



Witches' Brew

THE ZIONIST PROJECT was always without doubt a colonial project. Forged at the height of Europe's imperial adventure, the project for a permanent Jewish homeland was predicated upon the colonization of a piece of territory in the gift and under the protection of one or more of the Great Powers. Just as Liberia was to be the home of America's emancipated slaves so the new Zion was to be a home for Europe's emancipated Jews. Both projects in their own distinctive ways were destined, perhaps inevitably, to disaster.

Unless the Jewish homeland was to be sited somewhere entirely uninhabited it would, like every other European settler colony, have to be founded by the expropriation and subordination of the original inhabitants. These aboriginals, whether in South America, East Africa or the Levant were easily distinguishable by their lack of energy and their low level of culture. The European settlers, by contrast, demonstrated their natural superiority by their startling ingenuity and their capacity for hard work; unlike the lazy good-for-nothing locals they carved farms out of the wilderness and made the desert bloom. The destruction or displacement of those who stand in the way of progress, improvement, and industry, has never needed any other justification.

These European virtues, along with democracy, the rule of law, and a lively civil society, have for many years been used to justify the existence of the State of Israel. Not unnaturally, the great mass of Palestinian

Arabs takes a radically different view of their displacement and oppression. The trickle of Jewish settlers did not arouse much hostility or tension during the last decade of the nineteenth century and not even during the larger migrations of Jews, which followed the Kishinev Pogroms of 1903 and 1905. However, as repression aimed at the Jews became more violent and more general the numbers of Jews living in Palestine grew, reaching 84,000 in the early twenties to well over half a million by the mid forties. Jewish migration on this scale radically changed the situation resulting in sporadic inter-communal rioting and bomb attacks, and eventually in sustained fighting between Arab and Jewish militias in November 1947, which widened into full-scale war on the departure of the British from Palestine in May 1948. Egypt, Trans-Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq declared war on the fledgeling Jewish state, and aided by forces from Saudi Arabia and Sudan, the Arab armies invaded Palestine.

Although they inflicted heavy casualties on the Jewish forces, the defeat of the Arabs was fairly swift, and by March 1949 the State of Israel began a process of state building and consolidation in which millions of Arabs were displaced or exiled. This bloody process has gone on and on, grinding on through wars, rebellions, and generations, from November 1947 to January 2009. Assisted initially by the Soviet Union and armed via Czechoslovakia, recognised by the United States, and subsequently recognised by Britain, the foundation of the Jewish state was from the start always tangled up with the regional interests and ambitions of European states, the Russians, and the United States of America.

Should the State of Israel have been established? The answer has to be no. Like Southern Rhodesia, whose state was founded upon the exercise of privileged citizenship for a settler population of one ethnicity, ranged against a native population of another, Israel could never be anything but a Spartan state in a permanent state of armed preparedness against those it had dispossessed.

This much is clear. However, we all know that the founders of the State of Israel, worked not out of some abstract Zionist aspiration, but in direct response to waves of anti-Jewish persecution and murder throughout central and Eastern Europe, which culminated after 1942 in the Holocaust in which Jewish life and culture was more or less extinguished throughout Europe. The State of Israel would not have been established if the British, the Americans, the Australians and Canadians had opened their doors to Europe's Jews during the nineteen thirties and forties. The quotas, which limited the entry of Jews fleeing persecution into these territories, admitted only small numbers. This was because there was a fear, widespread among political elites in the West, that admitting large numbers of Jews would provoke domestic anti-Semitic unrest and disorders. This fear, in the context of depression, large-scale unemployment, housing shortages, and the rationing of much else, was not entirely unfounded.

This was a tragedy borne of tragedy. In a similar manner, and perhaps for similar reasons, the large-scale resettlement of Palestinian Arabs with the full rights of citizens has not taken place in the neighbouring Arab states or in the rich countries of the West. Sixty years after the establishment of the State of Israel, and forty years after the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, literally millions of Palestinian Arabs continue to be displaced persons living as refugees in camps and townships bereft of proper services, education or economic life. No country or group of countries has made any significant move to offer these people citizenship or a future. The result is war without end and a widespread belief on both sides – among Arabs *and* Jews – that only ethnic cleansing of one sort or another will settle matters.

This has set the scene for a tradition of posturing on the left in which Israel is identified as a kind of apartheid state maintained simply to further American interests. These leftists insist upon the abolition of Israel and foundation of a secular state in the land of

Palestine in which all Arabs and Jews would live harmoniously together. This absurd fantasy is canvassed in order to enable those on the left to stand shoulder to shoulder with Arabs and Muslims in their battle to liquidate the Jewish State. It enables them to pose as progressive secularists as they line up with Hezbollah and Hamas and other Islamists whose aim is to wipe Israel off the map.

The current war in which the bodies of little girls are being lined up in rows on the floors of hospital morgues, in which fathers and mothers in pyjamas and night-dresses are buried in the ruins of their houses, in which young men and women who should be at school and university are slaughtering each other in the streets, should not be thought of as an occasion for Tony Benn or Ken Livingstone, Lyndsey German or George Galloway to pose, yet again, as the friends of the oppressed and tribunes of the people. Attacking Israel while supporting Hamas and Hezbollah, will contribute precisely nothing to ending oppression and bloodshed in Israel, in Gaza, or in the occupied territories.

The broad left of the Stop the War Coalition, and the Islamists, take shelter behind Annie Lennox and Bianca Jagger's calls for an immediate ceasefire, while all the time committing themselves and their organizations to the victory of the Arabs over the Jews, and to the abolition of the State of Israel. The left's political bankruptcy shadows that of their allies in the Arab and Islamic world and mimics that of the irredentists in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv as much as it does that of the friends of Israel in Washington and London.

This left, along with their Islamist allies, opposes the two-state solution in which the Jews of Israel and the Arabs of Palestine would be guaranteed territorial and demographic security. In doing so they oppose the only conceivable way out of a crisis brewed in a witches' cauldron from anti-Semitism, colonialism, ethnic cleansing and terror, religious particularism, and the self-interested manoeuvres of great powers.