

A Disastrous Course

By Meir Vilner

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With the advent of April 1973, another public debate on the government policy in the occupied areas was touched when the war minister M. Dayan called for legalizing private land purchases in the occupied West Bank.

In the ensuing debate it became clear that the process of extensive land seizures in the occupied areas has been going on since the end of the aggressive 1967 war.

The old Zionist financial arm, the Keren Kayemet (land fund) has been doing the job, and certain commentators put the figure of land seized at 150 thousand dunams.

The Communist Faction moved a motion of no confidence in the government in Parliament (Knesset) and the debate was held on April 10, 1973. Communist MK M. Vilner spoke in the debate and unmasked the adventurist policy of the Israeli ruling circles. The government was able to weather the storm but wider circles of the population are gaining conviction that its policy of establishing "faits accomplis" blocks the path to peace.

M. Vilner said:

First of all what are the facts as published? It was published that, without the knowledge of the Knesset, hidden from the public up to now, an activity termed as "acquisition of lands" in the occupied territories has been going on. These activities were carried out by the official Israeli Land Administration, by the Keren Kayemet (international Zionist organization for the purchase of land in Israel) and also by other elements, including private ones. Reference was made to 150,000 dunams (15,000 hectares or 37,500 acres) of land already "acquired."

Matters have reached a point where persons went abroad in order to conclude land transfer deals, as in the case quoted in the daily Ha'aretz on April 6, 1973, when "A nimble Jerusalemite flew to Latin America in order to clinch a

deal with proprietors of a tract of land near Jerusalem and the Jerusalemite made more than one million liras out of the deal."

This recalls to one's mind the old Zionist method of conquest of land under the British colonial rule: land is bought from the proprietor, and later there are disastrous consequences for the fellahin. This is especially grave now, for it is done with the authorization of the state and under a military occupation, infused with all the elements of oppression. Under these circumstances, those "acquisitions" are a mockery. They are in fact acts of annexation by means of cruel eviction from the soil. These are acts of provocation against the Arab people and an act of territorial expansion, these are acts intended to liquidate the Palestinian Arab people and their rights without any pang of conscience. This is racism in the simple meaning of the word, and if a millionth part of this would be done to Jews, we would alarm the whole world against these expressions of anti-Semitism and cruelty which are intolerable in a civilized world.

Davar published the following item on the 8th of April: "The director of the department for land acquisition, of the Keren Kayemet, Abraham Hilleli, confirmed in a talk with a correspondent of Davar that the Keren Kayemet had acquired, since the six-day war (June 1967 war), tracts of land in Judea and Samaria (the Jordanian West Bank)."

Perhaps it will be understood now for what purpose the Keren Kayemet is needed at all in the State of Israel. The publications, said Keren Kayemet's department director, have done harm, for "they caused profiteering and raised prices in Judea and Samaria.... Earlier, it was possible to buy a dunam for some hundreds of liras."

You see what it means to "acquire land" under the boot of the military rule? A dunam for some hundreds of liras! Private persons, too, made such deals, with the permission of commissions under the general-director and of the military authorities.

In the press and radio the name of a mysterious person, Marco, was published. He says: "I received a permit from the director-general's committee as well as financial and political guarantees from the government to the amount of millions of liras." He quoted the figure of 12 million liras, intended for acquiring land, building houses in the occupied territories, and establishing business.

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It has also been made public that the former inspector-general of the Israeli police, Yechezkel Sachar, had been given a permit to buy land. Ha'aretz wrote on the 8th of April: "Mister Sachar confirmed in a talk with the correspondent of Ha'aretz that the military government permitted him to purchase land in Nabi Samuel, and said that in January 1973 he received a note from the military government, postponing confirmation until government decision.... Mr. Sachar, who today is a businessman and the manager of a construction company in Jerusalem,

said that the tract in Nabi Samuel is intended for building villas by the company he directs and for their sale to private persons." He said that the license which he received was conditional and provided that the building be built within two years." And further: "The spokesman of the Judea and Samaria (West Bank) district headquarters said yesterday in reply to a question that the government had at the time permitted Sachar to purchase the land in Nabi Samuel."

We have also been informed by Davar of April 8 and by other papers that MK Yigal Hurvitz also operates as a patent businessman, for whom "business is business," and he wants to prove that he is a patriot, too. Davar writes: "Knesset member Y. Hurvitz from the State List heads a company connected with a group of private citizens, in their majority from Jerusalem, who deal in the purchase of land in the West Bank, north of Jerusalem."

In this matter the press and radio published the utterances of Mister Ya'akov Tzur, the head of the Keren Kayemet who had been the prime minister's choice for State President. In a meeting of Keren Kayemet officials in the north of the country he said (I quote from Ha'aretz of the 6th of April): "All the discussions on this issue are useless and bring only harm.... In the past we did not publish figures on the acquisition of lands, and now too we will not publish what we have done. Indeed since the six-day war (June 1967 war) land is being bought in the (occupied) areas, where we are sure that its acquisition will be useful and in every place where it is possible to do so."

What does this mean? First of all, that eviction in the form of land "acquisition" is carried out with the authorization of the state, under state supervision and by private persons, endorsed by the military and civilian authorities. And what does it mean when Mister Tzur says: I do not publish and will not publish what we have done? This means that they wanted to do it secretly, in the dead of night, concealed from public opinion in the country and in the world.

What are you relying on? MK Begin who spoke before me said that he relies on the authority of the Bible, and he quoted the Bible. He said he has the right to the whole country, although professor Auerbach, a candidate for the state presidency, clearly proved that even according to the Bible the demand for the "greater land of Israel" (that is for the whole of Palestine) has no foundation.

Yehuda Ben-Meir (National-Religious Party) and Moshe Nissim interrupt.

Meir Vilner: You cannot negate the rights of another people with quotations.

The prime minister, G. Meir: One has to be exact.

Meir Vilner: I am exact in my words, but the appetite for annexation knows no limit. Gentlemen, if I stand on the rostrum of the Knesset and am indignant at what you do in the occupied territories, I do this not only because I am opposed to negating the rights of the Palestinian Arab people and to settling my own people on their ruins, but because I see in all you do a danger for my people, the Israeli people.

Moshe Nissim (Gahal): You speak about the Israeli people? About "my people"?

Meir Vilner: You do things which are liable to bring, in the course of time, dangerous results to Israel.

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