

ISRAEL: THE SHEIKH AND THE ZIONISTS

By AL FINDLEY

The problem of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel has been receiving more attention recently.

While the General Zionist Party (the conservative bourgeois party in the government) is pressing for the "normalization" of the Arab situation by abolishing military rule and other proposals, the main body of Zionists continues to regard the Arab citizens of Israel as enemies.

Unfortunately this latter point of view is dominant among the leadership of Mapai (the government labor party), who object to even the timid "normalization" proposals of the General Zionists.

Some months ago Sheikh Taher el Tabiri of Nazareth suggested an exchange of population between Israel and the Arab states. This was not to be a forced migration but was to be entirely voluntary, with each individual or family making its choice.

The proposal of El Tabiri was received with much satisfaction in government circles and given wide publicity by the Israeli and Zionist press in the country. With such encouragement the sheikh submitted his plan formally to the president of Israel.

The proposal then came to the attention of the foreign correspondents, especially the correspondent of the N. Y. Times, who proceeded to interview the sheikh.

In the course of the interview Sheikh El Tabiri gave his reasons for desiring

an exchange of population. He pointed out that Arab property was being confiscated under "various pretexts," there was taking place "the sale of Arab property to Jewish immigrants," and that the government of Israel "doubts the loyalty of Arabs in Israel."

The joy of some of the Zionists at El Tabiri's proposals cooled down considerably when his reasons were given international publicity.

The Yiddish press in the United States declared that sources close to the Israeli government were very much disappointed. They had thought, when the sheikh made the proposal for population exchange, that he was posing as a friend of Israel. (Why anybody who wants his people to leave Israel should be considered a special friend of Israel was not explained.) However, now that he gives as his motive the fact that Arabs are persecuted in Israel, he reveals himself as an enemy. . . . The moral, by implication, was: never trust an Arab.

In contrast with the preceding buildup of El Tabiri as an important figure, the sheikh was now declared to be only a minor figure in Nazareth, although more important among the local Moslems.

REACTIONARY SOLUTION

An exchange of population, with all its attendant miseries, is an extreme step that can perhaps be justified in cases where oppression and suspicion have created such a poisonous atmosphere between two peoples as to make impossible

any other solution. On the question of Arab-Jewish relations, such a low point has not yet been reached.

The Times correspondent reported that most Arabs canvassed declared that they would cling to their homes in Israel. This sentiment of the people was also that of other Arab leaders.

The Zionist leaders, who favor ridding Israel of a troublesome problem, the Arab minority, were blind to the self-accusing implications of their position: that the respective majority populations were mistreating their minorities.

Unfortunately, it was the British Labor Party which first proposed an exchange of populations in Palestine. The Zionist leaders now point to this labor-socialist "precedent" to support their policy. At that time, the Zionists were cool to the idea. Now that England can no longer be blamed for the ill-feeling between Jews and Arabs in Israel, the leaders of the state must assume full responsibility.

The reactionary implications of an exchange of population are so great, the resultant deterioration of mutual feeling between peoples who have common problems and needs also so great, that such a move is far from desirable.

The existing feeling of large sections of the minority peoples, to remain in the countries where they live and fight for equal rights, makes it mandatory that all efforts be directed toward measures to achieve full rights and privileges for all minorities.