

The Israeli-Egyptian Conflict

By BENJAMIN J. DAVIS

In two recent columns—Feb. 26 and April 2—A. W. Berry discussed the question of the Israeli-Egyptian conflict. On March 6, I wrote a letter commenting on the first column, criticizing its misleading inadequacy and its tendency to straddle the fundamental issues. In Comrade Berry's April 2, column he declared his disagreement with my "protesting" letter, and proceeded to take to task a similar "protesting" letter by C. B. What his disagreement are with my letter, he didn't say; but it was possible to gather the impression that in polemizing with C.B., he was handling my letter also. That such an inference could be left makes it necessary to say a few more words on the subject.

However, considerable time has elapsed and so have events. The situation in the Near and Middle East is very tense and serious. And the central question for Marxists is how to interpret it and what to do about it. In neither of Berry's columns does he deal with this question, and that is their fundamental weakness. In this regard, C.B.'s letter makes a contribution. Berry's column ignores this basic contribution, although it tackles other important related questions.

C.B. quite properly indicted "Israel's pro-imperialist foreign policies" and then stated: "A people's position on imperialism and colonialism is still the criterion for the Negro—no matter who now questions or seeks to blur that criterion." C.B. might have added that this criterion is true not only for the Negro people, but for all other broad democratic forces in our country, Jew or Gentile. This statement of the question by C.B., I submit, is fundamentally sound, although I disagree with other unfortunate formulations in his letter. I will not expand upon the question generally, since this was done in an excellent manner by the late Edward Strong, in his *Daily Worker* article of Nov. 22, 1956.

Berry's April 2 column no longer straddles the issue but gives the impression of an apology for the pro-imperialist policies of the Ben Gurion government, and fails to differentiate these policies from the national interests of Israel and of the Jewish people. It makes no mention whatsoever of bourgeois nationalism among certain Jewish circles, although the letter of C.B. raised this problem in a very concrete manner. It not only fails to mention the Bandung conference, but misses its pertinent significance in the Israeli-Egyptian conflict. Anyone of these shortcomings, taken alone, could seriously disorient any approach to the Mideast situation—and Berry's column has them all.

Instead of galvanizing the readers to struggle, the column serves as a tranquilizer, inducing passivity and frustration, as if the Egyptian-Israeli situation will be taken care of by time or in some other automatic fashion. Quite the contrary: the American working class and people generally have a vital role to play in their own interests, in this situation, be they Negro or white, Jew or gentile. Considerations of world peace and of colonial freedom dictate such a role.

The deep feeling of the Jewish people, in particular, in the U. S., for the legitimate national aspirations of Israel should be profoundly understood, taken into account and widely supported. Such sympathy and understanding should be cultivated among all sections of the labor movement and democratic folk in our country, Negro and white.

Israel has a right to a secure existence as a state, to the use of the Aqaba and Suez, and to equal sovereignty with any other

state, big or small. The attempt of various Arab leaders, or any others, to convert the justifiable indignation of the Arab and other anti-colonial masses against Israeli foreign policy, into wholesale persecution of the Jewish people in Israel or elsewhere, should be condemned and resisted in the strongest manner.

The main culprit in this situation is American imperialism, which has wedged itself into a dominant position in the Israeli economy, tying the country to the chariot of Wall Street and the State Department.

Assurances with respect to the security of Israel are an inseparable part of the prosecution of the central struggle: all-out support to Egypt which is spearheading the national liberation movement of the Arab peoples against British, French and American imperialism—particularly against the Eisenhower Doctrine.

A broad program of action along this line needs to be put into force including, it seems to me, a demand for the admission of Arab refugees to America. (If the doors are flung wide open to Hungarian fascists—who are a significant section of the Hungarian refugees—then why not the Arab peoples—except of course that the latter are dark and supposedly "inferior.")

Unless the foreign policy of Israel is reversed and she throws in her lot with the Bandung countries against the colonial powers, instead of serving as an accomplice of these powers, then Israel is courting national suicide, not national security. This is the most decisive question in the Israeli-Egyptian conflict. For if Israel had full unrestricted use of the Aqaba and the Suez, and all other rights to which she is entitled, and still threw in her lot with the imperialist powers, she would still be courting suicide.

It should not be forgotten that Israel just participated in a brutal aggression against Egypt—and no guarantees have been given the Arab states that the same thing will not be done again. The first item of such a guarantee is for the Ben Gurion regime to correct its foreign policy. Israel's independence and security lie with the billion or more peoples of the Asian-African community of which she is a part. It certainly does not lie in the direction of serving as a gendarme for American, British or French imperialism, in attempting to police the massive liberation struggles of the Arab peoples.

Questions of tactics and form as to how such an outlook is to be promoted among the workers and masses of our country are vitally important—but such an outlook is the only sound one. I have no doubt that the Jewish workers of the U.S., who are among the most advanced in the labor movement, will come to play a very positive role in this regard, for it is they, especially Communists among them who have been the main influence among the Jewish people in bringing about close Negro-Jewish relations. Communists should approach these workers with candor, confidence and with understanding.

C. B.'s letter gave examples of certain Jewish business circles attempting to intimidate Negro newspapers, citing the cases of the Los Angeles Herald-Dispatch and the Pittsburgh Courier. Berry replied unfairly by labelling C. B. as "concluding" that a "clique of organized Jews is censoring the Negro press." Berry continues: "I don't have to argue here just how such a conclusion would affect Negro-Jewish relations." To be sure. But one must ask whether it helps Negro-Jewish relations when an attempt to intimidate a Negro newspaper is made by a white business man who hap-

pens to be Jewish? This is a problem of life itself and cannot be buried under a labelling of the person who poses it.

I think C. B. exaggerated the scope of the problem—for the main attempts to intimidate the Negro press come from the big monopolies, the Eisenhower Administration and the Dixie ruling class, particularly in the South, where the Negro press operates at great risk. It is my belief that the problem cited by C. B. is a real one, but can be settled in concrete cases, largely because of the high level of cooperation between the Negro and Jewish peoples. But Berry did no service by trying to pin a label on C. B., nor by inflating C. B.'s critical position. That should be left to the capitalist press which recklessly labels Negro spokesmen who disagree with the Ben Gurion government as anti-Semitic.

The instances given by C. B. reflect bourgeois nationalism in certain Jewish circles with respect to the Ben Gurion government—that is, a belief that the Israeli ruling circles should have exceptional privileges to pursue war and chauvinism against the Arab peoples and states. American imperialism is doing everything possible to promote such reactionary nationalism among Jews and gentiles alike, in the hope of turning it to the use of the U.S. oil monopolists and to the advantage of the State Department's own colonial ambitions in that area. This pro-imperialist ideology has to be combatted.

The characterization of Ben Gurion as a "Hitler" in the news columns of the Herald-Dispatch, and certain other formulations in that paper, should be rejected as harmful and unfortunate by all the deserved supporters of that publication. The necessity, however, is not for name-calling and branding with respect to the Dispatch, but to help in clarifying and solving real problems that the paper faces. (Besides, it is well-known that the Eisenhower Administration is working both sides of the street in the Israeli-Egyptian conflict, spreading white chauvinism against the Arab peoples and their colored supporters, and anti-Semitism against the Jewish people in order to garner control of Arab oil. This is to split Negro-Jewish unity at home.)

For example, the chauvinist and far more prevalent slander is that of labelling Nasser as a "dictator" and "Hitler," which is designed to discredit the anti-imperialist role of Egypt and the Arab national liberation movement. This latter characterization has appeared in the N.Y. Post and other capitalist publications and ought to be vigorously denounced by the *Daily Worker*.

The undeveloped social systems of the Arab states have been imposed upon them by imperialist oppression. The one-sided reference in Berry's column to the Herald-Dispatch in effect unjustly branded this paper and gave a false picture of its whole role. By and large, despite this weakness, it is one of the most advanced Negro publications in the country, Negro or white. It militantly fights for Negro rights; it conducts campaigns against the Smith Act, and in behalf of specific victims of that Act, Negro and white, Jew and gentile; it has no truck with red-baiting and freely upholds free speech by opening its columns to Communists as well as other dissenters; it supported the assistance of the Soviet Union in smashing fascist attempts to take over in Hungary; it is a courageous and principled admirer of the Soviet Union, China and other socialist lands; it fights the unconstitutional passport bans upon Paul Robeson, Dr. DuBois and others. The policies of the Herald-Dis-

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patch on these issues inure to the benefit of all Americans Negro and white, Jew and gentile and the Daily Worker, among other publications, can learn much from its militant stand against U.S. reaction and imperialism. Differences with this paper should be marked by constructive criticism, not one-sided branding.

In the last analysis, the colonial question is at the heart of the Mid-East crisis. In the not too distant future, the destiny of mankind is going to be determined, in large part, by the decisive majority of the human race in Africa and Asia—not to mention Latin America and the Caribbean. Of all the major Western powers only the Soviet Union — armed with Marxism - Leninism — has foreseen that new and growing trend on the world scene and drawn the proper conclusions from it. The Western imperialists, whose days of unchallenged colonial supremacy are over, had better get with it.