding, maintaining that despite the bleak outlook, British ‘honour’ would guarantee that the Balfour Declaration would eventually be implemented. To many in the Irgun, Jabotinsky’s blind-faith in the British was delusional, and his influence over Irgun politics began to wane. By June 1939 Jabotinsky was powerless to prevent the Irgun sending ‘a booby-trapped envelope to the Jerusalem central post-office killing a British policeman,’<sup>103</sup> and in August 1939 three British policemen were murdered in retaliation for torturing captured Irgun members.<sup>104</sup>

The outbreak of the Second World War on 1 September 1939 triggered an abrupt conclusion to the internal ideological struggle that had been welling in the Irgun. With Britain still maintaining a strict quota on Jewish immigration to Palestine, in spite of Nazi advances in Europe, a decision had to be made whether to join the

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<sup>101</sup> Ben Josef’s launched his attack without Irgun authorisation, although the Irgun posthumously endorsed his actions.

<sup>102</sup> Gilbert ‘*Israel*’, p.93.

<sup>103</sup> Heller, ‘*Stern Gang*’, p.50.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

British in fighting the common enemy of Nazism, or to prioritise opposing British rule in Palestine and the White Paper. In advance of the Irgun's decision, David Ben Gurion addressed the dichotomy on behalf of mainstream Zionism, famously declaring:

‘We will fight with the British against Hitler as if there was no White Paper; we will fight the White Paper as if there were no war’.<sup>105</sup>

In so doing Ben Gurion committed the Haganah to fight alongside Allied forces, whilst simultaneously endorsing ‘illegal’ attempts to break the British embargo. In contrast to the unequivocal position of the Haganah and the Yishuv leadership, the Irgun found reaching a consensus on the crucial question of allegiance far harder. On a logistical level, the British campaign against the Irgun in advance of the war had resulted in the imprisonment of much of its leadership. Consequently, the Commander in Chief of the Irgun, David Raziel was forced to announce the Irgun's decision from jail, without consultation, on 11 September 1939:

‘To avoid disrupting the course of the war against Germany, and in order to invest maximum effort in assisting Great Britain and its allies, the Irgun Zvai Le'umi has decided to suspend all offensive activities in Palestine which could cause harm to the British government and in any way be of assistance to the greatest enemy the Jewish people has ever known - German Nazism’.

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<sup>105</sup> Gilbert *‘Israel’*, p.101.

Raziel's decision to end hostilities against the British and join their fight against Germany was met with scorn and disbelief by the extremist Irgun faction that surrounded Stern. In advance of the war, Stern had already declared that he believed:

'No Jew would fight in foreign armies, there would be no foreign legion or mercenary army instead he advocated that Jews would fight as a tribe of warriors alongside the power which would recognise that the Jewish people were the sole owners of the county and that they would establish their kingdom in it'.<sup>106</sup>

With such a fundamental divergence in ideological approach, an internal split in the Irgun became increasingly likely.

### **The Final Split: The Formation of LEHI**

LEHI, (Lohamei Heurt Yisrael, Freedom Fighters for Israel), also known as the Stern Gang, seceded from the Irgun on 26 June 1940, shortly after Stern's release from prison. The objectives of the organisation were set out under 'High Command Communiqués Nos.111 and 112, as: 'the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel by force of arms and the evasion by all possible means of any foreign recruitment'.<sup>107</sup>

Under Stern's guidance, LEHI immediately began a sporadic, indiscriminate campaign against the British in Palestine. Using tactics more reminiscent of bandits than a political organisation, LEHI members stole from banks and raided arms caches to raise supplies. With a guiding philosophy focused upon ejecting the British from

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<sup>106</sup> Heller, '*Stern Gang*', p.53.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p.71.

Palestine, LEHI members were encouraged to use all tactics and anything at their disposal to advance this goal. Infamously this included towards the end of 1940 and the beginning of 1941, two LEHI missions to Lebanon to discuss the possibility of ‘active participation in the war on the side of Germany against the British’.<sup>108</sup>

Despite being ‘relatively small, ill-equipped, and poorly funded, without any significant political support either in the Mandate or abroad,’<sup>109</sup> LEHI caused a disproportionate level of disturbance against British interests for its size. Stern ‘advocated ‘individual terrorism’, a technique borrowed from the writings and experience of the European anarchist movements, whereby the assassination of key individuals was supposed to bring down the whole government structure’.<sup>110</sup> This strategy was infused with a fanatical fatalism and reverence for glorified death. Together these two values formed a potent mix, which was manifested in a trial of random terrorist attacks against British personnel. A cult of personality quickly developed around Stern’s leadership, which was fashioned on Mussolini, and intensified following Stern’s death at the hands of British authorities on 12 February 1942.

On account of LEHI’s small size and the combined efforts of the Haganah, Irgun and British authorities to thwart its activities, LEHI’s ability to strike decreased in 1942, and the movement declined in the absence of its charismatic leader. It was, however, after Stern’s death that LEHI accomplished its most infamous wartime exploit by assassinating Lord Moyne in Cairo in 1944. Lord Moyne was appointed Minister Resident in the Middle East in January 1944 and had long been on LEHI’s rogue list following statements supporting the creation of an Arab Federation, and in particular, a speech in the House of Lords in June 1942 when he spoke ‘of the purity

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., pp.84-91.

<sup>109</sup> Bowyer Bell ‘*Terror*’, p.62.

<sup>110</sup> Charters, ‘*Jewish Insurgency*’, p.51

of the Arab race and denigrated the attempts of the mixed Jewish race to establish control over Palestine'.<sup>111</sup> Citing that Lord Moyne's appointment, as Minister Resident, was necessarily a bad omen for Zionism, two LEHI assassins shot Moyne dead on November 6 1944.<sup>112</sup>

The 'success' of the Stern Gang's mission in Cairo, whilst undoubtedly a significant coup for its members, acted to exaggerate the organisation's stature and flatter its abilities. By the end of the war LEHI was still shunned by mainstream Jewry, remaining a small, persecuted, lightly armed group of radical extremists.

Following Ben Gurion and Razieli's decisions at the beginning of the war to fight alongside the British, both the Haganah and the Irgun played an active part in the Allied war effort against Nazism, in the Middle East, North African and European theatres. Stories of Jewish Palestinian heroism were abundant during this period; Razieli himself was killed whilst on a mission in Iraq. Yet, whilst militarily fully coordinating with the British, both organisations continued to clandestinely attempt to bring Jewish immigrants into Palestine. As news of the horrors of Nazi persecution of European Jewry began to filter back to the Yishuv, continued British intransigence against Jewish immigration, which had resulted in ships laden with desperate Jewish immigrants being turned away and even sunk, led to increased levels of frustration and opposition.

Reflecting the maximalist ideology of the Irgun, a decision was taken by the newly appointed commander Menachem Begin to break ranks with the Haganah and the British. In January 1944 Begin proclaimed an armed revolt against the British Mandate declaring that:

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<sup>111</sup> Heller, '*Stern Gang*', p.123

<sup>112</sup> Wilson, '*Chariot*', p.121.

‘His Majesty’s Government was considered to be solely responsible for preventing Jewish immigration to Palestine, thus indirectly contributing to the Holocaust. This was despite Jewish loyalty and Arab treachery’.

There can no longer be an armistice between the Jewish nation...and the British administration in the Land of Israel which has been delivering our brethren to Hitler.<sup>113</sup>

On account of Jabotinsky’s death in 1940, there was no longer a steadying political hand to guide the Irgun. Furthermore Begin, severed all official ties with political revisionism whilst maintaining its ideology as that of the Irgun’s.

Like LEHI, following the Irgun’s secession from the British forces, it too was blighted by poor support and insufficient armaments. With only 600 members and sufficient weapons to arm just 200,<sup>114</sup> the Irgun’s primary battle was one of survival. Begin’s armed revolt consequently was extremely limited in scope, characterised by the distribution of propaganda pamphlets and limited attacks on British infrastructure in Palestine.

As the Second World War drew to a close, the record of Jewish underground activities in Mandate Palestine was extremely chequered. Established as defensive organisations against Arab attacks, the two main underground organisations had, reflecting their divergent ideologies, evolved in two different directions. The Haganah, true to its name, adopted a defensive strategy and the Irgun an offensive,

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<sup>113</sup> S.Zadka *‘Blood in Zion’* (London: Brassey’s, 1995), p.29.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38

increasingly anti-British stance. Mirroring the wider movements they represented, at the end of the war, the Haganah was by far the larger, better-equipped organisation, with an estimated 45,000 members against the Irgun's estimated 600-1000.<sup>115</sup>

Yet, in spite of the many differences between the Haganah, the Irgun and the small fanatical LEHI, with the end of the war and the defeat of Nazism, all three organisations were united in common opposition to the continued British presence in Palestine and embargo on Jewish immigration. It was this common anti-British cause that was to dominate Jewish underground activities in the post-war Mandate, eventually pitting all three organisations against British rule, and in so doing, exposing pro-Zionist Anglo-Jewry to the vexing dilemma of dual allegiance.

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<sup>115</sup> Charters, *Jewish Insurgency*, pp.44-46.



## CHAPTER 3

### The European Jewish Tragedy and the end of Jewish Restraint

On the eight of May 1945, the Second World War in Europe officially ended. In the closing months of the conflict, Allied and Russian advances deep into occupied Europe had uncovered the full horror of the Nazi's anti-Jewish policy. The liberation of the concentration camps at the beginning of 1945,<sup>116</sup> however, was too late for the vast majority of European Jewry, which during the six years of war, had been systematically exterminated. The Holocaust devastated mainland European Jewry, reducing a Jewish population estimated to have numbered 9.3 million before the war to a rump of 3.5 million in 1946.<sup>117</sup> Of the remaining Jews who survived the Nazi persecution, nearly all were displaced from their place of origin, and understandably most, particularly those of Eastern European origin,<sup>118</sup> had little or no inclination to return 'home'.<sup>119</sup> As Richard Crossman, a British Labour politician and member of the Anglo-American Committee, found when visiting a Displaced Persons (DP) camp in 1946:

'The Nazis and the anti-Semitic movements in the satellite countries, by the ferocity of their persecution transformed the surviving Polish, Hungarian and Rumanian Jews into a Jewish nation without a home'.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Auschwitz was liberated by Soviet forces on January 27 1945 and the concentration camps at Buchenwald and Belsen were liberated by the Allies on April 15 1945.

<sup>117</sup> B. Wasserstein, *'Vanishing Diaspora'* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996), p.viii.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>119</sup> The reluctance of Jews to return to their place of origin was in part due to the continuation of violent anti-Semitism after the War. The British Embassy in Warsaw reported that 300 Jews were killed in Poland in the seven months between the end of the war and the end of 1945. A.Bullock, *'Ernest Bevin Foreign Secretary'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.168.

<sup>120</sup> R. Crossman, *'Palestine Mission'* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1947), pp. 212-213.

‘They [the Jewish DPs] were not Poles any more; but, as Hitler had taught them, members of the Jewish nation, despised and rejected by ‘civilized Europe’.<sup>121</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is two fold, although the twin variables under examination are intimately related. First, it seeks to examine why the issue of Jewish DPs in Europe after World War Two radicalised Palestinian Jewry into violent anti-British politics. Secondly, it seeks to appraise the effect of Palestinian Jewish violence in the Mandate upon Anglo-Jewry.

### **The Holocaust, Zionism and Displaced Persons.**

In the most obscene and tragic of circumstances, in attempting to eradicate European Jewry, the Nazis accomplished what the Zionist had spent over half of a century trying to achieve, namely a mass Jewish belief in their own national identity.<sup>122</sup> As J.C. Hurewitz comments:

‘The fact that Jews had been massacred, not as citizens of their countries, but as Jews, made an impact on post-war world Jewry which now began to see itself as a nation and gather around political Zionism. World Zionism enrolment had more than doubled since 1939 and by 1946 had reached over two million, sixty-three countries having Zionist branches’.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> As cited in Gilbert, *‘Israel’*, p.128.

<sup>122</sup> Nachmani, *‘British Policy’*, pp.78-9.

<sup>123</sup> J.C. Hurewitz, *‘The Struggle for Palestine’* (New York: Norton, 1950), p.267.

In Britain, Zionism had by 1939 become well established on both formal and informal levels as an integral part of the character of Anglo-Jewry. Mirroring the wider international trend, the plight of European Jewry during the Second World War served to consolidate Anglo-Jewry's commitment to Zionism, catapulting the issue to the forefront of Anglo-Jewish concerns.

Intrinsically linked to Anglo-Jewry's commitment to Zionism was the related issue of Jewish DPs in Europe. The question of what to do, and how to manage, the huge number of DPs at the end of the war, which the British estimated in September 1945 to amount to a total of 1,888,000 persons,<sup>124</sup> emerged to transfix both British national politics and Anglo-Jewry alike. Of the nearly two million DPs at the end of the war Bernard Wasserstein contends that 'no more than 100,000'<sup>125</sup> were Jewish, however, as the vast majority of Jewish DPs were Holocaust survivors, their plight was arguably the most desperate, with many hundreds dying of disease and starvation even after the concentration camps were liberated.<sup>126</sup>

Politically, the quandary over Jewish DPs exacerbated tensions between Palestinian Jewry and Britain, and in so doing, exposed pro-Zionist Anglo-Jewry to the tug of the opposing forces of 'dual-allegiance'. At the end of the war the WZO made a renewed demand for the abolition of the 1939 White Paper and the immediate end to British restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine. The Irgun, which had already started its 'war' against the British in Palestine in 1944, went further, citing that its *casus belli*, (under Article 7 of its manifesto), originated in the belief that: 'His Majesty's Government was considered solely responsible for preventing Jewish

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<sup>124</sup> Wasserstein, 'Vanishing Diaspora', p.16.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>126</sup> The initial figure of 100,000 Jewish DPs burgeoned between 1946-47 when a large number of Jews who returned to Eastern Europe after the war fled westward in the face of renewed violent anti-Semitism.

immigration to Palestine, thus indirectly contributing to the Holocaust'.<sup>127</sup> Menachem Begin, the Irgun's leader reveals an even more radicalised belief in his autobiography where he wrote:

'One cannot say that those who shaped British Middle East Policy at that time did not want to save the Jews. It would be more correct to say that they very eagerly wanted the Jews not to be saved. The average Englishman was probably as indifferent to Jewish lives as any other non-Jew in the world. But those who ruled Palestine and the Middle East, were not in the least "indifferent". They were highly interested in achieving the maximum reduction in the number of Jews liable to seek to enter the land of Israel... I have no doubt that any honest British statesman who was really informed of the British Government's policy at that time, would admit that the purpose of British policy in Eretz Israel during the war years was to reduce to the minimum the number of Jews seeking to enter.'<sup>128</sup>

The British in contrast, mindful of the rioting of the 1930s, were keen to maintain the status quo regarding immigration. Typifying the government's position, the head of the Cabinet Committee on Palestine announced that he:

'Did not accept the view that...the European problem of Jews is...fundamentally less tractable than it was before the German persecution'.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Zadka, *Blood in Zion*, p.29.

<sup>128</sup> M. Begin, *The Revolt* (London: W.H.Allen, 1979), pp.28-29.

<sup>129</sup> Nachmani, 'British Policy', p.83.

## **New Government: Same Policy**

The first significant event in post-war British policy towards the Middle East, and in turn, upon the activities of the Jewish underground in Palestine, was the July 1945 general election. To Zionists, both in Palestine and in Britain, the outcome of the July 1945 election appeared highly encouraging with ‘the friends of Zionism to be found prominent and active in all three of the leading political groups’.<sup>130</sup> Writing ahead of the election in May 1945, the editor of the JC Ivan Greenberg confidently affirmed this situation:

‘The Labour Party has at its conference this week once again reaffirmed its oft-declared and complete sympathy for the Zionist Cause. The sentiments of the Liberal Party on the question are in not the smallest doubt. As for the Conservatives... the leader, Mr. CHURCHILL...had always been a supporter of the Zionist cause and still was...’<sup>131</sup>

Whilst the Labour Party’s landslide election victory, announced on 26 July 1945, surprised Anglo-Jewry, as it did all sections of British society, Clement Attlee and Labour’s victory were regarded as extremely positive developments for Zionism, especially by members of the Yishuv community. The JC’s Palestine correspondent, although personally holding a more pessimistic opinion wrote:

‘When the first flush of exhilaration over Labour’s victory in Britain faded many members of the Yishuv—of whose 600,000 souls at least a third hold

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<sup>130</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, May 25 1945, p.8.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8

strong Socialist views—turned to a more sober appreciation of the prospect of the materialisation of Zionist aspirations which, with the first announcement of the Labour landslide, was generally regarded as a foregone conclusion.

The more sanguine elements believe that some interim pronouncement on Palestine policy may be made before the end of this year; for the less sanguine, but unsubdued optimists, hope for an indication of Palestine's future by the time of Parliament's Easter recess; confirmed sceptics such as myself will be pleasantly surprised if any concrete action is taken in the next 18 months, despite the Labour Party's promises and assurances, which have been much quoted in the past few days in the local Hebrew press.<sup>132</sup>

The moderate Palestinian Jewish newspaper *Davar* meanwhile was far more optimistic and emphatic declaring: 'The victory of the Labour party...is a clear victory for the demands of the Zionists in British public opinion'.<sup>133</sup>

In Britain, the leadership of the Jewish community went to great lengths during the election campaign to dispel any notion that Anglo-Jewry was predisposed to supporting any one political party. Tellingly, such efforts were made to avoid providing fodder to the community's detractors, who, it was feared, would cite the existence of a 'Jewish vote' as an 'opportunity to throw doubts upon the Jew's loyalty to the State'.<sup>134</sup> The JC was unequivocal on this matter stating:

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<sup>132</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, August 3 1945, p.1.

<sup>133</sup> Bowyer Bell, 'Terror', p.140.

<sup>134</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, May 25 1945, p.8.

‘It must be borne in mind that the mere attempt to start a “Jewish vote” could easily—such are anti-Jewish tactics—become almost as mischievous as if the attempt had succeeded. We present that consideration to any feather-headed individual Jews who may already be busy with the “Jewish vote” criminal stupidity’.<sup>135</sup>

In the same way that the Labour Party victory was met with optimism in Palestine, it also appeared to Anglo-Jewry as a positive development for the Zionist project. In the 1944 Labour Party National Executive annual report it was pledged that:

‘There is surely neither hope nor meaning in a ‘Jewish National Home’ unless we are prepared to let Jews, if they wish, enter this land in such numbers as to become a majority. There was a strong case for this before the War. There is an irresistible case now, after the unspeakable atrocities of the...Nazi Plan to kill all Jews in Europe’.<sup>136</sup>

Since the Balfour Declaration the Labour Party had at ten party conferences pledged its support for the Jewish National Home.<sup>137</sup> Whilst Bullock makes light of the Labour Party’s commitment to Zionism writing: ‘[t]he fact was that these resolutions [in support of Zionism] were almost invariably put forward at the end of a long week and accepted because nobody objected,’<sup>138</sup> those Jews who supported the Labour Party in the election, and had high hopes of the new government regarding its commitment to Zionism, can arguably be forgiven for their ‘naivety’.

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>136</sup> A. Bullock *‘Ernest Bevin Foreign Secretary’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.47.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p.164.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p.164

With the announcement of the formation of the new Labour Government in Britain, all three Jewish Underground groups called a cease-fire to give the Labour administration an opportunity to announce its policy towards Palestine.<sup>139</sup> On 6 September 1945, Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, made his first public statement on Palestine, announcing his decision to maintain the tenets of the 1939 White Paper and its restrictions on Jewish immigration and to review the matter again in six months.<sup>140</sup>

On account of European Jewry's virtual decimation during the war and their impoverished and displaced status in its aftermath, Britain's decision to maintain the White Paper was met with shock and disbelief by Zionists. In their view, the obvious and only solution to the Jewish DP crisis was to transfer them immediately from Europe to Palestine.

The stance of the BOD on the matter of Jewish DPs was unequivocal,<sup>141</sup> but at the same time, as is indicated in the BOD's October 1945 resolution, mindful of the possible impact such a position would have on the ever present issue of dual allegiance.

'The Board of Deputies of British Jews, as the representative body of British Jewry and therefore in special relationship to the Mandatory Power and fully aware of those aspects of the problem which are connected with the British position in the Middle East, urgently appeal to H.M. Government to make it

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<sup>139</sup> Bowyer Bell, *'Terror'*, p.140.

<sup>140</sup> Bullock, *'Bevin'*, pp.170-171.

<sup>141</sup> In a statement reported in the *Manchester Guardian* in June 1945, the BOD announced: 'We cannot, we dare not remain silent to their [Jewish DPs] cry. We urge upon his Majesty's Government the immediate opening of the gates of Palestine to the remnants of Jewry. *Manchester Guardian*, June 18 1945, p.3.



possible for the remnant of European Jewry who so wish, to settle in Palestine. It is only in Palestine...that the Jewish survivors can rebuild their lives and join with their fellow Jews in making their contribution as Jews to the reconstruction and progress envisaged in the new world order’.

To enable this settlement in Palestine to take place, the Board...urges that the White Paper of 1939...should be immediately abrogated and that...permission be given immediately and facilities be provided for 100,000 of the Jews who survived to enter Palestine.<sup>142</sup>

In the view of the British government, the problem of Jewish DPs and the future status of Palestine were distinct. Bevin, an often brusque politician, brazenly aired his opinion on the issue whilst visiting President Truman<sup>143</sup> in Washington in November 1945 stating that he believed, ‘when Europe settled down’, as he expected ‘it would in the next two years, Jewish knowledge, intelligence, and technical ability could play a great part in its reconstruction’.<sup>144</sup> Bevin then added that he ‘hoped that Jews on the Continent, would not over-emphasize their separateness from other peoples,’<sup>145</sup> a comment, which aside from being insensitive to a community which had been systematically murdered on the very basis of its ‘separateness,’ also amply demonstrated how out of touch British policy was with the reality of Jewish DPs’ opinion.

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<sup>142</sup> Board of Deputies Resolution, 7 October 1945.

<sup>143</sup> President Harry Truman’s stance was essentially aligned with the Zionists and therefore at odds with Britain’s. This is evidenced in article in *The Times*, in which it was reported: ‘The White House communicated “directly with the British Government in an effort to have the doors of Palestine opened” to such “displaced persons as wish to go there.” *The Times*, October 1 1945, p.4

<sup>144</sup> *The Times*, November 14 1945, p.3.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

The attitude of the British press on Jewish DPs was also divided. In line with its reputation for ‘identifying with the ministerial mind’,<sup>146</sup> *The Times* echoed the government’s view. In a ‘special correspondence’ from Palestine, a *The Times* correspondent strove to ‘strip the Palestine problem of irrelevancies and find the fundamental truths,’ concluding that:

‘There are two problems, not one. There is the problem of Zionist political aspirations and there is the problem of a refuge for the homeless Jews of Europe. Zionists would have it that the two are one and that if the first is solved in their favour then the second will automatically have been solved too. This assertion needs careful examination’.<sup>147</sup>

In a similar special feature on the Palestine Question in the *Manchester Guardian*, the exact opposite conclusion was reached. Its correspondent implored:

‘That immigration cannot and should not be stopped is plain enough. Jews must be allowed to go to Palestine in almost unlimited numbers, not for humanitarian but for human reasons. Humanity has to give them not only a home but a chance to realise the dreams of the past and the dreams, so scientifically well founded, of their leader Dr. Chaim Weizmann.’<sup>148</sup>

It was against the backdrop of the British government’s decision to maintain the White Paper and stall a final decision on Palestine and Jewish DPs, by calling for

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<sup>146</sup> Terry Tastard, Perspectives on the Palestine crisis in some of the UK Press 1946-1948, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Hertfordshire (1998), p.3.

<sup>147</sup> *The Times*, November 19 1945, p.5.

<sup>148</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, July 31 1945, p.6.

the formation of an investigative committee in the form of the Anglo-American Committee that the 'United Resistance Movement' began its campaign of violent resistance to British rule in Palestine.

### **The United Resistance Movement**

The United Resistance Movement (Tenuat Hameri Ha'ivi) represented the merger of the three armed Jewish organisations operating in Palestine. Considering the differing ideologies and previous competition between the three groups, such a merger had always appeared unlikely. As Harold Wilson notes, after the war, 'Begin totally dissociated himself from Ben Gurion and his denunciations of the Jewish Agency could hardly be exceeded by a rabid anti-Semite'.<sup>149</sup> However, such was the frustration and disillusionment felt by many Haganah members with the new British government's unfavourable stance towards Zionism that widespread calls emerged within the organisation to put aside any differences with its radical rivals and end the Haganah's policy of restraint in favour of active resistance. This tension was apparent to Chaim Weizmann who sent a warning to Prime Minister Attlee.

'If what we hear is true [the British decision to maintain the White Paper], it would mean nothing short of a tragedy faces the Jewish people, that a very serious conflict might ensue, which we would all deplore'.<sup>150</sup>

The change in the Haganah's military strategy aligned it with the militant policies of the Irgun and LEHI, who were already actively resisting British rule, by

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<sup>149</sup> Wilson, '*Chariot*', p.121.

<sup>150</sup> Bullock, '*Bevin*', p.173.

targeting British installations, as is indicated in the May 1945 breach of ‘the Iraq pipeline by means of explosives in the Beisan area of the Jordan River Valley’.<sup>151</sup> Importantly, the Haganah’s decision to end its policy of restraint was secretly endorsed by the Jewish Agency, who were exasperated by British intransigence towards their cause and also worried by defections from the Haganah to the Irgun.<sup>152</sup>

Under an agreement ratified on 1 November 1945, ‘the Haganah took command of the URM but each group retained its independent existence. The Irgun and LEHI could propose operations, which would be approved in general terms by a three-man high command representing each of the groups’.<sup>153</sup> At the URM’s formation, the Haganah had approximately 40,000 members, although it was its elite ‘crack motorised field force’<sup>154</sup> of 1,500 men called the ‘Palmach’ that carried out most the Haganah’s military operations.<sup>155</sup> The Irgun and LEHI in comparison were far smaller organisations, with respectively 1500 and 250-300 members.<sup>156</sup> Yet, in spite of their relatively small size, both organisations displayed a radicalism and ferocity that meant they inflicted casualties and damage far out of proportion to their size.

Despite the decision of the Jewish underground groups to merge, there was a discernable difference in military approach between the Haganah and its more radical partners. Haganah-led attacks were generally aimed at targets associated with the British blockade on Jewish immigration and conducted with an aim of keeping human casualties to a minimum. In contrast, the Irgun and LEHI were concerned with ending British rule in Palestine, and deliberately employed tactics designed to inflict as much

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<sup>151</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, May 25 1945, p.6.

<sup>152</sup> Charters, ‘*Jewish Insurgency*’, p.53

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53

<sup>154</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, June 18 1946, p.5

<sup>155</sup> Charters, ‘*Jewish Insurgency*’, p.44.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46 and 48

damage as possible. In an interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Friedman Yellin, the leader of LEHI, who at the time had a £500 bounty on his head, revealed LEHI's distinct motivation:

“We are at war with the British Empire now, there is no other way. The British are determined that Palestine shall never become a Jewish State. We are equally determined that it shall.”

“All peaceful means of settling the question had been exploited in vain. It is clear now that the aim of the Jewish people cannot be realised through conferences, commissions, and the writing of memoranda. The chief issue of the creation of the Jewish state cannot be obscured by discussions about immigration. While the problem of Jews in displaced persons' camps of Europe was acute, the basic aim of LEHI is much more far reaching. We don't want the world's pity. We are not conducting a philanthropic and eleemosynary campaign.”<sup>157</sup>

With such a divergence in approach, and particularly in view of the Haganah's concern for limiting casualties and its esoteric connection with the Jewish Agency, the URM was from its very inception prone to instability.

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<sup>157</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, January 4 1946, p.7.

## The Insurgents' Challenge

The Haganah ended its policy of restraint, with a characteristic attack on October 10 1945 on a refugee clearance centre in Athlit. The attack successfully released 'two hundred and eight illegal immigrants'<sup>158</sup> and the camp guards were 'bound and gagged,' rather than killed. The Haganah's underground "Voice of Israel" radio station described the release of the Jewish detainees 'as marking a new period in Palestine of active resistance.' The transmission added: "Jews will no longer tolerate the deportation of their brothers from this country, whatever measures of force are used by the Government".<sup>159</sup> On the same night, in an equally characteristic raid, the Irgun attacked a military training camp at Rehovoth seizing '200 rifles, 15 machine-guns, 200 bayonets and other military equipment.'<sup>160</sup> In the process, 'one British constable was shot dead'.<sup>161</sup>

Since the October 1945 attacks were conducted before the URM agreement was signed, the first 'official' URM attack occurred on the night of October 31-November 1 against the Palestine railway network, harbours and Consolidated Refineries installation in Haifa. During the attack, 'railway-lines were cut in about 50 places, two police launches on the Haifa harbour were damaged and one launch at Jaffa was sunk. Locomotives and rolling stock were also damaged at Lydda Junction and one British soldier and four Palestinian Arabs were killed.'<sup>162</sup> The political message intended by the attacks was clearly anti-British. As *The Times* wrote:

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<sup>158</sup> *The Times*, October 11 1945, p.4.

<sup>159</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, October 11 1945, p.5.

<sup>160</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, October 12 1945, p.5.

<sup>161</sup> *The Times*, October 11 1945, p.4.

<sup>162</sup> *The Times*, November 2 1945, p.4.

‘The choice of communications, police launches and oil installations as targets can be interpreted as a protest against the arrival of British troops, against police measures to stop illegal immigration by sea and against oil interests accused of favouring Arabs’.<sup>163</sup>

Whilst *The Times* was highly disparaging and critical of the ‘Jewish outrages’ the *Manchester Guardian* was far more sympathetic commenting that:

‘During the past few weeks and, indeed, months of rising tension the Jewish Agency has been well aware that it might not be able to hold extremist elements from desperate acts. In the face of strong British reinforcements that have gradually been brought into Palestine any form of violence is now an act of utter desperation.

A too leisurely attitude towards so inflammatory a situation has coloured British policy ever since the war ended’.<sup>164</sup>

Notwithstanding the damage and loss of life caused by the 1 November 1945 URM attack, and even taking into account the considerable press coverage the attack provoked in the British media (although it is important to note it was not regarded as worthy of ‘front page coverage), in comparison to other international developments, and against the backdrop of the recent conclusion of the Second World War, the URM action was limited, and not regarded as being particularly significant.

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>164</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, November 2, 1945, p.8.

In account of the ‘limited’ or ‘low-level’ nature of the URM attack, and especially the small number of British casualties, there was unsurprisingly no reactionary impact upon Anglo-Jewry. This remained the case throughout the period of the URM’s low-level campaign. Accordingly, beyond generally denouncing the violence, the BOD and the JC felt sufficiently confident to express, in a similar manner to the *Manchester Guardian*, a soft-sympathetic leaning towards the URM.

The editorial line in the JC exemplified this daring and delicate approach to the early activities of the Jewish underground in Palestine. In response to the November 1 1945 attack, in a column headed ‘There is now no excuse,’<sup>165</sup> rather than denouncing the attack, the editorial asserted that there was ‘no excuse’ for the continuation of the British blockade on Jewish immigration to Palestine. Although the JC repeatedly decried the URM’s violence as ‘wholly and painfully at variance with the very spirit of Zionism’,<sup>166</sup> a greater emphasis was placed on criticising the White Paper. The formation of the URM and its anti-British activities were first and foremost regarded as ‘having knocked the bottom out of the case for not opening the gates of Palestine’.<sup>167</sup>

The BOD’s stance towards the URM attacks was, to where possible, ignore the issue altogether. Such a policy, opened the BOD to the accusation of tacitly supporting the URM actions, particularly as it made ever stronger statements calling for the abrogation of the White Paper. However, as long as URM activities remained low level and casualties small, there seemed little risk to Anglo-Jewry.

Between November 1945 and June 1946, the URM waged a deliberately planned sporadic campaign of violence against British interests in Palestine. The

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<sup>165</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, November 9 1945, p.10.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10



Haganah continued to attack British infrastructure associated with enforcing the embargo on Jewish immigration to Palestine, whilst the Irgun and LEHI conducted more extreme actions against British army and police personnel. The number of attacks in this period was small, amounting to less than ten serious incidents interspersed by long periods of quiet.

The April 3 1946 attack on the Palestine national rail network typified Haganah led violence. In that one night, the Haganah 'carried out a series of attacks on railway installations in various parts of Palestine...cutting the line and damaging bridges, telephone communications and a station'.<sup>168</sup> This hallmark Haganah tactic was used again on the night of June 16-17 when 'road and rail bridges along about 140 miles of Palestine's land frontier were attacked'.<sup>169</sup> In contrast, the December 25 1945 mortar attack upon the Jaffa C.I.D. headquarters, in which ten people were killed including five British personnel<sup>170</sup> and the April 25 attack in Tel Aviv upon British paratroopers, which killed nine soldiers<sup>171</sup> were indicative of the more violent Irgun and LEHI organised attacks.

Arguably the most spectacular attack of the period took place on 25 February 1946 in a coordinated raid by all three underground organisations on Royal Air Force installations and equipment. The attack earned front-page coverage in the JC, which reported that:

'Attacks lasting several hours were carried out by the Jewish Resistance Movement on Monday night against the R.A.F. aerodromes at Kastina, Kfar

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<sup>168</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, April 4 1946, p.5

<sup>169</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, June 18 1946, p.5.

<sup>170</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, December 28 1945 p.5 and *Manchester Guardian*, December 29, 1945, p.5.

<sup>171</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, April 29 1946, p.8.

Sirkin and Lydda, in Palestine, and 14 aircraft were reported to have been destroyed and eight damaged beyond repair'.<sup>172</sup>

Reporting the same incident, the *Manchester Guardian* recorded that '14 planes valued at £750,000 were destroyed'.<sup>173</sup>

The motivation behind the URM attacks remained consistent, and attacks were often launched either to coincide with, or in reaction to, political developments. Hence, a Haganah attack on a British Coastguard post in November 1945 was 'justified' by a broadcast on the 'Voice of Israel' because 'the coastguard stations had been active in the hunt for refugees from the Greek vessel Dimitrios'.<sup>174</sup> Similarly, the February 1946 attack on the aerodromes was defended on the basis that the destroyed planes were used for reconnaissance purposes against Jewish immigration.

In addition to strategic attacks, all three organisations also launched raids against 'soft' British military installations in order to steal much-needed munitions.<sup>175</sup> Without the financial benefit of 'officialdom' bestowed upon the Haganah, the Irgun and LEHI also resorted to often audacious, armed robberies, for example stealing £35,000 from a train on 12 January 1946<sup>176</sup> and in the same year stealing £40,000 of diamonds on 26 June 1946 from a polishing factory.<sup>177</sup>

As long as the URM's activities remained low-level the BOD and the JC maintained their position of either ignoring or even displaying sympathy for the

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<sup>172</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, March 1 1946, p.1

<sup>173</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, February 17 1946, p.7.

<sup>174</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, November 26 1945, p.5

<sup>175</sup> See for example the Irgun attack on April 23 1946 in Peta Tikva

<sup>176</sup> Bowyer Bell, 'Terror', p.153.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p.166.

activities of what the JC provocatively referred to as ‘the Jewish Resistance Movement’. With Anglo-Jewry’s interests so closely aligned to those of the Yishuv, and British policy at loggerheads with the Zionists, the increasingly brazen activities of the Jewish underground meant there was a very real danger of the loyalty of Anglo-Jewry being brought into question. This situation was further aggravated by the BOD’s persistent opposition to the White Paper;’ its belief that reports in the British press of Jewish violence were conflated ‘Arab propaganda;’<sup>178</sup> and its repeated referral to a bland, year old resolution regarding its position towards Jewish violence, which was past following the assassination of Lord Moyne in November 1944:

‘The Board of Deputies of British Jews expresses its deep abhorrence of acts of a terroristic or murderous character carried out by a small number of Jews in Palestine... The Board protests against any attempt at placing responsibility for their deeds upon the Jewish population of Palestine or upon the Jewish people as a whole’.<sup>179</sup>

### **The Intensification of URM Resistance**

In June 1946 URM tactics significantly shifted enacting a change, which had repercussions on both the URM coalition and Anglo-Jewry. On a more general level the number of Jewish underground activities suddenly increased, beginning with two large attacks on the Palestine railway system. More specifically, following the earlier arrest and June 1946 trial in a Palestinian Military Court of 31 Irgun members for

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<sup>178</sup> Board of Deputies Bulletin, 8 October 1945, p.3.

<sup>179</sup> Board of Deputies Executive Council statement. 19 November 1944.

‘carrying arms and explosives,’<sup>180</sup> the Irgun kidnapped five British officers from the Officers club in Tel Aviv.<sup>181</sup> In a tactic that later became synonymous with the Irgun, it announced that it was holding the captured British officers as ransom against the Irgun members being tried by the British.

The kidnapping of the British officers was highly embarrassing for the Haganah, ‘who issued an appeal on the ‘Voice of Israel’ for their release,’<sup>182</sup> as the British meanwhile, swept across Palestine in search for the missing men. The story of the kidnappings focused international media attention upon Palestine and the activities of the Jewish underground. Crucially, and disastrously for the Jewish Agency and Haganah, the Irgun’s action provided the pretext for British intelligence services, who were aware of the Haganah’s collaboration with the Irgun and LEHI, to raid the Jewish Agency headquarters in Jerusalem and arrest four Jewish Agency executive members. In so doing, the line between the supposedly ‘legitimate’ Jewish Agency and the activities of the Jewish underground was fundamentally blurred, along with any distinction between the Haganah and its more extreme counterparts. The later release, on 4 July 1946, of the kidnapped officers did little to ameliorate the situation.

The impact of the June 1946 Palestine crisis upon Anglo-Jewry was immediate and significant. The AJA, ever-sensitive to issues pertaining to Anglo-Jewry’s loyalty to the state, was sufficiently alarmed by the rise of violence in Palestine ahead of the kidnappings, to issue a statement in the JC before details of the kidnappings and ‘Black Saturday Swoop’ against the Jewish Agency were known. In the statement the AJA declared:

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<sup>180</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, June 27 1946, p.6.

<sup>181</sup> On the same day two British officers were shot and injured in Jerusalem.

<sup>182</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, June 21 1946, p.5.

‘The Anglo-Jewish Association views with great concern the outbreak of violence in Palestine. Misguided men, blind to the tragic implications and the calamitous consequences of their conduct have embarked upon a course of action which has already resulted in loss of life and is calculated to lead to further bloodshed. The Anglo-Jewish Association is certain that all Jews who care for the welfare of Palestine and the future of the Jewish National Home are at one in condemning these wicked and senseless outrages’.<sup>183</sup>

The shock of the June crisis, however, was greatest for the BOD and JC, since both institutions had cast a sympathetic light upon the activities of the URM and staked their reputations upon defending the Jewish Agency. Whilst the BOD’s sympathy for the URM had at least been tacit, the JC’s support was overt, as is indicated in the June 28 1946 editorial of the JC in which, rather naively, the JC sought to play down the malign nature of URM activities by publishing a URM statement made to the Anglo-American Committee:

‘Our path is not the path of terror... When, as a means of defence, we attack Government instruments used to oppress us, we take strict precautions not to injure those manning them, even if by so doing we endanger the success of the undertaking and the safety of our own men... The Jewish Resistance Movement *is not anti-* [original italics] British. We have devoted ourselves to a struggle against the hostile policy pursued against us by Great Britain; but

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<sup>183</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, June 28 1946, p.8.

we have no animosity towards the British people or the British Commonwealth of Nations'.<sup>184</sup>

Despite the greater stability of the BOD's position, it was still badly caught 'off guard' by the June 1946 crisis. In a move that is perhaps understandable in the context of the BOD's close relationship and support for the Jewish Agency, rather than focusing on the actions of the Jewish underground, the BOD instead chose to concentrate on the arrest of the Jewish Agency figures. However, whilst such a policy may have been 'appropriate' during the period of low-level URM violence, the events of June 1946 necessitated a change of approach in order to avoid increasing the strain between Anglo-Jewry and the British government and the charge of disloyalty. Such a situation was a very real threat, as is indicated in the Conservative MP Earl Winterton's demand that in account of the JC's sympathetic stance towards Jewish violence the newspaper should be prosecuted for seditious libel.<sup>185</sup>

The escalation in URM violence in June 1946 demonstrated for the first time the link between Jewish underground anti-British violence in Palestine and Anglo-Jewry's status in Britain. Anglo-Jewry's whole-hearted support for Zionism, and its close association with the Yishuv's efforts to secure the immigration of Jewish DPs to Palestine had already brought British Jews into direct confrontation with the government. This awkward situation was exacerbated significantly by Anglo-Jewry's ambivalence towards the anti-British activities of the Jewish underground. As the level of violence increased in Palestine, Anglo-Jewry's apathy towards the URM encouraged the widely feared situation, in which the loyalty of British Jews was

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p.10

<sup>185</sup> Cesarani, '*Jewish Chronicle*', p.189.

brought into question. The events of June 1946 dealt a severe blow to the Jewish Agency and Haganah, and by extension Anglo-Jewry. In order to rebuild their relationship with the British government all three organisations needed to change their stance towards political violence. The need for such a change was arguably greatest for Anglo-Jewry as, for the first time, its very allegiance to Britain was under scrutiny.

## Chapter 4

### From the King David to the Palace of Westminster: The Jewish Underground Strikes

In the July 12 1946 issue of the JC, John Shaftesley the newly appointed editor wrote in his first editorial:

‘A tragic rift has grown between the two peoples who, in partnership, have been steadily creating the Jewish National Home...In spite of all that has happened, in spite of the formidable errors which have been committed by both parties, we still believe that the highest Jewish and British interests are intertwined’.<sup>186</sup>

The sobriety of Shaftesley’s editorial was echoed in an equally grave statement made by BOD President, Professor Selig Brodetsky, at a crisis meeting:

‘The Board of Deputies believes that the two facets of Anglo-Jewry: their Jewishness and their Britishness can be combined. There is nothing inconsistent about them. As loyal citizens of this country and as good Jews they could proceed with a policy which would bring safety to the Jewish people and add to the security and strength of Great Britain and of the British Empire. Because they believed this, they had no hesitation in declaring their complete solidarity with suffering Israel, with the suffering Yishuv and their conviction that Great Britain would appear once again as the Power which

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<sup>186</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, July 12 1946, p.7.



understood, sympathised with, and wished to remove the sorrows and the suffering of the Jewish people'.<sup>187</sup>

The oft-repeated warning of Anglo-Jewish anti-Zionists that the communities' alignment with Zionism and the Yishuv would necessarily have a detrimental effect upon Anglo-Jewry's status and lead to accusations of disloyalty and alienation appeared, by July 1946, to have become an actuality. With many of Anglo-Jewry's senior leaders, including the President of the BOD, also executive members of the Jewish Agency,<sup>188</sup> the British Government's accusation that the Jewish Agency was implicated in the violent anti-British activities of the Jewish underground placed Anglo-Jewry in a position that in some circles was regarded as disloyal. Without knowing the calamitous events in Palestine that lay a short time ahead, the beginning of July 1946 therefore represented one of the deepest and gravest crises faced by Anglo-Jewry since the tumultuous years of British Union of Fascist activities in the 1930s. Palestine, and in particular the activities of the Jewish underground loomed large over Anglo-Jewry, a situation which left the community reeling and reacting to events that in a geographical sense were very distant but in terms of *real politik* had the potential to affect every Jewish household in the country.

### **A Community Divided?**

The internal impact on Anglo-Jewry of the British Government's swoop against the Jewish Agency was felt immediately. The AJA, which prior to the Mandatory crack down had issued an unequivocal statement in the JC against Jewish

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<sup>187</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, July 5 1946, p.15.

<sup>188</sup> See editorial comments in *Jewish Chronicle*, October 25 1946, p.12

violence, was in the words of one AJA supporter who wrote to the JC, ‘brought into sharp relief by the events’.<sup>189</sup> The BOD in comparison, which had in the view of the same AJA supporter ‘never seen fit to pass a resolution condemning Jewish violence’ and confined ‘its formal protests to the repressive measures taken by the British Administration’ was accused of ‘floundering in a morass of muddled thinking and self-deception’.<sup>190</sup> Whilst, as a letter from the Secretary of the BOD in response to the AJA charge made clear, the BOD had passed a resolution regarding terrorism in 1944,<sup>191</sup> (although importantly no subsequent resolution was adopted) a rift was seemingly developing in the leadership of Anglo-Jewry regarding its stance towards Palestine and the Jewish underground.

Evidence of this emerging rift was starkest in the editorial line of the JC. Under the editorship of Ivan Greenberg, the JC had become increasingly critical of the British government’s policy towards Palestine and the Jewish DP crisis, and simultaneously, increasingly sympathetic towards the activities of the URM. Consequently when the British government arrested members of the Jewish Agency executive, the JC, ignoring the sensitivity of the moment, carried a ‘defiant message to Palestinian Jewry’.<sup>192</sup>

The ‘provocative’ nature of the JC’s editorial line had already aroused criticism from some conservative quarters, culminating in the demand by the ‘Conservative MP Earl Winterton that the paper should be prosecuted for seditious libel’.<sup>193</sup> The directors of the JC many of whom, such as Neville Laski and Leonard Stein were also senior figures from the AJA and BOD, were, as ever, keen to minimise the opportunity for the community’s detractors to accuse Anglo-Jewry of

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<sup>189</sup> Letter from Mr Gershon Ellenbogen, *Jewish Chronicle*, July 26 1946, p.17.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>191</sup> See letter from Mr A.G.Brotman, *Jewish Chronicle*, August 2 1946, p.14.

<sup>192</sup> Cesarani, *Jewish Chronicle*, p.191.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p.189.

disloyalty, and convened a meeting on 24 May 1946 to discuss Greenberg's editorship.<sup>194</sup> Greenberg was accused of 'tending too far in the direction of Revisionism',<sup>195</sup> and new guidelines were devised to govern the JC's editorial line. Escalating tensions in Palestine during June 1946 and Greenberg's refusal to take heed of the new guidelines resulted in a second directors meeting on 2 July 1946<sup>196</sup> in which Greenberg was replaced by John Shaftesley as editor.<sup>197</sup>

The decision of the directors of the JC to remove Greenberg after nine years service is an important moment in both the newspaper and Anglo-Jewry's history. Greenberg's resignation is a clear indicator of the level of tension felt within Anglo-Jewry as a consequence of Jewish violence in Palestine, as Greenberg himself acknowledged in his parting editorial:

'With the developing tension of the Jewish position a growing divergence has manifested itself between the views my conscience compels me to hold and those held, equally conscientiously by the Board of Directors of the paper. In these stern and searching times, honour can tolerate no compromise of principles in any of us. And so, with natural regret on my part, which the Directors have graciously informed me they share, I relinquish this week the editorship of the JEWISH CHRONICLE.'<sup>198</sup>

An indication of the 'popular' attitude of Anglo-Jewry to the arrest of the Jewish Agency's leadership and the ongoing Palestine crisis can be garnered from a

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p.189.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p.190

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p.190

<sup>197</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, July 5 1946, p.5.

<sup>198</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, July 5 1946, p.5.

demonstration in Trafalgar Square in London, which was reported in the *Manchester Guardian*. The demonstration took place on July 7 1946, when ‘thousands of Jews demonstrated against the action of the British government in Palestine’. Tellingly, ‘the march was the first carried out by London’s Jewish community since 1933, when a similar measure of protest was made against the Nazi persecution of Jews in Germany’.<sup>199</sup>

In view of the popular Anglo-Jewish endorsement signalled by the July 7 demonstration, it appears that the BOD’s highly vocal policy of challenging the government on its position towards Palestine and the White Paper, even at the risk of exposing the community to accusations of disloyalty, was widely supported. The BOD’s continued criticism of the White Paper, which was described as ‘illegal’ in official statements,<sup>200</sup> and its call for the implementation of the Anglo-American Committee’s recommendation for the transfer of 100,000 Jewish DPs to Palestine, gained further credence as news broke of a serious pogrom in Kielce, Poland. The attack, which occurred on 4 July 1946, was reported under headlines of ‘ritual murder’,<sup>201</sup> and ‘unbridled savagery’;<sup>202</sup> captions befitting of a pogrom, which left forty-two Polish Jews dead.<sup>203</sup>

### **The King David Hotel Bomb**

It was against this already much strained background that news of ‘Palestine’s worst outrage’,<sup>204</sup> broke in the penultimate week of July 1946. The Irgun attack on the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, on 22 July 1946, represents one of the decisive

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<sup>199</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, July 8 1946, p.5.

<sup>200</sup> The Board of Deputies of British Jews Board Meeting Statement on the Situation in Palestine, 30 June 1946, p.1.

<sup>201</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, July 6 1946, p.5.

<sup>202</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, July 12 1946, p.1

<sup>203</sup> Gilbert, ‘Israel’, p.134.

<sup>204</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, July 23 1946, p.5

moments in Jewish underground violence. The bombing, in the words of the JC was ‘universally condemned’<sup>205</sup> and was variously described as a ‘wicked and senseless hideous outrage’<sup>206</sup> by Leonard Stein, President of the AJA, an ‘insane act of terrorism’<sup>207</sup> by Prime Minister Clement Attlee in a statement to Parliament and ‘insensate fanaticism’<sup>208</sup> by *The Times*. The bomb, which was hidden in seven milk churns that were delivered to the hotel kitchen,<sup>209</sup> caused a massive explosion which ‘blew up an entire wing of the hotel’<sup>210</sup> killing ninety one people and injuring a further forty five.<sup>211</sup> On account of the number of people killed, the extent of destruction wrought, and the symbolism of the attack—the King David Hotel was the headquarters of the British administration—the hotel bombing was, as all the headlines indicate, the single worst example of political violence in the British Mandate’s long and violent history.

The Irgun issued a statement on July 25 1946 claiming responsibility for the attack, although they maintained a telephone warning of the impending explosion was given in advance.<sup>212</sup> This first statement was later followed by a second, in which in spite of the colossal loss of life, the Irgun declared their commitment to a ‘war with Britain until freedom is achieved’.<sup>213</sup>

The repercussions of the King David Hotel bomb on Anglo Jewry were stark. The BOD, highly mindful of its close association with the Jewish Agency, which the

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<sup>205</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, July 26 1946, p.1.

<sup>206</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, July 24 1946, p.5.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>208</sup> *The Times*, July 23 1946, p.5.

<sup>209</sup> Bowyer Bell, ‘*Terror*’, p.170

<sup>210</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, July 26 1946, p.1.

<sup>211</sup> Bowyer Bell, ‘*Terror*’, p.170

<sup>212</sup> Zadka, ‘*Blood in Zion*’, p.87.

<sup>213</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, July 25 1946, p.5.

British government still presented as being compliant with Jewish underground violence, issued an unequivocal statement condemning the attack:

“The Board of Deputies of British Jews is horrified by the latest crime committed by a gang of terrorists in Jerusalem, and expresses its strongest and unqualified condemnation of this dastardly act.

The Board extends its sympathy to the victims and their relatives, and calls upon the Jewish Community in Palestine to do all in their power to help to put an end to all terrorist activities.”<sup>214</sup>

As could be expected, the AJA and the leading synagogal bodies issued similar statements denouncing the attack. It is, however, the reaction of the JC that is the most revealing. Having recently appointed a new editor with the explicit aim of reducing tensions between Anglo-Jewry and wider British society, the King David Hotel bomb presented an immediate test of Shaftesley’s *bona fides*. True to his appointment, Shaftesley’s editorial was a remarkable explication, remaining dignified and authoritative whilst sensitive to the strained mood of the moment. Shaftesley decried the bombing as ‘abominable,’ and clearly aware of the uncomfortable position in which Anglo-Jewry was placed, dedicated the majority of the editorial to expounding the great mutually beneficial symbiosis of Britain and world Jewry’s interests:

‘Nowhere in the world is there a kindlier or more tolerant people, and, despite under-currents of anti-Semitism which it would be foolish to ignore, but

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<sup>214</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, July 26 1946, p.6.

equally unwise to magnify, it still remains true that nowhere can Jews count more surely, not merely on civic equality, but on genuine goodwill and large-minded comprehension of their needs and problems. Nor has that goodwill shown itself only in the relations between British Jews and their fellow-citizens. There is a long tradition of British concern for Jewish minorities, wherever they may be...'<sup>215</sup>

The attitude of the wider British press to the King David Hotel bomb is equally revealing. Although both the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times* condemned the bombing in the strongest terms, very distinct conclusions were drawn regarding the extent to which the British government's Palestine policy was responsible for the escalating violence.

In the editorial of the Zionist leaning *Manchester Guardian*, the King David bombing was used as a pretext to launch a surprisingly scathing attack on Britain's Palestine policy:

'The attack on the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, in which so many British officers and men lost their lives, will be a shock to those who imagined that the Government's firmness had put a stop to Jewish terrorism and had brought about an easier situation in Palestine. In fact, the opposite is the truth. The arrest of the Jewish leaders could not put a stop to terrorism because the arrested men, however much they may have known were clearly not the real leaders of the Jewish resistance movement. Their imprisonment merely meant that control passed more than ever into the hands of extremists, those

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p.10.

desperate and daring men who believe that only by such means can the British Government be forced to change its policy. Yesterday was their answer, and it would be foolish to hope that it will be the last. This brutal murder (for so in effect it was) will inevitably bring further repression upon the Jews, but that in turn will only breed further terrorism and so on until the Government can agree on a policy to break this vicious circle. And though we in this country think first of the victims...we should be deceiving ourselves if we did not realise that many humane and moderate Jews in Palestine will think first with pride of the men who struck this blow at the headquarters of the administration. For such is the gulf which now divides the British and Jewish peoples in Palestine that what to us is a cruel and wanton murder is to them a brave and heroic action...'<sup>216</sup>

*The Times* in contrast was far more supportive of the Government's position:

'Only insensate fanaticism, the product of perverted propaganda, can explain yesterday's outrage at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. The indiscriminate nature of the attack necessarily resulted in the killing or maiming of many harmless individuals against whom the Jewish terrorist organizations can have cherished no grudge. The men who planned and executed a massacre of this kind are the dupes of an education which has taught them to rate nationalist ambitions above justice and mercy. Such an inversion of values, which is clean contrary to the dictates of Judaism and Christianity alike, imperils the best interest of a cause that it claims to promote. Of all people on earth the

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<sup>216</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, July 23 1946, p.4.



Jewish community have most to gain by the removal of racial discrimination from the minds of men. It can only be fostered by violent crimes of this nature'.<sup>217</sup>

Despite the division of opinion contained within the 'responsible' broadsheet media towards Jewish underground violence in Palestine, both newspapers studiously avoided accusative or inflammatory statements against Anglo-Jewry. Such restraint was not, however, employed in the British tabloid media. In the media frenzy that followed the bombing the JC, under the editorial headline 'Anonymous Slander,' reported that a number of anti-Semitic letters and articles had been published against Anglo-Jewry:

'Recent unhappy events in Palestine have given an opportunity for some anti-Semites here...to attempt to come into the open again after a fairly quiet period. There has been a sudden spate of letters—mostly anonymous or pseudonymous—especially in the provincial press, which not satisfied to denounce the outrages and their perpetrators, wander off into the usual banalities of the professional prejudiced anti-Semite. We hear again of the horrific tale of "succumbing" to "the power of international Jewry." One of the most important of the larger provincial cities, even had the bold headline above a selection of anti-Semitic letters: "WHY I AM NOW ANTI-JEWISH."<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> *The Times*, July 23 1945, p.5.

<sup>218</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, August 2 1946, p.7.

## **The Jewish Impact of the King David Bomb**

Such was the magnitude of the King David Hotel bomb that it had a fundamental effect on the structures of both Anglo-Jewry and the Jewish underground. Whereas prior to the attack the AJA and BOD were increasingly seen to be adopting conflicting stances towards Jewish violence in Palestine, following the bombing the AJA moved to renew ‘cooperation with the BOD and reconstitute a Joint Foreign Affairs Committee’.<sup>219</sup> The readiness of the AJA to put aside any differences with the BOD regarding Palestine Policy and ‘close ranks’ would have been highly unlikely ahead of the King David Hotel bomb attack, and serves to underline the direct effect of the bombings on Anglo-Jewry.

The effect of the King David Hotel bomb was equally tangible upon the Jewish underground. Ahead of the July attack the Haganah was already uncomfortable with the activities of the Irgun and LEHI with whom it was associated through the URM. In the wake of the British authorities’ arrest of Jewish Agency Executive members, and the publication of the White Paper “Palestine: Statement of Information Relating to Acts of Violence on 24 July 1946,<sup>220</sup> (which directly implicated the Jewish Agency and the Haganah with three coordinated sabotage operations with the Irgun and LEHI on 31 October/1 November 1945, 20-25 February 1946 and 16-18 June 1946),<sup>221</sup> the Haganah’s continued presence in the URM was clearly untenable. The Irgun’s attack on the King David Hotel reinforced this point in the most shocking manner.

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., July 26 1946, p.8.

<sup>220</sup> *The Times*, July 25 1946, p.5.

<sup>221</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, July 26 1946, p.1.

With moderates in the Jewish Agency, led by Weizmann, reasserting their influence since the British operation against its executive,<sup>222</sup> and in account of the genuine expression of horror both in the Yishuv and internationally against the bombing, the URM collapsed. The Haganah was instructed by the Jewish Agency to cease its ‘armed struggle against the British,’ which left the Irgun and LEHI, whose activities fell beyond the jurisdiction of the Jewish Agency, to continue operating independently.

Notwithstanding the Haganah’s decision to secede from the URM, the Irgun, recognising the heightened security in Palestine in the wake of the bombing, scaled back its anti-British activities, and a brief period of quiet descended upon Palestine. This lasted until 9 September 1946 when the Irgun renewed its campaign of violence beginning with an attack on Palestine’s railway system.<sup>223</sup>

### **Displaced Persons and the Export of Jewish Underground Violence**

Britain’s decision on September 23 1946 to ‘transfer 600 illegal Jewish immigrants that arrived on the caïque ‘Palmach’ to Cyprus,’<sup>224</sup> once more drew attention to the plight of Jewish DPs in Europe. An extremely mordant editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* recognised the risk Britain was taking in forcibly removing ‘illegal’ Jewish immigrants from Palestine to Cyprus:

‘The British Government seems happily convinced that what it is doing in Palestine is right. If Jewish refugees from Europe have to be shipped off to Cyprus it is unfortunate, but since they had no business to go to Palestine in

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<sup>222</sup> Charters, ‘*Jewish Insurgency*’, p.59.

<sup>223</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, September 10 1946, p.6.

<sup>224</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, September 24 1946, p.5.

the first place it is not the fault of the British Government. If some of them in their desperation jump into the sea and try to swim ashore they must be hauled out again. It only proves what obstinate, exasperating people these Jews are. If one or two get killed in the process it is too bad... One would have thought that if our experience in Ireland and India had taught this country anything it is that attempts to govern a people against its will can only lead to trouble.

As the *Manchester Guardian* astutely predicted, a new campaign of anti-British violence took hold in Palestine in response to the British immigration policy. In reaction to the much increased policing and military presence in Palestine, the Irgun resorted to planting landmines on roads regularly used by British military personnel to supplement their 'conventional' tactic of attacking railway infrastructure. Accordingly, October 1946 was punctuated by the bombing of a Jerusalem railway station and the killing of three British soldiers when their lorry struck a landmine.<sup>225</sup>

By far the most significant consequence of Britain's decision to reject the Anglo-American Committee's recommendation to allow 100,000 Jewish DPs to travel to Palestine, and instead deport and imprison any Jews that attempted to run the embargo in Cyprus, was the export of the Irgun's anti-British violence from Palestine to Europe. On the night of 31 October/1 November 1946 the Irgun detonated a bomb outside of the British Embassy in Rome. The bomb, deposited in suitcases, caused a powerful explosion and the embassy was reported in the British press as having been 'wrecked.'<sup>226</sup> Despite the size of the explosion, which caused 'a great rent in the embassy, exposed half the dinning-room and the pillared hall to the public view and

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>226</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, November 1 1946, p.1.

wrecked the ballroom,<sup>227</sup> since the detonation occurred at night there were no casualties. Blame for the bombing was immediately ascribed to ‘Palestine terrorists’ [sic]. Italy was, in the words of the *Manchester Guardian* ‘full of camps of Jewish refugees, who trickle down to the ports and embark clandestinely for Palestine’.<sup>228</sup>

On November 5 1946, *The Times* reported that a ‘Jewish gang’ had claimed responsibility for the bombing:

‘A letter affirming that the bombing of the British Embassy last Thursday morning was the work of a Jewish terrorists organization was received by American correspondents this afternoon. The letter had a Rome date line, was headed with the words “Supreme Command Irgun Zvai Leumi”...The military character of the organization is indicated by the language employed’<sup>229</sup>

A full copy of the Irgun communiqué was printed in the *Jewish Chronicle*:

“On the night of Thursday October 31, troops of the Irgun Zvai Leumi attacked the offices of the British embassy in Rome, which is one of the centres of anti-Jewish intrigue and the principal executor of the operations to strangle repatriation of Jews.

“Soldiers of Irgun Zvai Leumi, pioneers of the war of liberation of the Jewish people, will continue to fight against the British enslaver. The attack against the British Embassy in Rome is a symbol of the opening of the Jewish military front in the Diaspora.

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>229</sup> *The Times*, November 5 1946, p.4.

“Britain has declared a war of extermination against our people in the world. Let, then, the Briton who occupies our country know that the armed hand of the Eternal People will answer with war everywhere and with all possible means until the time when our enslaved country is liberated and our people freed. May God aid us.”<sup>230</sup>

The initial reaction of Anglo-Jewry to the news of the Irgun’s claim of responsibility for the Rome Embassy bombing was to downplay the significance of the attack. This arguably was appropriate, since despite a spate of special features in the British press following the King David Hotel bomb on ‘Palestine terrorists,’<sup>231</sup> [sic] which estimated the strength of the Irgun as being ‘between 5,000-6,000 strong,’<sup>232</sup> and its capabilities far reaching, Anglo-Jewry had much to lose in supporting the notion that the Irgun posed a threat beyond Palestine’s shores. Accordingly, coverage of the Rome bombing was kept towards the back of the JC,<sup>233</sup> and there was no reporting of an official Anglo-Jewish reaction to the attack.

If Anglo-Jewry had been worried by the possibility that scare mongers would seek to exaggerate the threat of the Irgun in the wake of the Rome Embassy bomb, then the actual impact of the bombing on Anglo-Jewry must have far exceeded even the most pessimistic prediction. In the aftermath of the bombing the British media descended into a wild frenzy over the ‘invisible’ Jewish underground, who, it was ‘reliably reported,’ were poised to imminently strike against mainland Britain. The

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<sup>230</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, November 8 1946, p.8.

<sup>231</sup> See *Manchester Guardian*, July 25 1946, p.5 and *The Times*, July 25 1946, p.4.

<sup>232</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, July 5 1946, p.1.

<sup>233</sup> The Rome bombing was only reported on page eight.

'orgy of journalistic speculation'<sup>234</sup> swept through the broadsheets and tabloids alike, and included such far-fetched claims as an imminent Irgun aerial attack on London.<sup>235</sup>

Supporting Goebbels' infamous wartime axiom that "if you tell a lie often enough the people will believe it," the sheer volume of material written about a Jewish attack in Britain resulted in the 'threat' being believed and taken seriously. The front page of the November 15 1946 issue of the JC provides an indication of the level of media attention centred on the Jewish underground. Under the headline, 'Mythical terrorists, newspapers' scare campaign,' the JC reported:

'Highly tendentious reports, described by Scotland Yard itself as "very exaggerated," of alleged Jewish "terrorist" arrivals and threats in this country, and of the unprecedented steps said to have been taken by the police and military authorities to foil them, have been featured prominently in many British papers this week.

After the British Embassy explosion in Rome, one or two of the more sensational newspapers printed lurid and quite unsubstantiated accounts of alleged Jewish terrorist plans and activities, especially in regard to this country. It is apparent from these that the present volume of publicity built up.

Two or three national newspapers did give publicity to Scotland Yard's scruples, but one evening paper at least, in reporting Tuesday's Royal

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<sup>234</sup> Bowyer Bell, *Terror*, p.181.

<sup>235</sup> Tastard, 'Perspectives', p.39.

procession for the State opening of Parliament, continued the innuendo by commenting that “Jewish terrorists did not interfere”.<sup>236</sup>

Although it appears that the British security services were confident that in spite of the media reports, a Jewish underground attack on mainland Britain was unlikely, this did not prevent a feeling of much heightened tension at the state opening of Parliament in London shortly after the Rome Embassy bombing:

‘The new session of Parliament met in the sensational aura of a melodramatic scare. It was widely inferred that Jewish terrorists planned to blow up the Parliament. The Stern Gang was to take up the role of Guy Fawkes.

Except, however, for the front pages of the more sensational newspapers, there was little abnormal to observe. Police precautions on State occasions are always thorough. It is true that there has been some tightening up of security measures. But they were certainly not of the order indicated in some reports.

The announcement that no additional guards were on duty at No.10 Downing Street put the matter in some perspective.

Members of Parliament have been embarrassed by the alarmist stories which have been circulated. Those specially interested in the Palestine situation are

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<sup>236</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, November 15 1946, p.1.



concerned that the scare may in fact encourage the terrorists, and give them ideas they did not originally have'.<sup>237</sup>

At the same time that Britain was transfixed with the possibility of a Jewish underground attack on Parliament, an equally far-fetched story emerged in Liverpool concerning the arrival of the ship *Ascania* from Port Said. Newspapers, including the *Daily Telegraph* and tabloids such as the *Daily Graphic* asserted that the *Ascania* was laden with 1,300 Jews concealed amongst whom were "Jewish terrorists".<sup>238</sup> It was reported that Liverpool port security was heightened to unprecedented levels and that special screening measures were to be enforced when the passengers disembarked.

Unequivocally displaying the falsity of the *Ascania* story the JC, launched its own investigation which showed that the *Ascania* had a total of '534 passengers aboard' of whom 'only a small proportion' were Jewish and 'Jewish passengers were not subjected to any more severe scrutiny by immigration and customs officials than that accorded other passengers'.<sup>239</sup> An equally revealing exposure of the unfounded nature of the Jewish underground scare stories later emerged in a Parliamentary question session, when in response to enquiry regarding levels of security at the state opening of Parliament, the Home Secretary, Chuter Ede, announced that the number of security personnel present was actually lower than in the previous year when there had been no such threat.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>238</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, November 22 1946, p.9.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>240</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, November 29 1946, p.5.

Even though the scare stories circulated in the British media about the Jewish underground were later exposed as baseless, the episode necessarily had a negative impact on Anglo-Jewry, as a JC editorial on the matter indicates:

‘The sensationalist Press campaign on “Jewish terrorism” has continued unabated and unabashed...The purpose behind this strange outburst by the newspapers—or of those who have purveyed to them this malignant crop of distorted ‘news’—is probably not to far to seek. It is naively divulged, for instance, in the dominant front-page headlines, “Crisis for British Jewry,” in the SUNDAY PICTORIAL, which has, as have other newspapers, uncritically swallowed all that the scare-mongers have offered it. There can be little doubt that the motive behind this whole business is the hope in the minds of certain individuals of panicking British Jewry into some form of compliance over the Palestine question. Unfortunately, it has not been recognised that the real—and worst—effect has been simply to give licence to the anti-Semites to come into the open with all their spleen. Witness, for example, the journal calling itself TRUTH, which has outrageously demanded the treating of what it terms the “Palestine incident” as a “formal war,” which should thus lead to the “precaution” of interning all “enemy nationals” in the country...As the NEWS CHRONICLE comments on this shocking emanation, “The slope of anti-Semitism is slippery...Let us be warned!”

In a further indicator of the severity of the crisis facing Anglo-Jewry the BOD dedicated ‘the greater part of the morning session discussing the report of the executive committee referring to the situation arising out of sensational reports

of...terrorist activities'.<sup>241</sup> Recognising the extraordinary nature of the situation, President Brodetsky announced to the BOD that for the first time 'the [media] campaign was not so relevant to the Palestine problem but very relevant to the position of Jews in Great Britain...it was with such consideration that the Board drew up a statement'.<sup>242</sup>

For the Irgun, the sensational wave of fear that spread across Britain perversely represented a significant coup. The issue of Palestine and Jewish DPs once more was front-page news, and by striking fear into the British homes in mainland Britain it was hoped that the British government would be forced into reconsidering its Palestine policy. This stance is evidenced in a statement given by Samuel Merlin 'political spokesman' for the Irgun in an interview on 14 November 1946:

'if the Irgun say they are going to attack Britons outside Palestine they will do so...the bombing of the Rome Embassy was the first step. There will certainly be others. They will carry the war into Britain. Precautions being taken against the arrival of Irgun...are therefore futile'.<sup>243</sup>

The 'success' that the 'Jewish terrorism' media frenzy was affording the Irgun was acknowledged in a typically satirical editorial in the November 21 1946 of the *Manchester Guardian*:

'The Jewish terrorists have only themselves to blame if anti-Semitism spreads—as it is doing—not only in Palestine but in this country also. At first

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<sup>241</sup> Jewish Telegraph Agency Bulletin No.264, 18 November 1946, p.3.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>243</sup> Charters, *Jewish Insurgency*, p.76.

thought their folly seems infinite, but this is not so. These terrorists welcome anti-Semitism in England and elsewhere because it justifies their thesis that the Jews will be safe and free only in their own country.

To them every pogrom in Poland is another argument for Zionism, while even a schoolboy's jest or a loutish sneer may remind some Jew in England that the eternal problem of his race has not been solved. If they can provoke us into brutality they are well satisfied. "Look," they say, "the British are no better than the rest of us."<sup>244</sup>

The Rome bombing and its associated effects, therefore, whilst representing a nadir for Anglo-Jewry, conversely was regarded as a high point for the Irgun. In the period between July and November 1946 the activities of the Jewish underground fundamentally altered from low level 'contained violence' to spectacular high profile international incidents. This transformation had a highly significant impact both upon the organization of the Jewish underground and Anglo-Jewry.

The Haganah's decision to secede from the URM left the extremist Irgun and LEHI organisations to operate unchecked. The King David Hotel bomb acted as the decisive event behind this process. The bombing had an equally devastating effect upon Anglo-Jewry. Citing Anglo-Jewry's support for the 'disgraced' Jewish Agency, the community's critics and detractors immediately used the pretext of the bombing to slight British Jews, as is illustrated in a number of anti-Semitic articles in the provincial press. Anglo-Jewry's support for Zionism, as the Jewish aristocracy had

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<sup>244</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 21 November 1946, p.4.

previously warned, was increasingly becoming a liability, exposing British Jews to criticism and ultimately anti-Semitism.

The Irgun attack on the British Embassy in Rome confirmed this trend. In both a literal geographical sense and figuratively, the Rome bombing brought the impact of Jewish underground violence much closer to 'home.' The resultant call for Anglo-Jewry to be interned as 'enemy nationals' irrefutably demonstrates that the activities of the Jewish underground had a tangible impact on Anglo-Jewry, which was manifested as an increase in anti-Semitism in Britain.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Revenge, Reprisals and the Hangman's Rope**

Following the Irgun's decision to intensify its activities against Britain, a radicalisation underscored by the export of the Irgun's violence from Mandate Palestine to Europe, the once 'close' relationship between the Irgun and the Haganah rapidly degenerated into one of hostility. Between November 1946 and July 1947, the Irgun, in cohort with LEHI, waged a sustained and increasingly violent campaign against British interests both in Palestine and abroad. At this point, it appeared to the leadership of the Irgun and LEHI that their struggle against the British was nearing its final stages. The British military was perceived to be demoralised by the Jewish underground's sustained and sporadic actions, and it was believed one final sustained wave of violence would induce the already exasperated British government to call for a full British withdrawal from Palestine.

The Jewish Agency, and by extension the Haganah, meanwhile, although also recognising the British government's increased impatience and hostility towards the Yishuv, were keen to present the most favourable impression of the Jewish National Home to the United Nations. The extremist activities of the Irgun and LEHI were therefore regarded by the Haganah with derision, and possessing a very real potential to jeopardise the Jewish Agency's diplomatic attempts to advance Jewish statehood. Hence, by the beginning of 1947, despite sharing a common objective of establishing an independent Jewish state in Palestine, a serious clash of interests emerged between on the one side the Jewish Agency and Haganah, and on the other side, the extremist Irgun and LEHI.

Irrespective of the emerging fault lines between rival Jewish camps in Palestine, Anglo-Jewry was faced with its own serious concerns arising from the escalating levels of violence in Palestine. The anti-Jewish backlash, which occurred in the aftermath of the Irgun's bombing of the British Embassy in Rome had clearly demonstrated the vulnerability of the Anglo-Jewish community. This situation was compounded by Anglo-Jewry's continued avowed commitment to Zionism and its concern for the plight of Jewish DPs in Europe. Such a stance remained in stark contrast to the policy of the British government. Anglo-Jewry was, therefore, by November 1946, placed in an unprecedented position, in which its own interests seemingly clashed directly with those of the British government. In the context of increasing Jewish anti-British violence in Palestine, this left Anglo-Jewry in an uneasy and highly vulnerable position. By virtue of Anglo-Jewish support for the Yishuv, British Jews became increasingly regarded by certain sections of British society as possessing split loyalties, and, as the number of British servicemen killed in Palestine rose, *ipso facto*, associated with the anti-British activities of the Jewish underground.

### **Rivalries and Internal Tensions**

After the King David Hotel bombing the Haganah ended its involvement with the URM in a bid to curry favour with the British and rebuild the credibility of the Jewish Agency. The move away from political violence towards systemic politics presented the Haganah leadership with two considerable problems. Firstly, as a supposedly law abiding organisation, what to do regarding Jewish immigration to Palestine, which above the small number permitted by the 1939 White Paper, was still regarded by the British as an 'illegal' activity; and secondly, how to curb the activities

of their Jewish compatriots in the Irgun and LEHI who remained committed to violently resisting British rule?

In line with the policies of the Irgun and LEHI, the Haganah remained implacably opposed to the British embargo on Jewish immigration. Crucially, the Haganah's opposition was not merely passive. Even before the Second World War, the Haganah, under the adages of the 'Mossad le Alyiah,' had sent special operatives to Europe to help European Jewry escape to Palestine.<sup>245</sup> After the war Mossad le Alyiah members infiltrated Jewish DP camps in Europe and arranged for the illegal transfer of Jewish DPs to Palestine.<sup>246</sup> This 'illegal' work was regarded as a Haganah priority, and it continued throughout the post-war mandate period, as evidenced by the steady stream of Palestine bound refugee ships.

The Haganah's commitment to illegally bringing Jewish immigrants to Palestine, aside from infuriating the British authorities, naturally also encouraged the Haganah's leaders to retain ties with the Irgun and LEHI, who were also actively involved in and supported such efforts. This, in addition to the Haganah's desire to 'continue influencing the insurgent's policy'<sup>247</sup> as a means of preventing a repeat of such damaging attacks as the King David Hotel bomb, meant that rather than completely severing ties, the Haganah continued to maintain contacts with the Irgun and LEHI in the immediate post-King David bomb period.

The escalation in Irgun and LEHI violence in the autumn of 1946 served to renew tensions in the delicate relationship between the extremists and the wary Haganah. The refusal by the Irgun and LEHI to call a cease-fire meant their activities increasingly became a liability to the Jewish Agency's diplomacy. As the considerable column space in the British press demonstrated, reasonably limited

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<sup>245</sup> Wasserstein, *'Vanishing Diaspora'*, p.17.

<sup>246</sup> Gilbert, *'Israel'*, p.96.

<sup>247</sup> Zadka, *'Blood in Zion'*, p.63.



actions by either the Irgun or LEHI were far more likely to capture the headlines than the slow and edifying tactics adopted by the Jewish Agency. Furthermore, it became increasingly apparent to all those involved in systemic Zionist politics that each extremist attack publicised in the British media provided grounds for the British government to harden their resolve against the Yishuv and undermine any diplomatic progress made by the Jewish Agency.

In the wake of the Rome Embassy bombing, the Haganah took active steps towards restraining Irgun and LEHI activities. In November 1946 ‘a broadcast from the “Kol Yisrael” [Voice of Israel] station of the Jewish Resistance Movement [Haganah] announced that terrorism would be fought by internal measures’.<sup>248</sup> In the same broadcast “terrorism” was renounced as ‘undermining Jewish policy and hindering the achievement of the legitimate political aims of the Jewish people’.<sup>249</sup> The Irgun quickly responded to the Haganah’s denunciation, announcing: “we have heard the challenge and will answer bullet for bullet”.<sup>250</sup> Although the Irgun’s belligerent response could have been expected from an organisation whose *raison d’etre* was extremism, the threat of a civil war in the Yishuv between rival Jewish organisations presented a ‘worse case scenario’ to the Jewish Agency that was seeking to promote an image of Jewish unity behind the Zionist project.

Acutely aware of the Irgun’s propensity to enact reprisal attacks and for want of inflaming tensions in the Yishuv, the Haganah was limited in its ability to curb Irgun and LEHI activities. This situation was compounded by the shared objective of independent Jewish statehood and opposition to British Mandatory rule. Furthermore, the idea of turning in a fellow Jew to the British authorities, however disruptive or insalubrious Irgun and LEHI activities were to the Haganah, remained commonly

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<sup>248</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, November 15 1946, p.5.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>250</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, November 29 1946, p.6.

abhorred. Haganah attempts to restrict the Irgun and LEHI consequently were internalised and implemented without the sanction of the British judiciary. The *Manchester Guardian* reported such an incident in November 1946:

‘A struggle in the conscience of some Jews is now going on, as shown in the story that 50 members of the Hagana rounded up several members of Irgun who were holding a meeting in a settlement... [A]nother detail given is that the Irgun men were given away by the sisters of their own mothers’.<sup>251</sup>

In spite of the Haganah’s attempts to suppress the Irgun and LEHI, both organisations continued their campaigns of violence against British interests. Bombings, shootings and mine detonations occurred with alarming regularity, and accordingly the number of British personnel killed in the Mandate steadily rose. Typifying such attacks the Irgun killed six Palestinian policemen by mining the railway network on November 13 1946,<sup>252</sup> and LEHI assassinated Assistant Superintendent of Police A. E. Conquest, who was in charge of Haifa CID, on April 27 1947.<sup>253</sup> In a statement issued to the House of Lords, it was noted that by April 1947, 240 British personnel had been killed in Palestine since the end of the Second World War.<sup>254</sup>

In the final days of 1946, as the tempo of the Irgun and LEHI’s campaign of violence accelerated,<sup>255</sup> an easily overlooked prologue to the climactic events of the summer of 1947 gripped the Mandate. With Britain keen to stamp its authority on

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<sup>251</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, November 11 1946, p.5.

<sup>252</sup> *The Times*, November 14 1946, p.4.

<sup>253</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, April 28 1947, p.5.

<sup>254</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, April 25 1947, p.5.

<sup>255</sup> Bowyer Bell, ‘*Terror*’, p.183.

Palestine in the face of the escalating violence, the Mandatory military court sentenced Katz and Kimchi, two armed Irgun members who had been arrested during an attempted bank robbery,<sup>256</sup> to eighteen years in prison and, crucially, eighteen strokes of the ‘cat’ whip.<sup>257</sup> The British authorities’ attempt to coerce the Irgun into submission through flogging, however, seriously backfired.

Upon hearing of the sentences, Menachem Begin vowed to avenge the “humiliation of Jewish soldiers” by exacting equal retaliation upon unsuspecting British soldiers.<sup>258</sup> True to his word, a few days after the British flogged Kimichi, on 27 December 1946, the Irgun exacted its revenge, when, at random, it kidnapped Major Brett and two Non Commissioned Officers and whipped each soldier eighteen times before releasing them.<sup>259</sup>

News of the flogging of British soldiers in Palestine significantly heightened anti-Jewish tensions in Britain. Following the Rome Embassy attack anti-Jewish sentiment was already riding high. In December 1946, ahead of the floggings, the JC reported ‘sensational press reports,’ ‘scare campaigns’ and ‘hoax phone calls’ made against the community.<sup>260</sup>

On account of the increased level of anti-Jewish hostility in Britain, the news of the Irgun’s revenge flogging of British soldiers in Palestine had a damaging impact upon Anglo-Jewry. In the local London paper the *Hendon and Finchley Times* it was reported that at a Union of British Freedom meeting there were calls that:

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<sup>256</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, January 3 1947, p.8.

<sup>257</sup> Bowyer Bell, ‘*Terror*’, p.184.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p.184.

<sup>259</sup> *The Times*, December 30 1946, p.4.

<sup>260</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, December 20 1946, p.16.

‘For every British soldier flogged by Jews in Palestine, four Jews in this country should be publicly flogged in the streets and market places’.<sup>261</sup>

Jewish property from London to Stoke-on-Trent was daubed with graffiti expressing similar anti-Semitic denunciations, as a wave of anti-Jewish sentiment swept across Britain.<sup>262</sup> Attacks on Anglo-Jewry were not limited to the local press or minor political organisations. On January 5 1947 the *Sunday Times* carried a stinging leader article entitled “To British Jews,” in which Anglo-Jewry was accused of:

‘...failing properly to denounce the Palestinian outrages, and thus were not performing their civic duty and moral obligation.’<sup>263</sup>

Beyond the damaging impact that the floggings had upon Anglo-Jewry, as had previously been the case in 1946, when the Irgun kidnapped five British officers, the Irgun’s readiness to enact reprisals and respond in kind to corporal sentences was a clear signal of intent. In reaction to the Irgun reprisal floggings, the British authorities quietly abandoned the practise of passing corporal sentences against Jewish underground members.<sup>264</sup> This reprieve crucially, however, was not extended to capital offences.

The Irgun’s refusal to recognise the jurisdiction of British rule in Palestine, and in particular the rulings of the military court, was not, as events later unambiguously proved, idle rhetoric. The Irgun regularly demanded in posters and

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<sup>261</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, January 10 1947, p.15

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>263</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, January 17 1947, p.12

<sup>264</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, January 10, p.8.

leaflets that its members be treated as soldiers rather than ‘terrorists,’ and, as such, when captured accorded the rights of Prisoners of War.<sup>265</sup> One such ‘warning’ released at the time of the Katz and Kimchi trials declared:

‘A Hebrew soldier, taken prisoner by the enemy, was sentenced by an illegal British military “court” to the humiliating punishment of flogging.

We warn the occupation Government not to carry out this punishment, which is contrary to the laws of soldiers’ honour...’<sup>266</sup>

The combination of the Irgun’s unyielding belief in their legitimate status as ‘soldiers’ and the decision by the British authorities to rescind the use of corporal punishment in the face of Irgun reprisals created an extremely potent situation. After the December 1946 floggings, all trials of Jewish underground members presented a high profile pretext for the Irgun to challenge British rule, and from the British perspective tested their ability to govern the Mandate.

The onset of 1947 heralded a significant intensification on all levels—diplomatic, domestic and international—of Palestine affairs. ‘On 15 February 1947 the British government announced that it would hand the Palestine problem over to the United Nations’.<sup>267</sup> Meanwhile, the related problem of Jewish DPs remained unresolved; the Irgun and LEHI were performing ever more audacious attacks on the British military, which in turn exacerbated relations both internally with the Jewish

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<sup>265</sup> The demand to be treated as POWs is indicated in Irgun members’ refusal to appeal against sentences on the grounds that they wished to be treated as soldiers and rejected the legality of the British courts. See *Manchester Guardian*, January 30 1947, p.5.

<sup>266</sup> Bowyer Bell, ‘*Terror*’, p.184.

<sup>267</sup> Gilbert, ‘*Israel*’, p.142.

Agency and externally with the British; and finally in consequence of the combination of all these factors, Anglo Jewry faced unprecedented levels of criticism and hostility.

The British government's reluctant recognition that it was unable to 'solve' the Palestine problem, and its decision to delegate responsibility to the United Nations, failed to arrest the activities of the Jewish underground in Palestine. Both the Irgun and LEHI declared that they would continue fighting the British until the British military unilaterally withdrew from the Mandate, and the Haganah continued its clandestine operations to bring Jewish DPs from Europe to Palestine.

The sombre tone was set on January 24 January 1947, when the death sentenced passed against Irgun member Dov Gruner for his part in a fatal attack on Ramat Gan police station in April 1946, was confirmed by General Barker. In view of the intensity of hostilities in the Mandate, and on account of Britain's experience in Ireland—where the execution of political opponents had led to their immortalisation as martyrs—all sides in the Yishuv still expected a last minute reprieve. For the British authorities, determining what to do about Dov Gruner posed an impossible 'Catch-22' situation, in which inaction would be interpreted as weakness but conducting the execution would enhance Palestinian Jewry's opposition to Britain and 'patently be regarded by the terrorists as a challenge'.<sup>268</sup>

Despite the bleak situation arising from the Gruner case, the British authorities were able to take a little solace in a Vaad Leumi announcement in January 1947 that it had 'unanimously adopted a resolution warning the outlawed political violence groups that their violence must cease'.<sup>269</sup> As the Yishuv's National Council, and by virtue of its broad membership, the Vaad Leumi announcement represented an important new

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<sup>268</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, February 14 1947, p.8.

<sup>269</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, January 24 1947, p.8.

departure in Zionist politics. Shortly after the Vaad Leimi statement the Haganah 'called for an end to Jewish violence and declared that it would not allow Zionist work all over Palestine and the hopes of a Jewish nation to be destroyed'.<sup>270</sup>

Reflecting the difficulties Anglo-Jewry was facing through its perceived association with the activities of the Jewish underground, news of the new anti-terrorism drive in the Yishuv was welcomed in all quarters of the British Jewish community. The exasperation and relief felt by Anglo-Jewry is clearly indicated in the January 17 1947 editorial of the JC:

'It would appear that the Yishuv is, at last, pulling itself together in a welcome recognition of the need for firm action to repair the untold harm which the viper of terrorism has done to the Jewish name throughout the world.'<sup>271</sup>

Implementing 'firm action' against 'the viper of terrorism' proved difficult. As was predicted, the British authorities decision to confirm the death sentence on Gruner resulted in an escalation of violence. In a now familiar tactic, on January 26 1947 the Irgun kidnapped Major H.I. Collins and Judge Ralph Windham and threatened to execute them both in the event that Gruner was hanged.<sup>272</sup> Securing the release of the Irgun's captives quickly became regarded as a 'test of [the] Zionists' promise to fight terrorism'.<sup>273</sup>

Under the threat of the imposition of martial law in Jewish areas of the Mandate, and in a desperate attempt to limit the damage caused to the Zionist

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<sup>270</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, January 6 1947, p.5.

<sup>271</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, January 17 1947, p.12.

<sup>272</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, January 27 1947, p.5 and January 28 1947, p.5.

<sup>273</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, January 28 1947, p.5.

movement, the Haganah and Jewish Agency exerted ‘unseen’ pressure on the Irgun to release the hostages. Simultaneously, the British authorities secretly informed the Yishuv leadership that Gruner’s execution would be postponed.<sup>274</sup>

Collectively, the Haganah and British authorities’ efforts were ‘successful’, facilitating the release of the Irgun’s hostages. However, once again, the handling of the crisis led the Irgun to believe that coercion was an effective and successful means of winning concessions from the British. An Irgun communication posted ahead of the hostages release reinforces this point:

“The two abducted men will be released shortly, not because of the threat of the head of the occupation forces to impose martial-law on occupied territory, but because the practical aim has been achieved. Dov Gruner was not executed.”<sup>275</sup>

Further indicating the Irgun’s increased confidence following the favourable outcome of the kidnappings, Menahem Begin broadcasted a stark warning to the British over the Irgun’s secret ‘Voice of Fighting Zion’ radio station:

“The British shall pay seven fold if Dov Gruner is executed. We will be merciless in retaliation for such premeditated murder.

“The next time we do not wait for confirmation of the death sentence against one of our soldiers. As soon as a British military court dares to pass the death sentence we will react. We will not be intimidated by threats of martial law.

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<sup>274</sup> Bowyer Bell, *Terror*, p.189.

<sup>275</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, January 29 1947, p.5.



We shall have the same attitude as Gruner—candidate for death who steadfastly refused to plead for clemency.’<sup>276</sup>

After a brief respite, violence returned to the Mandate on 1 March 1947. Exploiting the British authorities’ belief that the Irgun would not act on the Jewish Sabbath, the Irgun detonated a huge bomb at the Officers’ Goldsmith Club in Jerusalem killing 20 and injuring 28.<sup>277</sup> The British were outraged by the attack, a sentiment reflected in *The Times* report:

‘Having built up the illusion of observance of their Sabbath they [the Irgun] now used it to their advantage and shown that they care as little for sacred law as for secular law.’<sup>278</sup>

The casualties caused by the Goldsmith Club bombing were the largest since the King David Hotel attack. Considering the magnitude of the attack, the British authorities had little choice but to implement their earlier threat and introduce martial law. In so doing, ‘a quarter of a million Jews were confined to their homes... and deprived normal everyday facilities’.<sup>279</sup>

Confirming the trend that Anglo-Jewry was increasingly suffering as a result of Jewish underground activities in Palestine, *The Times* editorial on the Goldsmith Club bombing unequivocally articulated the negative impact such attacks were having upon British and world Jewry:

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<sup>276</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, January 30 1947, p.5.

<sup>277</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, March 7 1947, p.1.

<sup>278</sup> *The Times*, March 3 1947, p.4.

<sup>279</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, March 3 1947, p.5.

‘Such crimes injure the very cause their perpetrators have most at heart, they feed racial bitterness, they expose innocent civilians to all the inconveniences and deprivations inseparable from the application of martial law, they dismay the truest friends of Jewry, not only in Britain but throughout the world, and they arouse a lively fear that the foundations of the Jewish National Home are being submerged by a dark wave of bloodshed and intolerance.’<sup>280</sup>

As with all Britain’s previous efforts to curb the activities of the Jewish underground, the introduction of martial law failed to prevent further attacks. On March 14 1947 the JC reported:

‘Another melancholy chapter was added to the grim record of sudden death and wanton destruction of property when the Stern group mounted one of its pointless assaults in Tel Aviv martial law zone, when Citrus House, used as a military headquarters was attacked’.<sup>281</sup>

Despite the hardships felt by Anglo-Jewry through its association with the Jewish underground and the awkwardness of opposing British policy, the community was resolute in its support for the Yishuv. This position was made clear in a BOD statement in response to the introduction of martial law:

‘The BOD expresses its deep regret at the imposition of martial law...a measure which, while inflicting servers hardships on hundreds of thousands of

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<sup>280</sup> *The Times*, March 3 1947, p.5.

<sup>281</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, March 14 1947, p.6.

innocent men, women, and children, is not likely to eliminate the causes or acts of terrorism.

‘The Board has on a number of occasions expressed its unqualified condemnation of terrorism, and does so again. At the same time the Board reaffirms its conviction that the way to relieve the tension in Palestine is immediately to increase facilities for Jewish immigration.

‘The Board requests His Majesty’s Government, pending consideration of the Palestine issue by the United Nations, to permit Jewish displaced persons, whose hopes have been deferred for so long, to enter Palestine in numbers commensurate with their urgent needs.’<sup>282</sup>

After martial law ended, relative peace, once again descended on the Mandate, disturbed only by a Jewish underground sabotage attack on oil installations in Haifa in early April 1947.<sup>283</sup> However, as the March 1947 BOD statement had emphasised, as long as the related issues of Jewish DPs and Jewish statehood remained unresolved, Jewish violence in Palestine continued to be an ever-present threat.

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<sup>282</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, March 21 1947, p.1.

<sup>283</sup> *The Times*, April 1 1947, p.4.

## The Overturn of the Precarious Equilibrium

In the April 18 1947 issue of the JC, the editorial perceptively commented that:

‘Whenever there are signs of comparative respite in Palestine, the precarious equilibrium is overturned—either by heavy-handed administration or by a terrorist outrage, or, most frequently both...’<sup>284</sup>

The British authorities’ decision on April 16 1947 to execute Dov Guner, along with Dov Rosenbaum, Eliezer Kashani and Mordechi Alkachi, (Irgun members who had been sentenced to death for their part in an attack on Ramat Gan police station in April 1946),<sup>285</sup> emphatically provided the necessary ‘heavy-handed administration’ to overturn the precarious equilibrium in Palestine. The decision to carryout the executions was made in secret, and consequently news of the hangings took the Yishuv by complete surprise.

As a precaution against retaliatory violence curfews were enforced across Jewish settlements. The *Manchester Guardian* also anticipated an Irgun response, asking in its report of the executions ‘what reprisals will be attempted when the curfews are lifted, as they must be sooner or later?’<sup>286</sup> Anglo-Jewry, in a gesture of solidarity with unison with the Yishuv, was united in its opposition to the executions. Reflecting this opposition the JC sardonically noted that:

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<sup>284</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, April 18 1947, p.12.

<sup>285</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, April 17 1947, p.5.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

‘Surely there cannot any longer be anyone stupid enough to believe that the hangman’s rope can contribute one iota to the cause of pacification in a situation of unrest. It only increases every tension, exacerbates every hatred, reinforces every impulse of violent despair, weakens every counsel of moderation, and strengthens the terrorists by conferring an air of martyrdom on which they thrive’.<sup>287</sup>

Further aggravating matters for Anglo-Jewry, on the same day that the executions were reported in Palestine, a ‘terrorist bomb’ was discovered in part of the Colonial Office in Whitehall. *The Times* reported that ‘the authorities had no doubt’ that the bomb ‘was made and placed by sympathizers with the Jewish terrorists’ campaign in Palestine’.<sup>288</sup> Although the bomb failed to explode, its discovery signalled the arrival of Jewish underground violence in mainland Britain, and with it, an even greater danger to Anglo-Jewry.

Prior to the discovery of the Whitehall bomb, the heightened tensions in Palestine, in addition to placing an external strain on Anglo-Jewry, also served to re-ignite old internal community differences. Conscious of the BOD’s increased isolation from the government the AJA seceded from the BOD, citing familiar arguments over the issue of dual allegiance. An AJA statement summarised the organisation’s position:

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<sup>287</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, April 18 1947, p.12.

<sup>288</sup> *The Times*, April 17 1947, p.4.

“We may be disappointed—and we are—about what England thinks it right to do with regard to Palestine and our aspirations, but let us never forget that this England has always been our best friend.”<sup>289</sup>

In Palestine, reprisal raids quickly followed the executions. Within a week, in a series of attacks, the Irgun and LEHI ‘killed at least ten people, wounded many members of the British forces and caused considerable damage to property’.<sup>290</sup> Most significantly, in one foiled attack a noose was found in an Irgun vehicle, which it was believed the Irgun had planned to use to hang British soldiers to revenge the execution of their compatriots.<sup>291</sup>

With violence threatening to spiral out of control and the United Nations Assembly imminently scheduled to consider Palestine,<sup>292</sup> the Haganah became involved in a number of skirmishes with Irgun members in a bid to quell the violence. In one such skirmish the JC reported that one Haganah member was killed doing his “responsible national Yishuv duty,” when trying to remove an Irgun land-mine.<sup>293</sup> It was apparent to all parties that Palestine was rapidly approaching crisis point.

### **The Great Escape and Exploding Letters**

As had so often been the case before in Palestine, as the sense of ‘great occasion’ and expectation grew so too did the fear that all would be jeopardised by yet another ‘dastardly outrage’ at the hands of the Jewish underground. True to form, on May 4 1947, the Irgun launched its most audacious attack to date. In a carefully

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<sup>289</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, May 2 1947, p.12

<sup>290</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, April 25 1947, p.5.

<sup>291</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, April 22 1947, p.5.

<sup>292</sup> *The Times*, April 28 1947, p.6.

<sup>293</sup> *The Times*, May 2 1947, p.1.

planned attack, the Irgun exploded a massive bomb against the prison walls of Acre gaol and using a 'column of 18 stolen vehicles'<sup>294</sup> released many of the prison's inmates. Acre Prison had been the execution site of Irgun members in April and also operated as Palestine's central jail, housing many of the Irgun's captured members. The prison was therefore a highly symbolic target for the Irgun, and the ease and effectiveness with which it was attacked was very embarrassing for the British. The attack was, however, by no means a complete success for the Irgun, since nine of its members were killed in the fighting, and a further nine captured by the British forces.<sup>295</sup>

With the United Nations' Eleven-Power Commission about to open its enquiry into Palestine, the Irgun attack on Acre prison, (in addition to a number of further attacks it, and LEHI, carried out against the railway system and military installations), appeared very likely to seriously hamper the Yishuv leadership's attempts to present the Zionists' case. In response to the extremists' challenge the Jewish Agency announced its 'invigorated drive against terrorism'. Correspondingly, the number of Haganah preventative actions against the Irgun increased. In one such episode, the Haganah prevented a possible 'catastrophe' by exposing and destroying a tunnel dug by the Irgun under Citrus House, which had been primed for detonation.<sup>296</sup>

Whilst Palestine was preoccupied by the visiting United Nations' commission and transfixed by the internal struggle between the Haganah and the Irgun and LEHI, Anglo-Jewry faced its own problems. On 4 June 1947, the first of nearly twenty gelignite explosive letters arrived from Italy addressed to prominent people in Britain,

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<sup>294</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, May 9 1947, p.6.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>296</sup> *The Times*, June 19 1947, p.5.

including Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin. On June 7 1947 LEHI claimed responsibility for the letter bombs:

‘Fighters for the Freedom of Israel [LEHI] was responsible for the letters and was operating its letter-sending branch in Italy with the aid of experts in chemical warfare’.<sup>297</sup>

Although none of the letter bombs exploded, the impact on Anglo-Jewry was necessarily negative. A report submitted to a BOD meeting held in the midst of the letter bomb campaign in June 1947 confirmed this effect, recording that:

‘Anti-Semitism had spread in Great Britain in an alarming manner, and while that was neither the time nor the place to advance reasons, even the simplest had to realise that the terrorism preached and practiced in Palestine, and the ultra-national ambitions advanced by so many Jews had contributed to inflame the disease’.<sup>298</sup>

With confirmation of what had already been patently obvious to many British Jews—that anti-Semitism was ‘spreading in an alarming manner’ in Britain—the news on June 16 1947 that three of the five Irgun members standing trial for involvement in the Acre Prison attack were to be sentenced to death was treated with trepidation.

On 9 June 1947, in advance of the announcement of the death sentences, the Irgun launched a pre-emptive strike against the British military and kidnapped two

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<sup>297</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, June 7 1947, p.7.

<sup>298</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, June 6 1947, p.5.



British policemen as a ransom. Although these policemen soon escaped they provided a chilling account of the Irgun's intentions:

“If their [Irgun] men were not condemned they would let us go—if they were given death sentences they would hang us right there and that they had four-yard lengths of rope with nooses in [sic] the end”.<sup>299</sup>

The escape of the British policemen was naturally greeted with much relief by both the Yishuv leadership and the British. Yet, the Irgun's proven record of reprisals and the revealing account of the freed captives meant that when death sentences were passed against three of the Irgun members on June 16 1947, the Mandate was once again plunged into a period of nervous waiting for the next Irgun move.

On 9 July 1947, Lieutenant General Macmillan, confirmed the death sentences on Jacob Weiss, Meir Nakar and Absolom Habib, and an already nervous Palestine braced itself for the Irgun reaction. Despite the best precautionary efforts of the British forces, within a week of General Macmillan's announcement, the Irgun responded, as predicted, by kidnapping British military personnel as ransom against the condemned Irgun prisoners.

Following the news of the capture of sergeants Cliff Martin and Mervyn Paice, martial law was imposed in the area around Nethanya where the sergeants had been seized and a manhunt involving five thousand troops began.<sup>300</sup> Yet again, the timing of the kidnappings was disastrous for the Yishuv leadership as it coincided with the concluding stages of the United Nations enquiry. The Haganah immediately once

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<sup>299</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, June 11 1946, p.5.

<sup>300</sup> Bowyer Bell, *'Terror'*, p.228.

more unofficially began to cooperate with the British in the search for the captives, in a campaign against extremism which became known as the ‘little Season’.<sup>301</sup>

Probably more by design than luck, the ‘drama’ surrounding the captured British sergeants was soon overshadowed by a new crisis over ‘the Exodus,’ a Haganah operated ship laden with 4,500 Jewish DPs, which set sail from France and was refused entry to Palestine.<sup>302</sup> Beginning on July 21 1947, the saga surrounding the plight of the Jewish DPs on the Exodus, (to whom Britain not only refused entry to Palestine but also forcibly returned to France), emerged as the dominant story in the British and international media, deflecting all attention away from the Irgun kidnappings. On a daily basis *The Times* and *Manchester Guardian* reported on the Exodus story, alongside focused features on the problem of Jewish DPs. Anglo-Jewry, needless to say, staunchly backed the Jewish DPs’ attempt to gain entry to Palestine, vividly illustrating the clash between Anglo-Jewish and British governmental interests. The July 25 1947 editorial of the JC sombrely acknowledged the strain Anglo-Jewry was facing:

‘These events [the Exodus saga] have served to exacerbate further an already sorely vexed situation as regards the present relations between Britain and the Jews’.<sup>303</sup>

At exactly the time when Anglo-Jewry was at its most vulnerable, when, for the first time in its modern history the community was united in its overt and vehement opposition to British governmental policy, the British authorities in

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., p.228.

<sup>302</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, July 25 1947, p.1.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., p.10.

Palestine executed the three condemned Irgun prisoners on July 29 1947.<sup>304</sup> The executions did not receive much attention in the British media. The Irgun's claim the following day, however, to have revenged the execution of their men by hanging sergeants Martin and Paice certainly did capture the media's attention, and once more thrust Palestine into the centre of the international arena.

### **The Final Reprisal**

On 31 July 1947 the booby trapped bodies of the two British sergeants were found hanging dead in a wood near Nethanya. Pinned on them were mocking notices signed by the "tribunal" of Irgun saying:

'Two British spies held in underground captivity since July 12 have been tried after the completion of the investigations of their "criminal anti-Hebrew activities" on the following charges:

1. Illegal entry into the Hebrew homeland.
2. Membership of a British criminal terrorist organisation known as the Army of Occupation which was responsible for the torture, murder, deportation, and denying the Hebrew people the right to live.
3. Illegal possession of arms.
4. Anti-Jewish spying in civilian clothes.
5. Premeditated hostile designs against the underground.

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<sup>304</sup> *The Times*, July 30 1947, p.4.

Found guilty of these charges they have been sentenced to hang and their appeal for clemency dismissed. This is not a reprisal for the execution of three Jews but a “routine judicial fact.”<sup>305</sup>

Condemnations of the Irgun’s ‘bestialities’ came from all sections of British society and media. Under the headline ‘Murder in Palestine’ *The Times* commented that: ‘it is difficult to estimate the damage that will be done to the Jewish cause not only in this country but throughout the world by the cold-blooded murder of the two British soldiers...’<sup>306</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, whilst urging the government that it was ‘time to go’ from Palestine, similarly noted that the hangings were ‘a greater blow to the Jewish nation than to the British government.’<sup>307</sup>

Anglo-Jewry was as genuinely horrified by what the JC described as the ‘Irgun murders’<sup>308</sup> as their non-Jewish compatriots. The BOD voiced Anglo-Jewry’s ‘detestation and horror at the appalling crime committed against innocent British soldiers’<sup>309</sup> and the AJA branded the Irgun action as ‘a barbarous act of a kind peculiarly repugnant to civilised man’.<sup>310</sup> Similar criticism poured in from all sections of Anglo-Jewry, including the Association of Jewish Ex-Service Men and Women who ‘condemned outright the murder by terrorists of the two Army sergeants’.<sup>311</sup>

As so often the case before, the editorial of the JC captured the grave and foreboding mood of the moment. No doubt echoing the sentiment of many British Jews, in one particularly poignant passage the JC expressed Anglo-Jewry’s shame at the Irgun murders:

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<sup>305</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, August 1 1947, p.5.

<sup>306</sup> *The Times*, August 1 1947, p.5.

<sup>307</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, August 1 1947, p.4.

<sup>308</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, August 1 1947, p.12.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

‘Although the general public in Britain recognise that Jewry in this country are powerless to prevent the outrages, British Jewry cannot but feel a deep sense of shame that these murders have been committed’.<sup>312</sup>

Editor John Shaftesley’s carefully chosen words, whilst clearly articulating Anglo-Jewry’s abhorrence at the Irgun’s ‘crime,’ can also be interpreted as a plea to British society not to blame Anglo-Jewry for the ‘cold-blooded murder of the two British sergeants,’ or to seek revenge against the community. Unfortunately, Shaftesley’s plea was ignored, and during the bank holiday weekend, which began on August 1 1947, and throughout the following week, British Jews across the country felt the powerful impact of the Irgun murders, facing a torrent of hatred, abuse and ultimately rioting.

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., p.12.

## CONCLUSION

### **‘Holding the innocent to blame for the guilty’.**<sup>313</sup>

As Britain entered the summer bank holiday weekend on Friday 1 August 1947, the tranquillity of what should have been a quiet and restful public holiday was shattered by a torrent of anti-Semitic violence and rioting. The unambiguous cause of the violence was the Irgun execution of sergeants Martin and Paice. News of the ‘cold blooded Irgun murders’<sup>314</sup> quickly spread across Britain through extensive coverage in the British media, a development that served to unify the British public in shock and horror. The tabloid press in particular capitalised upon the tragedy by reporting the ‘Irgun murders’ in graphic detail and in a highly provocative manner. Typifying the sensational press reporting, the *Daily Express* carried a large picture on the front page, showing the sergeants as they were found, hands tied behind their back, hooded, and hanging from eucalyptus trees under the headline: ‘Hanged Britons: picture that will shock the world.’<sup>315</sup>

The provocative nature of the newspaper reporting contributed to the already tense situation surrounding Anglo-Jewry’s position in British society, although it was undoubtedly the calculated callousness of the Irgun reprisal hangings, which acted to spark the violent backlash against Anglo-Jewry. The rioting began as a wave of anti-Jewish demonstrations, which started in Liverpool and subsequently spread across Britain’s urban centres from London to Glasgow. These ‘demonstrations,’ fuelled by bank holiday high spirits, quickly turned into a violent outpouring of hatred against the Anglo-Jewish community, as a vendetta for the deaths of the British sergeants in Palestine.

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<sup>313</sup> Editorial of the *Jewish Chronicle*, August 8 1947, p.14, in response to anti-Jewish rioting in Britain.

<sup>314</sup> *The Times*, July 31 1947, p.5.

<sup>315</sup> Tastard, ‘Perspectives’, pp.31-32.

Indicative of the breath of the violence, incidents were reported in West Derby, where a wooden synagogue was burnt down, in Glasgow, where ‘bricks were thrown through the windows of Jewish shops, and in Liverpool, where ‘over a hundred windows belonging to Jewish owners were shattered’.<sup>316</sup> It was also in Liverpool where the rioting was most intensive and long lasting. For over five days the city bore witness to such extreme violence and looting that the Lord Mayor was compelled to issue an appeal to the city ‘to assist the police in the prevention of attacks on property and shops supposedly owned by Jews’.<sup>317</sup> In total over 300 Jewish properties were affected by the rioting in Liverpool, and the police made 88 arrests.<sup>318</sup>

Confirming the anti-Jewish motivation of the rioting, synagogues and easily recognisable Jewish properties and symbols throughout Britain were deliberately targeted by the vigilantes. In Hendon, London, windows of the Raleigh Close synagogue were smashed and a piece of paper was found with the words “Jews are sin”, Blackpool and St John’s Wood synagogues received telephone calls threatening that they would be blown up, and the walls of Plymouth synagogue were attacked and marked with fascist signs and slogans: ‘Hang all Jews’ and “Destroy Judah”. In other attacks on Jewish targets, gravestones in a Jewish cemetery were uprooted in Birmingham, “Hitler was right” was daubed on properties in North Wales, and Jewish property in Halifax, Pendleton, Lancashire, Bolton, Holyhead and Southend were also attacked.<sup>319</sup> In a further incident, the back door of the JC’s representative’s home in Cardiff was marked “Jews—good old Hitler”.

In addition to the widespread nature of the rioting, events in Eccles, Lancashire indicated the broad support and popularity of the anti-Jewish violence.

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<sup>316</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, August 4 1947, p.5.

<sup>317</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, August 8 1947, p.1

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

During the spontaneous anti-Jewish demonstration, on 5 August 1947, *The Times* and JC reported that a crowd of 700 people<sup>320</sup> ‘cheered each hit’ as missiles pelted Jewish properties smashing their windows.<sup>321</sup> In a further revealing incident, fifty abattoir slaughtermen in Birkenhead ‘refused to handle kosher meat for a week as a protest against the murder of the two British sergeants in Palestine’.<sup>322</sup>

Denunciation of the rioting was expressed from within and without of Anglo-Jewry. In a clear indicator of the severity of the disturbances, Home Secretary Chuter Ede gave a written statement to Parliament regarding the matter.<sup>323</sup> Under the headline ‘a disgrace’, *The Manchester Guardian* commented that:

‘The anti-Jewish demonstrations which have marred the week-end in Manchester, Liverpool, and other towns are clearly the work of the most irresponsible and hooligan elements in our population. But that does not make these outbreaks less menacing or less disgraceful...

The man who condemns the Zionists in Palestine on account of the crimes of the Irgun gangsters is only a degree better the youth who expresses his hatred by mobbing the innocent men and women of Cheetham Hill or Wavertree. There is no political fault so common or so dangerous as this primitive confusion between many and few. The murder of the British sergeants in Palestine was a brutal crime, the act of crazed fanatics. But...to answer terrorism in Palestine with terrorism in England is sheer Hitlerism. We must

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<sup>320</sup> *The Times*, August 6 1947, p.2.

<sup>321</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, August 8 1947, p.14

<sup>322</sup> *The Times*, August 6 1947, p.2.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.



be desperately careful to see that we do not let ourselves be infected with the poison of the disease we had thought to eradicate'.<sup>324</sup>

The JC, which since Shaftesley's appointment as editor had assiduously followed a restrained and sensitive editorial line regarding Anglo-Jewry's position in society, was provoked by the rioting to explicitly express its anger and disillusionment with Anglo-Jewry's treatment by its compatriots:

'Passion and fanaticism have, alas, spread to Britain itself and Britain's reputation suffers in consequence. The anti-Jewish riots which have occurred in several towns, on the pretext of the Palestine murders, are shameful in the extreme, both for themselves and for the fact that they represent the newest extension of the evil principle of holding the innocent to blame for the guilty'.<sup>325</sup>

It was, however, the Association of Jewish ex-Servicemen who gave the most informative and telling Anglo-Jewish reaction to the dual tragedies of the Irgun executions and the anti-Jewish rioting in Britain. In an unequivocal bid to display Anglo-Jewish loyalty to Britain, even in the face of the overwhelming animosity that the anti-Jewish rioting presented, the Association placed a wreath at the plinth of the Cenotaph with the inscription: 'In memory of Sergeant Martin and Sergeant Paice, who died doing their duty in Palestine. From the Jewish ex-Service comrades of the British forces.'<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, August 5 1947, p.4.

<sup>325</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, August 8 1947, p.10.

<sup>326</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, August 4 1947, p.5.

**The Impact of the August 1947 riots: ‘Hold your fire these premises are British’.**<sup>327</sup>

Despite the valiant efforts of the Association of Jewish ex-Servicemen, the anti-Jewish rioting that swept across Britain in the first week of August 1947 acted to demonstrate unequivocally the perception in Britain that Anglo-Jewry was an alien, community in British society. This perception of Anglo-Jewry’s ‘separateness’ and ‘difference’ from the remainder of British society is most vividly illustrated in a number of seemingly innocuous signs placed in shop windows in riot-affected areas. In one shop in Liverpool bearing the name ‘Lewis’ the owner placed a notice “We are not Jews” to avoid being targeted. In Manchester, which also suffered several days of disturbances, a similar notice was placed in shop window announcing:

“Don’t make another mistake, chums. This shop is 100 per cent British owned, managed and staffed.”<sup>328</sup>

The implication of the signs was stark: British Jews were regarded as ‘Jewish’ rather than ‘British’. Such a view is reinforced by the discovery in the midst of the rioting of a landmine outside a Jewish premise in Davenport. Whilst the landmine was found to be unarmed, a message was uncovered in place of the explosives, which read:

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<sup>327</sup> Notice placed in a Liverpool shop window to avert attack. *Manchester Guardian*, August 6 1947, p.5.

<sup>328</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, August 6 1947, p.5.

“Only because English lives are involved, this is empty. Down with the Jews.”<sup>329</sup>

In an atmosphere arguably more akin to race-obsessed Nazi Germany than free and democratic Britain, proving a citizen’s bona fides as a white Christian Briton became a valid and essential means of defence against violent attack. Herzl’s initial inspiration for writing *Der Judenstaat* in 1896 was his recognition that Jews, even in lawful advanced Western democracies, would never be accepted as full and equal citizens. The anti-Jewish rioting in Britain in August 1947 seemingly confirmed that over fifty years later, not even Britain was immune from such prejudices. The sense of betrayal and dejection felt by Anglo-Jewry at their treatment by their ‘compatriots’ is indicated in a simple sign spotted in a Jewish shop in the centre of an area of Manchester affected by the rioting. The sign simply read:

‘As a British sailor I fought for you. This is my reward’.<sup>330</sup>

### **The First in Living Memory**

In the words of the JC, the anti-Jewish rioting was ‘the first in living memory’.<sup>331</sup> Befittingly, in order to trace the origins of the rioting, it is also necessary to return to a period beyond the bounds of much of contemporary Anglo-Jewry’s living memory, to the beginning of the twentieth century when Zionism first arrived in Britain. At this time, the aristocratic Anglo-Jewish leadership was unanimous in its

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<sup>329</sup> *The Times*, August 6 1947, p.2.

<sup>330</sup> *Manchester Guardian* August 6 1947, p.5.

<sup>331</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, August 8 1947, p.1

opposition to Zionism, arguing that Zionism's demand for Jews to be considered as a separate nation would undermine the position of British Jews in society.

The eruption of anti-Jewish violence in August 1947 appears to confirm the Jewish aristocracy's initial fears. However, to cite the anti-Jewish riots as a vindication of the Jewish dukes' opposition to Zionism is misleading and ultimately erroneous. As it was asserted at the outset of this thesis, whilst Anglo-Jewry unquestionably was placed in an awkward position by the clash of its support for Zionism and the British government's obfuscation on the issue, it was the violent anti-British activities of the Jewish underground, which transformed an uncomfortable position for Anglo-Jewry into an intolerable one. As the climactic August 1947 anti-Jewish riots well demonstrated, the crucial factor behind the outbreak of violent anti-Semitism was the Irgun's decision to execute the two British sergeants.

The rioting therefore, rather than attesting the Jewish aristocracies' fears, confirms the central argument of this thesis that the violent anti-British activities of the Jewish underground tested the bounds of Anglo-Jewry's dual allegiance to its very limits. The Irgun executions acted to rupture the already dangerously unstable equilibrium between Anglo-Jewry and wider British society, and in so doing; Anglo-Jewry was exposed to violent victimisation.

Beginning with the arrival of Zionism to Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, it has been demonstrated that as a direct consequence of Anglo-Jewry's embrace of Zionism as an integral part of its Jewish identity, the community, for the first time in its modern history was placed in position where it was opposed to the policy of the British government. This opposition was shown to have centred upon the two crucial and related issues of establishing an independent Jewish state in Palestine

and the abrogation of the 1939 White Paper to allow unfettered Jewish immigration to Palestine. In most of the post-First World War period prior to the 1939 White Paper, Anglo-Jewish support for Zionism was in harmony with British governmental policy, and therefore the issue of dual allegiance never arose. However, in consequence of Anglo-Jewry's and the British government's conflicting stances towards Zionism after the Second World War, Anglo-Jewry became increasingly vulnerable and exposed to the accusation of split loyalties and being unpatriotic.

The anti-British activities of the Jewish underground seriously exacerbated the tensions Anglo-Jewry was facing. Due to widespread sympathy within the community for the plight of Jewish DPs in Europe and the attempt by Palestinian Zionists to create an independent Jewish state, the leading Anglo-Jewish institutions were not perceived to be sufficiently critical of the low-level campaign of violence waged by the URM against British interests in Palestine. Such a situation, although far from ideal, was tolerable as long as the Jewish underground's actions remained contained and British casualties low. The Irgun's devastating bombing of the King David Hotel in July 1946, instantly upset this delicate equilibrium, exposing Anglo-Jewry for the first time to anti-Semitic criticism.

The trend set by the King David Hotel bomb attack continued until finally culminating in the anti-Jewish rioting of August 1947. Confirming the correlation between the two factors of anti-British Jewish underground violence, and increased levels of anti-Semitism in Britain, as the activities of the Jewish underground intensified, so the manifestation of anti-Semitism became more severe, evolving from broad vocal or written threats against the community to actual physical violence.

The Irgun's reprisal hanging of British sergeants Martin and Paice in July 1947 unquestionably represented the climax of the Jewish underground's anti-British activities. Similarly, the anti-Jewish rioting in August 1947 in response to the murders represented the nadir of anti-Semitism in Britain. The patent and important correlations between these climactic events extends beyond their timing and mutual depravity. First and foremost, the stated motivation that the anti-Jewish rioting was inspired by the desire to exact revenge for the 'Irgun murders,' provides indelible evidence in support of the central argument of this thesis that the activities of the Jewish underground in Palestine impacted upon Anglo-Jewry. Secondly, and equally importantly, the riots serve to illustrate how, even in England, a mere two years after the Holocaust, the supposedly tolerant nature of society can quickly become broken down.

The perception that Anglo-Jewry possessed dual allegiances and split national loyalties was at the very crux of this breakdown. Although the riots were limited in scope, in the sense that no fatalities were recorded, the precedent set of victimising a minority community on the basis of its sympathy and support for a different nationality has massively far reaching implications.

In the months after the Irgun murders, as the creation of an independent Jewish state became increasingly likely, the Jewish underground slowly began to disengage from its anti-British activities and turn its attention towards the growing Arab hostility. The legacy of the Jewish underground's anti-British activities, however, endured, as is indicated by Britain's belated recognition of Israel in January 1949, almost a full year after Ben Gurion proclaimed the state's establishment.

Anglo-Jewish relations with wider British society slowly recovered after the August 1947 rioting, greatly facilitated by Britain's eventual withdrawal from Palestine in May 1948. However, in a final twist, the accidental shooting down of three Royal Air Force Spitfires in January 1949 by Israeli forces over the Negev desert nearly resulted in a diplomatic crisis between the nascent Jewish state and Britain,<sup>332</sup> an eventuality, which would have, no doubt, once more exposed Anglo-Jewry to the polar forces of dual allegiance.

By recounting the history of Anglo-Jewry in the period between the end of the Second World War in Europe in May 1945 and August 1947, it has been demonstrated that in direct correlation with the escalation of the Jewish underground's anti-British violence in Palestine and Europe, Anglo-Jewry faced increasing levels of hostility in Britain. By closely examining the main anti-British activities of the Jewish underground through the British media and by assessing the reaction of leading Anglo-Jewish institutions, the correlation between the rise in anti-Semitism in Britain and Jewish underground violence in Palestine has been shown to be directly related. In view of this evidence it is beyond doubt that the activities of the Jewish underground had a tangible and profound impact upon Anglo-Jewry.

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<sup>332</sup> Gilbert, *'Israel'*, p.247.

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