

Palestine—A Step in the Right Direction

Advocates of the collection of ground rent as a solution for many of the economic problems which perplex the nations of the world, will be interested in the proposal for the practical application of that principle, in limited form, to the lands of Palestine. The author, JUDGE BERNARD A. ROSENBLATT, is a former City Magistrate in New York, and President of the Palestine Foundation Fund (Keren Hayesod) of the U. S. A. A recognized expert on Palestinian economic problems—having spent much of the past twenty-five years in that country—he has been successful in initiating and carrying through a number of important enterprises in promoting the development of the Jewish Homeland. Judge Rosenblatt has lectured and written extensively; among his books are Social Zionism and Federated Palestine and the Jewish Commonwealth.

★ Six months before the meeting of the American Jewish Congress, in December 1918, the Zionists of America adopted a Pittsburgh Platform, under the inspiring leadership of the late Justice Louis D. Brandeis. That document of a quarter of a century ago reads almost like a blueprint for a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine today, with protection for "all the inhabitants of the Land," safeguarding the political and civil rights of all, but with the clear implication that the Jews are to be the major factor in the Land of Israel, with control over immigration and with "Hebrew, the national language of the Jewish people." It is perhaps useful to recall some of the principles of that famous document which are as valid today as when first enunciated. Particularly are points 2, 3 and 5 of that program of special significance at this time.

"2. To ensure in the Jewish National Home in Palestine, equality of opportunity, we favor a policy which, with due regard to existing rights, shall tend to establish the ownership and control of the land and of natural resources and of all public utilities by the whole people.

"3. All land, owned or controlled by the whole people, should be leased on such conditions as will ensure the fullest opportunity for development and continuity of possession.

"5. The fiscal policy shall be framed so as to protect the people from the evils of land speculation and from every other form of financial oppression."

The formulation of a proper land policy is the very foundation stone of a true commonwealth. For that reason, it might be well to re-examine a proposal for the taxation of land values, which is of even greater

importance today than ever before. It stands to reason that with increasing immigration after the war—a premise that we must assume for the development of a Jewish Palestine even as we assume the ultimate victory of the United Nations—the limited land area from Dan to Beersheba must necessarily increase immensely in price, so that it will become increasingly difficult for our pioneer immigrants to secure a foothold in the country. (Indeed, the latest information from Palestine would seem to indicate that land values have already increased substantially since Rommel's defeat in Libya.)

Now, the greater the volume of Jewish immigrants, the harder it will be to secure additional land at reasonable prices, and the present landlords (both Arab and Jewish) will reap a harvest which must operate virtually as an increasing tax upon every newcomer in the country. Such increased land values will be the result entirely of the new volume of Jewish immigration, while the old landlords will have contributed nothing whatever to make such lands more valuable. They will simply reap the benefits of increased immigration by "sitting" upon their land titles.

It is not only altogether unjust that such landlords shall collect these unearned profits, that must come to them as a result merely of increased immigration, but such a policy would operate as an automatic restriction upon immigration, for the newcomers will be unable to secure land for settlement at reasonable prices. Indeed, even our unique contribution to the social system in Palestine—the Jewish National Fund—is vitally affected, for it would be unable to purchase land at an increasing tempo to meet the demands of the new immigration, while land values continue to forge upward, with every shipload of immigrants. It will almost certainly prove to be the case that the land values will increase more rapidly than the monies we are able to collect for the Jewish National Fund—which is only another way of saying that the Jewish National Fund may be forced into the awkward position of becoming virtually a collecting agency for Palestine landlords! There is a simple method to remedy such a situation, which fits into a true definition of a "common wealth." Since the increasing land values will be the result not of what the landlords may have contributed (for we are not speaking of improvements to which they are justly entitled), but solely the result of increased immigration, it is only fair and proper that such an increase should go into the public treasury, benefiting all the people, through an annual land tax, *over and above the value of all the land of Palestine, as it stood on September 1, 1939*, before Palestine became involved in the World War. Such a policy will automatically keep prices to a reasonable level, so that new immigration may be placed upon the land speedily, and without the necessity to pay the ex-

(Continued on page 16)

(Continued from page 12)

orbitant prices upon inflated values to undeserving landlords.

We offer such a program of land taxation merely as an example, illustrative of the ideals and social implications of a true Commonwealth. The slogan of a "Jewish Commonwealth" is more than a part of the history of American Zionism during the last quarter of a century. Indeed, it has become part of American diplomatic tradition, for as early as March 3, 1919, while the Peace Conference was in session, President Woodrow Wilson uttered these fateful words, in receiving a delegation of American Jewish leaders:

"I have before this expressed my personal approval of the declaration of the British Government regarding the aspirations and historic claims of the Jewish people in regard to Palestine. I am, moreover, persuaded that the Allied Nations, with the fullest concurrence of our Government and people, are agreed that in Palestine shall be laid the foundations of a Jewish commonwealth."