

'Illegal' Corvettes: Canadian Blockade Runners to Palestine, 1946-1949

DAVID J. BERCUSON

Le 19 juin 1946, en matinée, le navire à vapeur *Beauharnois* largua les amarres du petit port italien de Vado, dans le Golfe de Gênes, et mit cap vers le Sud-Est. 1259 Juifs réfugiés en grande partie de Grèce, de Yougoslavie, de Tchécoslovaquie et de Pologne, se trouvaient à bord. Le navire prit le large en dépit des ordres du Gouvernement italien et fila à une vitesse constante de 17 noeuds afin de semer ses poursuivants. Le propriétaire du navire en était l'Agence Juive pour la Palestine qui avait rebaptisé celui-ci du nom de *Josiah Wedgewood* en l'honneur d'un membre du Parlement Britannique qui avait appuyé la cause sioniste dans les années 1930.

En quelques jours, le *Wedgewood* contourna la pointe sud de la Sicile et mit le cap vers l'Est en direction de la Palestine. Il fut intercepté par un destroyer britannique à 150 milles de son objectif.

La côte palestinienne fut perçue le 26 juin et au cours de la nuit, la plupart des membres de l'équipage en escalada le flanc afin d'éviter l'arrestation. Ils furent malgré tout interceptés. Le *Wedgewood* jeta l'ancre dans le port de Haïfa et les réfugiés furent conduits et parqués dans un camp de détention à Athlit qui se trouve à 19 milles au Sud de Haïfa.

Le *Wedgewood* était un bateau que l'Agence Juive et le Mossad possédaient. Le *Wedgewood* ainsi que ses navires soeurs: le *Haganah* le *Gadio* et le *Joséphine Barbara*, furent des corvettes construites au Canada à partir d'un plan standard utilisé par la Marine Canadienne Royale au cours de la Seconde Guerre pour fins de patrouille anti-sous-marine dans l'Atlantique Nord. Ces navires avaient été obtenus de la Corporation des Biens de Guerre du Canada par des agents de la Haganah dans la ville de New York. La marine Canadienne s'était agrandie à partir pratiquement de rien en 1939 pour atteindre le 4ème rang dans le monde à la fin de la guerre.

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En mai 1946, le Cabinet approuva des principes directeurs tracés par Norman A. Robertson, Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat aux Affaires Extérieures, afin de traiter du problème de la vente des navires et d'autres armes aux pays étrangers. Il recommanda que le Canada se refuse de vendre des armes à tous les pays excepté "ceux tels le Royaume-Uni et les Etats-Unis d'Amérique avec lesquels nous entretenons des relations politiques exceptionnellement étroites ainsi qu'une communauté de défense d'intérêts clairement établis". Le Gouvernement fut dans une gêne politique potentielle pouvant survenir si les armes canadiennes étaient utilisées à des fins non populaires auprès de la nation canadienne. Un mémoire, rédigé par Escott Reid, Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat Adjoint aux Affaires Extérieures en mars 1947, fit mention de plusieurs sortes de conflits qui étaient "répugnants à un grand nombre de Canadiens". Reid mit en garde également contre la vente d'armes à tout pays qui pourrait devenir hostile envers le monde occidental ou dominé par l'Union Soviétique.

La politique canadienne visait à restreindre les exportations d'armes. Cependant, les ventes et exportations des vaisseaux démilitarisés de la marine n'étaient pas touchées par cette politique attendu que de tels navires n'étaient pas considérés comme armes.

En 1945, David Ben Gourion envoya Danny Shind à New York afin qu'il travaille de concert avec Yaacov Dostrofsky, Chef du personnel de la Haganah, responsable de l'opération de New York. Shind et Dostrovsky créèrent un bon nombre de corporations factices qui achetaient des navires. Les navires mettaient cap vers l'Europe, habituellement la France, où ils étaient équipés afin de pouvoir transporter bien plus de personnes que ceux pour quoi ils avaient été conçus. Puis, ils se rendaient dans de petits ports sur la côte française ou italienne où des réfugiés Juifs étaient embarqués. Les réfugiés, restant du Judaïsme européen, avaient survécu au camp d'extermination d'Hitler. Les Britanniques avaient institué une politique en 1939 afin de restreindre l'immigration juive en Palestine à 1.500 personnes par mois au plus. La Marine Royale était responsable de l'interception des navires d'immigrants et les escortait jusqu'en Palestine. Fin 1946, la politique fut changée et des immigrants furent dirigés vers Chypre et placés dans des camps de détention.

La première préoccupation de la Chambre des Communes du Canada fut l'impact potentiel que les navires pouvaient avoir sur les rapports entre le Royaume Uni et le Canada attendu que les sentiments anti-sionistes allaient de plus en plus croissants en ce jour en Grande Bretagne.

À Ottawa, Escott Reid et Hudd considérèrent que l'utilisation de ces navires était plutôt "politiquement gênante" et espéraient que cette situation "ne se ré-

péterait point encore”. Hume Wrong, Adjoint au Sous-Secrétaire d’Etat aux Affaires Extérieures, se demandait quel type d’action pouvait bien être pris sinon demander à la Corporation des Biens de Guerre d’être plus prudente à l’avenir.

Le 25 septembre, un représentant du Haut Commissariat du Royaume-Uni à Ottawa, demanda à Hume Wrong de présenter un aide mémoire sur la question des corvettes canadiennes. Dans ce mémoire, le Gouvernement du Royaume-Uni souligna que le Gouvernement Canadien pouvait aider la Grande Bretagne à traiter d’un “difficile problème Palestinien”. M. Garner, représentant du Royaume-Uni, déclara à Wrong que l’Amirauté avait fourni des informations au bureau des Dominions après que John Holmes du Haut Commissariat Canadien à Londres se soit enquis des rapports du journal. Ce fut donc le Haut Commissariat à Londres qui déclencha l’action et non le Gouvernement de Grande Bretagne. La Chambre des Communes semblait plus préoccupée par le problème des corvettes que ne le fut le Gouvernement du Royaume-Uni.

Etant donné qu’il n’y avait rien que le Ministère des Affaires Extérieures pouvait faire à propos de l’affaire des corvettes déjà en possession de l’Agence Juive, cette affaire mourut de se belle mort quelques mois après. En mars 1947 toutefois, la question ressortit lorsque le Consul Général Canadien à Lisbonne reçut un télégramme énigmatique.

Le Portugal constituait une importante base pour les opérations sionistes en Europe. C’était un terrain de bataille pour les guerres clandestines entre les agents de la Haganah et les Britanniques. Fin février 1947, un groupe de sionistes locaux, dirigé par un certain Phillip Spitzer, négocièrent l’acquisition d’un vieux destroyer américain: l’*Arnprior*, ancré dans un port britannique. Dans la nuit du 16 mars 1947, le Capitaine McLellan, attaché maritime Britannique à Lisbonne et chargé de contrecarrer les agents de la Haganah à propos de l’acquisition du destroyer, reçut plusieurs balles dans le corps. McLellan rescapa de l’attentat et ses assaillants évitèrent l’arrestation. L’affaire de la corvette *Arnprior* fut passablement mystérieuse.

Le Département des Affaires Extérieures passa à l’action. Lorsque la question fut portée à l’attention du Ministère des Affaires Extérieures neuf mois plus tard, le bateau *Arnprior* se trouvait toujours à Halifax. De l’avis de H. O. Moran de la Division Economique du Ministère des Affaires Extérieures, il y avait très peu de choses à faire en la matière.

L’espoir que le navire pourrait être détenu en refusant d’émettre un permis d’exportation, fut perdu lorsque W. F. Bull, Directeur de Département de l’exportation du Ministère du Commerce et de l’Industrie, rappela à Moran que les

navires démilitarisés ne tombaient pas sous la coupe du contrôle de l'export. L'*Arnprior* ne pouvait être détenu en retardant l'émission du permis d'exportation. Cependant, lorsque Moran approcha le Ministère des Transports, il lui fut dit que l'*Arnprior* n'avait jamais été enregistré comme vaisseau canadien.

Reid suggéra que Moran approche la Division Légale des Affaires Extérieures afin d'y chercher conseil de la part du Ministère de la Justice sur la question de savoir si oui ou non le gouvernement Canadien avait le pouvoir d'empêcher un certain Levine de vendre l'*Arnprior*. Moran approcha la Division Légale. Deux éventualités furent examinées: le contrôle par restriction d'enregistrement et, l'invocation de certains principes de droit international qui pourraient empêcher l'emploi illégal d'un vaisseau à la suite d'une vente finale.

Le Sous-Ministre F.P. Varcoe écrivit à Lester Pearson qu'il ne connaissait point de "méthode aux termes du droit du Canada par laquelle un vaisseau (pourrait) être vendu afin qu'il (ne puisse pas) être légalement utilisé pour un dessein certain."

La corvette *Arnprior* ne fut jamais un navire d'immigrants. Pour des raisons qui ne sont pas encore connues, certains avaient perdu tout intérêt envers l'*Arnprior* vers la fin de l'année 1946 ou vers le début de l'année 1947. L'Agence Juive s'orienta vers l'acquisition de navires bien plus grands tel que le *Président Warfield* connu historiquement comme l'*Exodus 1947*.

Quelle que soit la raison, il est clair que ce fut l'Agence Juive et non le Gouvernement Canadien qui laissa l'*Arnprior* à quai à Halifax, attendant d'être utilisé.

L'immigration juive vers la Palestine était "illégale" en ce qu'elle violait les règlements du Gouvernement Mandataire mais elle n'était pas "illégale" quel que soit le sens accepté sur la scène internationale, que ce soit par convention ou en vertu du droit international.

Le Canada n'avait aucune stratégie directe et peu d'intérêts commerciaux dans la région, et, de plus, il n'avait qu'un contact diplomatique des plus minime au Moyen-Orient à cette époque (1947).

A Ottawa, le public Canadien appuyait la Grande Bretagne et fut hostile ou indifférent au sionisme. Il y eut un tollé public énorme contre les sionistes. A cet effet, il fut établi une politique canadienne visant à assurer que l'équipement canadien n'était pas utilisé pour des causes qui répugnaient aux Canadiens.

L'épisode des corvettes "illégales" fut un des quelques épisodes au cours desquels le Canada appliqua une décision de politique substantielle sur la question de la Palestine avant d'accepter d'être membre de la Commission Spéciale des Nations-unies sur la Palestine en mai 1947. Cette décision de tenter — autant

que faire se peut au sein de la loi et du règlement — de rayer l'accès de sionistes à des navires canadiens fut définitivement anti-sioniste dans ses implications. En matière de problèmes concernant la Palestine, la neutralité du Canada manifestait une certaine inclinaison pour la Grande Bretagne.

On the morning of June 19, 1946, the 1,039 ton steamer *Beauharnois* slipped her cable in the small Italian port of Vado on the Gulf of Genoa and headed southeast. Aboard were 1,259 Jewish refugees, most from Greece, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Poland, and a mixed crew of Palestinian Jews and American volunteers. The vessel sailed in defiance of the orders of the Italian government and made a steady 17 knots as she tried to elude pursuers. The ship flew the Panamanian flag but the ultimate owner was the Jewish Agency for Palestine which had renamed her the *Josiah Wedgewood*, after a British Member of Parliament who had supported the Zionist cause in the 1930s. In a few days the *Wedgewood* turned the southern tip of Sicily and headed east towards Palestine. Six days out of port she was intercepted by a British destroyer 150 miles from her objective. There was little resistance from the unarmed immigrant ship although the crew dropped anchor several miles from the coast causing a short delay. The Palestine coast was sighted on June 26 and in the night most of the crew climbed over the side to escape arrest. They were intercepted. The next morning the *Wedgewood* docked in the Port of Maifa and the refugees were taken off and trucked to a detention camp at Atlit, 19 miles south of Haifa on the Mediterranean coast.¹

The *Wedgewood* was one ship of a larger fleet owned by the Jewish Agency and by the *Mossad*, the immigration branch of the Haganah, the underground army of the Jewish community in Palestine. The ships were a mixed bag of decrepit coastal steamers, ancient and rusty excursion ships and modern, war surplus, warships. The *Wedgewood* and her sister ships *Haganah*, *Gadio* and *Josephine Barbara* were the fastest and most up to date of the lot. They were corvettes, built in Canada from a standard design and used by the Royal Canadian Navy in World War Two for anti-submarine patrol duty in the North Atlantic. These ships, originally commissioned as the *Beauharnois*, the *Norsid*, the *Owen Sound* and the *Guelph*,² had been obtained from the Canadian War Assets Corporation by Haganah agents in New York City and registered under the Panamanian flag. Their voyages caused acute embarrassment to the Canadian government.

By the end of World War Two, Canada had built more than one hundred thirty corvettes,³ small sub-chasers. The Canadian navy, in fact, had expanded

from almost nothing in 1939 to fourth largest in the world by war's end. Now Canada had little use for this armada and surplus vessels were handed over to the War Assets Corporation for disposal. It was clear to the government that some general policy was needed to guide the sale of ships and other arms to foreign countries, and in May 1946, the cabinet approved guidelines drawn up by Norman A. Robertson, the Under Secretary of State of External Affairs, to deal with the issue. He had recommended that Canada refuse to sell arms to all countries except "those such as the United Kingdom and the United States with which we have exceptionally close political relations and a clearly established community of defence interests."⁴ The government was particularly sensitive to potential political embarrassment that could occur if Canadian weapons were used in a cause unpopular to the Canadian people. A memorandum to the cabinet drawn up by Assistant Under Secretary of State for External Affairs, Escott Reid, in March 1947 noted several types of conflicts thought to be "repugnant to a large number of Canadians" including pacification of "rebellious colonial peoples," a civil war in China and civil disputes in Latin America. Reid also warned against sale of weapons to any country which, by change of policy or government, might become unfriendly to the western world or dominated by the Soviet Union.⁵

Canadian policy was designed to restrict arms exports, but sales and exports of demilitarized naval vessels were not covered since such ships were not considered weapons. This allowed the Haganah to acquire the four former RCN ships relatively easily. The purchase was directed from Haganah headquarters in New York which operated from the Hotel Fourteen in Manhattan. In 1945, after the end of World War Two, David Ben Gurion, Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive in Palestine, sent Danny Shind, a young Palestinian, to New York to work with Yaacov Dostrovsky, Chief of the Haganah Staff, who was in charge of the New York operation. Shind and Dostrovsky, using money donated to the Jewish Agency primarily by American Jews, established a number of dummy corporations which purchased ships. To avoid suspicion⁶, each company would acquire only a few ships — the Canadian corvettes were bought by the United Ship Corporation.⁷ The vessels were then registered under foreign flags of convenience, manned by Palestinians and volunteers from the United States and Canada and sailed to Europe, usually to France, where they were outfitted and equipped to carry far more people than they had ever been designed to hold. The ships then proceeded to small ports on the French or Italian coast where Jewish refugees were loaded aboard. The refugees came from the displaced persons camps in Europe which held much of

the remnant of European Jewry which had survived Hitler's extermination camps. The British, responsible for the Palestine mandate, had instituted a policy in 1939 to restrict Jewish immigration into Palestine to no more than 1,500 each month. The Royal Navy was charged with the task of intercepting the immigrant ships and escorting them to Palestine. At first immigrants were simply let free and their numbers discounted from the monthly quota. In late 1946 the policy was changed and immigrants were shipped to Cypress and placed in detention camps.

On July 30, 1946, the London *Times* carried a story which detailed the exploits of the immigrant ship *Haganah*. She sailed from a French port with about 2,600 displaced persons and had been intercepted off the Palestine coast the day before. The ship was rather well known in Royal Navy circles. On a previous occasion it had rendezvoused at sea, outside Palestine territorial waters, with a battered Turkish tramp steamer, the *Akbel*, and had transferred its entire load of immigrants to the older vessel. The *Akbel* made for the Palestine coast and was seized; the *Haganah* escaped scot free.⁸ The *Times* story noted that the fleet of immigrant ships in the Mediterranean outnumbered the Royal Navy in the area and added that the collection included "corvettes purchased in Canada."⁹

Five words buried on page 4 of the *Times* spurred the Canadian High Commission in London to action. The Commission sent a note of inquiry to the Department of External Affairs in Ottawa, which in turn, approached the War Assets Corporation for information. War Assets confirmed that a number of ships had been sold to "Jewish dealers in New York" and were currently operating under the Panamanian flag.¹⁰ The Department passed this information to the High Commission and noted that the Canadian government had "no control over [the] resale of these vessels."¹¹

The Canadian High Commission in London had interested itself in this case even though the newspaper reports of the Canadian ships were brief and there had been no editorial comment. Indeed, there had been no representations of any kind made to the High Commission about the corvettes by United Kingdom authorities. The prime concern at Canada House was over the potential impact the ships might have on Canadian-UK relations since anti-Zionist feeling was growing stronger by the day in Britain. Acting High Commissioner Frederic Hudd was, therefore, not satisfied with the disclaimer that Canada had no control over the resale of the corvettes. He thought the Canadian government had "a responsibility to look a little farther."¹²

In Ottawa, Escott Reid, then of the Political Division, agreed with Hudd. He

considered the use of these ships “politically embarrassing” and hoped that War Assets would do “all in their power” to see that this situation “did not happen again.”¹³ Hume Wrong, Assistant Under Secretary of State for External Affairs, wondered what action could be taken except to ask that War Assets be more careful in future.¹⁴ He approached War Assets, pointed out the sensitivity of these sales and asked the Corporation to “watch the sale of corvettes and frigates and do anything [possible] to lessen the likelihood of Canadian ships being resold for use in the smuggling of immigrants into Palestine.” He also asked the corporation to advise External Affairs when sales were made to allow the Department to better prepare for incidents of this kind in the future.¹⁵ J. H. Berry, president of the Corporation, agreed.¹⁶ On September 25, a representative of the United Kingdom High Commission in Ottawa called on Hume Wrong at the Department of External Affairs to present an *aide memoir* on the subject of the Canadian corvettes. In the memorandum the UK government passed along information obtained from the Admiralty on the four Canadian ships and noted that the Canadian government could help Britain deal with the “difficult Palestine problem” if it would “take any steps open . . . to ensure that [Canadian] ships are sold to purchasers who intend to use them themselves for legitimate traffic. . . .” Mr. Garner, the UK representative, told Wrong that the Admiralty had provided the information to the Dominions Office after John Holmes, at the Canadian High Commission in London, had asked about the newspaper reports.¹⁷ It was, therefore, the Canadian High Commission in London which had initiated action, not the British government. Canada House seemed more concerned about the corvettes than the UK government was. This perhaps explains why the corvette issue was never formally discussed between Frederic Hudd and the UK government and also why Canada House inquiries at the Dominions and Foreign Offices had discovered no excitement over the matter.¹⁸ Canada House had shown itself more Catholic than the Pope in leaping at an opportunity to insert itself into the matter of Palestine immigration.

Since there was nothing External Affairs could do about corvettes already in the hands of the Jewish Agency, concern over the issue died down completely over the next few months. It was revived in March 1947, with the receipt of a cryptic telegram from the Canadian Consulate General in Lisbon:

Information has been received that negotiations are proceeding for the sale of corvette “Arnprior” to buyers in Portugal . . . through Block of Montreal. If this is so an investigation is suggested . . .¹⁹

The Consulate General had received its information from the British Embassy in Lisbon which kept a close watch on Zionist activities in Portugal. The Em-

bassy had dug up the news from what they believed to be an absolutely reliable source at the end of “a luxurious dinner attended by freeflowing drinks.”²⁰ Portugal was an important base for Zionist operations in Europe. It was a battleground for clandestine warfare between the British and Haganah agents that only needed a ‘Third Man’ theme to qualify as the subject for a Hollywood thriller. In late February 1947, for example, a group of local Zionists headed by one Phillip Spitzer, a Rumanian Jew, negotiated the purchase of an obsolete American destroyer anchored in a British harbour. The British embassy in Lisbon uncovered the transaction and blocked the sailing even though the ship was, or had been, American property. On the night of March 16, 1947, Commander McLellan, British naval attaché in Lisbon, and responsible for foiling the Haganah on the destroyer deal, was driving towards Lisbon when two cars pulled alongside and several shots were fired at him. McLellan escaped injury; his assailants escaped arrest.²¹

The Canadian connection came through two Rumanian Jews, Moses Frades and Stefan Aldianu, “both well known Zionists and Communists” in the words of Lester S. Glass, Acting Canadian Consul General in Lisbon, who were negotiating for the purchase of the Castle Class corvette *Arnprior* for \$100,000 through Lewis Levine of Montreal. The ship was berthed in Halifax and Levine was using a Montrealer named Block as his sales agent. Glass reported that Frades owned 90% of a small local watch importing company that did about \$50,000 a year in business, while Aldianu’s method of living was “rather a mystery.” Glass concluded from the nature of Frades’ business and Aldianu’s lack of funds that they were “merely cover for Zionist interests.”²²

Alerted, the Department of External Affairs swung into action. Inquiries to the Department of Transport elicited the information that Levine had approached the War Assets Corporation in January 1946 seeking information about sales conditions for war surplus corvettes. He had told War Assets that he intended to operate his purchase “in the Mediterranean area” and wanted to be allowed to register his ship where he pleased.²³ In early February War Assets offered Levine, acting on behalf of Diesel & Precision Works Limited of Montreal, a Castle Class corvette for \$80,000 subject to the stipulation that proper conversion for civilian use be carried out in Canada. (The ship was already demilitarized but was still not suitable for civilian traffic.) Levine could either carry out the work in Canada at a cost of about \$80,000 or pay War Assets an additional \$15,000 for permission to re-sell the ship abroad. Levine put down a deposit of \$8,000 and accepted the conditions of purchase with the understanding that he would have “freedom in the use of the flag”. The balance of

\$72,000 was paid on April 12 and Levine took delivery of the ship,²⁴ tied up on the north side of Pier 4 in Halifax, on June 11, 1946.²⁵ Nine months later, when the matter was brought to the attention of External Affairs, the ship was still berthed in Halifax; the conversion work had not yet been carried out and the additional \$15,000 for permission to sell overseas had not been paid.²⁶

External had caught the horse just this side of the barn door. The sale had been completed but all of the provisions attached to it had not been carried out. In the opinion of H. O. Moran, of the Economic Division of External, there was little anyone could do if Levine chose to complete the work or pay the extra money to sell abroad. However, the ship still lay in a Canadian port and that offered some hope Ottawa could do something, perhaps in the way of "administrative delays,"²⁷ to prevent it from leaving Canada.

Hope that the ship could be detained by refusing to issue an export permit was dashed when W. F. Bull, Chief of the Export Branch of the Department of Trade and Commerce, reminded Moran that demilitarized ships were not under export control.²⁸ Thus, the *Arnprior* could not be detained by holding up an export permit. Bull suggested that the Department of Transport might have some power to act through their control over the transfer of ship registrations, but when Moran approached Transport he was told the *Arnprior* had never been registered as a Canadian vessel.²⁹ This meant that no registration transfer would be necessary and that the Department of Transport could not stop the *Arnprior* from sailing by blocking such a transfer. Moran was running out of options.

If Moran was not already aware of his own troubles, Escott Reid reminded him further in a memorandum drawn up April 29. He noted the British request of September 1946, that the Canadian government help prevent the use of Canadian ships in the immigrant traffic. "It would clearly be most regrettable" Reid wrote, "if another corvette were to be purchased by Zionist interests for the same illegal use." Reid suggested that Moran approach the Legal Division of External to seek advice from the Department of Justice on the question of whether or not the Canadian government had the power to stop Levine from selling the *Arnprior* for use "in the illegal carriage of immigrants to Palestine." If the answer was no, then the only thing left was to ask War Assets and any other government departments concerned to apply a policy of "administrative delays".³⁰

Moran approached the legal division. Two courses were examined; control by restricting registration and the invocation of some principle of international law which might prevent illegal use of a vessel following completion of sale. Neither offered any promise. There was little law on the matter and few prece-

dents. The legal division thought the problem was “practically insoluble” and could only suggest that the ship be delayed as long as possible, thus making “the proposition completely unprofitable to the party concerned.”³¹ This was a reference to the daily berthing charges that had already piled up on the *Arnprior* and which could only increase as long as the ship was tied up at Pier 4.³² The Department of Justice confirmed the Legal Division’s view. Deputy Minister F. P. Varcoe wrote Lester Pearson that he knew of “no method under the law of Canada whereby a vessel [could] be sold so that it [could not] be legally used for a certain purpose.”³³

Even though there was little or nothing the Canadian government could do about the *Arnprior*, the *Arnprior* did not sail. Levine did not complete the conditions of the transaction and was therefore not in possession of a valid Bill of Sale. Until he had such a Bill of Sale he could not register the ship in his name. Further, by late May 1947, he had not paid the \$15,000 to War Assets that would allow him to sell the ship abroad.³⁴ By then considerable wharfage charges had built up on the corvette. J. H. Berry, War Assets president, instructed officers in the Ship Sales Division in Montreal to hold Levine’s \$15,000 payment, should it be made, until his office or Moran had been notified.³⁵ Pearson wrote Canada House in London that they would be told if Levine showed up with the money.³⁶ But Levine did not show. Although the *Arnprior* was towed from Halifax to Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, on December 8, 1947,³⁷ nothing further was heard about the ship until late 1949 when Levine approached the Department of Transport with a request for information on any liens, leases or mortgages held against it.³⁸ Transport referred the matter to War Assets which contacted External. External replied that they were no longer interested in the matter.³⁹

The corvette *Arnprior* never became an immigrant ship. The cause lay not with the Canadian government. It tried to do all it could to prevent the *Arnprior* from sailing but it was, in fact, powerless to do anything. The reason lay with Levine and those he represented. For some reason still unknown, they had lost interest in the *Arnprior* sometime in late 1946 or early 1947. Perhaps other, more important, matters diverted their attention. The Jewish Agency was turning from small blockade runners, with limited passenger carrying capacities, to larger ships such as the Chesapeake Bay excursion steamer *President Warfield*, known to history as the *Exodus 1947*, which attempted to land more than four thousand refugees in Palestine in the summer of 1947. Later that year the *Pan Crescent* and *Pan York* sailed from Black Sea ports carrying approximately fifteen thousand refugees, most from Rumania. Perhaps also the money necessary

to free the *Arnprior* and pay the wharfage fees was more needed elsewhere. Whatever the cause it is clear that it was the Jewish Agency, and not the Canadian government, which left the *Arnprior* sitting idly alongside a Halifax dock.

It was not that External Affairs, supported by other branches of the Canadian government, did not try. From the moment news reached Canada House that former Canadian ships were being used to smuggle immigrants into Palestine, there seems to have been an automatic and unspoken assumption that it was Canada's duty to take action in support of British policies. Not once in the entire affair did anyone in External publicly take issue with Britain's determination to keep all but a handful of European Jewish refugees out of Palestine. No one questioned Britain's right to impose such a policy under the terms of the Palestine mandate originally granted by the League of Nations. Jewish immigration to Palestine was 'illegal' in any accepted international sense either by convention or international statute.

Canada's reaction reveals much about Canada's Palestine policy in the immediate post-war period. Canada had no direct strategic and few commercial interests in the region. Canada's total trade with the middle east was a small fraction of Canada's international trade and Canada did not import a single drop of middle east oil up to the end of 1947.⁴⁰ Canada had only minimal diplomatic contact in the middle east in this period. The sole Canadian diplomatic representative there was the Canadian Trade Commissioner in Cairo. (Canada opened an embassy in Turkey in 1948). With few interests in the region, and fewer contacts, Canada was content to follow the British lead.

Canadian diplomats in London were close to the centre of the controversy and well acquainted with the men who made Britain's Palestine policy. There was definite sympathy for Britain at Canada House and understanding of the British predicament. The Canadians were reluctant to pass judgement on Britain. Robertson, in the opinion of John Holmes, believed there was no right or wrong in the situation. Britain's immigrant blockade was a tough and difficult policy that Canada should not subvert without good reason. The diplomats in Canada House were also somewhat put off by what they viewed as the virulence of American Zionism.⁴¹

In Ottawa there was another factor to consider. The Canadian public supported Britain and was hostile or indifferent to Zionism.⁴² There was a tremendous public outcry against the Zionists, some of it unabashedly anti-semitic, whenever news of the latest Irgun action hit the newspapers. Hanging unarmed British sergeants or blowing up the King David Hotel may have been effective in driving the British out of Palestine but created thousands of enemies

in a Canada still overflowing with anglophilic solidarity from the war. In this connection it was established Canadian policy to ensure that Canadian equipment was not used in causes repugnant to Canadians.⁴³

The episode of the 'illegal' corvettes was one of the few instances wherein Canada made a substantive policy decision on a Palestine matter prior to accepting membership on the United Nations Special Commission on Palestine in May 1947. That decision, to attempt as far as possible within existing law and regulation to bar Zionist access to Canadian ships, was definitely anti-Zionist in its implications. On Palestine matters, Canada's neutrality had a pro-British tilt.

NOTES

1. *The Times*, June 20, 26, 28, 1946.
2. Public Records Office, Foreign Office Papers, FO 371/52632. Telegram from Dominions Office to U.K. High Commissioner in Canada, Sept. 4, 1946.
3. James B. Lamb, *The Corvette Navy: True Stories from Canada's Atlantic War* (Toronto, 1979), p. 5.
4. Public Archives of Canada (PAC), Privy Council Records, RG 2/18/Vol. 86, File M.30.2. "Export of Armaments (including Ammunition and Implements of War) to Foreign Governments." March 7, 1947.
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14. *Ibid.* (Pencilled notation on memo.)
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16. *Ibid.*, Berry to Wrong, September 3, 1946.
17. *Ibid.*, Pearson to Robertson, October 19, 1946.
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20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, McCourt to Nicholson, April 16, 1947.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, Birchard to Berry, April 16, 1947.
26. *Ibid.*, Moran to Reid, April 26, 1947.

27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*, Bull to Moran, April 3, 1947.
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30. *Ibid.*, "Memorandum to Economic Division," April 19, 1947.
31. *Ibid.*, "Memorandum to Mr. Hopkins Re: Canadian corvette 'Arnprior'," May 19, 1947.
32. *Ibid.*, Moran to Reid, April 26, 1947.
33. *Ibid.*, Varcoe to Pearson, June 17, 1947.
34. *Ibid.*, Whitehead to Roger, May 20, 1947.
35. *Ibid.*, Berry to Birchard, Saunders, Cruickshank, July 9, 1947.
36. *Ibid.*, Pearson to Wilgress, July 2, 1947.
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38. *Ibid.*, Levine to Superintendent of Marine Services, October 20, 1949.
39. *Ibid.*, Heeney to Coughlin, October 31, 1949.
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