

Balfour Draft, August 1917

His Majesty's Government accept the principle that Palestine should be reconstituted as the national home of the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to secure the achievement of this object and will be ready to consider any suggestions on the subject which the Zionist Organisation may desire to lay before them.

Milner Draft, August 1917

His Majesty's Government accepts the principle that every opportunity should be afforded for the establishment of a home for the Jewish people in Palestine and will use its best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object and will be ready to consider any suggestions on the subject which the Zionist organisations may desire to lay before them.

Milner-Amery Draft, 4 October, 1917:

His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish race and will use its 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 in any other country by such Jews who are fully contented with their existing nationality (and citizenship).

Note: words in brackets added subsequently.

Final Text, 31 October 1917:

His Majesty's Government view 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.

(2) JEWISH RESPONSE TO THE BALFOUR DECLARATION IN THE MAJOR CENTRES

- (a) U.S.A.: The repercussions of the Declaration as reflected in the Mizrahi organ "Ha-Ivri"
- (b) Britain: In the editorial of the London "Jewish Chronicle." — the mouthpiece of British Jewry
- (c) Russia: The comments of "Ha-Am", a major Jewish daily, published in Moscow with a circulation of 15,000 copies

(a) Kindle the Light! . . .

If it is unfortunate that the Declaration of the British government did not make a sufficient impression on Jews in general, it is doubly sad that devout Jews too, Jews faithful to their race and religion, regular synagogue-goers, have not yet shown their true appreciation of the historic event unfolding in our days. Indeed these Jews, the pillars of our nation, are fully identified with our national aspirations. Do they not pray for Zion and Jerusalem in their daily prayers? The saddening fact is that these Jews have not yet answered the great call resounding throughout the Jewish world. It is not because devout Jews are not stirred at this national development heralding the resurrection of the Jewish people and the rebuilding of Eretz Israel, but simply because this news has not yet reached their ears. They still think of the realization of our great dream as a newspaper-story blown up out of proportion. One has to find the right people to deliver the message and present it in the proper light, to reveal the full historic significance of the event and make them participate in it. This is the only way to transmit this national message to these people in the expectation that it leave an indelible imprint upon their very souls and hearts. It is this duty of being the harbingers of these tidings to the pious — that the "Mizrahi" Organization has taken upon itself. This body being the Zionist Organization of Orthodox Jewry, has decided to convene, during the coming festival of Hanukkah, public meetings in all the synagogues and Batei Midrash in the United States and Canada. At these meetings, the importance of this major historical event will be explained to the public. The Mizrahi movement wishes to kindle not only the Hanukkah lights but also the light of the good tidings, the light of hope and joy, to brighten the homes and hearts of the devout Jews. Not only the victory of the Hasmoneans over the Greeks should be celebrated, but also our own victory over the assimilated who deny their national roots and aspirations.

The Mizrahi movement will not rest satisfied in merely announcing the good tidings to the pious Jews. It wishes to make them partners in the enterprise; to unite them under a single banner. It goes without saying that the Balfour Declaration does not exempt us from further national striving at this hour. The British Government has merely expressed its agreement with the basic idea of a Jewish homeland to be established in Eretz Israel. It is for us, however, to announce to the world at large that we want such a homeland and that we want our historical rights to be recognized. This is corroborated in the latest news which has reached us from London. Our brethren in London, being near to the heart of events, emphasize the call upon all Jews at this hour to declare everywhere their demand for a national home. It is to this end that the Mizrahi movement is preparing a Referendum which will represent the wishes of all devout Jews who want Eretz Israel to serve as a national homeland for the Jewish people. All those who put their signature to the Referendum, demonstrate their unwavering adherence to the idea of a

Jewish homeland. So that the signatures should not represent a formal act alone, the Mizrahi organization has decided that each person who signs the Referendum should contribute one Shekel to the Mizrahi Organization, thereby confirming his identification with the great Zionist cause. This will be a source of encouragement and impetus to the Zionist leaders who will be able to speak on behalf of the people as a whole. It is the solemn duty of all devout Jews to sign the Referendum and to encourage their friends and acquaintances to do the same, as well as paying the Shekel. May the coming days of Hanukkah serve as a national demonstration; an expression of the national will of the people of Israel. At the same time as lighting for Hanukkah, kindle the light of hope, of the speedy realization of our dreams. Faithful Jews! Proclaim your demands in public! Kindle the light! . . .

From the Mizrahi organ: Ha-Ivri,
New York, 30 November 1917

Within our Movement

The Mizrahi office has published the following proclamation:

To all presidents and administrators of Orthodox synagogues and to all Jews in the U.S.A. and Canada: Brothers! The time has come! The great moment has arrived! People no longer speak of us in terms of slaves or eternal wanderers but as a united people which once lived in its own land and is now returning to it; a people once independent, that ought to regain its political, national and cultural sovereignty.

This is no vain talk, but the considered opinion of the British Government the cradle of political freedom for hundreds of years. Moreover there is full agreement on this subject by all the other important governments involved in fighting for human freedom and the recognition of the rights of all nations. The great democratic American nation to whom we are ever grateful for our personal freedom too shares their opinion. All these have recognized the basis of our historical aspirations and are ready to assist us in obtaining national freedom and independence.

The Lord who has chosen Zion and who protects this people and His Torah at all times, has now given us a token of his goodwill. Re-echoing in our ears are the momentous words of Cyrus the king of Persia: "To every man of his people now among you I say, God be with him and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah . . ."

Now, that the whole world is deliberating on our future, we must not remain as onlookers. We must not allow our enemies from within, the descendants of our detractors in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, to declare on our behalf that we do not wish to be free from exile, preferring to remain subservient as foreign subjects. We must proclaim to the whole world our national aspiration for independence in our own land, based on the Torah and our

ancestral tradition.

To publicize our cause to the whole world, the Mizrahi Organization has decided to call a general referendum in all the Jewish communities in the U.S.A. and Canada. All the members of Orthodox synagogues will sign a special memorandum to the effect that besides solving the problems of the small nations, the forthcoming Peace Conference must also solve the Jewish problem. This entails realizing our age-old hope of founding a Jewish Commonwealth in Eretz Israel based on a national religious spirit. All those who sign this referendum and by so doing express the opinion of the majority of the Jewish people in the United States and Canada, shall pay the "Zionist Shekel" (25 cents) to the Mizrahi Organization. By doing so, they will demonstrate their identification with the demand for a secure haven in Eretz Israel and for a national religious cultural centre.

Accordingly, we turn to you, honourable leaders and presidents of synagogues: you, who have been chosen by Divine Providence to head an important segment of the Jewish people, have a solemn duty to come to our assistance at this crucial hour, to ensure that all the members and worshippers of the synagogues led by yourselves, shall sign this referendum and pay their shekel.

All the Jews of America ought to announce in public, that they are at one with the Jews of all the other lands in their demand for a secure haven for the Jewish people in the land of Israel.

All synagogue-goers and your presidents, are duty bound to be among the first to fulfil this task — to sign your names immediately and through the small payment of twenty-five cents demonstrate your adherence to the great ideal of the resurrection of Israel through the Torah in our old-new land — Eretz Israel.

Be the first to sign and try to persuade all your acquaintances and friends both men and women from the age of eighteen upwards, to sign this referendum which will reflect the attitude of the Jewish people at the forthcoming Peace Conference. Your signature will prove that you do not, God forbid, belong to the negative elements, but to those who build our future in our own land in order to keep to our Torah and revive our people. Whoever is for the Lord, His people and Land — join us!

(signed by)

Members of the Mizrahi Central Committee:

Meir Berlin, President; Y.L. HaCohen Fishman; Dr. Y.A. Bluestone, Honorary Secretary; H.B. Isaacson, Treasurer; Shmuel Vilner

Members of the Mizrahi Supreme Committee:

D. Abramowitz — Rabbi in St. Louis; Dr. Sh. Shpier — Rabbi in Baltimore; A.M. Ashinski — Rabbi in Pittsburgh; Eliyahu Inzelbuch — Rabbi in Brooklyn; Yaacov Gordon — Rabbi in Toronto (Canada); Ephraim Epstein — Rabbi in Chicago; Ze'ev Gold — Rabbi in Brooklyn; Shaul Zilber — Rabbi in Chicago; Nahamu Zvi Evin — Rabbi in Buffalo.

Ha-Ivri, No. 44, 30 November 1917

(b) **A Jewish Triumph**

With one step the Jewish cause has made a great bound forward. The declaration of His Majesty's Government as to the future of Palestine in relation to the Jewish people marks a new epoch for our race. For the British Government, in accord — it is without doubt to be assumed — with the rest of the Allies, has declared itself in favour of the setting-up in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people, and has undertaken to use its best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of that object. Amidst all that is so dark and dismal and tragic throughout the world, there has thus arisen for the Jews a great light. It is the perceptible lifting of the cloud of centuries, the palpable sign that the Jew — condemned for two thousand years to unparalleled wrong — is at last coming to his right. The prospect has at last definitely opened of a rectification of the Jews's anomalous position among the nations of the earth. He is to be given the opportunity and the means whereby, in place of being a hyphenation, he can become a nation. Instead of, as Jew, filling a place at best equivocal and doubtful, even to himself, and always with an apologetic cringing inseparable from his position, he can — as Jew — stand proud and erect, endowed with national being. In place of being a wanderer in every clime, there is to be a Home for him in his ancient land. The day of his exile is to be ended.

The declaration of the Government, which concedes the Zionist position in principle, must have effects, far-reaching and vital, upon the future of Jews and Judaism. A National Home for the Jewish people established in Palestine — whatever the exact form it may take in the circumstances in which it may be initiated — is certain to develop and in good time fulfil the fondest traditional aspirations of the Jewish people. They will become an entity of which the world will have no doubt. Questions of religion, of race and all others which to-day are set up and tend to confuse Jewish issues, will have no significance in face of the fact that the world will have recognised Jews as a nation. . . . It would be niggardly indeed if the fullest acknowledgement were not accorded to the Zionist movement for the success to which it has now attained. Through years of agitation and propaganda, and let it be acknowledged, of opposition that not occasionally was venomous and bitter, Zionists have carried on their work for the Jewish cause as they saw it. With splendid energy and matchless devotion, in face of many a setback and many a disappointment, they have never turned from the work that was to them a sacred mission. And now they have obtained not merely an historic acknowledgement that their view of the Jewish position was the right and the practical one, but that their activity — so often misrepresented, so often condemned, so often baulked by the most powerful sections of Jewry — was politically sound and ethically just. It is a great victory, which must encourage the movement from end to end of the world and give to it an enormous impetus for the labours, the heavy labours, that are now before it.

*The Jewish Chronicle, London,
9 November 1917*

(c) The Zionist Assembly in Moscow

Information is being received from all sides on the impression made by the Declaration on the Jewish world. After the great manifestation of support in Odessa, a similar event took place in Kiev in front of the British Consulate attended by tens of thousands of people. Among those who spoke and who welcomed the Zionists was the Head of the Rada (Council), Professor Grushefsky.

The Zionists in that city organized a great assembly addressed by the Zionist functionary and writer H. Sirkin, who in passionate words unfolded the eminent value of this historical document for the Jewish people. The meeting sent a greetings telegram to Buchanan the British Emissary in St. Petersburg requesting him to communicate to his government the enthusiasm and thanks of the free Jewish people. "We are sure" the message reads "that the keys of Jerusalem in the hands of the Jewish people, will be the keys to happiness for all the nations".

On Sunday 24 Kislev, a popular meeting arranged by the Zionist Organization took place in the hall of the "Nikitine" Theatre, attended by several thousand people. Thousands more remained outside the theatre owing to lack of space. H.L. Yaffe opened the meeting by stressing the great significance of the British Declaration and its tremendous impact on the Jewish people. It came to Jews all over the world as an historical proclamation to this eternal, wandering people, to return and rebuild its ancient homeland. Were it not for the highly dangerous situation in Russia, the feelings of joy generated by the Declaration would have burst forth more vigorously, the Jewish people not having witnessed such a document for thousands of years. The great dream which has given us the strength to bear continued trouble and sorrow has become a reality. The Shekhinah (Divine Presence), accompanying us into Exile is to be redeemed. We are gratified that not in vain was the ceaseless toil of former generations, so that our dream may come true . . .

"At this moment of national rejoicing" H. Yaffe concluded "we again hear the historic call: "To every man of his people now among you I say . . . let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord". We are about to build a new House, a temple of righteousness, equity and world justice. We believe that after regaining normalcy the Jewish people's voice will be heard in the community of the civilized nations and Jewish liberty will usher in an era of universal freedom" (prolonged applause, ed.).

Two letters from Odessa:

The Jewish community in Odessa marked the signing of the Balfour Declaration with week-long celebrations. Footsteps of the Messiah! Odessa, that bustling and light-hearted city, thriving on the joys of the moment, with neither faith nor tradition, a community far removed from national affairs and interests is suddenly seized by a fever of excitement at the call from Britain and in its tens of thousands gathers under the Zionist flag. Isn't this

an evident sign of Redemption? Doesn't this wonderful event remind us of a similar marvel described by a great prophet two thousand five hundred years ago on the banks of the rivers of Babylon: "who bore me these, and who reared them up"? Immediately on receipt of the telegram from London containing the declaration of the British Government, the local and regional committees of the Zionist Federation convened a special meeting with the representatives of the National Democratic party . . .

On Sabbath all the synagogues were full to the brim, a sight rarely seen in Odessa. Speakers were sent to all the synagogues by the city Zionist council to dwell on this wonderful event. Among the speakers were M.M. Ussishkin (at the Brody synagogue) and A. Gruzenberg (at the "Yavneh" Zionist synagogue). Local gatherings of different organizations also took place. On Monday 20 November a mass meeting was held at the drama theatre which bore the character of a popular national festival. Despite the complete darkness in which the streets were shrouded as a result of an electricity cut, and despite the torrential rain which continued to fall throughout the whole evening, some six thousand people came to the theatre — many more than the theatre could hold. There was no room to move; people stood packed together with hardly enough space to breathe. Nevertheless the evening proceeded without the least disturbance, even when some speakers chose to address the audience in Hebrew, a language which most Odessans are unable to understand.

As the curtain rose there was thunderous applause to greet members of the Presidium seated on the stage, including M. Ussishkin (chairman of the meeting), Bialik, A. Gruzenberg, Dr. Himmelfarb and Dr. Klausner. Behind the scenes one could hear the strains of the Hebrew national anthem, followed by the Marseillaise.

Bialik's Speech

"We are not gathered here for the sake of publicity, there is no need for propaganda. This great hour heralds for us the *finale!* . Are we not witnesses to the resurrection "in the valley of the dry bones"? Does not this vast assembly which has drawn people from all the corners prove that there is still hope; that the "dead" have come back to life? Indeed the iron curtain that stood between us and our people, between Jewry and the nations of the world as also between us and our Father in heaven, has now been broken down.

How often in moments of despair did we ask ourselves — will these bones ever live again? All those who pounded on the doors of our hearts, was not their voice like a voice crying in the wilderness? Were not all our brethren who spoke Hebrew, our first pioneers, held up to mockery and scorn? Expulsions, suffering and disgrace which we suffered failed to impress this stiff-necked people. And yet suddenly with the delivery of the good tidings of redemption, a great host has gathered, tens of thousands of Jews have

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rallied under our flag. Indeed, the nation has risen again, the days of Cyrus the Great are being relived. This is truly the finger of the Lord. At this point, as some nations are descending from the stage of history and others are taking their place, when it was feared lest our people be swept away by the national currents of the world, and became assimilated and dispersed among the nations, at this very juncture tens of thousands of us have assembled under our very own banner. A great ideal has brought us together and activates our hearts. It is not merely that of creating a little state of one's own. For this would hardly be a fitting recompense for thousands of years of wandering and suffering. Israel's salvation is organically related to the redemption of the nations at large. Providence has chosen our land to be the centre of the world. Our's is the role of mediators between East and West, the point of balance tipping the scales of human thought. Eretz Israel, according to Yehuda Halevi, is the heart of the world. All developments throughout the four corners of the globe will find an echo in our heart. The creative genius of the Jewish people is destined to produce grand achievements, beyond all the expectations of humanity."

*Excerpts from "Ha'am" Hebrew Journal
Odessa, Russia. December 1917, January 1918*

(3) ADOPTION OF THE DECLARATION BY THE GREAT POWERS

- (a) U.S.A.: President Wilson's letter to Dr. Stephen Wise
- (b) France: Letter to N. Sokolow
- (c) Italy: Letter to N. Sokolow
- (d) The Vatican fears implementation of the Balfour Declaration favouring the creation of a national home for the Jewish people in Eretz Israel

(a) President Woodrow Wilson to Dr. Stephen Wise 29 October, 1918

I have watched with deep and sincere interest the reconstructive work which the Weizmann Commission has done in Palestine at the instance of the British Government, and I welcome an opportunity to express the satisfaction I have felt in the progress of the Zionist Movement in the United States and in the Allied countries since the declaration of Mr. Balfour on behalf of the British Government of Great Britain's approval of the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and his promise that the British Government would use its best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of that object, with the understanding that nothing would be done to prejudice the civil and religious rights of non-

Jewish people in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by the Jews in other countries.

I think that all America will be deeply moved by the report that even in this time of stress the Weizmann Commission has been able to lay the foundations of the Hebrew University at Jerusalem with the promise that bears of spiritual rebirth.

(b) France

The French Government on June 14, 1917, sent the following communication to Mr. Sokolow:

Sir,

You were good enough to present the project to which you are devoting your efforts, which has for its object the development of Jewish colonization in Palestine. You consider that, circumstances permitting, and the independence of the Holy Places being safeguarded on the other hand, it would be a deed of justice and of reparation to assist, by the protection of the Allied Powers, in the renaissance of the Jewish nationality in that Land from which the people of Israel were exiled so many centuries ago.

The French Government, which entered this present war to defend a people wrongfully attacked and which continues to struggle to assure the victory of right over wrong, can but feel sympathy for your cause, the triumph of which is bound up with that of the Allies.

I am happy to give you herewith such assurance.

Please accept, Sir, the assurance of my most distinguished consideration.

Jules Cambon

On February 12, 1918, Foreign Minister Pichon sent a message to M. Tardieu, the French High Commissioner to the United States, as follows:

Having seen M. Sokolow (representative of the Zionist Organization) I authorized him to state that, as regards the question, our views were essentially the same as the views entertained by the British Government.

M. Tardieu authorized the Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs to make that communication, as well as the following, public. Naval Radio, from the Press Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

M. Sokolow was received today by M. Stephen Pichon. M. Pichon was happy to reaffirm that the understanding is complete between the French and the British Governments, concerning the question of the Jewish establishment in Palestine.

(c) Italy

Through its Ambassador at the Court of St. James, Marquis Imperiali, the Italian Government, on May 9, 1918, publicly signified its approval of the English and French declarations in a letter to M. Sokolow which stated: