

The CIIR and Louis Allen

Uri Davis

In the concluding paragraphs of his open letter to the Catholic Institute for International Relations, Mr Allen notes that 'the ultimate objective of the Palestinians is said to be "a non-Zionist, Arab-Jewish state in the whole of what was once Palestine"'. This means the ultimate objective of the Palestinians is still the destruction of the state of Israel *as it now is* (my italics). Mr Allen clearly implies that individuals and organisations who subscribe to the objective of destroying the state of Israel as it now is cannot be considered legitimate parties to a Catholic debate on the Middle East conflict and the desired future for the Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Arab peoples. Mr Allen is a Catholic and he questions whether the CIIR is voicing a legitimate Catholic position on the question of the Middle East conflict presumably because *Comment 19* either states or implies the desirability of destroying the state of Israel as it now is.

Israeli-Jews, as a rule, are not too well informed of Christian history and more often than not betray unforgiveable ignorance of the development of Catholicism. I am no exception, yet, given my limited knowledge, I would be surprised to find a Catholic consensus that state-worship constitutes part of the Catholic spirit or dogma. I would rather have thought that Catholics, like people of any other religion, might have been expected to oppose any insinuation that unconditional acceptance of the existence of any state as it now is, irrespective of its policies and history, should constitute a condition *sine qua non* for a legitimate ethical-political discussion. I would further like to state at the outset that in terms of my own political ethics, no *ethical* discussion of the political domain can take place unless it involves a critical scrutiny of any existing state in the light of its history and *de facto* policies and can thus decide in each case whether one can justify support for its continued existence. This is as true of the state of Israel as it is of the Vatican State.

The justification for the continued existence of the State of Israel as it now is (an exclusively Jewish state) is therefore, in my opinion, not only a legitimate subject for debate but it is a subject debated far too seldom. The reason for this is rooted in the effective Zionist exploitation of Christian 'collective guilt' for the holocaust of the Second World War. I would like to make it clear that I do not believe in (and am engaged, apart from anything else in my capacity as former Vice-Chairman of the Israeli League for Human and Civil Rights in a serious struggle against) the doctrines of collective or inherited guilt.

In the name of these doctrines the Israeli government destroys the houses of suspects and throws relatives and families into the cold. In the name of this doctrine Jews were held 'guilty' by anti-Semites, and especially by the Nazis, for any sins that their ancestors or individual co-religionists may have committed. In the name of a parallel doctrine the Zionists make all Arabs or all the Palestinians guilty of any act committed by a single Arab or a single Palestinian organisation. Guilt can only be individual guilt. I do not feel guilty, either collectively or ancestrally, for sins committed by Jews *per se*: for example, for the genocide, described as having been committed on divine orders by Jews against the Canaanites and Amalekites—in spite of the fact that this genocide is praised in the Israeli compulsory education system, and is used both as a model and as a justification for contemporary Zionist policies. Catholics and Christians in general have criminally abandoned their responsibility to their fellowmen, Jews and Arabs, by surrendering to the 'collective guilt' blackmail, and thereby share direct responsibility for the atrocious reality in Palestine and contribute to the increasing jeopardy of the Palestinian-Arab and Israeli-Jewish national communities there.

I cannot but express my admiration for the CIIR for putting out *Comment* no. 19, which, contrary to Mr Allen's contentions, is accurate both in substance and implication, and is completely supported by my immediate knowledge (as a person born, raised and educated in Israel) of the political reality perpetrated by Israeli state policies. What merits particular praise is the fact that in their response to Mr Allen's letter they did not fall back into the morally crippling attitude of apologising for voicing truth in public. In what follows I would like to establish the above thesis by referring to specific points raised by Mr Allen. I could not hope to respond to them all in the available space and I trust that the following illustrations will suffice.

(Page 16): One should sharply distinguish between the Zionist political immigration into Palestine at the turn of the century on the one hand, and the Orthodox traditional Jewish pilgrimage and immigration to the holy cities of Jerusalem, Hebron, Safad and Tiberias. As a matter of fact out of this latter constituency stems the only consistent religious Jewish opposition to Zionism in Palestine-Eretz-Israel, namely, the *Neturei Kartah* (The Keepers of the Wall). This community, now approximately 7,000 people strong, is based in Jerusalem and Benei Berak in Israel, and is linked to affiliated communities in Britain and the US. They have declared the Israeli Day of Independence a day of mourning, they burn Israeli national flags in public, systematically boycott Israeli taxation and conscription, and have in fact, attempted to negotiate with the Palestinian-Arab leadership both before 1948 and after 1967 for a joint struggle against first the Zionist movement and then the Israeli government. This position they share with the radical socialist anti-Zionist organisations, popularly known as *Matzpen*, which constitute the marginal political fringe on the left of the Israeli political spectrum. In general, they consider Zionism to be the worst form of Jewish apostasy and are unrelenting in their active

opposition to the continued existence of the state of Israel as a Jewish state. Thus, *Comment* is correct in tracing Zionist Jewish immigration to the turn of the century.

(Page 16): Should we understand from Mr Allen's comment that 'the area of the original Mandate was much greater than that of Palestine . . . the original Mandate included the present Jordan as well . . . this was hacked off by the British Government and seized by the Emir Abdullah in the 20's' that he believes Israeli-Jews (or Jews for that matter) have legitimate claims to establish an exclusively Jewish state not only in post-1967 Greater Israel but in Trans-Jordan as well?

(Pages 16-17): I will not here enter into a detailed historical debate about the political allegiances of various Arab and Jewish political movements during the Second World War. There is no doubt that Mr Allen is correct in pointing out that many political circles, including the Palestinian leadership under Hajj Amin el-Husseini were pro-Nazi (as against, for instance, the Emir Abdallah, King Faruq, the Sherif Hussein, King Feisal and others who were pro-Allies). I would like, however, to point out that whereas he chooses his villains correctly, he is not so careful in choosing his heroes. David Razieli, who should, it seems, be the proper subject of our admiration, was the leader of the *I.Z.L. (Irgun Zeva'i Leumi—The National Military Organisation, popularly known as the Irgun)*, which was the paramilitary arm of the Jabotinsky-led Zionist Revisionist Party. The *Irgun* together with the *Lehi (Lohamei Herut Israel—Israel Freedom Fighters, popularly known as the Stern Gang)* committed the Deir Yasin massacre which played a critical role in the terrorised flight of the Palestinian Arab population from the advancing Israeli forces. (Yes, Mr Allen, Deir Yasin again.)

(Page 18): What is there so surprising about the fact that the number of the 1948 Palestinian-Arab refugees is given as 585,000 '(yet) further down the page the (*Comment*) writer speaks of "the existence of one million Palestinian refugees"'? Mr Allen wonders 'how has the number nearly doubled'? May I remind him that people, including Palestinian refugees are capable of procreation. In the 27 years of Israeli state existence not only has the number of Palestinian-Arab refugees nearly doubled, but that of the Israeli-Arabs has almost tripled, from 160,000 in 1948-9 to approximately 400,000 today.

I rather liked the section where a justification for the Israeli policy of denying the rights of the 1948 Palestinian-Arab refugees is implied in Mr Allen's condemnation of Arab states' policies towards the Palestinian Arabs. I fully grant Mr Allen that Arab policies concerning the Palestinian-Arab problem in general and the Palestinian-Arab refugee problem in particular set us no standard and I would further argue that in many respects the Palestinians' worst enemy is not necessarily the state of Israel under the Rabin government, but rather, for instance, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan under Hussein. After all, the 1970-1 Jordanian massacre of the Palestinians is unparalleled by any of the Israeli deeds and policies thus far. This, given Hussein's

immediate family tradition, is, at least, consistent. After all, the Palestinian-Arab state designated to be established next to the Jewish state of Israel according to the UN 1947 Partition Plan, was divided by secret agreement between the Ben Gurion government and Hussein's grandfather King Abdallah's government on an almost strictly 50-50 basis, and both parties kept the agreement throughout the 1948 war, including the agreed partition line for East and West Jerusalem. But then, this makes at best a case for symmetry between the state of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan or the Arab states in general. It does *not* make a case for symmetry between Israel and the Palestinian-Arabs, which, after all, is the crux of the problem.

(Page 19): Mr Allen astonishingly says that 'it was part of Israeli propaganda for years that their (the Palestinians) own leaders had broadcast to the Arabs to flee and then return; there seems no ground for believing this now'. In a way it is this sentence that betrays him more than anything else in his letter. What can he mean by saying that there seems no ground for believing this *now*? It was, after all, in 1961 that Erskine Childers published his research essay 'The Other Exodus' (*Spectator*, 12.5.61). Why *now* and not since (at least) 1961? I have little doubt that Mr Allen is familiar with this essay. But even in the unlikely event that this often reprinted essay (e.g., Walter Laqueur, *The Israeli Arab Reader*) has escaped his attention, I would have expected him to know that peasants do not abandon their ancestral villages and kin communities for dubious political objectives. Peasants can be got to move only if by specific intervention they are denied access to their lands and are forcibly driven from their villages by troops. Mr Allen should note, too, that the Palestinian refugee problem is not confined to the population outside pre-1967 Israeli borders, but has continually existed within Israel itself. People have fled from their ancestral homes to find shelter in neighbouring villages and towns, which after the 1949 Armistice came under Israeli rule. These people were, and still are, not allowed to return to their native villages. They are 'present absentees'. They are present to the extent that they are considered Israeli citizens, and accordingly are granted their rights to vote for local authorities, Parliament, etc. Yet, they are absent in so far as their property rights are concerned. Their lands and houses have been transferred either to state agencies or to the Jewish National Fund for the exclusive use of the neighbouring Israeli-Jewish (utopian socialist?) *kibbutzim* and *moshavim*. The best known and most notorious case, with which Mr Allen must be familiar, is that of the two Maronite villages of Birim and Iqrit. But there are, according to Nahman Fabian, 'The Precedent of the Displaced Persons' (*Ha-Aretz*, 23.7.1972) at least 21 similar instances, and this list does not include, for instance, the case of the village of Majdal (now the Israeli resort city and oil-pipe terminal of Ashkelon), which was evacuated by the Israeli army in 1950, its inhabitants forced at gun point to cross the border to Gaza. But all this, presumably, amounts in Mr Allen's terms to an 'apologia for the case of the Palestinian-Arabs and a *requisitoire* against Zionism and the State of Israel'. If that is the case, why, given

Palestinians? Does he know of any public Israeli statements of self-criticism and repentance for perpetrating the most damaging and dehumanising lie since its foundation? For perpetrating a lie that contributed critically to Israel's success in covering up its subjection of the Palestinian-Arabs to policies of oppression and atrocity? On what grounds does there now seem to be no reason to believing this official Israeli lie, except that through the efforts of a handful of courageous and honest people, including the persecuted and harrassed Israeli-Jewish anti-Zionists at home and in exile abroad, it is *now* far more difficult to make this story convincing.

(Page 19): As to the circumstances immediately preceding the 1967 war and its underlying motivation, I would like to support *Comment* by the following quotation: a statement made by the former Commander in Chief of the Israeli Air Force, who was the architect of the Israeli air operations during the 1967 war:

“The security of Israel is not the end of her existence. The State was established to realise and to promote various national objectives. And although the security factor is one of its fateful components, the image of the State must not be fixed according to ‘secure boundaries’ alone. Boundaries must be fixed according to long-range national, historical and actual interests. Only afterwards we must see to it that these boundaries be made ‘secure’.

Therefore, the line of ‘pass only on our bodies’ of the State of Israel is not the ‘threat to security’ alone but an external hindrance to the national effort; to be more precise, any threat by force to our essential national interests, which constitute the meaning of the State’s existence.

For example, on the eve of the Six Day War, when the blockade was imposed on the Straits of Tiran, the question was whether to go to war in order to reopen the straits and not because we might otherwise be exterminated. Had the question arisen from the second consideration the decision would have been much easier. In such a case we would not have needed to wait two nerve-tearing weeks but would have gone immediately to war, because ‘our lives were at stake’. A state does not go to war only when the immediate threat of destruction is hanging over its head.

These things contradict the ‘no choice’ slogan. This slogan is endorsed by the Jewry of the Diaspora, which for its purposes wishes to see us heroes standing steadfastly with backs to the sea. The threat of destruction was already removed from Israel during the War of Independence. The adoption of the ‘no choice’ slogan, however, engendered among us the Diaspora approval, as though Jews are allowed to fight only when they are targets of pogroms. . . .

From the long range historical view, the Six Day War was a direct continuation of the War of Independence. After the stage of ‘preventing destruction’, which was completed between the first and second truces, the natural objective of the war became—whether the then

leadership was conscious of this or not—the creation of a situation in which Israel could apply most of the effort and resources to realise the Zionist objectives.

For this purpose, we needed first of all, such geographic acquisitions as to allow us freedom of action under good chances of success. Outside of these actual considerations, the War of Independence should have secured, at least, all the western regions of 'Eretz Yisrael' to be included within the boundaries of the State of Israel. This should have been so, because the attachment to these very places is the essence of Zionism and without them the Jewish State does not constitute an historical wholeness.

The War of Independence did not bring a sensible answer to the question of frontiers. This is clearly expressed in the fact that until the Six Day War, the State of Israel had no 'frontiers' but 'cease-fire lines'.

Not that we initiated the Six Day War; we certainly did not cause it. But since it was imposed on us, our national instincts led us to take advantage of it beyond the immediate military and political problems it came to answer. In other words, the objectives of the war changed and expanded through the process of fighting, short as it was. We conquered the Old City not because we believed that, had it not been conquered, Jerusalem would have been destroyed; neither did we go as far as Jericho in order to isolate one or another Jordanian armoured brigade.

Had the national leadership from the War of Independence until the Six Day War been alert enough to the fact that we were not fighting solely to be secure against extermination, the present frontiers of Israel, especially the Eastern ones, would not have been improvised through the war, i.e., because of its momentum. They would have been calculated beforehand as the calculated objectives of every war we will be obliged to fight.

But this leadership sank so deeply in the minute details of day-to-day administration that it lost the historical consciousness and the sense of the Zionist mission, which has not yet been wholly fulfilled. Therefore, when it stood face-to-face with a problem whose dimensions and repercussions exceeded the boundaries of day-to-day questions, the leadership could not wrestle with it.

The leadership's loss of its 'cool', its lack of self-confidence, and its clear portrait in the eyes of the world and Israeli public as such engendered fear in the wide public. These things, and not the 'danger of destruction', engendered the fear. It is a fact that the people regained morale and self confidence with the formation of the United National Government and the joining of Mr Begin, Mr Dayan and the late Mr Y. Sapir to it.

The formation of a clear national policy may prevent, if an additional test hour comes, another 'waiting period' full of suspenses, fears and complexes. Such policy must be well understood by the people, and the whole world. It must not be wayward policy that answers only problems concerning the body of our nation but not the things of its soul. Only in this way can we form and crystallise a strong and indis-

soluble political stand. In such a stand is also found the most certain guarantee to reduce the chances of a new war.

But if we are obliged to go to war again, we will know that we are not fighting to survive but to be able to continue living here as we wish". (Ezer Weizmann, 'Without Complexes: The Guarantee for Reducing the Chances of a New War', *Ha-Aretz*, March 29, 1972.)

So as not to be accused of quoting an unauthoritative, biased authority notorious for his 'hawkish' views, who, though nephew of Israel's first President, Haim Weizman, has joined the leadership of the right-wing Herut Party, I would like to quote also from a well-known 'dovish' military authority, General (Reserve) Matityahu Peled :

"The thesis that in June 1967 Israel came under a threat of destruction and that the state of Israel fought for its physical survival is a 'bluff' which was born and developed only after the war . . ." ('The Claim That Israel Was Under Threat of Destruction Is A "Bluff" ', *Ha-Aretz*, March 19, 1972). *Ha-Aretz* is the Israeli-Hebrew equivalent of the London *Times*.

Finally, I grant Mr Allen that every state is based on acts of internal or external conquest and exploitation; I deny, however, that every state is based on policies of mass land dispossession and replacement of a native people. This is the preserve of colonial settler states. In such states, where the native population has survived the colonial assault, resistance and struggle for national liberation is bound to arise. Furthermore, it must be clear to Mr Allen as it is clear to myself, that such settler states are bound sooner or later to fall. This is true of Israel as well. The only way of preventing the suffering of the people wittingly or unwittingly involved, is to be against discrimination and oppression everywhere, and to encourage local resistance, in this case among Israeli-Jews, as much as possible, not to imply, as Mr Allen does, a doctrine of the unconditional sovereignty of the state, and certainly not to suggest that rejection of this doctrine is in any way un-Catholic.

Have you a friend who would enjoy one of the articles in this issue (or any other issue)?

Don't lend her (or him) your own precious copy. Tell us; and we'll send him (or her) a free copy with your compliments (and ours).