

UNITED NATIONS PALESTINE COMMISSION

Recent British Editorial Comment on the
Palestine Question

1. THE MANCHESTER GUARDIAN of 25 March 1948, in an editorial entitled "May 15" states that although Bevin announced that Britain was handing Palestine over to the United Nations and "not to chaos", there may in practice be little difference between the two. At the moment, it looks as though the partition plan will stand as the valid decision of the United Nations on May 15. "Since the Palestine Commission has already announced that it cannot enforce partition and is naturally reluctant to take responsibility in the circumstances, it would be optimistic to hope that there will be any United Nations authority in Palestine to whom we can hand over the government on May 15".

However, the editorial continues, there will be some authority -- a "de facto" partition -- since the Jews have decided "quite legitimately" to set up a provisional government and the Arabs will have effective control in Arab areas of Samaria and elsewhere. The problem, since these two "States" will almost certainly be at war, is to concentrate on forming the international regime for Jerusalem and providing it with its own police force. This would provide a calm center where the Commission could work and where moderate leaders on each side could meet and talk.

Although it would be difficult for the British Government to take part in this officially, after its "repeated farewells", British assistance might be given by allowing volunteers from the police and administration to stay on in Jerusalem.

2. In an editorial entitled "A Policy for Palestine" THE TIMES of London of 3 April 1948 describes the recent action of the Security Council as having "pronounced the doom of the present plan of partition by refusing the Palestine Commission's request for an international force to put it into operation".

Terming as "unjust" the claims of the Zionists that the Council's action has sanctioned Arab aggression, the editorial holds that the plan cannot be implemented except by the cooperation of both sides. In this connection, no progress has been made toward securing the active Arab participation on which the plan depends.

Commending the United States for not placing formal trusteeship proposals before the Council as possibly prejudicing the chances of a truce, the editorial points out that the General Assembly's immediate task is to create some authority to which Britain can hand over her responsibility on May 15.

The members of the Assembly "must know by this time that a settlement, to be effective, must command the support of both sides".

3. Discussing the possibilities of restoring the peace of Jerusalem, THE ECONOMIST of 3 April 1948 states that no international force could achieve this task without some basis of consent by the inhabitants. As things now stand, the City has become the center of fanaticism, as well as being a base of operation in Arab territory for the Jews and a valuable hostage for the Arabs.

Any attempts to save the City will need, on the Jewish side, the removal of the Jewish Agency and all Jewish official representation as well as the abandonment of outlying settlements which can only be maintained from Jerusalem. The article points out that this may seem to the Zionists too high a price to pay for a religious peace in which few of them are interested. On the Arab side it would require the acceptance of an international regime which, in the Arab mind is associated with partition. Efforts to overcome these obstacles must be made quickly, if the City is to be saved.