

ISRAEL PASSES A DISCRIMINATORY LAW

By DR. B. HOFFMAN (ZIVION)

Four years ago, David Ben Gurion proclaimed the independence of Israel as a state "based on the principles of liberty, justice, and peace." On April 1, 1952, the Knesseth passed the Nationality Act, which is a travesty on these principles. The following comment is translated from an article in the *Jewish Daily Forward* of April 26, 1952, by Dr. B. Hoffman (Zivion), one of the oldest and most prominent members of the Bund and a leading Yiddish journalist.

The Nationality Act just passed in Israel grants automatic citizenship only to Jews. Only Jewish inhabitants of Israel will be declared as citizens on July 14, 1952, when the law goes into effect. The Arab inhabitants of the country will, however, have to prove that they were citizens of Palestine during the British Mandate, that their names are included in the official register of citizens before March 1, 1952, and that they have had continuous residence in Israel since the establishment of the state.

In the reports received about this new law, it is claimed that only 10 per cent of the 170,000 Arabs in the country will be able to provide the proofs demanded. The others can apply for Israel citizenship five years later, if they will be legal residents. In addition, they must also know Hebrew.

I will not here discuss this discrimination against the Arabs in terms of justice. The morality of nationalism is that of the Hottentot. The Hottentot distinguishes between good and evil by saying that when he takes another man's wife it is good, but when the other man takes his wife, that is evil. We protest when we are discriminated against, but we consider it permissible to discriminate against others. Nonetheless, we should realize that only a small part of the Jewish people live in a Jewish country, whereas the great majority of Jews live in other countries. Only one out of every nine or ten Jews lives in Israel. Thus, it is obvious that it doesn't pay for the Jews to abide by Hottentot morality. If Jews will, in their own country, practice discrimination against non-Jews, then they can have no complaints when other peoples discriminate against them.

I cannot believe that discrimination against the Arabs is to any advantage to the Israelis. I cannot see any use in it, except to satisfy nationalistic feelings. On the contrary, this discriminatory law can harm the Israelis, because it will arouse enmity even among

those Arabs who have accepted Israel as an accomplished fact and deemed it best for them to be loyal citizens of Israel and help in the country's development.

Nor is it unlikely that the discriminatory Nationality Act can lead to serious complications in Ben Gurion's present government coalition which has the cooperation of five Arab deputies in the Knesseth who are affiliated to Mapai. If these five Arabs remove their support from the present government, as they did on this law, Ben Gurion's government may become quite shaky. Furthermore, this law will undoubtedly aid Communist agitation among the Arabs, giving the Communists an effective propaganda weapon.

But let us leave the question of the ill effects of this law on Israel to the local politicians. Judging from the Israel press, I can see that public opinion is far from united on this discrimination against the Arabs. In fact, some newspapers criticize the law quite severely. I wish, however, to dwell on the great damage which this law can wreak on Jews living outside Israel.

Reactionaries and anti-Semites in many countries, in favor of discrimination against Jews, have now received strong support of their own policies. They can point out now that the Jews, having attained the power to discriminate against others, avail themselves of it. This argument will not stop me from calling the reactionaries and the anti-Semites by their proper names, but I must admit it is a painful feeling to be accused of the very crime which we have always accused others of committing against us.

Jews have always protested against discrimination. We have always felt that our protest was justified. Can we now have that feeling of justification? Those who practice discrimination can reply to us: Are you Jews any better? Don't you do the same thing when you have the power? Do you not discriminate against members of another people living in your country?

I cannot explain what possible advantage the Israelis have won with the passage of this discriminatory law against the Arabs. I do know that the Jews throughout the world have lost a lot by this law. Morally the Jewish people has lost a great deal.