

## DOGMA



**I HAVE BEEN DOGMATIC** in my time. Consequently, I will tread carefully, avoiding the muddle between dogma and dogmatism. For example, I hold firm to the view that regardless of circumstances or evidence one must take sides in wars. Once the killing begins, the murder and mayhem, the wholesale destruction of people and things, neutrality is wholly inappropriate. It involves a kind of irresponsible condescension in which one aspires to a position above the fray, asserting superior reason, human feeling, or even indecision, as just causes for refusing to take sides.

There has not been much condescension in the war between Islamism and Zionism; between Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, and Iran, on one side, and Israel on the other. The broad left has taken the side of the

antisemites and Israel-haters, while probably a minority in Britain have taken Israel's side in the carnage.

I am particularly interested in the left-wing reasons given for supporting the Palestinians against the Israelis. People who hold this point of view tend to avoid the question of Islamism in preference for presenting their case as one of solidarity with Palestine and Palestinians, rather than Islam and Islamism. It is in relation to this that I think that the dogmas (or dogmata) involved need some explanation.

The Palestinians are oppressed by Israel which is an agent of imperialism. Consequently, it is not for us to judge how the oppressed choose to fight their oppressors. (Even if this involves depraved and bloody pogroms.) On the contrary, our duty is to offer unconditional support to the oppressed. Flowing from this idea, is the belief in the right of peoples to self-determination. This is often couched in anti-colonial terms, as if the denial of self-determination is always and inevitably colonial. This notion of the "colonial" carries with it the idea that some people are colonisers, the Jews for example, who are in league with the imperialists, in order to deny Palestinian's, the right of self-determination.

At this point, all seems clear, and yet the clarity is deceptive. More explanation is necessary if one is to get to the bottom of why many people, ostensibly on the left, find themselves in the enemy camp along with the Islamists, ranged against Israel.

The first place I suppose must be imperialism. Imperialism is the economic and military power which large rich nations wield over smaller or poorer nations. In the past this was often expressed in various forms of direct colonial rule, but it could also be expressed indirectly for example, like Britain's domination of Argentina in the late nineteenth century.

The left has, since the time of J. A. Hobson and V. I. Lenin, always regarded imperialism as a thoroughly bad thing. This is because imperialists tend

to strive against the right of nations to self-determination, and to pursue their interests in complete disregard for the welfare and independence of smaller or weaker peoples, often cloaking their machinations in formal support for independence, while in practice, pressing subaltern nations into the shape desired by the rich and powerful.

So far, so good. However, there are many peculiar exceptions and contradictions to this point of view among socialists and left-wing people in general. Early in the last century the Bolshevik wars against Poland and Georgia are not thought of as imperialist, anymore than the modern conduct of Chinese or Iranian foreign policy is regarded as the illegitimate use of economic and military power over smaller or weaker nations. No, almost without exception, “imperialist” is applied by the left, to anything done by the United States and her allies, rather than to their opponents. The actions of Western democracies are unequivocally imperialist, whereas the actions of their anti-Western opponents are not.

Similarly, the right of nations to self-determinations attracts entirely uneven and at times contradictory treatment by those on the left. There are many peoples who, for one reason or another, remain stateless. The Scots, Kurds, Basques, Catalans, Welsh, Chechens; even the English, are a people, who remain stateless. Obviously, there are profound geographical, cultural, and historical differences in every case – their statelessness is not in any sense comparable, one to the other.

So, Palestinian statelessness must be understood in its particularity. Palestine was historically part of a province of the Ottoman empire, it was then ruled by Britain as “Mandate Palestine”, subsequently, after the partition of the territory by the United Nations it was ruled by Israel, Jordan, and Egypt. Palestinian social, cultural, and political forces, failed to found state-like institutions, or to declare statehood. In complete contrast, the Jews began to form civil, political, and military institutions in Jaffa as early as

1920, and these grew into a quasi-state formation, capable of waging war against the British occupation and Arab forces; finally declaring full statehood in 1948.

Now the self-determination of the Jews is not accepted on the left for a variety of reasons. Firstly, because the Jews are seen as a catspaw of the imperialists. Secondly, because they are colonial settlers. Thirdly, because the foundation of the Jewish state involved the ethnic cleansing of 800,000 Palestinians. Fourthly, because the Zionist state gives privileged citizenship to Jews, and is therefore in open violation of the idea of universal rights. Fifthly, the Jewish state and its forces oppress the Palestinian people. For all these reasons the supporters of the Jewish state, supporters of the Zionists, are seen as wrongheaded, terrible, and uniquely evil, or wicked.

If one is armed with the suite of dogmata beloved by the broad left: Anti-Imperialism, Anti-Colonialism, the right to national self-determination, unconditional support for the oppressed, and belief in universal rights, virulent opposition to Israel logically follows.

Well, it does if you ignore the ethnic cleansing of Jews from the Arab world, issues of women's rights, religious freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of sexual expression, and the right of Jews to national self-determination, all inconspicuous in the Arab world, and totally absent amongst Israel's most prominent enemies: the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, Hezbollah, Yemen's Houthis, and the regime in Tehran. Viewed from this standpoint it becomes obvious that the pro-Palestinian left's dogmata are selectively deployed in order to demonise Israel.

Therefore, it becomes obvious that one cannot in all honesty deploy the dogmata beloved by the left with any hope of reaching an understanding of what is actually going on in Israel, Gaza, or the West Bank.

For example, I do not think the establishment of Israel was a good idea – founding a state in which a particular religious ethnicity is privileged above all

others is bound to cause trouble. However, Zionism arose in the 1880s and achieved fixed organisational form in the last decade of the nineteenth century. It arose because of the manifest failure of the struggle for Jewish emancipation, which became more and more apparent as the twentieth century advanced, resulting in a tsunami of killings and the wholesale slaughter of entire Jewish communities, starting after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 and ending in 1945-6.

It is unsurprising that Jewish nationalism arose in order to deal with this reality. Palestine became the principal centre of Jewish settlement, because everywhere else restrictions to Jewish immigration proved difficult, if not impossible, to overcome. This meant that the Jewish organisations, established in Jaffa in the 1920s, were best placed to resist British and Arab opposition to Jewish immigration and settlement.

Every other solution to the plight of the Jews conspicuously failed, Zionism was all that was left. This meant that after 1948 Arabs in Israel found themselves underprivileged in a variety of ways, despite being full citizens with the right to vote and to sit in parliament. After the Six Day War in 1967 the victory of Israel over the Arabs meant that Palestinians, formerly occupied by Jordan and Egypt, found themselves under Israeli occupation. Their oppression now stemmed, not from Amman and Cairo, but from Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

The history of this struggle between Arabs and Jews in Palestine from around 1920 to the present day is fraught with oppression, ethnic cleansing, and horror. It has been the consistent position of Palestinian agencies and organisations to oppose Jewish settlement, and to regard the Jewish state, Israel, as an entirely illegitimate entity. Even when Arabs have notionally accepted the existence of Israel they have always sought to undermine the Jewish state by demanding the right of the descendants of 800,000 Palestinians, expelled in 1948, to return to

Israel, thereby demographically destroying the Jewish state.

So, the Palestinian solution to the war between Arabs and Jews in the territory has always been the destruction of the Jewish state, and the denial of the right of Jews to national self-determination. This has meant a continuous armed conflict, often relatively minor, sometimes dormant, then vicious and wholesale, pulling in allied armies from Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, to help Palestinians destroy the Jewish enclave in Palestine. So far, they have failed to dislodge the Jews, who have against all the odds succeeded in creating a modern Hebrew-speaking state, with world-class universities, advanced technical and research facilities, with free speech, a more or less free press, an easy-going attitude to homosexuality in Tel Aviv, and with sophisticated civilian command and control of its armed forces.

The downside of all this, is the brutal suppression of the Palestinian population of the West Bank, riddled with roads, reserved entirely for the Israel Defence Force and Jewish settlers. The comprehensive oppression of Palestinians on the West Bank is simply undeniable. Yet this has arisen from the need of Israel to protect her citizens from the violent resistance of militant Palestinians, who will murder and maim Jews at every opportunity. The manifest oppression of the Palestinians arises directly from their refusal to accept the legitimacy and permanence of the Jewish state.

Now, I am only too aware that this sounds like blaming the victims for their own oppression. However, in the given circumstances, it is the only explanation. Palestinians must accept the legitimacy and permanence of the Jewish state before peace can be established in the region. Palestinian Arabs must stop attacking Jews, and declare their opposition to Hezbollah and Iranian interference, if they want to negotiate a peaceful settlement in which the security of both peoples is assured. The carnage in Gaza and the oppression of Palestinians on the West Bank can

only be brought to an end by ending the war between Arabs and Jews – this, in turn, can only be achieved by Arab acceptance and acknowledgement of the right of the Jewish state to exist.

The Palestinian Solidarity wallahs of the left will, no doubt, call for a single state between the “River and the Sea” in which Arabs and Jews can live in equality and harmony – this would be a state in which universal rights were guaranteed, and all the dogmata of the left would be fully recognised. Unfortunately, this does not chime with current realities, or the objectives of the principal Palestinian forces on the ground, who are blatantly committed to the destruction of the Jewish state, and ethnically cleansing the region of Jews by violent means.

I do not think that ethno-religious states like Pakistan or Israel are a good idea, but neither do I think the solution to these untoward historical developments is their destruction in war. The cherished dogmas or the pro-Palestinian left do not fit the present situation and do not offer any satisfactory solution – the destruction of the Jewish state and the dispersal of her citizens would be an absolute disaster, which Israel’s Jewish population and their Defence Force will fight ceaselessly to prevent.