

Land plan to end the Arab-Israeli war

MIDDLE EAST

"If only the Israelis and Palestinian Arabs could live together in peace".

Such a wish is often expressed by people of good will, but wishes only lead to frustration and failure if the underlying causes of the conflict are not understood.

The struggle between the Israelis and the Palestinian Arabs is not just a clash of ethnic groups or religions, but a battle for territory.

When two nations claim the same land area, they will go to war unless some means is available to resolve their claims with justice.

Plans offered so far for Israel have consisted of creating a Palestinian state or autonomous region made up of the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) and the Gaza Strip. The problem with these solutions is that they are unacceptable to both sides. Mere autonomy would not satisfy the Palestinians and statehood would be unacceptable to the Israelis, who would fear that a Palestinian state would threaten them, regardless of international guarantees.

Plans offered for Jerusalem, such as making it an international city, have also been unacceptable to the Israelis, who demand nothing less than full control over the city, while the Arabs have also pressed claims at least to the pre-1967 part of Jerusalem.

The problem of land claims may be too complex for the relatively simple solution of partition into Palestinian and Israeli states. Complex problems often require complex solutions. The place to start is the land itself.

Who is the proper owner of the land of Israel?

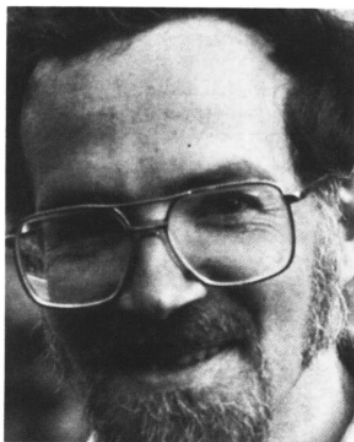
JEWES claim ownership from Biblical days, but Arabs claim centuries of possession before the State of Israel was established, and individual Arabs have claims against Israel. Israel might justify its claim as the latest victor at war. Indeed, if one were to trace any claim to the land one would eventually trace it to conquest by force.

The sad fact is that the land of Israel has been conquered or controlled again and again, by the Ancient Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, the Crusaders, the Turks, the British.

● **ARABS** make up just 17% of the population of Israel: but the figure would be larger, had the Palestinians not fled in their great exodus of 1948.

● **LAND** rights are at the source of the conflict between Jew and Arab. Even the bedouins, who support the state of Israel, feel aggrieved because of land expropriations.

● **PLANS** to resolve the running conflicts are noticeable by their absence. Everyone seems to be resigned to a solution that would finally emerge through the barrel of a gun.



● **FRED FOLDVARY** (above) presents for discussion an imaginative solution to the age-old hatreds between Jew and Arab. Its implementation would require imagination – and goodwill; the kind of goodwill that is absent today. But unless the combatants seek out and create that goodwill, they will all finally be the losers . . .

The fact is that the current residents are there, and for almost all, whether Moslem, Jew, or other, there is no other home.

The most just solution would be to give each resident an equal share of the land. This would be in harmony with the recognition by most of humanity of the equality of humankind, that no one group of persons has any moral right to have superiority over others.

If we recognise in principle an equal claim to the land by all inhabitants of Israel, there is no need to impose any arbitrary partition from outside authority. There is no need for any physical redistribution of

land. As Henry George pointed out in his book *Progress and Poverty*, the benefit of land ownership is reflected in its land value, which is also manifested as "economic rent", or the amount that the land would rent for in a free market, excluding any human-made improvements such as buildings and canals.

By collecting all the land rent and then dividing it among the residents, the "profit of the land" (as expressed in Ecclesiastes 5:9) would be equalised. All land now controlled by the State of Israel, including land owned by the government, could then be subjected to an assessment of land rents.

But to whom would the rent be paid?

The Confederation of the Levant

THE TERRITORY now held by the State of Israel would come under the jurisdiction of a new government, the Confederation of the Levant. This confederation would be made up of three states: Israel, Palestine, and the Canaan Free State.

One of its functions would be to collect land rent from both private and government land owners. The confederation would turn over 50% of its land rent revenue to the three constituent states according to their population.

Each person in the confederation would choose to become a citizen of one of the three nations, contracting with one of the national governments for terms of seven years. Most Jews would likely choose to belong to Israel and most Moslems would choose Palestine.

What would be the boundary lines of these nations? After all chose their nationality, the territory of each nation would consist of the land possessed by the individual citizens plus government-owned lands.

● Canaan would own no land as a state other than sites for its government buildings.

● The government of Israel would be given possession of any state-owned land within its pre-1967 territory and the Golan Heights, while government lands in the West Bank and the Gaza would be given to

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Palestine.

● Privately-owned land in either territory would be a part of the nation of the owner's choice.

Thus there would be a checkered pattern and the three nations would be fragmented throughout the confederation.

The reason for the third nation, Canaan, would be to allow those who do not wish to live under Israeli or Palestinian control to have a third option. Some Christians, Druze, Bahais, and non-religious persons would likely choose the Canaan Free State, which would be created with a constitution providing for a minimal secular government.

In Canaan there would be no taxation, no government schools, and no state enterprises, not even a government post office, in order to minimise any friction caused by favouritism or bias. Its government would consist only of a legislature, courts, and an executive branch with a police force. This would permit the Christians, Bahais, Druze, and other groups and individuals to set up their own institutions with no interference from the government other than protection from force and fraud.

The Confederation of the Levant would retain 14% of the total land rent for its administration. It would have three basic functions:

● **The collection of land rents.** This would include making annual land value or rent assessments. All land in the confederation would be subject to rent paid to the confederation as trustee of the land, but the confederation would impose no land use restrictions or regulations.

● **Peace and Justice.** Disputes among the three states would be resolved by the Supreme Court of the confederation, and there would be lower courts where citizens of the three states could bring disputes that they had with citizens of one of the other states. Confederation police would enforce laws and there would be a confederate legislature and executive to carry out these minimal functions. However, there would be no confederate economic or welfare agencies, as those would be functions of the states.

● **External affairs.** The confederation would have defence forces to protect the area from external threats – the states could only have domestic police forces. Probably U.N. troops would be used at first. Representing the contiguous territory, some diplomatic and other foreign relations would be conducted by the confederation on behalf of the states, but each of the three states would have seats in the United Nations and could have

trade agreements with other countries. The confederation could have non-voting observers at international organisations, but actual voting membership would be retained by the three states as sovereign, though confederated, countries.

The other 36% of the total land rent would be split equally among the three states, so each would get a fixed 12%, regardless of its population. This would be a counterbalance to the domination of the confederation by any state.

For example, suppose the extreme case where Palestine came to have 90% of the people of the confederation. It would get .9 times .5 of the land rent, or .45, plus .12, for a total of 57% of the total land rent. If Israel then had 8% of the people, it would get .08 x .5 + .12 or 16% of the land rent, and Canaan would get 13%. Thus the smaller the portion of the population, the greater the land rent revenues per capita it would receive, which would help it to strengthen its protective forces and also make it more attractive for residents so that the populations would be induced to equalise on economic grounds.

Though 36% of the land rent would not be equally distributed by population, it would be equally distributed to the constituent states and provide a counterbalance to any one state's becoming dominant through immigration.

Each of the states would govern its domestic affairs as it saw fit, with the provision that in Canaan there would be a minimal government. In addition to the land rent received, Israel or Palestine could have other sources of revenue and government involvement in the economy as they chose. Each state would elect representatives to the government of the confederation on the basis of population and also with a fixed number per state, again protecting the interests of the smaller states.

Israel and Palestine would have their own currencies, while Canaan would have no national currency or central bank, and the residents would be free to use any currency they wished, avoiding the imposition of any one cultural standard as well as any possible inflation or controls that the other two could be subject to – again a safety valve.

There would have to be some authority above the confederation at first, to keep the three states at peace and help the confederation become established. An International Commission with representatives from the U.N., the U.S., and other parties could act as a court of appeal and have a peace keeping force to defend the confederation during an interim

period. This would be for a number of years, after which the International Commission would be phased out.

Justice and Land

IF THE confederation idea were to work at all, it would not be due to any International Commission, but to the inherent justice of the plan. From the point of view of the average Israeli, the loss of state territory would be compensated by the establishment of peace.

He would still possess his house or store or farm. He would still be a citizen of Israel, even if he lived in Samaria or Judea – for those Jews living in the West Bank would be free to remain there. All that would be required of him would be to pay rent on the land he possessed, as payment for his share of the common heritage of the Levant. Those who owned no land would gain the common benefits of the land rent.

Idle land owned by absentee owners would be let go to avoid paying the rent, making land available to those who wished to use it productively.

Most importantly, the political struggle for land would be transformed into an economic marketplace where land would be available to anyone who would use it productively, in a free and open market.

An Israeli might feel resentment that his neighbour may now be a citizen of Palestine and the land next to his no longer Israeli. Equally a Palestinian Arab might not welcome the sight of an Israeli across the way from him. Yet a feeling of justice would permeate the land, for each was paying equally for the benefit of land holding, and both paying to the same Confederation.

The true source of resentment and hatred is the feeling that another is enjoying a privilege, an unfair advantage, or a position of dominance. When all would be equal, such feelings would subside and then and only then would cooperation and friendship be possible.

From the point of view of the average Palestinian, he could now be a citizen of a Palestinian State. The lack of a contiguous territory would be compensated for by the inclusion of Arabs and their land within the pre-1967 Israeli borders.

Those who did not wish to be subjected to Palestinian (and possibly PLO) authority, or to Israeli rule, with its religious laws, would be free

to join Canaan and live in a libertarian secular state where one could pursue one's culture and religion free from any state controls on personal conduct other than laws against using force.

United, Yet Apart

UNLIKE the situation in Lebanon, the confederation would have everyone living together, yet under diverse authorities. In Lebanon, there was an attempt to have one government for everyone, with shared power, and that failed. The confederation would provide with separate governments for the Israelis and the Palestinians, with a confederation to keep the peace among them, to coordinate foreign policy, and to act as the common land trustee, collecting and disbursing rent.

It is important that individuals and the states would pay their land rent directly to the confederation, emphasising the fact that they were living with the other nations on common land. Yet the people would contract with a government of their choice for a number of years, to freely associate with the nation of their choice.

Since the contracts between the people and the states would be set for seven years, the residents of the Levant could switch nationalities periodically, providing a further check against oppression or corruption in any of the states and fostering competition among them for citizens.

Finally, unlike Lebanon, the equalisation of land ownership would provide for justice, combining the equalisation of land with individual possession and initiative of enterprise. In Canaan there would be no taxation or restriction on labour and capital, giving enterprise the full freedom to prosper and allowing various cultures to express themselves freely.

The confederation would serve as a model for other torn areas, such as Lebanon or Northern Ireland, where ever two or more groups are fighting for a common territory.

I'm not claiming that a confederation would be a Utopia, but that it would go a long way towards rectifying the injustices that have built up for centuries in Israel/Palestine.

Land is the key to economic justice and peace, and until the equal right to the land is recognised, no peace plan can work.

With economic justice in place, peaceful co-existence becomes, at least, possible.

CANADA

Premier battles to give 'outcasts' new land rights

Paul Knight
writes from
Toronto

THE PROCESS of State formation entailed the development of new property rights in land.

The indigenous peoples of colonial territories, in suffering a loss of independent control over their land, were transformed into outcasts in the emergent European-dominated society.

This then created the hatreds which now intermittently flare up all over the world in the form of civil wars.

The Canadian government's present attempt to resolve age-old injustices may provide countries like Australia with a model for preventive action.

It entails the integration of racial groups into a peaceful society based on political equality and cooperation, together with a devolution of power, rather than risk the disintegration of the system based on ethnic conflict.

PRIME MINISTER Brian Mulroney has come close to entrenching in the Constitution the right to self-government of

the country's 500,000 aboriginal peoples.

At a summit meeting of the ten provincial premiers in April, Mr. Mulroney secured majority support for his action.

The group representing Treaty Indians — the Assembly of First Nations — opposed the wording of the amendment and the Inuit leaders wanted time to consult some Eskimo communities.

But Mr. Mulroney is confident that he will make progress.

He offered to personally lead negotiations on land claims for the Metis, the descendants of Indian women and French-Canadian fur traders.

Several premiers opposed the constitutional changes because they did not like the statement of entrenched rights to self-government being coupled with a constitutional obligation on provinces to negotiate specific rights.

They feared a series of legal cases on jurisdiction, land and resources which could take policy-making out of their hands.

But Mr. Mulroney, by profession a lawyer specialising in industrial relations, succeeded in finding a solution.

And Indian Affairs Minister David Combie says: "We are on the cutting edge of talks about aboriginal rights to self-government".

The diffusion of political power based on the right of direct access to natural resources ought to strengthen rather than weaken the political State.

But the essence of that strength is the system's ability to respond to the changing needs of people, while guaranteeing every individual's right of access to land.



● Prime Minister Mulroney