

REVIEWS

BEHIND THE SILKEN CURTAIN. By Bartley C. Crum. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1947. Pp. 297.

PALESTINE MISSION. By Richard Crossman. New York and London: Harper and Bros., 1947. Pp. 205.

IN the long and dreary record of what the world has done to the Jews who live and die in it, these two little books will be a sketchy footnote. As an explanation of the predetermined fate of the ill-starred Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, they unfold a tragic tale of hypocrisy and power politics with minor overtones of sincerity and disillusionment.

The Committee itself was a brief episode in post-war Palestine history, with little relation to what had preceded or has followed it. It was a straw at which a harried Labor Government grasped in a desperate effort to gain time. Time for what? Committed up to its neck with regard to Palestine by promises it found impossible to keep, the Labor Party had but one program—to stall just for time itself. So far as Mr. Bevin was concerned, his policy appeared to be one of improvisation, for which he had decided talents. Since 1939, the White Paper had been a festering sore in Britain's Middle East policy: there was the Arab disaffection during the war, British interest in the oil of Iraq, trouble in India and Egypt, and increasing violence in Palestine. Mr. Attlee could no more afford to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire than could his predecessor, nor had he any more intention of voluntarily doing so.

But the White Paper was a plain repudiation of the League of Nations Mandate for the execution of which Great Britain was responsible as the Mandatory power. Moreover, the United States might be regarded as having a legal as well as a political interest in the Mandatory's performance inasmuch as the Convention of 1924 in substance made this government one of the principals to which Britain was accountable for the discharge of her responsibilities. The rising resentment in America and the enormous increase of Zionist sympathy after the war had needled the President into making a public demand for the immediate admission of 100,000 Jewish refugees into Palestine. Mr. Attlee's proposal for a joint committee to investigate the facts, perfectly well known to both governments, had the certain advantage of gaining time and the possible one of involving the American Government in the Mandatory's responsibilities. Mr. Attlee and Mr. Bevin were also thoroughly sensitive to the stake which American aviation and oil interests had in the Middle East. Mr. Truman, having made his demand for the 100,000 in a loud voice, agreed to the British dilatory proposal in a soft one.

Both Crum and Crossman tell vividly the story of law, morality and justice caught in a network of imperialist aspirations of three great world powers, the story of a great humanitarian ideal smothered by the ruthless force of

dollar diplomacy. Here is the living tale of a dead issue—the issue of justice for Palestine and the thousands of European Jews whose sole passion in what is left of life is to exercise their legal right to go to Palestine. A timid President and perfidious State Department¹ on the one hand, a desperate Foreign Minister with a savagely anti-Jewish Colonial Office on the other, have probably ended forever the chances for a just solution of the problem.

Both books follow the same pattern. They outline in chronological order the Committee hearings in Washington and London, recount experiences of the Committee members in Europe, Cairo, Jerusalem, and finally Lausanne where the report was drafted. Crum's book is definitely pro-Zionist, Crossman's pro-Arabic. In spite of the difference in bias, both believe that the practical solution is partition, a recommendation which the Committee itself would not endorse. Both writers are realistic and see the human problem against its sordid background of politics, oil, and a disintegrating empire, with this difference—it is Crossman's empire that is going to pieces.

From Crum's book one obtains a sharp impression of a conscientious and sincere man striving to think his way through the tangled intrigue and cunning propaganda which has so enveloped Palestine as almost to obscure the real issues concerning that unhappy land. Here also is the acute pain and disappointment which accompanied rejection by two governments of the unanimous recommendations of a group of distinguished citizens of both countries who devoted four months of their lives attempting to solve one of the world's toughest problems. There is something of the same feeling about Crossman's book although, in spite of the Foreign Minister's commitment to do everything in his power to carry out a unanimous report, there were fewer illusions among the British members about the good faith of either government than on the part of the American members of the group.

Crum accepts the water-tight legal and moral case of the Jews and sees through the synthetic opposition of the Arab world. The problem of Palestine, he thinks, has been made unnecessarily complicated. He is convinced that, were it not for the influence of British administrators and the small group of Arab families who act as feudal overloads, Jew and Arab would live and work together in peace. Indeed, despite obstacles created by special interests, they are doing so now. He is confident of the ultimate success of the Jewish experiment in Palestine moderated perhaps by political compromises imposed by other nations. He believes in the formulation of a definite American policy notwithstanding the Committee's failure. Basically this policy must be one of two alternatives: either to support "the forces of reaction who prop up feudalistic regimes in the Arab States" or to back "the progressive

1. Although Crossman appears to accuse President Roosevelt of talking to the Arabs and Jews out of different sides of his mouth (pp. 44-5), Crum attributes the duplicity of American policy to the State Department and appears to have the evidence to support his conclusions (pp. 36-41).

forces in the Middle East."² He believes that "support for the Jewish National Home is the first and logical step to take on the path toward the advancement of a democratic way of life in that area of the world."³

Throughout Crossman's anti-Jewish pages on the other hand there is constant effort to build up the Arabs' phoney case for Palestine. The effort fails as does the case. Indeed, there is no case and for all his pains Crossman cannot produce one. Unlike Crum, he recognizes the contradictions of Zionism; nevertheless, he appears to accept the equally anomalous Arab nationalism and is not troubled by the spectacle of six Arab States acting as spokesman for and identifying their interests with the people who have a genuine and legitimate concern in the political destinies of Palestine.

"Western imperialism" is the Arab charge against the Jew. "The Zionist, the new Jew," says Azzam Pashe, speaking for the Arab League, "wants to dominate and he pretends that he has got a particularly civilizing mission . . . the Arabs simply stand and say 'no.' We are not going to allow ourselves to be controlled either by great nations or small nations or dispersed nations."⁴ "I have no doubt," comments Crossman, "that he had spoken for the whole Arab world. He had put to us an argument which, if it were accepted, would cut away, at a single stroke, the whole Jewish case."⁵

It is not easy to understand how a man with a grasp of the realities of the Middle East should be so impressed with the Arab position. Yet Crossman writes, as he apparently acted on the Committee, with an intelligent sense of the responsibilities which that body had a right to assume were theirs. As an Englishman, it is perhaps understandable that he cannot excuse Jewish leadership for refusing to follow the moderate policy of that other loyal Englishman, Weizmann, who struggled so long to obtain complete collaboration between the Jewish Agency and Great Britain. Crossman also accurately senses the weakness of the Zionist position in failing to make a definite decision either to negotiate in good faith or to resort to all-out revolution together with the Irgun and the Stern Group. Like Crum and the other members of the Committee, Crossman struggled both with his conscience and his colleagues for a unanimous report and thought the results achieved both a palliative to relieve immediate tension and a basis for eventual solution.

The two books together constitute an ironic preface to the appointment of the new international commission to rediscover all over again the matters reported by the Crum-Crossman group. In the meantime, as the Committee's report is filed along with many other similar reports, the small remaining segment of European Jewry can prepare to face another winter in the camps which Hitler invented while Palestine still waits for peace.

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2. P. 291.

3. *Ibid.*

4. P. 110.

5. *Ibid.*

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