

Izzy and the Other Zionism

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Shortly after Camp David, *The New York Review of Books* blessed the Egyptian-Israeli deal Jimmy Carter had stumbled on. I.F. (Izzy) Stone's by-line heralding Camp David as "The Hope" neutralized legions of skeptics. "This is the beginning of peace between Israel and the Arabs and that is a prime event of history," Izzy proclaimed.

That issue of *NYRB* arrived just as I was leaving for London, and I took it along on the flight. I was impressed, though not fully convinced, by Izzy's enlightened prophecy. I had just written for *Worldview* my own rather restrained judgment that "At best the Carter-inspired formula is an uneasy, unstable beginning to what might eventually become a firmer Middle East accommodation. At worst it is a collapsible gamble at a separate peace—one accomplished in exhausted desperation and one that, if aborted, might create an even more intolerable situation than existed before."

But Isidor F. Stone, like few American writers, has earned the right to have his opinions given considerable weight. And thus my own partly cynical reaction to the Carter "accomplishment" had been shaken by Izzy's conversion from biting critic to applauder. The next day, dining with an Israeli friend who works at London's Institute for Strategic Studies, I was doubly impressed because Stone's epistle had already been read and accepted there.

Rumor has it that Izzy is somewhat chastened now, many months later and into a new year. Even his earlier awareness that "We are heading into a kind of planetary wrestling match, replete with the most frightful grimaces, exquisite howls, agony, and sudden eye-gouges between, among and within all the far-flung capitals involved" apparently had not prepared him for the uncertainty that still surrounds the "process" inaugurated in September—and which will continue even if the Egyptian-Israeli arrangement is soon implemented.

Whether Camp David in retrospect will again be seen as initiating "a prime event of history," Izzy Stone's contemporary comments are undergirded by the length,

depth, and compassion of his involvement in the Arab-Israeli quagmire for over a generation.

It all began for him in the rubble of devastated Europe and with the remnants of his own people's rebirth from the ghastly horrors that European civilization had unleashed. Stone dedicated his 1946 book describing the Jewish exodus from Europe—"the greatest in the history of the Jewish people, greater than the migrations of the past out of Egypt and Spain"—"To Those Anonymous Heros the *Shelikhim* of the Haganah," who shepherded the DPs ("displaced persons," for those who have forgotten that sanitizing term) on their illegal and often incredible journey to British-controlled Palestine.

He opened the book with a Jewish ex-partisan's simple truth: "The Germans killed us. The British don't let us live." And he explained in a personal note: "I did not go to join them as a tourist in search of the picturesque, nor even as a newspaperman merely in search of a good story, but as a kinsman, fulfilling a moral obligation to my brothers. I wanted in my own way, as a journalist, to provide a picture of their trials and their aspirations in the hope that good people, Jewish and non-Jewish, might be moved to help them." He then added: "The plight of the Jews may be a minor affair, but world indifference to that plight is of spiritual significance for the future of us all."

Stone was the first reporter to travel with the illegal Jewish emigrants running the British blockade into Palestine. His *Underground to Palestine*, now republished after thirty-two years, can still bring tears as he passionately describes individuals caught up in historical whirlwinds, seeking life and hope in a promised land few had ever seen or even contemplated (*Underground to Palestine and Reflections Thirty Years Later* [Pantheon; 206 pp.; \$10.00/\$3.95]). Stone describes, for instance, a young girl on the boat he eventually joined on its fateful journey from Italy to Palestine. She was part of the "nationalist awakening which was sending these youngsters to a new and difficult country in a kind of fierce, proud reaction to the events of the Hitler period." "I never was a Jew before the war," she stoically told Stone. "But now that six million Jews have been

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killed, I will be a Jew too,' she said with an air of cheerfully stubborn defiance."

And he recalls his conversation with the Jewish "Red Army" major: "I'm a communist. I'm not a Zionist," the major insisted. "But we must support the building of Palestine. For many Jews in Eastern Europe west of the Soviet border there is no other way."

Stone's enduring capture of the human dimensions of the Jewish national rebirth must be read by anyone who wants to understand Israel's origins or to probe Israel's often irritatingly defiant attitudes. But it is Stone's political insights, then and now, his provocative ideas about Zionism and about the seemingly intractable Palestinian issue, that merit special attention.

Three decades ago Stone was one of the few to recognize that the "British are not playing a pro-Arab game. I have heard the amused contempt with which British officials in Cairo react to talk of Arab aspirations." Rather, "the British are trying to build an alliance with the Moslem upper classes in the Middle East against the Soviet Union, and also against France and the United States. They want to keep the whole area under their control and they are prepared to sacrifice not only the Jews but the Christian minorities of the East in the program." In 1917 there were worldwide reasons for the Balfour Declaration. By 1946 there were overriding regional reasons for the British to clamp down on the Jews and attempt to subordinate Arab aspirations.

There was, largely for this reason, a potential alliance between Jewish and Arab nationalists against British hegemony—which partially explains why the left wing of the Zionist movement (including Stone) advocated a bi-national, Arab-Jewish state encompassing Palestine as well as Transjordan. But this possibility faded as class rivalries succumbed to a combination of religious and nationalist chauvinism on both sides, and as traditional British divide-and-conquer tactics prevailed.

Nevertheless, British designs soon crumbled as the Empire found itself floundering to retain even a modicum of influence in the area. After toying with a brutally repressive policy, it appears Whitehall decided on a strategy of tactical withdrawal, hoping that the ensuing chaos might propel British power back under a United Nations shield. As Stone revealed then:

When I was in Jerusalem, I was told by one of the best informed sources in the Middle East that the British military had drawn up a three-part plan which was to culminate—if sufficient excuse could be found—in an offensive operation designed to smash Jewish settlements and cities. One high British military official told a Jewish leader frankly—I assure the reader this is not just gossip—"The world took the killing of six million Jews and if we have to destroy half of Tel Aviv, the world will take that too."

It was within this atmosphere and with an awareness of the grim possibilities that Izzy Stone took leave of journalism and became an advocate, took leave of impartiality and supported his people.

"I found myself reacting like a DP," Stone admitted. "I hope I may be pardoned if . . . I speak as one of them." He then concluded his book with the following plea:

I believe that full support of the so-called illegal immigration is a moral obligation for world Jewry and a Christian duty for its friends. I believe that the only hope lies in filling the waters of Palestine with so many illegal boats that the pressure on the British and the conscience of the world becomes unbearable.

And if those ships are illegal, so was the Boston Tea Party.

Yet Stone's personal identification with Jewish suffering, and the fact that his book was influential in promoting the Zionist cause, did not earn him a secure position in American Jewish circles. Within a few years, and ever since, Izzy Stone has been something of a pariah. In a sense the second part of Stone's republished book—"Reflections and Meditations Thirty Years After"—is Izzy's self-defense as well as his counterattack.

Stone committed two basic sins as far as American Jewry is concerned. First, he refused to buckle under to a newly imposed party-like "discipline" that organized American Jewry instituted as a reaction to its impotence during the Thirties. And second, he always maintained that whatever the pluses and minuses of Zionism, the interests of the Arab population of Palestine were also an important Jewish concern.

Part two of the new edition of *Underground to Palestine* consists of two short essays that many readers will already have seen in *Harper's* and in *The New York Review of Books*. In the first essay, "Confessions of a Jewish Dissident," Stone lambastes the American Jewish establishment. "Despite all these credentials," he notes after listing his Jewish ties, including a Haganah medal, "I find myself—like many fellow American intellectuals, Jewish and non-Jewish—ostracized whenever I try to speak up on the Middle East."

Stone's original sin was committed in a single sentence in his book. After suggesting that "In a sane and orderly world, the U.S.A., USSR, France and Britain would join in an international development scheme for the Middle East and in a context of rising living standards provide ample room for the Jews in Palestine," he suggested: "I myself would like to see a bi-national Arab-Jewish state made of Palestine and Transjordan, the whole to be part of a Middle Eastern Semitic Federation."

Though later his name was specifically associated with the Palestinian cause and later still with the notion of a Palestinian as well as a Jewish state in historic Palestine, in 1946 Stone made no further comment on these issues. But when the book was published and friends from the Zionist movement approached Izzy about an advertising campaign, he put his foot down on their polite insistence that the offending sentence disappear. Recalling the experience half a lifetime later, Stone notes: "That ended the luncheon, and in a way, the book. It was in effect boycotted."

Since then the name I.F. Stone has been harshly treated in American Jewish circles. Izzy has been unjustly vilified as a “self-hating Jew” and an anti-Zionist, neither of which his friends have ever known him to be. On the contrary, Izzy Stone has been and remains a fine Jew as well as a dedicated humanist. Beyond that he’s a rare erudite gentleman (though admittedly one who does get snotty at times) who understands and accepts the central contradiction in modern Jewish life: that there are now two competing and yet cooperating centers of modern Jewish existence—Israel and the United States.

The second essay, entitled “The Other Zionism,” recalls various figures and groups within the Zionist movement who were never antagonistic or condescending toward the Arabs, who always realized that Zionism’s fulfillment lies in eventual acceptance by the Palestinian Arabs. In assaulting Begin’s “rigid, monolithic policy totally unsuited to the great opportunities opened up by Sadat’s courageous initiative,” Stone recalls the schism in Zionism between Jabotinsky’s Herut movement and the various Zionist groups who have always accepted the legitimacy of Palestinian nationalism. In reviewing the ups and downs of this other Zionism, Stone rightly prophesies that “To impose the kind of self-rule Begin envisages on the Palestinians is to put Israel into an endless sea of trouble.” But “all else becomes negotiable,” he adds, “if the principle of self-determination is recognized.”

“The main current of Zionism has always nourished itself on the illusion that the Jews were ‘a people without a land’ returning to ‘a land without a people’”—Stone begins this second, concluding essay. “But there was from the beginning of the movement another Zionism, now almost forgotten, except by scholars, which was prepared, from the deepest ethical motives, to face up to the reality that Palestine was not an empty land but contained another and kindred people.”

Stone adds: “They were a lonely handful then, and a lonelier one now, when the pendulum of power has swung to the far right, to the ultra-nationalists, with their old leader, Menachem Begin, in office.”

After a career as reporter, editorial writer, and columnist for numerous American newspapers, Izzy Stone published his one-man newsletter, *I.F. Stone’s Weekly*, from 1953 through 1971, and in the process turned himself into both legend and hero. While writing a dozen books, he scooped up journalism awards and honorary degrees. Since 1975 he has been a distinguished scholar in residence at American University, studying the civilization of ancient Greece for its historical truths. And last year *The New York Times Magazine* paid Izzy a unique compliment by letting him act as both questioner and respondent in a remarkable interview to which they gave the title “Izzy on Izzy.”

No praise can testify so well to I.F. Stone’s *sui generis* contributions and visions as his own words that conclude the new edition of *Underground to Palestine*:

No matter which the choice, the two peoples must live together, either in the same Palestinian state or side



Photo courtesy Pantheon

“I. F. Stone, like few American writers, has earned the right to have his opinions given considerable weight.”

by side in two Palestinian states. But either solution requires a revival of the Other Zionism, a recognition that two peoples—not one—occupy the same land and have the same rights. This is the path to reconciliation and reconciliation alone can guarantee Israel’s survival. Israel can exhaust itself in new wars. It can commit suicide. It can pull down the pillars on itself and its neighbors. But it can live only by reviving that spirit of fraternity and justice and conciliation that the Prophets preached and the Other Zionism sought to apply. To go back and study the Other Zionism is, for dissidents like myself, to draw comfort in loneliness, to discover fresh sources of moral strength, and to find the secret of Israel’s survival.