

Scholarly Jewish Idealists Kill To Drive British From Palestine

'Stern Gang,' Carrying On Program of Slain Fascist Chief, Copies Tactics of the Irish Republican Army

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By Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

CAIRO, Egypt, Jan. 13—The assassination of Lord Moyne, British Resident Minister in the Middle East, for which two young Palestinian Jews are being tried for their lives by a Cairo military court, represents the most sensational outrage committed by the group formed by Abraham Stern, who was killed by Palestine police in a shooting affray almost three years ago.

His followers have been carrying on a series of bombing and shooting attacks on Palestine police and British officials in Palestine ever since.

The Moyne murder was the first time they crossed the Palestine border in what Stern's followers call their "war against the British Empire" and which the British and most Palestinian citizens, including most Jews, denounce as a series of illegal outrages.

Stern was a tall, thin, intellectual-looking young man with features along the lines El Greco painted. He was a classical scholar who had a fine record at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and for some time afterward earned his living by touring and teaching.

He received a scholarship as a classical student in Italy in the 1930's before Premier Mussolini adopted an anti-Jewish policy. While studying in Florence he became influenced by fascist ideas and methods and also by Anglophobia. He returned to Palestine imbued with both and commenced forming his terroristic organization, which is commonly known as the "Stern gang," among friends and former fellow students.

"Stern gang" is a misnomer, because Stern's followers are not gangsters seeking personal gain, but misguided idealists who think that by committing criminal outrages they are achieving idealistic victories. They are in the same tradition as the assassins of the Irish Republican Army, whose tactics they have assiduously studied, and America's own John Brown.

They have studied such incongruous subjects as gunnery and demolitions on the one hand and the history of the Jews by Josephus on the other. Some have adopted the names of zealots mentioned in accounts of the efforts by First Century Jews to expel the Roman armies.

Stern basically contended that his objectives justified his means and that therefore as Eliahu Bet-Tsouri—one of his followers and together with Eliahu Hakim, the admitted murderers of Lord Moyne and his British corporal chauffeur—bluntly stated in court they were "cold-blooded" and often fought "cruelly."

In his blind eagerness to expel the British from Palestine he was ready to make deals with anyone to accomplish his aim. Although Britain was unquestionably fighting on the side of world Jewry in its war against Hitlerism and the Axis, when the military situation looked bleak for Britain in 1941 Stern made a secret deal with Italian agents in Beirut to aid them when the Axis should eventually invade the Middle East.

The main agreement in this deal was that, when the Axis conquered Palestine, Stern and his followers were to be recognized as leaders of the Jewish community there. The ridiculous, blind, suicidal aspects of this arrangement were not apparent to Stern and his followers and typify the dangerously misled conceptions of his whole movement.

Following Stern's death—his followers have sought to popularize him among Palestinian youth as a martyr—his movement was for a long time quiescent because the Palestine police and British authorities succeeded in rounding up many of its leaders and others were killed.

Twenty important figures in the group escaped from prison and

soon the terrorist campaign was resumed. Its recent highlights have been the attempted assassination of Sir Harold MacMichael, High Commissioner of Palestine, and the murder of Lord Moyne.

The Stern group is a very small minority group of Palestinian Jewry and the active element is even smaller, although extremely well organized. Its adherents are undoubted fanatics and must be recognized as sincere idealists, although this does not in the least condone their criminal methods with their tragic results.