

THE FATE OF THE ARABS IN ISRAEL

TAWFIQ ZAYYAD*

THE results of the last municipal elections in Nazareth, December 9, 1975, and the general strike on Land Day, March 30, 1976, are two of the most important events in the history of the Arabs in Israel. These two events ushered in a higher stage of awareness, unity and struggle within the Arab masses who today comprise half a million people or 15 percent of Israel's total population.

These two events echoed across the world; they were reported on radio, television and on the front pages of world newspapers, arousing interest and concern for the fate of the Arabs in Israel who had remained in their homeland under the most adverse conditions of national oppression and racial discrimination.

It became obvious that the Arab population in Israel have an important and natural role which can no longer be neglected, in the struggle for a just peace in the Middle East, and in the struggle of the Palestinian Arab people to restore their national rights. The most important of these are the right to self-determination, the right to a sovereign state, and the right to return to the homeland of their fathers and forefathers from which they were evicted by a criminal blow of the sword in 1948.

These two events, the Nazareth elections and the general strike, created a considerable stir in Israel. Through them the rotten foundation upon which rulers of Israel have built their relationship with the Arab population—a relationship based upon privation, humiliation, coercion and national oppression—has been exposed.

As a result of the qualitative development in the role of the Arab masses in Israel, many people rightly came to the conclusion that a radical change in

*Tawfiq Zayyad is the mayor of Nazareth and a well-known Arab poet; this was an address delivered at the Ninth Annual Conference of the Association of Arab-American University Graduates, held in New York, October 1-3, 1976.

the official policy was inevitable in order to realize national equality for the Arab minority, especially because this national minority is part of the majority in the region, while the majority in Israel is a national minority in the region. It became evident that the democratic and rational Jewish forces were right when they claimed that the Arab masses in Israel could play an influential and important role in the process of solving the Arab-Israeli conflict; they can form a bridge for a just peace which would be based upon respecting the rights of the peoples and the sovereignty of the states in our area.

It is a known secret that the rulers of Israel wanted Israel to be “clean” from Arabs. The Arabs in Israel opposed these acts in a heroic and costly struggle. They won their first battle. They have succeeded in remaining in their homeland.

As the plan of expelling this remnant of our people failed, the authorities began a procedure of separating it from the main body of the Palestinian Arab people. The authorities tried to loosen the ties of national identity among the Palestinian Arabs in Israel. Israel wanted to use the Palestinian Arabs against the mother people and its national rights, like using a branch to cut the mother tree.

To support their policies the Israeli authorities fabricated absurd “theories.” Some Israelis declared, for instance, that the Druzes are not Arabs but are the thirteenth tribe that wandered in the desert after the exodus from Egypt. Others claimed that the Arabs in Israel are not a part of the Palestinian Arab people but instead comprise a different nationality, namely, the Israeli Arab nationality. It is obvious that this is a demogogical attempt to confuse affiliation of citizenship—which is an affiliation to the state of Israel—with national affiliation, since the Arabs in Israel are an integral part of the Palestinian Arab people.

Moreover, the authorities have always based their approach to the Arab population on the notion that they do not constitute a national minority or a single people, but a conglomeration of communities and religious minorities. In official statistics and announcements, no mention is usually made of “Arabs,” but of “Jews and non-Jews” or “Jews and minorities,” purposely ignoring that “non-Jews” and “minorities” are members of one and the same people and nationality. Even the local and Knesset election lists, which various official bodies and committees impose, are formed in accordance with this community-religious structure.

Prime Minister Rabin declared in an announcement made on April 13, 1976, shortly after the events of Land Day, that the Arabs in Israel lack

national characteristics of their own, that they only have religious and cultural features. The aim of considering the Arabs in Israel as a conglomeration of communities and religious minorities is to deny them any national right. If they are acknowledged as a people they would become entitled to a return of their national rights, contrary to the intention of Mr. Rabin and the makers of the official racist policy based on the Zionist theory that wants Israel to be a pure Zionist state, i.e., purely Jewish.

However, the unified heroic struggle that the Arab masses have been waging could bring such plans to failure.

A. ZIONIST SCHEME FOR EXPROPRIATING ARAB-OWNED LANDS

The battle for the land was, and still is, the basic struggle of the Arabs in Israel for national equality and for coherent development over their lands and in their homeland. Expropriation of Arab-owned lands is the basic strategy of Zionism, which in turn is the ideology applied by the Israeli rulers.

The Arabs did not lose lands accidentally. Their lands were taken from them by the power of special laws, by physical violence and by the use of the armoured cars and tanks of the Israeli police and army.

The number of Arab villages in the area on which Israel was established was 585. Since the establishment of the state, this number has gone down to 107 villages. The population of the remainder of these villages (numbering 478) were kicked out by force or ran away in fear. These 478 villages were bulldozed and obliterated. In addition, the authorities confiscated the millions of dunums belonging to the inhabitants of these villages.

The tens of thousands of uprooted villagers found shelter in nearby Arab villages and towns. The authorities forbade them from going back to the sites of their former villages. They were now regarded as "absentees" after the government had taken over their lands. The number of these "refugees at home" today exceeds 100,000 persons, and they form a separate issue by themselves. These same people refuse to give up their right to return to their villages and to their previous lands, in some cases not more than a few kilometers away from their present residence. Their struggle to return is on-going and is headed by the inhabitants of Iqrit and Kfar Bir'im whose struggle is well known in Israel and abroad.

After the establishment of the state and precisely on December 12, 1948, the Israeli rulers imposed military rule on the Arab villages and towns. On March 20, 1950, this military rule was converted into an established set of laws. These laws were based on the 1945 Emergency Regulations set up by the

British Mandate in order to quell the anti-imperialist struggle. According to these regulations, the military ruler has the right to take any measure against whomever he wants without taking him to court. These measures range from house arrest, banishment, administrative arrest to forbidding the movement of the person outside his zone.

According to these regulations, every Arab was forbidden to leave his residence or to go to his original village or even to his place of work without a military permit. The regulation of permits went on for 18 years. In 1966 it was abolished. But by abolishing the regulation of permits, military rule did not end. It remains in force until this very day. Hundreds of political activists who oppose government policies and who have been black-listed need permits to move from one place to another.

This military rule has two basic goals: first, to control the movement of every Arab, to terrorize him politically and economically, to kill the will to resist, to prevent the formation of political parties and to prevent free literary activities. The second goal of the military rule is to deprive the Arabs of their lands, and to forbid them from reaching their lands by declaring them "closed zones." In this way, the takeover of Arab-owned land was accomplished. Right after the establishment of the state of Israel, the Israeli authorities took over an area of more than 3,250,000 dunums.

The monster of land robbery was not satisfied with all this. The Israeli rulers began planning the takeover of Arab owned lands belonging to those Arabs who did not depart from their villages or their towns. The authorities passed tens of new laws which gave legal bases for these plans.

Since the establishment of the state of Israel, land confiscation was and is still going on. This is the major strategy which is being directed against the Arabs in Israel. The outcome has been the confiscation of about 1,750,000 dunums. In addition, the government announced its intention to confiscate 1,500,000 dunums from the lands belonging to the Arabs in the Negev. If we add to this the land already confiscated immediately after the establishment of the state of Israel (3,250,000) we will arrive at the figure of 6,500,000 dunums. These statistics are official statistics which are, of course, somewhat "diluted." In any case, this final figure equals one-third of the area of the state of Israel's pre-1967 borders.

In the aftermath of the Land Day demonstrations the government did not find anything more with which to reassure Arabs than the promise that in the coming ten years there will be no confiscations. This means that a campaign of confiscations is already planned for the 1980's.

B. THE CATASTROPHIC RESULTS OF LAND ALIENATION OF ARAB AGRICULTURE

It is natural that this confiscation policy had catastrophic ramifications: the average area belonging to Arab villages in 1948 was 16,500 dunums; in 1974, this area was down to 5,000 dunums—i.e., the average area per head in the Arab village went down from 16 dunums in 1948 to less than one dunum in 1974.

Examples of this: Nazareth was deprived of most of its land, while its population tripled (from 15,000 to 45,000). Um al-Fahim, the largest Arab village, used to own 140,000 dunums in 1948 while its population was only 4,000; today this same village owns 12,000 dunums while its population has increased to 17,000 (i.e., 128,000 dunums have been confiscated). Another Arab village, Taybih, lost 23,000 dunums, Tyrah also lost 23,000—and so on with the other Arab villages.

This policy destroyed the agricultural economy of the Arab village. The average area of arable land in the Arab village was, in 1948, an area of 9,136 dunums; in 1974, this area was down to 2,000 dunums. Since the population of the average Arab village increased by a rate of three-to-four times, we can imagine the sharp decrease in the rate of dunums owned per capita.

On September 7, 1976, the “Koenig memorandum” was published in Israel.* This is a racist document presented by its author as a work program for the Israeli authorities concerning the Arab population. Listed below are a number of the major ideas from this document:

1. It describes the Arab mentality as oriental, Levantine, superficial and backward.
2. It would forbid any aspect of lenience in the treatment of Arabs in Israel, tightening the use of strong control against them by the police, the army and the prisons.
3. It would impose a dishonest leadership on Arabs by a national Arab party administered secretly by the Israeli intelligence agencies and the tools of the authority.
4. It would establish a special intelligence system, to spy on the leaders of the Communist Party and other leaders to destroy their reputation and credibility.
5. It would impose severe measures against student leaders, and close the door to the universities in the face of Arab students, putting obstacles in the

*Printed as Special Document in this issue—ED.

way of their general education, meanwhile facilitating the emigration of Arab youth from the country and forbidding their return.

6. It would make the Arabs busy 24 hours a day struggling to earn their livelihood, so that they would hardly have the time to think about their situation, or their national or educational goals.

7. It would advocate imposing stiff taxes and fines on the Arab population that would deprive them of financial freedom and rob them of the economic energy to raise their standard of living or to improve their social conditions.

8. It would cancel social security benefits for Arab families, limiting these benefits to Jews.

9. It would confiscate more Arab lands to establish new Jewish settlements on them.

10. It would seek to offset the population increase among Arabs and strive to decrease their number by various means.

Here we must mention that Koenig, the author of this memorandum, has been for 13 years the governor of the Northern District where 250,000 Arabs reside (more than 50 percent of the Arabs in Israel). This memorandum is a clear model of the policy which has been practiced against the Arabs, and it closely reflects the official policy of the government.

The prime minister has refused to condemn this memorandum on the basis that "he did not read it." The government also refused to condemn the document. We cannot but consider the reaction of the government and its prime minister as more ominous than the memorandum itself.

C. PLANS FOR THE JUDAIZATION OF THE GALILEE

Last year the Knesset approved the racist program for the Judaization of the Galilee. The government issued orders for new confiscations which led to the general strike on Land Day, March 30, 1976. This program dates back to the 1950's when Ben Gurion, Israel's first premier, toured the Galilee and declared in racist anger, "Whoever tours the Galilee gets the feeling that it is not part of Israel." For the majority of the inhabitants are Arabs.

The plan of Judaization of the Galilee has two major aims:

1. To deprive the Arabs of the remainder of their land by means of confiscations.

2. To change the demographic composition of the Galilee, now inhabited by an Arab majority, into a Jewish majority.

The Arabs in Israel reject these Judaization plans which will deprive them

of the remainder of their land and create the objective conditions for their mass evictions. Undoubtedly there are many factors, some of which are objective, which make such plans hard to carry out successfully. But the major factor will continue to be the unity and struggle of the Arab masses who cling to their land and are ready to die defending it. This stand has received the backing of the democratic Jewish forces in Israel and the backing of world public opinion.

D. THE RETARDATION OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARAB CITIES AND VILLAGES

In order to mislead Israeli and world public opinion, the Israeli authorities have declared that the aims of land confiscation are the development and industrialization of the Arab villages. Here, things also take inverted names. The Israeli government has always followed the opposite course and imposed on Arab towns and villages a policy that has prevented development and cultivated systematic retardation.

Let us examine the bitter facts: Vast territories which have been expropriated and which were cultivated until the time of their confiscation, are still without cultivation because of lack of "Jewish" manpower. It is deemed preferable to have them uncultivated than to return them to their Arab owners. In all the Arab towns and villages there is absolutely no industry. Nazareth with a population of 45,000 and the largest all-Arab city in Israel, has not a single factory. The factories which existed in Nazareth during the British Mandate were liquidated during the early years of the state of Israel. In the all-Jewish city of Upper Nazareth which has a population of 16,000, there are tens of factories, some of which are regarded as the largest in their field of production, such as textiles, food industry, and car assembly plants. Land was confiscated from Arab Nazareth to construct a Jewish city so that Arab Nazareth would be converted, with the passage of time, into a neglected quarter of the Jewish city.

The picture in the Arab villages is even worse. About 60,000 Arab workers, from a total of 80,000, travel each morning from their towns and villages to work in Jewish cities and settlements, returning home in the evening. These workers regard their towns and villages as nothing but places of residence. Their only prosperous "industry" is the creation and supply of manpower.

The situation of public services in Arab towns and villages is a tragic one: there is not one Arab village that has a sewage system, except for Nazareth which has a partial one. Not one Arab village has a network of paved roads and streets. In the best of situations, the Arab village will be connected by a

single road with the main street or highway. The majority of Arab villages lack electricity, telephone communications, health centers, etc. The area which Arab villages can use for construction is limited to a fraction of its land. The aim behind this is to cause territorial suffocation by preventing all development and expansion.

In all the Arab villages and towns, there is not one single public library. There are no suitable football fields, or youth centers, or theatres, or cultural centers which go along with modern development. Every existing cultural or sports activity in the Arab areas takes place in spite of the programmed efforts at strangulation.

Tens of Arab villages have no local councils at all. In some villages there are government appointed councils instead of elected councils. The existing local councils suffer from lack of government financial assistance. Such assistance can be described only as token assistance with no real weight. The central goal of this "Chinese shoes" policy is to impose retardation on Arab villages and towns, freezing their development, embittering and impoverishing their life, to weaken any influence they might have on the political or economic life of Israel. This makes it easier to control the villages and to encourage their inhabitants to look for another homeland.

E. THE FAILURE OF THE POLICY OF CULTURAL JUDAIZATION

Along with the policy of Judaizing the land, the authorities have pursued a policy of cultural and intellectual Judaization aimed at creating an Arab generation lacking all national consciousness.

Immediately after the establishment of the state, the Ministry of Education revamped the educational programs in all the schools. It cancelled everything that would encourage the younger generation to love its homeland, stimulate national self-esteem or respect for moral values. For example, a song which had been taught in our schools from generation to generation was dropped out presumably because it speaks of love of country:

Peace unto you, O my fatherland,
How good it is to live and sing upon your soil.

The Arab student in Israel studies the Old Testament and Jewish history more than Arab history, which he is permitted to study only selectively and superficially. For instance, the Arab student knows about Salah ed-Din al-Ayyoubi (Saladin) only when he studies Maimonides who was Salah ed-Din's physician.

The Israeli Ministry of Education has put plans into operation which aim

not to educate the Arabs but to miseducate them. This policy was defined by one of the previous advisors on Arab affairs for the prime minister as follows: "Our policy towards the Arabs is to keep them illiterate by preventing the Arab students from reaching the universities. If they were educated it would be difficult to rule them. We should make them wood-cutters and water-carriers."

Although the Arabs in Israel constitute 15 percent of the total population, the percentage of Arab students studying on all levels is as follows (these figures are for the 1974–1975 academic year) :

- In elementary schools, 20 percent, due to the higher birth rate among Arabs.
- In secondary schools, 7.7 percent.
- In sub-university institutions, 2 percent.
- At university level, 1.7 percent to 1.8 percent.

According to Israel statistics for the year 1969, for every 100 Jewish students in schools, 9.6 students were at the university level, while the percentage for the Arabs was 0.9 per 100 students. For the Arab countries, taken together, the ratio is three times as high as that of the Arab students in Israel.

Training in some scientific fields is totally closed to Arab students. The schools of medicine rarely accept Arabs for enrollment. Only the humanities and the social sciences are open to the Arab students. Generally speaking, the acceptance of Arab students at Israeli universities is tied to political considerations and is done on a selective basis. Neither the university administrations nor the Ministry of Education recognize the organizations of Arab students.

The share of Arab university students on government financial assistance is almost nil. In 1974, government financial assistance for all university students was 20 million Israeli pounds. The share of Arab students from this amount was 65,000 Israeli pounds, or 0.33 percent. The number of university students with all this assistance was 114,000 of which only 260 were Arab students (0.2 percent of the total). Another form of this discriminatory policy may be seen at the Arabic-language faculties, where Arab students study their mother tongue through lectures in the Hebrew language.

Arab students also suffer from the severe lack of school buildings and facilities. According to a report which was published by a ministerial committee (Garaysy's Committee), the Arab sector was in need of an additional 3,000 school rooms. This number today exceeds 6,000. Many youngsters begin their first day of school under the open sky because of the severe shortage of adequate educational facilities.

Moreover, the vast majority of schools in the Arab sector are more like stables than schools, more suitable for animals than for human beings. The majority of these so-called schools consist of rented rooms scattered all over the village or town. Some of these schools are without any basic amenities, including toilet facilities. There is also a great need for more secondary and vocational schools. The schools which do exist lack suitable furniture, equipment, libraries, laboratories and other facilities enjoyed by the Jewish schools. Physical education in most Arab schools is virtually nonexistent.

Only a small percentage of Arab university and high school graduates are able to find work. Most graduates soon discover that they have no alternative but to learn a new vocation and seek work wherever they can find it.

But the outcome of this educational policy has been the opposite of what its architects had aimed at. The younger generation of Arabs, born in Israel, is more nationally conscious and more politically militant than the older one. This younger generation is the cornerstone of the Arab struggle in Israel for civil and national rights.

F. CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

The Arabs in Israel have achieved much in their struggle against Israel's policy of oppression and discrimination. They have waged numerous brave but costly struggles since the establishment of the state and up to the present day. They have partly succeeded in undermining Israel's policy to Judaize the land; they have prevented the beast of land-plunder from implementing its plans. In their struggle they have become one of the active forces of freedom and democracy in the world.

The general strike on Land Day was a turning point in the struggle, marking a qualitative change in it. The strike caused an earthquake that shook the state from end to end, and overturned its policies and expectations. The sanguinary assault by the repressive forces, intended "to teach the Arabs a lesson," caused a reaction far greater in its effect than the strike itself. This was demonstrated at the funerals of the martyrs who fell in the strike, which were attended by tens of thousands of people.

Although the Arabs in Israel still live under conditions of national oppression affecting all spheres of life, they are no longer the scared and scattered society of 1948. In spite of expulsion, confinement and all forms of repression, the Arabs in Israel have survived and prospered. They have increased in number from 150,000 in 1948 to half a million people today. In 1990 they will become a million, i.e. 22 percent of the total population of the state.

The Arab masses have proven capable of producing progressive intellectuals and experienced political leaders, of consolidating their national identity, and of gradually absorbing revolutionary experiences taking place in other parts of the world. This process began after the 1967 aggression when the interaction between the struggle of the Arabs in Israel and that of the people of the occupied territories developed and grew in strength.

As a result of the systematic and planned expropriation of Arab land, the social structure of the Arabs in Israel changed markedly. The majority of the younger generation became workers, but the number of intellectuals also increased. In the new social class structure, the workers and intellectuals play a decisive role. Greater numbers of the petty bourgeoisie and the middle class, whether urban or rural, have changed their position and taken part in the general struggle. The Arab villages have gradually grown into small towns that feel the desire to modernize.

As a consequence of this dynamic development, political awareness has increased and the drive for unity has become greater. The Arab masses have started to solidify their ranks. The success of the democratic front in Nazareth was a clear expression of this unity and its importance. It created very positive influences in every town and village and at the national level. Democratic and progressive fronts started to emerge in Arab villages. This success brought new hope for the Arab masses and increased their self-confidence. The accomplishments of the new municipality of Nazareth were great, in spite of the fierce political war waged against it, and the financial restrictions to which it was subjected. This gave stark evidence of the potential energy which the Arab masses have, when they are well organized and united.

It must be mentioned that this unity has been built around the Israeli Communist Party, the political leader of the Arabs in Israel since the establishment of the state. This fact is mainly due to two things: to the party's general program which calls for the establishment of a just peace in the area based on the recognition of the national rights of all sides and states; and to its heroic struggle throughout this period, which has resulted in hundreds of comrades being persecuted, jailed and banished.

The Arab masses in Israel have always revealed great political maturity, and have rejected irresponsible infantile revolutionary extremism. They have been fully aware of the authorities' intrigues and conspiracies, the last of which was the attempt by official circles to stir religious strife by exploiting the Lebanese crisis. But all those attempts were nipped in the bud.

The Arabs in Israel are fully aware that the policy of the government

against them is only an integral part of the government's adventuristic, chauvinistic and expansionist policy based on the illusion that it can solve all its problems by the point of the sword. The Arabs in Israel have an important role to play in the struggle for achieving a democratic and just solution of the national problem of the Palestinian Arab people—its right to self determination and to a sovereign national state, and the right of the refugees to return—and for establishing a just and permanent peace between Israel and the Arab world.

A just and democratic solution will create a convenient atmosphere for continuing the democratic struggle and for defeating the policy of racial discrimination and implementing full national equality. This means that land expropriation has to be stopped, and confiscated Arab land must be given back to its legal owners. In addition, the right of the Arabs to exist and to develop on their land and in their homeland must be recognized. The Arabs must have the right of due respect to their culture and national dignity, the right of full representation in the various official and public institutions, and the right of participation in remolding the general policy of the state and the future relations with the Jewish people, which they want to be based on mutual understanding, cooperation and respect. It is encouraging to remember that the democratic and rational Jewish forces that support this just struggle are increasing daily.