

A LETTER FROM ERETZ ISRAEL

(From Our Own Correspondent).

Jerusalem, January 16, 1937.

The Arabs Appear.

After it had dragged its course intermittently for nearly two months, Dr. Weizmann summed up the Jewish case before the Royal Commission at the end of last week. A short breathing space followed, during which the Commissioners visited Transjordan and heard what Emir Abdullah thought about the situation, and then the Arab case was launched.

There was no ceremony about the Arab appearance. It was as though they had been in frequent attendance at the Commission's sessions, and this was just a new sitting. Lord Peel opened the session by asking informally: "You are the members of the Arab Supreme Committee? What is this Committee and how is it constituted?" And then the evidence began. What did differentiate this session from former sessions, however, was the large number of red turbans that enlivened the journalists' and guests' rows. For the first time since the Commission arrived Arabs attended the hearings, and, in fact, were in the majority.

The whole membership of the Arab Committee was massed behind the Mufti, who opened the Arab case, and a number of them actively co-operated with him by proffering whispered suggestions as to what he should reply to some of the more awkward questions. The Mufti's declarations and grievances were not new. We have heard them repeatedly during the past year, and should have been foolish to have expected anything other than the same intransigent attitude. But those who may have thought that he would take the opportunity of trying to win the Commissioners over to his side by addressing himself to the task they have in hand were disillusioned. He knew perfectly well that the Commission is not empowered to consider whether the Mandate should be abolished or not, whether a national Arab Government can or cannot be introduced in Palestine, that it is not their concern to discuss whether the Jewish National Home is to be established, but only how it may be established in the light of the Arab problem. Yet his whole address was a negation of the basic objects of the Commission, and the latter might reasonably have been expected to tell him so, and to tell him further that he was wasting theirs and his own time. Instead, they listened patiently to his full-throated demand for national independence and the abandonment of the Jewish National Home experiment.

The truth of the matter, however, has little to do with the Commission. The Mufti knows full well that his demand cannot be fulfilled, neither by the Commission nor by the British Government. But he was speaking over the heads of the Commissioners to his own constituency, to his Arab followers. It was they whom he wanted to hear his vigorous demand for independence, it was to them that his ostensible fears for the Moslem and Christian Holy Places were addressed, and it was for them that his claim that Turkish sovereignty was preferable to the British mandated administration was intended. The Commission session was, in short, hardly more than another platform, one far more powerful than usual, from which the Mufti could address those whose counsel he pursues or whose allegiance he commands.

As far as the Commission itself was concerned, neither he nor the other Arab witnesses who have hitherto appeared can have much impressed its members. The frequent inaccuracies of figures and other data of which they have been guilty and on which the Commissioners pulled them up cannot have inspired respect in the latter. On the matter of grievances many of their claims were nullified because of their completely false premises—which the Commission have not been slow to reveal—and in the matter of their fears for the Holy Places, and their preference for the old Turkish sovereignty to the present British, the Commissioners openly showed that they did not believe them.

Only the blindest optimist will believe that the Arabs have done themselves any good by testifying as they have done until now. But whether the Arab failure to impress will be our gain is another question.

Two Delegations.

There are two delegations in Palestine at the present time, both of them of some importance, though in different ways, to the future of the country. The first consists of six leaders of organised Jewish labour in America. The Unions and Organisations under their influence hold a combined membership of over half-a-million, and the vast majority of them, as the larger number of the present delegation, have, until recently, been indifferent to Jewish endeavours in Palestine. Their absorbing interests were confined hitherto to the purely local problems of the Jewish worker in America and the cauldron of international politics. It was only in the past three years that they have begun to take a close interest in Palestinian developments, but now that interest is wholehearted.

The delegates, who have been in the country now for no more than a week, are filled with the deepest enthusiasm for what they have seen. Everything has exceeded their wildest expectations, and that so much of what has been achieved is the work of the labour element is a particular source of pride. Their conversion to Zionism is now complete, and, as one indication thereof, they have undertaken on behalf of the organisations they represent to raise \$100,000 for the Keren Kayemeth in the course of the coming year. In itself, this sum may not represent a tremendous effort, but compared with the complete inactivity of former years it is an eloquent symbol of their new-found allegiance.

The second delegation, also Labour, is that of the British Independent Labour Party, and comprises two of the four M.P.'s who represent this Party in the House of Commons. Their object is to report to their Party to enable the latter to elaborate a Socialist policy for Palestine. Recently the I.L.P.

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