

THE ZIONIST ILLUSION

by W. T. STACE

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PALESTINE is a little country. But what is being done in Palestine is symptomatic of the entire state of the world. It is the methods of settlement being used in Palestine, rather than the particular settlement which may be reached, to which I wish to direct attention. These methods, I will try to show, are disastrous; and if we persist in using them elsewhere in the world — and there is every indication that we shall — the result can only be violence and war.

So far as World War II had a moral issue, it concerned the question whether international relations are to be governed by force or by law. Law means the application of principles of justice to disputes. So the issue is really between force and justice. We have swung out of the war, and we suppose that justice has defeated force. But are we, now in peacetime, pursuing the methods of justice or the methods of force? On the answer depends the future of the world, the issue of war or peace. It is better to take a particular current case and analyze it in detail, to find out what the trend is, than to make general statements. Palestine is an excellent testing ground.

Men's opinions on political and international questions are almost always formed on the basis of their emotions and partisan feelings, and scarcely at all on the basis of reason. This is the prime cause of the wars and bloodshed which fill the world. For emotion and partisan feeling, untempered by reason, issue necessarily in violence. Reason is the principle of democracy and justice. It weighs the issues impartially in the balance. A competent judge reaches a decision by *arguing* the case, not by flying off the handle about it. Reason, not emotion, much less self-interest, must be his guide. Not until men learn to govern their opinions and actions in international affairs by unbiased and impartial justice, based on reason, will wars end.

Palestine is a case in point. Not only are Jews

and Arabs inflamed by passions, which they call patriotism, but the greater nations concerned, who at least ought to be impartial, are making no attempt to judge the dispute between Jews and Arabs impartially. Instead each of them is concerned with self-interest, and they have made of the question either a struggle for national power or, worse still, a catch-bag for votes for a particular domestic party.

Any attempt to apply to Palestine the rule of justice is fraught with grave difficulties. In the first place, it is met with a solid wall of prejudices. Apart from that, the very attempt is decried. Since justice is a moral concept, one cannot consider it without raising questions of "right" and "wrong." Then the cry is raised that one is talking academically, that one is trying to settle practical questions by "abstract" moral rules which have no application and are not "realistic." But how else is the world ever to advance to any sort of international justice — an avowed aim of the UN inserted in its charter at the instance of Americans — except by applying to concrete situations principles which are in themselves abstract? The principles which law courts apply to men's actions are, as stated in lawbooks and statutes, abstract; and further, they are, in the last analysis, the product of "moral" ideas.

The scene in Palestine shifts so rapidly that it may seem impossible to say anything about it which will not become out of date in a month. But the principles of law and justice do not change, or at least change very slowly. Now the main principle of international justice is that which was laid down in the Atlantic Charter. Nations should have the right of determining their internal affairs without aggression from outside nations. This is nothing new, invented by Roosevelt or Churchill. It was implicit in Wilson's policy and pronouncements. It was the idea on which the League of Nations was supposed to be built. It has always been, for that matter, the fundamental idea of democracy. For the self-determination or democracy of a nation means that its affairs are governed by the wishes of its own people. And since the wishes of a people are never unanimous, it means in practice that they are governed by the wishes of the majority.

That one nation should by force or threats com-

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pel another nation to act contrary to its own will, or contrary to the wishes of the majority of its people, is "aggression." It is contrary to the principles of justice, democracy, and self-determination in their external or international application. That a minority within a nation should forcibly impose its will on the majority — this is likewise aggression, but is generally called "tyranny." It is the negation of the principles of justice, democracy, and self-determination in their internal or domestic application. This is the only "abstract" or "moral" principle which is needed for the adjudication of the Palestine controversy. And no changes in the local scene, nothing in the kaleidoscope of shifting events, will alter it. It will not be outdated a year from now or in fifty years. How does it apply to the controversy between Jews and Arabs?

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THE Arab case is, in essence, this. The Arabs constitute a large majority of the inhabitants of Palestine. This is not only true now, but it has been true since somewhere near the beginning of the Christian era — that is to say, for nearly two thousand years. The Arabs in Palestine are opposed, rightly or wrongly, to any mass immigration of Jews. Therefore the majority of the inhabitants of Palestine are opposed to such a mass immigration. But according to the principle of self-determination, which is the accepted principle of international justice, the affairs of a country must be governed by the wishes of the majority of its inhabitants, and any attempt of an outside country to override by force the wishes of such a majority is "aggression." Therefore the actions of Zionists, of Great Britain, and of America, in seeking to force on Palestine a mass immigration of Jews contrary to the wishes of the Arab majority, constitute acts of aggression and are contrary to the principles of international justice, self-determination, and democracy.

It will not do to answer that the Arab majority in Palestine is acting "wrongly" in objecting to Jewish immigration, or that, owing to the sufferings of the Jewish people, the Arabs "ought" to welcome them. For according to the principle of justice quoted, it is the majority of the people of Palestine themselves who are entitled to decide what they ought to do. That is the essence of the principle. Our attempt to tell them what they ought to do, and to impose our opinion in the matter by force or threats, constitutes aggression.

We can see this principle more clearly if we apply it in a case nearer home. The majority of the inhabitants of the United States object to the mass immigration of non-Caucasian peoples, and they exclude such peoples by law. Suppose some outside nation were sufficiently powerful to try to force the United States to admit non-Caucasian immigrants in hundreds of thousands against our will. We should certainly regard this as an act of aggression, not-

withstanding that a good case might be made out for saying that our objection to non-Caucasian peoples is "wrong." We must therefore allow to the majority of the inhabitants of Palestine the same right of determining such questions of right and wrong for themselves as we claim for the majority of the inhabitants of the United States.

It might be argued that although the democratic doctrine of majority rule applies very well to a country with a reasonably homogeneous population, like England or the United States, it cannot be applied in a country in which a permanent religious or racial minority is faced by a hostile and permanent racial or religious majority, as is the case in Palestine, and also in India. It is true that such a situation creates grave difficulties for democratic government. It may be used as an argument for partition or for what has been called in India "communal representation." It shows that in applying democratic principles to such a country some special arrangement must be devised to protect the minority from oppression. But I do not see how these considerations, though they may prove the necessity of special constitutional devices, can affect the question before us. It cannot be argued that since majority rule is difficult in the absence of a homogeneous population, therefore minority rule ought to be allowed to apply, at any rate in some particular cases such as immigration laws. And this is what the argument we are considering would amount to. This objection to the Arab case must therefore be dismissed.

Thus it will be seen that the Arab case rests squarely on the admitted principles of international justice. It is a direct application of them to Palestine. And the logic of the argument appears on the face of it conclusive and unanswerable. Let us see, however, what case the Zionists can make against it.

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THE Zionist case rests upon five main arguments. They are not usually tabulated and kept distinct. They are, like most arguments on most subjects, often presented to the public mixed together in a confused heap. But if they are to be properly analyzed and assessed, they must be kept separate and taken up for consideration one by one. Any other procedure can only result in muddled thinking.

The first argument is that Palestine was a Jewish land in ancient times. It was for long ages the national land and home of the Jews. It may reasonably be said to have "belonged" to the Jews. Moreover, they did not leave it of their own free will. They were forcibly dispossessed. And this gives them a claim to re-enter it now and to make of it again a national home.

What force, if any, is there in this contention? The question can only be answered after we have first decided what are the grounds of right by which *any* nation can claim the country which it occupies.

The answer is clear. No nation has any right to the land it occupies except long possession. What right have Americans to live in, occupy, and control these United States? No right whatsoever except the fact that they have actually lived here for two or three hundred years. It is true that there were cases of so-called purchase from the Indians. But no one will claim that the general right of the American people to occupy this country is founded on such purchases. By and large we just seized the land by any means that seemed at the time most convenient. The Indians were, in most cases, forcibly dispossessed. The American claim is thus based on what lawyers call long possession or "prescription."

The same is true of every other people in the world. In most cases there was not even the pretense of purchase which we find in America. The British, the French, the Germans, the Japanese, the Zulus, have no claim to the countries in which they live except long possession.

Judged by this principle, which is the only possible principle to apply, the Arabs have a far better claim to Palestine than the Americans have to America. For they have effectively occupied the country for nearly two thousand years. There may have been always a small Jewish minority in Palestine, just as there has been in America a small Indian minority from the time of its white occupation until now. This would give the Jews in Palestine a right to vote and to proper treatment, just as it gives the same rights to Indians in America. But that is all.

These considerations make it clear that the fact that Palestine was a Jewish land in ancient times cannot possibly give Jews a right of mass entry there now. No matter how a people came originally into possession of a country, whether by aggression, war, or in any other way, we have *in the end* — that is to say, after a sufficiently long period — to admit their exclusive right to it, which means of course that all prior claims are extinguished. For that is the only basis on which any people can ever claim the country which it inhabits. What is a "sufficiently long period"? Certainly two thousand years is. Thus the first Zionist argument is entirely without force.

The second argument is that Palestine has for the Jews a peculiarly sacred religious significance. Can we admit religious feelings as giving any sort of claim to mass immigration into a country? Would we allow such a claim in any other case? Obviously not. Thailanders could not assert a right to migrate into India because they are Buddhists and India, where the Buddha was born and lived, has a special religious significance for them. And Britishers and Americans, who are Christians, could not claim a right of mass settlement in Palestine on the ground that it has for them, just as much as for the Jews, a deep religious significance. "Oh, but Thailanders, Englishmen, and Americans have already national homes of their own, whereas the Jews are homeless. And therefore the cases are not parallel." But this is an example of the muddled thinking which comes of

mixing distinct arguments together. The question whether the homelessness of the Jews in any way alters the case is a separate question which I will consider in its place.

The third Zionist argument is that the British Government in 1917 promised the Jews that they should have a national home in Palestine. A moral claim is here based on the general principle of the sanctity of promises. On this ground the Arab claim to self-determination and the Jewish claim under the Balfour Declaration have been described by a British commission as "fundamentally a conflict of right with right." This is a very interesting piece of muddleheadedness. It admits, in the first place, that moral criteria of "right" and "wrong" should have application to the controversy. This is correct. It admits, secondly, that the Arab claim is based on the principle of self-determination and is therefore "right." This is also correct. It implies, thirdly, that the Zionist claim, based on the British promise, gives the Jews a moral right. But all this last suggestion proves is that the royal commissioners were grossly incompetent as ethical analysts. The position here taken is widely accepted because neither the average Zionist, nor the average man of any sort, nor — it now appears — the average royal commissioner, is capable of making more than the first step in such an analysis. They think "promises ought to be fulfilled, and the recipients of promises have a moral right to demand their fulfillment. Therefore the Jews in this case have such a right."

This is a crude piece of ethical analysis. Wrong and unjust promises ought not to be carried out and give no rights to demand that they be executed. For instance, you cannot claim a moral right to enforce a promise to steal. And if you do, you are an accessory to the theft. Therefore the question which has now to be asked is whether the British had any right to make promises about the disposal of Palestine contrary to the wishes of the majority of the inhabitants of that country. It is plain that, according to the principles of democracy and self-determination, which are the accepted principles of international justice, they had not. Their action in doing so was an act of aggression. Therefore the Balfour Declaration gives Zionists no moral claim, and if they insist on its fulfillment, they are accessories to aggression.

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WE NOW come to the question whether the homelessness of the Jews, to which we must add the frightful sufferings which they have undergone and are undergoing, the persecutions, the pogroms, and all the other horrors, can be made the basis of a claim to mass immigration into Palestine. We may list this as the fourth Zionist contention.

No humane person can view these facts without profound feelings of pity and shame — pity for the victims, shame for the cruelty and wickedness of our

human kind. But we have to ask what moral claims can be founded upon it. There arises, most certainly, a claim to generous treatment by every country in the world. But just because the facts yield an *equal* claim against all civilized countries (except that the claim is stronger against those countries which have been most responsible for the sufferings), they cannot yield any *special* claim against Palestine. The claim is against England, America, Russia, France, and Palestine too (if Palestine is a humane and civilized country), but not more against Palestine than any other country.

In domestic law we should at once admit this principle. If an individual citizen of a country is homeless, oppressed, and starving, he has a claim to be rescued from these conditions. But the claim is against the community as a whole, not against any individual private citizen (unless it is this citizen who has wrongfully caused his misery). His condition does not give him a claim to make his home in the house of Mr. Smith or Mr. Jones or to demand food from them. Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones have indeed duties and responsibilities in the matter, but only as members of the community, along with and equally with all other citizens. Thus too humanity at large has a plain duty to find a solution to the Jewish problem and to put an end to the persecutions and misery of the Jews. But the solution is not Palestine. What the proper solution is I shall discuss later. What the considerations which have just been adduced show is that the fourth argument of the Zionists has no more force than the others. It is what lawyers call a "plea ad misericordiam."

The last argument commonly put forward for Zionism is the fact that Jewish immigrants into Palestine have already enormously improved the country, and that further immigration will result in further benefits to it. This fact is to be admitted, and it is unnecessary to go into any details here regarding the economic and cultural improvements made in Palestine by the Jews. They are well known. The question to be asked is whether they constitute a valid argument for Zionism.

The hole in the argument is that it can be used to justify almost any aggression whatever — at any rate, any aggression by an advanced and highly civilized nation against a more backward one. Hitler might have argued that he would run France, England, and even America more efficiently than the present rulers of those countries. And the claim might not be entirely lacking in truth. He might have argued — and indeed did — that his conquests would in the end benefit the world. And if we consider such claims in this case fantastic, consider some others. The British have always justified their position in India by the benefits which they have brought to it. And this claim to have improved the country is, in spite of Congress Party propaganda, true in some respects even if it is not true in others. Mussolini justified his conquest of Ethiopia by claiming that he would abolish slavery and

introduce in general more civilized modes of life. And there can be little doubt that he would in fact have done so, given time.

These are all no doubt highly controversial cases. But the principle is clear. A highly civilized people, by conquering a backward people, will nearly always improve their country. And therefore, if this argument justifies Zionism, it will justify any aggression of a more civilized against a more backward people. And this we cannot admit without undermining and in the end destroying the conception of international justice to which we profess to adhere. Moreover, if we accept that conception, we cannot deny that peoples (which means in fact the majorities in any people) have a right to run their own affairs badly and to resist all attempts by foreigners to run them well.

There is indeed a danger of becoming academic here. Perhaps it was "wrong" for Caesar to subjugate the Gauls. But can we really regret that the Pax Romana civilized Europe? Perhaps we did "wrong" to rob the Indians of their country. But would it have been "right" for a sprinkling of half-civilized people to exclude forever from this vast continent those who were more competent than they were to make use of its opportunities?

Nevertheless it seems to me that the principle that a people have a right to force an entry into another country if they can show they are improving it — which is the real basis of the Zionist contention, though this is not the way they put it — is so dangerous in the present state of the world that it ought not to be allowed. It is better to err on the side of overzealousness against aggression, and to refuse to countenance even what might be regarded as a sort of justifiable aggression — what a dangerous phrasel — than to adopt into our philosophy of international relations a principle which can be so easily twisted to justify any aggression or any war whatsoever.

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THE analysis of the case for Zionism and the case against it which has been given seems to me absolutely indisputable on any ground of logic. Minor mistakes may have been made in the presentation of the matter. And it is always possible to catch at sentences or expressions and find fault with them. But the logic of the case as a whole is too clear for any error in the general conclusion that, in the dispute between Jew and Arab, the Arab claim is correct and the Zionist claim is without any foundation. This is the inevitable conclusion to which an impartial judge would come.

Of course, it will be violently disputed, but disagreement will be based on prejudice, emotion, or partisan feeling. Let the Zionist who is angered, or contemptuous, at what has been said examine his own mind and ask himself whether *he* is free from prejudice, emotion, and partisan feeling, whether

his own opinions have been based on an *impartial* analysis of the two sides to the case. And if he asks how he can be expected to be impartial in a matter in which he and his own people are concerned as in a matter of life and death, one must answer with what is no doubt a hard saying: impartiality as between oneself and another, as between one's own claims and those of another, is the essence of justice and morality, is the only way in which one can act justly towards others in this world.

But the unhappy condition of the Jews in Europe gives them, as we have seen, an equal claim on all the civilized nations of the world. Hence the true solution of the problem stares one in the face. All the underpopulated countries in the world — Australia, Canada, parts of the United States, Palestine itself, and others — ought to amend their immigration policies so as to take, each one, its proper share, according to available empty space, of those who need asylum. This is obviously the only solution which is just to all parties, which no one can say is a violation of their rights. Why then is this solution not being adopted by the statesmen of the world? Why, though the obligation of all countries to take in the refugees if they have empty spaces is recognized in the recent Anglo-American report, is it soft-pedaled there and the immigration of Jews into Palestine played up? Why has it received almost no attention and no discussion?

It is true that President Truman expressed his intention to ask the Congress to increase the immigration quota for refugees, including Jews. But this is not accompanied by any recognition that along these lines alone lies the only just solution of the Jewish problem. It is not accompanied by an abandonment of the policy of injustice in Palestine. It does not fundamentally alter the situation. And we have to repeat our question why, though we give this grudging and doubtful recognition to the claims of the just solution, we throw all our weight on the side of the unjust solution. If we find the true answer to this question, we put our finger on what is rotten in the world today, on what is certainly destined to make the future of the world a nightmare of war, on what makes nonsense of all our peace efforts. The answer is that we, the inhabitants of the United States, of Canada, of Australia, of Great Britain, of the rest of the countries concerned, do not want to admit our own plain moral obligations in the matter. We do not want to take our fair share of the burden. We have found a small country, Palestine, and a remote and defenseless people, the Arabs, on whom we can unjustly shove the burden of our duties.

It is often said that the Jews themselves hunger to go to Palestine and do not want, most of them, to go to other countries. True enough. But we must not suppose that this is any argument for the justice of the Zionist claim. Since when has it become a principle of justice that in a dispute regarding property or anything else the strong desire of one of the

parties to have whatever is in dispute gives him a claim to it? What people want proves only that they want it, not that they are in justice entitled to have it. And if the nations concerned make it plain that Palestine will be asked to take only its proper share of refugees, along with the other nations of the world, and stand firmly by this decision, the Jews in Europe will go gladly enough to America, Canada, or any other country that will treat them decently. And if these countries give the passionate wish of the Jews to go to Palestine as a *reason* for not lowering their own immigration barriers, this is no more than a hypocritical excuse.

The real cause of the reluctance of these countries to lower their immigration barriers lies elsewhere. When Mr. Bevin said that America was pressing Britain to allow more Jews into Palestine because we do not want to allow them into America, his remark was greeted with a howl of execration. Naturally, since the truth hit home and exposed our wickedness and hypocrisy! But his observation is just as true of the British Empire as it is of the United States. We have to face the plain truth, however unpleasant it may be, — however shameful if you like, — that none of the great nations want these refugees, and they are therefore attempting to thrust them on a little Arab country. And the reason why America in particular tries to force the pace, while Britain hangs back, is simply that the Jewish vote is powerful in America while Arab influence is important to the British Empire.

But this whole line of thought, it will be said, is not practical politics. It is not "realistic." The United States and the British Empire refuse to lower their barriers sufficiently to solve the problem and it is not of the least use trying to persuade them to do so or to adopt the solution of the Jewish problem here recommended. Therefore the only solution left is Palestine. It may be so. The practical politicians ought to know. But what I want to point out is that their "practical" and "realistic" kind of politics is what leads to war and what will inevitably lead to war again, not only in Palestine but throughout the world.

Do we want peace or don't we? If we do, then there is only one way to get it. We have to cease deciding international issues by considerations of vote-catching, self-interest, power, greed, prejudice, passion, and more or less base emotions disguised under the name of patriotism. We have to begin to decide them impartially by reason and the principles of justice.

This is the real lesson of Palestine. It is not an isolated issue. It touches the future of the whole world. Just as Guernica was a good testing ground for German and Italian methods of war, so Palestine is the testing ground of our peace policies. Our methods there, our whole emotional and irrational approach to the problem, expose the hollowness and futility of our protestations about peace.