



PALESTINE

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by

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The report of the Palestine Royal Commission is a great state paper. It is incomparably the most thorough going and the most penetrating analysis of the Palestine situation that has ever been made.

It is a pitiless document. That is one of its greatest merits. It exhibits in all of its nakedness our miserable failure - the failure of each one of us, Jew, Arab, English. An extraordinary work of building up a waste land has been achieved. But we have failed. We have not known how to make peace. It is the well-documented story of two fierce nationalisms at war with one another. The document would have commanded that much more confidence had it exposed equally to the light of day the failure also of the Mandatory imperialism to rise to its unparalleled opportunities.

The failure of my own people is hardest to become reconciled to. We have been returning to a small, already populated, even if not over-populated land, and despite all the "rights" conferred upon us by states which had won the war, these rights are a thousand times less important than the consent, if at all to be obtained, of the Arabs who live in the land and of the Arab people who will continue to be our neighbors, even after British imperialism may have passed. Moreover, my people has a long and high ethical tradition. We have been incomparable witnesses to ideals of justice for ourselves and for others, and we have suffered, as perhaps no other people, from the brute force and selfishness of the nations. Our duty in Palestine to make peace was and remains our primary practical duty, as well as the duty of noblesse oblige.

The Commission's report should once and for^{all} clear the atmosphere of the cant that has surrounded the whole Palestine enterprise. We should all of us hang our heads in shame that we have not been worthy of the historical task placed upon us.

The question must however be considered from a purely practical point of view: What are the practical alternatives before us? There is one final test to any proposed answer: Will it help to secure freely and openly negotiated agreements between Jews and Arabs? Every other question, however important in theory or result, is secondary.

The Commission say that any kind of political agreement between Jew and Arab is impossible under the present system and that such an agreement may be possible in the future after the partition of the country.

My reply is: I agree that the present system must go. It has proved its inefficacy. But is partition the most practical alternative? I do not think so, although I admit that the Commission has made out a strong case for partition. I do not think so drastic a step should be taken now, with all the passionate dissatisfaction it is bound to create, before the policy has been seriously and sincerely tried of creating conditions leading to freely and openly negotiated agreements between Jews and Arabs.

It may be asked if that is not what has been tried and failed. By no manner of means. Thus far there has been government by see-saw. First one people, then the other would be favored or punished. There has never even been formulated, much less worked out or put into effect, a conscious, day-by-day policy that would have one great basic object in view: Freely and openly negotiated agreements between Jews and Arabs.

When His Excellency, the High Commissioner, in announcing the results of the Commission's inquiry, says, that every effort has been made "to encourage cooperation between Arabs and Jews", any one living in Palestine is in a position to challenge that statement. The High Commissioner or some official might occasionally, out of sheer good will, have done this or that to try to bring Jews and Arabs nearer to one another. But has there been a clearly worked-out and persistently and methodically pursued policy to that effect? Have Government officials been trained and instructed in what should be the basic policy, the primary duty, the chief justification for the existence of the Mandatory, namely, to try to create conditions in the atmosphere of which Jews and Arabs would be enabled, should they so desire, to negotiate agreements freely and openly with one another? We know that the answer is in the negative.

The Royal Commission admits as much. Indeed, each official, high or petty, has had his own policy, his own interpretation of the Mandate. Many have frankly said that the business of rapprochement between Jews and Arabs was none of their official business. Indeed some officials have gone further in their opposition to Arab-Jewish rapprochement, perhaps on the theory that it was patriotic to apply the ancient formula, divide et impera.

The Royal Commission itself seems to contend that the Mandate as drafted precluded the Mandatory from taking the necessary steps towards this Jewish-Arab entente. If this be so, the Mandate should be changed, the quicker the better. The new Mandate should have two basic points, 1) Both Jews and Arabs are in Palestine as of right and not on sufferance 2) The chief reason for the Mandatory's presence in Palestine is to endeavor to create conditions favorable to the free and open negotiation of agreements between Jews and Arabs,

such agreements to be incorporated progressively into the basic law of the land.

To such a suggestion the Commission might reply that without partition such a policy could not succeed. My reply is twofold: First, this policy has never been tried, and until it is, a prophecy as to its success is as legitimate as a prophecy of failure. Second, when I mention freely and openly negotiated agreements I mean such as, in the first instance, will be for limited periods of time.

This limitation of time is of the utmost importance. Political agreements are in their nature neither abstract nor eternal. Thucydides tells of a most sacred treaty that was made for sixty years and lasted fifteen. There are many examples nearer home. The Commission contend that Jews and Arabs will "never" be united unless there first be partition, disunion. "Never" is a long time for the historian. The Commission are right in saying that the great majority of Jews will "never", that is today, agree to becoming a statutory minority. The situation becomes entirely different if such an agreement is made for a limited period of time. The Commission say the Arabs will "never", that is today, make a political agreement with the Jews, except the Jews agree always to remain a minority. But if you leave out agreements that are presumably made forever - abstractions - and negotiate agreements for limited periods, there is the possibility of advance. And who knows better than the statesmen of the British Commonwealth, that many an apparently insoluble problem is met not by dealing in absolutes, but empirically, step by step?

Even during last year's rebellion - it is the proper term - some Arabs and some Jews were able to work out the outlines of a program for the next ten years. The Commission was informed of the existence of such a program.

The Commission did not ask to know more about it. Such an agreement must necessarily contain many elements of vital interest to both peoples. In addition to immigration, land, employment, it would contain points on agricultural, economic and cultural development in common, self-governing institutions, an Arab Federation, the League of Nations. With Arab consent, we could settle many hundreds of thousands of persecuted Jews in various Arab lands. That is worth a real price. Without Arab consent even our 400,000 in Palestine, remain in jeopardy, despite the momentary protection of British bayonets. With Jewish help, the Arab lands have a chance of rising to their former economic, political and cultural glory. I believe there are Arab statesmen both in Palestine and elsewhere of sufficient stature to know that that is worth a real price. Without Jewish help the destiny of these Arab lands will in all likelihood remain unfulfilled. If a meeting of minds was possible, even during a rebellion for a few Jews and a few Arabs, by no means the least among their peoples, this should be possible today, the more so in view of the hostility which partition arouses among both peoples. In the negotiations which the Mandatory must enter upon with the League of Nations and the United States Government, and above all with the Jews, and with the Arabs of Palestine and with the Arabs of Transjordan (which holds one of the chief keys to the riddle), there should be many opportunities for proposing freely and openly negotiated agreements for limited periods between Jews and Arabs, between the Jews of the world and the Arabs of the world. If a first period of comparative peace, say from five to ten years, could be established, as I firmly believe it can, there would be the necessary breathing space during which to prepare for the next five to ten years. Is this not in the true British political tradition of making haste slowly, of dealing

practically with the political questions of today and tomorrow, rather than those of the next generation?

It may well be that all these efforts would result in failure. But, as in every effort to end a war, it is our duty to make the attempt - certainly to make this attempt before partition is carried through as a counsel of despair.

If, unhappily, for whatever reasons of State, such proposals are thrown out without even a hearing, I hesitate as to the course which, in my opinion, would best lead to the possibility of agreements freely and openly negotiated between Jews and Arabs. With or without partition, the question of Jew and Arab remains the most important of all Palestine questions, a number of which have been so splendidly met by Jews in the work of upbuilding. Without a solution of the Arab-Jewish question, all the work of upbuilding is on shaky foundations.

Partition has many attractions and advantages as well as many drawbacks. For the Jews it means a State - essentially a Zionist solution. Its two chief advantages seem to me to be first, that responsibility for the peace is placed where it belongs, upon me, upon you, and not upon a third party, and second, that the government of the enlarged Arab State, including Transjordan, might become willing, in its own interests, to negotiate agreements, one by one, step by step, with the Jewish Government. The two chief disadvantages are, in my opinion, first, the terrible irredentas on both sides of the new frontiers, new Balkans with their fierce comitedjis winked at by governments, and, second, the tiny size of the narrow Jewish State deprived of the South, the Negeb. Shall we be able to breathe spiritually in such an atmosphere any

more freely than today, and shall we be able to make a living in what looks like a toy state?

I should like to say a word about Jerusalem. The Jewish State without Jerusalem has been called Zionism without Zion. Not only Jewish history and Jewish prayers throughout centuries, but Jewish messianic hopes as well, make Jerusalem the centre of our being. "If I forget thee, oh Jerusalem..." But Jerusalem is not Jewish alone, it is Christian, it is Moslem. The Christian Redeemer was crucified there and Mohammed's mystic flight began there. Jerusalem is an inter-religious sanctuary, an inter-national city, and it should remain this, Jewish State or no Jewish State. Its function is to be the center of the religious international of the world, at least of the Western world. It should be internationalized, neutralized. Its constitution should give municipal citizenship to all its bona fide inhabitants, regardless of their political allegiance, and it should provide that the head of the municipality be in turn a Jew, a Christian, a Moslem. Such remarks at this stage seem not to be superfluous. Despite a Jewish majority in the Holy City, its municipality has thus far been permitted to be predominantly Arab. Now, if I understand aright the terms of the Commission's recommendations, it is in future to be predominantly Christian and British. "My House shall be called a House of prayer for all peoples", and the governance of this Holy City should be equally in the hands of Jew, Christian, Moslem, of Jew, Arab and European.

To my Jewish brothers I would say, that such a destiny for Jerusalem, if finely planned and generously carried through, is of importance to all the world, and it would redound more to the honor and glory of the Jew than if Jerusalem were just the capital of the Jewish State.

The Jewish people is faced with a three-fold destiny in its

Return to Zion:

1. Forming a living, creative center for the Jewish People and for Judaism.
2. Helping to maturity the slumbering spiritual and intellectual force of the whole Semitic world.
3. Helping Jerusalem to become the true sanctuary of the three great Semitic religions.

These are tasks worthy of the People of the Book. They are within the realm of practical possibility on one condition - understanding between Jew and Arab and British.

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