

Arab Nationalism

• by Hayim Greenberg

WHO ARE the Arab Nationalist leaders? With whom have the Communists allied themselves?

There are four Arab parties in Palestine all of which have formed a temporary coalition. "Temporary" is used advisedly; too much envy and dissension exists between the various cliques naming themselves "parties", to make any abiding union possible. The present solidarity of these several rival family obligarchies is based not so much on love of country, as on hatred of the new-comer; they are united by a lust for power and a fear of the forces which may give fresh momentum to the arrested history of their gifted race. The platform of these four parties have exactly the same social significance. The Nashashibi party speaks of national independence within the confines of Palestine and Transjordan under the rule of Emir Abdullah; the Mufti-clique, named sonorously "The Party of the Palestinian People," whispers of a larger Arab state which must include Syria. It dispenses with Emir Abdullah, because it has a more imposing, a "holier" candidate for the throne of the Arab empire. Only the blind can fail to perceive that the Halidi group is merely camouflage for a second Grand Mufti party. The youthful romantics of the Istiklal Party declaim about a kind of Mohammedan Holy Empire which must include Palestine, Syria, Irak, and the states of the Arab peninsula—in short, all countries where Arab speech, or the clang of Arab swords is heard. Each one of these parties has its ambitions, its calculations and its connections with the Arab, as well as the still greater Mohammedan world, outside of Palestine. But not one of them has as yet formulated a social program for the politically oppressed, economically backward Arab masses. All four parties make their appeal to religious fanaticism, to chauvinist passion, or to both. Neither the Youth League nor the Storm-troopers recently organized by the Grand Mufti in enthusiastic imitation of Nazi style, have found it necessary to indulge in even such demagogic promises as Hitler made to capture the disorganized and desperate German masses. They all prate of "democracy" and of an independent "democratic government" — persuasive slogans not without effect on well-meaning but uninformed groups in America and Europe.

No one shouts more vociferously for a "democratic government" than the high priest of the Mohammedan faith in Palestine (as he would like to believe, the yet uncrowned Pope of world-Islam)—the Grand Mufti himself. But the Jerusalem gentleman familiar to us as Hadsh Amin Al

Husseini is not an unknown figure in the political life of the country. Herbert Samuel's short-sighted opportunism permitted him to seat himself on the Moslem cardinal's chair as early as 1922. Since then we have had occasion to observe the precise type of democracy that the "national liberator" practices. The Mohammedan church in Palestine is not a private organization as is the church in France or the United States. The Highest Mohammedan Council, headed by Al Husseini all these years, is an official body with prescribed secular functions. It administers substantial public funds and large estates. The Council owns considerable acres of land in towns and villages; it controls religious, educational and charitable institutions. All civil activities of the Moslem population (such as registration of births and deaths, marriages, divorces, wills, etc.) are in its jurisdiction. It appoints and dismisses the employees of the Moslem religious courts, which are paid by the government. As head of the Highest Council, the Grand Mufti handles thousands of pounds annually—state-moneys, church moneys, the capital of philanthropic institutions, alms from foreign countries, and contributions from rich Moslems in India. The Highest Moslem Council is a powerful economic and political machine which affects the interests of every Moslem in Palestine. What kind of democracy has the Mufti introduced into this organization where he is neither hampered by the Mandate nor "oppressed" by Zionism? The constitution of the church demands that elections be held and that financial reports be published. Within the framework of its own organization, the Mufti party had ample opportunity to demonstrate its ability to function democratically. The term of the present Highest Council ended in 1925. That year the government ordered church-elections, which were held under the supervision of the Grand Mufti. However, they were accompanied by such "gross irregularities"—to use the word of the Prosecuting Attorney—that the supreme court of the country had to annul them. Despite this decision the Mufti and his clique manoeuvred with such skill that all the members of the Council retained their posts, and the Mufti is still entrenched, though no elections have been held for eleven years. Hundreds of officials are his political servants because their salary depends on the good will of Mohammed's descendant, nor is the end of his rule in sight. Hundreds of thousands of pounds passed through his hands in the course of these years (money was even collected in Egypt and India for an Arab University in Jerusalem) but no hint of an accounting has

been given. From this sty of corruption, besides which our Tammany Hall is a holy of holies, there now issues a demand for "democratic" government and self-determination. The other parties are no better. When the Nashashibi clique quarrels with the Mufti and clamors about "violation of the national will" in the church and its institutions, everybody knows that the question at issue is a struggle for political power. The Nashashibi brand of democracy has been thoroughly tested during the years that he was Mayor of Jerusalem.

Such are the leaders who conduct the Arab general strike, the campaign of violence, arson and murder against the Jewish settlers, and the fight for "democracy" and "national liberation."

Characteristically enough, the Arab agitators no longer make the accusation, heard between 1921 and 1929, that Jews are depriving the Arab masses of their means of subsistence. Their slogans are now purely political: Jews are trying to become a majority; Jews will deprive the country of its Arab character; Jews want to establish a Jewish state in which the Arabs will be an oppressed minority; Jews are the enemies of Islam and of Christianity; some of them are dangerously capitalistic, others, no less dangerously bolshevistic. The charges about economic oppression and Arab "displacement" are raised less by Arabs than by Arab sympathizers, particularly Jewish Communists, who make a hue and cry about tens of thousands of Arabs driven off the land by Jews. A member of the Labor Party had occasion to express himself on this subject recently in the House of Commons: "There may have been tens of thousands of Arabs whose land Jews took, but when we began to count them, practically all vanished. The total number that could be discovered was between 500 and 600." Assuming that there are actually 600 Arabs with justifiable grievances, to what interpretation does this figure lend itself? At the very worst, we may grant that 600 Arab individuals suffered from Jewish colonization. But in what sense have they suffered? One would have to prove that their economic status was worse than before Jews purchased the land on which they were tenants. If these 600 Arabs have become wage earners in private or government enterprises in Haifa or Jerusalem, their economic status is probably better than when they were "share-croppers" under Arab landlords. For this reason, the Arab press has begun to use another term to designate the losses of the "dispossessed" fellah: dignity. It is unimportant, claim the Arab journalists, whether the former peasant earns less or more than formerly; what matters is his loss of social dignity, of independence because he has become a proletarian. Anybody can judge the social "dignity" enjoyed by the fellah on rented land, for which he gives the landowners one-third of his crop, and pays him from

25% to 40% interest on the money he must borrow. The notion of a relationship between human dignity and property, or merely rented property, is medieval and reactionary. Millions of men in the lands of western civilization have lost this "dignity" without regret. Their proletarianization has given them a higher standard of living, and by that fact alone, a more dignified human status.

A few weeks ago, another Arab professional group complained of their unhappy plight. Forty camel drivers gathered in Tulkarem and petitioned the government to intervene. Camel transportation cannot stand the competition of devilish inventions like the railroad and the automobile. As a result, the camel-drivers are losing their independence and their "dignity." No doubt pathos attaches to individual cases where a "proprietor" must part with his movable desert-property and become a railroad employee or a chauffeur. But we cannot arrest the development and industrialization of the country because of Bedouin romanticism. The gypsy in Soviet Russia must now part with his Bohemian freedom and become a wage-earner. Tragedies such as these are unavoidable in every feudal country which begins to develop economically. No one is to blame if it is the fate of the Jews to be the pioneers in this social economic transformation. There would be real cause for complaint if these Arabs or the 600 mentioned, previously had been thrown out of the economic system and could find no gainful occupation.

Simple arithmetic disposes of the charges of economic injury to Arabs through Jewish immigration. Within the last fifteen years, the Jewish population in Palestine increased by 300,000. The land of 600 poor Arabs could not create a means of livelihood for such a number with a much higher standard of living. One does not have to be an economist to realize the full absurdity of such an accusation and to understand the constructive role of Jewish immigration, if in the past fifteen years 300,000 Jews and from 60,000 to 80,000 non-Palestinian Arabs could enter the country without creating permanent unemployment.

The problem resolves itself in this: Is Palestine already populated to its full capacity, over-populated or under-populated? Is there room for mass immigration, or must each newcomer build his fortune on the native's misfortune? Without taking into account Transjordan, the thinly populated, most fertile section of western Palestine, we know that only 25% to 28% of the surface of Palestine is being cultivated. Some government experts have announced that over half of the remaining area is not cultivable, but the calculations of these experts were made on the assumption that agriculture in Palestine must always be extensive. They failed to take into account irrigation, drainage,

and various technological advances. The Jewish settler drains swamps and digs for water. Such places, arid for centuries, as Karkur, Nahalal, Tel-Adashim, Balfourial, Bartubiah, have yielded hidden treasures of water to the modern equipment of the Jew.

The advanced methods of agriculture introduced by Jews make the country larger as well as richer. The following statistics are instructive: A dunam of land cultivated by Arabs in their usual fashion brings in 48 *kilo* of wheat; a dunam in a Jewish *Moshav ovdim* yields 85 *kilo*; a dunam in a *kvutza* produces from 115 *kilo* up; in Daganiah B it gives 165 *kilo* (In Soviet Russia the yield for the same area is 66 *kilo*). This means that Jewish immigration increases the economic capacity of the country. Palestine is actually roomier *with Jews* than it was without Jews. It also means that the Arab peasant is gradually beginning to learn more progressive and profitable methods of cultivating his land.

The chief problem of the fellah is not how to acquire more land, but how to cultivate a smaller area intensively. For this he needs a larger amount of initial capital and easier credit. Land, in itself, does not solve his difficulties. For instance, forty years ago Baron Rothschild's representative purchased 120,000 dunam of fertile land in Hauran (Syria) for Jewish colonization. For a variety of reasons—opposition first of the Turkish, then of the French government, Jewish settlement did not take place there. The land was rented out for a pittance to some 1100 Arabs who have been living there for years. *Per capita* each Arab has approximately 120 dunam of fertile soil in a temperate, salubrious climate. (Josephus, long ago, described the charms of this region). No workers' colony in Palestine has so much land *per capita*. However, the methods of agriculture employed are so primitive that the Arabs live wretchedly. Within the last three years 40% of the able-bodied population emigrated from Sacham Djulan, the largest village of the region. They went to Palestine, the "roomless" land of "Zionist exploitation", where they entered the employ of Jews and rich Arabs.

This fact alone demonstrates how absurd and fabricated is the charge that Palestine has no room for further colonization, and that every Jewish immigrant takes bread from an Arab's mouth. And how ludicrous is the second charge brought forth by unbidden Arab champions that Jews displace Arab laborers. How can Jews take something that Arabs did not have? When Jews work in industry, it is in industries that they have themselves created; when they work in agriculture, it is on land that was not cultivated before Jewish colonization. Furthermore, a cheaper worker may displace a dearer worker, never the reverse. Possibly Italians and Slavs could drive out Jews in the

Jewish New York garment industry. Two years ago we saw workers from Alabama and Tennessee displacing the more expensive workers of the Middle West in the automobile industry in Detroit. But how can organized Jewish workers compete with oriental ones? One can understand, if not sympathize, with the complaints of Antwerp labor unions against Polish immigrants, or of French workers against Spanish and Italian newcomers. Unorganized immigrants with a lower standard of living can become a menace to the local workers. But how can European Jews compete with Arabs on the Arab labor market? One has merely to put the question, to perceive its absurdity.

It is clear to every impartial observer that economically and socially, Jewish colonization has been advantageous to the Arab. Even when the area of a given Arab holding decreases through sale of land to Jews, the productive capacity of the remainder becomes greater because the capital received makes improvements possible and because the Arab has begun to adopt agricultural methods introduced by Jews. Wherever a considerable number of Jewish workers has settled, the standard of life of the Arab workers has risen. An atmosphere has been created which makes their emergence as an organized and militant class possible.

Peaceful Jewish colonization is the Industrial Revolution of Palestine; the Jewish cooperatives and communes are the cells of a new socialist economy. They will revolutionize Palestine, and possibly the adjoining countries, more profoundly and with more far-reaching results for the awakening New East than the incendiary appeals and revolutionary phraseology of adventurers and political wind-bags. The present Arab chauvinist leaders seek to head off and destroy this revolution. Those who abet them; those who encourage fanatical mobs to burn fields and uproot trees in Jewish communal farms may vow faith to the social revolution all they please. Actually they have hitched their wagon to the Grand Mufti's counter-revolution.

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