

An Interview* in Mr. Balfour's
Apartment, 23 Rue Nitot, Paris,
on June 24th, 1919, at 4:45 p.m.¹

Present: Mr. Balfour, Mr. Justice Brandeis, Lord
Eustace Percy and Mr. Frankfurter**

Mr. Balfour expressed great satisfaction that Justice Brandeis came to Europe.† He said the Jewish problem (of which the Palestinian question is only a fragment but an essential part) is to his mind as perplexing a question as any that confronts the statesmanship of Europe. He is exceedingly distressed by it and harassed by its difficulties. Mr. Balfour rehearsed summarily the pressure on Jews in Eastern Europe and said that the problem was, of course, complicated by the extraordinary phenomenon that Jews now are not only participating in revolutionary movements but are actually, to a large degree, leaders in such movements. He stated that a well informed person told him only the other day that Lenin also on his mother's side was a Jew.

Justice Brandeis stated that he had every reason to believe that this is not so and that Lenin on both sides is an upper class Russian. He continued to say that after all this is a minor matter, that all that Mr. Balfour said was quite so. He believes every Jew is potentially an intellectual and an idealist and the problem is one of direction of those qualities. He narrated his own

* From E.L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, eds. *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, 1st Series, Vol. IV (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1952), pp. 1276-78. The interview was recorded in a memorandum by Mr. Frankfurter.

** Felix Frankfurter (1882-1925), Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, later Associate Justice, Supreme Court of U.S. 1939-62, and President Wilson's Consultant at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Lord Eustace Percy (1887-1958), British diplomat, later Conservative Member of Parliament, 1921-37. For Balfour and Brandeis. see above, p. 165, note.

† On Brandeis and the Balfour Declaration, see Manuel, pp. 165-72.

approach to Zionism, that he came to it wholly as an American, for his whole life had been free from Jewish contacts or traditions. As an American he was confronted with the disposition of the vast number of Jews, particularly Russian Jews, that were pouring into the United States year by year. It was then that by chance a pamphlet on Zionism came his way and led him to the study of the Jewish problem and to the conviction that Zionism was the answer. The very same men, with the same qualities that are now enlisted in revolutionary movements would find (and in the United States *do* find) constructive channels for expression and make positive contributions to civilisation.

Mr. Balfour interrupted to express his agreement, adding: 'Of course, these are the reasons that make you and me such ardent Zionists'.

The Justice continued that for the realisation of the Zionist programme three conditions were essential:—

First that Palestine should be the Jewish homeland and not merely that there be a Jewish homeland in Palestine. That, he assumed, is the commitment of the Balfour Declaration and will, of course, be confirmed by the Peace Conference.

Secondly, there must be economic elbow room for a Jewish Palestine; self sufficiency for a healthy social life. That meant adequate boundaries, not merely a small garden within Palestine. On the North that meant the control of the waters and he assumed that Great Britain was urging the northern boundary necessary for the control of the waters. That was a question substantially between England and France and, of course, must be determined by the Peace Conference. The southern and eastern boundaries, he assumed, raised internal British questions.

Mr. Balfour assented that that was so as to the southern boundary but questioned as to the eastern boundary.

The Justice added that, of course, the interests of the Hedjaz were involved, but after all, the disposition of questions between the Arabs and the Zionists was, in effect, an internal British problem. He urged on the east the Trans-Jordan line for there the land is largely unoccupied and settlement could be made without conflict with the Arabs much more easily than in the more settled portions of the North.

Mr. Balfour pointed out that in the East there is the Hedjaz railroad which can rightly be called a Mohammedan railroad.

The Justice replied that there is land right up to the railroad and Mr. Balfour stated that he thought that Feisul would agree to having an eastern boundary of Palestine go up to the Hedjaz railroad.

Thirdly, the Justice urged that the future Jewish Palestine

must have control of the land and the natural resources which are at the heart of a sound economic life. It was essential that the values which are being and will be created because of the cessation of Turkish rule and due to British occupation and Jewish settlement should go to the State and not into private hands.

Mr. Balfour expressed entire agreement with the three conditions which the Justice laid down. He then proceeded to point out the difficulties which confronted England. He narrated at length the Syrian situation and the appointment of the Inter-Allied Commission which finally terminated in the present American Commission. Feisul* was a comrade in arms with the British; he undoubtedly was of military help and by sheer force of events the British and the Arabs find themselves together in Syria. Feisul interpreted British action and British words as, in effect, a promise either of Arab independence or of Arab rule under British protection. On the other hand, are the old interests of France in Syria and the Prime Minister has given (and in Mr. Balfour's opinion, rightly given) definite word that under no circumstances will Great Britain remain in Syria. It would involve a quarrel with France which would not be healed. But Feisul prefers Great Britain to France, (at least, so he says), and all advices indicate that French rule in Syria will meet with the greatest opposition and even bloodshed on the part of the populace.

The situation is further complicated by an agreement made early in November [1918] by the British and French, and brought to the President's attention, telling the people of the East that their wishes would be consulted in the disposition of their future. One day in the Council of Four, when the Syrian matter was under dispute, the President suggested the despatch of a Commission to find out what the people really wanted. It began with Syria but the field of enquiry was extended over the whole East. Mr. Balfour wrote a memorandum to the Prime Minister, and he believed it went to the President, pointing out that Palestine should be excluded from the terms of reference because the Powers had committed themselves to the Zionist programme, which inevitably excluded numerical self-determination. Palestine presented a unique situation. We are dealing

* Faisal I (1885-1933) was the third son of The Sharif Hussein of Mecca and the leader of the Arab Revolt during World War I. After the War, he was proclaimed King of Syria by a Syrian national congress (March 1920) but was deposed by the French (July 1920). He then became King of Iraq until his death.

not with the wishes of an existing community but are consciously seeking to re-constitute a new community and definitely building for a numerical majority in the future. He has great difficulty in seeing how the President can possibly reconcile his adherence to Zionism with any doctrine of self-determination and he asked the Justice how he thinks the President will do it. The Justice replied that Mr. Balfour had already indicated the solution and pointed out that the whole conception of Zionism as a Jewish homeland, was a definite building up for the future as the means of dealing with a world problem and not merely with the disposition of all [an]² existing community. Mr. Balfour stated he supposed that would be the President's line. He continued to point out the great difficulties that are now besetting Great Britain in the East, namely, the ferment in the whole Eastern world, the Mohammedan restlessness, the new Arabic imperialism and the relations with the French. Then there is also the Sykes-Picot Agreement;* that is dead, but its ruins still encumber the earth. He was anxious that the Justice should know these difficulties for they all bear upon the Palestinian situation. He expressed the greatest satisfaction that the Justice was going to the East to study the problem at first hand.

The Justice hoped that while he was away at least nothing would be done which would embarrass the fulfilment of the three conditions which he laid down as essential to the realisation of the Zionist programme.

Mr. Balfour then stated that he understood Justice Brandeis' request that no decision be taken as to the boundaries and the extent of control over the land in any way counter to his views until his return in about four or five weeks. He thought it was perfectly safe to give him the assurance that no decision will be taken on those matters during that time to embarrass the aims which the Justice indicated.

Mr. Balfour stated that he would be either in Paris or in London when the Justice returned and he hoped that he will report to him at once upon his return on the questions as they appear to him from a study on the spot.

No statesman could have been more sympathetic than Mr. Balfour was with the underlying philosophy and aims of Zionism

* The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 had arranged that the Fertile Crescent would be divided into four areas, two to be directly administered by France and Britain respectively, while the other two would be administered by Arab Governments under the guidance of each of the two Western Powers.

as they were stated by Mr. Justice Brandeis, nor more eager that the necessary conditions should be secured at the hands of the Peace Conference and of Great Britain to assure the realisation of the Zionist programme.

F.F.

FROM HAVEN
TO
CONQUEST

*Readings in Zionism and the
Palestine Problem until 1948*

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

WALID KHALIDI

BEIRUT
THE INSTITUTE FOR PALESTINE STUDIES
1971