

# CHURCHILL AND THE JEWS



MICHAEL J. COHEN

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# CHURCHILL AND THE JEWS

MICHAEL J. COHEN

*Professor of History*

*Bar-Ilan University*

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## FOREWORD

This has not been a simple book to write. It might appear to be presumptuous to add yet another tome to the myriad already published on Winston Churchill. However, only one single study of Churchill's relations with the Jews has appeared so far – and that was a generation ago, written without the benefit of the archives.

The writing of this book has been handicapped by the extended closure of Churchill's private archives, for considerably longer than the usual term of thirty years. However, since the Trustees have determined on their closure to the general public until ten years after the publication of the last volume of the authorised biography, there is little point in the contemporary historian's waiting any longer. On the other hand, there are some compensations for the student of Churchill. First and foremost, all historians will be indebted to Martin Gilbert for the monumental volumes, and companion volumes of documents, which comprise the emerging authorised biography. Their forte, as put so well in a recent study, is their emphasis on 'source materials, superbly detailed and commented, rather than the complementary role of selection and criticism'.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the public and private archives, as well as Churchill's public utterances, in the Press and in the House of Commons, all provide a mine of information. Frequently, the problem has not been a dearth, but a surfeit of material with, inevitably, conflicting interpretations.

Let me make it clear from the outset that I did not set out to destroy or reverse the popular image of Churchill, as patron of the Jews and of Zionism. But I did try to put out of my mind all the popular preconceptions, and to get at what I believe is the more complex truth of the matter, reducing the myth to human proportions. Since the 1960s, many critical studies of Churchill have appeared, revising the tendency to panegyric of the previous generation. I would endorse the leitmotif of these revisionist works that 'if anything, the stature of the man is enlarged by an honest confrontation of his errors and weaknesses'.<sup>2</sup>

To understand Churchill's life-long association with the Jews, and their National Home in Palestine, I have had to review his many, frequently ephemeral, contacts, beginning in 1904, when he became Liberal candidate for the predominantly Jewish constituency of North-West Manchester, and concluding in 1948, when he pressed the Labour Government to grant diplomatic recognition to the new State of Israel. I have tried to analyse Churchill's views on the Jews, at the domestic level, as a minority in England; and at the international level, as a potential pawn of British imperialism. In covering a relatively long span of history, I have of necessity treated some periods more closely than others. It will be my contention that, beneath the thick layers of rhetoric, Winston Churchill was no more of a Gentile Zionist than were most of his more maligned colleagues. Indeed, there is no particular reason why he should have been, nor anything in his background which should have made him so.

In a project such as this, I have received the aid of many learned colleagues. I am obliged in particular to Dr Ron Zweig, who not only read part of the manuscript, but also allowed me generous access to private papers in his possession; I am grateful also to Professors Yehuda Bauer, Roger Louis, Norman Rose, Avrom Saltman, Peter Stansky and David Vital, to Mr Richard Ollard and to Diana Reich, who all read parts of the manuscript. However, academics are a stubborn breed, who do not always recognize, much less take, good advice when given. So I myself must assume sole responsibility for what follows.

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All societies create myths to disguise the true nature of political leadership within them.

G.D. Page

*The Scientific Study of Political Leadership*

London, 1977, p. 2.

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

It is now nearly 20 years since the first edition of this book appeared. It was accorded a mixed reception. My reservations about a man who was already a British icon, voted in a 2002 British national poll as 'the greatest ever Englishman', aroused passionate counter-attacks. Some choice epithets have been hurled in my direction. But, ironically, some of my detractors have also, even if inadvertently, merely added further fuel to my case.

In 1985, I gave a copy of this book to a colleague, one of England's most prominent historians. He told me that he could not find any fault with my facts, but he revealed to me for the first time that during World War Two, he had worked under and come to admire Churchill. He asked me: 'Michael, why did you have to do this to such a great man?' I replied that I had 'done it' because these were the facts that I had uncovered during my research, and I had tried to present them as honestly as possible. I believed that the story needed to be told, if only because it would come out sooner or later in any case.

The passage of time has naturally wrought a certain change in my own perspective. This new edition has afforded me the opportunity to check whether the research done since 1985 has uncovered any new evidence that would require me to revise or retract any of the theses that I put forward then. At least 70 full-length studies of Churchill have been published since 1985 – far too many even to begin to list here. I have perused most of them thoroughly for any new material on Churchill's association with the Jews and Zionism.

The preparation of the material for this new edition has not only been an exciting intellectual experience, but also an emotional odyssey. Today, I am more conscious of the fact that I wrote this book also because I am a Jew. (Not least because so many reviewers found it necessary to note my ethnic or national origin.) I identify fully with the view of Saul Bellow, who in 1987 wrote: '... the sources of the

truest truths are inevitably profoundly personal'.<sup>1</sup> However, while conscious of my own limitations, I have always strived to reach, as closely as possible, a judicious, objective, historical truth.

No one who visits the Churchill family estate at Chartwell can leave without a deep sense of the man's greatness, and the high esteem in which his contemporaries held him. As I noted in the Introduction to the first edition, I have no intention of detracting from the unique service that Churchill performed in 1940, not only for Britain, but for Western democracy as a whole. For this alone, his place in the pantheon of great British Prime Ministers and world statesmen is assured.

But I was concerned to investigate his record in one particular field, that of his association with the Jews, and their national renaissance movement in the twentieth century – Zionism. I knew also that his relations with the Jews and Zionism had to be examined through the prism of his broader political and imperial *Weltanschauung*. I found that Churchill was not the consistent supporter of Zionism that he himself, and so many historians after him had maintained. Although, while a member of the Opposition, he condemned the Palestine White Paper issued in May 1939 (which consigned the Jewish community to minority status in a bi-national, Palestinian state to be founded within ten years), he did not in fact cancel or mitigate that policy while he held supreme power, from May 1940 until the war's end. Not only that, but Churchill abandoned the Zionist cause in November 1944, for four critical years, following the assassination in Cairo of his close friend, Lord Moyne.

It may be true that no one else enjoyed such a high public reputation among the Zionists as did Churchill.<sup>2</sup> And 'Churchill with warts' was certainly better than no Churchill at all. But this should not mislead us into believing, as is implied by some, that the Zionists were unequivocally happy with his record, particularly during World War Two. The contemporary, authentic *angst* of the Zionist leaders gathered in London in closed session at the war's end is described below. The Zionists chose, for very sound, political reasons, not to publicise their true feelings (see below, pp. 307–10, 313). But from the particular viewpoint of the Jewish people, those feelings were legitimate and justified. For some reason that I am unable to fathom, not a single book published since 1985 has made reference to that closed meeting.

Churchill's record on the Holocaust is perhaps the most

problematic, and certainly the most sensitive of all the issues dealt with here. That cataclysm wiped out fully one-third of the Jewish people – six million human beings. In 1985, I debated the issue with those historians who argued that Churchill understood, indeed was unique in his understanding of the true historical significance of the Holocaust. So far as I have been able to ascertain, this claim has not been repeated since 1980!

It is now quite apparent that for the duration of the war itself, and for many years after, no-one could have even begun to comprehend the true historical significance of the Holocaust. A study by Tony Kushner, published in 1994, has concluded that ‘the recovery of the history of the Holocaust’ was a long and difficult process. British society ‘was one of the last to accept the importance of the Holocaust’; it became an issue of major interest to the British public only in the late 1980s.<sup>3</sup>

It is a moot question whether many of our intellectuals have begun to understand the significance of the Holocaust even today. Many eminent historians still relegate it to marginality. Indeed, many studies covering World War Two do not even mention the Holocaust, let alone Auschwitz (for instance, the recent biographies of Churchill by Geoffrey Best and Roy Jenkins, both published in 2001; Gerhard Weinberg’s magisterial, incomparable study of World War Two is a notable exception).<sup>4</sup>

British ‘revisionist’ historians on the right (whose books adorn the shelves of respectable British universities) continue to argue – with a total disregard for any moral considerations – that Churchill was wrong in 1940 to continue the war alone against Hitler – a decision that cost the British their Empire. They argue that Churchill could have reached an ‘honourable peace’ with Hitler – a move that would have allowed the British and the Germans to divide up the world between them.<sup>5</sup>

This myopia is all the more incredible in view of Churchill’s own comment, written after he had read the reports about the mass killings at Auschwitz – that they were ‘probably the greatest and most horrible single crime ever committed in the whole history of the world’. Churchill did instruct Foreign Minister Eden to ‘get what you can out of the RAF’. However, Churchill never followed up this directive, nor did he apparently check to see if anything was being done to implement it. His sentiments about the tragic plight of the Jews may indeed have stemmed at the moment of writing from his

undeniable humanity – but without any meaningful military action to accompany them, they remained just so many words.

The rescue of Jews from Nazi-occupied Europe was never a first priority for the Allies during World War Two. Naturally, the perspectives and the priorities of the Jewish people were different. Whatever the judgment of posterity on the Allied leaders during World War Two, it remains a stark, undeniable fact that they did not mount any military operation to rescue European Jewry from the jaws of the ‘Final Solution’. Nowhere was the gap between Churchill’s rhetoric and his actions potentially so significant, and fatal. By this criterion, Churchill, along with the other world leaders who offered so much potential and promise, failed the Jewish people in their most ‘tragic hour’.

For some reason, Churchill has fared much better at the hands of historians than has President Roosevelt. The latter’s ‘indifference to so momentous an historical event as the systematic annihilation of European Jewry’ has been judged by David Wyman to have been ‘the worst failure of his presidency’.<sup>6</sup> If one adopts the criterion that I have – assessing statesmen by their actions, rather than by their professed good intentions – can we return a different verdict on Churchill?

I would suggest that the historical significance of Hitler’s ‘Final Solution’ – perpetrated by one of the most cultured and civilized nations in Europe in the twentieth century – lay in its being a crude violation of all the universal ethical and moral values that the Allies declared themselves to be fighting for. As such, the Holocaust was *not* the private concern of the Jewish people alone – but of all those who counted themselves as members and guardians of an enlightened, liberal civilization.

It is apparent that Western governments have only begun to appreciate this in full over the last decade or so. The construction of Holocaust museums in some of the great cities in the West is a belated expression of this. The first Holocaust Museum to be housed in its own, purpose-made building was opened in Washington DC, in 1993 – nearly 50 years after the closing down of the last death camp. It was erected on government property, with private funds. The first permanent exhibition in the UK relating to the Holocaust, on the Bergen-Belsen camp, was established at the Imperial War Museum in London in 1991.<sup>7</sup> This was developed later into a permanent Holocaust Museum, housed inside the Imperial War Museum.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

Winston Churchill may be counted among those select few who became a legend in their own lifetime. His crowning achievement in inspiring and leading England to victory during World War Two for many years overshadowed the failures and blemishes of his earlier career – not to mention the numerous shortcomings of his wartime leadership. No one was interested in hearing about the imperfections of a man who had been right when it really mattered, who had demonstrated faith and courage when England had been on its knees.

In the pantheon of Zionist heroes, few Gentiles enjoyed such a privileged position as Churchill, a reputation which the authorised biographer has since enhanced. The single study of Churchill's record on Jewish problems, written more than a generation ago, returned the verdict: 'Sir Winston is one of the giants of our time ... he ranks among the greatest friends the Jewish people has had ...'<sup>1</sup> It will be the purpose of this study to examine, amplify, and if necessary, revise this categorical assertion.

The motives which prompted Gentile support for Zionism were various and complex. In the 19th century, evangelical support for a return of the people of the Bible to the Land of the Bible seemed to enter the realm of practical politics, with the apparently imminent collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and with it, the end of Moslem control over the Holy Land. However, it was England's Foreign Minister, Lord Palmerston, who decided to prop up the ailing Ottomans, rather than risk a Great Power share-out of its provincial Empire. This became known as the 'Eastern Policy', and lasted for nearly eighty years, until the Ottomans sided with the Germans against England and her Allies in World War One.

British motives for issuing the Balfour Declaration during the war, on 2 November, 1917, are discussed in some detail below (p. 51ff). Suffice it to note here that the Lloyd George Cabinet decided to Support Zionism in Palestine, above all in order to further Britain's Own short-term military interests, and her long-term strategic interests. Churchill himself was not privy to the discussions which

preceded the issue of the Declaration, and in 1922, even went so far as to disown all responsibility for it.

It would be a mistake to think that Churchill was ever a consistent, convinced supporter of Zionism. It goes without saying that he was never ideologically committed, in the same way as Herzl's adherents were, to the renaissance of the Jewish nation in Palestine, as the unique solution to 'the Jewish Problem'. The periods when Churchill concerned himself directly with Jewish problems were relatively brief, and were interspersed with far longer spans when he had no official contact whatever. In 1934, for example, he paid a private visit to Palestine, during the course of a Middle East tour. He stayed overnight in Jerusalem, but did not apparently meet with any Zionist representative.

Churchill concerned himself with Jewish problems primarily when he perceived them as being interwoven either with his own personal political fortunes, or with Britain's imperial interests. Churchill shared the popular view of the Jews' wealth and influence, both at the domestic and at the international level. In 1904, Churchill left the Conservative Party, and became the Liberal prospective candidate for North-West Manchester, a constituency with a large, influential Jewish community. As his son's biography readily concedes, Churchill's public concern with the Aliens Bills (directed primarily against Jewish immigrants from Russia), and with the so-called 'Uganda' scheme, were instances when, perhaps above all else, he was concerned to nurse and cultivate his Jewish constituents. At this juncture – and this was because that was the predilection of most of the leading Jews in North-West Manchester – Churchill supported the establishment of a Jewish National Home in East Africa, rather than in Zion.

While we may safely assume that Churchill was an ardent believer in the imperial importance of the Suez Canal, he does not seem to have subscribed to the War Cabinet's estimation of Palestine as a strategic buffer to its north. As Secretary of State for War, and then for the Colonies after the war, Churchill was preoccupied with securing economies and retrenchment in the Middle East. Repeatedly, but in vain, he urged retreat and withdrawal from the Middle Eastern mandates, Palestine and Mesopotamia.

But the Balfour Declaration, though disowned by Churchill, did assume for him significance in two no less important aspects. First, Churchill was convinced that the Declaration had been instrumental

in mobilising powerful Jewish support for the Allied cause – especially in the United States, whose entry into the war, Churchill believed, was secured partly by Jewish pressure. This enduring conviction would play a critical role in Churchill's support for Zionism during the first years of World War Two, prior to the American entry, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, in December, 1941. Second, Churchill did for a time believe that Zionism might provide the antidote to what he believed was Jew-inspired Bolshevism. Jewish resources and energy might be channelled usefully into building up a British-oriented protectorate in Palestine, at little or no cost to the British taxpayer. But Churchill took little or no account of the rise of Arab nationalism after World War One, nor indeed, of Jewish terrorism during World War Two.

The rise of Nazism during the mid- and late-1930s threatened, and eventually shattered, the political order established by the victors of World War One. The threat to the old order posed by Hitler became the dominant theme in Churchill's life during the late 1930s, to the exclusion of all other considerations. On a moral plane, Churchill's deepest emotions were stirred by the Nazi persecution of the Jews. Thus Hitler gave the historical 'Jewish problem' a new, tragic twist, which aroused in Churchill a unique, personal commitment, not apparent at other junctures of his political career. However, whatever the depth of his sympathy for the Jews' plight, that nation's suffering took a very clear second priority during World War Two. The humanitarian sentiment so eloquently lavished on the Jewish people during that war, was rarely, if ever translated into concrete assistance.

In May 1939, the Chamberlain Government issued a new White Paper on Palestine. The new policy permitted a further 75,000 Jews to enter Palestine over the next five years (and thereafter, only with Arab consent); and provided for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state after ten years – with the population ratio regulated at two Arabs to each Jew, this effectively meant that Palestine would become an independent Arab State. Churchill condemned the new policy in the House of Commons as a breach of faith, the 'destruction' of the Balfour Declaration. Churchill equated Chamberlain's treatment of the Jews in Palestine with the latter's treatment of the Czech people, and condemned each as futile appeasement. However, as with several of Churchill's public crusades, there was more than a suspicion of political opportunism in this particular attack; the

Palestine White Paper provided Churchill with yet another occasion to hammer away his anti-appeasement message. Churchill had seized on the Zionist cause as early as in 1937 when, contrary to the Zionists' own wishes, he had attacked the Peel partition plan as a betrayal of Britain's commitments under the Mandate.

As wartime Prime Minister, Churchill reminded his colleagues repeatedly that he did not consider himself bound by the 1939 policy, but adhered rather to 'his own' White Paper of 1922. This policy had stipulated that the Jews were in Palestine 'as of right, and not on sufferance', and that they might immigrate freely, subject only to the economic absorptive capacity of Palestine. Yet a solution to 'the Jewish Problem', in all its different aspects, was in fact deferred by Churchill until after the war. Although he took a pro-Zionist stand on several Zionist issues, especially in his support for a Jewish Division during the first two years of war, he did not in fact seriously question the administration of the 1939 policy. Notwithstanding the Jewish plight, there is no record that Churchill ever suggested waiving the 1939 limits on Jewish immigration. Although his frequent condemnations of the Nazis' 'Final Solution' would seem to indicate Churchill's early appreciation of the historical uniqueness of the Germans' crime, his failure to unleash some dramatic, if not wide-scale practical action on their behalf, stands in stark contrast to the dogged determination with which he pursued to a positive conclusion other matters of far less import.

For a time, Churchill entertained St John Philby's idea of setting up Ibn Saud as 'boss of the bosses' in the Arab world, conditional on Saud's recognition of a Jewish State in a part of Palestine, to be 'bought' from Ibn Saud by £20 millions of Jewish money. In 1943, Churchill established, and hand-picked the members of a Cabinet Committee on Palestine. He set as their terms of reference the task of evolving a long-term solution to the Palestine question, based on the partition plan proposed first in 1937 – a plan which at that time he himself had opposed. Arab fickleness during the war had confirmed Churchill's contempt for the Arabs, and *pari passu*, his expectations of the Jews in Palestine.

However, in November, 1944, Jewish terrorists from Palestine assassinated Lord Moyne, the British Minister of State Resident in the Middle East, and close friend of Churchill (it was in Moyne's yacht that Churchill cruised in the Mediterranean, in 1934). It is perhaps a measure of the depth of Churchill's commitment to the

Zionist cause, that after Moyne's assassination he in effect terminated all further promotion of it. True, he did block the demand for wholesale reprisals against the Yishuv\*. But of greater significance perhaps were his orders to the Secretary of the Cabinet, Sir Edward Bridges, to shelve further consideration of the partition plan, tabled by the Cabinet Committee, and already on the Cabinet's agenda for its final decision. When Churchill was voted out of office in July, 1945, the 1939 White Paper was still the law of the land in Palestine, and the wartime partition plan lay gathering dust in the Whitehall archives.

As early as 1919, Churchill had expressed his opinion that Palestine would provide no material benefit for the British Empire. He adhered to this view consistently, and re-iterated it during the last weeks of his war-time premiership. From the end of the war, and until Britain finally relinquished the Palestine Mandate in 1947, Churchill repeatedly urged the Labour administration to surrender Palestine unless – and this became increasingly unlikely – the Americans could be brought in to share the burden. It was, as Leo Amery put it, a policy of 'scuttle'.<sup>2</sup>

\* Yishuv – Heb., literally settlement, meaning the Jewish community in Palestine.

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I am indebted to Professors Stuart A. Cohen (Bar-Ilan), Yoav Gelber (Haifa), Martin Kolinsky (Birmingham), Roger Lockyer (Royal Holloway), Wm Roger Louis (Texas), Peter Stansky (Stanford) and David Stevenson (LSE), who were all gracious enough to read and comment on the various drafts of the Afterword.

Naturally, none of those mentioned above is in any way responsible for, or would necessarily agree with, what appears below.

## CHAPTER ONE

---

# CHURCHILL THE MAN<sup>1</sup>

Churchill's personal background, in particular the circumstances of his childhood, have been subjected to a penetrating, albeit not quite definitive psychiatric postmortem. The young Winston had to contend with emotional and physical handicaps which both moulded his character and prepared him for later vicissitudes. In part, his stormy political career may be interpreted as a struggle to overcome these initial disadvantages.<sup>2</sup>

Churchill seems to have inherited from his ancestors a tendency to recurring, prolonged fits of depression. That they were frequent, is indicated by the nickname Churchill gave them – 'the Black Dog'. The phenomenon is well-known to the world of psychiatry. The reaction of the victim, in order to avert the total paralysis and despair to which the fits reduce him, is to force himself into frenetic activity, leading to achievements beyond those which most men are capable of.

In Churchill's case, his prodigious energy was channelled into political and literary activity. His capacity for hard work was legendary. The legend grew during World War Two, when, at the age of 65, he drove himself to exhaustion and acute illness.

In 1940, Churchill attained 'his first hour', and experienced an exhilaration, perhaps even relief, that his appointment with destiny had finally arrived. But here again, his own experiences with despair proved good preparation for the desperate situation in which Britain found herself in that summer. As Anthony Storr has suggested: 'had he been a stable and equable man, he could never have inspired the nation ... only a man who had known and faced despair within himself could carry conviction at such a moment.'<sup>3</sup>

Churchill suffered from parental neglect, the fate of so many of the offspring of the British upper classes. His mother was too

preoccupied with the social whirl of high society, and his father Randolph too involved in politics to devote much time to Winston. His father remained something of a cool stranger, though Churchill remained devoted to an idealistic image he created for himself, somewhat different from the real father who refused to share his life with him. They talked only rarely, and when Randolph wrote to his son, it was as often as not to reprove him. Randolph's early death (when Winston was just twenty years old), of a venereal disease which brought on insanity, was a grievous blow to the devoted son. His posthumous devotion found outlet in the learning by heart of long extracts from his father's speeches, and in the two-volume biography he published in 1906. Once more, his later aggressiveness might be explained by this unhappy aspect of his childhood. As Anthony Storr again suggests, Churchill 'was deprived by parental neglect of that inner source of self-esteem upon which most predominantly happy persons rely'.<sup>4</sup>

Churchill's physical courage too was exceptional, much more than might have been expected from a man of his physique. His repeated self-exposure to physical danger was again an effort to overcome disadvantage, in this case physical. In doing so, he was consciously 'forcing himself to go against his own inner nature'.

Churchill was never a 'natural' public speaker. He had an imperfection of speech that was often painful to listen to, which he overcame gradually by prodigious effort. During his first years in Parliament, he literally learned entire speeches off by heart.<sup>5</sup> But he proved unable to improvise when unanticipated questions or debate arose. On one occasion, he prompted the following dig from Arthur Balfour: 'The Right Honourable Member's artillery is very powerful. But it is not very mobile. It has continued firing away at a position which we have never occupied.'<sup>6</sup> In April, 1904, in the Commons, he faltered in mid-speech, failed to recover and had to sit down amid confusion, mumbling an apology. Thereafter, though he continued to rehearse his speeches in advance, he always came equipped with notes.<sup>7</sup>

Churchill's relentless drive and ambition, and the methods he used to further the causes he espoused, earned him almost universal animosity. Aggressive ambition in itself need not necessarily be an entirely negative quality, but in Churchill's case, contemporaries often suspected that his adoption of, or opposition to particular causes was calculated to further his own career.<sup>8</sup> The suspicion was

of course greatest in that party which he forsook, especially when the new recruit was rewarded with ministerial office.

Churchill had a complex personality, comprising what would seem to be mutually-exclusive character-traits. In contrast to his aggressive ambition, there was his evident compassion for the underdog. He would not back down from a challenge, but he was characteristically magnanimous to a defeated enemy. It has been suggested that the 'alternation between aggression and compassion is characteristic of persons with Churchill's character-structure'.<sup>9</sup> Clement Attlee, who had good reason to resent Churchill's 'mischief-making' when India was evacuated in 1947, was impressed by Churchill's 'profound fund of humanity, benevolence, love ...'<sup>10</sup> During his first spell at the Colonial Office, Churchill checked the arbitrary behaviour of the officials towards black Africans. He uncovered what he considered to be 'shocking' violations of elementary principles of law and justice. He insisted that these principles be 'rigidly, punctiliously and pedantically followed'.<sup>11</sup>

Churchill was easily and often moved to tears. One close associate, Victor Cazalet, thought that he overdid it: 'The slightest exhibition of distress or sorrow elicits from him an amount of real sympathy totally disproportionate to the demand of the occasion'.<sup>12</sup> There can be no doubt that the plight of the Jews during the 1930s genuinely upset him. Attlee has recalled how he met Churchill one day at the Commons, and the latter told him what was being done to the Jews of Germany, 'with tears pouring down his cheeks'. Attlee has also testified that few men in public life 'were less prone than Churchill to paying mere lip service to a humanitarian cause'.<sup>13</sup> However, the moot question is just how much did Prime Minister Churchill translate his professed sympathies for the Jews into meaningful action? As we shall note below, Churchill's reaction went little further than repeated references to the Final Solution being 'the most horrible crime ever committed in history'. All appeals to Churchill to do something about it were deflected to Foreign Secretary Eden.

Lastly, in contrast to his generous warm-heartedness, there was Churchill's indifference and insensitivity to the feelings of those closest to him. It reflected what has been called 'an egotism that could see nothing outside the blinkers of his own imagination, which, if it was intense, was also surprisingly narrow and often superficial'.<sup>14</sup> Lord Moran, who was arguably the most intimate

associate of Churchill's during World War Two, felt that the latter was so taken up with his own ideas that he was simply not interested in what other people thought. It was 'as if he had lived for years in a foreign country without picking up the language'. Churchill's own wife, Clemmie, fearing he would shout her down in any discussion, resorted to putting anything important into writing, in notes for him.<sup>15</sup>

Churchill was never subjected to the intellectual discipline of a University education, a fact which he came to regret deeply.<sup>16</sup> During his early years, he made up for this by a prodigious industry. As one contemporary put it, Churchill had 'the genius which consists of taking infinite pains'.<sup>17</sup> He produced formidable, almost 'academic' state papers, and masterpiece orations for Parliament. By application, he developed his own technique, 'the combination of great flights of oratory with sudden swoops into the intimate and conversational'.<sup>18</sup> But his rhetoric, to which we shall refer in the next section, could arouse impatience, suspicion, and finally derision.

His historical forays have come in for much the same professional criticism as much of his spoken words. Although his prose won for him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1953, Professor J.H. Plumb has pronounced his work anachronistic, 'whiggish', gentlemen's history. Professor Plumb believed the fault lay with Churchill's own superficial acquaintance with society in general, that Churchill 'lacked a sense of the deeper motives that control human society and make it change, just as he lacked an interest in the deeper human motives'. Plumb thought that Churchill possessed 'a naiveté of insight that borders on the ridiculous', that his works revealed 'a paucity of historical knowledge, lack of analytical power, and an ignorance of economic, social and intellectual history of staggering proportions'.<sup>19</sup>

Churchill's lack of academic training, though compensated for by sheer industriousness, was perhaps responsible for his wild flights of fancy. His grasp of complicated issues was often superficial, and at times he was unable to distinguish the essential from the trivial. Churchill told Lord Moran that his reading had virtually ceased when he had entered politics. Churchill was not aware that the tank he himself had sponsored during the First World War was by the 1930s obsolete. Nor had he read De Gaulle's manual on tank warfare, printed in 1938, the lessons of which were implemented by the Germans when invading France in 1940.<sup>20</sup> Churchill had a tendency

to oversimplify complex issues, and to improvise solutions for immediate problems, rather than plan for the future. As Lord Esher put it in 1917, in a much-quoted aphorism: 'He [Churchill] deceives himself into the belief that he takes broad views, when his mind is fixed upon one comparatively small aspect of the question'.<sup>21</sup>

Lord Moran concluded that Churchill's mind was open to ideas, but often closed to reason, 'a mind not judicial in any sense, not logical, not analytical'.<sup>22</sup> That Churchill had a brilliant, inventive brain cannot be doubted. But his was a genius that went off at tangents, that required frequent bridling. During World War Two, the cabinet was at times over-awed by the plethora of brainwaves generated by the Prime Minister. His colleagues were hard put to quash and abort a great many, to avert the inevitable catastrophes they would have caused.<sup>23</sup>

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One commentator has suggested that 'the pattern of rejection that Churchill experienced in his childhood and youth was to repeat itself consistently during his political life'.<sup>24</sup> There is much to be said for this thesis.

From the very outset of his political career, Churchill demonstrated too much independence for the likes of his Conservative peers and, as noted by Rhodes James, 'young men who lustily throw stones at their elders are not usually rewarded for their activity'.<sup>25</sup>

Churchill engaged in quite a feud with Prime Minister Balfour. The latter made him 'the butt of a series of jokes and quips which finally exasperated the younger man'.<sup>26</sup> Churchill took his revenge just one year after crossing the floor of the House to the Liberal benches. In a puckish display of flamboyant irreverence, Churchill baited Balfour: 'He [Churchill] ventured to say that no Prime Minister, certainly not in recorded time, had ever before, in regard to matters of which he should be better informed than anybody, shown such a lamentable and extraordinary ignorance'.<sup>27</sup>

Even the Liberal Prime Minister, Henry Campbell-Bannerman, took good care to keep Churchill out of his cabinet. Churchill did obtain his first executive position when he crossed the floor of the House, as Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies. But it cost him the tag of being one of the most unpopular politicians in Britain. He had earned a reputation for 'putting people's backs up by an

apparently gratuitous offensiveness of manner'.<sup>28</sup> Even worse, many colleagues believed him to be 'deficient in discrimination and loyalty ... [and that he] loved the limelight too much ... [and was] unduly obstinate and aggressive in argument ... [and] not generally credited with acting from either conviction or loyalty'.<sup>29</sup>

More than one historian has noted the possible correlation between Churchill's tempestuous early political career, and the fact that he was at the same time writing his father's biography. Rhodes James has suggested that in his rebellion 'against the tyranny of party', and in his violent words and campaigns against his leaders, the younger Churchill was perhaps 'intent upon re-creating his father's career'.<sup>30</sup>

A more recent study of Lord Randolph has suggested that the converse may also be true, that the biography Churchill was writing may have been intended as 'a vindication of the political somersaults being executed by the author at the time of writing it'. The biography and the change of political tack proceeded apace, and both reached their climax in January, 1906, in which month Churchill both published the two volumes, and won the North-West Manchester seat for the Liberal Party.<sup>31</sup>

Churchill's relations with the Conservatives, to whose ranks he would return permanently in 1924, remained stormy throughout his political career. Between 1901 and 1904, he had been a disrespectful young rebel. Once he crossed the floor of the Commons in 1904, he spearheaded the Liberal attack on the Conservatives' Aliens Bill. In 1915, the Conservative veto on his inclusion in the Asquith coalition cabinet was due as much (if not more) to personal animosity as to Churchill's alleged responsibility for the Dardanelles fiasco. In 1931, Churchill once more broke with the party leadership, over constitutional reform in India, and later, over the appeasement of Germany. During the war, Churchill and the Conservatives worked together in pursuit of mutual interests. But it was 'something less than a love-match', and each viewed the other with wariness.<sup>32</sup> Upon his electoral defeat in 1945, Tory colleagues began to whisper that he needed a long rest. With the war over, the party leaders were no longer willing to suffer his overbearing attitudes, and many would have liked to ditch him, had they only known how. These views percolated through to Churchill, though most critics dared not speak out in front of him.<sup>33</sup>

A charitable view would interpret Churchill's switches in

allegiance as the expression of a resolute, independent spirit, who courageously refused to bow to narrow party dictates. Others, A.J.P. Taylor for instance, have claimed that Churchill regarded party 'as an instrument for putting him into office', rather than as an institution which it was his duty to serve.<sup>34</sup> At least during the earlier stages of his career, Churchill did combine a hunger for office with an alarming proclivity to adopt and jettison causes rapidly.

Churchill could claim few really close friends, and they came mostly from the world of politics. But Churchill drew little more satisfaction from his Liberal colleagues than he had from the Conservatives. He would be accused later of gathering round him a small coterie of admiring cronies. Even Lloyd George, his close friend and collaborator – perhaps the only figure in British politics whom Churchill really respected – repaid Churchill in poor coin. True, it was Lloyd George who brought Churchill back into the government after the Dardanelles affair. But at heart, Lloyd George mistrusted Churchill, and kept him at arm's length from No. 10 Downing Street. When after World War One, the two discussed plans for a new coalition, Churchill remarked: 'If you are going to include all Parties, you will have to have me in your new National Party'. Lloyd George rebuffed him: 'Oh no', he replied, 'To be a party you must have at least one follower. You have none'.<sup>35</sup> In March, 1921, their relationship was severed, when Lloyd George passed Churchill over for the vacated Chancellorship of the Exchequer. Lloyd George had feared having Churchill 'too near to the centre of power'.<sup>36</sup>

Adding to Churchill's unpopularity, and fuelling suspicions of unbridled ambition, were his 'apparent inconsistency, his unpredictable changes of mood and opinion, his lack of stability, both personal and political'.<sup>37</sup> Sir Isaiah Berlin, in a panegyric written during the war, has refuted the charge of inconsistency:

Far from changing his opinions too often, Mr Churchill has scarcely, during a long and stormy career, altered them at all. If anyone wishes to discover his views on the large and lasting issues of our time, he need only set himself to discover what Mr Churchill has said or written on the subject at any period of his long and exceptionally articulate public life, in particular during the years before the First World War: the number of instances in which his views have in later years undergone any appreciable change will be found astonishingly small.<sup>38</sup>

Mr Berlin's admiration is quite understandable, given the period at which it was written, as has been noted by Goronwy Rees:

written primarily for an American audience and while Churchill was still alive, it does not fall short of the hyperbole to which he was condemned when dead, but with more justification because it captures exactly the feeling of admiration, gratitude, almost reverence that Churchill inspired in Britain at the one period of his life when he performed an indispensable service to his country.<sup>39</sup>

Churchill's political contemporaries most definitely deplored his inconsistency, and Churchill himself readily admitted that 'changing circumstances demand different tactics'. In 1956, he told Lord Moran: 'I'd rather be right than consistent. During a long life I have had to eat my own words many times, and I have found it a nourishing diet'.<sup>40</sup>

We can perhaps understand Mr Berlin's statement better if we concentrate on the phrase 'large and lasting issues'. We can readily agree with Professor Arno J. Mayer's definition of the lasting issues to which Churchill would remain dedicated throughout his career:

Churchill was an equally resolute opponent of socialism and of anti-imperialist nationalism. Whatever his party affiliation may have been at any given moment, his purpose remained constant: to maintain Britain's political, social and economic system at home while upholding her imperial glory in the international arena.<sup>41</sup>

Naturally, outside of these broad principles, or ideology, there existed a plethora of political issues upon which Churchill was obliged, at times, to take a stand. Churchill was a man who often worked by instinct, and, secure in the conviction of his own inner consistency, he was untroubled by the 'charges of inconsistency which his impulses towards new enthusiasms often provoked'.<sup>42</sup> In addition, the sudden abandonment of causes with which he had been associated closely gave rise to doubts about the depth of his original commitment. Moreover, once set on his new course, Churchill was impervious to persuasion. His self-centredness, his inability to listen to the views of others, his inability to criticize himself, made it virtually impossible to change his mind once he had made it up.<sup>43</sup>

Churchill's exaggerated use of rhetoric also gave rise to contemporary criticism. People hardly knew if and when to take him seriously. One contemporary observer, Charles Masterman, wrote at the beginning of the century: 'He sets ideas to Rhetoric as musicians set theirs to music. And he can convince himself of almost every truth if it is once allowed thus to start on its wild career through his rhetorical machinery'.<sup>44</sup> Even prior to World War One, many of

Churchill's friends feared that this particular penchant was becoming an obsession, that 'his tendency to see first the rhetorical potentialities of any policy was getting out of hand'.<sup>45</sup> Contemporaries believed that he might be 'carried away by the logic of his own arguments, by the beauty of his own rhetoric ... that his real inclination was to conclude that a thing was right and true if it could be stated in a rhetorically effective manner ...'.<sup>46</sup>

Pre-war impatience with Churchill's style gave way to inter-war indifference and contempt. While staying with Churchill at Cannes, in 1923, Victor Cazalet noted in his diary: 'Whole perorations pour forth accompanied by Latin quotations, sometimes not wholly correct, by large extracts from Shakespeare, on the most trifling excuse.' It was but a short step from rhetoric to demagoguery. Leo Amery has noted that Churchill had a 'retentive memory for a striking phrase'.<sup>47</sup> Such phrases would be stored away, to be recalled and re-used on an appropriate occasion, albeit in a different context: 'well-trying word patterns were revised to meet new situations'. Professor Hyam has traced a 41-year-long pedigree for Churchill's famous speech of 1940: 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.' Churchill had used it on no fewer than five previous occasions.<sup>48</sup>

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In the light of the above character sketch, what conclusions may be drawn about Churchill's commitment to the Jews, or to Zionism?

First, Churchill's was not a trained intellect, and it is to be doubted seriously if he ever comprehended the socio-economic context of the 'Jewish Problem'. Churchill certainly never shared the Zionists' belief that that problem could be solved only by the territorial concentration of the Jewish nation in a state of their own. Churchill's world outlook was set and crystallised by the beginning of this century. Zionism, as an ideology, and as a political project, was acceptable or not to the extent to which it fitted into Churchill's existing thought-patterns.

Churchill's attitude to Zionism fluctuated wildly. It was quite obviously not one of those 'large and lasting' issues which merited his consistency. However, at an early stage, Churchill became convinced that the Jews, and Zionist colonisation in Palestine, could be of political and strategic use to Britain and her Empire. This had

been 'proved' for Churchill by the aid of American Jewry following the Balfour Declaration; in addition, he adhered for many years, until 1944, to the conviction that Jewish skills and capital might secure a British foothold in Palestine, adjacent to the Suez Canal.

And last, but not least, Jewish influence was a factor which Churchill frequently felt the need to take into account; whether during the 1906 election in Manchester (and again, in 1908); or in 1914, when he alleged that the Shell Petroleum company, headed by a Jew, was conspiring against the Government; or after World War One, when he alleged that the Jews, as agents of Bolshevism, were undermining the very fabric of Western democracy. These are some of the themes that will be examined in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

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# THE JEWISH PROBLEM

### 1. GENTILE ZIONISM

In England, Gentile interest in a Jewish return to the Holy Land dated back to the first half of the 19th century. Motivated initially by Protestant Evangelical doctrine, followed closely by strategic interest, it was fuelled later on by the search for a solution to the Jewish Problem, manifested in Czarist Russia by pogroms, and in liberal England by a flood of unwanted Jewish refugees.

Lord Ashley, later the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, the champion of the British poor, was also a leading advocate of the Jews' return to the Holy Land. The various political and military upheavals in the Near East at the turn of the 19th century, and during the 1830s (which gave rise to Britain's 'Eastern Policy'), created in some British circles what Barbara Tuchman has described as an 'almost proprietary feeling about Palestine'.<sup>1</sup> The Holy Land, it was believed, would soon be available for new ownership, and the idea of the 'return of the old tenant with a new landlord' appealed to a variety of English minds.<sup>2</sup>

Ashley's Bible studies had filled him with a reverence for 'God's ancient people', its land and its language. Convinced that events in the Near East presaged 'the national and religious restoration of the Jews, he took the lead in combining the religious trend with well planned political steps', maintaining that 'the fate of the Jewish nation was irrevocably linked with the Holy Land', and that the injustices committed against them could be repaired only by their restoration to Palestine.<sup>3</sup>

A characteristic feature of Ashley's Zionism was its paternalism: 'The role assigned to the Jews themselves in the historical drama of their Restoration was rather that of an object than of an acting protagonist.'<sup>4</sup> In addition, the Evangelicals considered it essential

that the Jews' restoration to Zion be preceded by their conversion to Christianity.

Later advocates of the Jewish return to their ancient homeland were concerned more with British imperial interests than with the Jews' own spiritual fulfilment. The year 1840 was a political and strategic watershed in the Near East. It was the year of the Damascus blood Libel,\* and also that in which the British intervened in Syria on behalf of the Ottomans, against Ibrahim, the son of Muhammad Ali. In the same year, the P. & O. Line inaugurated a regular steamship run from England to India via Suez. It became apparent that a Jewish state in Palestine, under British protection, might usefully guard the Egyptian flank.<sup>5</sup>

In February, 1841, Col. Charles Henry Churchill was a member of the victorious allied army which entered Damascus, and so brought to an end the brief rule of Muhammad Ali in Syria. He became England's consul in Damascus, and perhaps 'the most far-sighted and sensible of Ashley's successors'. The Churchill connection here is fascinating in its possible implications, although this particular Churchill was not in fact, as Mrs Tuchman and others claim, a descendant of the first Duke of Marlborough, and thus an antecedent of Winston's. He was in fact descended from the first Duke's brother, Gen. Charles Churchill (1654–1714).<sup>6</sup> However, be that as it may, there is no evidence that Winston Churchill himself ever read the Colonel's writings, or was in any sense influenced by them.

Col. Churchill's advocacy of a Jewish Return was distinct from the Evangelicals' millenarian visions. His motives were more material than spiritual, and he wanted to transform the Jews' own role from passive to active agents: 'the Jewish nation itself has to be the prime mover of its restoration'.<sup>7</sup> He lost faith in his country's 'Eastern Policy', of which he himself had been such an active agent in 1841. He predicted the futility of trying to breathe new life into the Ottoman body politic, and urged that 'Syria and Palestine must be rescued from the "blundering and decrepit despotism" of the Turks and Egyptians and taken under European protection'.<sup>8</sup> In June, 1841, he

\* In 1840, several of Damascus's leading Jews were arrested by the Turks on charges of murdering a French priest in order to use his blood for ritual purposes. The Jews were tortured severely, in order to extract confessions from them. News leaked out, and their release was eventually secured, following protest meetings by Jews all over Europe and the United States, and the intervention of European statesmen, many of whom were pressed by influential Jews in their country, e.g. the Rothschilds.

wrote to Sir Moses Montefiore, a leading British Jew, urging him to approach the European Powers and request that they assume a protectorate over the Holy Land:

I cannot conceal from you my most anxious desire to see your countrymen endeavour once more to resume their existence as a people. I consider the object to be perfectly attainable. But, two things are indispensably necessary. Firstly, that the Jews will themselves take up the matter universally and unanimously. Secondly, that the European Powers will aid them in their views. It is for the Jews to make a commencement. Let the principal persons of their community place themselves at the head of the movement ...

Were the resources which you all possess steadily directed towards the regeneration of Syria and Palestine, there cannot be a doubt but that, under the blessing of the Most High, those countries would amply repay the undertaking, and that you would end by obtaining the sovereignty of at least Palestine ...<sup>9</sup>

However, the leaders of Anglo-Jewry were 'too concerned in the home struggle for emancipation to look for Jewish nationhood',<sup>10</sup> and the Board of Deputies of British Jews resolved that it could only respond to the initiative of 'the general body of the Jews throughout Europe'.<sup>11</sup> Col. Churchill was brought to the conclusion that the time was not yet ripe.

Sir Moses Montefiore in fact travelled to Palestine several times, and was a munificent benefactor. Yet he was unable to contemplate any mass movement of Jews to the Holy Land except at the instigation of the Messiah. He was in fact torn between the material attractions of his membership of the English aristocracy, and the spiritual pull of Palestine. As Chaim Bermant has commented, whimsically: 'The advent of the Messiah would have solved his difficulty, but in His absence he resolved it by ... being buried in Kent with Holy soil beneath his head.'<sup>12</sup>

Col. Churchill's ideas were taken a step further by Sir Charles Warren, who proposed 'the formation of a Jewish chartered company in Palestine which would eventually become self-supporting and autonomous'. Sir Edward Cazalet also proposed a mass resettlement of the Jews in Palestine under British protection. Sir Laurence Oliphant, well-known oriental scholar and traveller, thought such a settlement eminently practical on the east bank of the River Jordan, and even approached the Ottoman Sultan for his consent, but without success.<sup>13</sup>

But by mid-century, it was quite evident that Gentile enthusiasm for a Jewish return to Palestine was not matched by any parallel

Jewish sentiment. In 1853, Col. Churchill published a book, *Mount Lebanon*, the product of fifteen years residence in the Near East. Churchill now urged an English initiative:

It must be clear to every English mind that if England's oriental supremacy is to be upheld, Syria and Egypt must be made to fall more or less under her sway of influence.<sup>14</sup>

However, the Ottoman Empire did not collapse until 1918, and Britain adhered to its Eastern policy until the Turks sided with the Germans in 1914. As the Ottomans became suspicious of the first waves of Jewish immigration from Czarist Russia in the 1880s, British statesmen took care not to encourage Jewish hopes of a national home in Palestine. When Herzl approached Colonial Secretary Chamberlain, the latter proposed first El Arish, in the Sinai desert, and later, British East Africa.

Perhaps the most prominent Gentile Zionist of the 20th century was Arthur James Balfour, who gave his name to the Declaration of 2 November, 1917, promising British aid to the development of a Jewish National Home in Palestine. According to Balfour's niece and biographer, Balfour's Zionism 'originated in the Old Testament training of his mother and in his Scottish upbringing'.<sup>15</sup> Balfour also developed an intellectual interest and admiration for certain aspects of Jewish philosophy, and became preoccupied with 'the Jewish Problem'. As Leonard Stein has commented, in Balfour's Zionism 'there may well have been an element of sheer intellectual curiosity'.<sup>16</sup> As Mrs Dugdale has observed, after Balfour's fateful meeting with the Zionist leader, Dr Chaim Weizmann, in 1906 (see below), Balfour turned to a deeper contemplation of Zionism, 'very characteristically, for relaxation, to a subject which interested him alike as a political philosopher, a student of history, and a statesman; but also as a statesman temporarily freed from responsibility'.<sup>17</sup> Long before Balfour's interest in modern, political Zionism, he developed a moral indignation at the way Christianity had treated the Jews. Christianity owed the Jews a debt, one 'shamefully ill repaid'.<sup>18</sup>

Barbara Tuchman has accepted and relied on Dugdale's analysis:

In Balfour the motive was Biblical rather than imperial. If the Biblical culture of England can be said to have any meaning in England's redemption of Palestine from the rule of Islam, it may be epitomised in Balfour. Though he was the reverse of Shaftesbury, not ardent, but a skeptic, not a religious enthusiast but a philosophical pessimist, he was nevertheless strongly

infused, like the Evangelicals and the Puritans, with the Hebraism of the Bible.<sup>19</sup>

But in our opinion, this is to over-simplify a complex problem. There can be little doubt that Weizmann impressed Balfour deeply at their first meeting in January, 1906. However, long before that, and after, Balfour devoted much thought and political activity to the search for a solution to the material aspects of 'the Jewish Problem'. As Balfour saw it, the problem had two facets. On the one hand, he regarded the Jews as 'the most gifted race that mankind had seen since the Greeks of the fifth century'.<sup>20</sup> But on the other, he believed that the Jews' natural talents were warped and distorted by their abnormal Diaspora existence. The Jews' refusal to assimilate to their Gentile surroundings both deprived their hosts of the genetic benefits of intermarriage, and aroused anti-semitism, which had manifestly exerted a great influence on the political world in which Balfour himself functioned. Therefore, as Balfour told Harold Nicolson in 1917, 'If we can find them an asylum, a safe home, in their native land, then the full flowering of their genius will burst forth and propagate ...'.<sup>21</sup>

Thus Zionism was seen as a cure for anti-semitism, a social disease which plagued western society. Theodor Herzl himself had reached similar conclusions to Balfour. The Great Powers, unable to accommodate and absorb the Jews, would have a material interest in aiding the Zionists, wrote Herzl:

The governments of the countries scourged by anti-Semitism will be keenly interested in securing a sovereign status for us ... The Jewish State is something the world needs, and consequently it will come into being.<sup>22</sup>

The 'Jewish Problem' in England reached acute proportions at the turn of the 19th century, with the great influx of Jewish refugees fleeing from persecution in Czarist Russia. The Jewish community, which in the 17th century had numbered between three and four thousand had by 1850 reached 35,000 souls. The community would increase tenfold between 1850 and 1939. Although the Jews never reached a significant proportion of the total population, they were 'visible in a spatial, geographical sense'. Jewish ghettos created social tension by exerting pressures on inadequate resources, and could be exploited 'by those hostile to the Jewish community to add to a more generalized picture of Jewish power and influence'.<sup>23</sup>

Anti-semitic elements had been present in the debate at the time

of the Bulgarian crisis in 1875,<sup>24</sup> during the Boer War, when many asserted that it was a war in the interests of internationally connected Jewish financiers (there was even talk of 'an Anglo-Hebraic Empire in Africa'), and at the time of the Marconi and Indian silver scandals during the years prior to World War One.<sup>25</sup>

At the end of the 19th century, with British labour in any case beginning to suffer the effects of Britain's industrial decline, it was felt that the spate of Jewish immigrants weakened the working classes' bargaining power, while at the same time they helped 'sustain grossly exploitative sectors of the economy', in particular, the so-called 'sweat industries'. A second wave of hostility, which arose during the years preceding the 1905 Aliens Act (see below), was in reaction to the pressures, over-crowding, and unhygienic conditions caused by the masses of destitute refugees. Well-established Jews were accused of exploiting this situation, by buying up properties, in order to evict the current tenant and replace him with their own race, whom they then proceeded to exploit. Jewish ghettos were singled out for their dirt and squalor.<sup>26</sup>

Thus before World War One, many British anti-Semites 'were easily reconciled to Zionist proposals which would divert Jews from Britain and provide for their settlement elsewhere'. Major Evans Gordon, who played a conspicuous role in organizing opposition to Jewish immigration into England, was himself sympathetic to establishing the Jews in Palestine, but since this seemed an impracticable idea for the foreseeable future, he supported the schismatic Territorialists.<sup>27</sup>

Liberal concern to solve the anomaly of Jewish exile, however well-meaning, might quite easily cross the narrow line dividing it from anti-semitism. It was Balfour's last administration which passed the 1905 Aliens Bill, and Balfour was himself severely criticised by the Jewish community in England for his sponsorship of it. The Jewish Establishment was particularly sensitive. They denied the existence of any Jewish Problem. It was their tragedy that their tranquil, affluent status was disturbed by the flood of their less fortunate brethren to the West at the end of the 19th century.

The other side of the Gentile Zionist credo, therefore, was a quasi anti-semitism. Some Gentiles were quite aware of this, and not afraid to admit it, among themselves of course. The best example of this, perhaps, is in the following extract, written by Col. Richard Meinertzhagen to Foreign Secretary Curzon in September, 1919:

My inclination towards Jews in general is governed by an anti-semitic instinct which is invariably modified by personal contact. My views on Zionism are those of an ardent Zionist. The reasons which induced in me a fascination for Zionism are many and complex, but in the main were governed by the unsatisfactory state of the Jews in the world, the great sentimental attraction of re-establishing a race after a banishment of 2,000 years, which is not without its scientific interest, and the conviction that Jewish brains and money could, when backed by such a potent idea as Zionism, give to Palestine that impetus in industrial development which it so sorely needs after lying fallow since the beginning of the world. Neither could my mind, educated in military thought for the last 20 years, totally ignore the great strategic value to the British Empire of a strong, healthy and contented Palestine under British guidance, and the resultant gratitude of the bulk of Jewry throughout the world.<sup>28</sup>

The ambivalence of Gentile Zionism has been pinpointed long ago by Leonard Stein. In his perceptive comments on Balfour, Stein noted that those very same distinctive characteristics of the Jews which commanded Balfour's respect, also made him 'uncertain and uncomfortable about their place in a Gentile society'.<sup>29</sup> Initially, the location of the Jewish homeland was considered to be secondary to the urgent need for an immediate refuge. For all of Balfour's familiarity with the Bible, he, as well as Churchill, supported the abortive East African scheme. Balfour may have been converted to the spiritual uniqueness of Palestine by Weizmann, but Churchill was not.

## 2. THE JEWISH VOTE

### (a) *The Aliens Bills, 1904–1905*

In 1904, and in 1905, Balfour's administration sponsored two successive Bills to regulate and supervise the immigration of Aliens, primarily Russian Jews, into England.

The Bills based themselves on the recommendations of a Royal Commission, appointed in March, 1902, which heard many witnesses and delivered its report in August, 1903. Many had given evidence to the effect that the Jews were unable to be loyal both to their own religion and to England. The report recommended that certain classes of aliens be subjected to state controls; that those who after two years' residence proved unable to support themselves be deported summarily; that any alien convicted of a misdemeanour in court suffer deportation.<sup>30</sup>

The 1904 Bill, which did not pass the House of Commons, would have empowered the Secretary of State, through immigration officers,

to prohibit without appeal the landing of any alien who had been convicted in a foreign country of an extradition crime in the previous five years, who was associated with prostitution, who was likely to be a charge on public funds or was without visible means of support, or finally, who was 'of notoriously bad character'. In all these cases, the onus of proof lay with the alien, and the expenses were, in general, to be borne by the shipping company which brought him.

The Act would also have empowered the Local Government Board to close to aliens any area where overcrowding could be shown to be due to alien immigration.<sup>31</sup>

The Liberal Party opposed the Bill, taking the line that it constituted an infringement of the hallowed principle of granting political asylum to victims of persecution. The Party was led from behind, by Charles Dilke and C.P. Trevelyan. The Bill was in fact ill prepared, and would have been difficult to enforce, due to the virtual impossibility of defining precisely who was 'of notoriously bad character', or 'without visible means of support', or 'likely to become a public charge'.<sup>32</sup> After limping through two readings in the Commons, the government waited two months before committing the Bill to a Grand Committee, an unusual procedure at that time.

The Committee began its consideration of the Bill on 20 June, 1904, and the government was ultimately forced to abandon the measure, after protracted Liberal obstruction, led by the recent addition to Liberal ranks, Winston Churchill. The historian of the Bill has characterized Churchill's tactics as having been carried out with 'that air of gleeful schoolboy naughtiness and pugnacity which so often attended Churchill's actions', albeit motivated by 'expediency, political tactics, and his own humanitarianism alike'. Even so, Dr Gainer asserts that Balfour himself must bear responsibility for the failure of the first Bill: 'Either he engineered its ambush in the Grand Committee on Law in order to avoid a clash with opposing groups of his supporters, or else he was so preoccupied with the calamity of Tariff Reform that his customary grasp of Parliamentary tactics momentarily deserted him ... his motives remain an enigma, however suggestive the available evidence'.<sup>33</sup>

A new version of the Bill was introduced into the Commons in 1905, and this time enacted into law in August, 1905, just four months prior to the fall of the Balfour administration. One study has suggested that the success of the Bill in 1905 was due to a series of Conservative by-election defeats, and their hope that the new Bill

might drive a wedge between Liberals and Labour, by appealing to working-class prejudices against aliens.<sup>34</sup> In 1905, Liberal opposition abated, on the grounds that the new Bill had been amended to meet their previous objections.

The 1905 Bill defined much more closely the 'undesirability' of aliens. Newly-designated immigration-ports were named, at which immigrants would be inspected. The Conservatives' concessions, it has been suggested, were due to their fears of a 'Jewish backlash'; there were also evidently some pangs of conscience, and murmurings from the back benches. Ironically, it would fall to the new Liberal administration, elected in January, 1906, to operate the new law.<sup>35</sup>

The debates which accompanied the proposed anti-aliens legislation in 1904 and in 1905 provide a unique opportunity to compare the respective attitudes of Balfour and Churchill, both of whom would be fighting the 1906 elections in a Manchester constituency.

In 1905, Balfour admitted frankly that the proposed legislation was calculated to curb the entry of Eastern European Jews into England. As Prime Minister of the administration which sponsored both bills, it is hardly surprising that Balfour incurred the wrath of the Jewish community, and thinly veiled accusations of anti-semitism. Balfour's record on this issue undoubtedly contributed to his electoral defeat in January, 1906, after a campaign conducted in the shadow of a fresh wave of pogroms in Odessa in December, 1905.

In a speech before the Commons on 10 July, 1905, Balfour rejected accusations that his government was indifferent to the sufferings of Russian Jews. On the contrary, Balfour claimed that his administration was the only one which had offered the Jews territorial asylum (i.e. in East Africa. See next section). But Balfour issued a frank warning about the detrimental effect to be anticipated in England from large-scale Jewish immigration:

... A state of things could easily be imagined in which it would not be to the advantage of the civilisation of this country that there should be an immense body of persons who, however patriotic, able, and industrious ... by their own action remained a people apart, and ... only inter-married among themselves.<sup>36</sup>

Balfour admitted that England had not nearly reached such a dangerous state of affairs, but, he added, the Commons should

bear in mind that some of the undoubted evils which had fallen upon portions of the country from an alien immigration which was largely Jewish,

gave those of them who ... condemned nothing more strongly than the manifestation of the anti-semitic spirit, some reason to fear that this country might be, at however great a distance, in danger of following the evil example set by some other countries.<sup>37</sup>

Such sentiments, however nobly intended in Balfour's case, lay well in the mainstream of orthodox right-wing prejudice.<sup>38</sup> A *Jewish Chronicle* editorial commented cynically that Balfour's comments were a peculiar expression of his alleged sympathy for Russian Jewry, and not the type of declaration the Jews expected from a British Prime Minister.<sup>39</sup>

In a private letter to Frederick Milner, M.P., Balfour explained that his very admiration for 'the special gifts of the Jewish race' made it the more regrettable that they refused to inter-marry with the rest of the population, 'not because I dislike the Jews, but because I admire them; and I think that their rigid separation in this respect from their fellow-countrymen is a misfortune for us'.<sup>40</sup>

It is quite evident that Balfour's interest in Zionism was due as much to his concern for the social fabric of English society, as it was to his concern about the continued existence of the people of the Bible. In 1919, in his introduction to Nahum Sokolow's *History of Zionism*, Balfour notes the benefits that Zionism will bring to the West, as a 'serious endeavour to mitigate the age-long miseries created for Western civilization by the presence in its midst of a Body which it too long regarded as alien and even hostile, but which it was equally unable to expel or absorb'.<sup>41</sup>

We may now turn to Churchill's record on the aliens issue. Let us state immediately that we have no reason to question the sincerity of Churchill's typically generous, humanitarian approach to the plight of Russian Jewry during this period. The campaign against aliens offended fundamental liberal principles, and although the word 'Jew' was avoided like the plague, the anti-alien lobby was frequently tarred with the brush of anti-semitism. This last accusation deeply embarrassed those Liberals who felt that the safety of their seats depended upon their opposition to alien immigration, and 'several of the affected Liberal politicians showed every sign of finding the dilemma between grass-roots demands and Liberal conscience a rather painful one'.<sup>42</sup>

But Churchill faced no such dilemma – on the contrary. Between 1904 and 1905, Manchester was one of the centres of the Jews' campaign against anti-alien legislation. Moreover, the introduction

of the first Bill into Parliament, on 29 March, 1904, came at a critical juncture in Churchill's own career, just two months before he crossed the floor of the House, and took his seat on the Liberal benches, on 31 May, 1904. He was adopted as prospective Liberal candidate for the Cheetham district of Manchester, which contained not only a high proportion of Jewish voters, but also a high proportion of Manchester's immigrant population.<sup>43</sup> As Randolph Churchill's biography states, Winston 'was to make himself highly acceptable to the powerful Jewish community. It is not without significance that many of his leading supporters in Manchester were Jews.'<sup>44</sup> John Garrard has been somewhat more charitable than the official biography, suggesting that 'the influence of a militant Jewish vote merely intensified and stiffened an attitude and line of action which would have become apparent anyway'.<sup>45</sup>

However, Churchill did not take part in the debates in the House during the first two readings of the Aliens Bill, which took place before he crossed the floor, though he was present.<sup>46</sup> On 30 May, 1904, the day before Churchill took up his new position in the House, he set out his views on the proposed legislation in a lengthy letter to Nathan Laski, J.P., copies of which he took care to send to the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times*. He accused the government of pandering to sectional prejudice, whereas he insisted that the population in general was not anti-semitic, and therefore not against aliens: 'English working men ... do not respond in any marked degree to the anti-semitism which has darkened recent Continental history; and I for one believe that they will disavow an attempt to shut out the stranger from our land because he is poor or in trouble ...'.<sup>47</sup> Churchill heaped ridicule on the Balfour administration, making telling use of quotations from the Royal Commission report:

... To judge by the talk there has been, one would have imagined we were being overrun by a swarming invasion and 'ousted' from our island through neglect of precautions which every wise foreign nation has adopted. But it now appears from the Board of Trade statistics that all the aliens in Great Britain do not amount to a 140th part of the total population, that they are increasing less than 8,000 a year on the average, and that – according to the report of the Alien Commission – Germany has twice as large and France four times as large a proportion of foreigners as we have ....

The whole bill looks like an attempt on the part of the Government to gratify a small but noisy section of their own supporters and to purchase a little popularity in the constituencies by dealing harshly with a number of

unfortunate aliens who have no votes ... it will no doubt supply a variety of rhetorical phrases for the approaching election.<sup>48</sup>

On 31 May, 1904, Laski responded warmly: 'you have won the gratitude of the whole Jewish community not alone of Manchester, but of the entire country'.<sup>49</sup>

However, Churchill's own record on the Aliens Bill was not entirely free of rhetoric, and provided his detractors with yet another example of his alleged tendency to exploit issues to further his own career. Ironically, his comments about Conservative motives for pushing the Bill through also upset certain sections of English Jewry.

Churchill's first speech from the Opposition benches, on 8 June, 1904, was an attack on the government's decision to send the Aliens Bill to Grand Committee, rather than discussing it from the floor of the House – on the grounds that it was not a contentious issue. In Grand Committee, he excelled himself with his frequent obstructions, and on one occasion provoked extreme indignation by speaking seven times on a single amendment. On 7 July, the government was forced to announce the withdrawal of the Bill, due to lack of progress. Of the Bill's 240 lines, a mere three had been dealt with, and even they had become smothered with amendments. When Churchill was accused of deliberate sabotage, he retorted that the government itself had never been in earnest, that the withdrawal of the measure was due not so much to his own obstruction but to the government's desire to appease its own 'wealthy Jewish supporters'. The remark provoked an uproar, and cries of 'Monstrous, absolutely monstrous', from a Jewish M.P., Sir Harry Samuel. On 15 July, 1904, the *Jewish Chronicle* dismissed with contempt Churchill's contention that the 'Government's lukewarmness was due to weighty Jewish influences'.<sup>50</sup>

Randolph Churchill has conceded that Churchill's comments about government 'electioneering' were disingenuous, since the withdrawal of the Bill in fact dealt a serious blow to the Conservative administration, by demonstrating that it had lost control over its own business.<sup>51</sup>

However, perhaps because Churchill himself was free of any anti-semitic bias, he had no compunction in criticising what he continued to believe was the undue influence of wealthy English Jews on the Conservative party. What was for Balfour a serious social problem served Churchill as a political brickbat. In a private letter written