

Dear

I am writing as Chair of the Brighton & Hove branch of Palestine Solidarity Campaign to convey to you our profound disquiet at the way in which the Israel-Palestine conflict, and particularly the present unrest, is represented in the media of this country. With notable exceptions we are presented with a picture at best, of two equally badly behaved children who need sorting out, at worst, of a villainous murderer pitted against an upstanding citizen who is only acting in self-defence.

The Israel-Palestine conflict is, and has always been, about land. At the First Zionist Congress in 1897 the programme for the creation of Israel was laid out as follows: 'Zionism strives to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law.' It was well understood at that time that the intention was to create an exclusive national state. In 1917 Arthur Balfour wrote his famous letter to Lord Rothschild reporting that 'His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people ... it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.'

Around 1938 and in direct contravention of the Balfour Declaration secret Zionist plans were drawn up to 'transfer' non-Jewish Arabs out of, and Jewish Arabs into, Palestine. Ten years later, under cover of war, 700,000 Palestinians were driven out of their country, over 400 of their villages were raised to the ground and a large number of Jewish Arabs (who had for the most part been living for centuries in harmony with their non-Jewish neighbours) were cajoled or threatened into moving to Israel. By the end of that war only 10% of the population of Israel was non-Jewish. (That percentage has now risen by natural increase to around 20%.)

The West, and particularly Britain, eases its conscience about this ethnic cleansing by two lines of defence. The first is to say that the Palestinians were responsible for their own downfall. This ignores the clear intention of the Zionists to exclude the native population (see Theodor Herzl's diaries) and to use war as an instrument of conquest. On 7<sup>th</sup> February 1948 David Ben Gurion, who soon after became Israel's first Prime Minister, wrote in his diary: 'The war will give us the land. The concept of "ours" and "not ours" are peace concepts only and in war they lose their whole meaning.' (Ben Gurion, D., *War Diary*, Vol 1, pp 210-11) It also disregards the fact that the programme of dispossessing Palestinians continues uninterrupted through the settlement policy being pursued in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The other Western defence is to argue that the Nazi atrocities against Jews were so gross that the injustice done to the Palestinians was, as it were, blotted out. Again, it was their fault for resisting. One only needs to put oneself in the shoes of Palestinians to realise the unacceptability of such reasoning. Were they supposed to say: 'Go ahead, we realise you've had a hard time, take what you like and when you've finished tell us where we can live'? And even if previous wrongs were to be forgotten, and most Palestinians have indeed accepted the *de facto* loss of 78% of their country, what are they to say to the continuing colonisation of the remaining 22%? And if you were one of the million Palestinian Israelis would you blithely accept that 92% of the country of which you are a citizen is reserved for Jewish use only.

Not to mention these realities (perceived realities if you prefer), is to distort the nature of the conflict beyond all recognition. The idea that to be balanced you are obliged to give equal or even preferential weight to Israeli over Palestinian arguments is like saying that Obersturmführer Adolf Maier's account of Nazi policies towards Jews should be put on a level with Rabbi Moshe Cohen's plea from the ghetto for help. I give this example because I want to break the linkage between criticism of Israeli policy and anti-Jewish prejudice. There are many distinguished people of Jewish background who are highly critical of Israeli policies, and often suffer for it by being branded self-hating Jews. They are dismayed, as we are, by the effectiveness of the 'anti-Semitism' weapon against would-be critics. Oppression is oppression, whoever is guilty of it. We urge your newspaper to recognise Israeli oppression, or at least to mention the question of land whenever you deal with the conflict in that part of the world.

Yours sincerely,

Francis Clark-Lowes (Dr)