

## Palestine and its problems

A new state has come into existence in Palestine, the Jewish State of Israel, and it has come into existence against the intentions of the British Labour Government. This Government which, to paraphrase Mae West, has climbed the ladder of power wrong by wrong, took its stand on the Balfour Declaration of 1917 guaranteeing the Jews a national home in Palestine, but it resisted what was bound to be the inevitable consequence of the carrying out of that declaration, the demand for an independent Jewish State. In 1936 the Arab landowners inspired a revolt against the continued immigration of Jews into Palestine, foreseeing a threat to their interests in the existence of the highly industrial and commercial community that was growing up in their midst. Since then Britain, which had secured a mandate over Palestine in 1922, has been exercising a virtual reign of terror. A significant commentary on this is the following statement contained in the *News Chronicle* (28/4/194):

"Palestine Government has ended its censorship, and yesterday's papers published their first uncensored editions for 12 years.—*News Chronicle* Correspondents, A.P., Reuter and B.U.P."

Within a few hours of the proclamation of the new Jewish State by its self-appointed Provisional Government, President Truman startled the world by publicly stating that America would recognise it. Commentators of Truman's action attributed it to a late attempt to capture the Jewish vote in the forthcoming presidential election. This is too thin. While in fact it may have this result there is far more behind the action than electioneering propaganda. Jews and Arabs in Palestine, like the Greeks, the Italians and the Jugo-slavs, are pawns in a much greater game which involves oil and the struggle between Russia and the Western Powers for economic domination. Why, for instance, has an allegedly democratic and anti-imperialist Labour Government supported the semi-feudal Arab landlords against the Jews, particularly when the leader of the Jewish nationalists, Ben Gurion, has proclaimed himself a social democrat and labour leader in sympathy with the outlook of the British Labour Party?

The Labour Government's blundering methods in Palestine are the offspring of attempts to harmonise conflicting policies. For years anti-imperialism has been a plank in the Labour Party's programme and the withdrawal from India, Burma, and Egypt (except the canal zone) is held up as an example of the implementation of this policy. But the Labour Government is also committed to the safeguarding of the British capitalists' commercial and industrial interests; this dictates an opposite policy. Torn between the two they have failed to satisfactorily accomplish either, disappointing their working class supporters and exasperating their capitalist directors. To protect capitalist interests they must take measures to conserve the monopoly of the oil interests and safeguard the supply lines of oil, a great and growing quantity of which comes from the Middle East. A glance at a map will reveal what has guided the blundering and hesitant steps of the Labour Government in Palestine and the adjacent territories.

There are two oil pipe lines from Iraq to the Mediterranean; one through Syria to the Coast, and the other through Transjordan to Haifa. Thus it is necessary to placate or force the ruling groups in each of these territories to favour the production and

transport of oil on behalf of Western capitalists. As the Arabs form the majority of the population in these territories the Arab landowners and rulers have been the principal objects of placation, not only by the Labour Government but also by their predecessors, and millions of pounds have been spent, both directly as an annual tribute to Transjordan and Iraq and indirectly under various forms of bribery, to influence a favourable attitude to the oil interests. The final result of terrorism and bribery has been to unite the Jews and Arabs in at least one direction—antipathy to the Labour Government. But the problem does not end with the territories already mentioned. Iran and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company also come into the picture, in dangerous proximity to Russia.

So far we have only looked at a part of the picture. On Saturday, the 15th May, the *Daily Express* announced, with large headlines, Truman's recognition of the Jewish State. In the very same issue of that paper we read the following, under the headline "Shares Boom on Wall Street":

"New York, Friday.—Shares went up £250,000,000 today in the biggest day Wall Street has seen in years.

"Rises per share were as much as 35s. Experts think another boom market, due to rising profits and rearmament orders lies ahead."

Yes! The vultures are gathering again! What is America's interest in the Middle East and what does it portend? Why, for instance, was America so frantically concerned about the Italian elections, and why does it back British policy in Greece? In the main the immediate answer is the same as that which concerns Britain--and which finally decided the British Government to give up the Mandate in Palestine convinced that America would be forced to help carry the burden. The answer is Oil and Russian expansion; in other words Oil and Strategy. UNO, as usual, has been ignored where matters of fundamental importance to the leading powers are concerned.

Economic necessity has forced America to become a Mediterranean power to whom the future policy of Italy, Greece and the Middle East is a vital matter. The Commander of the US Mediterranean Fleet, Admiral Bieri, recently pointed out that the US Fleet intends to stay in the Mediterranean and "American forces will be allocated wherever there are American interests, in closest co-operation with the British." (*Manchester Guardian*, 10/9/47). Modern mechanisation, both for industrial and for military purposes, has converted oil into priority number one. In spite of their own large oil reserves neither America nor Russia can meet their growing needs out of their own production. American oil interests are pressing into the Middle East and the safeguarding of the oil life line is of paramount importance. Russia has already shown its interest in Iranian oil, and it is trying to get a strategic foothold in the Mediterranean. The whole area from the oil fields of Iran, covering the coast of Palestine and the Mediterranean, is as much a matter of concern to American capitalists as to British. So far the British capitalists have borne the costs of maintaining the oil life line. What the British Government has now done is simply throw the ball to America, and America is compelled to take the pass.

The Palestine episode is thus another move in the strategical line-up of the two major imperialistic powers—America and Russia. Russia originally backed the Arabs—then they changed over to support of the Jews. Truman's quick response was obviously

aimed at getting in first and forestalling Russia. Russia has since also announced its willingness to recognise the Jewish State, but this need not prevent them from also backing the Arabs. It may be that Russia will find that its imperialistic interests will be better served by backing the Arabs. If it comes to that conclusion it will have no difficulty in finding a pretext for doing so, and we shall witness another somersault in Russian foreign policy. As an imperialist power the Russian Government is not cluttered up or inhibited by any ideals relating to democracy or the self-determination of small nations, Its methods are essentially the same as those of the Western Governments but lacking in the finesse and polish of the latter.

Whether the turmoil in the Middle East will be contained or will involve a wider conflagration (as American investors appear to anticipate) no one can at the moment determine with certainty, but what can be said is that it brings nearer the inevitable clash between Russia and the West. Both Jews and Arabs are in a position to block the oil supply but they would only ruin themselves by attempting to do so. Therefore the question is will either of them be able to turn East or West successfully for assistance.

Within the tormented area of the struggle Arab and Jewish workers have already given evidence of where the chains rub them by the strikes that have taken place against Jewish, Arab and alien masters. These Jewish and Arab workers form the vast mass of the population of the territories involved; they are the poverty-stricken exploitable material without which neither the Jewish nor Arab capitalists and landowners, nor outside capitalists, would be able to reap their harvest of profit from those rich areas. Industrially and commercially Jewish capitalists have been the progressive force. They have brought highly developed Western methods to a backward area, and in places have made the desert bloom. But with Western methods they have brought Western forms of wage-slavery and expanded under cover of nationalist ideals. For the Arab and Jewish worker neither Arab nor Jewish national independence will remove the mark of subservience from their brows. Their only hope of a life of comfort and security lies in joining with their brethren of other countries in a world socialist movement to overthrow capitalist domination in all its forms and establish Socialism in its place. Only a world Socialist system can remove from society the machinations of the oil and other capitalist interests that periodically turn the world into turmoil and bring greater misery to the millions of the workers.

Finally the personnel of the Provisional Government of Israel bears a striking likeness to the personnel of the British Labour Government. While this will not make for harmony between the two Governments it will provide another instance of how faithfully Labour Governments reflect capitalist interests.

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