

PALESTINIAN RECRUITS IN THE ARMED FORCES THE JEWISH WAR EFFORT

From a Jewish Correspondent

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The victories of the Eighth Army have brought deep and widespread relief to Palestine. Though the front has moved away, and the problem of direct defence has become less pressing, the calls made upon Palestinian man-power have grown owing to lengthening lines of communication and the requirements of offensive action. Shortage of shipping makes the intensification of local production, industrial and agricultural, increasingly vital.

Recruiting of Palestinians for His Majesty's forces was started rather haphazardly in the first months of the war. The entry of Italy made it imperative to utilize more fully local man-power for the Army. With Egypt and Iraq neutral, and while Syria was under Vichy, volunteers could be obtained from Palestine and Trans-Jordan alone. Recruiting gradually spread over all fields of service: the 1,700 Palestinians — nearly all Jews — who joined the R.A.F. in the autumn of 1940 filled gaps for which at the time no other personnel was readily available, and a first batch of 20 candidates for training as air pilots has just been selected.

Recently recruiting into the Navy, for shore and sea service, began. Jewish transport, R.E., and ordnance units have proved a distinct value to the army; about a dozen transport and R.E. companies have taken part in the conquest of Libya. Infantry and artillery units are stationed in Palestine, being mainly intended for the country's defence. Palestinian pioneer and port-operating companies took part in the campaigns in Greece and Crete, and 1,500 of them were taken prisoner. Since then the remaining Jewish pioneer units have been disbanded, and the men transferred to infantry and technical units. Arab pioneer companies still remain. Palestinians fought in Commandos in Eritrea and Libya. Groups of Jewish volunteers, whose knowledge of the local languages and terrain proved particularly useful, took part in offensive operations in Syria. One group which, under the command of a British Officer, undertook a particularly daring task, was

completely wiped out. There are 2,400 Palestinian A.T.S. (90 per cent. of them Jewish) doing good work in hospitals and offices and as drivers and ordnance store-keepers.

A Volunteer Force

Of the 29,000 Palestinian men and women who have so far joined the services some 21,000 are Jews. (With the 7,000 men in full-time local defence formations, all under military control, and 1,500 from Palestine serving in other allied armies, a total of nearly 30,000 is reached, which is equivalent to a volunteer army of about 2,500,000 in the United Kingdom. This is the more remarkable because Palestinian family allowances are only two-thirds of the British, while dependents' allowances are non-existent. Moreover, Palestinians are accepted only if they are fit for combatant duties, and men of category "C" are rejected as unfit. The abundance of civilian employment on army works and services also militated against recruiting, particularly as the authorities did not begin until recently to regulate the distribution of manpower in such a way as to ensure the optimum satisfaction of all war requirements, military as well as economic.

In the absence of conscription, the Jewish community, with its long tradition of autonomous, organized action, looked upon recruiting as a national responsibility calling for national regulation. As the demands on man-power increased in both military and economic spheres, the feeling grew that some system approximating to State regulation should be evolved by the Jews themselves. Accordingly the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, and the Council of Palestine Jews, with the full support of all Jewish organizations, local councils and the Press, proceeded to call up categories by age and family status: first, bachelors between 21 and 30 years of age, and next, married men without children, the age limits being fixed at 18 and 35. Single women of certain age-groups were called on for the A.T.S., or for essential work in industry or agriculture. No similarly binding obligation was laid upon family bread-winners because of the inadequacy of the family allowances. Though the Jewish Agency and the Jewish community are relieving distress by calling up Arab recruits into mixed units, or to use Palestinian recruits to

daily intercourse and cultural activities is Hebrew. The new method has greatly enhanced the morale and raised the efficiency of the units. There are today about 50 Jewish companies in the army and A.T.S., in various branches of the service, and scattered throughout the Middle East. The men long to be united and to show what a bigger Jewish force can do in battle. So far only infantry companies have been formed into battalions, and these bear the name "Jewish" in brackets.

Economic Effort

On the economic side, the output of Jewish industry has gone up by 75 per cent. since the outbreak of war. In 1940 89 per cent. of the capital invested in Palestine industry, and 77 per cent. of its labour, was Jewish. During the war over 300 new factories and workshops have been established by Jews, and many older ones expanded. Army contracts totalled £1,000,000 in 1940, £4,000,000 in 1941, and £10,000,000 in 1942. Citrus-growing has been hard hit by the war, but in mixed farming production has greatly increased. The shortage of labour however was such that farmers had to curtail rather than expand their programme.

Goods produced for the army range from tin water-bottles and clothing to machines and weapon parts, from potatoes to marmalade. Through the United Kingdom Commercial Corporation important supplies were ordered for Turkey, including boots for the Army (affectionately called "Churchills" by the Turks), canvas for tents, and heavy harbour equipment. The largest foundry and the only glass factory in the Middle East are in Palestine — both cooperative enterprises. Scientific institutions and personnel turn increasingly to the war effort. Important work of a specialized character is done in the laboratories of the Hebrew University, in the Daniel Sieff Research Institute (Dr. Weizmann is its director), and in the laboratories of Professor Goldberg, formerly of Zeiss, at Tel Aviv.

Skilled Workers

Tens of thousands of Arab and Jews are employed by the army as civilians. Jewish technical and skilled personnel is greatly in demand throughout the Middle East. A wide network of roads, in the case of Rostov, with the help of hundreds of technicians

use Palestinian recruits to bring British units up to establishment. The first mixed pioneer company saw service in France. The Jews were opposed to mixed units; denied a fighting force of their own, they claimed at least all-Jewish units. If not in Palestine, they asked, where else can they be treated as a people? Practical experience vindicated the Jewish contention: linguistic difficulties, the absence of a proper esprit de corps, the inevitable and often unwitting introduction of racial considerations into the life of a military unit, led to the abandonment of mixed, in favour of separate, Jewish and Arab units.

Palestinians are eligible for all commissioned ranks, within these units and today a number of Jewish companies are commanded by Palestinian Jews. The language of command is English, notices are posted in English and Hebrew, and the language of

of hundreds of technicians and artisans recruited in Palestine. Jewish experts and skilled workers are to be found in Egypt, in Eritrea, in Abyssinia; a few have even been called to India and Ceylon.

The accumulation of manpower, plant, skill, and productive and fighting capacity which has made possible this many-sided war effort is due to Jewish immigration in the inter-war period. Most of the 400,000 Jews who have entered

since 1920 (300,000 of them since Hitler's advent to power and about 30,000 since the outbreak of war) would now have been inmates of his torture chambers had they not escaped in time. The Jews of Palestine are conscious of the privilege which is theirs today in that they stand not as martyrs or objects of pity, but as fighters and workers for the victory of freedom and for the survival and liberation of their race.