

I MEET THE ARAB PROGRESSIVES

By A. B. Magil

WALK down Khoury Street in the Arab section of Haifa, and you will come across a four-story house with a sign hung from the top story. On the sign, black letters against a red background, are words in Arabic and Hebrew. They read: "League for National Liberation."

Any one of the Arab families living on the lower floors will direct you up to the large room that is the office of the League. There you will not be received by a secretary at a switchboard. The League can't afford such accessories. But you will face directly, sitting behind an orderly desk, Tawfiq Toubi or Emile Chabibi or Issam Abassi or some other of the leaders of what has become the most influential Arab organization in Palestine.

When I say "the most influential," I must add that this organization has no influence at all among the Arab effendis, wealthy business men and priests, who swarm around either Abdullah of Transjordan or the ex-Mufti and ex-nazi agent, Haj Amin el Husseini—depending on whether the feathering in their nests is British or American. Nor does the League for National Liberation have any standing with the United Nations, which recognizes the Mufti's hand-picked Arab Higher Committee as spokesman for the Palestine Arabs. And unfortunately it cannot be said that the League has the ear of the government of Israel, despite the fact that it is the only Arab organization in Palestine that supports the United Nations partition decision, fights the foreign Arab invaders and works for friendship and cooperation between Arabs and Jews.

It is among the ordinary folk of the Arab population—the peasants and workers for whom the war of aggression has been an even greater disaster than for the Jews—that the League has won wide confidence and support. Some four hundred thousand of these working people are today refugees, homeless and wretched. They are sick of a war they didn't want and in which, with few exceptions, they took no part. They are disillusioned in leaders they looked to in the past who have so heartlessly betrayed them. That is why the voice of the League is for them increasingly the voice of hope—a voice that calls for ending the war, for driving out the foreign mercenaries, for setting up people's fronts throughout the Arab sector of Palestine, for the creation of an independent, democratic Arab state, for peace and cooperation with Israel.

I recall that when the first news came in June that an Arab organization, the League for National Liberation, had distributed thousands of copies of two anti-war leaflets, one addressed to soldiers and the other to civilians, many Jewish men and women in Israel were filled with wonder

A. B. MAGIL is a journalist and former editor of the *New Masses*. He has just returned from a six months trip to Israel as *Daily Worker* correspondent.

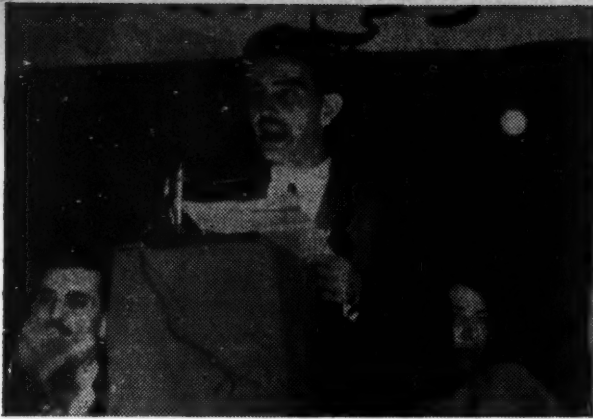
and half incredulity. Some said: "Communists. They don't amount to much." A few weeks later came news of anti-war demonstrations in Nablus, Gaza, Majdal, Nebrow, the Old City of Jerusalem and other Arab areas—demonstrations organized by the League for National Liberation in the teeth of terror. United Nations officials in Haifa reported that the League was gaining new adherents among war-weary Arabs, and the Beirut Arabic radio testified to the scope of these struggles by mentioning them in at least one broadcast.

Who are these Arabs whose courage and remarkable work have won occasional praise even from conservative Jewish quarters in Israel? They are the Arab communists of Palestine. And now they have taken a further step to fulfill the implications of their work: in the state of Israel they have united with the Jewish communists and have entered the Communist Party of Israel; in the Arab sector of Palestine, where they must work underground, they are transforming the League into a separate Communist Party to which Jewish communists living in that sector will also belong. And when the first elections (now scheduled for January) take place in Israel, among the communists who will undoubtedly be elected to the constituent assembly there will be Arabs as well as Jews.

Thus the fight for the realization of the UN decision of November 29, 1947, dividing Palestine on the basis of democratic self-determination for both its nations, has resulted in the *unification* of the vanguard of these nations. October 22, when the unification formally took place at a mass meeting in Haifa, was a great day for Israel, a defeat for the Anglo-American cabal who want to keep Jews and Arabs divided and fighting each other instead of the common imperialist enemy.

"This is something we should have done two years ago," said Tawfiq Toubi as we sat sipping coffee on the terrace of his home a few days before the October 22 meeting. In the distance lay the blue Mediterranean, and rising out of it, sprawling in the sun, that Haifa which he loved so well. This tall, handsome Arab, who speaks fluent, cultured English, has become at the age of 26 the leading political figure among the Arabs in Israel.

"Some people who have been very friendly to us don't like it," Toubi continued. He was referring to certain leaders of the United Workers Party who sought to dissuade Toubi and his colleagues from uniting with the Jewish communists. "But we are convinced that the interests of both the Jewish and the Arab peoples of Palestine will be best served by a single international party. We want our Arab members not only to fight for Arab rights, but to concern themselves with all the problems that affect the citizens of Israel."



Emile Chabibi addressing the unification meeting

One man was missing at that meeting in Haifa, a man whose name I had often heard but whom I never met: Emile Touma, the head of the League for National Liberation. Early this year Touma was arrested by the Lebanese authorities and sent to a concentration camp from which he only recently won his release (though not his complete freedom) through a hunger strike. But the spirit of Touma was there and his closest comrades were carrying on his work. And beside them stood their Jewish comrades: Samuel Mikunis, general secretary of the Communist Party of Israel, who in years of work as a civil engineer had come to know intimately the Arab peoples in the Middle East; those two gifted youngsters, Meyer Vilner and Esther Vilenska, each aged thirty, who share with Mikunis leadership of Israel's communists (Esther Vilenska is also editor of the party daily, *Kol Haam*); that tiny dynamo, Ruth Luvitch, who is secretary of the party organization in Tel Aviv; and others.

The Jewish communists are not the only progressives in Israel who advocate Jewish-Arab cooperation. But they are the only ones who consistently practice what they preach. And when Mikunis, the sole Communist representative in the Provisional State Council (the temporary equivalent of parliament) recently arose and asked Prime Minister David Ben Gurion to order an investigation of certain acts committed against the Arab population in several villages in the Nazareth area, he was defending not merely the interests of the Arab people, but of the Jewish as well. For such acts are a discredit to the Jewish state and a danger to it.

In our country it is not generally understood that the Arab policy of the Israeli government is harmful and foolhardy: its price is being paid in Jewish blood and eventually perhaps even in a large part of Jewish independence. It is a fact at one time freely admitted by official Jewish sources that, in contrast to the disturbances in 1936-39, very few of the Palestinian Arabs have participated in the war against the Jews. Instead of converting this into an asset for the Jewish state, the government leaders have done everything to turn it into a liability. The Jewish authori-

ties did not instigate the flight of some 400,000 Arabs from their homes. That was done by the Arab reactionaries and the British, playing on the fears of the ordinary folk. But it should be frankly said that Jewish looting, officially deplored but unofficially condoned, and the later action of Jewish military commanders in driving men, women and children out of Arab villages, contributed to the flight and seemed to confirm the fears of the Arabs.

At the same time all reports indicate that the experiences of the last few months have deeply embittered the refugees against both native and foreign Arab reactionaries. That this bitterness has in some places taken the form of open demonstrations against the war, is an indication of the latent reservoirs of strength that exist among these much abused people. One would think that this offered a golden opportunity to the leaders of the Jewish state to acquire a major ally and deprive their enemies of a major issue against the Jews. One would think that even realistic and patriotic conservatives, let alone people who profess to be socialists and democrats, would lose no time in seizing this opportunity.

Instead, Foreign Minister Moshe Shertok, playing what he no doubt regards as astute politics, has repeatedly announced that not even after the war will the refugees necessarily be allowed to return to their homes, that this is a matter for horse-trading in negotiating the peace settlement. Thereby of course he proclaims the hollowness of Zionist promises that in the Jewish state Arab citizens will have equal rights with Jews. But what is more important: he multiplies Israel's enemies, renders more difficult and costly its war of liberation, and strengthens the hand of the Arab rulers and their Anglo-American mentors and pay-masters.

The same folly, the same chauvinist blindness characterize the provisional government's attitude toward the implementation of the other half of the original UN decision, that which provides for the creation of an independent democratic Arab state. While eager to seize bits of that projected state on the ground that the security of the Jewish state requires an extension of its frontiers, the government has shown itself strangely indifferent to the Anglo-American scheme for annexing the Arab sector of Palestine to the synthetic kingdom of Britain's puppet, Abdullah. It would be difficult to make out a case that western Galilee would provide an adequate counterweight to British bases and British troops at the very doorstep of Israel.

That is why it is so important that those among both Jews and Arab who support *the whole* of the November 29, 1947 resolution and who recognize that without the whole there can be only *partial* peace and *partial* independence in Palestine, are now united in one party. The veterans of the underground fight against Arab reaction and its imperialist masters have clasped hands with the best anti-imperialist fighters among the Jews. That is an augury of the future: the unity of the vanguard is the prelude to the unity of the peoples that must be won in struggle. This alone can guarantee freedom and democracy for Israel and all of Palestine.