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Josiah Wedgwood and Palestine

CECIL BLOOM

Many non-Jews in British political life have been attracted to the Zionist cause. Arthur Balfour gave his name to the famous Declaration of 1917, but even before this, men such as Laurence Oliphant (1829–88) were fully supportive of Jews returning to the Promised Land. Apart from Balfour, a number of major British political figures during the Great War showed their sympathies both in speech and in action, including David Lloyd George, Winston Churchill and Leopold Amery. There were others too, such as Josiah Wedgwood, the great-grandson of the man of the same name who founded the world-famous pottery firm in 1759. A political figure of some significance in Britain in the interwar years, Wedgwood became a vociferous supporter of Zionism and a vigorous critic of his own government in regard to its Palestinian policies. He spoke much in the British Parliament in favour of Zionism, as well as speaking to outside bodies and writing on the subject; but, despite his deep commitment to Zionism, his activities on behalf of the movement have to a large extent been ignored by historians. In his biography, *The Last of the Radicals*, his niece, the distinguished writer Dame Veronica Wedgwood, devotes a chapter to his Zionist activities; but only one other writer, an American professor of history, Joshua B. Stein, seems to have written much on this subject. Elsewhere Wedgwood has received only brief mentions, if any.

Josiah Clement Wedgwood (1872–1943) was a Liberal Member of Parliament from 1906 to 1919, when he joined the Labour Party and he continued as a Labour MP until elevated to the House of Lords in 1942. He was a member of Ramsay MacDonald's first short-lived government in 1924, and had been Vice-Chairman of the Labour Party in 1922. It seems that Wedgwood first became aware of Zionism in 1915 through the Zion Mule Corps that provided support for the British Army in Gallipoli. He also served and was wounded there, and was impressed with the Mule Corps's work and admired their fighting spirit.¹ However, he was firm in asserting that he first became aware of Zionism 'as a creed' in the autumn of 1916 through his novelist friend Dorothy Richardson and her friend, Captain Berg of the Grenadier Guards, who arranged for him to 'address a meeting of the elect', when he began to see political and strategic value in a

¹ C. V. Wedgwood, *The Last of the Radicals* (London 1951) 182.

buffer state between a German Turkey and a British Egypt and Africa.² He recognized the merits of having a new state in Palestine that would give Britain strategic advantages as well as bringing peace and justice to Jews after two thousand years.³

Wedgwood may have been identified as a potential Zionist sympathizer before this, because Chaim Weizmann wrote that early in the war, in December 1914, C. P. Scott, the pro-Zionist editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, invited him with Lloyd George and Herbert Samuel to meet Weizmann in order to interest them in Zionism.⁴ In fact, Wedgwood makes no reference to this in his memoirs and wrote that his first real involvement with Zionism came in December 1916, when he attended one of Lloyd George's famous breakfast parties and met Weizmann. The topic of Zionism was, of course, on the agenda. Wedgwood followed up this exposure by speaking for the cause 'with much fervour'.⁵ Later that month, on a trip to the United States, he arranged to contact some American Zionists, and also discussed Zionism with Colonel House, President Wilson's advisor and confidant, who became America's chief delegate at the Versailles Peace Conference.⁶ In February 1917 Wedgwood suggested that the United States assume responsibility for Palestine and ensure that Jews be given the opportunity of realizing national aspirations. This proposal was similar to one made by Norman Hapgood, another individual with key links to the White House. Wedgwood believed that the United States would thereby be implicated in European politics and 'provide a buffer state to Egypt, Arabia and possibly India'.⁷ By 3 June that year, however, his views had modified, because he then wrote to Ramsay MacDonald to urge him to try to get Palestine for the Jews under either British or American protection. He saw the advantage of British protection in that it would allow Jewish masses to be British subjects; but American involvement would have the advantage of bringing them into European politics. He also told MacDonald in emphatic terms that Akaba at the head of the Red Sea should be in Palestine.⁸ Weizmann must have become concerned about Wedgwood's American suggestion because he wrote to him asking that they meet urgently to discuss it.⁹ This seems to have met Weizmann's objectives, because

² J. C. Wedgwood, *Memoirs of a Fighting Life* (London and Melbourne 1940) 132.

³ Wedgwood (see n. 1) 182.

⁴ C. Weizmann, *Trial and Error* (London 1949) 192.

⁵ Wedgwood (see n. 2) 133.

⁶ Wedgwood (see n. 1) 183.

⁷ *The Manchester Guardian* 1 Feb. 1917, p. 3.

⁸ Letter of 3 June 1917, Josiah Clement Wedgwood Papers, Keele University Library (hereafter JCW papers).

⁹ *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann* (hereafter CW): *Series A Letters*, ed. Leonard Stein (Oxford 1975), vol. VII, letter 331, p. 353.

Wedgwood as well as Hapgood came to accept Weizmann's view that Zionism would best prosper under a British protectorate.¹⁰

By this time it was clear that Wedgwood was firmly on the road to Zionism; he was involved if only on the periphery in the events leading to the November 1917 Balfour Declaration. At a meeting held only twelve days before Balfour's announcement, Wedgwood was loudly cheered for saying it was just as necessary to reconstruct a postwar Jewish nation in Palestine as it was to restore Belgium, Poland and Serbia. Jews were urged to avoid divisions among themselves and to prevent themselves from falling under the influence of a German *Kultur* that would help Germany gain material objectives under the guise of culture. He encouraged Jews once again to become a proud people and to say that Palestine was their country with Jerusalem its capital and the Lion of Judah its flag. He was certain that Germany saw Palestine as 'the high road to India', and added that he had it on 'the highest authority' both that France no longer opposed the Zionist idea, but was in favour, and that the Vatican was 'sympathetic'.¹¹ He once claimed that it was at a lunch with some leading Jewish figures that a plan was developed which ultimately became the Balfour Declaration, but this must be dismissed as somewhat fanciful.¹²

In the following years until his death, Wedgwood became a tireless if controversial Zionist supporter. Yet curiously, in his book of 1924 entitled *Essays and Adventures of a Labour MP*, he made no mention of anything Jewish. Indeed, he noted in its introduction that 'it is a matter of common knowledge that I exist only for the Single Tax' – he was in favour of a single tax based on land value.¹³ Once Britain had been given the Mandate in Palestine he was quick off the mark, asking in Parliament whether a civil administration would be set up to replace the military one then in operation.¹⁴ Some Jews wrote of their admiration of Wedgwood's strong support for Zionism. Norman Bentwich, who served as Attorney General in the Palestine Administration, admired him as 'the most intrepid fighter in Parliament for the Jews and Jewish National Home'.¹⁵ He eventually became a stringent critic both of the Mandate government and the Colonial Office; Barnett Janner, a Labour MP and a leading Zionist, called him a 'romantic nationalist who was unable to regard in apathy the possibility of reviving the Jewish nation on a revitalised Jewish soil'. Wedgwood once told

¹⁰ Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration* (London 1961) 424.

¹¹ *Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter *JC*) 26 Oct. 1917, p. 22.

¹² Wedgwood (see n. 2) 132–3.

¹³ J. C. Wedgwood, *Essays and Adventures of a Labour MP* (London 1924) 7.

¹⁴ *Hansard Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series, House of Commons CXXVIII* (hereafter *Hansard HC*) 1222.

¹⁵ N. Bentwich, *My Seventy-Seven Years* (London 1962) 85.

Janner that he could always be relied on to speak on Zionism and that he had always backed Zionism.¹⁶ Later, in 1932, Selig Brodetsky, one-time President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, a member of the World Zionist Executive and later President of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, wrote to him that 'it is good to know that we have in you a friend who sympathises and understands us'.¹⁷ Wedgwood joined in the enthusiasm around the activities that took place following the Balfour Declaration. At a crowded meeting in London in July 1918, arranged to welcome an American Zionist Medical Unit on its way to Palestine, Wedgwood said that the Zionists were going to do more than lay the foundation of a Hebrew University – something even greater than a University was being enacted.¹⁸ It was a foundation stone that converted a race into a nation, where all the evils of the old nations would be forgotten.¹⁹ 'See to it', he added, 'that in Palestine you set up a land of idealism and freedom not merely a land for Jews.'²⁰ A Parliamentary colleague of his, the pro-Zionist Labour MP J. M. Kenworthy (later Lord Strabolgi), gave him the highest praise when he wrote in 1933 that Wedgwood 'may yet be entrusted like Moses with the task of leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt. [He] may go further than Moses and complete the task by emulating his near namesake Joshua.'²¹ Winston Churchill wrote to him to say that, though Wedgwood could tell him nothing about the Palestine question that he (Churchill) did not know, there was very little 'you would be likely to say with which I am not in agreement'.²² To Leopold Amery he was an 'erratic but loveable champion of human liberty'.²³ But there were also some contrary views of him. Beatrice Webb, the wife of Sydney Webb (later the Colonial Secretary Lord Passfield), was scathing in her opinion of Wedgwood, whom she saw as a 'fanatical believer in crude political democracy on a strictly numerical basis'. She wrote that he demanded '*fervent partisanship* and that unless one was a *partisan* one must be a scoundrel [her italics]'.²⁴ The Webbs were very much opposed to Wedgwood's support of Jews and Zionism.

A leading Zionist historian, Israel Cohen, is one of the small number who wrote more than a few words about Wedgwood's support for Zionism. He referred to Wedgwood as the 'most resolute and militant Christian champion of the Zionist cause' and said of him in his autobiography:

¹⁶ E. Janner, *Barnett Janner, A Personal Portrait* (London 1984) 41.

¹⁷ Letter of 30 April 1932, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter CZA), File Z4/10.375.

¹⁸ *Zionist Review* Aug. 1918, p. 66.

¹⁹ Wedgwood (see n. 1) 184.

²⁰ J. B. Stein, *Our Great Solicitor, J. C. Wedgwood and the Jews* (London and Toronto 1992) 33.

²¹ J. M. Kenworthy, *Sailors, Statesmen – and Others* (London 1933) 310.

²² Letter undated, JCW papers.

²³ L. S. Amery, *My Political Life: Vol 1, 1896–1914* (London 1956) 225.

²⁴ B. Webb, *The Diary of Beatrice Webb: Vol. 4, 1924–43* (London 1985) 201.

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No debate on Palestine in the House of Commons ever took place in which he did not deliver a striking and provocative speech, and there was no searching or critical question in regard to the Jewish National Home that he was not prepared to put either to the Prime Minister or to the Colonial Secretary. . . . No Jewish MP ever ventured to indulge in such scathing attacks upon anti-Zionist or anti-Semitic officials in the Palestine administration with such courage and candour. . . . Indeed, the Zionist Executive sometimes felt uneasy because of the language that he often used, fearing that he might thereby do the cause more harm than good; and they often withheld information from him lest his use of it might prove detrimental. But no considerations could restrain him from his wholehearted advocacy of the Zionist cause at all times and in all places.²⁵

Wedgwood interested himself with events in Palestine even before Britain received the Mandate from the League of Nations in 1920, and he asked many questions in the House of Commons about the treatment of Palestinian Jews and on the country's future. But as time went on the Zionist leaders became apprehensive about some of his words. He spoke and wrote much on Zionist matters and he cooperated with Ramsay MacDonald, before the latter became Prime Minister in 1922, in writing two articles for the influential *Westminster Gazette*. Wedgwood likened Zionism to Labour Party socialism in that both created self-confidence and corporate self-respect.²⁶ However, there was another reason for support of a Jewish National Home in the Holy Land that was simply imperialistic. By the 1920s he had abandoned the view that American involvement in the region was necessary and he saw Palestine as a bridge between East and West that could replace Egypt's role in this regard. Egypt had become somewhat estranged from Britain, and Britain could be more certain of being able to protect its Indian and East African possessions with Palestine as a new Eastern Mediterranean centre of British power.²⁷ Wedgwood once called Palestine the 'Clapham Junction of the Commonwealth', because both air and ocean routes crossed there.²⁸

Weizmann's papers show that he thought quite highly of Wedgwood, as did Arthur Balfour's niece Blanche Dugdale, who has been described as the leading Gentile of her generation and who was a close confidante of Weizmann. The two men were on good terms and seem to have had a friendly relationship. Once they both went on a trip together to Holland 'to preach Zionism', as Wedgwood put it²⁹ – but Weizmann's papers point to

²⁵ I. Cohen, *A Jewish Pilgrimage* (London 1956) 342.

²⁶ J. C. Wedgwood, *The Seventh Dominion* (London 1928) 123.

²⁷ J. B. Stein, 'Josiah Wedgwood's Zionism', *Midstream*, Nov. 1985, p. 23.

²⁸ Wedgwood (see n. 26) 3.

²⁹ Wedgwood (see n. 2) 179.

his having had some doubts about Wedgwood. Wedgwood had gone to America on *Keren Hayesod* (national fund) business in 1922 and Weizmann initially wrote to the Americans to congratulate them on having found 'such an excellent advocate' for their cause.³⁰ But within a few weeks he was writing to a Zionist colleague that it was fatal to leave Wedgwood on his own in America without his being accompanied by Zionist officials, because that could do more harm than good. He also questioned the wisdom of sending a non-Jew on this project. Weizmann was worried too that he could fall into the hands of those opposed to the official Zionist Organization and be 'turned off from the real object of his journey'.³¹ This was probably a fear of possible links with Jabotinsky and his associates. (Wedgwood took up Jabotinsky's case after he had been imprisoned at Acre jail in 1920 for defending Jews against Arab riots, on which see later.) Yet Weizmann should have had little concern, because Wedgwood's speeches in America at that time were satisfactory. He addressed the United Palestine Appeal in New York where he told his audience that there was room for a million Jews in Palestine, and he told the campaign for a Palestine Foundation Fund that there were no grounds for suspecting British motives vis-à-vis the Mandate and that 'the Jews have behind them the fairest and justest portion of the British people... Great Britain needs the Jews in Palestine. But do not the Jews also need Great Britain in Palestine? It is this need which gives reality and permanence to the contract.' He told his audience that they had got to pour men and money into Palestine.³² Wedgwood also told American Jewry that the British Labour Party had Jewish interests at heart. 'British labour has the sense to know what the people who stir up racial feeling against Jews or against foreigners are [up to]. We want Palestine to be a state similar to Ireland to which Jews can go if they like and take up their share in governing under the British Mandate.'³³

In 1926 Weizmann told the Zionist Executive in London that Wedgwood had made an excellent impression on another trip he made to America (soon after one to Palestine).³⁴ There he made speeches to Jewish audiences in four cities. He pointed out to his Boston audience that many Jews were settling in Palestine and that manufacturing operations were opening up so successfully that Haifa would soon be rivalling Alexandria as the major port in that part of the world. Agricultural progress was remarkable, too, where men from the ghettos of Eastern Europe were 'setting an example to the world in the re-creation of a dead country'. As a prelude to

³⁰ CW letters, vol. XI, ed. Bernard Wasserstein, letter 193, pp. 169–70.

³¹ Ibid. letter 201, p. 178.

³² *New York Times* (hereafter *NYT*) 9 Oct. 1922, p. 2.

³³ Ibid. 7 Oct. 1922, p. 15.

³⁴ CW letters, vol. XIII, ed. P. Ofer, letter 137, p. 168.

his future thinking, he added that he hoped the country would eventually achieve self-government within the British Empire. In New York he brought greetings from his Labour Party to trade unionists and told them that he was working to establish a Jewish nation whose members would not be outcasts. To the Covenant Club in Chicago he urged Jews to drop their harps and pick up the trumpets that had destroyed the walls of Jericho. 'Read the pages of Josephus. We want more of the Maccabees and less Jeremiah.' Zionism should be an outward and visible sign of a glorious and successful nationhood.³⁵ *Keren Hayesod* in London published his four addresses in a booklet, *Palestine: The Fight for Jewish Freedom and Honour* (1926). Wedgwood's words in America were highly optimistic, but his earlier Palestine visit gave him insight into the problems faced by the Jews living there. While full of praise for the Jewish agricultural settlements, he was critical of the Administration.³⁶ Wedgwood was conscious that agricultural development was crucial for successful Jewish colonization. In a long foreword to a book dealing with land issues, published in 1926, he wrote that every Zionist recognized that success depended on getting adequate land, and that a Jewish majority and a safe country depended on getting as much land as possible. The sooner this happened the sooner would there be a Jewish majority in the country; he emphasized that Jews had to demonstrate their ability to be good producers of food, not just good middlemen. He was in favour of the Jewish National Fund owning the land and leasing it on a heredity basis in 'family-holding areas'; the term 'family' was intended to cover cooperative settlements.³⁷ Weizmann again praised him after Wedgwood visited South Africa in 1930, when he wrote to express his gratitude for Wedgwood's work there on a *Keren Hayesod* campaign.³⁸

In time, Wedgwood's independent opinions started to border on eccentricity and the Zionist leadership became wary of him, as his unconventional approach towards the Colonial Office and to the Palestine Administration developed. Levi Bakstansky, the General Secretary of the English Zionist Federation, once wrote to Weizmann: 'Wedgwood, of course, has some very queer ideas in general', but added that 'despite his peculiar ideas, he does help us'.³⁹ Even the Zionists in Palestine became cautious of him. During his 1926 trip to Palestine, he addressed the *Ahdut ha-Avoda* (Unity of Labour). This party, the principal one in the *Yishuv* at that time, had agreed with the Mandate government on an electoral system for municipalities based on separate Arab and Jewish electorates and, therefore, separate seats

³⁵ Stein (see n. 20) 36–9.

³⁶ M. Gilbert, *Exile and Return* (Philadelphia and New York 1978) 150.

³⁷ A. Granovsky, *Land Problems in Palestine* (London 1926) ix–xv.

³⁸ CW letters, vol. XIV, ed. C. Dresner, letter 217, p. 245.

³⁹ Letter of 11 March 1939, CZA file Z4/17043.

in each assembly. However, Wedgwood believed this system was the antithesis of democracy as it distinguished between Jewish and Arab workers and prevented them from voting for socialist candidates whose ethnic origins were irrelevant. He feared that a Palestinian society would never be able to progress to a liberal society as in Britain, and he urged *Ahdut ha-Avoda* to reverse its decision, which he believed threatened the whole future of the country because it could lead to serious conflict between Arabs and Jews. David Ben-Gurion, however, managed to convince him both that it would not be appropriate to have elected democratic institutions until there was a Jewish majority, and that the Arab-Jewish dispute differed from those elsewhere in the world.⁴⁰ These interventions made local Labour politicians suspicious of Wedgwood's judgement, although they never questioned his motives. Despite all these concerns, his standing was high enough for him to be the guest of honour in Jerusalem to mark the ninth anniversary of the Balfour Declaration.⁴¹

This visit to Palestine was a turning point in Wedgwood's thinking, because it convinced him that 'the best Jews in the whole world' lived in a country that had the worst administration in the whole of the British Empire.⁴² He wrote to his friend Lord Irwin, then Viceroy of India, that 'we have a very second rate lot of officials in Palestine, lazy, blind and sulky', but he advised Irwin to stop off at Palestine on his return to Britain in order to see the Jewish colonies, which were 'really remarkable – an agricultural population with their heads up'.⁴³ Wedgwood then proceeded to develop a plan to change the situation in the country. He proposed that Palestine together with Transjordan should become a land with a Jewish majority, leading to its becoming a Crown Colony and then a fully fledged (seventh) dominion within the British Empire. These views were aired in a book entitled *The Seventh Dominion* published early in 1928 (interestingly, under the Labour Party's own imprint). Wedgwood saw this seventh dominion as being a reaffirmation of an alliance with the Jewish people, but one which would be different from other British colonies where local populations were dominated by the home country. Furthermore, the antagonisms experienced in countries such as Iraq and India would be avoided. It was in British interests to have an amicable people in Palestine and he wanted the Administration to regard the Jewish settlers as they would British ones. Palestine would be a place where Britain would have a friendly population; to add it to the Commonwealth would be 'another free feather in our cap of democracy – that the Jews too should be part of the

⁴⁰ J. Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism* (London 1983) 40–2.

⁴¹ *The Times* 4 Nov. 1926, p. 13.

⁴² Wedgwood (see n. 2) 194.

⁴³ Gilbert (see n. 36) 150.

“family”⁴⁴ He criticized the Administration on many grounds: its tax system was primitive and outdated, land distribution was counter-productive and, even worse, the Administration was slothful, incompetent and anti-Semitic. It was from this time that his intemperate criticisms and attacks on the anti-Semitism of Palestinian and Colonial Office officials really began to appear. To him, a Jewish majority capable of achieving independence within the British Commonwealth was the only meaningful solution to Palestinian problems. The book received a mixed reception. *The Times* thought it was full of interesting proposals and commented that Wedgwood made breezy suggestions full of good sense, although some of these could probably be made by administrative decree;⁴⁵ but the pro-Zionist *Manchester Guardian* called his attitude to Arabs absurd as well as philistine. *The Observer* believed it was a book written with enthusiasm that raised doubts about its author’s judgement, but the paper conceded it closed with a fine justification of Zionism.⁴⁶ The *Jewish Chronicle* believed that Wedgwood’s plan could mark a vital point in Jewish history and was an attempt to have British non-Jews get Jews to utilize the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate in a manner that would benefit both them and the British Empire. The Government should endeavour to encourage and stimulate Jewish effort so that Palestine might develop into a seventh dominion.⁴⁷ Norman Bentwich told Wedgwood that his book was ‘extremely interesting and very good for all of us’,⁴⁸ and Nahum Sokolow hoped that time would allow full consideration to be given to the weight of Wedgwood’s argument, although it appeared to him that, at that present time, the scheme was a ‘sort of *pium desideratum*’.⁴⁹ Mainstream Zionist concern about Wedgwood’s sometimes inflammatory language could, however, have resulted in a break with him. In December 1928 Berthold Feival, Weizmann’s political and economic adviser in London, wrote to the Zionist Executive to tell its members that Wedgwood had threatened to withdraw from Zionist activities because he suspected he was not being trusted as much as other non-Jews such as Blanche Dugdale and Wyndham Deedes.⁵⁰ Yet any rancour must have blown over because he was soon active again with his Seventh Dominion scheme.

In an effort to put pressure on the Government to move Palestine into this new constituent of the British Empire, Wedgwood followed up his

⁴⁴ Wedgwood (see n. 26) 3.

⁴⁵ *The Times* 2 March 1928, p. 19.

⁴⁶ N. A. Rose, *The Gentile Zionists* (London 1973) 75.

⁴⁷ *JC* 15 Feb. 1928, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Letter of 10 March 1928, JCW papers.

⁴⁹ Letter of 5 July 1928, *ibid*.

⁵⁰ Letter of 14 Dec. 1928, CZA file 24/10.375.

book by founding the Seventh Dominion League at a large meeting in March 1929. MPs from the three major parties were on the platform, but the Zionist Organization was not officially represented and Joseph Cowan was the only Jewish Zionist of note on the platform. Wedgwood must have suspected that Weizmann would be cool about his scheme because he wrote to him before the meeting asking him not to oppose it. 'I want to believe that I am not starting something of which you personally disapprove for we have worked so long together – twelve years now – and old friendships are more cherished as one gets older.'⁵¹ At this meeting Wedgwood said he saw this new League as the reaffirmation of an alliance that had come through the War and he wanted the Administration in Palestine to look on Jewish settlers just as they would English ones. The Mandate should continue until Britain was satisfied its duty was complete and that the country was fit for self-government and as a home for the Jewish people. At that point he hoped that those living in the country – Jew and Arab – would be friendly enough to preserve their connection. Jews had been an unmixed benefit for the Arab working classes and he was satisfied that Jewish control would not allow Jews to exploit Arabs. The League's main objective was to have a friendly people in Palestine who 'by their peaceful presence would be a sufficient safeguard'. He dismissed objections to his scheme as being anti-League of Nations, pointing out that all Britain's dominions were represented at that body with complete freedom to act as each thought fit.⁵²

In an interview with the *Jewish Chronicle*, Wedgwood said that he had been led to find a solution to the problem because cooperation between the Mandate government and Jews had virtually ceased. The English had to show both Jews and the world that they and the Jews were not ashamed of being friends; the development of British culture and Jewish ideals in the East was of great moral and imperial value. He said he had endeavoured to show what could be done in Palestine, what kind of regime was necessary there to achieve the Zionist task and what concessions the government must provide to make Jewish settlement successful. The Jews for their part should begin to think of their future in association with the British Empire. His programme envisaged Palestine as part of the British Commonwealth of Nations, but he was certain that this did not show any disregard to the League of Nations or to the Mandate. He emphasized that the British Government must facilitate the absorption into Palestine of great numbers of Jews and so transform the country into a real Jewish National Home.⁵³

The Seventh Dominion League helped to crystallize thinking about Palestine's future, and at first British public opinion showed some sympathy

⁵¹ Letter of 31 Jan. 1929, JCW papers.

⁵² *JC* 1 March 1929, pp. 9–10

⁵³ *JC* 15 Feb 1929, p. 21.

to the scheme in that it was a way of retaining a strong British presence in the Middle East. But attitudes towards the League soon changed. The *Jewish Chronicle* initially favoured it, believing it ‘may well prove to be a vital point in Jewish history’. It saw the scheme as an invitation for Jews to utilize the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate in a manner that could benefit them as well as the British Empire.⁵⁴ The Colonial Office, however, quickly dismissed Wedgwood’s proposals as ‘visionary and impractical’.⁵⁵ Weizmann and his supporters were opposed because of fears of hostility from both the United States and Germany. In fact Weizmann wrote to his wife Vera to ask her to tell Blanche Dugdale to direct Wedgwood ‘away from this *Seventh Dominion* business’.⁵⁶ Weizmann made no reference to the Seventh Dominion League in his autobiography, which says much about his view of Wedgwood’s proposed scheme.

There was one Zionist group favourably inclined to the League – the Revisionist Party led by Ze’ev Jabotinsky. Jabotinsky and his followers were always in opposition to mainstream Zionism and their support for the League marked the start of a friendship between Jabotinsky and Wedgwood that lasted until the former’s death in 1940. The two men must have discussed Wedgwood’s plan some months before he published his book, because Jabotinsky wrote to him in October 1927 to ask for elaboration of the plan. He wrote that he [Jabotinsky] ‘would not shrink from something like direct annexation, fixing the status of the country forever as part of the British Commonwealth, now a Crown Colony, and in the end a Dominion’.⁵⁷ Jabotinsky said of Wedgwood’s campaign soon after its launch that it had ‘my unbounded enthusiastic support’, adding that having Palestine as a seventh dominion would mean that England would have a permanent say in that part of the Mediterranean. He predicted that the idea would become popular among Palestinian Jewry.⁵⁸ Jabotinsky told Wedgwood that *The Seventh Dominion* was ‘more than brilliant and clever – it is a service to both causes, the British and the Zionist’, and that he was especially in favour of the idea ‘to make the British official directly responsible for the success of Jewish colonisation’. The concept gained his unreserved approval, and he added that ‘had we even today a 99% majority in Palestine, I, the extremist, would still fight every idea of independence and would insist on keeping within the British Empire’. Jabotinsky told Wedgwood that he liked ‘the slogan’ and was not averse to asking his organization to accept it because this would make it ‘a household term in all

⁵⁴ Ibid. 15 Feb. 1929, p. 16.

⁵⁵ S. Brodetsky, *Memoirs: From Ghetto to Israel* (London 1960) 153.

⁵⁶ CW letters, vol. XIII, ed. P. Ofer, letter 484, p. 541.

⁵⁷ Letter of 15 Oct. 1927, JCW papers.

⁵⁸ *JC* 2 Aug. 1929, p. 16.

Zionist discussions'. The Revisionist Conference held in Vienna in December 1928 resolved that there was no contradiction between the idea of a Jewish Palestine and eventual Dominion status within the British Commonwealth.⁵⁹ Wedgwood assisted Jabotinsky on numerous occasions during his struggle with the authorities in Palestine, and when a branch of the Seventh Dominion League was formed in Jerusalem in May 1929, Jabotinsky became its chairman until he was expelled from the country.⁶⁰ He was clearly enthusiastic about *The Seventh Dominion* because he once wrote to Wedgwood to tell him that he had heard from a 'Mr Steimatsky who was a bookseller in Jerusalem' that he wanted to publish a Hebrew edition of the book. Steimatsky had told Jabotinsky that he had had 'a colossal' success with the English edition, of which he had sold three hundred copies in his shops in Jerusalem and Jaffa. This was considered a good sale in a country where even educated people spoke little English. Steimatsky was certain that a Hebrew edition would be 'a little avalanche' and he wanted Jabotinsky to write an introduction to it.⁶¹ Mr Steimatsky must have been the founder of the well-known Israeli book chain established in 1925. The Revisionists did ask the League to include the principle of a Jewish majority in Palestine into its programme, but, for their part, Palestinian Labour feared that this could result in many governments placing difficulties in the way of their Jewish nationals wanting to support the Zionist movement. Labour was also worried that, in the light of a hostile attitude shown by the Arab press to the idea of converting the country into a British colony, which would result in the anglicization of the Arab population, the plan would further estrange Jew and Arab.⁶²

Wedgwood's relationship with Jabotinsky is intriguing given their different political positions, one essentially an old-fashioned politician with liberal values and the other a militant right-wing anti-establishment figure who, as far as Zionist politics were concerned, was a vigorous opponent of the Weizmann whom Wedgwood claimed was a sincere friend. There is one letter from Jabotinsky to Wedgwood that gives details of Jabotinsky's personal intentions regarding a permanent return to Palestine and what he hoped to do there.⁶³ Yet perhaps their association was not all that strange. Jabotinsky from an early stage in his active life was convinced that the Jews of Palestine had to take up arms to defend themselves, and Wedgwood too believed Jews needed to establish their own defence. When Jabotinsky was

⁵⁹ J. B. Schechtman, *Fighter and Prophet. The Vladimir Jabotinsky Story: The Last Years* (New York and London 1961) 108–9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 109.

⁶¹ Letter of 21 Aug. 1928, JCW papers.

⁶² *JC* 1 March 1929, p. 12.

⁶³ Letter of 21 August 1928, JCW papers.

sentenced to prison in Acre jail after he had led a defensive force following Arab riots in 1920, Wedgwood had asked questions in Parliament (as did Kenworthy) about his treatment in jail,⁶⁴ and later claimed that he was responsible for Jabotinsky's subsequent release from prison. He was also involved in Jabotinsky's 1928 campaign against an Arab parliament when he arranged a dinner in the House of Commons for this purpose.⁶⁵ On Jabotinsky's behalf in September 1931 he asked questions in the House of Commons on whether his friend could be allowed back into Palestine, from which he had been expelled the previous year.⁶⁶ He also asked about the arrest and trial of the Revisionist supporters who were accused of the assassination of Chaim Arlosoroff in Tel Aviv in 1934.⁶⁷ The Labour leaders in the *Yishuv* were always apprehensive about links between Wedgwood, the Labour politician, and Jabotinsky and, when Wedgwood visited Palestine in December 1933, Moshe Shertok sent a coded message to Ben-Gurion to warn him to beware of Wedgwood's being drawn into Revisionist circles.⁶⁸ Wedgwood was completely in sympathy with Jabotinsky's attempts to get Jews into Palestine, even though this was officially illegal: in April 1939 he addressed a letter 'To Whom It May Concern' in which he fully and unreservedly supported Jabotinsky's work in getting Jews into the country.⁶⁹ He quickly followed this up by telling a meeting at the Anglo-Palestine Club in London that Palestinian Jews would not do their duty unless immigration were made possible and, in the end, legal.⁷⁰ Wedgwood even supported Jabotinsky on the platform when he presided at a Revisionist rally in Leeds in 1939 that was addressed by Jabotinsky.⁷¹ For their part, the Revisionists wrote to him on a number of occasions to congratulate him for his support for militant Zionism,⁷² and to celebrate Jabotinsky's fiftieth birthday Wedgwood was asked by the editors of *Ressviet*, the main organ of the Revisionist movement, for an article on their leader.⁷³ The two men must have formed a fairly close friendship in later years because in one letter Wedgwood addressed Jabotinsky as 'Jabo'.⁷⁴ With this letter Wedgwood enclosed one he had received from a man whose two sons he had helped to enter Palestine illegally, and he asked Jabotinsky for help to try to get the father into the country as

⁶⁴ Hansard HC CXXVIII 1022.

⁶⁵ Schechtman (see n. 59) 107.

⁶⁶ Hansard HC CCLVI 816-17.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* CCXC 32.

⁶⁸ Stein (see n. 27) 24-5.

⁶⁹ Letter of 8 April 1939, Jabotinsky Institute (hereafter JI) Archives.

⁷⁰ Schechtman (see n. 59) 426.

⁷¹ Bentwich (see n. 15) 85.

⁷² Letters of 30 Oct. 1931 and 24 April 1932, JI Archives.

⁷³ Letter of 12 Oct. 1930, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Letter of 28 June 1939, *ibid.*

well. After Jabotinsky's death he eulogized him, writing 'All illegal immigrants in Palestine really owe [Jabotinsky] their lives and present liberties. Others would not have dared [to conduct illegal immigration] had he not led the way'.⁷⁵ Wedgwood also greatly helped Jabotinsky when Jabotinsky's son Eri got into trouble with the British authorities. Eri was involved in getting Romanian refugees into Palestine clandestinely, but was arrested when a ship carrying the refugees was stopped by the British and escorted to Haifa. The refugees were eventually released, but Eri was taken into custody. Wedgwood unsuccessfully demanded in the House of Commons that Eri be tried in a court of justice, but he received a twelve-month sentence.⁷⁶ He asked questions about Eri's situation on a number of occasions, at one point telling government ministers that Eri was only guilty of having saved two thousand lives from the Danube, and that he was puzzled that there was persistent persecution of a man whose father 'is doing his best to help this country'.⁷⁷ In view of the connection between the two men, it is curious that Wedgwood did not mention Jabotinsky in his autobiography of 1940.

Few non-Jews in Britain seemed to show much interest in the League even though there were eminent politicians on the platform at the inaugural meeting. Leopold Amery favoured the scheme in principle, but it appears that, apart from Wedgwood, Kenworthy was the only non-Jew of note who supported the concept of a Jewish state within the British Commonwealth.⁷⁸ The mainstream Zionist leaders voiced uncertainties about the scheme. Chaim Arlosoroff, one of the Labour leaders in the *Yishuv* and a political theoretician of note, examined the proposal carefully but reached no firm conclusions on its merit. He suggested that Palestine might become the ninth dominion, being preceded by India and East Africa, and he saw both economic and political advantages in *Eretz Israel* being part of the Commonwealth. However, one grave disadvantage was that once linked directly to Britain it would become partisan in its siding with one power, which could alienate Jews elsewhere. Then the Jewish National Home would be likely to lose its position as the centre of the whole Jewish nation. Nevertheless, this leading Jewish intellectual did not reject Wedgwood's plan.⁷⁹ It was the August 1929 Arab riots that marked the end of the League, nevertheless, as its supporters came to accept that the manner in which British-Zionist relations were changing gave the scheme little chance of success.⁸⁰ Some eighteen months after the inaugural meeting,

⁷⁵ *Jewish Standard* 9 Aug. 1940, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Schechtman (see n. 59) 431.

⁷⁷ Hansard HC CCCLXII 428.

⁷⁸ Rose (see n. 46) 89.

⁷⁹ C. Arlosoroff, 'The Ninth Dominion', *The New Palestine*, 5 April 1929, pp. 291-3, 308-9.

⁸⁰ Rose (see n. 46) 80.

Wedgwood had to concede that his plan was dead, although he claimed some success for it both inside and outside Parliament. He warned, however, that unless there was a radical change in British policy the Jewish Agency could press for the Mandate to be transferred elsewhere and he actually suggested Holland as the least anti-Semitic country suitable for this.⁸¹ Paradoxically, some interest was shown in Wedgwood's plan (albeit some years after it had folded) when, although the Seventh Dominion League was not mentioned, the Labour Party International Department Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions in 1935 expressed the hope that Palestine might eventually become a self-governing dominion within the Commonwealth.⁸² A similar proposal was put forward a year later by an organization called the Palestine Crown Colony Association, supported by some British and Palestinian Jews.⁸³ Within a short while this association collected several thousand signatures to a petition calling for the status of Palestine to be changed to that of a British Crown Colony. Wedgwood offered some support by organizing a meeting aimed at establishing a parliamentary section of the Association, but the plan collapsed after much pressure from Mrs Dugdale and others.⁸⁴ This was not, however, the end of this issue, because in January 1938 the Board of Deputies resolved that it would 'welcome a solution for the future of Palestine which will provide for the establishment of a Jewish Dominion within the British Commonwealth of Nations'.⁸⁵ The Board does not, however, appear to have taken the matter any further.

Wedgwood's judgement on his country's motives relating to Palestine changed dramatically and from 1929 onwards he became an obsessive critic of the Mandate government, not infrequently accusing its officials there of being 'ordinary, narrow-minded, half-bred Englishmen who feel about Jews just as their counterpart Herr Hitler does'.⁸⁶ Once, in the House of Commons, he accused the Government of anti-Semitism and of being a 'disgrace to England',⁸⁷ and he never ceased making similar remarks. In fact, 1929 was an important year in the Arab-Jew conflict. Wedgwood was saying in April that the Administration was antagonistic to 'the most important element in the country – the Jews',⁸⁸ and he followed this up with a condemnation of Arabs for the attacks on the Western Wall in

⁸¹ *The Times* 30 Oct. 1930, p. 10.

⁸² Stein (see n. 27) 25.

⁸³ Rose (see n. 46) 83.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 90.

⁸⁵ *JC* 21 Jan. 1938, p. 26.

⁸⁶ W. B. Ziff, *The Rape of Palestine* (London 1948) 177

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 295.

⁸⁸ *The Times* 1 May 1929, p. 8

August, blaming the Arab police force for not acting properly. Wedgwood saw the Arab rising as a premeditated one and he pressed for a larger Jewish element in the police force and urged the Government to send a commission to investigate.⁸⁹ He consistently attacked Arab motives and actions in the interwar period and was continuously pleading for a Jewish police force to protect the Jewish population. In a speech to the Anglo-Palestine Club in November 1929 he said that a trustworthy police force was needed, but that the Administration appeared to be neutral between ‘murdered and murderers’. Nevertheless, he was sure that Arab workers benefited from Jewish capital and Jewish methods of agriculture, as well as Jewish and Western civilization.⁹⁰ So strong were his views that he once said that if he had been in charge of Palestine in 1929 he would have hanged the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem outside the Damascus Gate.⁹¹ At a huge protest meeting in London following the massacres in August 1929, he asserted that British honour was at stake in the light of the official reaction to the massacres; he commented that the official figures issued had an uncanny resemblance to communiqués given during pogroms in Russia. Only a Jewish police force together with a Jewish Palestine defence force officered by the British could provide a reliable safeguard for the Jewish settlers. He pleaded for a united Jewish front – united from San Francisco to Shanghai and across the board, Zionist and non-Zionist, both mainstream and Revisionist as well as religious and secular.⁹² Weizmann has written of this period that Wedgwood ‘always stood staunchly with us’.⁹³ A Parliamentary Committee for Palestine under Wedgwood’s chairmanship was then set up comprising members (Jews and non-Jews) from the three political parties with the objectives of promoting the Mandate government’s policy and supporting the colonization of the country.⁹⁴ Two years later another committee, the Parliamentary Palestine Committee, was formed to watch over the interests of the Jewish National Home, this time with Wedgwood as vice-chairman.⁹⁵ He kept a careful eye on all Palestine developments, and in April 1932 was again accusing the Administration, this time for ‘not playing the game’ because it was disloyal to British ideals. He wanted typical Colonial officials to replace those of the Administration.⁹⁶

Wedgwood’s obsession with the conduct of the Mandate government

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 28 Aug. 1929, p. 13.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 28 Nov. 1929, p. 11.

⁹¹ Hansard HC CCXC 120.

⁹² *JC* 6 Sept. 1929, p. 24.

⁹³ Weizmann (see n. 4) 411.

⁹⁴ *JC* 15 Nov. 1929, p. 24.

⁹⁵ *The Times* 27 Nov. 1931, p. 11.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 23 April 1932, p. 7.

regularly erupted in accusations of anti-Semitism against its officials, which were vigorously denied. He called the Administration the most profoundly anti-Semitic government in the British Empire and pointed to statistics that showed Arab immigration to be growing while immigration of Jews was being restricted. Even medical practitioners were being obstructed from entry into the country.⁹⁷ He also complained about the manner in which the Arab community was being given funds for schools and for road-building whereas Jewish needs were being neglected.⁹⁸ When a proposal to grant a constitution to Palestine was put forward, Wedgwood believed the suggested plans could lead to violence, and he was worried that the Jewish minority would be left helpless and that racial and religious bitterness would be encouraged.⁹⁹ A House of Commons debate on Palestine in March 1936 in which the Government was criticized from all sides pleased Wedgwood so much that he wrote to his daughter 'I have had a successful week ... actually slain the Palestine Constitution. I got Churchill and Chamberlain, Amery and Sinclair all to speak and they did, leaving the Rt Hon J. H. Thomas [the Colonial Secretary] in tears.'¹⁰⁰ Wedgwood was strongly against the partition of Palestine, believing that the first early proposals were actuated by a fit of sheer pique to annoy Jewry.¹⁰¹ At about this time, the senior Labour politician Sir Stafford Cripps put forward a plan aimed at bringing peace to the country that involved the establishment of two independent autonomous states within a federation; Wedgwood was forceful in attacking it because it smacked of the wisdom of Solomon and seemed to favour partition.¹⁰²

In 1937 Wedgwood appeared as a witness before the Peel Royal Commission, after requesting to give evidence on the basis of being 'the principal critic of the Administration for the past eighteen years'. There were only two witnesses on the day he appeared; the other was Jabotinsky for whose appearance he was responsible. He knew that Jabotinsky would make a strong indictment of the Administration and was naturally anxious for the Commission to hear the latter's views. At first, Jabotinsky's attendance did not appear to be possible because the Commission was then taking its evidence in Palestine and Jabotinsky was barred from the country; but, thanks primarily to Wedgwood, Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. Patterson (the former Commanding Officer of the Zion Mule Corps and Royal Fusiliers' Jewish Battalion and then an associate of Jabotinsky's) and Kenworthy (by

⁹⁷ Ibid. 30 July 1935, p. 10.

⁹⁸ Hansard HC CCXC 107–8.

⁹⁹ *The Times* 3 Jan. 1936, p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ Wedgwood (see n. 1) 191.

¹⁰¹ Wedgwood (see n. 26) 74.

¹⁰² Rose (see n. 46) 126.

then Lord Strabolgi), it was agreed after much argument that Jabotinsky's evidence would be taken in London.¹⁰³ In his evidence Wedgwood told the Commission that Palestine had more British public officials than anywhere else, and that they had become anti-Jew and pro-Arab; there was no contact with Jews. Jews were not allowed to arm themselves for self-defence and he begged Peel 'not to sound the death-knell of Jewry' in his report but 'censure misconduct just as British people should do'.¹⁰⁴ After Peel's proposals were published, Weizmann organized a meeting attended by, among others, the Labour leader Clement Attlee, the Liberal leader Archibald Sinclair, Winston Churchill, Leopold Amery and Wedgwood; all except Amery were against partition, especially Attlee who was firm in his belief that partition would mean a concession to violence, a confession of failure and the triumph of fascism.¹⁰⁵ Wedgwood also spoke against partition when Peel's report was debated in the House of Commons, saying that it had utterly disregarded the needs of Palestinian Jewry and that attempts to put pressure on Jews by limiting immigration were mean. Partition was unfair because of the restrictions it placed on the territory to be awarded to the Jewish population, and the proposals were 'cowardly' and fatal to British prestige; the policy had failed thanks to official sabotage.¹⁰⁶ He believed, however, that the situation could be salvaged because the Jews 'could look after themselves'. The move for an independent Arab state, the brainchild of the Administration, was neither in British interests nor in those of Arab *fellaheen*. An Arab state with a Mediterranean port and an open frontier with Egypt would open its doors to arms and propaganda that would result in Britain losing the friendship both of Palestinian Jewry and of the United States. Britain's friends would show pity, but its enemies contempt.¹⁰⁷ Wedgwood's views on partition may not have been as forceful as they seemed, however, because Blanche Dugdale is on record as saying that although Wedgwood did not favour partition he was not as violent in his view as she had previously been led to think. He had told her that six months of resolute government could make all the proposed plans unnecessary.¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, despite his controversial views and super-critical attitude to Palestinian problems, he was still recognized by many as a politician whose opinions were relevant. Controversy he courted. Notwithstanding his moderate left-wing politics, he began to move markedly towards the Revisionist position. He replied in May 1938 to a letter from the Jewish

¹⁰³ Schechtman (see n. 59) 305–6.

¹⁰⁴ *The Times* 12 Feb. 1937, p. 16.

¹⁰⁵ Rose (see n. 46) 132.

¹⁰⁶ *JC* 16 July 1937, p. 31.

¹⁰⁷ *The Times* 21 July 1937, p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ B. Dugdale, *Baffy: The Diaries of Blanche Dugdale 1936–47* (London 1973) 41.

Former Army Officers' Association in Palestine asking for his help following the Peel report on partition:

[G]overnments only give way to action. Demands backed by nothing but a sense of justice, play little part in modern history... I do not think reprisals in the form of murdering *innocent* [his italics] Arabs is morally justifiable. When ordinary law breaks down lynch law generally takes its place. That is better than murdering innocent people; but I cannot advocate that, nor can I judge of its necessity. But I think you are morally entitled to arm to defend yourselves and your outlying colonies and to erect such defences as are possible... There remains such passive resistance as Ghandi put into practice in South Africa and in India. Such action needs solidarity and the will to suffer by going to prison.

He then pointed out that passive resistance could take several forms, such as occupying land and refusing to leave, refusing to pay taxes, refusing to recognize courts and therefore going to prison, as well as attending demonstrations that had been declared illegal. In addition, illegal literature could be distributed and illegal immigration assisted. He continued:

Last year some Jewish illegal immigrants were marched in chains to Acre jail. I think if you had freed them on that march, even by violence, British public opinion would have supported you and it would never have occurred again... You expect me to protest in Parliament. I am not going to do so any more. It is for the Jews of Palestine to stop that sort of thing. The same applies to Jews arrested for carrying arms. The Bastille was pulled down for less than this... You must have a willingness to suffer as well as a united willingness to help the sufferers. ... You curse [British officials] behind their backs; try cursing them to their face. ... If you dare not, you are not worthy of your country... Like you I want to see a free, manly, fighting people like the Maccabees in Palestine once again. I want to see an army of 40,000 Jews fit to defend all that you and I hold dear. With reluctance I have come to the conclusion that only by the hard road laid down above can we arrive.¹⁰⁹

His letter caused a political storm: it was described as an 'outrage' by the Foreign Office and even moderate Zionists were not pleased, calling his proposals 'lazy'. Jabotinsky's Revisionists were, of course, ecstatic and they included the letter in a pamphlet issued under the title 'Colonel Wedgwood calls Jewish youth to revolt', which was subsequently banned under the emergency regulations then in force.¹¹⁰ There appear to have been two versions of Wedgwood's letter in circulation in the *Yishuv*, because the

¹⁰⁹ Wedgwood (see n. 1) 191–3. Letter in CZA file J1/2001.

¹¹⁰ *The Times* 20 July 1938, p. 13.

Jewish Agency wrote to Arthur Lourie, the Political Secretary at the Zionist Executive in London, to tell him this and claimed that Wedgwood's letter had been seriously distorted in Hebrew versions. Lourie was told that the body to whom Wedgwood had written consisted of 'some fussy and presumptuous nonentities with patent Revisionist leanings'.¹¹¹

From the beginning of 1938 British policy favoured permanent minority status for Palestine Jews by cutting back and, it was hoped, ending immigration. A new Commission, the Woodhead, was appointed that led to a new partition plan. In the debate that followed the new commission's appointment, Wedgwood was scathing in his criticisms. To him the situation in which Palestine had found itself during the past three years would have been ridiculous and comic had it not been tragic, because of the Administration's anxiety to placate insurgents instead of trying to suppress revolt. He pointed out that 1400 Arab policemen had had their arms taken from them because of their habit of giving some to the rebels, but they still continued to draw pay for doing no work. Throwing open the doors of the country would not result in massacres of Jews but the extermination of gangsters.¹¹² He attacked the Government after the 1938 disturbances, accusing it of failing to give the military the authority or power to quell these disturbances, and he was contemptuous of the decision not to use the forty thousand Jews in Palestine who were capable of bearing arms. For two years murder and destruction of Jewish property had gone unpunished under British rule, and violence and anarchy were worse than ever. He had not known such a black page of incompetence and hypocrisy in British history.¹¹³ The Colonial Secretary, Malcolm MacDonald, was accused of placating Arab insurgents and taking no action to suppress them. He told MacDonald that the insurgents (or 'gangsters') were only a small group, but were being trained in Berlin where they were receiving payment mainly from Germany.¹¹⁴

Wedgwood refused to alter his stance in the face of all the criticisms levelled against him, and his attacks on government policy continued. After the publication of the 1939 White Paper, he warned the House of Commons that the next step would be a demand for the disarmament of the Jews so that 'they may be handed over, bound hand and foot, to the new Arab state'. He said that the two previous Colonial Secretaries, both strong Zionists on taking up office, had found the Administration to be too powerful for them and had been 'smashed'. Furthermore, he said that he had heard of some 'excellent ideas', such as blowing up pipelines and bridges and bombing

¹¹¹ Letter dated 14 July 1938. CZA file 24/31.710.

¹¹² Hansard HC CCCXLI 2051.

¹¹³ *The Times* 21 July 1938, p. 10.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 20 Nov. 1938, p. 8.

along IRA lines, and he seemed to favour such action. The Government was most unjust in putting the administration of the Jerusalem municipality in Arab hands even though the city had a Jewish majority; any faith that Jews in Palestine or elsewhere may have had in the Government had been destroyed. Again, he fulminated against Palestinian officials and the bulk of officers who were pro-Arab and anti-Semitic and who had latent sympathy with Nazi Germany. The best way to smash the Jerusalem government that 'was in the hands of Arabs' was by refusing to pay taxes. He was very positive in his support for the *Yishuv*, and he concluded by saying that the men there were preparing to sacrifice their lives just as the ancestors of today's British citizens had done, and that in the long run they would win the same freedom as the British had achieved.¹¹⁵ MacDonald was criticized for his position on a refugee problem that by early 1939 was becoming acute, and Wedgwood reproached him for the unjust laws in operation in Jerusalem. His agitation on behalf of refugees continued and he complained about the delays in the granting of visas that he claimed had given rise to a large number of suicides in Prague.¹¹⁶ Britain's role he compared adversely to that of the United States.¹¹⁷ Refugee problems intensified as war became inevitable, and attempts by those fleeing Nazi Europe to reach Palestine were mostly unsuccessful. Wedgwood asked a number of questions in the House of Commons at this time about the fate of illegal immigrants trying to reach Palestine, including one in which he specifically referred to some seventy-four Revisionist supporters who were being held in detention.¹¹⁸ He wrote to Brodetsky just before the outbreak of war to warn him that if illegal immigration was stopped, Zionism would fail and Macdonald would be triumphant. Wedgwood believed the Revisionist movement was now broken and incapable of any positive action. The last straw was the closing of the Romanian frontier to Jews from Poland seeking to go to Palestine, and the fact that the Revisionists had no funds to buy a vessel to take refugees to Palestine.¹¹⁹

Controversies surrounded the tragic sinking in November 1941 of the two vessels *Patria* and *Struma* which led to the deaths of hundreds of passengers: both ships contained refugees from Nazi Europe and when they were refused admission to Palestine both sank. Two ships with more than 1700 refugees reached Haifa, but they were refused landing and all were transferred to the French liner *Patria* so that they could be deported to Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. While at anchor off Haifa, *Irgun Zvai Leumi*

¹¹⁵ Hansard HC CCCXLVII 1992–2002.

¹¹⁶ *The Times* 8 April 1939, p. 6.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 14 June 1939, p. 9.

¹¹⁸ Hansard HC CCCXLIX 448.

¹¹⁹ Letter of 15 Aug. 1939, CZA file 24/31.710.

terrorists placed a bomb on the ship to prevent its departure, but the bomb exploded unexpectedly, sinking the ship with more than two hundred refugees being drowned.¹²⁰ Despite objections from the military authorities, the survivors were allowed to stay in Palestine on the instructions of Churchill. Wedgwood may have been instrumental in Churchill's decision, because when this tragedy happened, Wedgwood wrote to Attlee, then the Deputy Prime Minister, to appraise him of the situation and ask for a change in policy for the surviving refugees, commenting that 'Churchill cannot approve of it' and adding that the inhumanity and injustice that had occurred had 'already cost the lives of innocent men, women and children'. It was a 'disgrace to our way of copying and pleasing Hitler', and American as well as liberal opinion in the United Kingdom would have been antagonized by the event.¹²¹

A few months later the *Struma*, carrying 769 Jews, arrived at Istanbul in February 1942, but was ordered by the Turkish authorities to return to the Black Sea because it was denied entry into Palestine. It was then targeted by a German submarine and sank with only one survivor.¹²² Shortly after this disaster Wedgwood made a broadcast to the United States saying that what should have been cooperation for twenty-five years had instead been years of jealousy, malice and uncharitableness that had ended in the massacre of the *Struma*. He said that a committee had been created to concentrate efforts on arming the Jews of Palestine, and he accused the Administration 'from the top to the Irish police who masquerade as British' of being hostile to the half-million Jews in the country. They would never allow the Jews to have arms, land, free immigration or refuge; he accused his own country of having more anti-Semites and crypto-Fascists who 'back up the Hitler policy and spirit'. He had no hope for the Administration and he urged his listeners to press for America to take over the Mandate.¹²³ By then Wedgwood was a member of the House of Lords, where he defended his US broadcast (which he quoted in full) by saying that he had told the Americans 'the ugly truth' because he wanted to force the hands of the Foreign Office since empty protests were insufficient. He added that he hoped to live to see those who had sent the *Struma's* cargo back to the Nazis, to be hanged 'as high as Haman, their prototype, and with their Fuhrer, Adolf Hitler'. It was not wrong to tell the Americans what was happening, especially now that they were fighting with Britain against Hitler.¹²⁴ Wedgwood likened the

¹²⁰ M. Begin, *The Revolt* (New York 1978) 72.

¹²¹ Letter of 29 Nov. 1940, JCW papers.

¹²² Gilbert (see n. 36) 259.

¹²³ Wedgwood (see n. 1) 197–8. Speech in CZA file J1/2001.

¹²⁴ *Hansard Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series, House of Lords* (hereafter *Hansard HL*) CXXIII 179–81.

situation to that of the Black Hole of Calcutta. He justified the three demands he had made of his government that Jews should be allowed to raise and arm a home guard and that a Jewish armed force should be recruited from Jews who had or could escape from Hitler, adding that Jews then serving 'ignominiously' in the Pioneer Corps in the British Army should be armed militarily.¹²⁵ Foreign Jews were not allowed to serve in normal Army units but only in a labour corps. He told the Lords and the Americans that all Britain's problems in Palestine were due to the biases of the Administration which did not like Jews; Wedgwood claimed there was a pro-Arab, pro-Italian clique which was inimical to the country and abetted Fascism.¹²⁶

Another storm followed this broadcast, in which Weizmann believed that Wedgwood 'went fairly beyond the permissible and must have created some sort of stir in London as well as in New York'.¹²⁷ As reported in the *New York Times*, the BBC was forced to apologize for allowing the broadcast.¹²⁸

Despite continuing apprehension about his radical statements, Wedgwood was *persona grata* in Jewish circles and in May 1942 soon after his notorious broadcast he became joint chairman of a new committee that began pressing for a Jewish Fighting Force. A number of important political figures, Jewish and non-Jewish, were members.¹²⁹ In 1941 the Zionist Organization had offered to provide Jewish troops to fight as a Jewish brigade anywhere in the world under their own flag, but the offer was declined, for which Wedgwood blamed 'Fifth Column' influences in Egypt.¹³⁰ He wanted Jews to be allowed to arm themselves in order to provide sufficient defences for Palestine, but the Colonial Secretary Viscount Cranbourne dismissed this plan as 'dangerous nonsense and mischievous'.¹³¹ Ironically, some two months later the Government announced plans for the creation of separate Jewish and Arab battalions and a Palestine regiment was indeed formed (as an expansion of a battalion that had already been established).¹³² It was at this point that Wedgwood told a Jewish audience that he would put the defence of Jerusalem into the hands of Jews and not the British. He believed that 100,000 Jews would fight if attacked by the Germans, but that they lacked arms.¹³³

¹²⁵ Ibid. 179–86.

¹²⁶ *NYT* 11 March 1942, p. 7.

¹²⁷ CW letters, vol. XX, ed. M. J. Cohen, letter 290, pp. 299–300.

¹²⁸ *NYT* 28 May 1942, p. 4.

¹²⁹ Janner (see n. 16) 76.

¹³⁰ *The Times* 26 Nov. 1941, p. 8.

¹³¹ *NYT* 10 June 1942, p. 10.

¹³² C. Sykes, *Cross Roads to Israel* (London 1965) 253.

¹³³ *NYT* 15 Aug. 1942, p. 8.

Josiah Clement Wedgwood's unequivocal support for a Jewish National Home in Palestine was, unlike that of most other pro-Zionist upper-class Gentile British people, highly radical, sometimes bordering on the extreme. Of his contemporaries only Patterson can be said to have had similar attitudes to Zionism. Nevertheless, although Wedgwood became a violent critic of his government, he was never accused of being a traitor to his country. He once told the House of Commons:

I hope the Hon. Members will believe me when I say that I am not pro-Jew; I am pro-English. I set a higher value on the reputation of England all over the world for justice than I do for anything else ... but when I see this sort of thing going on, with the Government unable to put any argument on the other side, it makes me perhaps bitterer than even a Jew can be against the Government of Palestine today.¹³⁴

Even as he lay dying in June 1943 he had a message for the Jewish people, asking Blanche Dugdale to tell Weizmann that he had been thinking about what Jews ought to do in Palestine: they should cooperate until the end of the war, but should begin to plan civil resistance against any attack on their just rights which a future peace conference might threaten.¹³⁵ Despite all the controversies surrounding him, all factions of Jewry mourned his passing and his life was commemorated in a number of ways. Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, allocated \$50,000 to establish a fund in his name for the settlement of refugee youth in *Eretz Israel* and there are streets in his name both in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. A measure of the way in which British Jewry regarded him is shown by the fact that the Chief Rabbi, J. H. Hertz, visited his bedside several times before his death. Hertz had previously written to him that Jewry around the world 'would ever gratefully remember your sympathetic understanding of the Jewish cause and the splendid support you have given it'.¹³⁶ On his death Ben-Gurion sent a telegram to the Wedgwood family on behalf of the Jewish Agency in which he said that the Zionist movement had lost one of its greatest protagonists, who saw more clearly than others that only the re-establishment of a Jewish National Home offered a permanent and constructive solution to the Jewish problem. He added that Wedgwood had courageously stood by the movement throughout its darkest hours.¹³⁷ The indisposed Weizmann sent a message to a memorial meeting in which he said that Wedgwood had always challenged the easy, the accepted, the taken-for-granted way and that no story of hardship or unfairness had ever left

¹³⁴ Hansard HC CCXC 114.

¹³⁵ Dugdale (see n. 108) 204.

¹³⁶ Letter of 31 Dec. 1941, JCW papers.

¹³⁷ Telegram of 27 July 1943, CZA file J1/2001.

him unmoved. His death left Weizmann with a sense of irreparable loss and loneliness.¹³⁸

Not all Zionist supporters favoured Wedgwood. The non-Jewish Richard Meinertzhagen left a dinner held to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Balfour Declaration in the middle of a speech given by Wedgwood because ‘his platitudinal catch-phrases, his intense desire for cheap applause, his vulgar parliamentary delivery disgusted me’.¹³⁹ Given this history, it is curious that Wedgwood never spoke on Zionism or Palestine at any Labour Party Conference, even though the subject was either on the agenda or was raised during the Conference on eighteen occasions between 1920 and 1948.¹⁴⁰ Another curiosity is that his obituary in *The Times* made no mention of the activities described in this paper.¹⁴¹

What is history’s judgement on Josiah Wedgwood as far as Zionism is concerned? He clearly loved the Jewish people and was genuine in his belief in the need for a Jewish state. However, one factor in his thinking was the imperialistic one that he considered that a Jewish state would be a reliable friend of Britain in one of the key strategic parts of the world. He was a man of honour, courage and principle, who was sympathetic also to the lot of the Arab masses, since he saw Zionism as a means of improving their lives. As has been demonstrated, Wedgwood was highly conscious of the need to provide facilities for Jewish defence, mirroring Jabotinsky’s pleas for a Jewish defence force. Yet, as his words became more extreme, he lost any real authority to influence events. Mainstream Zionism led by Weizmann respected him, but was cautious and nervous about some of his activities, although it is clear that his undertakings to Palestine, the United States and elsewhere on behalf of the Zionist movement were welcomed by its leaders. Was he successful? Clearly not in relation to the events of his time, but his work for the Zionist cause should nevertheless not go unnoticed.

As an addendum, one further item regarding Josiah Wedgwood should be recorded. In 2004 a book entitled *My Righteous Gentile: Lord Wedgwood and Other Memories* was published in the United States.¹⁴² It contains an affectionate memoir of Wedgwood written by an elderly woman named Gabriella Auspitz Labson, who was born in Budapest during the First

¹³⁸ *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann: Series B Letters* (New Brunswick, NJ, and Jerusalem 1979) vol. II, letter 29, pp. 520–21.

¹³⁹ R. Meinertzhagen, *Middle East Diary 1917–56* (London 1959) 139.

¹⁴⁰ C. Bloom, ‘The British Labour Party and Palestine 1917–48’, *Trans JHSE* XXXVI (1999–2001) 143.

¹⁴¹ *The Times* 27 July 1943, p. 6.

¹⁴² G. A. Labson, *My Righteous Gentile: Lord Wedgwood and Other Memories* (Jersey City, NJ, 2004).

World War but grew up in Mukachevo (later Munchatz), which became part of Czechoslovakia in 1919. Wedgwood visited Mukachevo in the late 1920s where he was welcomed by the Jewish population as a committed supporter of Zionism. Gabriella Labson, then an elementary-school pupil, was introduced to him. The teachers and pupils of the Hebrew Secondary School later wrote to him to thank him for his 'continual intervention in the House of Commons regarding our work in Palestine'.¹⁴³ When the political situation became critical after Munich in 1938, Labson wrote to Wedgwood to ask him whether he could arrange for certificates of entry to Palestine for her and her family. There had been no contact between them since his visit to Mukachevo, but he replied that he remembered her. He was unable to arrange for entry documents, but sent her visas for the family to come to Britain. Wedgwood invited Labson to visit him at his home in the English countryside where she stayed for a few days. Then Labson and her family emigrated to the United States. When Wedgwood made his 1941 trip there he stayed with her and her husband in Philadelphia.

Labson dedicated her book as a 'memoir to Lord Wedgwood who saved my brother and me from certain death at the hands of the Nazis'. The fact that it was published many years after his death, when she must have been approaching her nineties, suggests that it was always on her conscience that she honour the memory of a man who was concerned about the Jewish fate. This gives support to the general thesis presented in this paper.

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¹⁴³ Letter of 26 March 1927, JCW papers.