

CONSEQUENCES

The Trial of ARTHUR BALFOUR

by
Warren R. Bardsley



In November 1917, as the First World War entered its fourth year, as thousands of British, Allied and German soldiers were perishing in the mud of Passchendaele and the outcome of that terrible conflict hung in the balance, the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Arthur Balfour signed the famous Declaration on behalf of the War Cabinet:

His Majesty's government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country. November 2, 1917

Thus began a process leading to the seemingly endless conflict between Israelis and Palestinians which continues to this day. Here, wrote Arthur Koestler was 'one nation promising another nation, the land of a third nation' (which it was not theirs to give anyway). The Oxford historian, Elizabeth Monroe described it as 'one of the greatest mistakes in our imperial history' while British High Commissioner in Mandate Palestine, Sir John Chancellor concluded in 1928 that the Declaration was 'a colossal blunder.' The promise of a safe haven for persecuted Jews in Europe, itself a laudable intention, failed to take into account the political and nationalist aspirations of the indigenous Arab population (90%) which over time became a source of deep resentment. In the centenary year of the Balfour Declaration, the author of this book introduces us to those involved in the fateful developments of autumn 1917 and their long-term consequences. The second half of the book takes the form of a drama in which Arthur Balfour is made to see how the 67-word piece of paper which bears his name sowed the seeds of conflict and decades of misery for the Palestinian people.

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