

M. SHERTOK'S LETTER TO "THE TIMES"

"The Times" on March 4, published the following letter from Mr. M. Shertok, written on February 29, the day following the publication of the Land Transfer Regulations:

Landless Arab Myth

In accepting the Colonial Secretary's case for land restrictions in Palestine you state that further land sales to Jews threaten "the disastrous swelling of a landless Arab proletariat." The Jewish Agency has repeatedly asked the Government for the data by which such statements can be justified, but its request has been ignored.

The only detailed inquiry into the facts was made in 1931-32, following on Sir John Hope Simpson's Report, and only some 600 Arabs, mostly tenants, were found to have been displaced during the 10 years in which the Jews had purchased 115,000 acres of land; of these displaced Arabs only about 100 availed themselves of the opportunity of resettlement offered by the Government, and according to the Official Report for 1937, some 50 of these families have "deserted the settlement and are engaged, for the most part, in other than agricultural work." Since then the Government has passed a Tenants' Protective Ordinance to prevent further displacements. As to peasant proprietors, no facts have ever been adduced to show that they are being dispossessed. In fact, Arabs sell land which they can spare, and with the proceeds, develop the remainder. Such sales of surplus land have been the chief source of capital for improving Arab agriculture. You rightly say that "the ultimate wealth of a country is measured not by its crops, but by its men"; but the well-being of men depend on their crops, and the volume of crops does not depend on space alone, but on how that space is used. The new measure will condemn large areas to economic stagnation.

But why argue the case on economic grounds when it is the political reasoning of the White Paper of 1939 that inspires the present measure? You define the prohibited zone as consisting of "the hill country, together with certain over-populated regions in the South," which may suggest that these regions have be-

come over-populated as a result of sales of land to Jews. But it is precisely in the hill region and the southern area in question that the Jews have bought very little land, while in the coastal plain it has increased greatly. Is it on economic grounds that the Government forbids the Jews to apply their labour and resources to the development of the land which the Arabs admittedly cannot cultivate? This, according to the Arab Delegation at the Palestine Conferences, comprises about two-thirds of Western Palestine. Again, how can a congested Arab village benefit by another village, with surplus land, being forbidden to dispose of it to their own advantage — unless indeed the Government contemplates collectivising and re-distributing Arab land-holdings?

Crystallization

The new restrictions are political in character, designed to crystallize the Jewish National Home territorially in the same way as the Immigration Clauses of the White Paper are meant to crystallize it numerically, in each case without regard for the adverse economic consequences to the country. As to the far-reaching effects of the measure on the Jewish position, I would quote from a letter addressed by Mr. D. Ben Gurion, Chairman of the Executive of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem to the High Commissioner for Palestine: —

The new land policy strikes at the heart of the Jewish national home by depriving the Jews of the right to settle on the land outside a small pale of settlement, and compels them — as in the Diaspora — to be town-dwellers. This attempt to frustrate the age-long aspiration of the Jewish people to become rooted again in the soil of their ancient homeland is made at a time when millions of Jews are being mercilessly persecuted by a cruel enemy. And this blow is being inflicted by the Government of the great nation which undertook to restore the Jewish people to their national home. The Jewish people will not submit to the conversion of the Jewish national home into a ghetto; nor can it believe that Great Britain would consciously be responsible for such a travesty of its international obligation.