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Different drummer, same parade: Britain's Palestine department, 1942-1948

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Abstract:

This thesis examines a longstanding object of scholarly inquiry -- the degree Palestine's distinction from other settler colonies -- in light of two developments: historians now examine the social history of Palestine; others, twentieth-century colonial theory and practice. The topic of labour administration in the British government -- the work of the Palestine Labour Department from 1942 to 1948 -- together the two perspectives. The thesis first surveys pressures on British administrators during the interwar period and the responses of the Colonial Office and colonial administrators. In particular, policies and programs reflected a growing interest in labor accorded to colonial workers, both settlers and so-called "natives," as the British government's World War II revealed Britain's dependence on colonial stability to protect its economic and strategic resources. As it places the Palestine mandate in this context and examines the operation of the Palestine Labour Department, the thesis refers to the example of Northern Rhodesia, another colony with highly organized settler workers and a "native" workforce. Drawing mainly on British and mandate government archives, the thesis presents the department's aims, achievements, and deficiencies in light

and hindrance from external political and economic forces and other parts of the government. Examination of one protracted and ultimately uncompleted attempt to set up a system of government-run labour exchanges, provides an example of the strengths and vulnerabilities, strategies and tactics, of the agencies and interests that shaped labour administration in the mandate. The thesis argues that the Palestine Labour Department shared in the pressures from government and other forces that commonly affected contemporary colonial labour departments. At the same time, the distinctive characteristics of Palestine and its workforce required a labour department that differed in composition from its counterparts. That difference in experience and outlook made Palestine's labour agency a forerunner of the agencies of the succeeding phase of colonial administration.

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