J. L. MAGNES AND THE PROMOTION OF BI-NATIONALISM IN PALESTINE

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As hostility to Israel has intensified in the Western world in recent times (especially within the Trade Union movement, academia, intellectual circles, and the political elite) there has been a noticeable increase in the call for a bi-national solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict as a viable alternative to a two-state solution. The Palestinian commentator Ahmad Samih Khalidi explained in a 1998 article in *Prospect* magazine1 that bi-nationalism entails

an agreed equal sharing of the whole land [of Palestine] between two peoples... on the basis of equality between its citizens rather than ethnicity or national/religious origin.

In 2003, Tony Judt expanded on that idea in a controversial article in *The New York Review of Books*. The late Edward Said of Columbia University had also championed ‘a bi-national state, a federal union’2 because it seemed to him to be

the only reasonable solution for the Israelis, who cannot continue to live in this part of the world basically as an occupying, bullying, aggressive force which is the language of [Israeli Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon and all those who preceded him.

These (and numerous other) proponents of a bi-national solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict differ on the details of how exactly such a state would come about and function effectively in the Holy Land. For example, Said believed only that the Jews had a right to ‘self-determination’ as opposed to ‘national self-determination’, and it is unclear how this could be achieved within a ‘federal union’. Nevertheless, all share a fundamental belief that as long as there is a Jewish majority in a Jewish State, there can never be an end to the Israel-Palestine conflict. In this, at least, they share the view of Judah L. Magnes, the leading proponent of bi-nationalism during the era of the British

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Mandate in Palestine (between 1922 and 1948). However, it must be stressed that Magnes differed from present-day bi-nationalists in his deeply-held conviction that Jews had a right to live in Palestine, whereas many bi-nationalists see it as a way of dismantling the State of Israel which they view as an anachronistic, indeed as an illegitimate, entity.

Magnes, the Zionists and Bi-nationalism

Magnes was born in San Francisco in 1877. After training as a Rabbi, he served as secretary of the American Zionist Federation from 1905 to 1908. In 1909 and until he emigrated to Jerusalem in 1922, he was the representative of the influential American Jewish Committee in New York. Following the opening of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in April 1925 (seven years after its first cornerstone was laid on the Gray Hill estate at the top of Mount Scopus), Magnes was appointed the university’s first chancellor. In 1935 he became president of the Hebrew University, a post which he held until his death in 1948.

Magnes had a distinct view of what Zionism meant. He was convinced that the Zionist endeavour must take into account the interests of the Jewish community of the Diaspora and should not lead to a ‘negation of the Galuth’. He declared at the annual meeting of the American Zionist Federation in 1908: ‘Our Zionism must mean for us Judaism in all its phases; Zionism is complete and harmonized Judaism’. Moreover, for him Palestine was neither ‘just an Arab land . . . or just a Jewish land’. He believed in the ‘indissoluble historical association of the Jewish people and of Judaism’ with Palestine and he also believed that Arabs had ‘natural rights’ in Palestine. Zionism therefore could only thrive, both practically and morally, if it was committed to peaceful co-operation and co-existence with the Arab community of the country. This necessitated an abandonment of political Zionism. In 1929 Magnes told Sir John Chancellor, British High Commissioner in Palestine, that the ‘only hope for future peace of the country lay in the repudiation by the Jews of political Zionism’.

He summed up his outlook in The New York Times of 18 July 1938, declaring that the Jewish people were faced with a threefold destiny in its return to Zion. First, the forming of a living, creative center for the Jewish people and for Judaism. Second, helping to maturity the slumbering spiritual and intellectual forces of the whole Semitic world. Third, helping Jerusalem to become the true sanctuary of the three great Semitic religions... These are the tasks worthy of the People of the Book. They are within the realm of practical possibility on one condition — understanding between Jew, Arab and British.
The Hebrew University was the most prestigious academic and cultural institution in the Jewish world; its first board of governors included the veteran Zionist leader, Chaim Weizmann, and such renowned figures as Sigmund Freud, Martin Buber, and Albert Einstein. His position as Chancellor of that university provided Magnes with the platform to champion the bi-national cause, though he refused to join officially B'rith Shalom (an association founded in 1925) to promote bi-nationalism.

In his 1930 pamphlet *Light Unto All the Nations*, Magnes set out the fundamentals of the bi-national position, as he saw it. He desired the establishment in Palestine of an entity based on the Swiss model, where each nationality (Jews and Arabs) had its own canton, in which the majority group could outvote the minority. However, ethnic rivalries and tensions would be kept in check by a federal superstructure which controlled key areas such as foreign affairs, communications, and transport — thus providing parity between the two national groups.8

In its earliest form this proposal also envisaged free Jewish immigration into Palestine and opposed legal restrictions on Jews buying land on the basis of their religion. However, by the mid-1930s, as Arab opposition to the Zionist programme intensified, Magnes became convinced that for the sake of real peace in Palestine, Jewish immigration would have to be significantly curtailed. He proposed that it be restricted to 40 per cent of the total population for a period of 10 years, and even suggested that some Jews travelling to Palestine to start their new life might be diverted to neighbouring Arab countries.9

Though Magnes gained support for his proposals from many within the Jewish intellectual elite, including such notable figures as Martin Buber, Pinhas Ruttenberg, Gad Frumkin, Moshe Smilansky, and Moshe Novomeysky,10 there was little support for a bi-national settlement in the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish community of Palestine) or in the Jewish Diaspora. Raphael Patai, who had been a doctoral student at the Hebrew University during these years, recalled in his memoirs that support for Magnes’s bi-national proposals was ‘minuscule’.11 Moreover, he was vilified in some quarters. In 1932 he received death threats from extreme right-wing Zionist groups,12 an experience which would recur sporadically for the remainder of his life; in 1946, after testifying at the Jerusalem hearings of the Anglo-American Committee on Palestine, he had to be placed under police protection.13 This threat of violence emanated only from the extreme margins of the Zionist movement; mainstream Zionists were horrified that his life might be endangered because of his beliefs. In December 1942, the British Embassy in Washington reported to Whitehall that ‘more responsible Zionists’ were actively avoiding criticism of Magnes in public out of fear that he might be the victim of a violent attack.14
However, mainstream Zionists did dismiss his proposals as impractical and argued that his call for Jews to be settled outside Palestine failed to take into consideration their ardent desire to settle in the Yishuv, while his willingness to accept restrictions on Jewish immigration was anathema to the Zionist movement, whose programme was based on the presumption that free Jewish immigration would result in a Jewish majority in Palestine. As early as 1925, Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion had made it clear to leading bi-nationalists that he categorically opposed giving up any right to strive for a Jewish majority in Palestine; in a 1936 letter to Magnes, Ben-Gurion repeated this and explained that the main difference between them was that Magnes was ‘ready to sacrifice immigration for peace’ while he was not. Moreover, Zionists were particularly incensed that Magnes was using his status at the Hebrew University to promote his bi-national proposals; Ben-Gurion pointed out to him in 1938: ‘you stand at the head of the supreme cultural institution of the Jewish people and political circles do not regard you as an individual but a representative’.

Attitudes to Magnes and Bi-nationalism in Britain 1930–1945

Magnes was isolated within the Yishuv and faced relentless criticism from the world Zionist movement but, at least in the 1930s, he found a far more receptive audience among the British Arabists who opposed the commitment to Zionism made by the British government in the Balfour Declaration of 1917. They became increasingly hostile to the British commitment to the Jewish National Home following the 1922 decision of the League of Nations to grant Britain a mandate for Palestine, into which the key clauses of the Balfour Declaration were incorporated. In 1922, for example, anti-Zionists in the House of Lords succeeded in having a motion passed (by 60 votes to 29) against the Palestine Mandate. The following year, 111 Conservative MPs signed a pro-Arab ‘memorial’ calling on the government to ‘reconsider the Palestine question in the light of the Arab demands’.

Thus, in 1930, the year of the publication of the Passfield White Paper and the Hope-Simpson report on Palestine (both of which were highly critical of the Zionist programme) the leading British Arabist Harry St John Philby told Magnes that his advocacy of the bi-national scheme had significant support among Englishmen like himself. This was encouraging as Magnes considered Philby to be the ‘greatest living Arab authority’ and the previous year both men had worked together to draw up draft proposals which they hoped would gain, in the words of Magnes, ‘sufficient approval on the part of Arabs and Jews to justify the Labour government’s putting them forward as a basis for a round table conference between Arabs and Jews’.
This, of course, did not occur and the Magnes-Philby negotiations fizzled out by early 1930, but the key points that the men put down on paper highlighted Magnes’s thinking on bi-nationalism by this time. They agreed, for example, that Palestine should be ‘administered as a democratic constitutional republic’, in which legislative authority would reside in a representative assembly of Arabs and Jews selected by persons of Palestinian nationality (defined as those who had resided continuously in Palestine for two years up to that point) in proportion to their number of the population. Executive authority would reside in a Palestine Council which would be elected on the same basis.  

Apart from Philby, Colonel Stewart Newcombe also became a supporter of Magnes in England at that time. Newcombe had been a colleague of Lawrence of Arabia during the First World War and was treasurer of the Palestine Information Office, the leading anti-Zionist lobby group in England during the 1930s. In 1937 he looked for Magnes’s endorsement of a Palestine plan which he had jointly drafted with Albert Hyamson, a member of the Anglo-Jewish community who had earned the ire of the Zionists in his rôle as director of the Immigration Department in Palestine between 1926 and 1934. The Newcombe-Hyamson proposals envisaged the founding of a sovereign independent State in Palestine where all Palestinian nationals had equal rights and where complete autonomy existed for all communities, including complete municipal authority for all Jewish towns, villages, and districts. However, the plan also made clear that there could be no possibility of the creation of a Jewish State in any part of Palestine at any time in the future, that the existing majority (the Arab population) would rule, and that Jews could at no time constitute more than 50 per cent of the population.  

The plan was rejected by the Zionist leadership and David Ben-Gurion sent a letter to Magnes, warning him that it was a ‘deception’. But as Israel Kolatt has noted, Magnes welcomed the Hyamson-Newcombe proposals as the ‘portals to an agreement’ and his support for this proposal came at a time of rising tension in Palestine, following the outbreak of the Arab Revolt the previous year and the decision of the Royal (Peel) Commission on Palestine to recommend the partition of Palestine in its July 1937 report as ‘the best and most hopeful solution of the deadlock’. Specifically, the Peel Commission called for the establishment of two sovereign independent States — an Arab State composed of Trans-Jordan and that part of Palestine allotted to the Arabs, and a Jewish State consisting of the part of Palestine allotted to the Jews. Jerusalem and Bethlehem, with a corridor to the sea, would form part of a small enclave to be reserved under a new British mandate, while Jaffa would form an outlying part of the new Arab State.  

Magnes had argued against partition in his evidence to the Peel Commission and in July 1938 he submitted a subsequent memorandum...
to the chairman of the Palestine Partition Commission [the Woodhead Commission] which had been set up by the British government to examine the feasibility of the Peel Commission’s partition recommendation. In this document Magnes argued that even if Palestine were ultimately partitioned the ‘principle of bi-nationalism would be applied to the new Palestinian [that is, Jewish and Arab] states’. He then raised the example of Switzerland; though he acknowledged that ‘the details of the Swiss pattern cannot automatically [be] applied anywhere’, he argued that there were ‘at least two basic lessons’ which could be drawn from the Swiss case. The first was that the cantonal system had a number of in-built advantages, since the sovereignty of the canton gave the majority population a ‘wide field for self-determination and self-expression’.\(^\text{58}\) However, for Magnes, the ‘chief lesson’ of the Swiss model was that ‘. . . equal nationalities . . . constitute and administer the State upon the basis of equal political rights without regard to who is the majority and who is the minority’. Thus, he hoped that the ‘principle of a bi-National state in Palestine — two politically equal nationalities regardless of majority and minority’ be adopted. Finally, he argued that if such a mechanism were to be applied to a partitioned Palestine then the ‘chief conditions are given for the eventual reunion of the dismembered parts of the Holy Land’.\(^\text{29}\)

In September 1938 Magnes met in Jerusalem Sir Harold MacMichael (British High Commissioner in Palestine) to discuss his bi-national proposals. He told him that he believed that ‘partition was doomed if not dead’ (and indeed two months later the Woodhead Commission rejected the partition recommendation as unworkable) and that the only solution was a ‘bi-national state, without any partition’. He added that for this to succeed the British government had to play an ‘essential rôle’ in two areas — safeguarding the Holy Places of Palestine and facilitating the ‘building up of a bi-national state’.\(^\text{30}\) Later in that month Magnes wrote directly to the British Colonial Secretary, Malcolm MacDonald, urging him to give serious consideration to his bi-national proposals as an ‘alternative to the partition of Palestine’, and repeated what he had previously told MacMichael, that for this plan to work the British would have to play a key rôle in the ‘protection of the Holy Places of Palestine’ and in the ‘establishment of a Palestinian state with two nationalities of equal status’. He then urged that the British government make this ‘its declared policy and put its full strength behind it’, and he offered to travel to London to discuss the proposal despite his ‘reluctance to leave here [Jerusalem] in these days of stress’.\(^\text{31}\)

MacDonald replied that it was not necessary for Magnes to ‘make a special journey for this purpose’.\(^\text{32}\) This lacklustre response was due to the widespread belief within official circles in Britain that while
Magnes was (in the words of MacMichael) ‘a gentleman of scholarly attainments, great ability and acknowledged honesty’, he had little influence over the Zionist leadership and limited support within Jewry. John S. Bennet of the Colonial Office commented that although Magnes was ‘genuine . . . it has always been doubtful whether he carries much influence in Jewish circles. In fact he typifies the aloofness of the Hebrew University from the National Home’. This view was confirmed by Bennet’s senior colleague, Sir John Shuckburgh, who believed that though Magnes was ‘an attractive man’ and that he was ‘convinced of his bona fides’, he was ‘out of sympathy with the official Zionists and I am afraid that his views carry no weight with them’.

There was moreover scepticism over the content of his proposals. In 1929, Sir John Chancellor, British High Commissioner in Palestine, described Magnes as an ‘idealist altogether out of touch with reality’. A decade later Shuckburgh also challenged the validity of the Swiss analogy, noting that although ‘German, French and Italian Swiss may differ in race, language, traditions’ unlike the Jews and Arabs in Palestine, ‘at least they all belong to the same general level of progress and civilisation’. More importantly, by this time politicians and mandarins in Whitehall — in the face of the bloody Arab Revolt in Palestine and worsening relations with the Zionist leadership — were not persuaded that Arab-British-Jewish co-operation was achievable. There was equally little sympathy for similar idealistic proposals emanating from other sources. In February 1939, a Paris-based group called the Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe (whose patrons included Edouard Daladier, Paul Reynaud, and a number of French academics and religious leaders, and members of the Jewish community) submitted a memorandum to the British Foreign Secretary (Lord Halifax), setting out suggestions for what they called the ‘Arab-Israelite State of Palestine’ which they believed would bring a ‘reconciliation between Arabs and Jews in the Holy Land’. This was dismissed by the Foreign Office on the grounds that the Committee was ‘completely Utopian in its approach’.

The British government was concerned about anti-British sentiment in the Arab world at a time of increasing rivalry with Nazi Germany and fascist Italy in the region, and it introduced the Palestine White Paper in May 1939. This document, which became the basis of Britain’s Palestine policy for the duration of the Second World War, limited Jewish immigration levels into Palestine and was supplemented by accompanying Land Transfer Regulations which restricted the sale of land to Jews in Palestine. This led to an outcry in the Jewish world, even among Jewish opponents of political Zionism, like Magnes, who shared the Zionist view that the document was a subversion of the
Jewish national revival in Palestine and signalled the abandonment of European Jewry to their Nazi persecutor. Nevertheless, Magnes did welcome the fact that the war had frozen any decision on the final status of Palestine and, ever the optimist, he hoped that Jewish and Arab support for the British war effort would serve as a new basis for Jewish-Arab co-operation. 41

In May 1942, 600 American Zionists and 60 Zionist leaders from around the world, including Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion, attended a meeting at the Biltmore Hotel in New York, where they adopted the Biltmore Declaration, which made the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine the official policy of the mainstream Zionist movement. The following August, Magnes established the Ihud (Unity) Association, to replace the defunct B’rit Shalom. Like its predecessor, Ihud advocated an Arab-Jewish bi-national state in a self-governing, undivided Palestine, based on equal political rights for the two peoples of Palestine. British officials dealing with the Palestine issue were preoccupied with defending the White Paper policy in the United States, where Zionists and their supporters in Congress were pressuring the Roosevelt administration to oppose the document, but they continued to monitor Magnes’s efforts to promote his bi-national plans during the war. There were, for example, sporadic reports to Whitehall from British embassies in the Middle East on the Arab attitude to Magnes’s proposals.42 In December 1942 the British Embassy in Washington sent a report to the Foreign Office on the influence of Magnes in the United States, as well as a summary of newspaper stories on Magnes’s ties to Jewish anti-Zionists in the country which they believed to be of ‘some interest’.43

In 1943, as Britain’s White Paper policy came under increasing attack from supporters of Zionism in the United States, the Foreign Office even considered sending Magnes on a ‘moderate’ Jewish mission to America in order to shore up support for Britain’s Palestine policy. But the British Embassy in Washington advised against this on the grounds that it would only lead to ‘increased controversy’ since a visit by such a ‘prominent and controversial figure as Dr. Magnes would probably do more harm than good, and would lead to violent Zionist counter-propaganda’. 44 By 1944 a high-level committee — which included many of the leading British military and diplomatic officials in the Middle East — was being briefed by Lord Moyne (British High Commissioner in Palestine) that the Cabinet Committee on Palestine had completely rejected the future implementation of that ‘failure of a policy of bi-nationalism’ since ‘twenty five years of working experience had shown that this could not be hoped for’.45 And while a number of committee members (such as Lord Killearn and Sir Kinahan Cornwallis) expressed their preference for a bi-national
solution in theory, they acknowledged the validity of the Cabinet’s argument that this was not possible because the Arabs had ‘hardened their hearts’ and the Jews ‘would never now be content with less than complete control’.46

The Arab Response to Magnes’s Bi-national Proposals

That acknowledgement by British officials that the Arabs had ‘hardened their hearts’, and, therefore, were not interested in a bi-national solution, is rarely mentioned in contemporary discussions on bi-nationalism. For example, Philip Collier writing in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* in 1982 completely focused on the fact that ‘Magnes and those in Israel today who are true to his ideals and beliefs, should be so utterly rejected by their people’ without referring to the fact that opposition towards bi-nationalism was even more widespread among Arabs than Jews during the Mandate era.47 Raphael Patai noted that the bi-national proposals ‘never evoked any response whatsoever from the Arab side’.48 In his 1938 letter to Colonial Secretary Malcolm MacDonald, Magnes was compelled to admit that as far as bi-nationalism was concerned the ‘effective Palestinian Arab leadership is intransigent at the present time’.49 By the end of the war little had changed and Magnes was acknowledging that although the Arab press did publish his writings, the Arabs were for the most part hostile to him.50

This widespread Arab antipathy to the Magnes proposals can be seen most clearly in the response to his evidence at the 1946 crucial hearings of the Anglo-American Committee. That committee was established by the British and American governments in late 1945 to examine conditions in Palestine as they related to the issues of Jewish emigration and settlement and to study the position of Europe’s Jewish population which had survived the Holocaust.51 In his evidence, before the committee’s Jerusalem hearings in 1946, Magnes reiterated his arguments in favour of bi-nationalism based on ‘parity’ between Jews and Arabs in Palestine and the principle of free Jewish immigration (although this was subject to limits in any negotiated settlement).52 Arab representatives at these hearings rejected his proposals out of hand; in his statement on behalf of the Arab Office — the Arab League’s information body — the young Albert Hourani (later a leading British scholar of the Middle East) explained that ‘the basic objection . . . is one of principle . . . to further immigration’ and added53 that a bi-national state would

only work if a certain spirit of co-operation and trust exists . . . and if there is an underlying sense of unity to neutralise communal differences . . . but that spirit does not exist . . . as such Magnes’ solution . . . [is] impossible . . . and if a bi-national state was created it would lead to either [the] complete

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deadlock of Palestine and the need for foreign intervention... or else domination of the whole life by communal considerations.

In answer to questions from committee members following his statement, Hourani went further and admitted that he believed that ‘the parity which Magnes suggests is not as complete as it appears’. Ahmed Shukayri, Hourani’s Arab Office colleague (and later the first head of the Palestine Liberation Organisation) also spoke on behalf of the Arab League. He made the same argument as Hourani, but in a far less diplomatic manner, when he claimed that ‘bi-national government [was] void of justice, security, expediency’.54

After these hearings, the Arab League published a critique of the bi-national proposals which was circulated in London and Washington, arguing that the Magnes proposals were unacceptable and had no more legitimacy than did the orthodox Zionist call for a Jewish State in all, or part, of Palestine.55 The following year it reiterated this view claiming that Magnes ‘presented an apparent departure from the official Zionist line but in fact demanded the same thing. For in spite of its outward cloak of moderation his bi-national state is only a preliminary step to a Jewish state’. It added that the ‘apparent moderation of Magnes’ was a Zionist plot and that ‘this distribution of rôles or functions is a tactical trick highly characteristic of Zionist propaganda [whereby the] extremist attitude of Ben-Gurion is intended to make the Magnes proposals appear as a kind of compromise which might deceive... and camouflage the real intention behind the bi-national state scheme’.56 Later in the same year the Arab League’s newspaper in London57 summed up

the fundamental Arab objection to the idea [of parity/bi-nationalism] is one of principle... proposals of Magnes and his group are nothing but another way of reaching the objective of Zionism, the creation of a Jewish state. For this reason the Arabs regard the views of Magnes no less extreme, and perhaps, more dangerous than those of the official Zionists because they are cloaked in an aspect of moderation and reasonableness.

The Gentile Anti-Zionist Response After 1945

By the end of the war Magnes found himself isolated among the Gentile anti-Zionist community in England — but there had been some exceptions. Colonel Stewart Newcombe continued to champion him and in September 1940 he wrote a memorandum to the Colonial Office arguing (somewhat misleadingly) that although Magnes was ‘not an accepted Zionist leader... he is greatly respected by Arabs who agree that they can co-operate with him’;58 and in 1942 he told an audience at the prestigious Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) that Magnes’s support of bi-nationalism
was the ‘best news for a long time’. However, all other leading Gentile opponents of Zionism in England at that time (such as Sir John Hope Simpson, the land and refugee expert whose report on Palestine in 1930 opposed further Jewish immigration or land settlement, and Major General Sir Edward Spears, a veteran MP, whom Churchill had appointed Minister Plenipotentiary in Lebanon and Syria during the war) opposed Magnes’s proposals. Likewise, Sir Ronald Storrs, the former Governor of Jerusalem and a harsh critic of Zionism, also had little respect for what he called the ‘pathetic reasonable Magnes school’.65

Although such men opposed partition, they rejected Magnes’s view that there was an ‘indissoluble historical association of the Jewish people and of Judaism’ with Palestine. They agreed with the Arab position that a bi-national state, rather than being a compromise, would be prejudicial to the Arabs. At the heart of this Gentile anti-Zionist distaste for Magnes’s proposals was a belief that his demand for ‘parity’ and ‘equality’ was unfair to the Arabs because the Palestine issue was not a matter of ‘right and right’, as Chaim Weizmann had told the Royal Commission on Palestine in 1937. Rather, it was a matter of right and wrong; Dr. Maude Royden-Shaw, a leading British missionary and a vocal anti-Zionist, stated during a November 1945 BBC radio discussion on Palestine, ‘I cannot see that there are two rights’.63

Thus, in the crucial period between the end of the war in 1945 and the end of the British Mandate in 1948, bi-nationalism found little support among the Arabs, their defenders in England, or within the British government. Magnes’s most committed supporter in England in these years was the Jewish-born Rita Hinden, secretary of the Fabian Colonial Bureau (FCB). That Bureau was a clearing house for information on colonial affairs and became a pressure group acting for colonial peoples. Although it was an independent body, it was closely linked to the Fabian Society — the oldest socialist organization in Britain (founded in 1881) whose early members included George Bernard Shaw, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and H. G. Wells. The Fabian Society supported the FCB by way of an annual grant, which was later augmented by the Trade Unions Congress and the Labour Party. Some members of the FCB were committed Zionists (such as Labour MP Lyall Wilkes, who was on the group’s advisory committee). But Rita Hinden explained to a correspondent in 1945 that the Bureau’s position had ‘never been to favour the complete Jewish state idea’.65 In 1943 Magnes had approached Hinden about the possibility of forming a high-powered committee in London to support his bi-national proposals, but after consultation with other interested parties, she told Magnes that while she sympathized with his position, and believed his proposals deserved serious consideration
in Britain, it was impossible (at least through the FCB) to organize an influential body to ‘enter into the whirlpool of this immense political problem’.

Nevertheless, between 1943 and 1948, Magnes corresponded regularly with Rita Hinden and also sent her articles he had published or which referred to his bi-national proposals in the world press. As their personal relationship and friendship blossomed, he increasingly confided in her about his growing frustration and pessimism over the relentless hostility against him from both Jews and Arabs. In turn, as she herself became increasingly disillusioned with what she considered to be the ‘extreme and, what seems to most people, the unreasonable attitude being taken today [by the Zionist movement]’, she promised to use her position at the FCB to give Magnes whatever help she could. She also promised him that if he ever visited Britain to fight for his proposals she would put the FCB’s resources at his disposal.

In 1945 Rita Hinden included an essay by Magnes on bi-nationalism in the FCB’s high-profile Symposium on Palestine. Moreover, she made extra provisions for his contribution to the symposium to be sent as an individual pamphlet to (as she put it) ‘a few key people’. And although she thought it unwise for the FCB to be directly associated with the publication of his, and Ihud’s, English-language publications, she did offer to help him distribute such material ‘to the right people in England’. She also agreed to arrange for the FCB’s circulation manager to assist in the distribution of Ihud’s pamphlets to a wider audience. More importantly, following the Labour general election victory in 1945, Magnes consulted her on the best way to approach the new Labour government, with which the Fabians had very close ties. He asked her, for example, whether he and other Ihud leaders (most notably, Martin Buber) should write directly to Prime Minister Atlee to put forward the bi-national case. He also appealed to her to use her connections with the government to get him an invitation to the 1947 London Conference on Palestine. She attempted, but failed, to get Magnes invited to the talks, but told him that she could easily arrange unofficial meetings between him and members of the Labour government, although the appearance that this might give of him being forced to go by the back door was ‘unsatisfactory’.

Magnes and Anglo-Jewry

British Zionists were very aware of Magnes’s attempts to lobby for support in Britain and they exerted much effort in countering his bi-national proposals — which they termed a ‘national calamity’. The Zionist press, most notably The Zionist Review (the organ of the
British Zionist Federation) and *New Judea* (the organ of the World Zionist Organisation in England) criticized the work of the League of Jewish Arab Co-operation, the English branch of Ihud, which was founded in 1942. In particular, Zionists argued that the League was dangerous because it highlighted a division in Jewish opinion at a time when unity was vital for the Zionist cause. Moreover, they argued that the existence of such a body implied that the mainstream Zionist movement was opposed to co-operating with Arabs, which was totally untrue. In 1943, British Zionists stepped up their attacks on Magnes after the publication, by the Independent Jewish Press Service, of a leaked letter purportedly written by Magnes to the leading American Jewish anti-Zionist leader Rabbi Morris Lazaron. In that letter Magnes explained that the Zionist programme was ‘likely to provoke civil war in Palestine and confusion abroad’ and, most controversially, he referred to Jewish nationalism as both ‘chauvinistic’ and ‘terroristic’.

British Zionists, like their counterparts in the Yishuv, were also very concerned by the fact that Magnes’s position as president of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem damaged the Zionist cause in England, where that University was held in high regard. For example, following his testimony before the Anglo-American Committee, *The Times* reported that Magnes spoke in his capacity as both the ‘Rector of the Hebrew University’ and as the founder of Ihud. Indeed, until his death in October 1948, the Zionist press in Britain continued to condemn Magnes for using his position at the Hebrew University to ‘attack bitterly and [do] his best to destroy the state of Israel’. Despite the Zionist dominance of Anglo-Jewry, by this time there was some support for Magnes among the influential non-Zionist organization, the Anglo-Jewish Association (AJA). The AJA was founded in 1871 as a charitable and cultural body. On the issue of Palestine, it supported Jewish settlement and was prepared to work with Zionists for the practical benefits of the Yishuv, but refused to endorse the objective of a Jewish State. AJA members believed that the bi-national proposals advocated by Magnes would promise Jews equal rights in Palestine and constitute a fair compromise to the conflict; it therefore gave much encouragement and publicity to Magnes. In 1943, for example, a number of leading members of the AJA, including the distinguished Norman Bentwich, arranged for the publication and distribution in England of a pamphlet by Magnes on bi-nationalism which had previously appeared as an article in *Foreign Affairs*. The AJA’s own journal, *The Jewish Monthly*, published Magnes’s statements on Palestine claiming that it was both ‘privileged’ and ‘performing a public service’ in being able to present the views of Magnes which had ‘received scant attention in the Anglo-Jewish press’. The response of the magazine’s readership to the ‘prophetic message’ of Magnes was so positive that
the AJA decided to publish his articles as individual pamphlets which were then distributed to members. In 1946, R. N. Carvalho, a leading member of the AJA, argued that in Magnes’s proposals ‘alone lies hope’ and he appealed to both British Zionists and the extreme anti-Zionists of the Jewish Fellowship (who opposed the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine in principle under any circumstances) to co-operate with Magnes. The Fellowship never officially endorsed a bi-national solution, and its sister organization in the United States, the American Council for Judaism, rejected the bi-national plan as undemocratic, but the Fellowship’s leaders lamented the fact that bi-nationalists were being ‘ignored by the Zionist machine in Britain’. The editors of The Jewish Outlook, the Jewish Fellowship’s monthly magazine, also gave strong editorial support to Magnes and publicized the efforts of the League for Jewish Arab Co-operation to promote bi-nationalism in Britain. Like their peers in the AJA, leading members of the Fellowship worked to promote Magnes’s proposals. Most notably, Fellowship member Albert Hyamson, whose co-operation with Newcombe in the 1930s had won Magnes’s endorsement, promoted bi-nationalism wherever possible. In 1943, he had co-operated with Bentwich and others in distributing in England a pamphlet by Magnes, and in 1945 he set out in The Contemporary Review the reasons for his support of bi-nationalism, which he viewed as a compromise between the extreme solutions of either Zionist or Arab dominance of Palestine. He reiterated this view in a letter to the Jewish Chronicle in 1946, in which he rejected partition, and argued that ‘a bi-national state in an undivided Palestine with as wide an autonomy as possible… preserves [the] unity of Palestine… [and] safeguards members of both principal communities from domination by each other’. Hyamson also wrote several articles in support of Magnes in The Jewish Outlook.

Conclusion

Magnes never abandoned his belief in the key rôle which Britain could play in promoting a bi-national solution to the Palestine problem and both he, and his small band of British supporters, regularly wrote to the British press to draw attention to the British rôle. In 1947, he even proposed that potential Jewish immigrants to Palestine could instead be diverted to Great Britain as part of a bi-national solution. But with the exception of some members of the non-Zionist AJA and the anti-Zionist Jewish Fellowship, Magnes could find as little support in Anglo-Jewry as among the British Arabist elite or policy makers in Whitehall. Indeed, in April 1948 he made the final trip of his life to the United States, not Britain, to lend his voice to those opposing the imminent establishment of Israel.
Magnes died on 27 October 1948, five months after the establishment of the Jewish State which he had relentlessly opposed for more than two decades. In an emotional tribute, The Spectator weekly praised the ‘humanity, good sense and humility’ of his bi-national vision. Even The Zionist Review paid him a generous tribute in an obituary entitled ‘Rebel and Saint’. But it was Magnes himself, in a moving letter to Rita Hinden just months before he died, who provided the most honest assessment of his struggle to promote bi-nationalism and the disillusion which he felt about championing that cause: ‘I am very gloomy over it all... I hope I am wrong in this, and I am almost tempted to say that I am sure I am wrong, and this is because I seem to have been wrong in all of the things I have worked and written, and pleaded for, for more than a generation’.

NOTES

8 Judah Magnes, Light Unto All the Nations, Jerusalem, 1939.
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13 Sir Alan Cunningham to Colonial Secretary George Hall, 5 April 1946, Cunningham Papers, Box 5/2, Middle East Centre, St Antony’s College, Oxford.


15 Judah Magnes, The Magnes-Philby Negotiations, op. cit. in Note 6 above, p. 52.

16 Cited in Teveth, op. cit. in Note 12 above, p. 539.


18 The Balfour Declaration (named after Lord Balfour, Britain’s foreign minister) was issued in the form of a letter to Lord Rothschild, the leading figure in Anglo-Jewry. The Declaration called for the ‘establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people’ and pledged that Great Britain would ‘use its best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine’. Another proviso, which was responsible for much of the opposition to the Declaration within Anglo-Jewry, stated that ‘nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of Jews in any other country’.


20 Philby to Magnes, 20 February 1930, Philby Papers, Box 10/2, Middle East Centre, St Antony’s College, Oxford.

21 See telegram from Magnes to Arthur Sulzberger, 28 October 1929, Joseph Levy papers, Box 28, Israel State Archives, cited in Judah Magnes, op. cit. in Note 6 above, p. 17.

22 See Magnes, op. cit. in Note 6 above, p. 100.


26 Kolatt, op. cit. in Note 9 above, p. 638.


29 Ibid.


33 MacMichael to Shuckburgh, 5 September 1938, PRO CO 733/371/14.
34 See comments by Bennet in minutes on ‘Dr. Magnes’, 14 September 1938, PRO CO 733/371/14.
35 See comments by Shuckburgh in minutes on ‘Dr. Magnes’, 21 September 1938, PRO CO 733/371/14.
37 See comments by Shuckburgh in minutes on ‘Dr. Magnes’, 21 September 1938, PRO CO 733/371/14.
40 Palestine, A Statement of Policy, Cmd. 6019, London 1939. The immigration clauses of the document restricted Jewish immigration to 75,000 over the subsequent five years, after which the Arabs of Palestine would have the final say on future Jewish immigration levels.
41 Kolatt, op. cit. in Note 9 above, p. 640.
42 See, for example, Lascelles, British Legation, Beirut, to C. W. Baxter, Foreign Office, 29 April 1943, PRO FO 371/34958.
45 ‘Notes on Conference held in Commander in Chief’s War Room’, 6 April 1944, PRO FO 371/40135.
46 Ibid.
48 Raphael Patai, op. cit. in Note 11 above, p. 410.
49 Magnes to MacDonald, 22 September 1938, CO 733/371/14.
50 Magnes to Rita Hinden, 24 October 1945, Fabian Bureau Archives, Mss.Brit.s.365, Box 176/6, Rhodes House Library, Oxford (hereafter, FBA, followed by Box and file number).
52 See Buber and Magnes, op. cit in Note 5 above.
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54 Ibid, p. 100.
60 See Manuscript Diary of Sir Ronald Storrs, 1 February 1943, Storrs Papers, Box 6/6, Pembroke College, Cambridge.
61 Buber and Magnes, op. cit. in Note 5 above, p. 14.
65 Hinden to B. Boroker, 12 December 1945, FBA, Mss.Brit.s.365, Box 176/6.
66 Hinden to Magnes, 13 August 1943, FBA, Mss.Brit.s.365, Box 176/6.
67 Magnes to Hinden, 24 October 1945 and 27 December 1945, FBA, Mss.Brit.s.365, Box 176/6.
68 Hinden to Magnes, 10 January 1946, FBA, Mss.Brit.s.365, Box 176/6.
69 Hinden to Magnes, 30 November 1945, FBA, Mss.Brit.s.365, Box 176/6.
71 Hinden to Magnes, 27 September 1945, FBA, Mss.Brit.s.365, Box 176/6.
72 Hinden to Magnes, 1 November 1946, FBA, Mss.Brit.s.365, Box 176/6.
73 Hinden to I. Kopioiwitz, 25 February 1946, FBA, Mss.Brit.s.365, Box 176/6.
74 Magnes to Hinden, 21 November 1946, FBA, Mss.Brit.s.365, Box 176/6.
75 Magnes to Hinden, 22 January 1947, FBA, Mss.Brit.s.365, Box 176/6.
76 Hinden to Magnes, 28 January 1947, FBA, Mss.Brit.s.365, Box 176/6.
77 The Zionist Review, 5 October 1945, p. 8.
78 See, for example, B. Rabinowitz’s Zionism and the Arabs, London, 1946, p. 34.
81 The Times, 15 March 1946.

67
See Magnes to Hinden, 15 June 1943, FBA, Mss.Brit.s.365, Box 176/6.


For the positive response to Magnes among AJA members, see Walter J. Wolfgang’s letter to the editor of *The Jewish Monthly*, vol. 1, no. 11, February 1948, p. 7.

See R. N. Carvalho, ‘Arab Jewish Unity: Testimony of Magnes and Buber before the Anglo-American Committee’, *The Jewish Monthly*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1946, p. 4.


See *The Jewish Outlook*, vol. 2, no. 3, August 1947, p. 10.

See, for example, *The Jewish Outlook*, vol. 2, no. 1, June 1947, p. 6.


The *Jewish Chronicle*, 20 September 1946, p. 16.


See, for example, letter from Magnes to the editor of *The Times*, 26 September 1945, and letter from Evelyn Wrench in support of Magnes’s efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Palestine problem, *The Times*, 25 August 1945.


Kolsky, op. cit. in Note 87 above, p. 186.


Magnes to Hinden, 15 January 1948, FBA, Mss.Brit.s.365, Box 176/6.