

# Palestine: What is the Solution?

## (1946)

by Alexander Bittelman

### *Editors Introduction*

*On April 23, 1982 Alexander Bittelman died at the age of 91. Bittelman was an outstanding figure in the history of the Communist Party, USA from its foundation until his expulsion from the Party in 1959. Bittelman did not always make the most correct decisions—his support of the Foster-Browder group against Lovestone, for instance—but he was a true revolutionary intellectual nonetheless. After the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the resulting inner-party crisis in the CPUSA which decimated its ranks, Bittelman refused to return to the old orthodoxy upon which its surviving leadership insisted. For this “crime” he was expelled.*

*Bittelman played a leading role in the “Jewish work” of the Communist Party. As a result he had occasion to write on the struggles which led to the formation of the State of Israel and the exile of the Palestinian people from their homeland. In 1946 the United Nations had established a Special Committee on Palestine to prepare for its decolonization. Britain proposed a federal solution to the problem of two nations: one Jewish and one Palestinian. Others advocated the partition of the country and the creation of two separate states. Before the Soviet Union agreed to this second proposal, a decision which was immediately (and incorrectly) endorsed by the world communist movement, Alexander Bittelman wrote the following article.*

*With remarkable prescience he dissected the reactionary character of the partition plan and how it would turn the resulting Jewish State in Palestine into a beachhead of world imperialism and a center of war in the Middle East. As we go to press the continuing Israeli invasion of Lebanon stands as a grim reminder of the truth of Bittelman’s predictions and of the urgent necessity for concerted action against Israeli aggression and its attempts to physically liquidate the national movement of the Palestinian people.*

*The following article first appeared in the November 1946 issue of Jewish Life. It appears here in abridged form.*

What is the solution for Palestine? Is it to be partition? So-called federalization? Fraudulent independence as in Transjordan? Or is it to be real independence—a free and independent Palestine of Jews and Arabs? Only the blind among us, or such as are ready consciously to turn the Jewish people into a tool of imperialists and warmongers, will agree to support anything else but an independent Palestine in which both Jews and Arabs can live in peace and freedom.

It is reported that the Jewish Agency now favors partition, instead of the British imperialist scheme of “federalization.” It is also reported that the Truman administration supports the position of the Jewish Agency, at least insofar as it facilitates further penetration by American imperialism into Palestine and the Middle East generally. We believe that these reports are true.

The supporters of partition do not, of course, speak of it as just the splitting up of Palestine. It is represented rather as a scheme whereby a “Jewish state” will be set up, not in the whole of Palestine but in a part of it, a part that would be “adequate” for the development of “a viable” Jewish state.

What is the truth? The Jewish Agency plan for the partition of Palestine, presumably supported by Truman, is a proposal for a *reactionary and imperialist* solution of the Palestine question. It would mean splitting up the country, the homeland of Arabs and Jews, by foreign imperialist powers into an arbitrary number of parts without regard for and against the will of the overwhelming majority of the population of Palestine, Arabs and Jews.

Partition would violate every single precept of democracy. It would deny to the peoples of Palestine—Jews and Arabs—the democratic right to determine for themselves, freely and voluntarily, the ways and forms of their national lives and of their state life. It would forcibly impose upon the peoples of Palestine, both Jews and Arabs, new forms of foreign imperialist domination in place of the present, old forms. Where British imperialism now rules singly, the partition plan of the Jewish Agency would open the doors to another foreign

oppressor—American imperialism—or to the combined domination of the Anglo-American imperialist bloc.

## Reject Anti-Democratic Scheme

Can the Jewish people support a scheme that is anti-democratic and imperialist, that promotes and strengthens national oppression and exploitation, that serves the interests of those who are planning and preparing a third world war by making Palestine and the Middle East one of the jumping-off places?

How can a people like ours—the Jewish people—which has suffered so much from the injustices of national oppression and discrimination; which has lost six million of its flesh and blood at the hands of extreme imperialist reaction and national oppression—fascism; which is at this very moment confronted with new fascist and anti-Semitic dangers largely because imperialist reaction in America and in England is once more on the offensive at home and abroad; which less than any other people in the world can afford another world war because that would spell the physical extinction of our people—how can a people like ours support a solution in Palestine which strengthens imperialist reaction and the incendiaries of a new war? It simply cannot. It must not. Our salvation as a people and as individuals lies in peace, democracy, and national freedom for all peoples. To support the violation of these principles in Palestine is to endanger them all over the world.

But isn't the Agency's partition plan better than Britain's so-called federalization, or some phoney "independence" scheme? Isn't British imperialism the oppressor of Palestine and of the Jewish Yishuv? Isn't British imperialism our main enemy in Palestine? And wouldn't therefore the setting up of a Jewish state even in a part of Palestine be a democratic achievement?

There should be no argument among us about British imperialism being the oppressor and exploiter of Palestine; or about the need for rejecting totally and finally the brazen, arrogant and fraudulent imperialist "federalization" scheme of the British government. But we must reach the necessary *conclusions* from that. For there are some among us, especially the official Zionist leadership, who merely pay lip service to these truths, and only on certain occasions. But in practice they collaborate with British imperialism and are even now seeking a new understanding with it.

## Some Basic Conclusions

From our opposition to British imperialism in Palestine we must arrive at the elementary as well as basic conclusion that this foreign imperialist oppressor of the Palestinian Jews and Arabs must get out of there, and return the country to the peoples who live in it and to whom it belongs. In other words, we must support the democratic demand for an independent and free Palestine. And in the present world situation, the struggle for this demand would be advanced considerably by having the United Nations—or the Big Three within

it—assume charge in Palestine with a view to bringing about its independence.

Having arrived at this conclusion, we must reach yet another, equally elementary and basic. There can be no democratic solution of the Palestine question, i.e., no independent and free Palestine, without a united struggle of Arabs and Jews for such a solution. And again, there are some among us who seem to believe in Arab-Jewish unity but only on condition that the Arabs agree to the Zionist program in Palestine. This is no unity at all but a policy of sacrificing the interests of one people, the Arabs, to the interests of another people, our people, the Jews. And no Jewish-Arab unity can ever be achieved on the basis of sacrificing the interests of the Arabs to those of the Jews, or the interests of the Jews to those of the Arabs.

A democratic solution of the Palestine question rules out from the outset any and all proposals of reactionary nationalists—Arab or Jewish—to sacrifice the national rights and interests of one people to those of another. Such proposals are fundamentally wrong in principle and therefore will not endure. Reactionary Zionist leaders do not consider the Arabs in Palestine a people at all, but just Arabs, so many and so many in number, who at best would be entitled to "equality before the law," while the Jewish people there would be the *people* and the Palestine state would be theirs. On the other hand, the reactionary Arab nationalists look upon the Jewish community in Palestine, not as a people with definite rights as a people, but just as so many immigrants to be tolerated and perhaps granted certain elementary civil rights. Is it conceivable that Arab-Jewish unity can be built on these reactionary conceptions? Obviously not.

But is it conceivable that there can be a successful struggle for an independent and free Palestine without Arab-Jewish unity? Not in the present world situation. In the absence of firm democratic Arab-Jewish unity for a free Palestine, the imperialists, British and American, together with their collaborators, the reactionary Zionist leaders and the reactionary Arab leaders, will be able to promote *more easily* their schemes of division, partition, of fraudulent independence, national chauvinism and hatred. They will be able more successfully to impose an imperialist solution of the Palestine question, by force and violence, whatever the exact forms may be.

## Position of Jewish Marxists

That is why, as Marxists, we oppose on principle any policy which seeks to sacrifice the interests of the Jewish people to those of the Arabs. That is why, as Marxists, and especially as American *Jewish* Marxists, we must direct our *main* attack against the Jewish reactionaries and national chauvinists, against those who seek to sacrifice the interests of the Arab people to those of the Jewish people. In this we follow a fundamental principle according to which the main task of the Marxists among any people, nationality or nation is to fight and defeat *first of all and always* the exploiters, the reactionaries, the national chauvinists and opportunists *of their own people, nationality or nation*. Only thus can one defend

properly the rights and interests of one's own people, i.e., on the basis of democracy and progress.

In the past, American Jewish Marxists have not always displayed a positive attitude to the rights and interests of the Jewish people, to the special needs and problems of our own American Jewish national group, and to the interests and rights of the Jewish community in Palestine. The tendency was to identify more or less loosely the Jewish people's interests with nationalism and reaction; to identify, for example, the interests of the Jewish community in Palestine with Zionism, and to transfer and extend the correct opposition to nationalism also to Jewish interests in general and to the Palestine Yishuv in particular. It was a case of falling under the influences of bourgeois assimilationism, which is a reflection of the "superior" race theories of Anglo-Saxon imperialism, as well as of national nihilism, both of which have nothing in common with Marxism. And this happened largely because American Jewish Marxists went to the other extreme in their correct efforts to avoid the pitfalls of bourgeois nationalism—Zionism and Bundism—and of national chauvinism which are incompatible with consistent democracy and with Marxism.

But in more recent years, especially during the war against the Axis, American Jewish Marxists made considerable advances on the road to freeing themselves from the influences of bourgeois assimilationism and national nihilism. They thus came close to a correct Marxist position as well as to the masses of the Jewish people—their needs, problems and progressive struggles. It is thus that the American Jewish Marxists made their significant contributions to the anti-fascist Jewish people's unity for victory over the Axis.

But in doing so, in correcting many of the errors of assimilationism and national nihilism, we have not fully succeeded in avoiding, and in some fields failed to avoid, the other extreme, the pitfalls of bourgeois nationalism. Outstanding in this regard was precisely the error of not basing the fight for the rights of the Yishuv completely upon the foundations of Arab-Jewish unity for a free and independent Palestine, of not resisting sufficiently the nationalist tendency to ignore and subordinate the rights and interests of the Arab people in Palestine, of insufficient struggle for the correct Marxist positions and for the ideology of the working class. These errors must be corrected thoroughly and completely. A systematic struggle must be carried on against all influences of nationalism and chauvinism. And learning from experience, we must make sure *not to retreat back to the errors of assimilationism and national nihilism*, but to hold fast to the Marxist positions by combatting both dangers—bourgeois nationalism and bourgeois assimilationism.

## Partition Is No Alternative

It is from these Marxist positions that we are able to demonstrate the basic and vital need for a democratic solution of the Palestine question. It is from these positions that we are able to show that the democratic

alternative to British imperialist rule in Palestine and to its present schemes of "federalization," is not partition, not reliance upon the penetration of American imperialism into the Middle East or collaboration with it, but Arab-Jewish unity for an independent Palestine state of Arabs and Jews, safe-guarding the interests and national rights of both nationalities.

The idea that we can have "a viable," i.e., a livable, "Jewish state" in a partitioned Palestine is utopian and reactionary. It is utopian and reactionary because in this splinter state the Jewish community will not be able to develop an independent national economy freely associating with the national economies of the Arabs and of other peoples. Jewish economic life will be totally subordinated to the *narrow and special military and war needs of Anglo-American imperialism*. So will Jewish political and social life. It will not be a Jewish state but an Anglo-American military reservation, in which Jewish capital will make profits, but in which the Jewish people will be sweated and oppressed economically in a political regime similar to that in Singapore or Hongkong. Moreover, this military reservation, or base, is going to play a major role in the *war preparations* of Anglo-American imperialism. And this so-called "viable Jewish state" will be called upon to sacrifice itself—economically, politically and physically—to enable the Anglo-Saxon imperialists to extend and perpetuate their rule.

Is it not clear that the Agency's plan—if such it is—for the partition of Palestine, based upon subordination of the interests of the Jewish people to British, American and Anglo-American imperialism, as a way of setting up "a viable Jewish state," is utopian, reactionary, and would turn the Jewish people into a tool of the warmakers?

## A Complete and Lasting Solution

In arriving at these conclusions, we are naturally guided by the fundamental Marxist idea that the complete and lasting solution of the Jewish question in every country in particular and in the world at large will be achieved only with the abolition of capitalism and imperialism and the introduction of socialism. This is the Marxist-Leninist way of arriving at a fundamental solution of the national question. It is clear, therefore, that the solution of the Palestine question, which must be sought on a democratic basis, will solve the national problems of the peoples of Palestine, and not of all peoples nor of the Jewish people of all countries, who have their own special problems; and this solution will be only a partial one, since only socialism will give the complete and final solution.

This does not minimize the importance of a democratic solution in Palestine either for the Jewish people or for the world at large. We have already pointed out that a democratic Arab-Jewish solution in Palestine will promote world peace and democracy. And for the Jewish people, who, to say the least, are no less interested in world peace and democracy than any other people, this would mark a significant though partial solution of the national problem of a vital part of the

Jewish people—the Yishuv in Palestine. This development will strengthen the democratic forces of the Jewish people and reinforce our struggle for survival. Like all democratic achievements, this will advance us further on the road of democracy to a complete and final solution under socialism.

A democratic Jewish-Arab solution of the Palestine question now will help promote peace and democracy, will provide partial solutions of the national problems of the two peoples, and will open the road there to the eventual complete solution on the basis of socialism.

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