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Truman, Harry S., 1946.

August 26, 1946

THE TRUMAN ADMINISTRATION'S RECORD ON PALESTINE

Exactly a year ago -- on August 31, 1945 -- President Truman first made his request of Prime Minister Attlee that 100,000 homeless European Jews be admitted into Palestine immediately. When the President's request was made public, the Jews of America -- an overwhelming majority of whom subscribe to the Zionist program -- as well as millions of non-Jews who are deeply concerned about the problem of Europe's homeless Jews and Palestine, hailed President Truman as the first leader of the democratic nations to take concrete steps to save the remnants of European Jewry.

Speakers at Jewish rallies and Jewish newspapers pointed out that in all the years of Jewish suffering since the advent of Hitler, the Democratic Administration merely offered its condolence and sympathy to the Jews, but did nothing concrete to rescue them. It was pointed out further that, with the publication of the Roosevelt-Ibn Saud correspondence, public opinion was confronted with harsh reality: it became clear that at the very moment when the Administration was making pledges in support of the Zionist program, it was at the same time giving conflicting assurances to the Arab states. Needless to say, the reaction among the Jewish masses was one of shock and let-down.

Following these revelations and the well-established charges that the U. S. State Department was pursuing a pro-British and pro-Arab policy on Palestine, it is understandable that President Truman's letter to Prime Minister Attlee was greeted with great enthusiasm. This action served to give the Jews and their supporters renewed hope that the Administration was not going to forsake them after all.

It was well known that President Truman's letter to Mr. Attlee had been sent after the President had read the harrowing details of Earl Harrison's report on the conditions of the Jews in Europe's Displaced Persons' Camps. The warnings of Mr. Harrison and of other competent observers that only immediate action to transfer these harassed refugees to Palestine will avert a catastrophe, were regarded as clear indications that the required steps would be taken without delay.

But months passed and nothing was done. The British Government and the U. S. State Department employed one delaying device after another -- and the Jews languished in the concentration camps of Europe. People again wondered whether they were not being given another "run-around" by the Administration.

The British Government then countered President's Truman long-standing request with a proposal that an Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry be set up to investigate the entire problem of Palestine once again -- this after the facts in the situation had been made all too clear by the Harrison Report and other surveys. The British move was obviously another delaying tactic, but President Truman agreed to this new investigation without taking advantage of the readiness of American Zionist leaders to discuss the entire situation with him, to point out how utterly undesirable this proposal for a new Inquiry was, and to warn him that the British had no intention of taking positive action as a result of the Inquiry, but intended only to procrastinate further.

After four months of time-consuming exploration and investigation, the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry issued a Report which recommended what President Truman had requested in the first place -- the immediate emigration of 100,000 homeless Jews to Palestine. However, the Report also contained certain long-range political recommendations which, Zionist leaders pointed out, "can never be accepted by the Jewish people." These latter recommendations, which run counter to American policy on Palestine as stated by Congress, were obviously included in the Report at the insistence of the British, who would not otherwise have agreed to the recommendations favoring the immediate emigration of 100,000 Jews.

By consenting to the British proposal of a joint inquiry, the President had, therefore, allowed the United States to be maneuvered into an untenable position: in order to obtain consent to the immediate emigration of 100,000 Jews -- the United States would be repudiating every international pledge made to the Jewish people with respect to Palestine, and acting in opposition to the will of the American people as expressed by two resolutions of Congress -- one of which was passed during President Truman's administration.

The President now had to reconcile two conflicting positions. Fortunately, he was prevailed upon to take the correct steps under these circumstances, and in making public the report of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on April 30th of this year, he declared:

"I am very happy that the request which I made for the immediate admission of 100,000 Jews into Palestine has been unanimously endorsed by the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry. The transference of these unfortunate people should now be accomplished with the greatest dispatch . . . I am also pleased that the Committee recommends in effect the abrogation of the White Paper of 1939, including existing restrictions on immigration and land acquisitions, to permit the further development of the Jewish national home. It is also gratifying that the report also envisages the carrying out of large-scale economic development projects in Palestine which would facilitate further immigration and be of benefit to the entire population. . . In addition to these immediate objectives, the report deals with many other questions of long-range political policies and questions of international law which require careful study and which I will take under advisement."

This, then, was United States policy as enunciated by the President: the emigration of 100,000 Jews to Palestine was a matter for immediate action, and not subject to further consultations; the long-range political questions were to be taken "under advisement."

Weeks, and then months, went by and still nothing was done. The plight of the Jews in the Displaced Persons' Camps had become unendurable, and the frustration of these unfortunates expressed itself in repeated clashes with our own occupation troops in Europe. The Jews of Palestine had also reached the depths of despair, and the British were becoming more brutal in the enforcement of their illegal policy of excluding Jewish refugees from their internationally-guaranteed homeland. Under these conditions, violence was inevitable and Britain's tyrannical act of suppression only served to produce more bloodshed and destruction. Meanwhile, the U. S. State Department was following the procedure of further "consultations" initiated by the British.

The American public could not understand -- and still cannot understand -- how it is possible for the President of the United States to enunciate one policy

publicly while his subordinates in the Administration follow procedures that are diametrically opposed to that policy. Throughout the country people said -- and continue to say -- that the Administration is merely playing a clever game with the Jews; that the Administration has no intention of carrying out its promises to the constituency in behalf of the Jewish people.

Then the Cabinet Committee was appointed. The American people were told that this new Committee was set up to bring about the speedy implementation of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry's Report. When the Cabinet group was formed, President Truman expressed confidence that his request for the immediate emigration of 100,000 Jews to Palestine would be speedily implemented. He had an extremely cordial meeting with leaders of the Zionist movement on July 1st, following which the White House issued a statement which read:

"The President further added that it was his determination that these most recent events should mean no delay in pushing forward with a policy of transferring 100,000 Jewish immigrants to Palestine with all dispatch, in accordance with the statement he made upon the receipt of the report of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry. The President indicated that the Government of the United States was prepared to assume technical and financial responsibility for the transportation of these immigrants from Europe to Palestine."

After conducting its own "investigation" of the problem, the Cabinet Committee reversed the policy repeatedly stated by the President and produced a British-sponsored plan for the "federalization" of Palestine. This scheme was a complete surrender to British Colonial Office policy. The position taken by the entire American Zionist movement on the plan was stated by Dr. Abba Hillel Silver, president of the Zionist Organization of America and chairman of the Executive Committee of the American Zionist Emergency Council. Dr. Silver said:

"The 'federalization plan,' recommended to the American and British Governments by the Anglo-American Cabinet Committee, is a conscienceless act of treachery, dooming the helpless Jewish survivors in Europe to further death and humiliation and driving the Jews of Palestine to further desperation.

"The Cabinet Committee's recommendation that the admission of 100,000 homeless European Jews to Palestine, first urged almost a year ago by President Truman and unanimously recommended as an immediate step by the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, be made 'conditional' on the adoption of the 'federalization' proposal, is as revolting as it is immoral. In plain English, this means that 100,000 helpless refugees are to be used as hostages by Britain and the United States in order to extort from the Jewish people acceptance of a political formulation which clearly repudiates every international commitment made to the Jewish people with respect to Palestine -- a formulation which the governments concerned surely know the Jews cannot accept.

"That the lives of oppressed men, women and children, who have already passed the limits of endurance, should thus be used as pawns in Britain's imperialistic maneuvers -- and that the United States should now be a party to this abomination -- does not augur well for the world of peace and justice which, it was hoped, would emerge from the ruins of the greatest of all wars. We respectfully suggest to those who are responsible for shaping government policy on this question that what is required above all in the present situation is simple morality. . . .

"This is a plan for the ghetto-ization of the Jews in their own homeland. Even that small portion of the country remaining for Jewish settlement under the 'plan' would be controlled almost completely by the same British Colonial Administration, whose only right to be in Palestine in the first place is the duty assigned to it by the Balfour Declaration and the Palestine Mandate: facilitation of the development of the Jewish National Home."

Americans -- Jews and non-Jews alike -- could not help but ask whether the Administration's earlier statements were sincere in view of the fact that the President's own Cabinet Committee had now repudiated not only Mr. Truman's position, but every official American declaration of support for Jewish aspirations in Palestine, including the plank in the platform of the Democratic Party, which reads:

"We favor the opening of Palestine to unrestricted Jewish immigration and colonization and such a policy as to result in the establishment there of a free and democratic Jewish commonwealth."

Could the President's Cabinet Committee have accepted this abominable "federalization" plan if its members had been convinced that the President wants them to carry out U. S. policy as stated by him? Surely the members of that Committee were astute enough to realize that the British would offer them a series of "plans" and would try to secure U. S. agreement to that formula which is least in the interest of the Jews. But it is clear that Mr. Grady and his fellow Committee members were advised by the State Department to follow the line proposed by the British.

Furthermore, the public was astounded to read accounts in the press which reported the President as having taken a most unfriendly attitude towards those who called on him to repudiate the "federalization" plan. For example, the following dispatch appeared in the New York Times of Wednesday, July 31st:

"TRUMAN 'REBUFFS' PALESTINE PLEA

"New York Congressmen Say That He Hinted At Political Motives In Their Visit

"Washington, July 30 -- Nine New York members of the House called on President Truman today to protest the proposed partitioning of Palestine and insist on the immediate admission of 100,000 Jews, but they came away expressing dissatisfaction with their reception.

"The President was reported to have been sympathetic to the homeless Jews' plight, but only as part of a larger problem of displaced persons generally. Members of the delegation said that he was inattentive to their arguments and had suggested at one point that the reason for their call was political.

"Coincidentally, Senators Robert F. Wagner, Democrat, of New York, and Robert A. Taft, Republican, of Ohio, assailed the Anglo-American Cabinet Committee's latest proposals in the Senate. Mr. Wagner called the plan 'a deceitful device to stifle the hopes of a long-suffering people.' Mr. Taft said that it was a 'cynical plan' that would mean the 'complete frustration' of Jews in Palestine and 'deep despair for the million and one-half surviving Jews in Europe.'

"The delegation calling on Mr. Truman was led by Representative Emanuel Celler, who read a prepared statement. Mr. Celler gave a reporter the following digest of it:

'The President should reject the new proposal of the British because admission of 100,000 Jews is conditioned upon its acceptance. Thus the innocent 100,000 Jews are considered as hostages. This is utterly unfair.

'The plan would narrow the Jewish province to 1,500 square miles and prevent any further development economically and culturally after admission of the 100,000. Acceptance would be approval of a ghetto in Palestine. Furthermore, the British know that neither the Arabs nor the Jews would accept the plan. And thus they would be privileged again to delay a decision. The plan is nothing but a stall.'

"Mr. Celler would not describe the President's reaction, but other members of the delegation said that it was 'discouraging.' One of the descriptions of the conference was: 'It was rough.'

"Mr. Truman was said to have shuffled papers on his desk while Mr. Celler read and to have commented, when Mr. Celler started to speak further about a problem 'close to my heart' that he did not have time to listen, that he knew all about the subject anyhow. The President, according to the Representatives' accounts, indicated that he was sympathetic to the Jewish problem, but explained that he was working on a broader question in trying also to get 100,000 displaced persons admitted to South America, 100,000 to British possessions and 100,000 to this country.

"He was reported to have said that he did not blame the Congressmen for coming to the White House, that he realized that they were all up for re-election this fall, but that it was time somebody came to see him about the United States problem for a change. He ended the Conference abruptly, the witnesses said, before the Representatives were ready to leave.

"In addition to Mr. Celler, those attending the Conference were Representatives Walter A. Lynch, Ronald L. O'Toole, John J. Rooney, Charles A. Buckley, Leo F. Rayfiel, and Arthur J. Klein, Democrats; Vito Marcantonio, American Labor Party, and Leonard W. Hall, Republican."

Obviously, the President has failed to understand why the Jews of America and those who support their cause are persisting in approaching him: the fact of the matter is that nothing has yet been done for the Jews, and the 100,000 are still languishing in the detention camps of Germany.

As a result of the nationwide outburst of indignation against the "federalization" plan and the tremendous pressure that was concentrated on the White House, President Truman was prevailed upon not to accept this proposal. Instead, he recalled the Grady Committee to Washington for further consultations. The American members of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry were also called to Washington to offer their opinion of the plan, and they were unanimous in repudiating it.

The State Department made an effort to keep the Committee of Inquiry's opinion secret, so that it could go ahead with its program of employing the Grady Committee's report as a basis for discussions with the British. Fortunately, other individuals realized the importance of informing the public as to what had transpired in the Washington discussions, and the story appeared in the press. It was only as a result of the most determined pressure that the State Department's efforts to secure Mr. Truman's agreement to the Grady scheme as a basis for negotiations were defeated.

After numerous reports and rumors, many of them contradictory, as to the exact nature of President Truman's communication to the British Government had appeared on the front pages of the country's newspapers, the White House finally issued an announcement on the subject. The text of that statement is as follows:

"Although the President has been exchanging views with Mr. Attlee on the subject, this government has not presented any plan of its own for the solution of the problem of Palestine. It is the sincere hope of the President, however, that as a result of the proposed conversations between the British Government and Jewish and Arab representatives a fair solution of the problem of Palestine can be found and immediate steps can be taken to alleviate the situation of the displaced Jews in Europe.

"It is clear that no settlement of the Palestine problem can be achieved which will be fully satisfactory to all of the parties concerned and that if this problem is to be solved in a manner which will bring peace and prosperity to Palestine, it must be approached in a spirit of conciliation.

"It is also evident that the solution of the Palestine question will not in itself solve the broader problem of the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons in Europe. The President has been giving this problem his special attention and hopes that arrangements can be entered into which will make it possible for various countries, including the United States, to admit many of these persons as permanent residents.

"The President on his part is contemplating seeking the approval of Congress for special legislation authorizing the entry into the United States of a fixed number of these persons, including Jews."

This statement has been interpreted in the press and elsewhere as a declaration by the President that he is "washing his hands" of the entire question. This interpretation has also been advanced in private conversation by leading U. S. officials, including those of the State Department.

This is where the matter stands now. After all the pledges, after all the committees, the investigations and the consultations, the President of the United States announces that "this government has not presented any plan of its own for the solution of the problem of Palestine." Even though the resolutions of Congress and the platform of his own party should be regarded as commitments to a very clearly-defined program of action, the President now decides to retreat from the entire issue --- and at a time when the British are employing the resources of their empire, both political and military, to liquidate the Jewish position.

President Truman did not even publicly reaffirm his earlier statements with regard to the 100,000. The White House's announcement of August 16th, quoted above, can, therefore, be viewed only as a declaration of collapse on Palestine by this Administration. And the American people ask: has not the United States sufficient prestige, influence and authority in the world -- particularly in its relations with the British Government, whose economic future America has underwritten -- to insist that Britain fulfill her pledges and obligations to the Jews?

Nor is Jewish public opinion in this country particularly impressed by the White House's assertion that "the President, on his part, is contemplating seeking the approval of Congress for special legislation authorizing the entry into the United States of a fixed number of these persons, including Jews." Assuming that such efforts can meet with a degree of success, what must be clear to everyone is the fact that weeks, perhaps months, of interminable Congressional debate on the

question would ensue before any action is taken. Neither is American public opinion unmindful of the fact that Congress has adjourned and will not be in session for some months to come.

As for the Jews in the Displaced Persons' Camps, who will shortly be faced with the dread prospect of another bitter winter -- they are evidently expected to remain patient while their one hope for salvation -- United States action -- is removed by no less a personage than the President of the United States himself.

This is the record of the Democratic Administration on Palestine. Let not the Administration believe that merely by issuing further declarations of sympathy and condolence, it will succeed in sugar-coating this bitter pill. Anything short of the oft-promised, but repeatedly delayed concrete action will neither satisfy nor reassure the Jews of America and large numbers of their supporters, who have reached the point when they must say in a loud and clear voice: "We have been betrayed again!"

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MORE



September 12, 1946

At his press conference on September 5th, President Truman said that the Grady Committee's report was still under consideration. According to the Associated Press, the President made this statement in reply to a direct question as to whether the Grady report had been rejected.

This latest statement by President Truman will certainly not serve to reassure public opinion on the Administration's handling of the Palestine question. Coming as it does after the events noted above, this statement is, to say the least, confusing. The President's additional assertion that he is still pushing for the immigration of 100,000 Jews into Palestine can be considered only in relation to any concrete steps that are taken to implement that requested action. Thus far the public is not aware of the existence of such concrete steps.

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SERIES II

MANSON FILE

Subseries A: Main Manson File

Folder:

Folder Title:

Manson File/number: IV-61 [folder and contents lacking at
time of filming]

