

Is Zionism Imperialistic ?

• by Hayim Greenberg

IS ZIONISM imperialistic in its essence? Official Jewish Communism has long ago pronounced for the affirmative. Within the past few weeks the Communist press of America and Soviet Russia has launched a fresh offensive against Zionism as an imperialistic movement. Should pogroms against Jews transpire in Palestine, argues the Communist press, the fault would lie with Zionism which seeks to build a Jewish state on the ruins of the Arab people. When the average intelligent non-Jew, whose knowledge of history has taught him what penetration of the "civilized white man" into colonial countries means, encounters such accusations, he finds the reasoning plausible. It is easy for him to assume that the Jews are behaving towards the Arabs approximately as the European did towards the Indians in America, or that they have undertaken the same "cultural mission" in Palestine which the French executed so brilliantly in the Congo, and the Belgians in Algiers. Worst of all, there are a number of Jews whose reaction to this Communist ratiocination is one of shocked outrage at the gross phenomenon of Jewish "jingoism."

Of course, a closer analysis of the question shows immediately how poorly the analogy between the Jews and imperialistic peoples holds. There is no Jewish state which is striving to annex "Arab" Palestine; no Jewish navy has as yet disembarked sailors on the shores of Haifa; and no Jewish soldiers have shed Arab blood or bombarded Arab cities or villages. Even the uninformed reader cannot help perceiving that Jews acquire land for colonization by methods other than those employed by the British in Kenya, and that all Manhattan Island cost less than a few dunam of Arab land. Still another difference becomes apparent: European imperialists send chiefly plantation-owners, militia, civil employees, merchants and traders into their colonies. Jewish immigration to Palestine, on the other hand, consists chiefly of workers. In fact, the principle of self-labor is becoming cardinal in Zionism. Obviously the characteristic ear-marks of imperialist policy are not to be seen in Zionism. But the doubter is still not reassured. Perhaps Zionism represents an individual, special brand of imperialism, paradoxical in form, but essentially aggressive, bent on seizing a country and oppressing another people?

This is a question of social ethics which requires an answer. If Zionism is merely the expression of an egotistic nationalism it deserves neither the support nor the tolerance of progressive groups; Jews themselves should extirpate it. I am even

prepared to go farther. If Zionism is the form taken by an aggressive Jewish chauvinism, it is not only unjustified morally but doomed to eventual defeat. I do not believe that the Jewish people will ever have the strength necessary to carry out so grandiose a task—unparalleled in history—unless it has the consciousness of being in the right. Without this consciousness, all objective factors would be arrayed against us. Anti-imperialists would oppose us on principle; imperialists, for the good and sufficient reason that they need no further partners in the business of dominating the world, the number of invited and uninvited share-holders being already uncomfortably large. From this viewpoint, the question of "Jewish imperialism" becomes not only a theoretical moral one, but a practical one.

What criterion must then be applied to Zionism? To what kind of strict, objective analysis must it be subjected? I believe that there is no better gauge than the principle of the equal rights and equal worth of all peoples and races. Each people, no matter how great or small its size, is not more than a unit, nor less than a unit. Such a standard of value—essentially the basis of democracy—must be applied to the relations between people and people, race and race, as well as to individuals. We have already learned to distinguish between formal, verbal democracy and actual democracy. Even the blind have begun to see that the democracy of the present capitalist state is a pseudo-democracy. The true democracy of our time no longer consists in the bankrupt liberalism of today but in the rise of Socialism. Socialism gives concrete expression to that conception of equal rights originally formulated by liberalism. To-day we know that a phrase in the constitution does not insure equality; that the words remain empty unless they are given social and economic content. Though the well-fed or over-fed citizen may feel himself to be no more than an individual "unit" in the commonwealth, the ragged, hungry possessor of equal rights feels himself to be considerably less than a unit; he feels himself to be zero. Legally we may claim that both the banker and the unemployed have the same right to spend the winter in Florida, and that neither should steal a bottle of milk. When we translate this purely legal "equality" into sociological terms we perceive the melancholy humor of the word.

A principle of equality according to which neither England, nor, let us say, the gypsies, may seek new territory is similarly hollow. The time has come to abandon the formal liberal slogan of

"equality" not only in the relations between classes, but between peoples. A man who sleeps on newspaper on a subway bench is not a citizen with equal rights no matter what the constitution may guarantee. And a people with not enough soil under its feet and sky over its head to enjoy its share of the natural riches of the world, is not a people with equal rights, no matter what may be written in the covenant of the present or a hypothetical League of Nations. In domestic policies, the bourgeoisie stands for the "status quo"; the oppressed classes display a "greedy" desire for the other fellow's property and goods. Similarly, in international affairs, the advocates of the "status quo", of "right and order" are those peoples who have more than their share, who have even more than they can use. On the other hand the peoples who have less than their needs, display "selfishness" and "lawless desires."

The connection between the foregoing and Zionism becomes apparent when we realize that no matter how unique and specific the Jewish problem may be, Zionism is nevertheless a part of a larger, universal movement. Whether or not its proponents are aware of it, Zionism is an aspect of an immensely greater international problem; it is a part of the struggle of oppressed and disinherited peoples for actual equality. Assuming that "new deal" is an adequate term for the adjustment of class grievances (let us disregard for the moment the association which every thoughtful American has developed in connection with this expression) then a "new deal" is also in order in international affairs. There must be a redistribution of resources and land among peoples and races. We cannot ignore the fact that the Chinese people, with its four hundred million mouths draws its sustenance from an area one half the size of Canada with its population of ten million. Not all American readers know that two million Chinese died of hunger in the course of one year. Our newspapers relegated the information to the back pages, because the front headlines were devoted to the finer points of a Hollywood divorce. Nor can one speak without shame of "equality" of the three hundred hungry millions of Indians in Asia, when New Guinea alone, according to conservative estimates, can sustain an additional 120 million people adequately. Neither England, Holland nor Australia—the three rulers of New Guinea—have enough men to exploit this territory. East Africa (together with Madagascar) comprises an area of 1,800,00 square miles. It is as large as all India and probably has twice as much arable land as India. Its entire population is between nineteen and twenty millions, approximately eleven individuals per square mile. By whom is East Africa controlled? By England, which despite post-war unemployment is unable to colonize a single one of her dominions properly; by France,

which does not use up its full quota to the United States and must frequently import Slavic and Italian seasonal workers to save the harvests; by Portugal which has long since sent the excess of its population to Brazil and other South American countries. One can readily see from the foregoing in what measure and how needlessly the natural resources of East Africa go to waste.

Let us forget temporarily that when God created the world he issued the edict that there were to be no "colored races" on the American continent. On the other hand, let us also disregard for the moment the present brutally chauvinistic policy of Japan. In addition to a militaristic government, Japan has a people, an industrious, laborious people, which requires more land for existence. That need becomes sharper and plainer from day to day. We know that in Iowa, for instance, the average farmer's family utilizes 35 times more arable land and 23 times more cattle than a farmer in Japan; that Texas, with its insignificant population, is somewhat larger than all Japan. The methods now employed by Japan for "expansion" are brutally cynical and fraught with danger for Asia and the world as a whole, but the fatalistic passivity of China and the fabulous patience of India are neither normal nor final solutions for their plight. We know, of course, that the natural resources of the soil are not used to the maximum in both China and India. If there were a higher degree of technological development and a better planned economy—conditions which cannot be introduced as long as the present ruinous bourgeoisie is in power—the standard of living could be raised somewhat, even without territorial expansion. But considering that about three-quarters of a billion people are involved—almost one-half of the population of the world—it becomes impossible to conceive a normal standard of living within the cramped confines into which European imperialism has doomed these peoples. The international problems of the twentieth century cannot be solved without the migration and colonization of millions of people. Without such redistribution of population there can be no talk of actual equality. The more fortunate peoples have barred the way for the only possible solution. They do not themselves utilize the territories under their jurisdiction and do not permit other peoples to use them—the typical dog-in-the-manger attitude. The only excuse they offer is that possibly future generations will require the room they now hold unoccupied.

Now to return specifically to Zionism. How are, or may, the national interests of the Arabs be injured by Zionism? Who is who in the melancholy political struggle between the Jews and the Arab leaders? Which of the two groups is imperialist, and which must struggle against imperialism in order to get its lawful share? When we

speak of Arab national interests, we cannot confine ourselves to the boundaries of Palestine. There is no separate Palestinian Arab people with a definite Palestinian national consciousness. The Arab of Palestine considers himself either a member of a tribe, or a son of the Arab people of which only a small part lives in Palestine. It is no accident that the Arab national movement, insofar as it exists, is Pan-Arab. The "Istaklal" group has no monopoly of Pan-Arab dreams and aspirations. Every Arab nationalist sees before him the perspective of a great national political organism spreading over a large area of Arabic speaking countries. When the Communists wish to ingratiate themselves with the Arabs and to appeal to their emotions, they know that they must dwell on England-France-Zionism—the factors which obstruct the foundation of a Pan-Arab kingdom.

From this viewpoint the reckoning must be made not between the 380,000 Jews and 800,000 Arabs in Palestine, that is between the aspirations of 380,000 individuals Jews and the interests of a larger number of individual Arabs, but between two units; one unit which calls itself the Jewish people, and another which calls itself the Arab people. Which of the two is more cultured or more advanced is unimportant. Let us consider what each of these two possesses. The following territories (in the form of various states and principalities) may be chalked up to the Arabs; the whole Arab peninsula with an area of three million square kilometres and a population of not more than three to four million; Irak (Mesopotamia) with an area of 370,000 square kilometres and a sparse population of about three million; Syria, with a population of at most two and a half million on 180,000 square kilometres. Taken all in all we have a total population of some ten million settled on 3,500,000 square kilometres, approximately three individuals per square kilometer. (In Europe the density of population is 43 per sq. kilometer). Some Arab nationalists include Egypt in their dream of a future Arab federation of states. Accepting these calculations, the so-called united Arabistan of the future would encompass 4½ million sq. kilometres—that is, an area one-half the size of the European continent. True, the area of a country is not always an accurate gauge of its capacity. Labrador, despite its size, is of small economic worth. The Arab lands have their quota of desert and rocky waste, which have only "aesthetic" or "romantic" significance. But everybody knows that the Arab peninsula is far from being developed to its maximum potentiality. It is an open secret that Syria, if better administered and properly irrigated, could sustain an additional six to eight million on a higher scale of living than at present. Nor will any one question that Mesopotamia, the former "granary of the world", could

take in from seven to ten million people. (In ancient times it probably nourished vastly more people than now.) The Arab people as a whole, therefore, occupies a larger area of land than it requires, than it cultivates, and than it is capable of cultivating with the numerical strength at its disposal.

We are somewhat better acquainted with the other unit. We know its history, past and present, and we need no expert geographers to determine the territories possessed by the Jewish people. Palestine, to which the Jews aspire, is less than one percent of the area of the proposed Arabistan.

In the light of this criterion—the only criterion that can be turned on problems of great social ramifications seen in historical perspective—the Arab nationalists, in so far as they may be judged from their representatives, are psychologically akin to the sated European imperialists, who do not eat their cake, but must have it, and will not share it with the hungry. Of course, there is one difference between the Europe and Arab imperialists—a technical one, rather than a spiritual one. European imperialism employs a colossal military machine; Arab nationalism only dreams of one.

As yet there is no Arab empire, nor is everything dreamt in the thousand and one nights of political calculations realized on the morrow. Arab imperialism is for the time being only a state of mind, but it is none the less reactionary and threatening. The Hebrew writer, Abraham Swadron, created an apt terminology to distinguish between two types of imperialism: the imperialism of expansion (European) and the imperialism of accumulation (for instance the Arabic). The imperialism of accumulation, that is the holding on tightly to whatever is in one's grasp whether one can utilize it or not, is just as much a violation of the principle of the true equality of peoples as the imperialism of expansion.

Millions of people already understand that individual private ownership is not sacred and untouchable. It is time to understand that the national "private ownership" of countries is not an absolute holy of holies, that the sovereign rights of peoples have not been proclaimed together with the laws of nature. National egoism, particularly the variety from which the egoist derives at best a fictitious, imaginary satisfaction, must be combatted just like individual egoism. The absolute right of a people to land, the right to place "no trespassing" signs on territory which cannot be used by the so-called owner, is a moral and economic anachronism. It is a sorry mixture of the feudal "sense of honor" and the capitalist complex of ownership for the sake of ownership. It is an inheritance from the past which must be liquidated as soon as possible.

Zionist colonization in Palestine takes a stand

opposite to that of Arab imperialism. All progressive elements, Jewish, non-Jewish, and Arab should fight against the imperialism of accumulation. At the same time, naturally, Jewish policy and economic planning in Palestine must guard

against losing its moral equilibrium. Zionist policy must have no taint of chauvinism, nor lose in any measure its sense of right and wrong. The actual working out of Zionism as it affects Arab-Jewish relations will be discussed in a subsequent article.