

At the time when Canada was first drawn into the discussion of Palestine's future, I remember that a committee of the United Nations General Assembly, over which I presided had before it the introductory statement of the United Kingdom representative: "We have tried for years to solve this problem of Palestine ... we now bring it to the United Nations in the hope that they can succeed where we have not". That was the point from which the United Nations effort started. There was at that time, as you all recall, a deep division of opinion in the General Assembly as to how the matter should be handled. I think no government dissented, or at least openly dissented, from the widely-held belief that the time had come for the Jewish people to have somewhere in the world a territory in which to rebuild a national life of their own. Those people, torn and persecuted by the Nazis in World War II, desired, for obvious reasons, to establish that territorial base in Palestine. To most non-Jews also, this point of view seemed acceptable and logical because there had already been laid in Palestine by Zionist effort, within the period of the mandate, considerably more than the mere foundation for a Jewish national home.

The problem which confronted us, then, was essentially this: On the one hand there was an Arab determination to fight in order to secure a single independent state in which at least two-thirds of the voters would be and would remain Arab. On the other hand, there was an equal determination by the Jewish Agency representatives to resist any recommendation of the General Assembly which did not give the Jewish element of the population control of one of the two states into which it was proposed that the mandated territory should be divided.

No matter what recommendation was made by the Assembly, therefore, it was tragically clear that conflict was only too likely to break out. For those of us who had worked through the United Nations meetings to secure a fair agreement on the future of Palestine, the question remained essentially the same at the end of the debate as it was at the beginning: Which of the proposed arrangements would impose the least injustice in the face of conflicting claims, and which gave greatest promise of being capable of providing a foundation on which the fullest development of both Arab and Jewish life was more likely to be possible?

I was among those who were very greatly disappointed that the Arab governments refused to see the positive possibilities for themselves in the partition plan which we worked out at the General Assembly in the autumn of 1947 with meticulous attention to detail and with constant concern for the rights both of the Palestinian Arabs and of Jews. Since there already existed in Palestine a large Jewish community, and since there was already a lack of harmony between Jewish and Arab views on a wide range of questions relating to their common problems it had seemed to us not impossible that the Arabs would consider it better after all in the long run to accept partition than to be in constant conflict with a vigorous one-third minority in a unitary state covering the whole of the country.