

# **THIRTEEN YEARS AND ALMOST FORTY VISITS**

## **REFLECTIONS OF A PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR WORKING IN ISRAEL**

### **PART ONE**

**This will be a series of accounts and reflections upon my experience working first for the University of Liverpool and then the University of Derby directing, teaching and examining masters degrees in education for schoolteachers in Israel. The series is based upon an earlier reflection published on my website. The students were from very mixed cultural, religious and political backgrounds and for Liverpool we worked in Arabic, English and Modern Hebrew. I based the language model on my experience of examining GCSE in both Welsh and English.**

Please do not expect any outpouring of hatred here. I certainly witnessed injustice, racism, ignorance, prejudice, falsification of history and a long list of human wrongs and examples of political stupidity. The guilt for all that extends to more than one country, including the one in which I live.

I also found and witnessed love, generosity, fairness, co-operation and a confirmation of the sheer ordinariness of living with neighbours, bringing up children, caring for aged parents and complaining about the traffic. My accounts and reflections shall not be chronological and I shall go back and forth and sometimes insert comment based upon more recent events. But perhaps I can begin with impressions of my first visit in December 1996.

Arriving at Manchester Airport my colleague and I were astonished and (at first) amused to find ourselves among a party of middle aged Americans wearing green sweatshirts with emblazoned in gold lettering 'The Christian Mission to Convert the Jews'. Back then we knew little about such movements and less about how, seemingly illogically, groups that we might think are opposed to each other find it expedient to play at forming temporary alliances when they decide that they have a common enemy.

Israeli politics is full of that and possibly Netanyahu is the greatest practitioner of politics based upon, first, frightening people with tales of an enemy, then gathering together parties of oddities with no chance of power themselves but grateful to be given a seat in the cabinet. It makes for unstable government but as long as the

narrative of threat is maintained, even cranked up when power looks as though it might slip away, someone like Netanyahu can cling to power.

We arrived at the old Ben Gurion Airport. If you go to the modern airport you see an architectural statement of power and solidity. All the walls are clad in Jerusalem Stone. They shout at you. You are required to be impressed. Back then you landed at a somewhat disorganised place with a car park that seemed to have little logic to it. Clearly it did to taxi drivers but not to us.

And so into Tel Aviv driving through what we had no idea back then had been a Palestinian village from which the inhabitants were expelled. In *The Invention of the Land of Israel* (2012) Shlomo Sand, a professor at Tel Aviv University dedicates the book to the people of al-Sheik Muwannis.

We pass the British and French embassies and, almost opposite on Hayarkon Street the HQ of the Labour Party. Yes it was spelled with a 'u' in 1996. Today reading the autobiography of Chaim Herzog, born in Belfast, grew up in Dublin, educated in Aberystwyth, whose father spoke fluent Irish and who led the Israeli Labour Party it is difficult to reconcile a picture of a man so elegant, sophisticated and learned dedicating his life to the suppression of an indigenous people.

Settled in the hotel we went for a walk on the promenade and received a surprise. It was named after a Scouser, Herbert Samuel the first Governor General of Palestine. More on his grandson another time; for now just to mention that he was at university with Thatcher and had something to say.

Next time I hope to write about the struggle to drive more quality into the programme.

Cliff Jones 6<sup>th</sup>. July 2019

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