

The Man Who Jumped

Uri Avnery

December 30, 2017

NOBODY DESCRIBED THE outbreak of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict better than the historian Isaac Deutscher.

A man lives in a house that catches fire. To save his life, he jumps out of the window. He lands on a passer-by in the street below and injures him grievously. Between the two a bitter enmity arises. Who is to blame?

Of course, no parable can reflect reality exactly. The man who jumped out of the burning house did not land on this particular passer-by by chance. The passer-by became an invalid for life. But on the whole, this parable is better than any other I know.

Deutscher did not provide an answer to the question of how to solve the conflict. Are the two condemned to fight each other forever? Is there a solution at all?

COMMON SENSE would say: of course there is. True, the injured person cannot be restored to his former condition. The man who caused the injury cannot return to his former home, which was destroyed by the fire. But. . .

But the man can—and must—apologize to his victim. That is the minimum. He can—and must—pay him compensation. That is what justice demands. But then the two can become friends. Perhaps even partners.

Instead, the man continues to harm the victim. He invades the victim's home and throws him out. The victim's sons try to evict the man. And so it goes on.

Deutscher himself, who fled the Nazis from Poland to England in time, did not see the continuation of the story. He died a few days after the Six-day War.

INSTEAD OF quarreling endlessly about who was right and who was wrong, how wonderful we are and how abhorrent the others are, we should think about the future.

What do we want? What kind of a state do we want to live in? How do we end the occupation, and what will come after?

Israel is divided between “Left” and “Right”. I don't like these terms—they are obvious misnomers. They were created in the French National Assembly more than two hundred years ago by the accidental seating of the parties in the hall at the time, as seen by the speaker. But let's use them for convenience sake.

The real division is between those who prefer the people to the land, and those who prefer the land to the people.

Which is more sacred?

In the early days of the state there was a joke making the rounds. God summoned David Ben-Gurion and told him: you have done great things for my people, make a wish and I shall grant it.

Ben-Gurion answered: I wish that Israel will be a Jewish state, that it will encompass all the country between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River and that it be a just state.

“That is too much even for me,” God said. “But I will grant you two of your three wishes.”

Since then we have the choice between a Jewish and just state in part of the country, or a Jewish state in all the country that will not be just, or a greater and just state, that will not be Jewish.

Ben-Gurion must be weeping in his grave.

SO WHAT are the solutions proposed by the two major forces in Israeli politics?

The “Left” has by now an orderly program. I am proud of having contributed to it. It says, more or less:

- (a) A State of Palestine will come into being next to the State of Israel.
- (b) Between the two states there will be peace, based on an agreement that will provide for open borders and close mutual relations.
- (c) There will be joint institutions as necessary, by consent.
- (d) The united city of Jerusalem will be the capital of both states, West Jerusalem the capital of Israel and East Jerusalem the capital of Palestine.
- (e) There will be a limited, agreed, one-to-one exchange of territory.
- (f) There will be a limited, symbolic return of refugees to Israel, all other refugees will receive generous compensation and “return” to the State of Palestine or remain where they are.
- (g) Israel will remain a mainly Jewish state, with Hebrew as its first official language and open for Jewish immigration according to its laws.

(h) Both states will join regional institutions.

This is a clear picture of the future. Both ardent Zionists and non-Zionists can accept it wholeheartedly.

WHAT IS the program of the “Right”? How do its ideologues see the future?

The simple fact is that the Right has no picture of the future, no program, not even a dream. Only vague sentiments.

That may be its strength. Sentiments are a strong force in the life of nations.

What the Right would really like is the endless continuation of the present situation: the military occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the indirect occupation of the Gaza Strip, enforced by blockade.

Cold logic says that this is an unnatural situation that cannot go on forever. Sooner or later it has to be institutionalized. How?

There are two possibilities, and only two: an apartheid state or a binational state.

That is so obvious, that even the most fanatical right-winger cannot deny it. No one even tries to.

There is a vague hope that the Arabs in Palestine will somehow pack up and just go away. That will not happen. The unique circumstances of 1948 will not and cannot repeat themselves.

A few well-to-do Palestinians may actually leave for London or Rio de Janeiro, but their demographic weight

will remain negligible. The mass of people will remain where they are—and multiply.

Already now, there live between the sea and the river, in the Greater Israel of the dream, according to the last count (July 2016): 6,510,894 Arabs and 6,114,546 Jews. The Arab birthrate is bound to fall, but so will the Jewish one (except for the Orthodox).

What would life be like in the Israeli apartheid state? One thing is certain: it would not attract masses of Jews. The split between Jewish Israelis and Jews in the USA and other countries would widen slowly and inexorably.

Sooner or later, the disenfranchised majority would rise, world opinion would condemn and boycott Israel, and the apartheid system would break down. What would remain?

What would remain is the thing almost all Israelis dread: the binational State. One person—one vote. A country very different from Israel. A country from which many Israeli Jews would depart, either slowly or rapidly.

This is not propaganda, but simple fact. If there is a right-wing ideologue somewhere who has an answer to this—let them stand up now, before it is too late.

I CANNOT resist the temptation of telling again the old joke:

A drunken British lady stands on the deck of the Titanic, with a glass of whisky in her hand, and sees the approaching iceberg. “I did ask for some ice,” she exclaims, “but this is ridiculous!”