

Mr. Edward Atiyah's Speech

On Arab Boycott and Israeli Aggression*

Mr. President, Sir,

I should like to begin by thanking you most warmly for the honour you have done me in asking me to speak tonight—to speak on the Paper. It is an honour which I prize highly, for when I was an undergraduate at this University many years ago I failed to persuade any of your illustrious predecessors of that time to accord me this great mark of favour. And I failed, Mr. President, after all but achieving a meteoric success in my first term.

One evening your distinguished predecessor of that term invited me to the Presidential reception after a debate in which apparently I had made a certain impression on him by defending him against a scurrilous rumour that while on a visit to the United States he had swapped his non-existent wife for a mythical Ford car.

And to my intense delight he asked me if I would like to speak on the Paper the following week. Naturally I said I would. Then he told me what the motion was going to be. I promptly said I wanted to speak against it. "It's a pity," he said. "I've got two speakers lined up for this side and I had hoped you would speak on the other."

Chagrined beyond words but a martyr to my principles, I begged to be excused, and so the Paper—this alluring, noble, parchment which emblazons the names of this Society's great orators, eluded me, and never came within my reach again, except once when I had the modest distinction of appearing on it as a Teller. Forty-two years were to elapse, Mr. President—a substantial slice of any man's life except for Lord Russell and the former Dean of Canterbury - before I was asked again to speak on the Paper and on, for me, the appropriate side of the motion, which is that "This House Supports Arab Interference With Israeli Trade ". I only wish that I had the skill of Robert Louis Stevenson so that I might say with him, "If I have at all learned the trade of using words to convey truth and arouse emotion you have at last furnished me with a subject."

There are so many misconceptions and misrepresentations about the Arab boycott of Israel, and at no time were they so deliberately exploited and unwarrantably reiterated as during what has come to be known as the Mancroft Affair. The most pernicious and baseless of them all is that the Arab boycott of Israel is a wicked anti-Semitic manifestation. This is utterly untrue, Mr. President. It is untrue not only of the Arab boycott

of Israel but of the entire Arab opposition and hostility to Israel, which has nothing whatever to do with anti-Semitism. Indeed it is one of the great tragic ironies of the Arab-Israeli conflict that the Jews should have done in Palestine a great wrong to a people that had never wronged them but had befriended them through the centuries.

The bitter Arab opposition to Israel today has nothing whatever to do with the race or religion of the Israelis. It is solely a political opposition to an act of political aggression and intolerable injustice. It is the natural, inevitable outraged opposition of an innocent indigenous people, of the long-established rightful owners of a country to alien invaders and colonizers. And the Arabs would have felt the same bitter sense of injustice and the same hostility towards these invaders and colonizers, whatever their race or religion. The householder does not have to be anti-Semitic and the burglar a Jew, for the former to object to his dispossession and eviction by the latter.

I trust therefore that we shall hear no more—at least in this House, Mr. President, of this entirely irrelevant and groundless charge of anti-Semitism, which the Zionists have so ably exploited against the Arabs and their supporters in this country that scarcely any criticism of Israel or the Zionist movement can be voiced here except by the very honest and very courageous—that, at one time, to defend the Arab cause in this country was to be damned as a Nazi—again an instance of supreme irony in a tragedy compounded of ironies ; for in Palestine it was not the Arabs but the Zionists who came with doctrines of racial exclusiveness and a policy and technique not easily distinguishable from Nazism in reverse.

But to return to Lord Mancroft and the Arab boycott. Lord Mancroft was not on the Arab black list because he was a Jew. In fact, the Arabs did not know that he was a Jew until Zionist propaganda in this country blared out the fact. He was on the black list because he was known to have wide financial and commercial dealings with Israel, to have a direct interest in the Israeli economy, to be helping to strengthen and promote it and therefore to be strengthening and developing Israel's war potential. And this Mr. President, is the only criterion by which the Arabs apply their boycott. They do not boycott any individual just because he is a Jew, or any firm because it has Jewish capital or Jewish directors. They only boycott firms and individuals who by their trading and financing activities are helping the Israeli economy and increasing Israel's military strength. For the Arabs consider themselves as being still at war with Israel. The loss of Palestine in 1948 was the loss of a battle not of the whole war, seen in the perspective of history, as a struggle only just begun and to be pursued relentlessly until the great wrong done to the Arabs has been righted and their inalienable right to Palestine restored.

I submit, Mr. President, that an economic boycott is the most civilized and humane way of conducting such a struggle. It does not involve violence. It does not destroy human lives or even property. It is infinitely preferable to military action. And in this case it is the only weapon left to the Arabs. Nor are the Arabs the only people in the world to have resorted to such a weapon in similar circumstances. In fact boycott sanctions are internationally recognized as a justifiable means of bringing pressure to bear by individuals or countries against a state or regime which they regard as hostile to them or whose policies they find repugnant to accepted international morality. The United States is boycotting Cuba and even trying to prevail on her allies to do the same, while many people in this country and elsewhere have strongly advocated a boycott of South Africa. So there is nothing unusual or outrageous about the Arab boycott of Israel.

This boycott, however, was heavily attacked and misrepresented in this country during the Mancroft Affair on other phoney grounds than those of anti-Semitism. You were told, Mr. President, that the Arabs were trying to interfere in domestic British issues, that they were trying to dictate terms to British firms and that the British Government could not possibly submit to this kind of interference and blackmail. All this, Mr. President, was pure nonsense. In applying their boycott the Arabs are not interfering in the domestic issues of other countries or trying to dictate terms to foreign firms. Indeed, the Arabs have no means of doing that even if they wanted to.

They have no power to interfere or dictate or compel. They can only withdraw their custom from firms that are unwilling to accept the terms of the Arab boycott. And surely trade is a free and contractual affair. You are free to trade where you wish and with whom you like. The Arabs are free and the foreign firms are free. And it is perfectly

legitimate for the Arabs to say to foreign firms: " We will not trade with you if you wish to take part in promoting the Israeli economy." And the foreign firms are free to choose. If they choose Israel, if it is in their interest to choose Israel, they are free to do so, and the Arabs are free not to trade with them. It is as simple as that.

And now, Mr. President, having shown that the boycott is itself a legitimate and permissible weapon to use, I shall proceed to show that the cause in which it is being used by the Arabs is a just and moral cause. For this surely is the decisive test. This cause, the Arab cause in Palestine, which has gone by default time after time because the Arabs were not there to make their voice heard or because they were not strong enough to make their will felt by those who took the decisions, while the Zionists were able to do both—this cause is morally and legally unassailable, being based on indisputable facts of history and geography and rooted in the deepest instincts of humanity and the most elementary notions of right and wrong. When the project of creating a Jewish national home—later to become a national state in Palestine—was first conceived and canvassed, Palestine, in the words of Mr. Arthur Koestler—and I cannot quote a Jewish source of greater integrity—Palestine was by every possible definition an Arab country.

Over 90 per cent of its population were Arabs. Its entire complexion, character, and ethos were Arab. It was an integral part of the Arab world indistinguishable from Syria or Iraq. It had been so for 1,300 years. And that for me, Mr. President, is not only the beginning of the argument; it is also the end of it. If Palestine was an Arab country, it had the right to remain an Arab country as the vast majority of its people wished. And every step in the long, tortuous, equivocal, prevaricating, conspiratorial, discreditable process which took it away from its people against their wishes and their right of self-determination, and gave it to a host of foreign immigrants coming from the four corners of the globe to make in it a national state for themselves was wicked, outrageous, and utterly invalid.

Britain had no right to issue the Balfour Declaration promising one people a national home in the country of another. And the implementation of this promise in thirty years of British rule and occupation in Palestine was a cynical outrage on the rights and interests of the vast Arab majority who were denied the right to self-determination and held down by the force of British arms so that Jewish immigrants could enter Palestine in increasing numbers with the object of colonizing and appropriating it. Even the resolution of the United Nations in 1947, proposing the partition of Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews, lacks the authority and validity which the Israelis wish to attribute to it as the charter of their existence. The United Nations General Assembly has no authority whatever to impose solutions or decisions. It can only make recommendations to its member states, and the word "recommendations" implies that the member states may reject them or offer alternatives. And it is certain that in recommending the partition of Palestine the General Assembly did not intend that its proposals should be carried out against the wishes of the Arab majority, for that would have been a violation of the U.N. Charter itself. The intention of the General Assembly was obvious from the fact that a built-in condition of its partition scheme was an economic union between the Arab and the Jewish state. Such a union obviously required Arab consent, and the Arabs did not consent, and so the whole scheme fell to the ground. In fact the recommendations of the United Nations were not accepted by any of the parties concerned. The United Kingdom refused to play the role of midwife to partition, as envisaged in the scheme. The Arab states unanimously and vehemently rejected it. Even the Jews failed to abide by many of its major provisions such as the internationalization of Jerusalem.

In other words the partition scheme, which came out of the General Assembly stillborn, was quickly buried by all those to whom it had been recommended and the Israelis proceeded to seize Palestine, or as much of it as they could by force. The General Assembly send out Count Folke Bernadotte to mediate between the Arabs and the Jews. He saw that the frontiers of the partition scheme were impracticable and proposed certain modifications in them. He was murdered by the Israelis. So let us hear no more, Mr. President, of this worthless argument that Israel is a legitimate child of the United Nations.

But you will also hear, Mr. President that seven Arab states launched an aggressive war against Israel and invaded her at the moment of her birth. What happened, Sir, was that the Arabs of Palestine, the rightful owners of the country, helped by their fellow Arab states around them tried to resist the final accomplishment of this naked aggression. From the beginning of this deplorable story the Zionists and not the Arabs have been the aggressors, the Zionists have been the invaders and the Arabs the invaded, the Zionists have been the attackers and the Arabs the attacked.

This is not a question of argument, Mr. President. It is a question of fact. Whenever the Arabs have fought it was to defend their natural, indisputable rights and lives and property in their own land. That was the case in 1948 when the Arabs from within and without Palestine fought to prevent the seizure of the country by the Zionists. That is the case today when the Arabs fight with the boycott weapon to prevent further Israeli aggression, and to regain their stolen land for its rightful people. For the Zionists or their supporters in this country to go on accusing the Arabs of aggression on every occasion, to go on representing the Arabs as the big bad wolf and Israel as the innocent lamb is only to echo the famous French saying :

"Cet animal est tres mechant, Quand on l'attaque il se defend."

In the course of the fighting for Palestine in 1948 nearly one million of the Arab population of Palestine of a million and a quarter became refugees, losing their homes, their land, and all their property. You will be told by Zionist propaganda that they were not driven out by the Jews but left of their own free will and because their leaders instructed them to do so. This is untrue, and its untruth has been proved to the hilt by unassailable evidence. Some of these refugees—a tiny proportion—did leave as a matter of choice, hoping that a swift Arab victory would enable them to return to their homes before long. But the vast majority were either forcibly evicted by orders of the Jewish commanders from every area they occupied or terrorized into flight by such atrocities as the massacre of Deir Yassin, in which the inhabitants of a whole Arab village including children and pregnant women were deliberately slaughtered by machine guns.

In support of this assertion, Mr. President, I am not going to quote a single Arab source. I am not going to quote any British source: I am only going to quote the view recently expressed by a well-known Israeli Jew who himself took part in the fighting. Writing in the Paris newspaper *Le Monde* of 9th May of this year, this Israeli Jew, Mr. Uri Avnery, who edits a newspaper in Israel and leads a small political party of anti-Zionist Israelis, said, "I believe that during the third and last phase of the war (that is to say the Arab-Israeli war) the evacuation of Arab civilians had become a war aim of Zionism."

There you have it, Mr. President. The Zionists wanted to get rid of the Arab population. In my opinion, and according to the logic of the Zionist programme, they had wanted this from the very beginning of their movement, because Palestine could not become "as Jewish as England is English" in the words of the late Dr. Weizmann himself, if there was in it a large Arab element, if indeed that element was the majority at the beginning. Also, the Zionists

wanted to bring in more and more Jewish immigrants, and they could only do this if they succeeded in driving the Arab population out. And drive them out they did. Arab property estimated at £500 million was thus seized by the Zionists, homes and lands belonging to nearly one million Palestinian Arabs.

Sixteen years have passed since then, Mr. President, and these million Arabs are still living as destitute refugees in the surrounding Arab countries, succoured partly by the Arab states and partly by the United Nations, insisting on their right to return home and living only by that hope, supported in this demand and this hope not only by all the Arab states but also by the United Nations itself. Year after year since 1948 the General Assembly has by overwhelming majorities passed an annual resolution calling upon Israel to allow the refugees to return home and to offer compensation to any of them who did not wish to return. Last year this annual affirmation by the United Nations of the right of the Arab refugees to return to Palestine was sponsored by the United States and eighty-one nations voted for it. Against it there was the solitary vote of Israel. Yet, Mr. President, Israel has consistently refused and still refuses to take back the Arab refugees or offer them adequate compensation. How then can the Arabs regard the war with Israel as being over? How can they abandon the struggle to regain the stolen rights and property of the Palestinian Arabs? How can they accept this *fait accompli* as they are often urged to do by so-called realists in the West when the "accomplishment" of this fact dispossessed a whole Arab people of its land and left it to rot in refugee camps?

Why should the Arabs accept such an iniquitous *fait accompli* of only sixteen years duration, when the its refused to respect the *fait accompli* of two md years of history and geography which had the Arabs the indisputable rightful owners of Palestine. Against that massive reality how can the its claim that they had a right to Palestine because the Jews had been in it two thousand years before? Let every nation look to its frontiers and to its title-deeds, own homeland today if such a fantastic claim is tolerated.

No, Mr. President, the Arabs will not accept this so-*fait accompli* with all the injustices and perils it has brought them. They will pursue their struggle against injustices and these perils until they have been red. And this is the justification of the Arab boycott of Israel which I am appealing to the House to support tonight.

For many years, for many decades the Arab case has gone by default. People all over the world did not know truth about it, about the Zionist usurpation of Palestine. But the truth will come out, and there is ample evidence mounting on every side that more and people and more and more countries are beginning realize what an appalling injustice was done to the Arabs, and to support the Arab struggle for the removal of that injustice. The most striking and massive example of this came lately in the joint communique issued by the Heads of State or Government of the non-aligned countries at the conclusion of their conference in Cairo. In this communique thirty-three non-Arab states stood solidly side by side with the Arab in affirming that, and I quote, "The conference condemns the imperialistic policy pursued in the Middle East and, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations, decided to: (i) endorse the full restoration of all the rights of the Arab people of Palestine to their homeland, and their inalienable right f-determination; (2) declare their full support for the Arab people of Palestine in their struggle for liberation from colonialism and racialism." These thirty-three non-Arab states who have thus pledged their support for the Arab cause include Burma, Ceylon, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Senegal, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Uganda, The United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, Yugoslavia, and Zambia.

These, Mr. President, are the leading countries of the non-aligned world and they speak for half the continent of Asia and almost the entire continent of Africa. Together with the Arab states they constitute nearly half the membership of the United Nations and they have all declared their support for what they consider a struggle against colonialism and racialism in Palestine. They have made it clear that in their view Zionism is a colonialist movement based on racial exclusiveness and thus they have linked the Palestine question with the world-wide issue of freedom, independence, and self-determination against the remnants of imperialism and the wrongful settlement on the land of one people by another. Their voice is not to be lightly ignored. For only if it is listened to will justice be done and peace and stability be restored to the Middle East. Real peace, Mr. President, not the peace which the Israelis are always pressing on the Arabs with protestations of innocence, good will, and a desire for friendly co-existence.

This peace which the Israelis offer the Arabs reminds me of a page in that admirable survey of English history, on which no doubt the Honour School of Modern History in this University is largely based - *1066 And All That*. The page in question deals with the Zulu War. It consists of three eminently brief and telling chapters: Chapter I - War with Zulus, Chapter II - Zulus Exterminated, Chapter III - Peace with Zulus.

That, Mr. President, is the peace which the Israelis offer the Arabs today, having eliminated them from Palestine not by physically exterminating all of them as individuals, but by destroying them as a political entity and kicking them out of their country.

* This is the speech Mr. Atiyah was making when he died by heart attack on the evening of Thursday, 22nd October, 1964, in support of a motion "that this house supports Arab interference with Israeli Trade", at the Oxford Union Society Debate.