

Solving The Arab - Jewish Question

• by E. Golomb

RECENT REPORTS from Palestine and the neighboring countries reveal the beginning of a change in the relations between Jews and Arabs. The firm stand and the progress of the Jewish community of Palestine during the three years of terrorism, on one hand, and the mass impoverishment among the Arabs which resulted from their political strikes and the riots on the other hand, have brought many Arabs to the realization that the plans of the Mufti and his bands to destroy the Jewish community and to prevent its development are pipe dreams which bring great suffering upon the Arabs. This realization began to grow even while the terror lasted, but any Arab who at that time dared to speak his mind, let alone act on this realization, was immediately branded as a traitor and many such lost their lives at the hands of the terrorists. The number of Arabs killed by internal Arab terrorism exceeded the number of Jews who lost their lives. Under such circumstances there were but few Arabs wanting peace who dared to come out in the open against the terrorists. Only after the outbreak of the present war, when the patrolling of the borders became more intensive and the Mufti and his followers who maintained ties with Germany and Italy came under a more strict surveillance and it became impossible to send agitators, terrorists and money into Palestine, did various Arabs begin to dare to reestablish relationship with the Jews and to announce their point of view in public. During the past few months we reached a situation where not only murderous attacks have almost ceased, but even the Arabic press, which previously incited to violence against Jews, has changed its tune. "Falastin" and "Adifaa" which all through the riots piped the tune of the Mufti, began publishing essays on the need for Jewish-Arab cooperation to save the country from the economic dangers of the war. "Hakikat al Amar," an Arab language paper published by the Histadruth, Jewish Federation of Labor in Palestine, began to circulate widely and publicly throughout the country. The Egyptian Arabic press even went a step further. "Mukats" and "Al Basir," the most widely read papers not only in Egypt but also throughout the Arab countries, declared in their articles that the economic and scientific forces which the Jews developed in Palestine could serve as an anchor of salvation for the economy of the entire Near East. The agricultural department of the Egyptian government which planned to send a commission to Europe for purposes of study decided to send the commission to the Ziv

institute in Rehoboth, Palestine. Do not all these manifestations point to a significant change in Arab opinions? Is it not our duty, despite all other pressing worries, to make special efforts to advance the solution of the painful problem of the relations of Jews and Arabs in Palestine and the surrounding countries?

Let us not fool ourselves that this problem will be solved by itself. We still have a long and difficult road to traverse. The positive evaluation on the part of the Arabs of the economic and cultural contributions of the Jews to their welfare is no doubt encouraging and important. But experience in Palestine teaches us that this is not enough and that in crucial periods political upheaval is liable to undo the achievements attained by economic and cultural factors alone. For years the Histadruth has fostered economic and cultural activity among Arab workers. It maintained joint activity with the railroad workers union, which included both Jews and Arabs, it supported special trade unions of Arab workers, it maintained clubs for organized Arab workers, helped in founding loan societies, extended medical aid through its sick fund (Kupath Cholim); but despite all this, the joint activity was of no avail when the rioting broke out. The unions built on joint Arab-Jewish membership broke down, the economic institutions disappeared and the Arab workers' clubs were emptied. Only few of the Arab workers withstood the pressure of the propaganda on treason and terror. Similarly there were other groups among the Arabs, who recognized the contributions of the Jewish community and the need for joint action but failed to resist the pressure. The efforts of Jewish individuals and groups (Kalvarisky and others) who devoted great efforts toward the fostering of friendly Arab-Jewish relations were undone. This was also the fate of the ties which the Jewish Agency established after great effort through direct contacts with Arab leaders and through constant relations with the heads of tribes and important families and various Arab circles throughout the country. The only achievement which remained even during the period of terrorism were the ties of the Jewish Agency with influential Arabs outside Palestine and with the Arab press in Syria and Egypt.

Now that opportunities of meeting with Arabs have again appeared, we should not be blinded by this fact without learning the lesson of the past and drawing the correct conclusions from the present situation. Whether we like it or not, we must realize that if in addition to the attempts to

foster relations of friendship in the economic and cultural fields there will not also be found a political solution, all our efforts may again come to naught one of these days. The economic advantages derived even by large sections of the Arab community will not prove effective on the day when political national ambitions will come to the fore. Who can guarantee that these ambitions will not crop up anew even during this war, or at its conclusion?

Militant Arab nationalism may arise again whether the Arab countries emerge strengthened or weakened from this war. In the first case Arab nationalism may feed on the envy of Palestinian Arabs of their neighbors and also on exaggerated national hopes. In the second case it may feed on the need of the neighboring countries to compensate their injured national sentiments by reckless support of the aggressive ambitions of Palestine Arabs and of a struggle against Zionism. This was also the case in the past. At the end of the first world war and with the establishment of the Arab states, Arabic nationalism in Palestine increased. The internal defeats that followed in the Arab countries—squabbles between different religious groups and tribes and quarrels between different pretenders to power in Iraq, economic and cultural debility in Iraq and Syria and finally the great political defeat of the annexation of Alexandretta by Turkey—only added fuel to the flames of Arab nationalism in Palestine. The competitors for power who suffered political defeats found no easier way to regain popularity than to appear as the champions of Arabs against Zionism.

To forestall such a sad historical repetition we must make all the efforts—insofar as these depend on us—to work out a political program for ourselves and for the Arabs, a program that would satisfy the historic hopes of the Jews and would meet the needs arising out of Jewish suffering in this period, and would also conform to the fundamental needs of the Arabs, a program that could serve as a banner to the forces of peace among the Jews and the Arabs in Palestine and its neighboring countries.

The question is whether such a program is possible and what should be its fundamental planks. There is no doubt that no program will entirely do away with manifestations of demagoguery and intransigence on the part of Arabs. But we are in duty bound to attempt to weaken such manifestations and to develop important Arab forces who wish for peace on the basis of existing common interests by showing a sincere desire for cooperation and mutual assistance.

The conception of the problem as outlined above could serve as an accepted basis for the main Zionist bodies. But the situation is different

when we begin to deal with the problem concretely. We meet with two fundamentally different approaches. The first approach is that of the "Peace Leagues," beginning with "Brith Shalom" and ending with the "leagues" that continue to exist to this day albeit with not much success among the public. These groups believe that the matter of friendly relations between Jews and Arabs can be the subject of action of individual groups and need not necessarily be the task of the entire body of Zionist Jews. This does not mean that if their views were to be accepted by the central organizations that they would continue to remain separate groups. But since their views did not come to be accepted, they feel that even a limited and separate group is capable and has a right to do political work in this field.

The question of the activities of these "leagues" on their own responsibility in such a complicated problem is not merely organizational. It concerns the very question of Arab-Jewish relations. It is in the nature of a group that limits itself to but one problem not to see the problem in all its ramifications. Jewish-Arab peace was transformed by these leagues into an aim in itself instead of being viewed as a Zionist problem. As a result, the first of the leagues, "Brith Shalom," finally reached the point of abandoning Zionism for the sake of peace. Its basis for peace was fundamentally that of the British "White Paper": limitation of immigration and a minority status for Jews. At one of their meetings about ten years ago they suggested stopping Jewish immigration to Palestine after the number of Jews will have reached 400,000. According to this suggestion Jewish immigration was to have stopped three years ago. The "leagues" that followed "Brith Shalom" were not so extreme but also suffered from similar weaknesses. The right of Jews to settle in Palestine and to build economic enterprises that would absorb Jewish workers was placed by them under some form of question mark. Individual members of the "leagues", it is true, do not want to renounce any Jewish rights but these salve their conscience by dreams of easy solutions to a complicated problem, by criticism of the Zionist or economic institutions and by exaggerating the importance of transitory phenomena. To these we can look for no serious solution.

Another approach to the problem is current among the general institutions which deal with the Arab question. These do not overlook the difficulties of the problem and are not ready to renounce any fundamental rights, for the sake of whose attainment and not renunciation the entire Arab problem is dealt with. An effort is made by these to find a way that would satisfy the fundamental needs of both peoples. At the basis of

these efforts there lies the assumption that both Jews and Arabs must still go a long way before attaining independence and that peace and mutual assistance will be of benefit to both.

We need hardly speak of the great efforts that will still be required for the transfer of masses of Jews to Palestine and enabling them to be settled and to build their forms of life. Nor is it necessary to speak of the importance of peace and mutual understanding for the attainment of the above goal, since this is obvious. But the Arabs too must still go a long way before attaining genuine independence even in those countries which technically are already independent. Iraq is constantly confronted with internal and external dangers. This country is rich in potentialities and poor in ability. Underpopulation, lack of capital and underdeveloped scientific forces hinder its development. The internal squabbles between the Kurds and the Arabs, and between the Sunnite and Shiite religions among the Arabs, hinder Iraq still further. On the other hand, the wealth of Iraq's natural resources is a constant temptation for neighboring countries and for European capitalism. Such a country should be interested in the increase of its Arab population and the development of its riches under conditions of peace and mutual aid in the Near East. The attempts of families or cliques to enhance their power through anti-Zionist political demagoguery must meet with defeat when confronted with a policy leading toward the enrichment and strengthening of Iraq. This is also true of Syria. Syria has already suffered because of its internal economic weakness. Not only was Alexandretta taken away but its entire independence is now questionable. Instead of the French-Syrian pact there came the fall of the government, recognition of the territorial demands of the Druzes and Ilawis against the central government and the placing of the entire country under French commissioners. Trans-Jordan is certainly in a weaker and less independent position than Syria. All of these countries are interested, or should be interested, in peace and collaboration in the Near East. A Jewish Palestine, with a developed agriculture and industry, with capital and forces of science, can advance the development of the East without introducing the danger of outside political domination, more than any other force in the world. This situation justifies the hope that the idea of a federation of the interested Arab countries together with a Jewish Palestine will in the end win in the mind of the Arabic world. This realization is still weak in the Arab world. But every new political difficulty in the East and every sign of the growing strength of the Jewish community in Palestine increase this conviction among the Arabs.

This should be one of the fundamental bases of Zionist policy toward the Arabs. The efforts of the Jewish Agency in increasing and strengthening political activity among the Arab countries are therefore not only the most successful, but also the ones that will lead to the desired end more effectively than all others.

It is obvious that a policy of peace is organically bound up with just relations between Jews and Arabs in Palestine itself. It is quite possible that with the growing progress of the neighboring Arab countries and with their growing desire to increase their populations, there will come about a measure of emigration from Palestine to these independent, growing Arab countries. But even in such a case the emigration of Arabs from Palestine will never attain large proportions. Guaranteeing the complete rights and liberties of the Palestine Arabs is no doubt a pre-condition for any policy of peace in the East. In our days freedom is indissolubly bound up with self-administration and participation in the government that determines all matters touching the interested parties. A Zionist program on the Arab question must therefore include the principles of autonomy for the Arab community in Palestine and its participation in the government as a unit with equal rights. A national unit cannot be satisfied with mere rights for the individuals that comprise it. It must also be assured that its rights as a national group will not be infringed upon. For this reason some Zionist programs include the concept of political parity, equal participation in the government by national bodies, irrespective of whether they are a majority or a minority in the country.

Zionism cannot submit to limitations in the sphere of immigration, colonization and the right to develop Palestine for the absorption of Jews. But Zionism must assume limitations that will guarantee that it will not dominate others nor force them to do things against their will. On these principles there will arise a true bond of peace between Jews and Arabs. This will come sooner or later, after a rapid agreement or as a result of protracted negotiation, discussion and development. Fate has decreed that Jews and Arabs live together in Palestine. We can direct this fate for the benefit of both peoples.

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