

The Future of Palestine

By S. VERE PEARSON

PERHAPS IN THIS WORLD so woebegone by war Palestine may become, before other places, the land of the free. Well-supported schemes endeavoring to make it so are not lacking. But there are divisions of opinion on the best way to proceed. While some advocate as a means of deliverance from religious and racial antagonisms the abandonment of Zionism, others believe the growth of socialism will bring a free system of society; and still others suggest revolutionary class struggles. But among the Jews a Palestinian national home is most favored.

Meanwhile alert and hard-working Jewish immigrants have worked wonders in developing Palestine, and the war conditions of the last five years have in some respects helped. Meanwhile, too, certain Americans are preparing plans for developing cheap power and concentrated irrigation farming by a very costly "Jordan Valley Authority." They believe that influences emanating from German cartels, which held a monopoly in potash and worked up Turkish obstruction in the last war, have now been stamped out. Perhaps they are after monopoly rights themselves. There have also been plans (and later reports of the dropping of such schemes) for new pipe-lines to bring oil from the East across to Mediterranean refineries and ports.

All these things are stirring the imagination of those watching this country, a land situated in such a "key" position. Its strategic importance no longer depends so exclusively, as it did not so many decades ago, upon its proximity to the Suez Canal, but upon a number of other factors. A short survey of some of the facts must precede a study of the

methods which might be used in Palestine to establish peace, freedom and prosperity for *all* its inhabitants.

Between 1918 and 1944 almost 400,000 Jews entered Palestine, the Jewish population increased from 60,000 to over 500,000, and from 10 per cent to almost one-third of the total population—the highest percentage of Jewish population in any country in the world. One in every four Jews in Palestine is a member of the General Federation of Jewish Labor (“Histadruth”); about 40,000 of the Jews in Palestine work in agriculture and more than half of the agricultural workers with their dependents live in workers’ colonies, of which more than half again are collective settlements where all the means of production and its results belong to the commune. No body of workers has done so much as these to reclaim and restore soil fertility in a land where the soil had been neglected and denuded for centuries. Yet, as in all other countries, urban population has increased in Palestine far more than rural.

Now racial and religious antagonisms can only be made to disappear when the economic opportunities of all—whether in urban or rural districts—come to be equal. How can this be brought about? Much can be said in favor of Zionism. Nevertheless it can be shown that Zionism has proved in some ways unsatisfactory for both Jews and Arabs; that, whatever wonders have been worked, both immigrant worker and native peasant have been losers to the advantage all the time of ground landlords. It is only natural that landlords gain when population has increased and many developments have taken place. Money, much of it out of taxes, has been spent on roads, public works, buildings, etc. Many dollars, often from rich American Jews, have been expended in buying land. Of the 375,000 acres of land in Jewish occupation about 144,000 acres are owned by the Jewish National Fund. With

an increasing demand for locations and the creation of a purchase fund supported from outside sources, the sale value and the rent of land, naturally, rise constantly. At the same time users of sites are also handicapped by taxes due to the necessity of paying for the public developments, a necessity met out of taxes because those directly benefitting by these things, the landlords, are not called upon to make equivalent contributions. No wonder there is discontent. No wonder racial and religious squabbles are fanned. No wonder the few grow rich and the many relatively poor. Legalized theft by the private appropriation of the rent of sites and the robbery which systems of taxation involve increase poverty and thwart liberty, fraternity and equality. Yet few writers point to these essential facts.

Those anxious to establish a free system of society should not neglect attention to taxation: and they should also study the methods used for exploiting workers through the assistance obtained by concession hunters from government authorities. These often gain their privileges from groups hiding under such titles as National Socialist, or Communist. It matters not at all whether the exploiters are Jews or Gentiles, a Lord Reading or a Mr. Pinas Rutenberg, or whether they are British firms such as the Imperial Chemical Industries or a firm registered in Germany or America. Natural resources can be annexed, concessions obtained, and monopolies established by the one as easily as by the other so long as the evils of the present régime persist, and so long as governments support monopolies—as they always do.

The references here to the late Mr. Rutenberg are to the Rutenberg Concession acquired by him after fierce discussions as to priority rights between him and Mr. Marcommatis. These took place about twenty years ago before the Court of International Justice of the League of Nations. The late

Lord Reading helped Mr. Rutenberg to raise money (chiefly in America) for his electric light and power stations, plants set up after obtaining water-power concessions in Palestine on favorable terms—favorable to the syndicate, but acknowledging quite inadequately that God's gifts are for all. The waters of Jordan, of the Dead Sea, and of the Sea of Galilee, like sunshine and air, should be for the benefit of all the inhabitants of Palestine. Furthermore, if oil and potash minerals below the surface come to be mined, such developments should reflect benefits to all.

The only way to make God's gifts free is to collect for the community the revenue to be willingly obtained from the users of sites, such rent representing the value of the services rendered by a man's neighbors for the various public (and private) works they provide in close proximity to where the earth's resources are processed and transported for commercial use. Then every exclusive occupier of a site will be put square with his neighbors; and no one will find any advantage to ask payment simply for being a title-holder of a site. Yet the corporations founded to exploit the Rutenberg concession and the concessions obtained in Palestine by the Imperial Chemical Industries were not based on such methods of guaranteeing the general welfare; they contravened them. The high-sounding professions of politicians and diplomats re-echo from past centuries only to become a mockery so long as financial groups are allowed to exploit the riches of foreign lands without paying just rents to local communities for the privileges granted and the conditions maintained by society wherever situated. Not until payments for services rendered are made to those who render them can burdensome taxes be abolished. If the people do not awake the same mistakes will recur when new pipe-lines, refineries, water-power plants, mining operations, etc., are

installed in these rapidly developing regions. And some of these schemes are likely to be carried out one of these days, perhaps by American firms and money.

Lovers of freedom should realize that the way to reconcile Arab and Jew alike and to appease Moslems elsewhere (and this is equally important at this juncture in the affairs of the world and of the British Commonwealth in particular), is to "confiscate" (using this word in its original sense) for the public weal the whole of the publicly created rent, to leave to holders of sites the whole value of the improvements they make, and to remove all tax burdens. Those who have done so much for Palestine in the last twenty years, have been thwarted quite often in their endeavors to be secure in the possession of the values their own individual efforts have created. They are difficult to guarantee, even under schemes of ownership in common and collectivism, so long as taxes take from men some of their wages, which are essentially no more and no less than the products of their own labor. Moreover, workers have to meet charges for water, electricity, etc., which are the higher because they are based on privileges obtained years ago by a few persons. Regardless of race or sect any man should be relieved from the hindrances to initiative and production imposed by the interferences of government, and in particular those associated with taxation; and he should have security in his own improvements. Payments for developments not made by the occupier, increasing the value of the occupancy of locations, should form the fund which is the public revenue. They measure the benefits conferred on the individual or group of individuals by the public expenditure and would be willingly paid in return for those benefits. But they should not accrue to title-holders who have not provided them, for that means paying twice for them: once in privately appropriated rent or in purchase

price to the title-holders for so-called "land-value," and once in taxes, central or local.

The policy of collecting the public's true revenue and using it for public local needs resembles that adopted for ages in most Moslem countries. It is not unknown to some of the wisest British colonial administrators (for example in Northern Nigeria, British Somaliland and in Mandated Tanganyika). It is favored by Rabbis Stephen Wise, M. Aaronsohn and M. L. Perlschweig. This remedy differs from political reforms, alteration of boundaries and status; it opposes the usual pastoralist view (of "ranchers" in Eire, "squatters" in Australia, and some nomad Arabs in Palestine) that many potentially rich areas can be left in comparatively unproductive cultivation; and it opposes the Jewish view that justice can be done to farmers and laborers by buying land titles from *effendis*.

No religious or economic disputes arise in face of just agrarian and fiscal laws. This simple but far-reaching policy would ensure access on equal terms to raw materials and trade which is essential for economic prosperity. And no freedom from the dictates and interferences of authority is possible without its adoption.

There are many progressive thinkers and workers today who seem to think that freedom can be achieved through socialism. There are others who think that it can be organized on a syndicalist basis and installed by revolutionary methods. Real liberty cannot be won by use of force, nor by methods which slip into a new form of authority and into the very dangers people are striving to avoid. Socialist governments are very apt, like every other kind of government, to trample on liberty and engage in warfare, as we have seen in the case of the Communists.

The only excuse for delegating authority to others who may

interfere with individual citizens, is the need of an agent to do for us what we, as individuals, cannot do for ourselves. But the mistake must be guarded against of endowing that authority with funds. That leads to authorities becoming autocratic and subversive of freedom. To obviate that danger the evils of taxation must be appreciated. Any authority set up by the people can demand nothing, not even advice, from its principle, and its first duty as a servant is to collect that which is due for the services the community renders to individual members of society. By that plan the individual pays for what he gets, and his neighbors are paid for the services they render.

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