

The centenary of the Balfour Declaration, imperialists' visa for Nakba and the Zionist occupation

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The twentieth century began with a grand war. In favour of the interests of a fistful of monopolies, millions of workers were forced to slaughter each other in the First Imperialist War. The “middle east”, which was then under the Ottoman rule, was in a turmoil. One aspect of this was the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire, while the other was the founding of the Zionist Israel which would have been a watchdog of imperialists' in the region afterwards. The Balfour Declaration, issued in November 1917, was a sort of a visa in order for the Zionists to fulfil the second.

As a result of this declaration, an occupier and expansionist apartheid “state”, functioning as a bastion for imperialists, is standing in the heart of the Socialist Middle East Federation that we, revolutionary Marxists, struggle to establish. The destruction of this entity, an ally of all the reactionary forces of the region, is a sine

qua non for us. The masses of the “Middle East”, who are exploited, oppressed, displaced, tortured and slaughtered are so exhausted that they will not bear the consequences of this document for yet another one hundred years. Therefore, in order to understand the historical importance of this document and to lay the foundations of a struggle against Zionism and imperialism in the region, we need to comprehend this document and the circumstances of the time period that it was issued. The issuance process and aftermath of this document includes valuable lessons for all the forces fighting against imperialism and Zionism. For this purpose, we will explain shortly the development of the Zionist movement and its relations with imperialists, examine the declaration in detail, and evaluate its results.

The Birth of the Zionist Movement

As a political project, Zionism was born in the last decades of the 19th century. This was a time which the number of Jewish organisations were increasing in Europe. Tsarist Russia’s massacres and exiles aiming at Jews, were the main reason behind this. Hovevei Zion (Zion Lovers) which was founded in 1882 and aimed to transfer Russian Jews to Palestine is usually shown as a prototype of Zionism.¹ But not merely in the Tsarist Russia, beginning with the 1870s, anti-semitism was becoming widespread all across Europe.

These motives, led to the Jews at the beginning. Theodor Herzl, an Austrian journalist, was the man who brought these ideas to maturity. In his book, *The Jewish State*, Herzl asserted that the only way for Jews to survive was to have a nation state. In fact, his views had important contradictions with Judaism. A Christianity-like expectation of a messiah², has an important role in Judaism. Ideas of Herzl were taken as an attempt to mobilise Jews, before the arrival of the messiah, and his views could not become popular at least between religious Jews in the beginning. Moreover, many like the United Committee of Jews under the leadership of Lucien Wolf at Britain, took the views of Zionists contrary to their own plans³ and opposed.

But later on, many people from both religious Jews and Wolf’s supporters, tended towards Herzl’s ideas, partly because of the rising anti-semitism. Zionism took an organisational form in time. 200 delegates from different countries, joined the first World Zionist Congress held in Basel in 1897. Formation of a Jewish State, an idea parallel to Herzl’s, was one of the decisions of this event. The congress clearly

1 Fahir Armaoğlu, *Filistin Meselesi ve Arap-İsrail Savaşları*, İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, Ankara, 1991, p. 14.

2 This expectation was often criticised for passivising the Jews against anti-semitic attacks.

3 Unlike Zionism, these Jewish organisations were aiming at the assimilation of Jews in societies which they were part of. Wolf and his followers were working for the improvement of the rights and statutes of Jews in these societies. They also asserted that British Empire had to make a separate peace agreement with the Ottoman Empire.

pointed to Palestine for this purpose.⁴

One must state that the Zionist movement had distinct tendencies in. A group of Zionists under the leadership of Haim Weizmann were aiming the formation of a Jewish state in Palestine, while another group under the leadership of Romanian Moses Gaster were limiting their aims to the improvement of Jewish culture and Hebrew language all around the world. But, the winner were Weizmann's. After Herzl's death in 1904, Weizmann, who would later become the first president of the illegitimate state of Israel, took the leadership of the Zionist movement. Zionists under the leadership of Weizmann, rejected offers made by imperialists in order to settle them on lands in Uganda, Texas, Canada and Argentina. Zionist movement's program for the Jews, to settle on the lands on which then another people were already living, in order to get rid of the atrocity that they faced, were highly accepted. We will discuss this later on.

Palestine at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Ottoman rule which began in 1517 was still continuing in Palestine. Ottoman administration had given the name Arz-i Filistin (Palestine land) to the region and divided it into sanjaks (Al Quds, Gaza, Nablus and Safed) under the Şam (Damascus) province. Although some notables revolted against the empire at time, and Mehmet Ali Pasha took the control of the region in the middle of the 19th century, the Ottoman rule persisted until the Great War. But it was the same Ottoman rule that became so fragile as a consequence of the fact that the empire itself had been gradually turning into a semi-colony, during the 19th century.

At the end of the 19th century, few landowner families began to concentrate the economic power in Palestine. One must add the ulema and multezims (tax collectors) to them. At the beginning of the same century, an advanced level of development in agriculture, trade and crafts could be observed in Palestine. Despite the negative consequences of the collaboration of Palestinian notables with the Ottoman administration, Palestinian society were productive and culturally rich.⁵ Palestinian Arabs were constituting 80 percent of the total population of Palestine at that time.⁶

Abdulhamid II was the Ottoman Sultan who diverted the Empire's politics to panislamism in order to eliminate the possible dispersive effects of the nationalist movements across the Arab provinces of the empire at the end of the 19th century. His attempts to reunite the ummah such as the Hedjaz railway project were followed by

4 William Cleveland, *Modern Ortadoğu Tarihi*, Agora Kitaplığı, İstanbul, 2008, p. 269.

5 Ralph Schoenman, *Siyonizmin Gizli Tarihi*, Kardelen Yayınları, İstanbul, 1992, p. 20.

6 Justin McCarthy, *The Population of Palestine*, New York, 1990, p. 11.

a gratifying of Arab nobles by the Sultan. After the 1908 revolution, panislamism was displaced by first Ottomanism, and then, particularly after the Balkan Wars, by Turkish nationalism. This policy change led by the İttihat ve Terakki (Committee of Union and Progress), the bourgeois revolutionary political party of 1908, sparked some negative effects all around the Arab region, particularly when the İttihat ve Terakki turned Turkish language into the official language of the empire, and when the same party show a tendency for building a more centralised state structure. These attempts resulted with the raising of Arab nationalism and foundation of many Arab nationalist organisations. Arab nationalists demanded the Arab language to be one of the official languages of the empire, and also autonomy for the Arab provinces.⁷

The Palestinian intellectuals played an important role in this movement. They even had a publication entitled *Palestine*. An important factor for this was the silence of İttihat ve Terakki on the Jewish possession of Palestinian lands during the first years of their government. Arabs were aware of the aims of the Zionists, and they were also worried about an inability of İttihat ve Terakki government defending the Arab lands against Zionists. In general, İttihat ve Terakki's approach to these movements were quite hostile. Ottoman forces under the leadership of Cemal Pasha, began an assault at Syria, including the execution of some of the leading figures of this movement. Apparently, this enormous pressure was successful in cushioning the blow, but in reality, Arab nationalism grew further among the Arabs.⁸ This trend would of course effect Palestine, but as we see, imperialists had other plans regarding the Palestinians and their lands.

Ottoman Empire and the Zionist Movement

Ottoman Empire's relationship with the Zionists was quite different from the popular narrative that's wide-spread today, even on TV series. While diverting the empire to panislamist policies, Abduhamid II did not avoid bargaining about a "Jewish home" in Palestine with Theodor Herzl, the historical leader of the Zionist movement, through the agency of the German emperor Wilhelm II. His final answer to Herzl was negative, because of the fact that the disintegration of the empire had begun then. **But he did bargain with Herzl multiple times, although he knew what Herzl would demand again!**

First contact between the two was in 1896. Herzl transmitted his offer of paying 20 million sterling Ottoman debt, in return for a "Jewish home" on Palestinian lands to Abdulhamid II. Five years later, on 17th of May 1901, and again on 4th of July 1902, Herzl met with the sultan. Abdulhamid II, did not reject Herzl's offer directly at the last meeting, but instead, he transmitted his negative answer through

⁷ Cleveland, p. 159.

⁸ Tayyar Arı, *Geçmişten Günümüze Ortadoğu*, Alfa Basım-Yayım, İstanbul, 2007, p. 110.

the leader of the Jewish minority in Istanbul.⁹ It's clear that the sultan thought for a while, and then said no, probably because he found that the game was not worth the candle. Zionist movement saw the Arab nationalism rising in Palestine as a great danger for its aims, both in the Abdulhamid II and the İttihat ve Terakki eras. Zionists warned both of them about the "dangers" resulting from the Arab nationalism and showed themselves as "a group, that will chest the attacks made against the power of the sultan, in Palestine." Moreover, while Palestinians were embracing the Armenians, who were escaping from the genocide, Zionists like Vladimir Jabotinsky were supporting the genocide directed to Armenians.¹⁰

Between 1882 and 1903, first Jewish migration to Palestine, named as the First Aliyah, began. In these years, most of the Jews migrating to Palestine were originated from Eastern Europe and Yemen. Especially the Jews escaped from the pogroms of the Tsarist Russia, settled to Palestine following the first initiatives of the Zionists. Many of these, amounted to 25.000, left Palestine afterwards. But with the Second Aliyah, nearly the same amount of Jews settled to Palestine, and settled in the coastal regions of the country.

Zionists' relations with the imperialists

Jews having an important social and economic power in the US, began to carry a big importance for the internal conflict among the imperialists, as this conflict took its final shape with the alliance of Russia, England and France against Germany. Zionist movement was important for Germany, particularly for receiving the support of Russian Jews living in the US who hate the Tsarist regime. Germans were hoping to win the United States to their side or to neutralise it totally. Moreover, Germans hoped to canalise the Russian Jews to a revolt. The presence of the centre of the Zionist movement in Berlin, was what Germans relied on.

Zionists were aiming to manipulate the conflict between the imperialist camps. At first they got closer to German imperialism and persuaded German emperor Wilhelm II to support their projects. But Wilhelm could not be able to persuade Ottomans to follow such a policy. Zionist movement would stake on English imperialism.

Zionists had darkened the British door per se, before they got closer to Germany and the Ottoman empire. Herzl asked England for acquiring some areas on the Sinai peninsula in order to establish a Jewish state. England was a coloniser in Egypt then. In a similar manner, Nahum Sokolow, an administrator of the Zionist movement, had a meeting with the English department of state on 3 March 1914, a

⁹ Armaoğlu, p.21.

¹⁰ Schoenman, p. 20.

date before the Zionists changed their course to the English imperialism. But Zionists could not get what they wished. In the first years of the First World War; Haim Weizmann, Nahum Sokolow and Walter Rotschild, three important names of the Zionist movement, began to get the support of some important names of the English cabinet. At the same time, the Zionist movement was extending its popularity in the Jewish population.

English imperialism “bargains” the region with many “clients”

For the British, the Zionist movement was crucial in the sense of, firstly, obtaining much more military support of the United States, which had just went to war as an ally of England, France and Russia, and secondly, benefiting from the financial power of the US banks. (US President Wilson was a supporter of the Zionist movement. Also, there were many Jews who support Zionism, owning many US banks or at least working in the decision making bodies of these banks.) But English alliance with the Tsarist Russia became an obstacle for these pursuits. Anti-Tsarist movement was quite strong among the Jews who immigrated from Poland and Russia¹¹ at the beginning of the war. This prevented England and France to find credits for their war expenditures from the US banks. It was the juncture for both countries to create an initiative aiming to win the Zionist movement. The process leading to the Balfour Declaration matured as a consequence of this need. Balfour Declaration meant a permission of the English state for the materialisation of the Zionist project. We will discuss it later on. But first, one must clarify how English imperialism made Palestine lands a subject of separate bargains with separate powers.

First bargain was made with the Arab rebels, on the condition that they would fight against the Ottomans. First contact between the English and the Arabs was at the beginning of the war. Before the beginning of the war, emissaries of the Arab nationalist movement were declaring that they prefer at least a federal structure against the centralising policies of the İttihat ve Terakki. The Adem-i Merkeziyet (decentralisation) party of Egypt was among these. At first, İttihat ve Terakki didn't change its approach against these movements. But after the loss of Libya, İttihat ve Terakki's attitude softened. In order to regain the Arab nationalists, Said Halim Pasha was appointed to the grand viziership and the use of Arab language was eased. Beginning with the start of the war, these attempts failed. However, almost none of the Arabic communities at Bilad Al-Sham (Levant) or Bilad Ar-rafidayn (Mesopotamia) clashed with the Ottoman armies. Only Sharif Hussein, who was appointed as the Sharif of Mekka by İttihat ve Terakki, took action to establish an

¹¹ After the ten years following 1881, 134.000 Jews immigrated to USA as a consequence of Tsarist Russia's oppression (Armaoğlu, 1991, 13). In 1892, 500.000 more Jews were added to this sum.

Arab state¹², and applied to the English imperialism. As far as we learn from the correspondences between Sharif Hussein and Henry McMahon, then English high commissar of Egypt, Sharif demanded to establish an independent Arab state on all the Arab lands excluding Egypt (also taking the Mersin-Mosul line as a northern border), and McMahon declared that England would admit such a state on the lands that Sharif mentioned, but Bagdad, Basra, Syria and Mersin-Antakya.¹³ English imperialism did not draw a fixed border line for the Syrian shore to the Arabs primarily because they had proposed it to the French before. They also wished to hold Palestine for themselves. This policy led English imperialism to wield the Arabs against the Ottoman Empire's jihad tactic¹⁴, and the Arab rebellion against the Ottoman Empire began on the 5th of June, 1916.

Second bargain of the English was the one made with the French. Totally beyond the Arabs' knowledge, the Sykes-Picot treaty which divides much of the lands promised to the Arabs between France and England, was signed between these two imperialist countries in May 1916. Sykes-Picot treaty reserved the Mersin-Sivas-Midyat triangle and the Syrian coast under the direct control of France, and Basra under the direct control of England, left the lands that mostly laid within today's Jordan, Iraq and Syria to an Arab state which would be under the domain of France and England.¹⁵ Although France insisted to keep Palestine under her domain as a part of Bilad Al-Sham, the establishing of an "international administration" in Palestine was agreed upon in the treaty. Moreover, England would keep Haifa and Akka (Acre) in order to provide the security of the Suez channel.

The third bargain that English imperialism made on Palestinian lands was with the Ottoman Empire which held these lands for four hundred years. During the war, England proposed to Enver Pasha of the Ottoman government, that the Ottoman flag could go on waving on the Palestinian lands, in return of a separate peace agreement between the two empires which would result with the disengagement of the Ottoman Empire from the German bloc. Enver Pasha refused. He probably had bigger dreams about the future of the Ottoman Empire then.

12 Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, who could be taken as a rival of Sharif Hussein, stayed neutral as a result of the inducement of the English imperialism. But, when Sharif Hussein did give his cold shoulder to imperialists after the war, Ibn Saud would come into play and founded his state that covers a large part of the Arabian peninsula.

13 Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, *The Israel-Arab Reader*, Penguin, ABD, 2008, pp. 12-13.

14 Armaoğlu, p. 30.

15 Laqueur and Robin, pp. 12-13.

The Declaration

Balfour Declaration, was a consequence of a fourth bargain between the Zionists and the English imperialism, as a result of the convergence of the two as we mentioned above. In fact, English imperialism was hesitant about such an attempt even in the summer of 1917. For instance, Zionists made an appeal to English government in the summer of 1917, for a declaration of the latter stating Palestine as the “home” of Jews. But the English government refused.

Weizmann, the leader of the Zionist movement in England, told the English government that Germans were having tripartite meetings with the Zionists and Cemal Pasha of the Ottoman government, which will result in an acceptance of Zionists’ demands about the Palestinian lands in a short time. Meanwhile Arthur Balfour, the English foreign minister returning from his visit to the US, was arguing for a support to the Zionist movement, in his talks with other members of the English cabinet. Also for the English imperialism, the fat hit the fire in Russia, following the February revolution which created a dual power in the country. According to Balfour, Jews both living in the US and the Tsarist Russia were under the influence of Zionism, and a support to the Zionists’ goals would create benefits for the interests of England.

In the end, the renowned declaration was given to Jewish banker Lionel Walter Rotschild on the 2nd of November 1917, to be forwarded to the British Zionist Federation. The declaration had a balanced content, including commitments to Zionists while at the same time indicating that the Arabs living in Palestine would not be affected negatively:

Foreign Office
November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you on behalf of His Majesty’s Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by the Cabinet.

“His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely,
Arthur James Balfour¹⁶

16 Laqueur and Robin, p. 16.

The declaration appeared in newspapers on the 9th of November, 1917. English army prepared leaflets and airdropped to German and Austrian battlefronts. Jewish soldiers in these armies summoned to lay down arms by these leaflets. It was also emphasised in these leaflets that a victory of the allied powers would mean the return of Jews to Zion.¹⁷

In the period following the declaration, Ottoman Empire lost its power in the region. On the 7th of December 1917, Ottoman army left Al Quds to English and Arab armies, in less than one year, defeated by the same forces at Nablus, lost Damascus and Aleppo in succession. After the signing of Mondros Armistice Agreement at the end of 1918, Ottoman Empire's relation with Arab nation became limited to "neighbourhood", except for a relatively small Arab population which had already been living in south Anatolia. Following the Great War, Arabs had to negotiate their sovereignty on their own lands, with English and French imperialisms.

After the war

France, USA and Italy, declared that they support the Balfour Declaration, in 1918. A committee from the World Zionist Organisation visited Al Quds and examined how could the topics related to the declaration be handled. Zionists were aiming to put their plans on Palestine into practice. The only armed force before them was Sharif Hussein's¹⁸ Arab troops engaged with English forces during the war. Sharif had trouble with the imperialists when the Bolsheviks revealed all the secret agreements which the Tsarist regime was part of, including Sykes-Picot. But he was first soothed by the imperialists and then inculcated that a collaboration with the Zionists would be also in his benefit. Zionists got in touch with the Sharif too, in order to prevent any possible disagreement with him. As a consequence of this contact between the Sharif and the Zionists, a treaty was signed between Sharif's son Faisal and Haim Weizmann, at Akabe. By signing the treaty which also refers to the Balfour Declaration (in article 3), Faisal approved the Jewish migration to Palestine (in article 4).¹⁹

For sure, the views of the winners of the Great War on the region which would come to light at the Paris Peace Conference beginning on the 18th of January 1919, was more important than this treaty. The foundation of mandate governments under the French and English administrations in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire was accepted as a general principle. On the other hand, Sykes-Picot treaty led to some unexpected results for Sharif Hussein and his sons, during the conference. Commitments made to Sharif seemed to be impossible, and large parts of the Arab

¹⁷ Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration*, Valentine Mitchell, London, 1961, pp. 579-580.

¹⁸ Sharif was named as the *King of Hedjaz* after the war.

¹⁹ Laqueur and Rubin, pp. 17-18.

Kingdom which Sharif dreamed to establish, was divided between two imperialist powers. Sharif tried to react, but his lands were invaded by Ibn Saud's troops backed by England, and he lost his sovereignty.

Arab nationalists, mainly the ones resident in Syria, began scrutinising the new situation they faced. The existence of the mandate governments and Zionists' plans about Palestine, made them feel quite anxious. In this period, Arab nationalism emerged as an inconvenient factor for France and England in the region.²⁰ Arab nationalists began to put pressure on England, to ensure a grant of self determination right which was accepted generally after the war, for Arabs, especially for Palestinians. Then, in July 1919, Arab nationalists convened at the Syrian Congress, and published a resolution which indicates that they, unlike Faisal, would not allow a Jewish state in Palestine²¹ (article 7). Arab nationalists also protested any treaty that may led to the establishment of a Zionist settlement in south Syria (aka Palestine) as a result of a partition of Syria, and called for the cancellation of any such treaty (article 10).²²

But the declaration of intention of the imperialists would be heard from Arthur Balfour soon. Balfour gave a memorandum to the British government on 11 August 1919:

The four great powers²³ are committed to Zionism, and Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700.000 Arabs, who now inhabit that ancient land.²⁴

Balfour's words speak for themselves. Here, the "desires" refer to the right of self determination of Arabs, and the "prejudices" refer to Arabs' reactions against the Zionist's plans, which were laid bare.

20 Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, *Osmanlı Devleti'ne Karşı Arap Bağımsızlık Hareketi*, Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları, No. 512, Ankara, 1982, pp. 243-244.

21 Resolution of this congress addressed, to a large extent, to the US president Wilson, and demanded the Arab nationalists to be invited to peace talks in France. The congress, pointed to the Taurus Mountains as northern, Aqaba as southern, River Euphrates as eastern and Mediterranean Sea as western borders of Syria (article 1). Also, Faisal, son of Sharif Hussein (who later became the king of Iraq), was pointed as the king of the state which was to be founded (article 2). The 3rd article of the resolution protested the mandate governments, by stating that the Arab nation was not a lower nation compared to the nations that are "at the middle stages of development", like Bulgarians, Serbians and Greeks (Laqueur and Rubin, 2008, 21-23).

22 Laqueur and Rubin, pp. 21-23.

23 England, USA, France and Italy.

24 Harry N. Howard, *The King Comission: an American Inquiry in the Middle East*, Beyrut, 1963, via Schoenman, p. 23; Peter Mansfield, *A History of the Middle East*, Penguin, Londra, 2003, pp. 164-165.

English mandate in Palestine and Jewish migration

Although the mandate governments were de facto established after the Paris Peace Conference, the details of these governments were discussed at San Remo Conference in 1920. Mandate governments were confirmed by the League of Nations on 24th of July, 1922, and put into practice in March 1923.²⁵

The decision of the United Nations put a burden on England, for the implementation of the Balfour Declaration. This was of capital importance for Palestine. As a consequence of this, the Balfour declaration which was previously a binding agreement for English imperialism, and also for French, USA and Italian imperialisms, became a text acknowledged by the League of Nations.

Palestinians lived under this government until 1948. Britain had an important role on the settlement of Jews from various parts of the world. At the time of the declaration, the Palestinian Arab population was 670.000, a high number compared to the 60.000 Jewish living in Palestine. Although few in number until 1930s, the continuing Jewish migration increased the number of Jews in Palestine eventually. The number of Jewish migrants increased to 30.000 people per annum in 1930s. In 1936, the number rose to 62.000.

Jewish migration upset the social balance in Palestine, which had limited resources and had already been damaged previously with the beginning of the war. Increasing of unemployment following the migration, also provoked the reaction against Jewish migration to the region.

Ghassan Kanafani, Palestinian poet and militant of the PFLP (People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine), states that the lands which Jewish groups possess was 1.250.000 dunams²⁶ in 1930, whereas it was 300.000 dunams only one year ago. 200.000 Palestinians had already lost their lands by 1931. According to Kanafani, this huge loss amounting to one-third of the Palestinian farmlands, drove Palestinians to poverty. Kanafani also states that the land loss created a significant cultural and social disintegration alongside the economic one.²⁷

The handover of the lands did not occur by force. At least to a certain year during the mass migrations, Jews did not (or could not) annex the Palestinian lands. Immigrant Jews bought these lands from Palestinians. They also bought lands from English mandate government. This government, seized the lands of Palestinians who did not pay taxes, and sold these lands to immigrant Jews. The underlying reason of the land sales of particularly the poor farmers, was the fact that they had borrowed huge amounts in order to discharge their previous debts, and to buy seeds, agricultural implements, livestock etc, during the last period of the Ottoman domi-

25 Laqueur and Rubin, p. 30.

26 An area equal to approximately 900 square meters.

27 Ghassan Kanafani, *The 1936-39 Revolt in Palestine*, New York, 1972, p. 20.

nation in Palestine. So, it must be emphasised clearly that land sale was a last resort for Palestinians. It's a big mistake to assert that Palestinians betrayed their country, or their lands, by selling their lands to Zionists.

English imperialism did not only provide lands for the settler Jewish population. It also played an important role in strengthening the Jewish bourgeoisie in Palestine. The mandate government gave 90% of the public privileges to Jewish bourgeoisie, and led the control of the economic infrastructure of the country fall into the hands of this group.²⁸ Moreover, it was mostly Jews who were made to use incentives for industrialisation and the like. This, increased the differentiation of the levels of development of two communities.

1920s were the years in which Palestinians confronted the results of the waves of the Jewish immigration to Palestine. The dynamics mentioned above made Palestinians feel more and more angry against Jewish migrations and their consequences. After some small-scale riots during the 20s, a rebellion, in which hundreds of Arabs and Jews were killed, occurred in 1929. English government, feeling that the social transformation created by the Jewish migration is becoming highly unsustainable, began to work on how it could bring the situation under control. Eventually, a report by Lord Passfield, which pointed that one-third of the Palestinian Arabs did not have lands and problems occurred because of the inability of the English in limiting the Jewish migration, were published. This report stated that the English mandate government had to limit the land sale to Jews.²⁹ But Zionists started a campaign against the report, and blamed England for failing to fulfil the requisites of the Balfour Declaration and the commitments of the mandate government. Pressure of the Zionists, made English imperialism retreat. One year later, a new report, called "the black letter" by Arabs, was published. Although this report, also known as the MacDonald Letter, didn't refer to the previous one, it did give a guarantee for the contents of the Balfour Declaration to be fulfilled by England.

During the 1930s, armed Zionist gangs began attacking Palestinians, while the Jewish immigration to Palestine was going on. One of these gangs, Haganah, was supported and trained by the English army. The struggle against the Zionist settlers and the Zionist terror, politicised all the Palestinian society rapidly. Amin Al-Husseini, then mufti of Al-Quds, rose to prominence and head the newly founded Al-Jihad Al-Mukaddes (The holy jihad) organisation. Other organisations like the Black Hand and the Green Hand were also founded in this period. In 1935, the murder of Izz Ad-Din Al-Qassam, the leader of the Black Hand organisation, by the mandate government, upsurged the Palestinian resistance.

But, in time, Al Husseini came into the service of Nazis, so to speak. He met

28 Schoenman, p. 30.

29 Armaoğlu, p. 53.

with Hitler, and helped Nazis forming Muslim brigades, after spreading his ideas among the muslim population of the Balkan peninsula. Al Husseini's support to the Nazis cannot be defended, for sure. But the Zionist movement was not in a better position compared to the mufti's. Many indicators, like the Anglo-Palestine Bank's breakage of the boycott of Jews to the Nazi regime, by making an agreement with the Nazis, or the rapprochement and the reciprocal visits between the Zionists and the Nazis³⁰, prove this. The Zionist movement was in a great betrayal of European Jews. Since the emancipation of the European Jews could hinder the settlements and the migration to Palestine, Zionists' interests were conflicting with those of the great majority of the European Jews. Zionists tried to show the Zionist entity in Palestine, as a shelter for the persecuted European Jews.³¹

The selection of settlers was important for the Zionists. Because of this, during 1933 - 1935, the World Zionist Organisation did not give permission to the Jews who were escaping from the anti-semitism in their countries and wishing to settle to the "promised lands" in Palestine, for reasons such as being old or not having vocational skills, but above all, for not being Zionists. Instead, educated and young Jews amounting to more or less 6.000, from countries like the USA and England where Jews were living safely, were accepted.³²

The 1936-1939 revolt and afterwards

Neither Palestinians nor the Arab countries could maintain a stance against the Zionist gangs systematised attacks until 1936. Needless to mention the fruitless attempts of Arabs before the imperialist countries, without learning any lesson from the Balfour declaration and the Sykes-Picot treaty.

But Palestinians began to show their rage in a more organised manner, as a result of the Zionist migration and land loss. The revolt of 1936-1939 was the most important one. On the 7th of May, 1936, a conference which brought together Palestinian delegates was held and a decision of not to pay taxes to the mandate government was taken there. It was followed by a general strike across Palestine.³³

A counter attack came from the English imperialism in the same summer. A Martial law was declared. Imperialist occupiers tried to stop the revolt by mass custodies and arrests, and also arsons. Zionists helped the British imperialism on its attacks to Palestinians. Part of the Zionists were taken to the "police force" of the mandate government. Many others were organised in gangs like Haganah and Irgun, which had 12.000 and 3.000 gunmen respectively. The so-called police force

30 See Schoenman, p. 51.

31 Schoenman, pp. 51-52.

32 Schoenman, p. 52.

33 Schoenman, p. 30.

reached 15.000 by the end of 1938. In 1938, 5.000 Palestinians were arrested and 2.000 of them received imprisonment from the mandate government. 148 people were executed. More than 5.000 houses were demolished.³⁴

After realising the impossibility to govern the region, England held a conference in 1939. A White Paper was published in the following days of this conference which failed just as the previous attempts of the occupiers. The White Paper was asserting that the Jewish migration would depend on the allowance of Arabs, after England's allowance of 75.000 more Jewish settlements to be carried out in the following five years. The report was also stating that the term "a national home for Jews" caused a confusion and resulted at the revolts of Arabs, and England is not aiming to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. The new formula of England was establishing a Palestine state, in which Arabs and Jews will live together, and thus realising the interests of both sides mutually.

Some Arabs' acquiescent approach to this plan, divided the resistance movement of Palestine. Some groups laid down their arms to the English army. Just then the Second World War began and the these ongoing problems of Palestine were frozen by the imperialists. On the other hand, the dissent among Palestinians ascended.

The curse of Balfour becomes real

Haganah gained strength during the war years by supplying arms from the British. It also helped illegal Jewish migration to proceed under its control. Some Jews fought voluntarily in the English brigades in Italy, and then, used the military experience they acquired during the war, against the Palestinian Arabs.³⁵

After the war, the US demanded from Britain, to lift the quotas which the mandate government of England imposed before. Then president of the US Henry Truman was claiming that the migration of at least 100.000 more Jews to Palestine was requisite, based on a research that he ordered to be done himself. A UK-USA commission established with the initiative of Truman, also did some research in Palestine and found similar results.³⁶

Balfour's heritage were adopted by the US imperialism after the war. Partly relying on this, the Zionists began also attacking the British army in Palestine. Britain, realising that it cannot steer the process in Palestine, brought the problem before the United Nations in 1947. The problem was handled in the Special Committee of Palestine. The committee suggested to dissolve the mandate government, to give independence to Palestine, to establish either two separate states for Jews and Arabs

34 Schoenman, p. 31.

35 Cleveland, p. 290.

36 Ari, pp. 218-219.

or one federal state, to turn Al Quds into an international land.³⁷ After voting on 29th of November, 1947, the infamous resolution 181 of the United Nations, which is also known as the “Partition Plan” was accepted. The USSR voted in favour of this resolution, as a result of Stalinist bureaucracy’s policy of peaceful coexistence with imperialism.

When the Partition Plan were on the UN’s agenda, there were 630.000 Jews and 1.300.000 Palestinian Arabs living in Palestine. But this plan was giving 54% of the lands to the Jews.³⁸ About three-fourths of these lands had already been invaded by the Zionist organisations before. Moreover, an important part of the lands given to the Jews were consisting of fertile agricultural lands.

Zionists accepted the UN resolution, which Arabs clearly opposed. Zionist gangs began an assault. Haganah and other such organisations attacked Palestinians, and made hundreds of thousands of Palestinians flee and become refugees, in 1948. There were 475 villages and small towns belonging to the Palestinians, 385 of which were demolished and wiped off the map. Between the acceptance of the partition plan and the declaration of the “foundation of Israel”, Zionists put 780.000 Palestinians in a refugee situation.³⁹ They also committed all-out slaughters, on the way to the Nakba, the day which Palestinians commemorate on every May 15th. As a matter of fact, there was no other way to turn such a big population into refugees and to expel from their lands. On April 9, 1948, Zionists slaughtered 254 defenceless people, including children, in Deir Yassin village. Another slaughter was made in Dueima in the same year. These sort of slaughters became a common practice for the Zionists in the following years.

Then newly founded Arab states declared war on the Zionist entity, after its foundation. Although Arab armies gained success at the beginning of the war, Zionists won, thanks to the support given by the imperialists.

The division among Arabs brought negative material results. On September 22, 1948, Al Husseini’s organisation declared the foundation of the state of Palestine. Many Arab countries recognised officially this new state, except for King Abdullah of Jordan, who were then willing to annex Palestinian lands. After the victory of the Zionist entity, the same division manifested itself when the Arab states signed separate peace agreements with the Zionists. After the war, the illegitimate Israel annexed more lands than the envisaged area decided in the partition plan.

Zionists seized all the properties of the people that they exiled from their lands, by the “Absentees’ Property Law” of 1950. Between 1948 and 1953, they annexed lands 2,5 times larger than the area provided to them by the mandate government.

37 Cleveland, pp. 292.

38 Schoenman, p. 33.

39 Schoenman, pp. 33 and 36.

Citrus yards, olive groves, shops and buildings and also all the underground treasures were annexed by the occupier entity. Furthermore, all these resources were bestowed only to Jews, and by a racist practice, whole Palestine was judaised. The selling or leasing of lands or any other immovables to non-Jews was forbidden.

After the Nakba

After the foundation of the Zionist Entity, the struggle of the Palestinian people came to a new stage. A considerable part of the Palestinian people had become refugees and the remaining were struggling to survive. In this setting, first the Fedayeen and then, in 1958 Al-Fatah was founded. An important milestone was the 1964 congress in Al Quds, which declared **a repudiation of the Balfour Declaration** and **a demand of the founding of one Palestine State**, along with the foundation of one the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO).

In 1967, the Zionist entity launched an assault against its Arab neighbours and defeated them. The number of Palestinian refugees increased sharply as a consequence of the victory of the Zionists, which led to further annexation of Palestinian lands. Egypt and Syria attacked the Zionist entity in 1973. As a result, Israel could not be defeated, but Syria and Egypt retrieved some lands back from the Zionists.

After the 1973 war, two lines became evident among Palestinians. One of them was the guerrilla war waged especially by the PFLP which was founded in 1967, and later by the Islamic organisations, while the other one was the diplomatic attempts of the PLO. Even though there's no need to put one against the other completely, but it's worth saying that the diplomatic line did not bring any success to Palestinian people. The same is true for the repetitive diplomatic failures of Anwar Sadat of Egypt, who even spoke at the occupier's parliament, the Knesset.

In 1980s, with the help of Ronald Reagan, then newly elected president of the US, Israel became clearly the spoiled child of the Southwest Asia. In 1981, this illegitimate state bombed Iraq, then, declared that it annexed the Golan Heights of Syria, but most importantly, invaded south Lebanon in 1982, which accompanied by the bombing of civilians in Beirut, and the massacre in Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.

It was not the diplomatic manoeuvres of Yasser Arafat of Al Fatah, which went so far as to recognise the Zionist entity officially, that made the Zionists step back, but instead, it was the intifada of 1987, with its heroines and heroes attacking the occupier with only stones. Beginning with the Oslo Process in 1993, especially after the Cairo Treaty of 1994 and the Washington Treaty of 1995, PLO gave up its demand of the Palestinian people's right to return, and dirty work of the Palestinian people, and the Palestinian Authority, an infant of the Oslo process, transformed into a gang which does the dirty work of Zionists and batters with the funds of

the European Union. The failure of this authority in meeting the needs of Palestinian people, and Oslo's end in smoke, caused the beginning of a new intifada in 2000. This time, the resistance organisations and military actions were on the stage. But even Hezbollah's victory against the Zionist occupier in 2006 could not deter the Palestinian Authority from its strategy of "land bargains" with the occupier.

In 2007, Hamas, the Islamist resistance organisation in Palestine having its origins in the Muslim Brotherhood, took power in Gaza. Unlike the accommodationist Palestinian Authority, Hamas was denying the existence of the Zionist state, which in the end of 2008, led to a Zionist assault against Gaza, that killed nearly 1.500 Palestinians most of whom were civilians. Both 2006 and 2008 wars of the Zionist entity were part of the imperialists' - post 9/11- **permanent war** strategy, directed to countries which did not slavishly attached to them, as well as some organisations which were in contradiction with imperialists. Zionists tried what the US imperialism did in Iraq, a regime change coming after an embargo trying to disorganise the embargoed society, or, if this fails, a military assault.

On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority led by Mahmoud Abbas insisted carrying out the policy that is opposite to the policies of the PFLP, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Years 2013 and 2014 passed with vain bargainings under the watch of US foreign secretary John Kerry, while in 2014 Israel was attacking Gaza again, killing 2.000 civilians this time.

In 2015, an initiative called the third intifada or (the knife intifada by many people) began. Palestinians (can only) use knives and sometimes, especially when grouped, stones, Molotov cocktails and fireworks, thanks to the disarmament of the West Bank by the Palestinian Authority, for the good of the Zionist entity. The apartheid wall and the checkpoints of the occupier which both turn the West Bank into a prison, are obstacles in front of a mass uprising. Unlike the previous intifadas, this initiative is also peculiarly targeting the "settlers", who in growing numbers became an armed and organised threat to the Palestinian people. Another difference from the previous attempts is that Palestinian women, especially the young ones, take part in the forefront of the clashes, or stabbing occupation soldiers, while being killed or being put into the Zionists' prisons is a moral certainty.

In addition to some Palestinian organisations which did not cooperate with the occupier, e.g. the PFLP, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, two contemporary important elements of the Palestinian resistance against the occupation are worth mentioning: The international BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) Movement and the ISM (International Solidarity Movement). BDS movement focuses on the pressing of the occupier, while the ISM is focusing on the support to Palestine, with the help of campaigns like the Freedom Flotilla. Particularly the BDS movement, inspired by the anti-apartheid campaigns of South Africa, is seen by the illegitimate Israel as a massive threat to its interests.

Conclusions: Challenging the Balfour Declaration

The contemporary history of Palestine teaches lessons for the working class and the oppressed of the Southwest Asia. But, when analysed by a nonmaterialistic approach, this history may be evaluated in an improper manner. Especially when taking into account the increasing influence of political Islam, it's so important to pay attention to this danger. Because political Islam analyses this history, also the Balfour Declaration, as a struggle between Muslims and Jews (and the Christian supporters of Jews). Political Islam confuses opposing Zionism with opposing Jews and Judaism, thus leaves the door open for anti-semitism. It also ignores the Christian Palestinians opposing the Zionist occupier.

It's a one of the common mistakes of the Islamists is to analyze the role of English imperialism after the declaration, through the religious beliefs of English statesmen. According to this approach, British statesmen like Arthur Balfour and Lloyd George were followers of Christian Zionism, which is based on the belief that in order for Jesus Christ to return to earth, Jews must be re-settled to Palestine first. That's the reason for the support of Lord Balfour et. al to the Zionist cause for them. This approach shades the material basis of Britain's need for the support of the Zionists during the First World War. British statesmen worked in accordance with the interests of imperialism, not the interests of themselves. They did not tend towards an alliance with the Zionists from the beginning. They began looking for such a collocation after realising that it would be salutary for British imperialism. They also wished to keep Palestine in their hands, in order to provide the security of the route which goes to Britain's colonies.

Islamic movements came to existence at a relatively later time. Hamas, the most powerful Islamist organisation in Palestine, was founded as an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In time, due to some lamenesses of the secular bourgeois movement and the help which they got from some Arab countries, it quickly gained strength. Until 2017, Hamas did not commit a political suicide by making a mistake of recognising the Zionist entity, like Al Fatah did. It also continued to reject the Balfour Declaration systematically. Of course, the political program of Islamist organisations like Hamas cannot be advocated by revolutionary Marxists. But, albeit giving no political support to these movements, revolutionary Marxists insist on advocating the legitimacy of the war that these organisations wage against Zionism and imperialism, and use their reasonable efforts to provide these organisations to win against the Zionist occupier.

Zionists make the Balfour Declaration out to be a document, that provided the emancipation of the European Jews from the anti-semitism of 1930s. We briefly mentioned how Zionists collaborated with the Nazis in line with their interests. But the most important problem with the Zionist movement was that this movement

channelled wrongly the steam sourcing from the oppression of the European Jews in the last quarter of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Schoenman, a Jewish Marxist writer, meant this, while blaming Zionist leaders like Herzl and Weizmann for **choosing the wrong side of the barricades**. Zionists aligned themselves with capitalist exploitation. Instead of championing the rights of Jews together with the opponents of exploitation in the countries Jews lived, Zionists applied to first the Ottoman Empire and German imperialism, and then, English and US imperialisms in order to achieve an “emancipation project” which has only mythologic references, and also is crystal clear to make another people be stricken with griefs. Zionists tried to persuade the imperialists that their project is in line with imperialists’ interests. Indeed it was. But the “insignificant” problem with this project was that it was not in line with the interests of the European Jews. The massacre of these Jews even suited the Zionists’ book, in their endeavour to persuade the European Jews to a colony in Palestine. Furthermore, Zionism was not accepted among the European Jews to a large extent. Zionists, far from leading the resistance of Jews who wished to live equally in the countries they lived, or to live somewhere other than Palestine, hindered the Jewish campaigns to boycott the Nazi economy. For Zionists, the Jews had better die en masse, instead of any other emancipation other than settling to Palestine.⁴⁰

Today, even if all the Jews seem to be the winning party of the post-Balfour era, it’s apparent that this is not true for all. Although a substantial part of “Israel’s” working class, especially the low-waged ones consist of Palestinian workers, Jewish workers’ struggle against their bourgeois and their illegitimate state is being trivialised and ambiguated under the influence of a chauvinist hegemonic force, in the “Israeli society” which is becoming an increasingly racist and a settler population. The social depression caused by being an occupier on someone else’s land and also by being surrounded with (at least once) allies of the real owners of this land, creates results that are in favour of the Jewish bourgeoisie, and against the Jewish workers class. Jewish bourgeoisie can easily hide the class contradictions behind a fiction of a “common interest of a whole nation under attack”. This illusion hinders the collective struggle of Arab and Jewish workers. Although in an indirect way, an adverse consequence of the Balfour Declaration is paid by the Jewish working class.

The Balfour Declaration is a document of treachery with regard to the bourgeois Arab leaderships. Many Arab leaders, beginning with Sharif Hussein and his sons, faced the legacy of this document. But it seems that bourgeois Arab leaders did not take any lessons from this document. If this was the case, the bourgeois leaderships

40 Schoenman, pp. 59-60.

imposed to Palestinians, could not be looking for the solution in the collaboration with Zionism or imperialism time and again. In this sense, Sharif Hussein's legacy is in the hands of Abu Mazen. In fact, the history of Palestine is a stunning example of the bankruptcy of vain hopes for national emancipation through a collaboration with imperialism. This is because despite all the negotiations made with imperialism and Zionism, Palestine is still a colony. Imperialism opts for expansionist Zionist entity which is an outpost of theirs, to the real owners of Palestine. The bourgeois leaderships who then were only able to provide the Palestinians the status of being a colony of imperialism to Palestine people, ignore the right of return of the Palestinian refugees, and can only provide living in a disarmed open air prison, with apartheid walls around for the "non-refugee" Palestinians today.

The real winners of the Declaration were the imperialists who dominated all the Southwest Asia after the Great War. As Abu Mazen holds the legacy of Sharif Hussein, Tony Blair holds the legacy of Arthur Balfour and Donald Trump holds the Wilson's. The perpetrators of Balfour and Sykes-Picot still seek their interests in the region. Balfour had to write a letter, in order to get the support of the US finance capital. Today, in order to win the presidential election, Donald Trump has to declare that he would move the US embassy to Al Quds. Here it is, the "Trump Declaration"! For imperialists, the rights of Palestinians, like those of the Afghans and Iraqis are insignificant details for the realisation of their interests.

Ottoman Empire hold Palestine for 400 years, milked it by imposing taxes if well-meaning. The invasion of Arab provinces of the empire by the imperialists created a big devastation for the empire. In this sense, the Balfour Declaration created a rage in the empire. But as in the Cemal Pasha case, the Ottoman State made use of the declaration and the Sykes-Picot Treaty in its psychological war to divide the Arab forces. But it failed. As a matter of fact, after a certain point in war, Ottoman empire became incapable of thinking Palestine or any other Arab province.

It's clear that, at least ostensibly, the Balfour Declaration is a document to be slammed from the point of the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, the Justice and Development Party, the ruling islamist party of Turkey), the carrier of Ottoman image in today's Turkey. But AKP's honesty in this subject is highly questionable, because of the fact that the AKP abused the Palestine question by using it as a domestic policy instrument, and then, stabbed Palestinians in the back by "normalising" Turkey's ties with the illegitimate Israel.

The declaration of Arthur Balfour must be analysed along with the process of sharing the region by imperialists. The "home" provided to Zionists in Palestine became also an outpost for English imperialism. Today, this outpost belongs rather to the US imperialism. Thus, in order to oppose the Balfour Declaration, one must oppose imperialism and its bases. But although AKP has some contradictions

with imperialists, it does not think of shutting down the Incirlik Base of NATO, based in Turkey, or of leaving NATO completely. Similarly, in order to oppose the Balfour Declaration, one must break off the relations with illegitimate Israel, the monstrosity that it created. But after six years of “abnormal” relations, (how come, in which trade numbers increased incrementally), the AKP government started a process of “normalising” with the Zionist entity, including a strategic cooperation between the two. AKP’s interests are the same with the Zionist occupier, when it comes to the fragmentation of Syria or the sectarian war in the Southwest Asia.

Contrary to this, Palestinian leftist organisations, especially the PFLP, although being under the influence of Stalinism in some degree, did not ever abandon its stance against Zionism and imperialism, in all this time period in which Marxism and Leninism was “falling from grace”. PFLP also managed to retain its base while keeping its stance against the forces mentioned. In this manner, PFLP carried out the most decisive and principled struggle against the occupier.

In the centenary of the Balfour Declaration; there are important tasks for the revolutionary Marxists to fulfil such as, telling the masses that the Israeli State is an illegitimate one build on stolen lands of Palestinians; unrolling the alliance between the AKP and Israel; mobilising Turkey’s workers against Zionism as well as against imperialism; elucidating to the masses that the Palestinian question cannot be solved by imposing a new subjection on Palestine, based on another form of colonisation of a country like the Ottoman empire and the like, nor by a “two state solution” accepted by the comprador Palestine Authority; and pointing the solution to be the foundation of a unified, secular, democratic, socialist Palestine, a member of a future Socialist Middle East Federation.

The Palestinian question is a national one. But Palestinian society does not consist of only the people living in the Gaza and the West Bank. An important part of Palestinians live in the refugee camps in some other countries, as a result of the consequences of the Balfour Declaration. The solution to Palestinians’ national problem, also include the right to return of these people. **The realisation of this right is possible only with the destruction of the illegitimate state of Israel. The task of Turkey’s revolutionary Marxists is to support the struggle of Palestinian resistance organisations as an internationalist duty, while working for the enhancement of the class struggle of their own country at the same time.**