

The Costs of Arab-Jewish Cold War: Ihud's Experiment in Moral Politics

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by Ernst Simon, *Commentary*, September 1950

For many years, some of the leading thinkers and pioneering figures of modern Israel have formed a small group, "Ihud," with political ideals strikingly at variance with those of the major political parties of the Jewish community of Palestine and, now, of Israel. Their political program was explicitly based on moral and ethical principles, including the refusal under any circumstances to countenance the establishment of a Jewish state by force. Ernst Simon, professor of education at the Hebrew University, who had formerly been co-editor with Martin Buber of the monthly *Der Jude* and an instructor at the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* of Franz Rosenzweig in Frankfurt, was and is one of the leaders of this group. He here describes their role in Palestinian politics over the past twenty years, their major failure and limited successes, and considers what their role may be in the Israel of the future.

The question of Jewish-Arab relations has seldom been in the foreground of official Zionist thought. Yet the fathers of Zionism were constantly calling attention, though only in passing, to its importance. Herzl began with the Utopian notion that Palestine was an uninhabited country, and summed up his solution of the Jewish question in the slogan, "The land without a people for the people without a land." But the reports of others and then the evidence of his own eyes must have convinced him of his error, and he later sought to include the Arab population in his program for the upbuilding of Palestine. In his Utopian novel *Altneuland*, which was his last comprehensive exposition of the aims of Zionism, Herzl even goes so far as to speak, no longer of a "Jewish state," but of a "new social order" embracing all the inhabitants of Palestine. Its first president, as Herzl imagines it, is a Mohammedan Turk. So interwoven were national and humanitarian considerations in the founder of Zionism that he saw the redemption of his own people in the image of the reconciliation and fraternization of nations. Those who speak today of the Jewish state as the realization of Herzl's dream should also call attention to the extent to which it departs from the original ideal.

In the fifty years between the first statement of the idea of a Jewish state and its actual realization, there were always individuals and small groups to insist on the primary importance of the Arab question in Zionist politics and in the reconstruction of Palestine. But their views were listened to, and had influence, only in the short periods directly following the Arab uprisings—that is, in 1921, 1929, 1931, 1939, and in the years just before the establishment of the State of Israel. Once order was reestablished, the Yishuv and its leaders turned back to the

apparently more pressing cares of reconstruction, and the Arab problem was more or less “repressed.” However, a lurking realization that the settlement of the question was still pending—and that in all probability it would be bloody—was present in the people’s unconscious and in the plans of the leadership.

Those who refused on moral and also, as most did, on religious grounds to countenance any solution by force, joined together at the beginning of 1940 to establish a new organization called Ihud (“Unity”). Ihud’s chairman was Dr. Judah L. Magnes, the real founder of the Hebrew University and a public figure of the first rank. He had started out as an American Reform rabbi, but under Zionist and other influences his religious views took a more conservative and traditional turn. At the same time, however, he was an outspoken radical liberal in politics. In public speeches and at large rallies he had argued against America’s entry into the First World War, much to the dismay of many of his Jewish friends. His position on the Arab question, after he settled in Palestine in 1921, brought him into increasing disagreement with his Zionist political friends. During almost thirty years of activity in Palestine he won the confidence of a large number of non-Jews, British Christians as well as Mohammedan Arabs, but in politics he found himself increasingly isolated from his own people.

The small group that supported Magnes (though they did not refrain from criticizing details of his policies among themselves), and who looked to him to lead the way to a peaceful attainment of the Zionist goal, failed to recruit many new adherents after they had organized under the name of Ihud. Ihud never had more than a few hundred supporters and readers of its literature. Yet, even so, it numbered among its active members people whose services to Zionist reconstruction are a part of history. I will mention only three names here: Martin Buber; Chaim Margalioth Kalvarisky, who from the turn of the century helped direct the Rothschild work of colonization; and Henrietta Szold, that great American Jewess who directed both the medical auxiliary of Hadassah and the Youth Aliyah, which organized the immigration and the training and settlement on the land of Jewish youth from the imperiled countries of Europe.

For a number of years the intellectuals making up the membership of Ihud worked together with the left-wing Hashomer Hatzair, a Marxist but not Communist working-class movement. The two groups joined together in the League for Jewish-Arab Cooperation and Rapprochement, whose goal was the establishment of a binational state in Palestine in which the two peoples, Arabs and Jews, would enjoy equal political rights, regardless of which was in the majority. This fundamental principle was called “political parity.” But there were decided differences of opinion between the two partners in the League as to what, exactly, binationalism meant. The Hashomer Hatzair was convinced that this policy of reconciliation did not conflict with the principle of unlimited Jewish immigration—feeling indeed that such immigration was the indispensable condition for the success of the binational program. For it would make possible a revolutionary alliance between the Jewish and Arab working classes against the half-feudal economy of the Middle East and against British imperialism; Jewish and

Arab proletarians together would lay the basis for the modernization of the country and its political liberation.

Ihud, on the contrary, saw in immigration the core of the problem of binationalism. It interpreted parity not only in a political sense, but as applying also to the future relative sizes of the two populations, Arab and Jewish, as well as to the division of the arable land. And in all these things Ihud believed that complete equality should prevail. Once this goal was reached by (it was hoped) peaceful means, further Jewish immigration could be regulated by amicable agreement so as to make up the difference between the large natural increase of the Arab population and the smaller increase of the Jewish. As a condition for all negotiations, however, Dr. Magnes always insisted on the immediate admission into Palestine of the 100,000 refugees in the European DP camps.

Ihud carried on its activities completely in the open. It published its own Hebrew monthly, *Baayot* ("Problems"), under the editorship of Martin Buber and Ernst Simon, issued a volume of collected essays in English, *Towards Union in Palestine*, and sent speakers to represent its views at meetings and at the public hearings of the UN commissions deliberating on the future of Palestine. Dr. Magnes' statements on such occasions always made an unusual impression, yet never had any direct political consequences.

Ihud also had relations with the Arab world. At critical moments, when the safety of the Yishuv was imperiled, Dr. Magnes was sometimes called upon to act as the semi-official Zionist mediator, though he did not work through official channels. As a mediator he achieved some notable successes and averted many a calamity. Occasionally matters went so far that Ihud found itself involved in political conversations with Arab leaders, and at one time it even managed to reach a preliminary agreement with them on the basis of general parity.

There were two factors, however, that stood in the way of conclusive results. For one thing, Ihud, together with the even larger and more representative League for Jewish-Arab Cooperation and Rapprochement, spoke for only a limited section of Palestinian Jewry and of course never claimed to represent the majority opinion or to have enough authority to commit the Jewish community of Palestine to any binding pacts. Although the official Zionist leadership blamed Ihud for not producing agreements with the Arabs, that leadership blocked any possible agreements in advance by the fact that it felt itself bound at the same time by the new Zionist program calling for the transformation of the whole of Palestine into a Jewish commonwealth.

The second obstacle to an accord with the Arabs lay with the Arabs themselves. It happened more than once that Arab leaders ready to talk politics with us, or otherwise conciliatory in attitude (as, for example, in trade-union questions), fell victim to assassins from among their own people. These assassins were never identified, but even the most cautious and objective historian would agree that they must have taken their orders directly from Hadj Amin Husseini,

the former Mufti of Jerusalem and leader of the extremist wing of the Arab nationalist movement.

A third factor, the British Mandate government, was the subject of differing opinions among the advocates of Jewish-Arab understanding. The socialist Hashomer Hatzair saw in British imperialism the principal obstacle to peace, and believed that without British intervention the two peoples would have come to an understanding long ago. Ihud was much more cautious in its judgment. All one could say, we thought, was that no clear and uniform policy could be discerned in all the varied and vacillating attitudes and actions of British officials and individual Englishmen. But certainly the British did not openly declare and consistently pursue any policy for economic union between the two peoples within a common political framework on the binational line.

Historical events seem now to have completely invalidated most of Ihud's assumptions and predictions. The events themselves are fresh in our memory and need no recapitulating: the UN decision to partition Palestine; the Jewish acceptance and the Arab rejection of partition; the British evacuation of Palestine, which almost intentionally left the country in a state of utter anarchy; the uprising of a part of the native population and the invasion of Palestine by all the neighboring states, followed by the brilliant military victories of the Jews on all fronts, with the exception of the Old City of Jerusalem and a part of its immediate vicinity.

In three things especially was Ihud deceived. First of all, it underestimated the desire and determination of the Jewish nation to establish a state of its own. Ihud was composed of intellectuals who in their political thinking had gone beyond the notion of the state, believing that the social and political conditions of modern life required broader and more comprehensive forms of national and social organization. They did not understand the inner logic of a nationalist movement that was seeking belatedly to obtain what other peoples had long enjoyed: the concentration of its people in some one territory with at least a minimum of political "sovereignty." The anachronistic nature of Jewish history in the Diaspora, the characteristic tardiness of the Jewish response to the tendencies and movements working in the surrounding world, seemed to Ihud to make it possible, as it were, to skip the stage of the national state and to realize Zionism directly under the new communal forms to which the future seemed to be promised. In reality, however, the anachronistic character of Jewish history had an exactly opposite psychological effect on the Zionist movement. It caused emotions that had been late in developing to manifest themselves in more intense and violent forms than otherwise—like a case of delayed puberty in an individual. Passions long dammed up and forcibly repressed burst forth all at once; a messianic longing was at last fulfilled, however much the reality now achieved has fallen short of the messianic ideal.

Ihud's second error had to do with the comparative military strength of Arabs and Jews. It feared a defeat, even an overwhelming defeat, and the complete annihilation of the Jewish population of Palestine. In Ihud's small circle there was hardly a soul who believed in the

possibility of a victory—a victory that, if it should come, would have to be a miracle. This may have been want of faith on Ihud's part, but it was also connected with a reluctance in principle and on moral grounds to see Zionist aspirations realized on the ruins of the Arab settlements of Palestine. This negative attitude, this apprehensiveness, could not, in contrast with the positive resoluteness of the radicals among Ihud's opponents in the Zionist camp, become father to a plan of action, much less to deeds growing out of such a plan. It is true, of course, that most of the Jews of Palestine, and even some of their leaders, were likewise completely unprepared for the extent of the victory, if not for the fact of victory itself.

Ihud's third error was connected with the catastrophe suffered by the Jews of Europe. This was certainly as painful to the members of Ihud as it was to other Jews and Zionists in spite of all the unjust things that people said about Ihud; but Ihud underestimated the basic changes that had taken place in the character of the Zionist movement as a result of the events in Europe. Ihud was made up of three different types of peoples: veterans of the old Palestinian settlements, like Chaim Margalioth Kalvarisky, whom I have already mentioned, and Moshe Smelansky, one of the leaders of the Jewish farmers of Palestine; idealistic intellectuals of a religious bent, particularly those of Buber's school, who saw in Zionism both their own redemption as human beings and a higher stage in the development of the Jewish spiritual heritage; and, thirdly, young people, chiefly Western in origin, who were reluctant to renounce the humanist and international traditions of European culture. What these otherwise dissimilar groups had in common was their having freely chosen Zionism by an act of will, and at a time when other choices were open to most of them. This peculiarly constituted Zionism based upon personal choice, rather than upon a common fate, now met up with an objective historical situation in which homeless masses, pursued by the furies of persecution and pogroms, sought desperately for a place of refuge. A Zionism that is the result of an act of free choice is perhaps superior, as far as the individual is concerned, to a Zionism produced by necessity and adhered to as an emergency measure; but the men of Ihud, in imputing their own kind of Zionist convictions to masses living in the harshest physical misery, fell into error and failed to appreciate the spiritual state of the survivors of the European catastrophe.

As Against such errors in judgment, however, there are these correct evaluations and predictions by Ihud to be considered: Ihud never thought it would be possible to transform the whole—or even a part—of Palestine into a Jewish commonwealth, as contemplated in the official Zionist Biltmore program, without provoking armed opposition by the Arabs. In contrast with soothing official declarations about the likelihood of a peaceful realization of this program, Ihud never tired of warning Jews of the danger of war involved—and events unfortunately proved it right. And Ihud further reasoned that even with a Jewish victory—which, as I have said, it considered most unlikely—the threat of war would still continue to hang over the Jewish state. Ihud hopes the future will show it to be mistaken in this respect, but we in Israel are already feeling the consequences of living in a state of permanent preparation for war: a far-reaching militarization is going forward in every area of our life.

Over and over again in its publications during the last ten years, and particularly the last five, Ihud has likened the situation of a Jewish state established against the will of the Arab world to that of ancient Sparta hemmed in on every side by hostile Messenians. I do not wish to stress this comparison unduly, but without especial vigilance, particularly in matters spiritual, and without the courageous resistance of private individuals to the encroachments of military and political power, the possibility of an ideological militarism, with all its attendant dangers for culture and education, cannot be excluded. If these fears should be realized, the Jewish state would lose its inner legitimacy and most of its significance for the Jews of the Diaspora. In the long run it would have no further contribution to make to international Jewry and would have to expect in return the loss of much of its support.

Of One of our predictions—or rather fears—it is impossible for the time being to say definitely whether it has been proven right or wrong. The theory of binationalism assumed that the situation of a Jewish minority in an Arab Palestine, or conversely the situation of an Arab minority in a Jewish Palestine, would be an extremely difficult one, and that there would be great danger of irredentism. The official Zionists replied that this would be true for Jewish minorities in Arab countries, but not the other way round. Three reasons were given in support of this view, all of which were not always advanced at the same time. For one thing, it was said, we are enjoined by our religious tradition concerning the “stranger,” to “love him as thyself” (Lev. 19:34). Secondly, our two thousand years of minority existence and our liberal convictions have become so much a part of our flesh and blood that a few years of political independence would hardly cause us to forget or renounce them. And, lastly, the Jewish minorities that exist in almost all of the Arab states would serve as hostages against a Jewish state’s maltreatment of an Arab minority; even if religious and moral reasons proved insufficient, we would certainly accord an Arab minority complete equality of rights in order to protect our own minorities in Arab countries.

Today the positions in this debate have been signally reversed. Ihud now tries to make sure that its past fears will prove mistaken by reminding the public of these arguments, while its opponents on the contrary would often like to forget them. The motive of this desire to forget is a fear that the Arab minority in Israel, if given sufficient autonomy and allowed to grow, might be turned into the nucleus of a Fifth Column that would spring into action in the event of that “second round” so persistently spoken of at government rallies, military demonstrations, in the newspapers, and at meetings. I do not think I am being unfair when I say that official policy is aimed at keeping the number of Arabs in the State of Israel as small as possible, thus fulfilling, paradoxically enough, quite another Biblical verse about the stranger, this time the word of warning spoken of by the Egyptian king regarding the growing Israelite minority: “. . . come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and it come to pass that, when there befalleth us any war, they also join themselves unto our enemies, and fight against us, and get them up out of the land” (Exod. 1:10). I am not referring only to the Israeli attitude to the question of the Arab refugees; for this attitude holds also for the way in which the constitutionally guaranteed equality of rights is interpreted administratively and carried out economically.

There can be no doubt that the permanent tension within the country and at its frontiers has had some rather detrimental consequences, plainly evident to all the inhabitants, Jews and Arabs alike. We here list a few of them.

A very substantial percentage of the national income has to be earmarked for military purposes and, as such, is not under the control of the Israeli parliament, which is thus far not empowered to deal with the security budget, at least not openly so. The man on the street, the newspaper reader, remains in the dark as to what portion of his taxes is spent for the army—he only has the feeling that it is no small part.

This burden on the country's economy is further aggravated by the military considerations which influence most decisions even in seemingly quite peaceful quarters. The bulk of the new immigrants cannot be put to constructive agricultural or industrial work, but are immediately taken for active service; this in turn makes the army into the largest existing agency for adult education, in the direction, mainly, of Hebraization, assimilation within the national "melting pot," etc.

Even when the stage of colonization and settlement is finally reached, normal economic and social considerations are still not paramount. For example, in the case of borderline settlements, it is often not the fertility of the soil or the nearness of markets, but strategical and tactical position which decides the choice of a location.

Here we might pause to consider, in the general question of relations to the Arabs, the narrower one of markets. First, as to the internal market. In this aspect of the national economy, the Fellahin remaining within Israel play today an important role; apparently, they manage to make a fairly good living by selling their products to governmental and other agencies. In case of war, their friendliness of attitude and their readiness to remain on the soil may be of vital importance in the feeding of a country surrounded by hostile states and lacking, up to now, a sufficient number of trained farmers with knowledge of the special land conditions. But this friendly attitude has to be prepared now, not when it may be too late. Then there is the export market. We need only be reminded that the export market depends, to a great extent, on stable and favorable relations with our neighbors.

To return to more immediate military considerations. It may be said that the military preparation of the youth and, as a matter of fact, of the whole Jewish population, is carried on in Israel with an intensity which may be unique in the whole of the world. The semi-obligatory pre-military training begins at fifteen, at the latest, both for boys and girls. At about eighteen, both sexes must give a service of no less than two years—girls may spend one of them in agricultural labor—and after that, citizens are trained in an elaborate system of exercises each year until they reach a quite mature age. Thus, the chief of staff was able recently to remark

that the Israeli citizen must always regard himself as “a soldier on leave”—a remark which aroused a good deal of controversy.

All these facts are well known, constantly discussed and debated in the press, within Israel and abroad. Here we may add one or two comments. First, there is a danger of an all too sudden change in the psychic fabric of the Jewish youth and adult which may in turn cause a sort of collective neurosis, as is sometimes the case when artificially accelerated social processes have cut across the sense of historical continuity of those who are their bearers. Secondly, the intellectual level of the Jewish population as a whole may go down. True, the government and especially the Ministry of Security seem to realize this danger and have made considerable allowances with regard to duration and kind of military service of students of the Hebrew University, the Technion in Haifa, and the various teachers’ training colleges—but this leaves the basic problem untouched. The tragic truth is that if the Jews were, perhaps, once a nation with a surplus of intellectuals and professional workers, now, in consequence of the wholesale slaughter in Eastern Europe, their situation is nearer the reverse. For the new immigrants, it is true, the two years in the army serve as a school, as we have noted, but for other sections of the population the military service will cause a permanent loss in their intellectual and professional careers.

It is in problems such as these that *Ihud* now finds its sphere of activity. It is its consistent endeavor, with the help of its new publication *Ner* (“Light”), to rouse the public conscience and to remedy the abuses in our midst, whenever possible, by open discussion and free criticism. *Ihud* is not alone in this. All sorts of newspapers and periodicals, especially those of the liberal and socialist Left, constantly run articles of a similar tendency. There is, however, no other organized group in Israel for whose policy and activity such questions are paramount and the very justification of its continuing existence.

Ihud insists on full justice for the Arab minority, and wherever possible for the Arab refugees as well, not only to mitigate suffering that is often undeserved, but also in order to preserve the moral purity of the Jewish national movement. In the Arab problem we see, basically, part of a purely Jewish problem, just as the Jewish problem was at bottom a problem that belonged to the Christians. The creation of a Jewish state, which we of *Ihud* neither desired nor expected, offers us Jews, in addition to its inherent historical and political significance, the great moral opportunity of showing to what extent we seriously believe in those claims for universal right and justice which we have never tired of making on other peoples during the long years of our Diaspora existence. Now that we are for the first time in a position to receive rather than present petitions for justice, it will be seen whether our past concern with this matter was merely an “ideological superstructure” based on the selfish group interests of an eternal minority, or a real expression of our prophetic heritage. Our attitude to the “stranger” will be instrumental not only in the education of our children but even, curiously enough, in the moral evolution of our predecessors’ words and deeds. These will now be judged, in any case, by our own behavior.

It is our conviction that without the conclusion of a lasting peace between Israel and her neighbors there is little prospect that the Arab minority's claims will be satisfied. We always feared that the establishment of a Jewish state would sharply reduce the chances of a Jewish-Arab understanding, or even render it impossible. However, official Zionist leadership has, in the recent past, declared their desire for that lasting peace and their own belief that such a peace is only possible when both parties meet as political equals, negotiating an agreement as one state with another. Ihud tries, so far as it lies within its limited powers, to support all such negotiations in favor of peace, in the hope that they will lead to lasting results. At the same time it tries to shun the dangers of political dogmatism, and would, for example, heartily welcome a peace with Transjordan, although the left socialist groups of Israel see too deep a commitment to the "West" in such a step. Every step toward peace, no matter what its direction, is "progressive" in Ihud's eyes, irrespective of its "Western" or "Eastern" orientation. Yet we are also inclined to support the proclaimed foreign policy of Israel insofar as it seeks to pursue a neutral middle course between the Eastern and Western blocs, although we are aware of the formidable difficulties of such a position. Above everything else, we would prefer to have Israel and its neighboring countries enjoy a neutrality guaranteed by the United Nations.

Ihud means "unity." In the past, as I have said, we strove to realize this unity within the broad framework of a binational state. The whole undivided country, we had hoped, would be part of the larger unity of the peoples of the Middle East, which in turn would form part of the United Nations.

Political developments have outstripped the first stage of this program, but we of the Ihud are endeavoring to realize the second and third stages. There is hardly another country in the world, we think, and certainly not another people, that has as vital and precious a stake in the cause of world peace as Israel.