



Bi-national Palestine

Handwrite, 1930.

Some obstinate lovers of political twaddle come out, from time to time, touting again and again this panacea which must reconcile the Arabs with Zionism: the Bi-national State theory. Obstacity deserves analytical attention, so let us analyse. What can be the meaning of bi-nationalism? What kind of regime or constitution does it presuppose? And – which is the most important aspect of the problem – what and where are those particular advantages inherent in the scheme which are expected so to attract the Arabs that they would give their blessing to Zionism in its bi-national version?

This writer, as some readers may have heard, is chauvinist and an extremist and generally a political cannibal, but he can produce documentary evidence of having always been a staunch adherent of the bi-national, even the multi-national state idea. As early as twenty four years ago, in December 1906, at a congress of Russian Zionists held in Helsingfors (the Finnish capital was chosen because it was out of reach of the Czarist police, it was this writer who submitted those proposals which, by the unanimous vote of the gathering, became known and famous throughout East-European Jewry as the Helsingfors Programme. The gist of that programme was exactly this: every state on earth should be rebuilt into a bi-national one. On paper only Russia was mentioned, but we all know that the real intention was to reform all the countries of the globe. Moreover, the term "bi-national" is unduly weak: what we meant was, in the first instance, Hungary with her five nationalities, Austria with nine, Holy Russia with one hundred and four. In Helsingfors we laid down that in every one of such empires, big or small, each one of those nationalities should be considered as one of the "ruling races" of the "state nations" equal to any and second to none; that its dialect should be an official language of the state; that its inner autonomy should be guaranteed; its schools and other institutions maintained at the expense of the State Treasury; its right to levy taxes from its nationals enforced by the State police; its rightful share ensured, in strict proportion, both in parliament and the bureaucracy.



This principle of multi-national equality was to apply rigidly to all the races within the state, no matter whether great or small, whether constituting 90 percent of the population or only a scattered handful.

The Helsingfors utopia has, of course, never been attained, either in Russia or anywhere else. Yet I hope that all those who voted for it, if still alive, keep unflinchingly faithful to its principles; and I trust that the first country where they will, some day, be fully applied will be our own Palestine – that is, when we Jews shall have become its masters.

But I am afraid all this has very little to do with conciliating those Arabs who do not want the Jews ever to become the masters of Palestine; for they obviously think that the main "national" fact about any country is not a question of rights but a question of numbers: who is the majority, and how big is the majority?

Being a believer in progress in spite of all disappointments, I feel convinced that in a century or so every state on earth will be organised upon a bi-national basis in the sense of the Helsingfors programme, or upon a tri-national basis or more as the case may be. Yet all this will prove powerless to prevent any country, where one of the races forms a considerable majority, from remaining or becoming, *de facto*, a predominantly national state of that one race, and no amount of equal rights, however honestly upheld, will ever in any way affect the iron law that it is the majority, especially under a decent liberal constitution, which determines in the long run the national character of a state.

This rule, so far as I can see, knows only three exceptions. The first is illustrated by the very much overquoted example of Switzerland; but this example has only a superficial bearing on our question, for most of the Swiss cantons are unilingual, and a canton is, after all, a state. A more real departure from the iron law can be observed in those countries where the majority race is a primitive race, incapable for the moment of competing with its civilised rulers: though it is remarkable to observe how uneasy, for instance in South Africa, those civilised rulers themselves

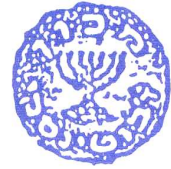


feel about the chances of keeping their dominion" a white man's country" for ever. The third exception is purely political: in Czarist Russia, a regime based on frank oppression made Ukraine, Lithuania, and Georgia look and sound almost "Russian". But under normal and "decent" conditions, i.e. in a country inhabited by two or many modern nationalities and ruled with a modicum of respect for self-government, the ethnical majority, must prevail in the end, and that majority's national characteristics will inevitably permeate every aspect of state life in spite of all the bi- or tri- or hepta-national paragraphs on the Statute Book. The sweep and the tempo of this process will, of course, depend on the size of the majority: here will be hardly any effect if it is only 60 per cent; fast and deep assimilation if it is over 80 per cent; while with a 90 per cent majority of one race the country will look entirely mono-ethnical and the most inquisitive tourist will be likely to overlook the very existence of protected minorities and their inviolable schools.

If I mention percentages it is, of course, only to illustrate my argument: in actual life such exact measurements are hardly ever applicable. But the trend of actual life is clear: a state with a bi-national or multi-national constitution but with a distinct numerical preponderance of one ethnical element will tend to become a national state of the majority.

In our case it means: should we Jews be condemned forever to remain a minority in Palestine, even a minority protected by the best imaginable kind of bi-national constitution, when Palestine will eventually become in its entirety an Arab national state, gradually but inevitably obliterating all the essential expression of our own Jewish individuality?

If, on the contrary, we Jews become the majority in Palestine (in which case, no doubt, it will be a matter of pride for us to endow our country with the most perfect of all bi-national constitutions), the tendency will be in the opposite direction, towards a Jewish national State ever more pronounced and complete; and with every oncoming year that tendency will grow stronger because a Jewish majority will mean an open door for further Jewish immigration.



True, the "national" prospect for the Arabs under a Jewish majority would be much brighter than the "national" prospect for the Jews in an Arab majority state. The reason is obvious: Palestine is situated in the middle of several countries whose civilisation is, and will remain, Arabian. The Arabs of Palestine will always enjoy the advantage of easily accessible Arab influences across the border; not so the Jews.

Furthermore: should Palestine be allowed to crystallise as a state with an Arab majority, that would only be the beginning of further Arabisation. The next step would be for that state to join an Arab or pan-Arab federation; which would mean that the Jews, even if they formed a "considerable" minority within Palestine as such, would sink to the status of a very small percentage within the greater state.

To sum up the bi-national state trick is worthless. The crux of the problem remains the same old one: Jewish majority or Arab majority. For the Jews to agree to a minority status under the aegis of a bi-national regime would be suicidal. Nor can Arab nationalism be expected to welcome the opposite prospect.



Some leading spirits of the great fraternity of Twaddle accuse me of scaring the Arabs away from every reasonable compromise. They say that every time such a compromise is suggested I hasten to give the show away by disclosing its hidden traps. In the present case, no doubt, the charge will be repeated: the Twaddle fraternity will complain that the Arabs might let themselves be enticed by the safety-catch of a bi-national constitution had I, or such as I, not betrayed to them the secret that the safety-catch is a dummy, and the unpleasant subject of the unpleasant controversy remains unpleasantly the same: who is to rule Palestine? a Jewish or an Arab majority?

In reply, I can only repeat what I told my fellow-Zionists years ago in the "Iron Wall" articles published in 1925: that all these charges are blind and foolish nonsense, based on the stupid illusion that the Arabs can be deceived by empty



formulas. There is no need for me or such as I to disclose any hidden traps: the traps cannot be hidden. Any Arab who has heard or is likely to hear about a bi-national constitution will immediately and instinctively, without any need for prompting or coaching by me, answer that it may all be very well but quite beside the point. The only point is majority. Why, I have heard of Arab nationalists being quite prepared to offer us Jews all the guarantees of a bi-national regime provided we agree to remain arithmetically a minority.

I confess that there are moments when I, too, dream dreams of an Arab-Jewish agreement on Palestine. True, these are only moments of exceptional tiredness, or, perhaps, of exceptional sublimation which, they say, are an experience reserved only for souls or minds which are utterly tired. Then I dream of a great pan-Arab gathering containing representatives of a long belt of lands stretching from Agadir to Bassora; and the Jewish delegate, facing that gathering, openly and honestly claims the whole of Palestine on both sides of the Jordan for his own people's home and state, to settle and govern. In my dream, this is what he says, "This land is less than one hundredth of the immensity of space which God has given you, and my people are homeless; and in my heart I have always called this land mine. I must have it or die; I am ready to fight for it: but perhaps fighting is not necessary; perhaps, O Sons of Father Ibrahim, Ishmael will uphold the claim of Israel, not because compelled to nor because deceived, but simply because it is right that God's earth should be re-distributed so that a homeless nation may re-occupy its ancient kingdom." And the great gathering's answer in my dream is in the affirmative.

I very much doubt whether this dream of mine has any chance of ever coming true. I am afraid we shall get Palestine only by fighting. But at least it is a clean and honest dream, as honest and clean as the other and more likely expedient – fighting.