

PALESTINE - Pogrom or Revolution?

By MAX SHACHTMAN

The reactionary Arab leaders have diverted the nationalist movement of the masses into Pan-Islamic and anti-Semitic channels and out of its natural current against British imperialism. Is not this clear from all that has happened? Here is an interview (New York Times, September 7, 1929) with Auni Abd-el-Hadi Sij, secretary of the Arab Executive, secretary to Feisal of Iraq at Versailles and co-signer of the treaty:

THE ARAB CONGRESS

"At our congress today we solemnly declared that we would not budge from our conviction that Palestine must again form a part of the Arab Empire of our dreams." The Arab leader went on to say that the Arab Executive gave orders to the Arab population not to shoot at British troops even when these troops, blinded by London orders, were shooting at them. In the last outbreaks the Arabs shot at Jews only; those Englishmen reported killed, he said, were the victims of stray bullets. "We are by no means anti-British." (My emphasis. M. S.)

Furthermore, the Executive Committee of the Arab National Congress, in a message to the League of Nations, asked it to see that a parliamentary government, representative of the Arabian majority, was installed in the "Holy Land". Between these gentlemen and their Zionist contemporaries there is about the same difference as between the Polish nobility and the favoring Jews under czarism.

The cause of the street struggles is therefore not to be found in the dispute over the so-called Wailing Wall. Rather the latter is only a religious cloak for deep-going social conflict. Only the passionately blind or the wilfully deceptive fail to acknowledge this obvious fact now. Have not even the National Council of Palestine Jews, and Chief Rabbinate and the pious Agudheh Israel admitted, in their memorandum to the British High Commissioner, that the Wailing Wall is only incidental to the main struggle?

Is the Arab attack upon the Jews a pogrom? That the action of the Arabs had anti-Semitic features is quite clear, and is implicitly admitted even by the Communist Party Thesis (*Daily Worker*, September 3, 1929) when it says that "the action of the Arabs transformed itself rapidly (but from what? M. S.) into a national revolutionary uprising." That it was not a pogrom on the Jews, however, is eloquently evidenced by the fairly reliable figures of the *Literary Digest*, which reports that the first two weeks of the upheaval brought the following fatalities: Moslems killed, 870; Christians, 4; Jews, 175. That the main responsibility lies up British imperialism and its Zionist salesmen, and only in an entirely secondary sense upon the Arabs, is attested by no less an "unbiased" authority than the editor of the *American Hebrew*: "The arrogance of the so-called Zionist revolutionists is doubtless a causative factor behind the unhappy Moslem outbreaks against the Jews. The bravado with which they claim Jewish Palestine against the Arabs, the aggressive zeal with which they demand an exclusive Jewish nationhood in Palestine, the inflammatory political harangues with which they demonstrate their foolhardy assertiveness are in no little measure to blame for the ill-will and recurrent clashes between Moslem and Jew in the Holy Land." No, it is not a pogrom. It is an uprising of the down-trodden Arabian masses, seeking expression for their hatred of the British oppressor, but still strangled and retarded by their corrupt feudal and bourgeois leaders, sold out at every opportunity, and often dragged off into reactionary by-paths.

THE ROLE OF THE FORWARD

It is, therefore, the lowest kind of reactionary nationalism, jingoist incitement of backward sentiment, and contemptible insult to an "inferior race", when the "socialist" *Forward* writes in its leading editorial (August 31, 1929): "The main motive (so!) of the pogromists, the force that drove them to their bloody work, was 'Gold and women'. 'In the Jewish houses you will find herds of gold and lovely women.' That was the cry, that was the fire that excited the blood of the mob and drove it to carry out its diabolical work." The Southern Bourbon reaction always uses precisely the same "reasoning" when it proceeds to lynch Negroes. And every worker to whom the cause of Labor is dear, will condemn unmeasuredly the scandalous lynching campaign of the *Forward* and its Zionist allies against the Communist Party, and its Jewish Organ, the *Freiheit*, in particular. The daily incitement of the *Forward* and the *Jewish Day*, aided, as in Chicago, by the American Legion, has resulted in hooligan attacks upon the *Freiheit* office in Chicago, intimidating newsstand dealers from selling the papers, pressing advertisers to withdraw their contracts, and breaking up Communist street meetings. These are the same despicable methods used by Bursleson and Palmer against the socialist and the labor press during and after the war, and they have nothing in common with the working class. We protested against these actions when Stalinists sought to break up our Opposition meetings and tear up our press. We will fight with the party against the present methods of the yellow *Forward*.

THE ARAB LEADERS

Now, is the Arab uprising a national revolutionary movement, as the official Party press declares? No.

Pogrom or national revolution? The answer to this question, arising out of the recent events in Palestine, has brought confusion and sharp dissension into the labor and Communist movement in this and other countries. An understanding of the present situation is prerequisite for an answer.

The artificially-established country known today as Palestine has been inhabited by Arabs for more than twelve centuries. While under the domination of Turkey, the liberation of the country (together with other Arabian territory) was promised by British emissaries to the Emir of Mecca, Hussein, as soon as Turkey entered the world war on the side of the Central powers. In November 1915, the English pledged the Arabs title to their lands, retaining reservations on French claims to Syria. Hussein, relying upon the support of Britain, began his noted revolt in May 1916, and Britain signed the Sykes-Picot agreement on May 16, 1917 which agreed to support an eventual Arab national state in the interior of Syria. Hussein's son, the Emir Feisal, sweeping through Transjordan into Syria, took Damascus, and made it the capital of the Arab state.

The end of the World War saw the betrayal of the promises made by England to the Arabs and dissolved their Pan-Islamic dreams in the brutal realities of imperialist striving for power. Through the secret treaties, France was given Syria north of Palestine; and after driving Feisal out of Damascus occupied the whole country. England got the oil regions of Mosul and Palestine.

PALESTINE AND THE EMPIRE

With Cyprus and Egypt, Palestine forms the triangular protective collar of the jugular vein of British imperialism: the Suez Canal, the great route to India and China, the other end of the long Mediterranean gap guarded on the Atlantic by Gibraltar. Moreover, Palestine is of additional strategic importance for England. The pipe line for Mosul oil will terminate at the seaport of Haifa, and with it the railroad to Mesopotamia; Britain's imperial airways, of the commercial and military variety, have an important post in Palestine, over which lies the land route to India. To retain a stranglehold on Palestine by throttling any Arabian movement for independence has become a cardinal section in the British imperialist code.

Largely to this end, as well as for the purpose of distracting the sympathy of the Jews from the impending Bolshevik revolution, Lord Balfour issued his notorious declaration on November 2, 1917, which proclaimed England's intention to assure Jewry "a national homeland", that is, by their domination of the Zionist movement, to inject into Palestine a solid base for British imperialist support, and a source of friction with the Arabs, a bulwark against the nationalist wave. The reactionary-Utopian character of Zionism lent itself splendidly to this design. Misled by the glowing promises of the Zionist leaders, thousands of Jewish workers were brought to Palestine to serve as the instruments of British imperialism against the Arab natives and the reactionary aims of well fed Jewish magnates in establishing a state in Palestine dominated by the Jews—who to this day form only about one-seventh of the population—and serving the cause of the Union Jack.

The expropriation of the Arabian peasants began on a big scale. Their land was "bought" by Zionist speculators at incredibly low prices, usually paid to the rich Sheiks and Effendis, leaving the Arab fellahin without any source of livelihood. Together with thousands of Jewish workers, the Arabs were transformed into objects of almost limitless exploitation as agricultural workers and proletarians in the incipient industry of the country.

THE NATIONALIST MISLEADERS

The natural growth of Arab resentment against British imperialism and its Zionist trail-blazers, expressing itself in a movement for national liberation by the unshackling of England's fetters, was checked, perverted and emasculated by the Arabian feudal landlords, the religious caste and the budding bourgeoisie. From the Grand Mufti to the lower caste Sheiks, there is hardly one of the leaders of the Arabian nationalist movement who has not at one time or another been bought, or who could not be bought to serve British or French imperialism. And outside of this reactionary element, dominated largely by religious and Pan-Islamic notions, there is no substantial anti-imperialist movement except the Communist Party of Palestine. Today there is not even as advanced a movement in Palestine as was represented in China by the Kuo Min Tang.

It is this element that is today leading the Arabian nationalist movement, particularly in Palestine, and much to the detriment of the interests and aspirations of the Arab peasant. It wants the establishment of an Arab State in Palestine, if not throughout all the Arabic countries proper—an Arab State in agreement with the British, "if necessary", and even under their benevolent protectorate. Thence arises their sharp antagonism to the Zionists and their servile attitude towards the British master.

Therein lie the causes of the present struggle. To jockey for a better position in Palestine, to advance their desires for greater power, the Arab and Zionist bourgeoisie continue to set their respective peoples into conflict with each other. The Arab worker and peasant is depicted to the Jew as the source of all his difficulties. The Jew is pointed out to the Arab as the source of all evil.

Not every movement led by spokesmen of an oppressed nationality is a revolutionary movement. It is a lamentable fact that at the present time the Arab movement is directed by unconcealed reactionaries, with no substantial Left wing or revolutionary force to challenge their leadership, outside of the Communist Party of Palestine which has virtually no influence upon the recent events and which these same reactionaries helped to drive into illegality and imprisonment. The Arab leaders have curbed the genuine movement of the masses, they have stunted its growth and prevented the development of its natural course of struggle, they have repeatedly misled and vitalized it.

They are still the only spokesmen of the movement, and they speak for reactionary aims. They fight for an "Arab Empire". They have compromised with imperialism and are willing to do it again. They are against all Jews as Jews. They set up the reactionary demand for the "restriction of the Jewish immigration into Palestine".

They do not even pretend to a program one-tenth as advanced as that of the Kuo Min Tang three years ago. They promise the peasant no land and the worker no social improvement. They are vehement enemies not only of Bolshevism, but of the mildest kind of labor movement. In this respect, they far "excel" their Zionist competitors.

But all of this means to the Stalinist high priests of the "Third Period". They have their idiotic and empty formula, and feel compelled to make every event, occurring anywhere in the world, fit into the cherished blueprint. The confused and misdirected action of the Arabs is therefore touched with the magic wand of the "Third Period", and presto! it has become a "national revolutionary uprising against British imperialism." And endless as the Arabian deserts are the theses written to "prove" this contention. But who is leading this movement along national revolutionary lines? We are not told, because discretion is the better part of the New Line. Were an answer given, it would have to be: the Grand Mufti, the rabid Pan-Islamists, the Effendis, the feudal lords are the as yet unchallenged leaders of the movement that has been generated.

But, you say, thereby the contention falls to the ground? Yes, that is precisely why we have the astounding picture of three theses of the Political Committee and its Agit-Prop department (August 30th, September 3rd, and September 7th issues of *Daily Worker*) that do not say a word about these reactionary leaders of the Arab masses, much less condemn them. The September 3rd thesis has 9 slogans at its conclusion, without a single one of them implying the need of struggle against these elements who will never lead a national revolutionary movement or allow one to develop. The September 7th thesis says: "We must point out the distinction between the Jewish bourgeoisie and the exploited and misled Jewish working masses in Palestine." Excellent! But why is there not a whisper about the "distinction" between the Arab fellahin and their oppressive Effendis and Mukhtars? Are we perhaps to understand that the Grand Mufti has become the leader of an Arabian "Bloc of Four Classes" as was Chiang Kai-Shek before him? Has the green banner of Islam replaced the blue of the Kuo Min Tang? Are we to witness another period of exaggeration of the essence of the movement, of praises sung to the "national revolutionary anti-imperialist bourgeoisie" until they again decimate a whole generation of workers and peasants?

Behind all the "revolutionary" blabber of the Stalinists on the Palestine uprising is concealed an abysmally opportunist appraisal of the movement and its leaders.

THE FREIHEIT'S ZIG-ZAG

Does this mean that we have the same viewpoint as that of the *Freiheit* before it was condemned by the Party Political Bureau? By no means. The viewpoint of the *Freiheit* was quite indistinguishable from that of a Reformed rabbi with leanings towards the labor movement. "The Arabian attacks bear all the signs of the czarist pogroms," it said (August 26). "Protest against the British government which permits the pogroms upon innocent people!" (Ah, cold-hearted MacDonald, why don't you send some warships and troops to shoot down these confounded Arab pogromists!)

What happened was that when the incurable Menshevik Olgin, and the Zionist-trained Epstein, were scratched by a struggle, their thin coat of Bolshevik veneer was scraped off to reveal the Bundist underneath. The fact that the Olgins and Epsteins (there are many of them, all specialists in slaughtering Trotskyists, by the way) covered their scratches inside of an hour with some more varnish as soon as they found they were ordered to by the Political Committee, changes nothing about them. It merely made them throw away the speeches prepared for the Plaza Hall meeting, and rewrite them, using the same facts, but adding on new slogans furnished them by the Agit-Prop department. But you will never make a milk purse out of a sow's ear, or a Bolshevik out of Olgin.

British imperialism, with the help of God and "comrade" MacDonald and Webb,—not to speak of the anointed Zionists—will suppress the present uprising, but since its causes remain, the situation will continue to cast up new and greater insurrections. But the Arabian masses will win their liberation only under the banner of Bolshevism.