

ISRAEL AND THE ANTI-COLONIAL MOVEMENT

ORIENTATION TOWARDS THE ORIENT OR THE OCCIDENT?

By Walter Zander

The all-day meeting on Palestine recently arranged in London by the Union of Arab Students, was noteworthy for several reasons: firstly for the seriousness and intensity of the youthful participants, secondly, for the attempt by British fascists to offer themselves as allies to the Arab cause, an offer which was rejected by the intellectual leaders of the students who warned emphatically against an association with anti-Semitism or any other form of racial discrimination; but, most important, the meeting revealed some of the fundamental ideas upon which the Arab attitude is based.

It showed that Arab nationalism today is a revolutionary force which considers itself a part of the great anti-colonial movement of the peoples of Asia and Africa towards freedom and independence from the last vestiges of Western influence. The leading element among the Arabs in this respect is certainly Egypt but the intelligentsia in Arab countries share the same convictions.

Zionism as “a protégé of the West”

Zionism on the other hand appears to the Arabs to be linked essentially with the West. The Balfour Declaration and the Mandate came into existence when the victorious Western countries stood at the zenith of their power and made themselves responsible for the new order in the East.

Accordingly, the establishment of the Jewish National Home - protected in its beginnings by British arms and later supported by the United States - to the Arab is part of the general settlement which the West imposed on the peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean without, or against, their consent.

Israel, therefore, is in Arab eyes a protégé of the West, largely dependent on its support, and a remnant of “*the hateful system of colonialism*” which to “*shake off is the duty of every Arab patriot*” from the West coast of Africa to the borders of Iran.

To the Jews Israel's association with the West appears in a very different light and is based on some of the greatest values of Western civilisation. They know that their determination to return to the Promised Land is incomparably older than any imperial interests of the West.

Nevertheless, it remains true that in the field of practical politics the Jewish National Movement at the end of the First World War threw in its lot with Britain, whose power then appeared to be paramount. Whether the Jewish leaders at the time realised the ephemeral character of this position or whether they were not aware of the rising strength of the peoples of Asia and Africa is here irrelevant.

What Gandhi said

Unfortunately, the belief that Israel is linked to colonial interests is shared by many peoples in those continents. Gandhi, for example, had written: “*The Jews erred grievously in seeking to impose themselves on Palestine with the aid of America and Britain.*” In 1947, when the United Nations decided on partition and the establishment of the Jewish State, all peoples who ever had been directly or indirectly the object of colonialism voted against the resolution; and in 1955 when most Asian and African peoples assembled in Bandung, Israel was not invited. .

This attitude is bound to affect the practical prospects of peace because it strengthens Arab reluctance to recognise Israel. This Arab refusal of recognition does not spring only from a psychological aversion to accept military defeat, nor only from the fact that the Arabs feel they have suffered a moral injury. It is linked with the conviction that this injury was inflicted by the colonial powers, and the Arabs fear that recognition of Israel may imply their acceptance of the results of colonial policy.

Recognition, therefore, is a decisive issue in all peace negotiations, besides the problems of refugees and frontiers. For no final solution can be acceptable to Israel which does not contain full recognition of her statehood.

A Middle Eastern federation?

The Western powers no doubt are most anxious to bring about a settlement. But there must be no illusion about their limitations in this field. The time when the West dominated the Middle East has passed, and its moral authority to impose solutions there is not recognised any more by those concerned. In addition, the application of force by one side alone is no longer possible without incalculable consequences.

This is as true today in the Mediterranean as it has been for some time in the Far East. Only five years ago, when the Western Powers issued the Tripartite Declaration, the situation was different. Today the discussions on how the Declaration may be implemented appear almost out of date and unreal.

The prospects of peace in the foreseeable future must be considered as uncertain but truce may continue. This must be used to ponder once more on Israel's relations both with the West and with the Arabs, and the Asians and African peoples behind them; and to redefine - possibly in the context of a Middle Eastern federation - Israel's position in a world which is changing rapidly and profoundly.