

# Jewish and Arab Rights

• by Abraham Revusky

**T**WO peoples inhabit the small country between Dan and Beersheba. Both have a long connection with that country and both claim the full right to shape its future destinies. The conflict between these seemingly contradictory claims, usually expressed in bitter political struggle, reached its climax during the recent Arab outbreaks.

## CONFLICTING CLAIMS

**T**HE Arabs, forming a majority of Palestine's present population, base their claims on the principle of self-determination in the formalistic sense of this much misused word. They argue that as a majority of Palestine's population they have an inherent right to self-government which they may use for any purpose they choose. Specifically, they claim the right to use the control of self-governing institutions for perpetuating their majority by severe restrictions on the further growth of the present Jewish minority.

The Jews now forming a sizeable minority—about 30%—base their claims on their old historic connection with Palestine which was their cradle as a nation and civilization. They point moreover to the legal rights given to them by the Balfour Declaration and to their economic achievements during the 55 years of Palestinian colonization.

Most Arabs reject the Jewish claims as unjust and even imperialistic. They state that the Jews, in spite of the spiritual attachment to the country of their forefathers, lost all their rights when they abandoned it after the destruction of their second temple. The more modern Jewish claims, based on the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate, are described as inconsistent with the Arab rights for self-determination. The Jewish achievements in Palestine, though important, are likewise rejected as a basis for claims on the future.

The average Jew is frequently inclined to take the same uncompromising attitude as the Arab. He denies the organic connection of Palestinian Arabs with the present country of their habitation. He points to the devastation of the country by its Arab inhabitants, who not only were unable to increase the productive capacity of Palestine, but abandoned to decay the improvements already achieved in Biblical times. He looks upon the Arab as a guardian over someone else's estate, one who forfeited his rights because of poor and dishonest management.

Is there a possibility of compromise between these two extreme points of view?

No such compromise seems to be possible unless both sides of the controversy show a readiness to

revise their own claims and to recognize at least partly the claims of the others. A far-reaching psychological readjustment is the most important prerequisite of any serious attempt to eliminate the causes of the present strife, to inaugurate a new era of good will and co-operation among the Jews and Arabs.

## THE LIMITS OF SELF-DETERMINATION

**L**ET us first analyze the Arab claim for pre-dominance in Palestine. Let us measure this claim not with the yardstick of purely Jewish interests but in accordance with national rights which should prevail in a progressive world.

In other words, are we Jews, in claiming the right to build our national home in Palestine, infringing upon the natural rights of its present Arab majority? Do we claim, in building Palestine, an exception to the prevailing rules of international justice?

There would be a great deal of justification in demanding such an exception. We may claim that physical and ethnic preservation of Jews, condemned to annihilation in the lands of their present habitation, is more important than the national sovereignty of the Palestinian Arabs. We may argue that preservation of human lives must take preference over the less elementary national rights which in comparison seem a luxury. We may also state that the Arabs have much room for development in other countries of the Near East, that they may sacrifice something of their rights in Palestine to save as many Jews as possible from complete destruction.

## FIAT JUSTITIA, PEREAT MUNDUS

**C**ONSIDERING Jewish rights to Palestine an exception to prevailing rules, we cannot, however, expect everybody to see justice in it. For instance, the Jewish communists, torchbearers of simon-pure internationalism among us, may take the position that no exceptions shall be allowed even if it were to mean the physical destruction of another million Jews. They may take the attitude of "*fiat justitia, pereat mundus*". True, their Russian teachers did not take such a rigorous attitude during the upbuilding of the Soviet State, nor do they show such an uncompromising rigorousness in the present day's world politics. Even the Jewish communists do not practice such unrelenting "*Prinzipienreiterei*" in other fields of their activity. They may feel impelled, however, to put sanctity of the principle above real requirements of life when they come across a problem concerning the very being of their own people. Jews may not be considered important enough to

merit the same kind of theoretical readjustment which is being made for other, more essential interests, at stake. There is therefore small wonder that our communist brethren, like true saints and martyrs, are ready to sacrifice their own flesh and blood before expecting similar righteousness from other people. Naturally, they are doing it from a very lofty pedestal of idealistic self-sacrifice. I sincerely believe that the best of them while white-washing and even encouraging pogroms in Palestine must have the same inner experience our forefather Abraham had in sacrificing his only son Isaac for the glory of God.

#### DO WE CLAIM EXCEPTION?

**I**F ZIONISM is an exception to the prevailing rule of national relations the Arabs may also feel justified in rejecting it. They may agree that the salvation of Jews is an important human task. But why must this salvation be accomplished at the expense of Arab sovereignty in Palestine? Why only Palestine—why shall not the persecuted Jews be distributed among all other countries?

Almost this line of argumentation was recently taken by an Arab emissary in London who seriously suggested that Great Britain open the gates of its colonies and dominions to Jewish immigration, eliminating thereby the necessity of Jewish concentration in Palestine.

In other words, if national rights must be sacrificed for the sake of Jewish salvation, why should the Arabs be the only ones to make the sacrifice?

We do not, however, believe that the Jewish right to build a national home in Palestine must be considered an exception justified only by the tragic plight of the Jewish people in other countries. We do not concede that Jewish rights in Palestine are irreconcilable with the general principle of self-determination of nations. The principle of self-determination shall not be misused to perpetuate glaring inequalities in the distribution of populations on the surface of the earth. Instead of being progressive, the principle of self-determination would be transformed into a most reactionary political weapon if it were used to close hermetically any territory against the influx of politically oppressed or economically distressed people from other nations.

#### "RUGGED NATIONALISM" A DANGER TO HUMANITY

**T**HE fault of the Arab leaders as of many nationalists throughout the world lies in transplanting the petty bourgeois conception of private property, glorified by generations of capitalism, into the domain of national relations. As a socialist, the author is not inclined to concede the sacredness of private property even in the inter-relations of individuals. Even bourgeois governments nowadays recognize the necessity of regulating private

rights, for the purpose of preventing individuals from overstepping them to the detriment of their fellowmen. The era of rugged individualism is definitely over. Still less reason is there to recognize "rugged nationalism" as a justified form of inter-human relations.

The insistence of the Arabs that their rights to Palestine include the right to exclude the Jews from the country for their salvation is a reactionary conception of national sovereignty which should in no way be encouraged or even tolerated by progressively-minded people. It is not by accident that Hitler and Mussolini are the more popular heroes in the eyes of the Arab youth which took an active part in the recent guerilla warfare against Palestinian Jews. It is the "rugged nationalism" which has replaced to a great extent the "rugged individualism" abolished even for capitalists in the domain of the fasces and swastika.

When we meet a "radical" who is denying Henry Ford the right to run his factories according to his own wishes and caprices, and at the same time concedes the right of the Husseinis and Nashashibis to run Palestine to their heart's content we have before us an inexplicable example of mental aberration.

There is no necessity for abolishing Arab rights to make possible the upbuilding of a Jewish home in Palestine. All that is necessary is to put them in the general frame in which such rights shall be recognized throughout the world.

Rugged nationalism is a still greater danger to humanity than the rugged individualism of the previous generation. It is better to tolerate rugged individualists in a relatively free and economically interdependent world than to have individuals suppressed in hermetically closed totalitarian states with national autocracy as their goal.

#### ARAB RIGHTS AND JEWISH PROGRESS

**T**HERE is no denying the Arab rights in Palestine, and it would be a serious mistake if some Jewish leaders were to insist on regarding them as of secondary importance. The Arab rights to Palestine are just as valid as the Jewish ones. But they should not include the right to thwart the gradual upbuilding of the Jewish National Home as long as it can be done without economic injury to the individual Arabs inhabiting the country.

Our ability to build up Palestine without a detriment to our neighbors has been sufficiently proven by the past and present of that country. There is no doubt that the Arabs of Palestine, instead of having been pushed out by Jewish immigration, have greatly profited from it. Due to Jewish medical activities the mortality among the Arabs was greatly reduced and their present rate of nat-

ural increase is one of the highest in the world. From 568,000 in 1919 the Moslem population of Palestine increased to 865,000 in 1936. This increase was due not only to the great surplus of births over deaths, but also to an influx of Arab laborers from the neighboring countries. They were attracted to Palestine by higher wages and greater opportunities to find work. The standard of living of the Palestinian Arabs, especially in the vicinity of the Jewish settlements, is much higher than that in the neighboring Arab countries. Even the Arab peasant who is not seeking employment in Jewish colonies indirectly profited from the Jewish immigration because of the larger and more profitable market created by it for his farm products.

### ARAB FEARS FOR THE FUTURE

**T**HE economic advantages brought by Jewish immigration to the Arabs of Palestine are so great and self-evident that many of the Arab leaders recently gave up previous attempts to build their case on economic grievances. Instead, they are now trying to justify their hostile attitude towards Jewish immigration solely by fears about the future. It is true, they cautiously concede, that the Arab gains from Jewish immigration up to date have been greater than their losses. They claim, however, that the absorptive capacity of Palestine is decreasing with every new wave of Jewish immigration, and the time may soon be reached when further Jewish colonization can only proceed at the expense of the Arabs. They argue further that when Jews will become a majority and obtain actual control of the country without the restrictions now imposed upon them by the Mandatory Power, the Arabs will lose all their previous advantages and may even be subject to violent oppression.

Let us start with the first of these most important Arab arguments:

What are the factors on which depends the absorptive capacity of a country? Looking at the far future, an empty country seems to offer greater possibilities for the settlement of new people than an inhabited one. The immediate capacity of a country to absorb mass immigration depends, however, not on the number of its empty square miles but on the opportunities for immediate employment offered there to new immigrants. The economic capacity of Australia is now much greater than it was at the time when England began to colonize it by deporting convicts to its lonely shores. In spite of the efforts of American Jewish philanthropists to direct Jewish immigration to the West, over-populated New York City attracted infinitely more Jewish immigrants than the open spaces of Texas.

### THE ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY OF PALESTINE

**I**F THE Jews, together with their fields and factories, could by some magic trick be eliminated now from Palestine's picture, the absorptive capacity of that country would be nearly nil. More exactly: its absorptive capacity would be approximately the same as in the first generation of the Jewish colonization when an immigration of 500 persons yearly was considered a great achievement. It would not exceed the absorptive capacity of Biro-Bidjan that has more open space than Palestine but must still undergo the extremely slow and difficult preparatory stage which Palestine underwent before the World War.

Another fallacy of the opponents of the further Jewish colonization of Palestine consists in linking too narrowly the economic prospects of a country with its own natural resources. The opinion is frequently heard that Palestine is too poor to absorb a lasting mass immigration. What will all these poor Jews do in such a small country deprived of coal and iron, usually considered the foundation for a truly great industry?

In the first place, the natural resources of Palestine are not yet known to their full extent. Only recently we began to grasp the tremendous possibilities offered for the development of a great chemical industry by a large-scale exploitation of the Dead Sea minerals. Another recent and very pleasant revelation was the discovery that the underground water resources of Palestine are much greater than was the belief only five years ago. There is practically no spot in Palestine's valleys where artificial irrigation could not be installed, provided we find a cheap source of power for pumping the water to the surface. And this problem is also on the way to its solution!

### INDUSTRIAL POSSIBILITIES

**B**UT even conceding Palestine to be a poor country we must not forget that a large Jewish community may be based to a great degree on economic services to the surrounding East and even to the whole world. After all, we must not despair of the common sense of humanity and must not imagine the future world as a great number of hermetically closed countries smothering the natural process of economic exchange among them. With even a minimum of sanity in the world we will be able to develop in Palestine industries requiring much specialized work, even if the comparatively less important raw materials should have to be imported from abroad. Nobody would seriously argue that jewelry, watches, and even wearing apparel could not be manufactured in Palestine on a great scale because of transport difficulties. Palestine, due to its geographical position and especially to proximity to the Suez Canal, is an ideal country for all kinds

of "transit industries" based on the processing of raw materials coming from India, Australia, and the Far East.

We will not dwell further on the question of Palestine's economic future which deserves a special analysis. The above facts are sufficient as a basis for our sincere belief that Palestine with all its natural limitations is still able to absorb millions of Jews without any disadvantage to the present Arab population of the country.

#### SHALL IMMIGRATION BE LIMITED?

**S**HOULD the moment arrive, however far it seems to be, when, in spite of Jewish ingenuity in finding new sources of economic existence, a further absorption of immigrants by the Jewish community of Palestine will not be possible, Jewish immigration will stop of itself with no injury to the Arabs who will then be in a much stronger economic position than at the present time. I believe that in the event of an Arab-Jewish understanding, based on broader mutual interests of both peoples, a way could be found to allay Arab fears in this respect. We shall have no objection to the establishing of a kind of safety valve to indicate the moment—however remote it may be—when Jewish immigration shall have reached the saturation point. This moment, however, shall be determined not by artificial quotas or percentages dictated by nationalistic jealousy but by economic realities only.

Such a safety device already practically exists. It consists in the right of the British authorities in Palestine to limit the labor immigration to definite schedules established twice yearly in accordance with the then existing demand for Jewish workers. Jews have many reasons for criticizing the attitude of British immigration officials who seem to be influenced by political expediency, or more specifically, by Arab pressure, no less than by economic realities. In case of an understanding with the Arabs the Jews would be only too glad to transfer this task to a committee of League members who have no political interests of their own in the Near East and therefore would be able to measure the economic capacity of Palestine with an impartial yardstick determined exclusively by economic factors.

#### FEARS OF A JEWISH MAJORITY

**S**TILL more important is the assertion of Arab leaders that their people may become an object of discrimination and even oppression in case the Jews become the majority of Palestine's population. I believe this contention to be the most sincere fear at the basis of the Arab fight against the Jewish National Home.

The average Jew meets this assertion with an outburst of moral indignation. It is inconceivable, he believes, that Jews, severely oppressed in many

parts of the world, will ever debase themselves to the role of oppressors in Palestine. The mere thought of such a possibility is considered a moral aspersion on the character of the Jewish people.

In all fairness the author does not consider this indignation, however laudable its motives, a sufficient answer to Arab fears for the future. The world too often has witnessed the transformation of oppressed people into oppressors to expect the Arabs to take us at our word. The Arabs are therefore justified in demanding from us effective guarantees for the future, and I do not believe that they would be satisfied with mere formulas. Such a formula as "Not to rule and not to be ruled", however admirable in principle, must be supplemented by real guarantees to form a basis for a future understanding.

As stated on a few previous occasions, I do not believe that such an understanding could be reached in the narrow limits of Palestine proper. To be of lasting value to both sides of the Palestine controversy such an understanding must embrace the whole Near East. This does not mean that we expect to extend the frontiers of our National Home to neighboring countries. It does mean that we do expect certain economic opportunities in the neighboring countries of the East in exchange for the limitations we would be ready to accept for our future status in Palestine.

#### THE NEAR EASTERN FEDERATION

**J**EWES, for instance, shall not oppose, in principle, the inclusion of Palestine into a free federation of Near Eastern countries which, establishing lasting economic links among themselves shall at the same time not affect the political sovereignty of any one of them. In such a Near Eastern federation the Jews of Palestine, even forming a majority in their own National Home, would still be a minority in comparison with the Arabs of the surrounding countries. This situation alone would be an actual and sufficient guarantee that the Jewish promises included in a future Jewish-Arab understanding would be kept meticulously independent of the state of mind of the coming Jewish generations. It is simply unthinkable that the Jews of Palestine, even losing their present good intentions, would ever dare oppress a minority in their own country related to a majority in the countries on which they will be most dependent for their economic well-being.

Naturally, such an ironclad guarantee could be given by Jews only if Arab leaders of Palestine definitely renounced their present conception of Palestine as the private property of the Arab majority, to be closed to oppressed Jews from other countries. We would not convince the Jewish masses who have their own idiosyncrasies about exclusive rights to Palestine to concede fully Arab

rights to the country unless the Arabs were just as ready to recognize our right to build up Palestine without actual loss to them.

**DIFFICULTIES OF UNDERSTANDING**

**I**S the time ripe for such a basic understanding? I am afraid it is not. It must take a long time before both sides in the Palestine controversy are able to adopt a broader and more tolerant view on the general situation.

In the meantime we must strive for this goal by all means. In the first place we must continue to keep a cool-headed and humane attitude even in the face of bloody provocations. It was a glorious page in Palestine's Jewish history when the *Yishuv*, with very few regrettable exceptions did not answer in kind to the guerilla warfare conducted against us in recent months.

We shall not, however, be contented with heroic suppression of primitive instincts calling for retaliation and vengeance. We must go a step further. We must take the initiative in creating friendly relations with our neighbors in Palestine. Should such friendship be rejected by the Arab people as a whole it must at least be reached with individuals and groups among them. We must give the Arab language a more prominent place in our schools and we must also learn more about Arab customs and habits.

**THE WAY TO PEACE**

**W**ITHOUT giving up any of our fundamental rights we shall at the same time fully respect the rights of others. This applies less to practical infringements—we could not ignore Arab rights even if we desired to—than to the occasional loose language of self-styled leaders and journalists, especially outside of Palestine. We cannot afford any more unrealistic slogans like the famous "Palestine as Jewish as England is English". They served as a most efficient weapon for anti-Jewish propaganda among the Arabs. We must no longer furnish the Arab extremist leaders with such excellent propaganda material.

As matters now stand we cannot expect a Jewish-Arab peace to be established soon by the magic wand of an ingenious leadership. The Jewish-Arab understanding must not be considered a job for political leaders only. The efforts of such leaders will be futile unless friendly inter-relations are established by a growing number of individuals of both peoples. Peace with Arabs must therefore be the goal of every Jewish man and woman in Palestine. To a certain degree this is the task even of the Jewish press in *Galut*, which must adopt a more responsible attitude in informing the Jewish masses about the situation in Palestine.

The Jewish-Arab understanding is not an easy task. It is a slow and tedious process requiring much patience and forbearance. It is easier to

sow hatred among peoples than to establish peace and amity among them. It is a long way to the final goal, but there is no other road that would lead to it. There are no shortcuts in history.

**I**N outlining the general prospects of a Jewish-Arab peace the writer is fully aware that many important questions connected with this problem have not been answered in this exposition. What shall be our attitude towards the Arab demand for a representative self-government in Palestine? How will a Jewish-Arab understanding affect the British position in the Near East? How are we going to solve the Arab labor problem? Such answers remain for another occasion.

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