

Government Denies Arabs Freedom of Movement, Property Rights

Israel's Arab Policy: A Scandal

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By WILLIAM ZUKERMAN

Practically nothing is known in this country about the problem of the Arab minority in Israel. Ordinarily, when the Arab problem is mentioned here at all, what is meant is the Arab refugee problem outside Israel.

But it is not widely known that, apart from the larger Arab refugee problem, there is also a problem of an Arab minority of 170,000 living in Israel who have never left the country. The official version is that this minority enjoys all rights, freedom and equality with the majority Israelis; that there is no bias, prejudice or discrimination against them. Their status is the same as that of the Israelis. They even have two representatives in the Knesset. In a word, there is no problem of any kind.

Recently, two voices have reached here which reveal facts generally unknown in the U. S. and which deserve attention. Of the two voices, one comes from Israel itself; the other from England.

The voice from Israel is the more authentic one because it comes from a well-known Arab who speaks from experience and deals only with facts and with no theories. These he states in an article in the *Ner* (Candle) of Jerusalem (January 1951), a publication of the *Iehud* Party, the organization of the late Dr. Jehuda Magnes, which has always advocated peace and understanding between Arabs and Jews, rather than force and hatred.

The article, entitled "Israel and the Arab Minority," is remarkable for the temperance of its language, for the lack of bitterness which usually characterizes the words of both Arab and Jewish nationalists when they speak on the subject, and reveals a rare understanding of the difficulties of the Israel position with regard to the Arab refugees outside Israel, but at the same time states the case of the Arab minority in Israel with a simplicity and clarity which speaks for itself.

ARABS' SIDE

Writes Mr. E. N. Koussa: "The grievances from which the Arabs of Israel suffer are serious and deserve the honest assistance of the Jewish public to

ensure an early remedy. They complain of unjustifiable intervention with their rights of property, their freedom of movement, and of flagrant discrimination. . . .

"There is first of all, the Absentees' Properties Law of 1950, with its vicious consequences aggravated by an executive machinery that leaves much to be desired. I do not think there is in any other country, civilized or uncivilized, an enactment similar to or identical with this law whereby a person physically and lawfully present is deemed to be absent for the single purpose of depriving him of the right to control, administer and enjoy the income of his properties.

"I wonder whether many of the Jewish public realize the inequity of this law. An Arab may sit as a member of the Knesset, participate in its deliberations, have a say in the formulation of the destiny and policy of the state, and enjoy the privileges and immunities inherent in its membership, and yet he is under a legal disability to control his properties. Such is the actual condition of Mr. Taufiq Toubi, the Arab Knesset member. There are many other illustrations arising from this oppressive law which I abstain from enumerating for the sake of brevity.

"Secondly, there is the law enacted by the provisional government and subsequently ratified by the Knesset, enabling the minister of agriculture to take possession of any land allegedly left uncultivated, in pursuance of which many Arab cultivators, present in Israel, have been arbitrarily dispossessed of their properties without compensation.

"The owners are eager to recover possession, to cultivate the lands extensively and intensively and to play their part in producing some of the essential commodities necessary for the population. They wish to feel that they are citizens of the country, and not the object of racial persecution and discrimination. They have applied, time after time, to the government for the restoration of their lands, but it has hitherto turned deaf ears to their applications.

"Thirdly, the prevention of male members of resident Arab families above the age of 15 from rejoining their parents is the cause of much disappointment and distress. Doubtless, you appreciate the sufferings and sentiments of a father and of a mother who are deprived of their sons by the unjustifiable action of the

government setting down the arbitrary age limit of 15, for male members entitled to return under the scheme of reunion of split families.

"I do not think that the number of such sons is likely to exceed 1500. Is it reasonable to exclude them on the frivolous excuse that they would be a danger to the safety of the state?

"Last, but not least, there is the military rule with its concomitant severity and harshness in Arab towns and villages whether near to, or far from, the boundaries which detrimentally affect Arab business and peaceful activities and their freedom of movement. It undoubtedly constitutes a flagrant discrimination against the Arab inhabitants of Israel."

DISASTROUS PROPOSAL

Another voice heard on the Arab minority in Israel recently came from England—the voice of Mr. R. H. Crossman, Labor member of Parliament and outstanding friend of the Zionist movement in Great Britain. Mr. Crossman is one of those curious non-Jewish liberals and friends of Zionism, frequently found in England and the U. S., who forget their liberalism when they deal with Jewish nationalism and who out-Zionize the Zionists.

Crossman recently visited Israel and is now writing a series of articles on its problems in the London *New Statesman and Nation*. In one of these articles (March 3), he touches on the question of the Arab minority.

Like Mr. Koussa, he confirms the fact that the Arabs in Israel are "still second-class citizens and are treated by the military authorities as potential fifth columnists," but adds that "the Israeli army is completely justified in treating them like this. . . . If the fortunes of the war changed, the vast majority of the Arab minority in Israel would side, at least passively, with the Arab armies."

He then proceeds to ask: what then is to be done? and advances a proposal which has all the earmarks of a trial balloon. He says: "The tempos of the Jewish and Arab progress are so fantastically different that the communities can never coalesce, unless the Arab becomes a Jew. Would it not be wiser to accept the fact of discrepancy and solve the problem by a wholesale exchange of populations? Why not let the 150,000 Arabs of Israel be transferred to Iraq and make place for

the Jews of that country? Why not achieve peace between Israel and her neighbors not by union, either political or economic, but by separation and agreement to disagree?"

It is to be hoped that this fantastic proposal is Mr. Crossman's own invention, not an inspiration of the Mapai leaders whose views Crossman often advances. For nothing could be more outrageous morally and more disastrous politically for Israel and for the Jewish people outside it than such a shabby attempt on the part of Israel to get rid of its small Arab minority by a maneuver of "exchange" after having eliminated the majority through a common accident of war.

Can any sane person reasonably believe that Israel could ever have real peace with her Arab neighbors after such an "exchange"? And what would be the position of Jewish minorities all over the world after an act of this kind?

For two thousand years the Jewish people have lived among others as a minority, and the bulk of them still live as such now. For two thousand years they have appealed for justice and equal rights for minorities and by their very existence repudiated the lie that a country must consist only of one people. Are they, now that they have established a state of their own, to treat their own minority not only as second-class citizens but attempt to eliminate it altogether? Would not that be an open invitation to other states which, for one reason or another do not want Jews in their midst, to follow the example set by Israel?

And what about the morality of it all? In what way does an "Arab-rein" state differ from a "Juden-rein" state? It is terrible to contemplate to what depths of moral degradation, nationalism can lead even liberal-minded people in our age.

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