MEMORANDUM
of a Conference held on the 7th February 1917 at
133 Maida Vale, London, W.

Present:-
Dr. M. Gaster (in the chair), Rt. Hon. Lord Rothschild, Rt. Hon. Herbert Samuel, M.P.
Col. Sir Mark Sykes Bart, M.P. Mr. James de Rothschild, Mr. Sokolow, Dr. Ch. Weizmann,
Mr. Joseph Cowen, Mr. Herbert Bentwich, and
Mr. H. Sacher.

The Conference was called for 11.30 a.m. and began punctually.

Dr. Gaster opened the proceedings by stating in general terms the aims of the Zionists. They insisted on two things:— (1) there must be no condominium or internationalisation in Palestine, as that would be fatal. What Zionists in England and everywhere desired was a British protectorate with full rights to the Jews to develop a national life. (2) The Jews in Palestine must be recognised as a nation, a millet. The East was based upon a system in which national rights were recognised, including the right to control religions and cultural affairs. Such a Jewish nationality would not interfere with the loyalty of Jews outside Palestine.

Dr. Gaster then called upon Lord Rothschild.

Lord Rothschild had prepared his views in a letter which he handed over to Dr. Weizmann, in the event of his being unable to attend personally.

A copy of this letter is appended. Lord Rothschild said that he sympathised fully with the development of a Jewish state in Palestine under the British Crown. He was irreconcilably opposed to any form of condominium. Great Britain must annex Palestine. As Palestine was not large enough to include the Jews of the whole world, a preference might be given to the oppressed Jews, notably those of Rumania and Russia. A Jewish Palestine should be developed by means of a Chartered Company. That Company should not be a profit making concern. The maximum dividend should be quite low, perhaps 3%, and all surplus profit should be handed over to the irrigation authority, the local government, or for other public purposes.

Jews should have control of their own local affairs for education, religion etc., and there should be a proper central government body set up by the Sudderain. There should also be many Jews in the Palestine Civil Service, but no Jew should be appointed who is out of sympathy with Zionism as that might bring the enterprise to failure. So far as the Holy Places were concerned he was prepared to see the control of them put into the hands of any other nation, (should that be thought necessary) than Great Britain, always excepting Russia. It would not be fitting that the officials of a nation which was oppressing the Jews should exercise authority in Palestine.

In conclusion Lord Rothschild once again affirmed his hearty agreement with the building up of a Jewish autonomous colony in Palestine.

The Rt. Hon. Herbert Samuel, M.P. spoke next. He said that in general he agreed with what had been said by Dr. Gaster and Lord Rothschild. On the question of a condominium, he insisted that anything of such a nature must be avoided. Experience shows that under a condominium the protecting Powers are constantly at loggerheads, that the system always, sooner or later, breaks down, that the Powers look forward to such a collapse and prepare for it by pegging out their own claims, that meanwhile the interests of the inhabitants
suffer. These arguments against internationalisation do not apply in the same way to the Holy Places. The small, strictly defined and scheduled areas of the Holy Places should be internationalised. Such an arrangement would incidentally help to increase the influence of Judaism through the world, because there would be no fear that the Jews would obtain control over the Holy Places and no antipathy to Judaism arising out of any such expectation.

If it was intended to create in Palestine a Jewish nation co nomine care must be taken to explain the sense in which the term was used, because there was much misunderstanding among Jews of the West and some fear owing to that misunderstanding that a Jewish state in Palestine might be incompatible with their loyalty. So long as it was plain that by "nation" is meant an organised community well and good, but it might be misunderstood as meaning that the Jews in Great Britain, for instance, would constitute as a result of a Jewish Palestine a separate nation in the same sense as the British are a nation. That did not mean that the Jews in Palestine itself may not have all the attributes of a nation in the largest sense of that term. There may in time come to be a Jewish nation in Palestine.

In the programme which had been prepared and submitted to Sir Mark Sykes (a copy of the programme is appended to this memorandum) it was not suggested that the Chartered Company should have control over immigration into Palestine. What was asked for was full liberty for the Jews of the world to immigrate. It might not be possible to give this unrestricted right until proper arrangements had been made for their reception, otherwise the experiment might break down. The best plan was for the Suzerain government to grant the full right of immigration to all Jews, but for the Chartered Company or some other Jewish authority to exercise a right of regulation. Jews throughout the world should be asked to contribute to the Chartered Company so that all Jews should share in building up the new Palestine. If the scheme of a Jewish Palestine were endorsed by the British Government most of those British Jews who now opposed it would come in and give it their support.

Mr. Nahum Sokolow spoke next. He said that the Jews of the whole world had for generations looked up to England as the traditional benefactor of the Jewish people and as the home of liberty. They all desired that England should annex Palestine. He was certain, from conversations that had taken place, that the Russian Government would not oppose any such step and he could give the assurance that not only the poor Jews of Russia but also the middle classes were anxious to settle in Palestine. It was not simply a question of material conditions, it was national sentiment. The Jews of Russia and Poland could not be absorbed in the peoples they lived among. They were too numerous, their distinctive culture in relation to their neighbours was on too high a level, and their national spirit was too high. It was also the case that many Jews, mostly Russian Jews, were anxious to go to Palestine from America. They had proved that by the societies Achas and the like, which they had formed for colonies in Palestine. If Great Britain annexed Palestine and assisted in the establishment of a Jewish society there it would win for her for all time the affection of the Jews.

Dr. Weizmann who spoke next emphasised two points:—

(1) that the Jews who went to Palestine would go to constitute a Jewish nation and be 100% Jews, not to become Arabs or Druses or Englishmen, (2) that the Suzerain authority should not put any restriction on Jewish immigration into Palestine. That would smack of Alien Bills and would be deeply resented. The regulation of immigration should be in the hands of the Chartered Company. The fact was that Jews would willingly submit to control by Jews when they would not to control by England or non-Jews in general.

Mr. H. Sacher distinguished between nation and state. The state was a political entity involving political obligation, the nation was a spiritual entity not involving political obligation. Jews in Palestine would be members of the Newish state and owe it political obligation. Jews outside Palestine
would be members of the Jewish nation and owe Palestine such respect or reverence as they thought fit, but would owe it no political obligation. (Mr. Samuel: "In the same way as Catholici do Rome"). The general arguments against a condominium in Palestine were fortified by particular arguments applying to the special case:-(a) it would break the unity of Jewry, by setting French Jews and English Jews, for instance, in opposition to one another, (b) in Palestine the task was to build up a Jewish nation, there was no parallel to this under any condominium, (c) Palestine was to develop into a self-governing dominion - that was not aimed at in the case of other territories under a condominium.

If the United States entered the war that Power would be deeply interested in the question of Palestine. President Wilson's adviser in Jewish matters was Justice Brandeis, the head of the Zionist movement in America. Mr. Brandeis was in favour of British annexation of Palestine and utterly opposed to a condominium. Finally there was the very important question of the frontiers of Palestine which would have to be thrashed out.

Mr. James de Rothschild said that the support of the Jews throughout the world was necessary and must be appealed to. He also could give the assurance that Mr. Brandeis desires a British protectorate and is opposed to a condominium. A condominium would be fatal. He urged that the hands of the British Government would be greatly strengthened if the American and Russian Jews were encouraged to send petitions exhorting the British Government to take over Palestine. He suggested that if possible a convention should be made under which the various Powers bound themselves not to tax the stock of the Chartered Company. The Holy Places might be placed under international protection. The Guard might be French on the model of the pontifical Guard at Rome. That would go far to satisfy the clerical party in France.

Mr. Joseph Coven said that every German Zionist would welcome a British Suzerainty over Palestine. He was quite sure that the project would arouse sympathy and enthusiasm among gentile Englishmen. The area under the control of the Chartered Company should be strictly delimited.

Mr. Herbert Bentwich said that doubtless the British Government had in its pigeon-holes constitutions to suit all conditions, including those in Palestine. That matter could be safely left in its hands.

Before Sir Mark Sykes was called upon,

Mr. Herbert Samuel desired to draw attention to the strategical aspect of Palestine. It was of enormous importance that that territory should not fall into the hands of another Power, which might be enabled to threaten the security of the Suez Canal and Egypt. He also emphasised English sympathy with a Jewish restoration to Palestine. Even to-day the Bible exercised vast influence over important classes of Englishmen, and won them to desire to assist at a Jewish return to Palestine.

Lord Rothschild referring to Mr. Bentwich's observation insisted that even though the British Government might draft the central constitution of Palestine, the Jews must reserve to themselves full autonomy in religious, educational and philanthropic matters.

Dr. Gaster then called upon

Sir Mark Sykes who said that he attended the conference in his private capacity. The soldiers, he thought, would soon find themselves in Palestine, even though they might not think so. Time was pressing. He had long had the question of Palestine and the Jews in mind and the idea of a Jewish Palestine had his full sympathy. He understood entirely what was meant by nationality and there was no confusion on that point although terms might be a little difficult to define. He would like first to put before the conference the difficulties of a Jewish Palestine-

(1) Russia: He had been in Petrograd and talked the matter over with Saxonoff when he was Foreign Minister. Saxonoff had objected that there was no room in Palestine
for all the Jews of Russia. Sir Mark had then put to him the case for Palestine as a spiritual centre for the Jews and Sazonoff had admitted its force. Sir Mark had gathered the impression that Russia wants to keep out of Palestine and that her interests there are only religious. She wants a definite say in the Holy Places and in the Jordan Pilgrimage and in general guarantees for the Russian pilgrim traffic.

(2) The Arabs: There was certain to be within a generation or so a great Arab national movement. The Arabs had linguistic unity (for the differences of dialect were not really greater than those between Somerset and Scots), much vitality and brains. Education was coming to them. The brain of the movement was in Syria round Beirut and Damascus, and Syrians were the advisers of the King of Hedgas. One would have to go very carefully with the Arabs. The Syrians in the organ of the King of the Hedgas had commenced attacking Zionism. He had stopped that. The Arabs professed that language must be the measure and could claim all Syria and Palestine. Still the Arabs could be managed, particularly if they received Jewish support in other matters.

(3) Italy: The Italians went on the principle of asking for everything that the French demanded. Still they were not a serious difficulty.

(4) France was the serious difficulty. He could not understand French policy. The French wanted all Syria and a great say in Palestine. What was their motive? Was it sentimental, that is clerical or colonial ambition? Was it the Vitali railway concessions? The Vitali railway concessions were a great scandal, but no doubt they could be disposed of with money. Nationalist and clerical pretensions were more difficult to handle and nationalist more difficult than clerical. We ought to discuss the matter with the French very frankly. We have given them no pledge in Palestine. (Mr. de Rothschild pressed for assurances on this point as he had been informed differently). The French have no particular position in Palestine and are not entitled to anything there. He suggested that the Zionists should approach M. Picot, the French delegate, and convince French.

Objections were taken to this suggestion. It was suggested by Mr. Samuel and others that it is the business of the British Government to deal with the French and dispose of their pretensions. Mr. de Rothschild pointed out that if the Zionists approached the French Government, that Government would probably try to get the French Rabbi to say that they wanted a French Palestine. In this way Jewry would seem divided.

The solution he would propose was that all the Jews desired could be embodied in the constitution of the Chartered Company which would be British. As the Chartered Company bought land it would come under British protection. (Col. Sir Mark Sykes' statement was very vague and from this point it was changed from a speech into a discussion).

Lord Rothschild wanted to know whether it was proposed that land should change its political allegiance when it changed ownership. That was an impossible system.

Mr. de Rothschild pointed out that such an arrangement would send the price of land up against the Company.

Sir Mark Sykes then suggested that a defined area should be put under the authority of the Company, with certain islands which should be under international control. The limits he would suggest would be from Accon across in a straight line east of the Jordan. The Haoran (by which apparently he means the Gebel Druse) would be excluded. It was thickly populated and it was during the war practically independent of the Turks. The Southern frontier could be arranged with the British Government. The islands under international control should include the whole of Jerusalem and a belt from Jerusalem to the sea along the Jaffa railway and including Jaffa, because the Russian pilgrims came along this route.

It was pointed out to Sir Mark that his suggested frontier would exclude
much of Galilee with its Jewish colonies and much of the Hauran which the Jews could not surrender, because with it would go the hope of an extensive population, as for the islands, Jerusalem was a Jewish city, most of the Jewish colonies lay along the Jaffa railway, the whole government of Palestine would become impossible. (Mr. Herbert Samuel was particularly emphatic in driving home these objections. He said that the French had no claims whatsoever in Palestine and that the problem of Palestine must be considered in relation to the general treaty of peace. The French were getting one-third of Africa, Alsace-Lorraine and Syria. They had no right to anything in Palestine. The Foreign Office should point out that Palestine was practically the only thing England was claiming and should insist upon it. As for the Jaffa railway why should not the Suzeain Government run it and so guarantee the pilgrim traffic? (Lord Rothschild urged that it was absurd to open negotiations by offering extensive concessions. The result would be that the French would raise their claims and in the end nothing would be left in Palestine that would be worth having. The British Government must demand the whole of Palestine.

Dr. Gaster wanted to know what would happen if the Jews, rather than see Palestine cut up, suggested a French Palestine. Sir Mark indicated that the Foreign Office would not be greatly concerned. He also intimated that the soldiers were not impressed by the strategic argument for annexing Palestine. It was replied that public confidence in the opinions of the soldiers had been badly shaken by two years of war, and Dr. Weizmann recalled the cession of Heligoland.

Mr. Herbert Samuel once again emphasised the strategic arguments for a British Palestine. If Palestine was in the hands of another Power and had behind it the resources of Syria it would become a great place of arms threatening the security of the Suez Canal and Egypt.

Mr. de Rothschild again desired to know whether any pledge had been given about Palestine. Sir Mark Sykes suggested that Mr. Samuel might say what had taken place. Mr. Samuel replied that he could not reveal what had been done by the Cabinet. Sir Mark thereupon repeated that with great difficulty the British Government had managed to keep the question of Palestine open. He asked that the Conference might appoint someone to put the Jewish views before M. Picot and to continue negotiations with himself. Mr. de Rothschild indicated Mr. Sokolow who could speak for the Russian Jews also, as the proper person. This was seconded and agreed to by the Conference and readily accepted by Col Sykes. It was thereupon arranged that Mr. Sokolow should be introduced by Sir Mark Sykes to M. Picot on the following day.

The Conference terminated at 1.45 p.m.
OUTLINE OF PROGRAMME.

JEISH RESSETTLEMENT OF PALESTINE.

IT IS PROPOSED that the following be adopted as Heads of a
scheme for a Jewish Resettlement of Palestine in accordance with the
Zionist aspirations.

I. BASIS OF RESETTLEMENT.
Recognition of Palestine as the Jewish National Home.

II. STATUS OF THE JEWISH POPULATION IN PALESTINE.

The Jewish population of Palestine (present and future) to be officially
recognised by the Soverain Government as possessing national status; and to
enjoy full national, political, and civic rights.

III. IMMIGRATION INTO PALESTINE.

The Soverain Government to grant full and free right of immigration
into Palestine to Jews of other countries.

IV. ESTABLISHMENT OF A CHARTERED COMPANY.

The Soverain Government to grant a Charter to a Jewish Company for the
Colonization and Development of Palestine.

The Company to have power to acquire and take over any Concessions for
works of a Public character which may have been or may hereafter be, granted
by the Soverain Government and the right of pre-emption of Crown or other Lands
not held in private or religious ownership, and such other powers and privileges
as are usual in Charters or Statutes of similar colonizing bodies.

V. INTERNAL AUTONOMY.

The Jewish population to have power to frame and adopt rules and regulations
for Local Government and for enforcing law and order among themselves.

Full autonomy to be enjoyed by the Jewish population in all matters bearing
upon their educational, religious, or communal welfare, with power to tax their
own nationals for any of these purposes.

VI. LANGUAGE.

The use of the Hebrew language, for all purposes to be recognised as an
inviolable right of the whole Jewish population.