

Background of the Israel-Arab Conflict

By Daniel Roberts

Daily skirmishes take place in the Gaza strip between Egyptian and Israeli forces. Every truce is shortlived. The danger of a new war between Arab and Israeli armies may be imminent.

Sympathy of the U. S. Big Business press in the majority is for Israel. Here, they say, is a progressive country bringing Western enlightenment, industry and sanitation to a backward area of the world. Against them is arrayed an overwhelming number of benighted people led by feudalists who threaten war out of fear of social progress.

This touching portrait of Little David Israel facing an Arab Goliath is also the one painted by the Zionist movement. But it does not accord with reality. Historic right in the Arab-Israel conflict lies wholly on the side of the Arabs. They are the aggrieved party.

It is enough to cite the fact that 900,000 Palestinian Arabs were driven out of their country by Israeli troops in 1948. At that time the total population of the country was 1,900,000. These people had a history in Palestine dating back over one thousand years. It is their homeland. Since 1948 the refugee Arabs have lived in camps on the

borders of Israel under conditions verging on starvation.

To be sure, Palestine — the land area covered by the present Israeli state — was the Jewish homeland in Biblical times, but it held only a small Jewish population in 1920 when sizeable Zionist migrations began. Even in 1947 — on the eve of the Israel-Arab war — the majority in Palestine was Arab. After the expulsion of the Arabs the Jews outnumbered them within the country seven-to-one.

The Zionists were permitted entry into Palestine by British imperialism to check the Arab national independence movement. It is this movement, engulfing Arab countries from Morocco to Iran, that alone holds out hope for genuine political and economic advance to the 60 million Arabs. The aim of the independence movement is to smash the domination of imperialism, and this program when carried through to the end means also the uprooting of all feudal land relations and the beginning of a socialist transformation. This is what the history of all colonial struggles has demonstrated.

The Arab national movement in Palestine acquired great strength during the course of World War I as a movement

against Turkish domination. The British troops during the course of the war occupied the country, and the Arabs then made their demands for self-rule on the English government. British imperialism pretended to honor these claims.

At the same time through the Balfour Declaration, it announced that it would help establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The British government declared, however, that Zionist claims to take over Palestine for the Jews would have to be squared with Arab demands for national self-determination. The British government set itself up as umpire in the situation. In 1922 the League of Nations — the imperialist thieves' kitchen, as Lenin called it — endorsed the Balfour Declaration and gave British imperialism a mandate over Palestine.

DIVIDE AND RULE

With the Balfour declaration, British imperialism began the game of divide and rule in the Near East, using the Zionist claims to check the legitimate aspirations of the Arab masses. The same game is now being played by U. S. imperialism — the new controlling power in the near and middle East. The Zion-

ist movement became the cat-paw of imperialism in the Arab world.

From the first, the Zionists behaved as would-be conquerors over the Arabs. Their communities in Palestine pursued a policy of no economic intercourse with the Arabs and boycotted Arab goods. Jewish capitalists grew up dependent on imperialist aid and support from rich and middle class Jews in Europe and America.

Histadrut, the Zionist labor organization, demanded that Jewish capitalists employ only Jewish labor. The organization excluded Arabs from membership, and as a rufe gave no support to the strikes of Arab unions conducted against foreign-owned concerns.

Never did the Zionist leaders show the slightest sympathy for the demands of the Palestinian Arabs for national independence.

In 1939, says the Encyclopedia Britannica, "the delegates of the Arab countries" to a conference in London "proposed the independence of Palestine and the enjoyment of full minority rights and cultural autonomy for the Jewish national home in its 1939 extent. The Zionists opposed with utmost vigor a solution which they regarded as exclud-

ing all possibilities of a Jewish state in Palestine."

By its arrogant behaviour and its character as an agency of imperialism, the Zionist movement has deeply antagonized the Arab masses. This has created the opportunity over the years for Arab feudalists — also props for imperialism in the Middle East — to seek to divert the potential revolutionary sentiment of the Arab masses against feudal oppression into the channels of anti-Semitism.

In this way, too, Zionism has stifled the Arab national movement, which depends for success on the mobilization of the Arab workers and peasants against their own ruling classes.

In 1948, when the British mandate expired and British troops left Palestine, Israeli forces defeated Arab armies and proclaimed an independent state. However, Israeli capitalists are not yet satisfied. They want to bring more Jews into Israel and keep its frontiers undefined as long as possible for purposes of expansion.

This raises the danger of new expulsions of Arabs from their traditional lands. And it confronts the Arab nationalist movement with new interference in realizing its aspirations.