This is not the place for an analysis of the Passfield White Paper. Suffice it to say that it was considered by all Jewish friends of the National Home, Zionist and non-Zionist alike, and by a host of non-Jewish well-wishers, as rendering, and intending to render, our work in Palestine impossible. There was nothing left for me but to resign my position as the President of the Jewish Agency. In this drastic step I had the complete support of Lord Melchett and of Felix Warburg, who also resigned, the former as the chairman of the Council of the Agency, the latter as a member of the Jewish Agency Administrative Committee.

Then began an intense struggle with the Colonial Office which, having been unable to guarantee the security of the Jewish community in Palestine, having ignored our repeated warnings concerning the activities of the Mufti and of his friends of the Arab Executive, having made no attempt to correct the indifference or hostility of British officials in Palestine, now proposed to make us pay the price of its failure. We realized that we were facing a hostile combination of forces in the Colonial Office and in the Palestine administration, and unless it was overcome it was futile to think of building on the foundations which we had laid so solidly in the previous years.

There were, of course, great protests throughout the Jewish world; they were backed by powerful figures in the non-Jewish world. Stanley Baldwin, Sir Austen Chamberlain, Leopold Amery, General Smuts, Sir John Simon, and a host of others, all from various points of view, attacked the Passfield White Paper as inconsistent with the Mandate which Great Britain had been given in Palestine. Apparently the Prime Minister had anticipated an unfavourable reaction, but not the force and volume of it. A few days before the issuance of the White Paper he had, perhaps with the idea of heading off my protests, invited the Jewish Agency to appoint a committee which should consult with a special Cabinet Committee on the Palestine policy. We accepted – but that did not prevent my resignation, nor the resignations of Lord Melchett and Mr. Warburg. …

Lord Passfield was present at some of the committee sessions and proved to be the head and fount of the opposition to our demands. What effect our arguments had on the Government, and how much the change was due to the pressure of an adverse public opinion in England and elsewhere I cannot say. But on February 13, 1931, there was an official reversal of
policy. It did not take the form of a retraction of the White Paper – that would have meant a loss of face – but of a letter addressed to me by the Prime Minister, read in the House of Commons and printed in Hansard. I considered that the letter rectified the situation – the form was unimportant – and I so indicated to the Prime Minister.

Document B: “**Speech to 17th Zionist Congress**, Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky (1931)

We are all deeply shocked by the behavior of the British. I too am deeply shocked, for I know that I also contributed my share in tying Jewish policy to the policy of Britain. I often asked myself: Have I lied to the Jewish people? … None of us is now prepared to say: “England is playing the game.” The essential question however is: how did affairs reach such a pass?

Either this was fated, and would have happened even if our methods were better and even if we had a better leadership … or was it our mistakes that were decisive? … If it is true that the best methods would have been of no avail, then all hope is lost. But if one can say that even in the present circumstances the results would have been better if we had had a better method, then there is still some hope. The optimists are those among us who say: it is our policy that is to blame; it is our policy which led the British people to believe that the political situation is satisfactory. Now we wish to embark on a new and final experiment, but using new methods …

Before the Jew declares that all the world is against us, that one of the greatest of the civilized nations is devoid of honesty, that God himself has turned away from us, before we say this, honesty demands that we say, “ashamnu, bagadnu” [we have sinned, we have betrayed] and we shall now mend our ways and our methods!” If it should really transpire that [our aim] cannot be achieved with Britain, it would be tragic. But in the depths of our beings we are convinced that even in that case our hope is not lost. We would find other ways. That question however has not arisen today…

With that naïve belief of those who foregathered many years ago in Basle – I was then a mere boy – with that same naivete, I believe in the integrity of the world, in the power of a just cause. I believe that the great questions are by the power of moral pressure, and that the Jewish people is a tremendous power of moral pressure …. Ani maamin [I believe].

Document C: “Jewish Telegraphic Agency Interview”, Chaim Weizmann (July 3, 1931)

I have no sympathy or understanding for the demand for a Jewish majority. A majority does not necessarily guarantee security. ... A majority is not required for the development of Jewish civilization and culture. The world will construe this demand only in one sense, that we want to acquire a majority in order to drive out the Arabs.

I come now to an incident in my life on which I look back with little pleasure, and write about with some distaste: my demission from the Presidency of the Zionist Organization at the Congress in July 1931.

In spite of the fact that the Ramsey MacDonald letter had restored our political position and initiated a period of peace, prosperity and great immigration into Palestine, the excitement originally created by the Passfield White Paper continued to exercise the minds of the Zionists, and particularly of the Revisionists, led by Jabotinsky. The latter spoke of the letter contemptuously, in part because it was only a letter; they demanded British official endorsement of a clear-cut Revisionist policy, and the acceptance of anything short of that maximum – which meant a Jewish State on both sides of the Jordan, with all that this implies – they declared to be political weakness, cowardice and betrayal. As the Congress of 1931 approached I became the butt of ever-mounting attacks, and the occasion for a pernicious extremist propaganda. …

…the Congress insisted on going through the motion of passing a resolution of nonconfidence in my policy by a roll-call vote, in which the Revisionists under Jabotinsky took the leading part, with the Mizrahi, the religious wing of the movement, strongly supporting. …

At this Congress I found myself in a minority, with only the Laborites and a few of the general Zionists understanding me. I sat through the whole performance, until the last man had voted. When it was finished, and some tactless person applauded my so-called downfall, the feeling came over me that here and now the tablets of the law should be broken, though I had neither the strength nor the moral stature of the great lawgiver.

In 1935 I returned to office as President of the World Zionist Organization and of the Jewish Agency. I did it reluctantly, and after long and earnest pleading on the part of my friends, particularly of the labor movement. I had got into the stride of my scientific work again, spending more and more time in the laboratory in the new Institute, among my colleagues. …

Yet this was not the fundamental reason for my reluctance. It was rather that I did not see a genuine change of heart in the movement, or, let me say, of the majority which had ejected me in 1931. They were asking for me because a certain number of Zionists were now of the opinion that they had nobody who could do much better! [Nahum] Sokolow, though respected by the British as a man of learning and dignity, had not got very far with them.

Weizmann returned to office in vastly changed circumstances. No longer able to dictate terms as he had done in the past, he found his room for manoeuvre severely curtailed. In the early 1920s, the Zionists had followed him with an enthusiasm that set few limits on his talents and ability and gave recognition to his outstanding political achievements. In time, the movement matured; more conscious of its collective strength, it was less willing blindly to follow him. Nowhere was this more evident than in his relations with Mapai, the Palestine Labour party, whose leaders were among his warmest admirers. But they were equally conscious of his faults.

Weizmann had built his political power on personal contacts and influence, on the charismatic appeal he held for all sections of Jewry. A moody and volatile loner, he was given to intense personal likes and dislikes which, occasionally, coloured his political judgment. And he had stamped on the movement a highly individualistic style of leadership which, though it had its uses, was now considered outdated. Mapai’s power, on the other hand, rested not on shifting sands but on grass-roots political activity in the Yishuv, on a political machine and knowing how to manipulate it to good effect. Yet both parties needed each other. Weizmann’s political future hinged on retaining Mapai’s trust and support, for no stable executive could be formed without them. Mapai required his immense prestige and authority to unite the movement, a workers’ party, it required that touch of class, that air of majesty that Weizmann alone could bestow upon it, legitimizing its political coming of age. With a great international crisis brewing, with European Jewry under siege, Mapai understood that it would be folly to disavow his unique talents.

It was not a love match but a *marriage de convenance*. Mapai did not wholly trust Weizmann, and now spoke from a position of strength. The centre of gravity of Zionist affairs was moving toward Jerusalem. Ben Gurion was now chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, the major figure in *Yishuv* politics, and challenging for the leadership of the movement.

I have borne most things in silence; I have defended the British administration before my own people, often against my own better knowledge, and almost invariably to my own detriment. Why did I do so? Because to me close cooperation with Great Britain was the cornerstone of our policy in Palestine. But this cooperation remained unilateral – it was unrequited love.

On November 11, 1936, the Royal Commission of Inquiry arrived. Its instructions were to determine the fundamental causes of the unrest, to explore Arab and Jewish grievances, and to make recommendations for the future. All six commissioners were men of distinguished background. The chairman, Lord Robert Peel, was the grandson of the eminent nineteenth-century prime minister, and had served as secretary of state of India. …

Although the Zionists hardly were delighted that their National Home should be reevaluated by yet another Royal Commission (they had bitter memories of the earlier Shaw and Hope Simpson inquiries), they agreed to cooperate. By contrast, the Arab Higher Committee decided as a matter of strategy to boycott the proceedings. The visitors accepted this setback manfully; from the day of their arrival, they began collecting whatever evidence they could from British and Jewish witnesses. Thus, during their two-month stay in Palestine, the commissioners held thirty public and forty private hearings throughout the country. The Jewish Agency officials were well prepared, their memoranda carefully formulated. Their most eloquent witness was Weizmann himself. In his three appearances before the commissioners, the sixty-two-year-old Zionist leader described the tragedy of Jewish life in Europe, the rising specter of anti-Semitism throughout the world. As in his many earlier briefs before statesmen and parliamentarians over the years, Weizmann traced the historic Jewish connection with Palestine and related in detail Jewish accomplishments under the mandate. He issued an impassioned plea for Britain to respect its obligation under the Balfour Declaration and the League mandatory award …

It was during Weizmann’s testimony at the fifty-first meeting of the commission, held in Jerusalem on January 8, 1937, that the notion of partitioning the country was first broached. Professor Coupland said to him at the hearing: “If there were no other way out to peace, might it not be a final and peaceful settlement – to terminate the Mandate by agreement and split Palestine into two halves, the plain being an Independent Jewish State … and the rest of Palestine, plus Trans-Jordania, being an Independent Arab State…” Weizmann was astonished at the magnitude of the proposal. At first his reaction was uncertain: “Of course, it is cutting the child in two,” he said. He asked for time to consider the plan. Outside the meeting room,
however, Weizmann confided to his secretary that the long toil of his life was at last crowned with success. A Jewish state was at hand. Excitedly, he began to indulge in dreams of the future, even outlining his vision of the new state’s political structure.

Document I: “May 1939 White Paper” (Excerpts)

His Majesty's Government therefore now declare unequivocally that it is not part of their policy that Palestine should become a Jewish State. They would indeed regard it as contrary to their obligations to the Arabs under the Mandate, as well as to the assurances which have been given to the Arab people in the past, that the Arab population of Palestine should be made the subjects of a Jewish State against their will. …

Jewish immigration during the next five years will be at a rate which, if economic absorptive capacity permits, will bring the Jewish population up to approximately one third of the total population of the country. Taking into account the expected natural increase of the Arab and Jewish populations, and the number of illegal Jewish immigrants now in the country, this would allow of the admission, as from the beginning of April this year, of some 75,000 immigrants over the next five years. …

After the period of five years, no further Jewish immigration will be permitted unless the Arabs of Palestine are prepared to acquiesce in it.


There is a darkness all around us and we cannot see through the clouds. It is with a heavy heart that I take my leave. … If, as I hope, we are spared in life and our work continues, who knows – perhaps a new light will shine upon us from the thick black gloom. My heart is overflowing. …

We shall meet again in common labor for our land and people. Our people is deathless, our land eternal. There are some things which cannot fail to come to pass, things without which the world cannot be imagined. The remnant shall work on, fight on, live on until the dawn of better days. Towards that dawn I greet you. May we meet again in peace.”