

THE POLICIES AND ATTITUDES OF LABOR AND NON-LABOR GOVERNMENTS IN AUSTRALIA REGARDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A JEWISH STATE: 1932-1949¹

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While acknowledging certain reservations about Australian Minister of External Affairs Dr. Herbert Evatt's bona fide support for Israel, this essay shows that, in marked contrast with the governments of Lyons and Menzies, which strongly opposed the aspirations of the Jewish people to develop a national home in Palestine and establish their own state there, Evatt and important leaders in the Labor movement were very sympathetic to the Zionist ideal of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine and made a significant contribution to the achievement of that goal.

Introduction

Academic works in recent years have yielded radically opposing conclusions regarding the attitudes and policies of the Australian Labor governments in office from 1941 to the end of 1949 towards the establishment of the State of Israel. On one side of the spectrum, one finds scholars such as Dr. Rodney Guttman who, despite some reservations, hailed Dr. Herbert Vere Evatt, Australian Minister for External Affairs during that period, as the person largely responsible for Australia's principled and indepen-

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dent policy of supporting the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.²

On the other side of the spectrum one finds vehement critics of Evatt, such as Dr. Howard Adelman, who blamed Evatt for having betrayed the Jewish people in their struggle to establish their own state. As evidence, Adelman cited declassified cables showing that in 1947, Evatt had instructed John Hood, the Australian representative on the United Nations Special Committee On Palestine (UNSCOP), to abstain rather than support the majority's recommendation to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. According to Adelman, Australia's abstention could have had grave consequences for the not-yet-born State of Israel. Adelman alleged that Evatt had betrayed the Jews in favor of the Arabs and the British at that critical moment in order to gain the support of the Arab countries for his candidacy for president of the United Nations General Assembly. As the title of Adelman's article suggests, Adelman came to believe that in contrast with all other gullible people who had hitherto naively believed that Evatt had been the "midwife" of the birth of Israel, he, Adelman, had been successful, for the first time, in unmasking Evatt and presenting him for what he had really been all along — a selfish two-faced ambitious politician — the "abortionist" of the State of Israel.³

Adelman was not the first person to cast doubt on Evatt's bona fide support for the Jewish state. Ten years before Adelman, Eliahu Elath had revealed in his memoirs that he and his colleagues in the Jewish Agency delegation at the UN in 1947 had had very serious reservations regarding Evatt. Elath wrote:

We were not happy at [Evatt's] appointment [as Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee]. We found out that when Evatt campaigned for the position of President of the General Assembly, Hood and Atyeo...asked the Arab delegations to support Evatt's candidacy, promising them that it would help the Arabs' aim of defeating the Zionists at the General Assembly.⁴

When Dr. Oswaldo Aranha of Brazil defeated Evatt and was re-elected President of the UN General Assembly on 16 September 1947,⁵ Elath and the Jewish Agency delegation at the UN, who deeply mistrusted Evatt, were very pleased with the result.⁶

Similarly, in September 1949, Harry Levin, the first Israeli consul general in Australia, wrote:

Some keen observers seem to feel that there is nothing at all that Evatt holds dear; even his friendship for Israel, they say, will last no longer than it suits his personal ambition. Evatt himself is making it clear that he expects financial support for Party funds from local Jewish leaders and he expects them to transmit the funds through him personally, there being rivalry among the Party leaders as to who brings in most to the Party coffers.⁷

An Australian senior diplomat, Alan Renouf, claimed that while Evatt was very active in the UN in supporting the partition plan, "he was a little more reluctant about the establishment of Israel than appeared in public."⁸ Goultman, myself, and others have also criticized Evatt for pushing through a UN resolution in 1949 calling for the internationalization of Jerusalem. We claim that Evatt and Prime Minister Chifley believed at that time that their action would assist them in wooing Catholic voters in Australia, in the pending federal elections.⁹

In contrast, some commentators, including the prominent Australian Zionist leader, Max Freilich, insisted that Evatt had been unjustly portrayed and misrepresented publicly as being inept and deficient in character. Freilich insisted that, beyond a doubt, Evatt's role and influence was a deciding factor in bringing about the UN resolution in favor of a Jewish state.¹⁰

Evatt was a very complex person, a politician who sometimes tried to achieve contradictory goals, including his personal ambition to become president of the UN General Assembly in September 1947. At the same time, using fresh evidence, this article will show that from 1943 onwards, Evatt had been genuinely committed to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. As Tennant put it, "He supported the cause of Israel because he felt the Jewish people were a race that must have sanctuary. He thought in large moral issues and this was the way in which he asked the United Nations to think."¹¹ At the same time he pursued his own political career and ambitions, which at times affected his actions regarding the interests of Israel. He was neither the villain, as portrayed by Adelman and Elath, who was prepared to sacrifice Israel for the sake of his own political ambitions, nor the unambiguous supporter of Israel.

Due to their one-sided negative view of Evatt, neither Elath nor Adelman were able to explain Evatt's uncompromising public support for Israel after the presentation of UNSCOP's reports. Evatt's support of Israel brought him into sharp conflict with Britain and the U.S., and compromised his chances of becoming president of the General Assembly in September 1948. When as-

sessing Evatt's role in the establishment of the State of Israel, one should bear in mind the constraints under which he had to operate. Though extremely influential, Evatt was not omnipotent in the formulation and execution of Australian policy. One should also recall the political price he had to pay for his support of Israel. He antagonized the Arabs, the British, the Americans, the Australian federal opposition, and the Australian press. Even his own prime minister, Ben Chifley, only begrudgingly defended Evatt's support for partition as "taking the least of a number of evils."¹²

The main focus of these controversies has been Evatt's personal role in the establishment of the State of Israel. This is understandable given his overwhelming part in the formulation of Australia's foreign policy in general and regarding the question of Palestine in particular. However, this controversy over Evatt should neither cloud nor underplay the fundamental difference between the mainly pro-Zionist attitudes and policies of the Labor government of Joseph Benedict (Ben) Chifley (1945-1949) and its Minister of External Affairs Evatt, and its predecessors, the Liberal and Country governments of Joseph Aloysius Lyons (1932-1939) and, in particular, the government of Robert Gordon Menzies (1939-1941). The government policies of Lyons and Menzies towards the Jewish-Arab conflict over Palestine was the product of a unique Australian interpretation of the interests of the British Empire in the Middle East, reinforced by anti-Jewish prejudices that turned out to be more hostile to the *Yishuv* (Jewish community of Palestine) than even British policies.

The Governments of Lyons and Menzies

The British government rightly believed that in the case of war breaking out between Britain and Nazi Germany, Jewish support of Britain was assured, while Arab support could not be taken for granted and would depend on British pro-Arab policies in Palestine. The subsequent mass extermination of European Jews by the Nazis and the expulsion of Jewish survivors from the shores of Palestine by British war ships in line with the White Paper of May 1939, set the British and the Zionists on a collision course. However, the opposition of the governments of Lyons and Menzies to the establishment of a Jewish state and Jewish immigration to Palestine even surpassed the blatantly anti-Zionist policies of the British government itself.¹³ Under the total influence of Britain, Lyons and Menzies perceived the British Empire's interests in the

Middle East as completely divergent from those of the Zionist movement. In February 1939, Lyons, who regarded the Middle East as being of great importance to Australia owing to its relation to vital imperial communications, warned the British against the partition of Palestine, lest it estrange the Moslem world. Instead, he advocated the maintenance of the status quo in Palestine "with safeguards to prevent Jewish predominance."¹⁴

In May 1939, the British government published a White Paper largely meeting Arab demands by severely restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine, with the aim of ensuring that the Jewish section of Palestine would not exceed one-third of the total population. It also severely restricted the purchase of land in Palestine by Jews and stated, unequivocally, that it was not the policy of the British government that Palestine should become a Jewish state. Instead, it supported the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in which the Arabs and Jews would share authority in the government.¹⁵

While the *Yishuv* and its leaders were outraged regarding the White Paper as a breach of faith and a surrender to Arab terrorism, and the Zionist Federation of Australia and New Zealand protested at once to Prime Minister Menzies, as did several leading Australian intellectuals and churchmen, Menzies rejected these protests and wholeheartedly defended the White Paper.¹⁶

Similarly, while being aware of the fact that two million Jews had been herded into concentration camps in Poland where they were "doomed miserably to perish," the Australian government uncritically accepted the reports of its envoy in Britain, Alfred Thorp Stirling, who had continued reporting British claims that Jewish refugees fleeing to Palestine were "not truly refugees but carefully picked and trained young men of military age...organized and encouraged by various Zionist bodies whose aim is to overthrow the UK government's policy." Australian Minister of External Affairs John McEwen feared that unfavorable developments in the Middle East might threaten India, the direct line of communications between Australia and Britain, and thus the fate of thousands of young Australian soldiers who were stationed in the Middle East. Therefore, he encouraged Britain to fully implement the terms of the White Paper. In November 1940, the Australian High Commissioner in London and former prime minister, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, warned Menzies that, in fact, the Axis powers were behind Jewish illegal immigration to Palestine, their object being to arouse the Arab world against Britain and to introduce enemy agents into Palestine and the Middle East. When Bruce requested that Menzies, on behalf of Britain, take 3,500 "of

these illicit Jews and intern... them for the period of the war, of course on the understanding that the UK Government would bear the whole of the costs and specifically undertake to re-export [sic] them out of Australia on termination of hostilities," the Australian War Cabinet rejected the British request.¹⁷

The vitriolic attacks of Bruce and Menzies regarding Jewish immigration to Palestine surprised even the British. In November 1940, when Britain allowed the survivors of the *Patria* to remain in Palestine, Menzies vigorously insisted that the admittance of any illegal immigrants into Palestine should not proceed, "except with Arab approval." Consequently, the British government found it necessary to reassure Menzies of its unchanged policy and determination to retain the goodwill of the Arabs. They explained that its action regarding the survivors of the *Patria* had been "an exceptional act of mercy towards those fleeing from the cruelest form of persecution," and promised Menzies that the number of survivors granted entry to Palestine would be deducted from the next immigration quota.¹⁸

The Labor Government

The major dilemma for the *Yishuv* and the Zionist movement during that period was how to simultaneously support the British struggle against Nazi Germany and oppose the White Paper. The reluctance of many countries to grant entry to Jewish survivors reinforced the fundamental Zionist argument that the only practical solution was their absorption by the *Yishuv*. Consequently, Zionist and other Jewish and non-Jewish organizations in Australia joined with their counterparts in Palestine, the U.S., Britain, and other countries in a campaign to abolish the White Paper and to open Palestine to unrestricted Jewish immigration.

The Zionist campaign in Australia to abolish the White Paper was conducted directly through lobbying Curtin, Chifley, and Evatt, and indirectly through meetings of protest and petitions by various bodies such as the Pro-Palestine Committees (PPC), which advocated free Jewish immigration to Palestine.

In 1943 Evatt received a Jewish deputation which presented to him the Zionist arguments regarding the solution to the tragedy of European Jewry. According to Freilich, who attended that meeting, Evatt "promised his utmost support 'when the time comes.'"¹⁹ However, Australian Prime Minister John Curtin, like his predecessor Robert Menzies, firmly believed that the question of Palestine was a matter to be decided exclusively by the British gov-

ernment.²⁰ When some representatives at the Australian Labor Party (ALP) Federal Conference in December 1943 countenanced a resolution in support of a Jewish state, Curtin successfully opposed it.²¹

The British dilemma regarding Palestine was expressed succinctly by the Australian politician and diplomat and British Minister of State in the Middle East Richard Gardiner Casey. Casey explained that while the Jewish Agency wanted increasing privileges clearly directed towards the eventual creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, the Arabs were hostile to the Jews and made great efforts to hold Britain to the White Paper. The Arabs, while acknowledging the persecution and suffering of the Jews in Europe, argued that this should not be offset by the creation of another injustice in the shape of a Jewish state in Palestine to the detriment of the Palestinian Arabs. The Arabs believed that the White Paper was Britain's fixed policy, and Britain would have run a great risk of forfeiting Arab confidence had it departed from it and made further concessions to the Jews. Britain was anxious to maintain its friendly association with the Arab countries by reason of the war situation. Departure from the White Paper policy would have been a risk. If it appeased the Jews, it would have affronted the Arabs, and vice versa. Britain needed a quiet Middle East. Its oil interests and its sea and air communications through the Middle East during the war and after necessitated a friendly Arab world. Even in 1943 moderate Zionists were speaking publicly of the possibility of two million Jews being settled in Palestine, which infuriated the surrounding Arab states. The official British policy was the White Paper, but it felt obliged to work out possible alternatives in private, which meant partition in some form. However, the British government believed that any public discussion of partition would mean bloodshed and possibly spreading trouble with the surrounding Arab states, so nothing came of it. It was agreed at that time that "partition was damnation." The White Paper was the sensible middle course. Casey admitted, "I can think of no way in which our policy could have been altered for the better in the circumstances that existed. We knew that there was no ideal solution — only the lesser of two evils."²²

While consistently refusing to take a stand regarding Palestine, once Britain referred the matter to the UN on 2 April 1947,²³ the Australian Labor government conducted a more independent and, by and large, pro-Zionist policy. Thus, it immediately opposed the Arab demand for the termination of the British Mandate and the granting of independence to Palestine. Such action would

favor the Arabs who constituted a majority in Palestine. Instead, Australia insisted on the establishment of a committee that would conduct a wide inquiry into this question.²⁴

The Jewish Agency for Palestine dispatched its envoy, Michael Comay, to Australia where he met with Chifley and Evatt in Canberra in May 1947. Comay reported that while Chifley would not be disposed to oppose Britain's Palestine policy, Evatt was pro-Zionist and had foreign policy firmly in his own hands. Evatt, who insisted on complete confidentiality, expressed to Comay his support for partition and derision of the Arabs. Evatt condemned "British policy of kowtowing to the Arabs" as disgusting, in view of the Arabs' war record, when "they had hung around the flanks waiting to stab us in the back if things went wrong." Evatt seemed even somewhat forgiving in his attitude to Jewish terrorism in Palestine, arguing that "it had made the world realize [the Jewish] struggle." He advised, however, against arousing the Arab opposition in advance of the UN meeting in September and insisted that it would be wrong for someone like him to come into the open in support of partition at that stage, thus provoking widespread repercussions. The partition scheme would have to be sprung at the right moment, during the actual course of the September session. In gratitude, Comay expressed the Jewish Agency's support for Australian membership on the United Nations Special Committee On Palestine (UNSCOP).²⁵

Evatt's pro-Zionist attitude prevailed even in the face of an anti-Zionist and, at times, anti-Jewish press in Australia. Comay reported that the Australian press was solidly hostile to Zionist aspirations, giving the Jewish terrorists' activities the fullest display while closing its columns to any other angles.²⁶ Comay himself came under attack by *Smith's Weekly*, which accused him of conducting a campaign in Australia aimed at financing anti-British terrorism in Palestine and the illegal migration of all Jewish children from Europe to Palestine. The paper demanded that Evatt, as Attorney General, should conduct an investigation into this matter.²⁷ Consequently, Youth Aliya sued the *Weekly* for defamation, but lost on a technicality.²⁸

In May 1947 UNSCOP, comprising 11 members including Australia, was instructed to conduct investigations in Palestine and elsewhere and submit a report by 1 September 1947.²⁹ Evatt argued that UNSCOP should conduct a full preliminary investigation of the facts, as the only means likely to lead the UN to impartial and objective decisions. He instructed the Australian representatives on UNSCOP, Hood and Atyeo, to be "as non-com-

mittal as possible and to avoid being labeled as pro- or anti-British, Arab or Zionist.”³⁰

When UNSCOP visited Palestine, Hood was overwhelmed by the seemingly dangerous and intractable nature of the Jewish-Arab conflict.³¹ He vacillated between supporting a temporary trusteeship leading to Palestinian self-government, and partition, and insisted that if Palestine was to be partitioned, a military force of one of the great powers would have to impose and maintain order in the transition period.³² Evatt repeatedly instructed Hood to refrain from committing himself against partition or in favor of any recommendation, emphasizing the fact-finding nature of UNSCOP.³³ By the end of August 1947, Hood informed External Affairs, in confidence, that he supported a federation in preference to partition.³⁴

On 31 August 1947, UNSCOP signed its report recommending the termination of the Mandate for Palestine. Out of seven countries, a majority recommended the partitioning of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state and the placing of Jerusalem under an international UN Trusteeship. A minority proposed the creation of an independent federal state of Palestine comprising an Arab state and a Jewish state with Jerusalem as its capital. Australia was the only country to abstain on the ground that the task of UNSCOP was to elucidate the problem and submit facts, rather than to make definite proposals. While the Jewish Agency accepted partition as the “indispensable minimum,” the Arab governments and the Arab Higher Executive rejected it.³⁵ When *Banativ*, the journal of the Youth Department of the Zionist Federation of Australia and New Zealand, expressed profound disappointment with Australia’s abstention,³⁶ Evatt reiterated the investigative nature of UNSCOP.³⁷ Max Freilich reassured the Jewish Agency that Evatt had promised him his support for partition at the decisive moment.³⁸

Following UNSCOP’s majority support for partition, Britain reiterated its refusal to accept responsibility for imposing a settlement in Palestine by force of arms against the wishes of either party. It warned that in the absence of a settlement to which both Arabs and Jews consented, Britain would be left with no other choice than withdrawing from Palestine.³⁹ Evatt consequently accused Britain and the UN of wanting to do nothing about implementing the recommendation of UNSCOP. Instead, he wryly commented, the UN established yet another committee so that the General Assembly could conduct “an investigation into the investigation” regarding the work of UNSCOP. On 25 September 1947, Evatt was elected chairman of this Ad Hoc Committee.⁴⁰

The Ad Hoc Committee concluded its deliberations on 25 November 1947, when it adopted the plan of partition and economic union. This time Australia voted in favor, while Britain abstained.⁴¹ Comay consequently praised Evatt for his "masterly handling of the Ad Hoc Committee" and for having made "a very vital contribution to the final result."⁴² Evatt also asked UN Secretary General Trygve Lie to persuade UN President Aranha to influence the Latin American countries to support the partition plan.⁴³

On 29 November 1947, the General Assembly adopted the Ad Hoc Committee's draft resolution for the partition of Palestine and the establishment of an international regime in Jerusalem, by a two-thirds majority. Australia, New Zealand, the U.S., and the USSR supported the resolution, while Britain abstained.⁴⁴

Evatt was consequently praised by the governing bodies of the *Yishuv*.⁴⁵ The Jewish National Fund decided to plant a forest in Evatt's honor in Israel.⁴⁶ In later years the president of Israel, Chaim Weizmann, hailed Evatt for having played "a momentous role in all the processes which culminated in the birth of Israel."⁴⁷ Australian Jewish leaders also paid tribute to Evatt over the years and when he died in 1965, the *Australian Jewish News* eulogized him as "the man who piloted the establishment of Israel through the UN in 1948."⁴⁸ However, Evatt also had his critics.

That the creation of Israel would involve injustice to the Arabs in Palestine was an inevitable consequence because the territory of a viable Jewish state would contain almost as many Arabs as Jews. The British would not cooperate with the UN on the partition plan, and when fighting between Arabs and Jews began in December 1947, they increasingly confined their authority to military camps and police stations. To enforce partition, Britain would have been drawn into fighting the Arabs, but its interests were overwhelmingly involved in maintaining goodwill with the Arab nations.⁴⁹

Following the UN resolution, Evatt accused the British government of actively sabotaging partition through their encouragement of the Arabs to resist partition by force of arms.⁵⁰ He maintained that in its treaty negotiations with the Arab countries regarding the establishment of a defensive system in the Middle East, Britain should make Arab acceptance of partition a condition for the finalizing of such treaties.⁵¹ The British rejected Evatt's proposal.⁵² Australia informed the Jewish Agency that it had let Britain know, in no uncertain terms, that Britain's attitude was not in accord with the resolution.⁵³ Australia also suggested that the permanent members of the Security Council should take

the lead as Great Powers in establishing an international force in Palestine and that other countries should contribute proportionally. This brought Australia into conflict with the U.S. which feared that a contingent of Russian troops, if thus constituted, would never leave the key strategic area of Palestine.⁵⁴

Following the invasion of Palestine by the Arab countries, Australia conveyed to Britain its concern over reports that Britain was under obligation to help train and equip the armed forces of Transjordan and to provide equipment for other Arab states, and to veto attempts in the Security Council to take immediate action in Palestine.⁵⁵

Evatt's continuous conflicts with the British over Palestine led the Foreign Office to bypass Evatt and communicate directly with the prime minister's office.⁵⁶

The Liberal and Country parties, now the federal opposition, continued their anti-Zionist stance from the period they had been in government. They severely criticized the Australian government's support for partition, arguing that Evatt was motivated by "the urge for glory"; that there was no certainty that Britain indeed wanted to relinquish control over Palestine; that partition amounted to the "cutting up of somebody else's country," and would turn the Arabs and the Muslims against Australia and drive them into the arms of Russia. This would enable Russia to penetrate the Persian Gulf, the Suez Canal, and North Africa. For this reason, the opposition argued, the U.S. had withdrawn its original support for partition. The UN decision resulted from political pressure by American Jews and was thus illegitimate. The opposition also warned that because of its important role at the UN in support of partition, Australia would be expected to provide financial assistance for the implementation of partition and participate in an international force in Palestine. In reply, Evatt reassured parliament that the British government itself had decided to refer the question of Palestine to the UN and to officially remain neutral about the question of Palestine throughout the debates at the UN. Prime Minister Chifley assured parliament that Australia was not obliged to provide financial or physical assistance in carrying out the partition. The opposition also criticized the raising of funds by the Jewish Agency among Australian Jews, implying that it had been done under duress and could be used for anti-British purposes in Palestine.⁵⁷

As a gesture of appreciation, the Israeli delegation actively supported Australia's inclusion in the Conciliation Commission for Palestine, and when Australia was not included Evatt was convinced that Australia's exclusion was due to British opposi-

tion.⁵⁸ *Banativ* praised Australia which, “unlike Britain...is not lending her support to any plan of settlement which gives territorial concessions in Israel to foreign invaders who had been routed in battle.” *Banativ* also criticized “certain members of the Opposition” who “have attacked Dr. Evatt for failing to follow slavishly the anti-Israel line adopted by Britain.”⁵⁹

Australia’s adherence to partition also brought it into conflict with the U.S. which, on 19 March 1948, dramatically announced the withdrawal of its support of partition in favor of a temporary UN Trusteeship in Palestine.⁶⁰ While Britain supported Trusteeship, the Jewish Agency rejected it outright, with Chairman David Ben-Gurion insisting that a Jewish state would be established as soon as the *Yishuv* had enough military force to do so.⁶¹ Evatt rejected, in public, the Trusteeship proposal as ambiguous, potentially damaging to the authority of the UN, and amounting to “intrigues directed against the Jewish people.” He warned, “it would be most disturbing if mere consideration of power politics or expediency were allowed to destroy [the UN] decision,”⁶² and that U.S. vacillation only encouraged Arab intransigence.⁶³ The Israelis and Secretary General Lie praised Australia for rejecting Trusteeship and adhering to the partition resolution.⁶⁴

When opposing Trusteeship, Australia found itself in the same camp as the Soviets, who accused the U.S. and Britain of maneuvers intended to overthrow the partition in order to make way for their military strategic bases in Palestine.⁶⁵ Australia also came into conflict with Britain when it rejected UN Mediator Count Folke Bernadotte’s recommendation of ceding the Negev to the Arabs, and the imposition of restrictions on Jewish immigration to Israel.⁶⁶ Britain supported Bernadotte’s proposals, particularly regarding the Negev, in the hope that this would enable Britain to establish military bases there. In contrast, Australia objected to the subtraction of the Negev from Israel on grounds that this would be greatly detrimental to its economy.⁶⁷

Israel regarded Australia as a crucial ally in their common effort to stave off attempts at the UN to rush through Bernadotte’s proposals, and to persuade member countries to support free and direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Arabs, under UN auspices. In the diplomatic arena this helped Israel maintain its territorial gains achieved in battle.⁶⁸

Relations between Israel and Britain became so tense that on 12 January 1949, Israeli Foreign Minister Shertok sought the assistance of the Dominion countries, including Australia, in diffusing the tension. Shertok assured the Dominions that Israel posed no threat to British interests in the Middle East and sought no

conflict with Britain.⁶⁹ The Israeli government warned that British hostility towards Israel would only benefit the anti-British and anti-West right-wing Revisionist and left-wing workers' parties in the pending elections. In addition, Israel requested that Australia recognize Israel before the elections.⁷⁰

David Courtney, writing in the *Palestine Post*, praised Evatt for having pushed Australia to the forefront of international diplomacy, and expressed his hope that on his return to Australia Evatt would be able "to give an effective antidote to the British Foreign Minister, Bevin's poison, which will have been administered during the past fortnight to the Prime Minister, Mr. Chifley, through the unsuspecting agency of the High Commissioner in London."⁷¹

In contrast, the *Sydney Morning Herald* praised Bevin for having shown "a deep appreciation of strategic necessities in the Middle East — a vital security area for a great part of the British Commonwealth."⁷²

Evatt also differed from Britain when he strongly supported the recognition of Israel immediately following recognition by President Truman. However, due to enormous pressure from Britain, Australia deferred recognition until Britain authorized it eight months later.⁷³ Initially, the British argued that recognition would antagonize the Arab world and jeopardize British prospects of obtaining facilities for the extraction of Middle East oil.⁷⁴

Prior to the Australian Cabinet's deliberations on recognition, the *Canberra Times* and *Sydney Morning Herald* called on the Australian government to follow British policy and refrain from recognizing Israel.⁷⁵ According to Renouf, when Evatt asked the Australian government on 1 June 1948 to consider the *de facto* recognition of Israel, he did not come down strongly one way or the other.⁷⁶

On 1 June 1948, the Cabinet agreed that if Britain recognized Israel or if an arrangement was reached by the Commonwealth with Britain regarding recognition, Australia would accord *de facto* recognition of Israel.⁷⁷

Abba Eban, who was convinced that not one of the three dominions — Australia, New Zealand, and Canada — would have withheld recognition of its own accord, regarded the absence of recognition by them as "perhaps the most malicious blow that Bevin has struck against us recently."⁷⁸ A leaflet supported by trade union leaders, academics, and clergymen was published by Brian Fitzpatrick in July 1948, calling on the Australian government to recognize Israel,⁷⁹ and a public meeting of over 13,000 Jews at the Paddington Town Hall joined the Zionist Federation

in calling upon the federal government to accord such recognition.⁸⁰ As time went by, Evatt found it increasingly embarrassing to defend Australia's position in front of the Israeli UN delegation.⁸¹

In November 1948, Australia pleaded with Britain that recognition of Israel would assist in reaching a settlement in Palestine and that "a firmly established Jewish State may exercise considerable stabilizing influence in the Middle East."⁸² Chifley also announced in parliament that Australia would soon recognize Israel.⁸³

In December 1948, Comay met with Evatt in Paris and told him, "in confidence," that Israel had been sounded out by the British regarding the establishment of relations between them. Evatt consequently blamed the British for blocking Australian recognition while trying to "sneak ahead" of Australia. He divulged to Comay that following the proclamation of the State of Israel, the Australian Cabinet had actually agreed on recognition, but because of Bevin's personal pleas, Chifley, who was a cautious man, refused to defy such strong representations. Comay interjected that after all that had happened since then to discredit British policy, surely Australia would feel more confident about relying on its own judgment in the matter. Evatt agreed, adding that immediately on his return to Australia he would try to influence the Cabinet to recognize Israel regardless of the British view. He would not, however, be back in Australia until January 20. Evatt was not pleased that Britain should be allowed to establish any sort of relation with Israel in advance of the Dominions, who were only prevented from recognizing Israel by British interference, after the consistent record of friendship towards Israel by Australia and New Zealand (and to a lesser extent Canada), and the equally consistent record of hostility towards Israel by the British. He felt that it would be proper for Israel to indicate to Britain that it wanted the Dominions to have a full and free opportunity of extending recognition to Israel before Israel entered into any kind of relations directly with Britain. Consequently, Comay suggested that Evatt initiate Australian recognition of Israel in advance of his return to Australia. Comay argued that this would encourage the Arabs to accept Israel as an accomplished fact; it would set the lead for other countries, including Britain, and assist the Israeli government in the pending elections.⁸⁴

External Affairs officials were also concerned that a delay in recognition might impede Israel from procuring wheat and flour from Australia.⁸⁵ Following Canada's recognition of Israel, Evatt, in the middle of his journey back to Australia, hastened to instruct

John Burton, Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, to announce, as soon as possible, Australia's recognition of Israel. Chifley vetoed Evatt's instructions.⁸⁶

On 21 January 1949, Attlee suggested to Chifley that both governments should synchronize their recognition of Israel and that if Australia decided to recognize Israel, it should also recognize the government of Transjordan.⁸⁷ Evatt agreed to simultaneous recognition of Israel by Australia, Britain, and New Zealand, but insisted on postponing the formal recognition of Transjordan.⁸⁸ In contrast to Britain, which favored only *de facto* recognition, couched in narrow and technical terms, Chifley and Evatt insisted on a broad form of recognition and in warm and friendly terms.⁸⁹

On 29 January 1949, Chifley announced that the Australian government had decided to give full recognition to the Jewish State of Israel, and regarded the new nation of Israel as "a force of special value in the world community." He expressed his confidence that Israel would assist in carrying out the UN's decision declaring the special international status of Jerusalem as a holy city, and promised that Australia would support the admission of Israel to the UN.⁹⁰

In contrast with Australia, on 30 January 1949, Britain only extended *de facto* recognition of the Israeli government.⁹¹ The federal opposition in Australia supported Britain and vehemently criticized the government's *de jure* recognition of Israel.⁹²

While supporting the establishment of Israel, the Labor government adhered strictly to the UN Security Council embargo on the sale of arms to Palestine. In March 1948, Australia's Ministry of External Affairs rejected an application for the export of bullet-proof armored plate to Tel Aviv.⁹³ In May, Chifley revealed that several firms had sought to purchase 68,000 surplus, high-velocity, Australian rifles, but the government had vetoed that sale.⁹⁴ Burton even went so far as postponing the export, by several Jewish firms and individuals, of clothing from Australia to Israel, unless it was approved by the UN mediator as destined for the relief of refugees, because "the chances of these items being put to warlike use in equipping Israeli forces are considerable." He later approved the export of ponchos to Israel, arguing that items of clothing should not be withheld from refugees in Palestine in the rigorous winter season.⁹⁵ Australia also acted vigorously to prevent the recruitment of people in Australia to fight in the war in Palestine. The Commonwealth Investigation Branch (CIB) monitored the activities of Zionist organizations which were allegedly involved in such activities.⁹⁶ The Commonwealth

Government also threatened to refuse passports and punish Australians who sought to go to Palestine to fight for either side.⁹⁷ However, despite efforts by CIB to prevent it, during 1948-1949 the Israeli Air Force managed to illegally purchase six aircraft in Australia and fly them to Israel where they took part in battles against the invading Arab forces.⁹⁸

In contrast with its embargo on the export of warlike stores, and despite pressures from the Department of the Treasury and in parliament, Burton insisted that while there was an absolute ban on the export of warlike supplies to Palestine, there was no ban on the export to Palestine of materials or resources falling outside the definition of warlike stores, including the remittance of funds by the Palestine Foundation Fund from Australia to Israel.⁹⁹ Consequently, in 1948 the Commonwealth Bank allowed remittances from Australia to Israel of up to £100,000.¹⁰⁰

The Labor government also supported Israel's admission to the UN despite opposition by Britain.¹⁰¹ Following his election on 21 September 1948, as president of the General Assembly, Evatt initiated a meeting with Shertok and Comay. He derided the Arabs for having opposed his election as president, claiming this was their revenge for his support of Israel, and promised his support for Israel's admission to the UN.¹⁰² On 23 November 1948, Australia proposed to the UN Political Committee a draft resolution calling on the Security Council to support Israel's application for admission to the UN.¹⁰³

The *Sydney Morning Herald* criticized Australia's action, arguing that Israel's boundaries had not yet been defined, and called for the deferral of Israel's admission to the UN "until Israel has shown by moderation, restraint, and readiness to concede that she merits a place among peace-seeking nations."¹⁰⁴ Israel's application for membership was rejected.¹⁰⁵ When Israel reapplied on 4 March 1949, Chifley informed Britain that Australia favored Israel's admission. He called for the consideration of Israel's application on its own merits and divorced from other considerations.¹⁰⁶ The UN Security Council then recommended to the General Assembly that it admit Israel to UN membership by 9 votes to 1 (Egypt). Britain abstained.¹⁰⁷ Some countries hesitated to admit Israel because of its opposition to the internationalization of Jerusalem and its policy regarding the Arab refugees.¹⁰⁸

The Israeli delegation blamed the Arab states for having themselves created the refugee problem by waging war against Israel. Israel agreed to allow the return of some of these refugees into Israel, but insisted that for the sake of stability and peace, the majority of them should be resettled in the neighboring Arab states.

Regarding Jerusalem, Israel approved of an international regime which applied only to the holy places. Despite their differences over Jerusalem, the Australian delegation presented a resolution, sponsored by six other countries including the U.S. and Canada, proposing that, as Israel was a peace-loving nation and was able and willing to carry out obligations under the Charter, it should be admitted to the UN.¹⁰⁹ On 9 May 1949, the UN Ad Hoc Committee adopted by a vote of 33 in favor, 11 against, and 13 abstentions the resolution presented by Australia for the admission of Israel to the UN,¹¹⁰ and two days later the General Assembly resolved to admit Israel for membership. Britain abstained. Deafening applause greeted the announcement of Israel's admission by UN President Evatt, who then asked Foreign Minister of Israel Moshe Sharett to make his speech of acceptance.¹¹¹ Sharett thanked Evatt, describing him as "one of the foremost personalities responsible for the birth of Israel," and presented Evatt with a certificate of the Jewish National Fund "in recognition of his services to Israel."¹¹²

Evatt decided shortly afterwards to exchange diplomatic missions with Israel. The first Israeli envoys to Australia, Consul General Yehudah Harry Levin, and Consul Gabriel Doron, arrived in Sydney on 14 August 1949.¹¹³ Levin's first meeting with Evatt in Canberra on 17 August 1949 was very cordial and included the presentation of a gift to Evatt and an invitation to visit Israel. Evatt expressed his warm feelings towards Israel and his utter contempt for the "Gypos" (a derogatory term used by Australians for Egyptians). He informed Levin of Australia's intention to appoint an envoy with the rank of minister to Egypt, who would deal directly with the Egyptian government regarding Australia's difficulties in transporting passengers and goods through Egypt. He expressed his wish to conclude such a diplomatic exchange first with Israel with the same rank of minister.¹¹⁴ The Israeli government welcomed this proposal.¹¹⁵

Evatt's appointment of Osmond Charles William Fuhrman as the first Australian minister to Israel met with strong disapproval by the leaders of the Australian Jewish community. They warned Levin of Fuhrman's anti-Semitic disposition, showing that Fuhrman, Australia's Consul-General in Shanghai in 1947, blocked the entrance to Australia of many European Jewish refugees from Shanghai. When briefed on Fuhrman's record, Evatt was distressed, but maintained that he had no other career man to send. Evatt warned that if he delayed the appointment until after the elections, a different government would probably make no ap-

pointment at all.¹¹⁶ Fuhrman arrived in Israel on 19 December 1949.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

After coming to office in 1941 and until April 1947, when Britain referred the question of Palestine to the UN, the Curtin and Chifley governments, like those of Lyons and Menzies, were unwilling to challenge British policy in Palestine. However, in marked contrast with the governments of Lyons and Menzies, which strongly opposed the aspirations of the Jewish people to develop a national home in Palestine and establish its own state there, Evatt and important leaders in the Labor movement were very sympathetic to the Zionist ideal of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine.

From April 1947 onwards, the Labor government conducted, by and large, a very pro-Zionist policy in the face of severe criticism by Britain and the Australian federal opposition of the Liberal and Country parties. Admittedly on a few occasions, and in some cases on Evatt's personal instruction, the Labor government under Ben Chifley acted against the interests of Israel as defined by its government — in abstaining on UNSCOP's final report; in supporting the internationalization of Jerusalem; in its strict implementation of the arms embargo; and in succumbing to British pressure to delay recognition. On all other matters it supported Israel. Even Evatt's severe critic, Eliahu Elath, conceded that Evatt played a crucial role as chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee in bringing about the Committee's pro-partition recommendation. Australia voted in favor of partition in the UN's historic resolution of 29 November 1947; it vigorously resisted attempts by the U.S. and Britain to replace partition with Trusteeship; it assisted Israel in blocking attempts at the UN to implement Bernadotte's recommendation to cede the Negev to the Arabs; it pioneered Israel's admission to the UN as early as November 1948 and continued its support despite British opposition. Australia was also the first country to accord *de jure* recognition of Israel, and among the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the fledgling Jewish state.

With this record it is hardly surprising that prior to the 1949 federal elections, *Banativ*, the Zionist youth magazine in Australia, called on its readership to vote for the Labor government which "consistently supported the cause of Israel, Jewry, and the UN." *Banativ* warned that "a Liberal Government would result in

the growing tide of anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist feeling being heard more loudly in parliament, but this time from the government benches."¹¹⁸

Notes

1. I wish to thank the staff of the following organizations for their assistance:
AA = Australian Archives, Canberra.
CZA = Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.
EC = Evatt Collection, Flinders University, Adelaide.
IAFA = Israeli Air Force Archives, Tel Aviv.
IDFA = Israeli Defense Forces Archives, Ramat Gan.
ISA = Israeli State Archives, Jerusalem.
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4. Eliahu Elath, *The Struggle for Statehood, Washington 1945-1948*, part 2 (Tel Aviv: Am Oved and Zionist Library, 1982), pp. 201, 245, 326-337 (Hebrew, my translation).
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6. Elath, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-202.
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8. Alan Renouf, *Let Justice Be Done: The Foreign Policy of Dr. H.V. Evatt* (St. Lucia, Queensland: Queensland University Press, 1983), p. 247.
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15. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 185-186.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 186.
19. M. Freilich, "The Controversial Herbert Vere Evatt," p. 45.
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22. Lord Casey, "13 July 1943," *Personal Experience 1939-1946* (London: Constable & Co., 1962), pp. 138-140.
23. External Affairs to Australian UN Delegation, Cablegram 237, 11 April 1947, AA: A1068/1 M47/17/1/2.
24. *Current Notes on International Affairs (CNIA)*, vol. 18, no. 5, May 1947, pp. 297-299, and vol. 18, no. 6, June-July 1947, p. 378.
25. Comay to Shertok, 2 May 1947, ISA:2266/15.
26. M. Comay to Kirshner, 16 May 1947, CZA: S25/22813.
27. "Jews Raise Huge Funds to Fight the British," *Smith's Weekly*, 31 May and 7 June 1947.
28. Max Freilich, *Zion In Our Time: Memoirs of an Australian Zionist*, Sydney, 1967, pp. 167, 169-170.
29. *Palestine Post (PP)*, 14 May 1947.
30. Comay, "The Executive, Subject: Australian Representatives Palestine Committee," 11 June 1947, ISA:2266/15. "Extract from Statement of Foreign Affairs Tabled by the Minister for External Affairs — 6th June 1947," AA:A5954/1 2255/2.
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32. "Debate," 6 and 7 August, 1947, ISA:2270/1.
33. External Affairs for Hood, G.82, 11 August 1947, AA:A1068/1 M47/17/1/2.
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37. *Banativ*, October 1947 and February 1948, Melbourne.
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42. M. Comay to Secretary-General Zionist Federation of Australia and New Zealand, Sydney, 3 December 1947, *ISA:2266/15*.
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72. *SMH*, 20 January 1949.
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79. "Australia and Israel," *AA:A1838/238 851/12/3 Pt 1*.
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81. "Meeting of the Israeli Delegation to the UN General Assembly, Paris, 18 October 1948, *PADD*, document no. 32, pp. 65-66.
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83. *PP*, 25 November 1948.
84. Comay to Evatt, Paris 14 December 1948, *ISA:2391/35*. "Meeting: M. Comay — H. Evatt, Paris, 14 December 1948, *PADD*, vol. 2, pp. 295-297.

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86. Evatt to Burton, 26 December 1948, I.20436, *AA:A1838/1 191/1/4 Pt 1*.
87. *AA:A1838/250 175/1/2/1*.
88. External to Crotonate, 22 January 1949, *AA:A3318/1 L49/3/1/8 Pt 1*.
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103. *ISA:2452/2*.

104. *SMH*, 2 November 1948 and 17 December 1948.
105. M. Sharett, *B'shaar Haumot*, p. 337.
106. Chifley to Williams, UK HC, Canberra, *AA:A461/2 E350/1/3 Pt 1*.
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108. Australian UN Delegation, UN 245, 13 April 1949, *AA:A1838/238 851/12/3 Pt 2*.
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110. Australian Delegation, UN, NY, UN 302, *AA:A188 T184, 175/9/1*.
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