

Israel - the migrations that formed the country

Background to how Palestine/Israel came about:-

*Balfour Declaration
Foreign Office
November 2nd 1917*

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

The above Balfour Declaration was the first major political triumph of Zionism and the culmination of Jewish independent political activity until that time.

The declaration came in a letter that British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour sent to Lord Rothschild (Lionel Walter Rothschild, the honorary president of the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland at the time) on 2nd November 1917. The letter, to be conveyed to the British Zionist Federation stated that the British government “views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and would use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object”

The 1st world war had stunned the World Zionist Organization and confronted it with numerous problems. When it was thought that Russia was joining powers with Britain and France many Jews thought Russia would change their anti-Jewish policy but they were disappointed. This disappointment reinforced the belief of many Jews, particularly in the USA where many had supported the Central Powers of Germany and Austro-Hungary. As early as 1915 British Zionists, led by Chaim Weizmann, had begun to attempt to persuade the British government to safeguard Jewish interests in Palestine, out of the hope that after the war the country would be under British trusteeship. Several prominent British Jews, including Sir Herbert Samuel (later the first British High Commissioner for Palestine) presented a memo to Cabinet ministers in this spirit. Another memo the Zionists submitted to the British government in October 1916 contained the demand that, after the liberation of Palestine from Turkish rule, the rights of the Jewish people in the country be recognized, also free immigration be permitted and the status of Zionist institutions be legalized.

The change of government in Britain and the worsening military situation induced the British Authorities to respond more strongly to Zionist demands. The Allies hoped that, through a declaration, recognition would influence Jewish public opinion in the USA to aid them in their efforts to persuade the USA to join the war effort.

The Zionists submitted to the British government the draft text of a proposed political declaration, in which Britain would agree with, “the principle that Palestine should be reconstituted as the National Home of the Jewish People”

Migration 1923 - 1948

With the British conquest Jews who had been expelled by the Ottomans were able to return and Jewish immigration picked up again. The third Aliyah saw 40,000 migrants between 1919 and 1923, then 80,000 during the Fourth Aliyah 1924 to 1928, the Fifth Aliyah saw the arrival of an estimated 225,000 – 300,000, 1929 – 1939. During this time, tensions with the Arabs increased over Jewish population, and these tensions culminated in the 1936-1939 Arab revolt in Palestine which saw the Arabs launch widespread attacks against both Jews and the British. In 1947 there were approximately 630,000 Jews living alongside approximately 1.2 million Arabs in Palestine. Following increasing levels of violence the British government expressed a wish to withdraw from Palestine that year. – Partition. On 14th May 1948, one day before the end of the British Mandate the leaders of the Jewish community in Palestine led by the future Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion declared the re-establishment of a Jewish State in Eretz – Israel - to be known as the State of Israel.

The Mass Migration to Israel of the 1948 – 1950's

Between 1948 and 1951 saw the largest migration ever to reach the shores of modern Israel. This influx began at a time when the state was in the throes of its greatest struggle for survival, the War of Independence continued throughout a period troubled by both security concerns and economic hardship. In the mid 1950's a second wave arrived in Israel. The immigrants of the country's first decade radically altered the demographic landscape of Israeli society as well as the balance between Israel and the Jewish diaspora. Many of today's social issues are rooted in this mass migration.

Some 688.000 immigrants came to Israel during the country's first three and a half years at an average of around 200.000 a year. As approximately 650.000 Jews lived in Israel at the time of the establishment of the state, this meant in effect a doubling of the Jewish population even though 10 per cent of the new immigrants left the country during the next few years. Immigration declined rapidly during the early 1950's another 166.000 arrived in the middle of the decade.

The first immigrants to reach the new state were survivors of the Holocaust, displaced persons camps in Germany, Austria and Italy and others from British detention camps in Cyprus and from other countries. After the initial influx of European Jews the percentage of Jews from Moslem countries in Asia and Africa increased considerably. Many were brought over from Yemen, Iraq, North Africa and Aden because they were considered to be in danger.

There were many differences between the immigrants and European countries and those from Asia and Africa. The survivor population was usually older and contained fewer children. On the other hand Jews from developing countries in Asia and Africa tended to have a large number of children but a smaller elderly population. The European immigrants were generally better educated, neither group however resembled the profile of pre-state immigration. Post 1948 immigrants were in the primary wage earning group compared to earlier immigration waves and consequently fewer could participate in the work force of the

new state. The newer immigrants had less education with only 16% of those aged 15 and above had completed secondary education compared to earlier settlers, especially women.

The mass migration led to a steep rise in the Israeli Jewish population. Not only was the population doubled within a short period of time but the high fertility rate of many of the newcomers led to continued population increase in the years ahead. This growth was significant both with the regard to the ratio between Jews and non-Jews in Israel and to the demographic role of Israel in the Jewish world. Secondly due to the large percentage of immigrants from Asia and Africa and to their higher birth rate the mass migration led to a change in the ethnic composition of Israeli society. An indication of this trend can be seen in the rise of the proportion of foreign-born Israelis who were born in Asia and Africa. In November 1948 this proportion stood at 15.1% but by the end of 1951 it had risen to 36.9%. Thirdly the new state now had to deal with a considerable population that to a large extent lacked agricultural or modern professional skills or the same degree of modern education as the veteran population. This created difficulties with integrating the new population. One of the most important social issues in Israel resulted from the difficulties involved in absorbing new immigrants.

Israel's Jewish population continued to grow at a very high rate for years, fed by waves of Jewish immigration from round the world, including the massive immigration wave of Soviet Jews, who arrived in Israel in the early 1990's according to the Law of Return. Some 380,000 Jewish immigrants from Soviet Union arrived in 1990-91 alone.

The current net migration rate for Israel in 2023 is 1.113 per 1000 pop. A 1.59% decline from 2022
The net migration rate for Israel in 2022 was 1.131 per 1000 pop. a 1.57% decline from 2021
" 2021 was 1.49 per 1000 pop. a 1.46% decline from 2020
" 2020 was 1.66 per 1000 pop. A 1.52% decline from 2019