

Emma Goldman and Reginald Reynolds on Palestine

Some notes on anti-Semitism and Zionism before World War Two

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However shocking are recent events in and around Gaza, they do not arise like lightning on a clear day and out of blue skies and may be seen in historical context. This text goes a little way towards sketching anarchist perspectives on this historical and political conflict.

In the 1930s, and at other times, Anarchists were sympathetic to the concerns of diverse interests and communities in Palestine and commented on developments. Exchanges between Emma Goldman and Reginald Reynolds published in *Spain and the World* and other texts highlight actual and potential conflicts between long-term residents and new settlers.

The situation in Palestine (1920s and 1930s)

Anti-Semitism was on the increase before 1939. Some anarchists were not immune. Rudolf Rocker broke with the German anarchist-communists in 1925, when their federation (the FKAD) published Paul Robien's article 'Der jüdische Nimbus', with tropes about 'Jewish profiteers', in *Der freie Arbeiter*.¹ Rocker wrote that such views were intolerable, and that no other anarchist journal would have printed such things.² FKAD editors refused to publish his reply. Rocker turned to the journal of the Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands,⁽¹⁾ *Der Syndikalist*, to print a condemnation:

the moment we define national classifications with special and essential features, when we link Jewish exploiters to some particular depravity, at that moment we cease to be anarchists and socialists, and have plainly, with all flags flying defected and placed ourselves in the lager of nationalist and *völkisch* [folkist/fascist] reaction.³

Nazi influence was on the rise and was not confined to Germany. Car magnate Henry Ford funded the printing of 500,000 copies of the mendacious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Some 50,000 Jews fled Germany in 1933⁽²⁾ alone, and a similar total fled over the next two years. Jews attempted to enter neighbouring countries, the Americas and Palestine. Few found any welcome.

Zionism had once been viewed as a minority current. Rudolf Rocker had seen it as 'rather irrelevant'.⁴ *Le Libertaire* (28 August 1924) reported on a conference of the Jewish World Relief Conference (JWRC) held in Czechoslovakia. It noted the presence of anti-Semitism in several countries. It encouraged participation in broad social movements rather than in specific Jewish organisations and regarded the desire for a Jewish nation as an error, defining Zionism as a commercial enterprise, financed by rich tycoons out of self-interest. Jewish workers, it wrote, had to defend the proletariat and its cause against capital.

¹ Very many FKAD members rejected Robien's arguments.

² Helge Döhring, *Organisierter Anarchismus in Deutschland 1919 bis 1933*, Bodenburg: Verlag AV, 2018, p. 336.

³ *Gǎi Dào* (Offenburg), No.83, 2017; Helge Döhring, *Organisierter Anarchismus*, op. cit., pp. 191ff, 214-15, quoting *Der Syndikalist*, No. 46, 1925; Rudolf Rocker, *Rivoluzione e involuzione 1918-1951*, Milan: Centro studi libertari / Archivio Giuseppe Pinelli, 2017, p. 328.

⁴ Rudolf Rocker, *Nella Tempesta, Anni d'esilio (1895-1918)*, Milan: Centro studi libertari/Archivio G. Pinelli, 2016, p. 164.

⁽¹⁾ The FAUD was an affiliate of the of the revolutionary syndicalist International Workers' Association.

⁽²⁾ The year Hitler came to power.

Co-operative ideals prevailed among many settler communities in Palestine. Initially many members of co-operative Jewish colonies were inspired by Gustav Landauer⁵ and Kropotkin.⁶ *Le Libertaire* of 22 November 1924 believed that there were revolutionary prospects in Palestine, grounds for high expectations: young Jewish Russians, inspired by idealism, were forming an army of conscious agriculturalists, developing a practical and libertarian communism. However, eight days later another writer in the same paper reported on conflicts and Arab protests after land was purchased by Zionists. Evidently 'Israelites' should have the same rights and freedoms as other people: 'but why should they demand them in Palestine?' This writer asserted: 'That is imperialism. Can't Jews struggle with all oppressed people to conquer freedom here, where they find their freedom contested? This appears to be logical and could avoid many future conflicts.'

Some libertarians located class differences: they might note that between Jewish employers and Jewish employees there was only superficial solidarity; when strikes broke out this solidarity vanished.⁷ Some insisted on the possibility of working for mutual understanding with the Arabs.⁸ For Sébastien Faure writing in *L'Encyclopédie anarchiste* in the early 1930s, Jewish migration to Palestine was something that allowed Jewish people both to escape from anti-Semitism and to promote egalitarianism through agricultural collectives; but, through fermenting nationalism, it opened potential new obstacles.

Co-operatives were expected to treat people fairly, avoiding discrimination and paying equal wages to all, or if not equal wages, then compensation adjusted for effort and responsibility. There was some admiration for progressive measures, for example their stress on gender equality.⁹

The Mexican anarchist journal *Verbo Rojo* published a text on horrific killings in Palestine in 1929. It noted the progress of Jewish colonisation and commented that Zionism might appear as a solution – a refuge for Jewish people – but these colonies, however prosperous, were surrounded by the hatred of Arab peoples and by open, sordid war. In this view, Zionists of good faith might think that they were resolving the 'Jewish question', but, continued this text, there is no Jewish question, rather there is a 'human question', what was needed was the liberation of all humanity; the liberation of one race was impossible unless humanity as a whole was liberated. 'The error of Jewish nationalism is that it is a nationalism, the error of having believed that problems could be solved within patriotic frameworks', in the form of a state, through a politics of colonisation, which could only have lamentable consequences.¹⁰

Palestinians might differentiate between neighbours of Jewish faith, living nearby for decades or even centuries and whom they respected, and new incomers. Patterns of employment changed as more and more settlers arrived. At first, as Jewish settlements were created, Arab people were employed as labourers. Later, as more unskilled Jewish labour arrived, labouring jobs in Jew-

⁵ Landauer was asked to comment on proposals for a new Jewish society in Palestine. Martin Buber made some efforts toward *Ihud* and co-operation with Arabs. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/avraham-yassour-topos-and-utopia-in-landauer-s-and-buber-s-social-philosophy>

⁶ James Horrox, *A Living Revolution: Anarchism and the Kibbutz Movement*, Edinburgh: AK Press, 2008; also reviews see: <http://www.asawinstanley.com/2010/10/our-dreams/> and *Jewish Socialist* No. 78 <https://www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/resources/js-item/no-78>

⁷ *Le Libertaire*, 23 February 1925.

⁸ Quoted in: Kenyon Zimmer, *Immigrants Against the State: Yiddish and Italian Anarchism in America*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, p. 193.

⁹ E.g.: Israel Rubin, 'Alumbramiento de una nueva vida para un pueblo viejo', *Nervio* (Buenos Aires), No. 20, December 1932.

¹⁰ *Verbo Rojo* (Mexico City), October 1929.

ish enterprises were reserved for Jews. There was considerable unemployment. In this territory, officially a League of Nations mandate, British authorities used employment as a tool for rewarding one or other community, something which did little to promote mutual solidarity between Arabs and Jews. The *Histardut* was the largest labour organisation and simultaneously the second largest employer in Palestine (after the government). It was founded in 1920 as a Jewish-only organisation.¹¹ For many years it maintained segregation, with Arab workers in a separate national section, earning wages that might be half of those paid to Jewish counterparts.⁽³⁾

Some attempts were made by Arab workers on the railways and elsewhere, to build solidarity with Jewish counterparts. Arab workers attempted to explain their views through Hebrew language leaflets. Efforts such as these made only limited progress. Many Arab workers developed an anti-Zionist politics. In part this flowed from resentment, given that Zionist influence often had worked to split the few 'international' unions that struggled to develop and involve Arab and Jewish members on an equal footing.¹² Communities might mix, in diverse larger cities like Haifa, and or in large workplaces, but in many smaller workshops, employment was confined to one community. Subsidies were available to Jewish workers, from Jewish funds abroad (putting workers on European pay scales), but not for Arab workers. The British mandate administration also maintained differential pay scales. The combined effect of these various factors worked against any cross-community organising. Differentials and subsidies confined much of Arab labour into a low-paid sector, while helping a better-paid sector to emerge. Various dynamics pushed and pulled: external forces made some impact, but relationships were largely shaped by local friction between peoples and class fractions.

The libertarian press on Palestine

Some thoughtful articles in the libertarian press addressed broad issues. An article by Alexander Schapiro on 'Palestine, Britain and the Jewish Question', was published by the IWA in 1930. Schapiro viewed the creation of the Jewish state in the context of British ambitions to bribe Jewish people to support British imperialism, and to help secure geographical connections through the region towards India, in the era of World War One. He saw the British government and communists sowing seeds of hatred between Arabs and Jews, in the post-1918 world. Such hatred had become evident in recent events – boycotts of Arabs against Jews, or Jews against Arabs, many persons killed or wounded by either side. Looking at Germany Schapiro saw anti-Semitism targeting Jews as blatant, outrageous and brutal, but he recognised that if a future Palestine was to escape from its subjection as a British mandate, then a new state might be constituted by either the Arabs or the Jews, and one or other community might become an oppressed minority. He speculated that if an Israeli state was constituted, then Arabs would be pushed out across the frontiers into neighbouring lands. (This was something that had been debated in Zionist circles and it was envisaged that to create a predominantly Jewish society, or an Israeli state, it would

¹¹ Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948*, University of California Press, 1996, pp. 66ff; 358.

¹² *Ibid*, p 74.

⁽³⁾ *Le Combat Syndicaliste* (15 October 1937) asserted that the Jewish *Histardut* was open to both communities, but Arabs rarely joined; joint campaigning was needed, against both Jewish capitalists and Arab landowners and financial interests.

be expedient to induce Arab peoples to leave.) Schapiro considered the broad, international situation facing Jewish people: In the face of general hostility⁽⁴⁾ where should Jews look to? Not so much to Britain or France, nor to the USA which after 1918 had closed its gates to immigration. In his view any Jewish state might become an armed fortress. People might have the right to defend themselves, but, wrote Schapiro, such a right should not encourage people to travel to another land, appropriate it, and expropriate Arab peoples who had lived there for centuries:

The social problem, and it is the only one that counts, knows no religion, no nation, no race, no colour. The Black man in the USA will have to struggle for his liberation without working for the constitution of Black state. Whites in the USA, and everywhere else, must fight with him.

Schapiro thought Jews would have also to fight for their liberation wherever they found themselves – in Palestine, Romania, Poland and elsewhere – without having to create a Jewish state. Non-Jews everywhere would (and should) come to their aid. He concluded: ‘The Jewish question will eventually be solved only in conjunction with the social question.’¹³

Solidaridad Obrera (7 May 1936) commented on an Arab strike in Palestine, drawing attention to the contradictory promises made by the British government twenty years earlier – to Arabs and Jews – asking for support and raising expectations. It reported that an organisation of Palestinian Arabs was demanding an end to Jewish immigration.¹⁴ A longer article in *Solidaridad Obrera* (3 June 1936) noted that some 30,000 Jews had recently emigrated to Palestine – many were not Zionists but were driven out of Germany by bestial Nazi anti-Semitism. Among Jewish people were revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries, capitalists and supporters of co-operative communes. What was the way forward? In Palestine it was no longer possible to throw out Jewish people – so what was needed was an entente between Arabs and Jews and the formation of a non-capitalist society – independent of British, Italian and German imperialism.

E. Novenad presented another perspective in the New York journal *Vanguard*. Shortly after Jewish people had been attacked by Arabs in Palestine, he asked what was happening there? ‘Some regard this as a pogrom against the Jews, others say that it is a rebellion of the Arab colonial peoples, still others that the events are merely temporary outbursts of passion.’ The author wrote:

The Jewish Socialist workers have the right to defend their lives against murderers and incendiaries, who knowingly or unknowingly serve foreign lust and its ambition for conquest.⁽⁵⁾ The socially-minded Jewish masses must not allow themselves to be bulldozed. However, they must extend the hand of comradeship to their brothers, the poor *fellahs* and landless peasants. Jewish Socialists in Palestine must turn to the Arab artisan and land workers as well as to the proletarians. The Jewish Socialists together with the Jewish workers and exploited Arab workers of city and country

¹³ ‘Palästina, England und die jüdische Frage’, in *Die Internationale*, (FAUD) No. 6, April-June 1930. <https://syndikalismus.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/palc3a4stina-da-73-januar-1989.pdf>

¹⁴ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 7 and May 1936.

⁽⁴⁾ After 1935 Jewish students in Poland faced segregation policies forcing them to sit on ‘ghetto benches’.

⁽⁵⁾ The author had in mind oil companies on the one hand and the governments of Italy and Germany on the other, all seeking to influence Arab leaders.

will have to fight exploitation and the nationalistic position of the Arab Effendis and the Zionist nationalists.

The author recognised that there was nothing easy. *Vanguard's* editors stressed that Zionism was driven by events in fascist Europe, and concluded:

The general solution lies along the lines of a revolutionary struggle against these [European fascist] conditions. The place of the young Jewish people, crowded out from life, is in the international revolutionary struggle of the proletariat and not in an escapist movement imbued with a reactionary romanticism, the realization of which has already led to one of the worst entanglements for the Jewish toiling masses.¹⁵

Loss of land acerbated Arab discontent. When landowners sold land, those who had used it might be deprived of a living and had reason to resent new landlords, of whatever community. Under Ottoman law, peasants were serfs: they might work on the land and take produce, so long as they paid rents and taxes, but they had no ownership. They may have looked on the land as theirs, but in law they had no rights. When Arab landowners sold up to settlers, these serfs had no security. In this context the creation of progressive communities for only one ethnic group, and the expulsion of another ethnicity, might be called 'Zionist Socialism', but it was something else: it might be defined as a project that 'subverted all other goals, including that of joining an internationalist workers' struggle, to the primary task of building a Jewish nation-state.'¹⁶

Goldman and Reynolds on Palestine (in *Spain and the World*)

In the UK, there was an ongoing controversy over Palestine in the Labour party, and the issue was also addressed in the journal *Spain and the World* edited by Emma Goldman. A long letter in the latter, entitled 'Facts Concerning Palestine', and signed by 'I. Almoni', suggested that Jewish immigration was helping Arab workers' pay levels to rise substantially; that these Arab workers had received aid from the collective Jewish workers' organisation – the *Histadrut*; that this help was filling the hearts of Arab feudal lords with fright; that Italian and German fascism was funding Arab reaction; that that the latter were hostile to progressive forces – in Spain and elsewhere; that 'Jewish workers are killed almost daily, for the only crime of ... being born ... sons of a nation deprived of a homeland'; and that there had been 2,000 attacks 'on the Jewish colonies and on the Socialistic Commonwealths'.¹⁷ This provoked a reply by Reginald Reynolds (*Spain and the World*, 18 March 1938):

... if we want to trace the cause of anti-Semitism among the Arabs then we must ask how it came about that Jews and Arabs once lived together peaceably in Spain and other countries and cannot do so to-day in Palestine. The answer is, because it is and has been the avowed intention of the Zionists to make Palestine a Jewish country

¹⁵ *Vanguard: A Libertarian Communist Journal*, August-September 1936.

¹⁶ Paula Rayman, 'Kibbutzim: The Vanguard of Zionist-Socialism', *Interrogations*, March 1976, pp. 126-28.

¹⁷ *Spain and the World*, 21 January and 2 February; an earlier article, by 'V. R.', 'Terrorism in Palestine', 27 October 1937, had condemned the brutal British policing.

with the help of British imperialism and in spite of the wishes of the Arab population, which is [in 1938] still the majority population of the country. Such a policy could only be pursued by the dictatorship concealed in the League of Nations 'mandate' and Almoni must be aware that the Arab demand for democratic self-government has been consistently opposed by the Zionist organisations for this reason. Zionism is a policy which can only be fulfilled so long as Britain keeps its bargain, made in the Great War to secure the support of Jewish financiers. For strategic reasons it pays the British Empire to adhere to that bargain; and the long arm that strikes down the Indian peasant is to-day upholding in Palestine the interests of its Jewish allies. As for 'our own' interests, they have been repeatedly admitted in Parliament and elsewhere by representatives of the ruling class. I have tried in this letter to confine myself to the principles at stake and to facts which the ordinary reader can check for himself. One can argue interminably about the crimes of the Government on the Arab terrorists, the economic effects of Jewish immigration, etc. The outstanding points remain: (a) Do we approve of British imperialism? (b) *if not, can we approve of a policy (Zionism) which depends on British imperialism for its success?* and (c) *Do we support the demand for democratic self-government* (reserving the right, of course, to demand a great deal more than that – but simply regarding this as a minimum claim) irrespective of the real or alleged motives of those who sponsor it? No amount of sympathy with the Jews because of their persecution in Germany and other countries can prevent me from saying 'No' to the first two questions and 'Yes' to the last. The very reasons which make one pro-Jew and anti-Nazi in Germany lead logically to the pro-Arab anti-Zionist position in Palestine. And those who really wish to combat anti-Semitism ought to realise that Zionism is their worst enemy because it has made the whole Arab world regard the Jews as enemies of the Arab People.

In a further article, published in July, Reynolds wrote:

Arab landlords sold land to the newcomers, but the Arabs as a whole had nothing to gain and everything to lose. A few peasants found a temporary market for their produce, while labourers found work in some of the Jewish enterprises. But in the nature of things they could not last. 'Buy Jewish goods' and 'Employ Jewish Labour' became inevitably the slogans of Zionism. The Jewish workers and 'socialists' of whom we hear so much, actually took the lead in this type of propaganda! But whatever temporary prosperity may have come to any section of the Arab community, the net result of Zionism was plain. The country which had been their home for generations was to be handed over to a foreign race on the flimsy pretext that it had belonged to the Jews 2,000 years ago! ... For the Zionists there has never been any question of settling among the Arabs and living as equals. They have the intolerable arrogance of people who regard their own race as 'superior,' and the Arabs hate them for the same reason that the Negro hates the White Man.¹⁸

Reynolds also noted British forces' brutality and how it mainly targeted the Arab community. These texts drew a reply from Emma Goldman, she distinguished between Zionism which she opposed, and the rights of Jewish working people:

¹⁸ *Spain and the World*, 29 July 1938.

I have no quarrel with our good friend about his charges against the Zionists. In point of fact, I have for many years opposed Zionism as the dream of capitalist Jewry the world over for a Jewish State with all its trimmings, such as Government, laws, police, militarism and the rest. In other words, a Jewish State machinery to protect the privileges of the few against the many.

Reginald Reynolds is wrong, however, when he makes it appear that the Zionists were the sole backers of Jewish emigration to Palestine. Perhaps he does not know that the Jewish masses in every country and especially in the United States of America have contributed vast amounts of money for the same purpose. They have given unstintingly out of their earnings in the hope that Palestine may prove an asylum for their brothers, cruelly persecuted in nearly every European country. The fact that there are many non-Zionist communes in Palestine goes to prove that the Jewish workers who have helped the persecuted and hounded Jews have done so not because they are Zionists, but for the reason I have already stated, that they might be left in peace in Palestine to take root and live their own lives.

Goldman stressed workers' desires to till the land; working people should show solidarity with each other and defend 'rights of asylum'. She condemned:

the inconsistency in pleading on behalf of land monopoly, to which the Arabs alone should have the right. Perhaps my revolutionary education has been sadly neglected, but I have been taught that the land should belong to those who till the soil. With all of his deep-seated sympathies with the Arabs, our comrade cannot possibly deny that the Jews in Palestine have tilled the soil. Tens of thousands of them, young and deeply devout idealists, have flocked to Palestine, there to till the soil under the most trying pioneer conditions. They have reclaimed wastelands and have turned them into fertile fields and blooming gardens. Now I do not say that therefore Jews are entitled to more rights than the Arabs, but for an ardent socialist to say that the Jews have no business in Palestine seems to me rather a strange kind of socialism.¹⁹

Emma was naïve in hoping to find fairness and solidarity, and ill-informed or lacking insight in hoping to find many non-Zionist communes. The willingness of Jewish kibbutz members to do manual labour did not, of itself, imply a commitment to broad radical change. Talk of reclaiming wastelands or making deserts bloom might have a grain of truth but also more than a grain of untruth. Such tropes concealed facts: people lived on these so-called 'wastelands' before new settlers came in, these were not 'empty' lands; also, it did not follow that because settlers were making 'wasteland' more productive that their interests should prevail.²⁰ Non-Jews were not routinely asked to join the kibbutz; they were unwelcome. There was little or no solidarity in joint occupation and cultivation of land by Arabs and Jews together. Indeed, some seventy years later, when odd members of Arab communities were allowed to join a kibbutz, this event was seen as something new and remarkable.²¹

¹⁹ *Spain and the World*, 26 August 1938; replying to an earlier article of 29th July.

²⁰ Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel and the Palestinians*, Boston: South End Press, 1983, p. 278.

²¹ 'Amal Carmiya, an Arab Muslim from Qalansawe, along with four additional families, was accepted as mem-

Reginald Reynolds wrote this reply to Emma for *Spain and the World* (16 September 1938):

The prime question is not whether I approve of Jewish immigration, but who shall decide on its extent. At present, it is determined by a foreign government – our own⁽⁶⁾ – whose decisions are enforced upon an unwilling population at the point of the bayonet.

... I am not as Emma appears to imagine, interested in nationalism for its own sake but only where it is an expression at revolt against Imperialism. And just as I am opposed to the Moors when they appear as conquerors in a fascist army, so I am opposed to the Jews when they appear as colonists in British scheme to create an 'Ulster' in Palestine. To follow this Irish analogy a little further, I am anti-Catholic; but in the Irish struggle for Catholic emancipation, I should have been an emancipationist: not because I love the Pope, but because I do not believe in depriving a nation of its rights on account of its religion. Just so, in Palestine, I stand for the rights of the people against the claim of a minority to over-ride them, irrespective of all other considerations.

Reginald Reynolds addressed the matter of who should decide – implicitly he recognised that while many libertarians might advocate one line of thinking, they might also recognise that they were a small minority, and however much they might look for internationalism and solidarity it would not be themselves who would make that decision. Also, although libertarians might respect the wishes of Palestinian working peoples and might advocate a multi-national, non-state administration, they had little influence among them.

This stance by certain libertarians, directed against Zionism, did not imply hostility to Jewish people. In France, Jules Chazoff (Chazanoff) condemned Zionism as a new form of colonialism. He noted that for a time Arabs found a market for goods, and a few were employed by Jews, but subsequently the Zionist watchwords became 'Buy Jewish' and 'Employ Jewish workers':

... So, it appears clear that the minority of Jews who have installed themselves as in a conquered land, in Palestine, have nothing in common with the general run of Israelites persecuted in Europe, and it is the former who provoke the violent reactions of the Arab population ... No non-Jew could ever legally purchase land, lease it or purchase its crops, once it was owned by the JNF [Jewish National Fund].²²

Chazoff's anti-Zionism was condemned as anti-Semitism.²³

Hostility to all states and to any patriotism was a commonplace among libertarians, for example in *Le Libertaire* (8 September 1938): 'Workers have no *patrie*' (homeland); there was also

bers of Kibbutz Nir Eliyahu. This is the first time ever that the Kibbutz Movement has accepted an Arab Muslim as a member.' November 2008. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/world/kibbutz-welcomes-first-arab-muslim-1-1434445>; in contrast see: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-exclusive-israeli-towns-shun-arabs-and-anyone-else-incompatible-1.5628067>

²² Paula Rayman, 'Kibbutzim: The Vanguard of Zionist-Socialism, *Interrogations*, March 1976. ('Zionism, Jewish colonial nationalism, was itself an unusual form of nationalism.')

²³ 'Quand Israël règne' and 'Les Juifs et la Palestine', *Le Libertaire*, 18 August and 1 September 1938.

⁽⁶⁾ Palestine was administered by British officials.

widespread sympathy, for example Ida Mett saw Jews in Palestine not so much as colonists but rather as refugees, deserving help. She addressed criticisms to the editors of *Révolution prolétarienne*:

For an old, internationalist revolutionary all this [anti-Semitism] might seem comic, if these times were not so dangerous and tragic. But just now when enormous fires rage and are directed against Jewish people ... What should we say now of a pogrom that is devastating Europe and which might begin tomorrow on the streets of Paris?²⁴

Some years later Noam Chomsky would comment: ‘the indigenous Arab population rejected the idea, accepted as natural in the West, that they had a moral obligation to sacrifice their land to compensate for the crimes committed by Europeans against Jews.’²⁵

Spain and the World of 3 December 1938 noted that the British Royal Air Force had bombarded Palestinian villages – and few protests had been heard. A book review there expressed the hope that Jewish and Arab workers would be able to find a way to work together. Libertarians were insufficiently aware (perhaps because of censorship) that a war was going on, involving some 50,000 British forces targeting an Arab revolt, and resulting in the deaths of some 5,000 Arabs, and having a wider impact on much of the Palestinian population. The revolt was neither united nor coherent – but it drew in massive numbers so much so that British forces maintained limited control only in urban areas. Jewish personnel were recruited as auxiliary forces and helped provide intelligence. Torture and collective punishment – the destruction of housing and property – were meted out; resisters were treated as common criminals.²⁶ Many Jewish people criticised the British administration and its policy of restricting Jewish immigration into the territory. The mesh of these various ingredients was complex and offered no easy solutions, leaving libertarians somewhat bewildered, and with little leverage insofar as they were unable to gain a foothold in both communities. It would take a very long time for any solidarity to merge.

Terre Libre (May 1939), reported that in 1938, 503 Arabs were killed along with 255 Jews, and 63 British soldiers; that year 75 Arabs were condemned to death, as against 2 Jews; 50 Arabs were sentenced to life imprisonment as against 2 Jews. Political detainees numbered 2,489 Arabs and 139 Jews. ‘As for the British, the Zionists are assured of almost complete impunity ... for Zionists and for Palestinian Jews in general, this unbalanced situation allowing two Arabs to be killed for one Jew is accompanied by a tragic moral bankruptcy’. Further statistics were quoted: British reprisal actions had destroyed 681 Arab houses (in 1938 alone); since 1936, 244 Arab towns and villages had been subjected to collective fines – despite this the mutual killings were not slowing down. ‘Facts show that if the situation of oppressed Jews was deserving of every sympathy, their conduct as oppressors does not differ in any way from that of other men’.

In 1939, British anarchist Albert Meltzer (of Jewish heritage) called for a revolutionary movement in Palestine without consideration of nationality. He wrote that at first there was no anti-Semitism in Palestine: ‘Not until immigration became colonisation, and the aim of a Jewish state, did trouble commence.’ He concluded that: ‘The anarchist tactic for the situation in Palestine is

²⁴ Sylvain Boulouque, ‘Anarchisme et judaïsme dans le mouvement libertaire’, op. cit., quoting a letter from Ida Mett to Busseuil (Finidori), 13 November 1938.

²⁵ Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle*, op. cit., pp. 92-93.

²⁶ Matthew Hughes, ‘The Banality of Brutality: British Armed Forces and the Repression of the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936–39’, <https://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/3202/3/Fulltext.pdf>

the only road that will lead away from the present debacle; the co-operation of the Arab revolutionaries throughout the Near East, in co-operation with the anti-Zionist Jewish minority and all workers, of whatever race, will alone push forward the opportunity for a complete revolution.' Co-operation would not be easy however if communities spoke different languages, or if settlers did not work to learn Arabic.²⁷ There were some attempts to build bridges between communities, but these were rather few and rather ineffective.²⁸

Final thoughts?

In the texts above one can see issues of censorship and conflict. News was censored and spun to conceal the scope of killings and punishments and to justify such things. Today, news is still spun.²⁹

As regards conflict, one might ask what are the mainstream components of libertarian thinking? And how, and in what context, can one best understand 'facts'? Emma Goldman might point to 'non-Zionist communes' but did not – and could not – identify communes where Jewish and Arab people mixed on equal terms. Concerns might be focussed on threats in Europe and might neglect the context of local conditions amid competing imperialisms.

Over and above such points there were different attitudes. Some libertarian writers were drawn towards the defence of 'progress' – perhaps equated with pay, culture, gender, and/or productivity.³⁰ Some have identified such things in one community as against another. Other writers may take another view, questioning the trope between progress and barbarism, and perhaps following on from the Bakunin who once wrote:

'Civilised nations' conquest of barbarous peoples: that is their principle. It is the application of Darwin's law [of evolution] to international politics. As a consequence of natural law, civilised nations, being ordinarily the stronger, must either exterminate barbarous people, or dominate them to exploit them, or, so to say, civilise them. So, in such a way, permission was given for North Americans to gradually exterminate Indians, for Britons to exploit Indians of the East, for the French to conquer Algeria and lastly for the Germans to civilise Slavs³¹

In this view the barbarians were often the so-called 'Civilised nations'.

²⁷ *Revolt*, 25 March 1939; Vernon Richards, Ed., *British Imperialism and the Palestine Crisis, 1938-1948*; London: Freedom Press, 1989, pp. 37-39.

²⁸ Paula Rayman, 'Kibbutzim', op. cit., pp. 131-32.

²⁹ David Edwards, 'Israel's "Flour Massacre" – When A Crime Becomes A "Tragedy"', 14 March 2024, <https://znetwork.org/znetarticle/israels-flour-massacre-when-a-crime-becomes-a-tragedy/>

³⁰ See Augustin Souchy's series of articles 'Impressions of Israel', *Combat Syndicaliste* (Paris) 1951.

³¹ *Bakunin: Selected Texts 1868-1875*, A.W. Zurbrugg (ed.), (London: Anarres, 2016), p. 176.

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