

Time for Justice

Stéphane Hessel

Stéphane Hessel spent part of his diplomatic career with the United Nations where he was a privileged witness at the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He is the author of Indignez Vous!, translated as Time for Outrage!, his best-selling broadside against the deprivations of neoliberalism, which was published in 2010. Prior to that, he participated in the creation of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine, and became its Honorary President, serving on its jury and attending all four sessions of the Tribunal, in Barcelona, London, Cape Town and New York. On 18 February 2013, he completed his Preface to a new book entitled Justice pour la Palestine!, shortly before his untimely death.

Since the creation of the State of Israel, which I attended at the United Nations, sixty-five years ago, the necessity of finding a solution to the Palestinian problem has seemed imperative to me, as does the condition, *sine qua non*, of the survival and prosperity of the Israeli State.

We owe the Palestinian people the realisation of their own State, like all other peoples on Earth. That is why, and this is the aim of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine, we have to take stock precisely of the multiple infringements of fundamental rights and locate the responsibility, which is most certainly that of its neighbour, the Israeli government, but also of the international community: the European Union, which has been timorous; the United Nations, which has proved incapable of imposing resolutions; and, of course, the United States of America, which is among the few states to have voted against these resolutions.

What's happening here is a unique case in which one state, Israel, owes its creation and existence solely to the United Nations – and the realisation of the objectives of the Charter of the United Nations – and which, since then, behaves as if the obligations of the Charter don't apply to it. Unfortunately, after Israeli victories in the Six-Day and Yom Kippur wars, successive Israeli governments have not understood the necessity to do so, and they have pursued a policy that contradicts international law, a policy of occupying territories not assigned to them, and of colonisation within those territories.

All countries commit reprehensible acts. But when a nation has been created on the

basis of the unacceptable, the *Shoah*, out of the necessity to give a state to a people who have suffered, and this state has to be given to it by an authority which stems from international law, then this international law, naturally, forms part of the new state's fundamental obligations. For Israel, whose existence was called into being by international law as a matter of principle, since all peoples have the right to a state, the need for the creation of a Palestinian state should be plainly evident.

The work of the Russell Tribunal contributes to getting to know the situation in Palestine, to making it comprehensible to a greater number of people, and making the situation less subject to impunity, which is the case at the moment. I have been concerned a lot with the notion of impunity; the international community must no longer accept the acts of violence committed against the Palestinian people, and the violations of their fundamental rights. These matters I wish to emphasize.

These numerous acts of violence have often been denounced, but the Russell Tribunal wanted to take a new, more objective and more complete approach. During four sessions, diplomats and lawyers of high standing have made the most complete inventory possible of the unacceptable ways in which the Palestinian people are treated. For some weeks, 138 of the 192 states assembled in the United Nations have supported the wish of the Palestinian government to be recognised as a state, making it all the more urgent that something is done to ensure their vote does not remain a pious hope.

The Russell Tribunal encompasses great variety among its members (Nobel prize-winners, diplomats, lawyers, and so on) in order to meet the high standards required by its ethical and legal responsibilities. It seeks to make as complete a record as possible of the violations that have been committed. This permits us to ask whether each of these violations has been met with a corresponding sanction, remission by the state, or powerful protest.

The Russell Tribunal is a civil tribunal without juridical competence, which is one of its limitations. It is a Tribunal because it wants to judge, but it is without jurisdiction. It relies entirely on each of the readers of its report to make the best possible use of its findings, to agitate, and to protest. Let us suppose that Europe takes seriously its own failures that were established during the first session of the Tribunal, or that the enterprises reproached during the second session will take that into account, then the necessary conclusions must be faced: they must radically change their policies.

The Russell Tribunal on Palestine has taken the Vietnam Tribunal as its

model. Even today, it is difficult to estimate the true impact of that Tribunal, but we absolutely have to recognize that the situation in Vietnam that was denounced at the time was, subsequently, transformed. This experience, 45 years ago, in calling on the United States to withdraw its troops from Vietnam, made by convening a civil tribunal in the name of the great humanist, Bertrand Russell, reminded me of a comparable situation today, in which the voice of public opinion clearly weighs on those responsible: the Israelis, but also the Europeans, the Americans, the businesses that allow violations of the incontestable rights of the Palestinians. The European and American partners of Israel do not know how to impose on their leaders a policy of true negotiation with the Palestinians in order to find a fair solution.

One can think that this way of operating, which seems uncertain because it is non-judicial, corresponds with the great new preoccupation of citizens, women and men, of all the regions of the world, not to remain indifferent to serious problems which we face and grow worse. The new phenomenon of our decade is the civil movement. Certainly, there have been many such movements throughout history, of the right as well as the left, but the movement we are now experiencing has a world-wide character, maybe for the first time. Naturally, it is present in a limited number of countries at the moment, but there is the same ambition and dimension of concern to tackle problems that are not solely the problems of one country but also the problems of human society in its entirety. This movement is very ambitious and, as a consequence, it is not susceptible to letting go its aims very quickly. In my opinion, that is why we shouldn't despair. For example, after Occupy Wall Street, the people who said 'this is finished because no one is interested' were mistaken. Something endures.

One might say that a person equipped with a computer, in a culture that is more open internationally in a certain number of societies, has contributed to bringing about a movement like ATTAC, which reflects the views of economists such as René Passet and others about the operating conditions of a particular economy, the global economy, and has given rise to a sort of ambition for the renewal of the planetary paradigm amongst this ensemble.

The Russell Tribunal on Palestine comprises volunteers, who are funded by some institutions and supported by sponsorship. We pay tribute to our general co-ordinator, Pierre Galand, who succeeded in raising the necessary sums for the good running of the Tribunal.

In March 2013, assembled in Brussels, the Tribunal will give its

conclusions, which will then be distributed everywhere. We hope that qualified persons will assess them. It will then be necessary to mobilise people of good will to highlight the failures of the last 40 years and appeal for resolute action.

I conceive of an influence, notably amongst the media, as a modest, sincere and resolute contribution, necessary for the Israeli people as well as for the Palestinian people, towards harmonious coexistence between these two peoples, whose future can only be common.

Translated by Monica Hochbauer and Tony Simpson

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Stéphane Hessel was fond of reciting Shakespeare, particularly this Sonnet, which he reflected on during the Second World War, when under sentence of death by the Gestapo. A short film of one bookshop recitation is available online (link below).

Sonnet 71

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
 Then you shall hear the surly sullen bell
 Give warning to the world that I am fled
 From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell:
 Nay, if you read this line, remember not
 The hand that writ it; for I love you so
 That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot
 If thinking on me then should make you woe.
 O, if, I say, you look upon this verse
 When I perhaps compounded am with clay,
 Do not so much as my poor name rehearse.
 But let your love even with my life decay,
 Lest the wise world should look into your moan
 And mock you with me after I am gone.

<http://stevemurez.com/#Stephane-Hessel-Shakespeare>