
THIS BOOK makes fascinating reading despite its brevity (215 pages). On Zionism, Israel, Arab nationalism and the characters of people such as Moshe Dayan, it gives a wealth of facts not generally known. It realistically examines the standpoints of both sides, refreshingly putting main responsibility on the author's own side to get some movement towards peace.

Insofar as it deals with the faults of the Arabs, the main point made is that it is a great mistake to regard Israel as merely a stooge for Western imperialism, although the author recognises reasons for the existence of such a view.

The main thesis of the book is the recognition that two great national movements, perhaps inevitably in view of historical circumstances, have come into collision in the Middle East, and that the only possible way out short of ultimate catastrophe is to break what has become a vicious circle.

Uri Avnery was born in 1924 in Germany and left for Palestine with his family shortly after Hitler came to power. He joined Irgun, the National Military ("terrorist") Organisation which fought the Arabs and also the British, whom they thought were secretly supporting the Arabs, though Avnery records that later he realised the Arab fight was at bottom a great national rebellion which was destined to grow.

Avnery fought in the war of 1948, and in 1950 became editor of Ha'olam Hazeh ("This World") which is now regarded as Israel's leading weekly news magazine. Attempts to mute the voice of this journal in 1965 impelled him into the political arena, and he was elected to the Knesset (with 1.2% of the votes under proportional representation) as the sole parliamentary spokesman of a new political grouping.

The origins of the clash of nationalisms he places in the founding of Zionism by Theodor Herzl in 1896 with his book Der Judenstaat (The Jewish State). Avnery describes Zionism as a direct product of the spirit of nationalism in nineteenth century Europe, in the wake of the infamous Dreyfus affair.

Zionism, Avnery says, envisaged even greater changes than those introduced by other national revolutions, in that it involved as well the transfer of people from one country to another, and often from one class to another (usually lower).

The "achilles heel" of this fervent nationalism was its ignorance and blindness in regard to the Arabs. Avnery quotes an almost unbelievable incident recounted in one of the books of the famous Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. Nordau, another top leader of Zionism "hearing for the first time that there were Arabs living in Palestine ran to Herzl deeply shocked exclaiming, 'I didn't know that! We are committing an injustice'" (p.50).

Avnery dryly records that Nordau did not take long to recover completely from his shock and sense of injustice. So much so that at the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905 he advocated an alliance with the Turks (then ruling Palestine) against the Arabs — "It meant, practically speaking", says Avnery, a declaration of war on the emerging Arab nationalist movement" (p.51).

This was followed by other moves, by the Arab side as well as the Zionist, and, says Avnery.
Thus began the cycle in which Zionist-Arab relations have moved incessantly ever since: (1) The Zionists increase their efforts at immigration and settlement; (2) the Arabs react violently to what they consider a mortal threat to their national existence; (3) to contain the threat and gain political and military assistance, the Zionists look for an ally, an ally that can only be a foreign power whose interests are being adversely affected by the rising Arab nationalism: [Turks, British, French, Americans]; (4) the pact between Zionism and the foreign power whets Arab hatred and bitterness, sharpening their attack upon the Jewish national home; (5) this increases for the Zionists the need for even bigger allies.

It is a complete cycle, a truly vicious circle, this not-so-merry-go-round where each rider sits on his horse as it goes up and down, imagining that it is he who decides his course, tragically condemned — by the inner logic of his earlier acts and the ideology nourished by them — to follow a predestined course" (p.59).

Opportunities presented by positive Arab attitudes at various times were never responded to because of the basic Zionist attitude which remained dominant. For example Ben Gurion, regarded as the architect of the State of Israel "never wavered in his belief that Israel must remain a homogeneous Jewish state, that it must align itself with the West, and that peace with the Arabs is impossible" (p.97).

Opportunities missed because of this include relations with Nasser, of whom Avnery says that he had no anti-Israel sentiments or policy to start with.

Also the events in 1954, when General Riad announced that the Arabs were prepared to accept international control over the waters of the Jordan River which would have meant some actual collaboration between the Arabs and the State of Israel, and various other moves which may have opened some doors. Zionist attitudes and policies however made certain that these remained shut.

Other facts related by Avnery include those concerning the notorious spy story of 1954 where a group of Jewish Egyptians were directed to plant bombs in American and British offices throughout Egypt to worsen relations with these countries to the "benefit" of Israel.

Within Israel, Zionist policy worked in the same direction. The fundamental tenets of Zionism are described by Avnery as follows:

“(a) all the Jews in the world are one nation; (b) Israel is a Jewish state, created by the Jews and for the Jews all over the world; (c) the Jewish dispersal is a temporary situation, and sooner or later all Jews will have to come to Israel, driven, if by nothing else, by inevitable anti-Semitic persecution; (d) the ingathering of these exiles is the raison d'etre of Israel, the primary purpose to which all other aims have to be subservient" (pp.157-8).

Thus, in Israel, there is no separation between Church and State. Every Jew has the automatic right to settle in Israel, immediately acquiring Israeli citizenship (though his spouse, if a Christian would not become such except through normal processes of naturalisation).

But what is a Jew, who is a Jew? No clear-cut legal definition exists. There can be, and is, no definition except a religious one, and the courts of Israel have even decided that a person ceases to be a Jew if he adopts another religion. There is no civil marriage or divorce in Israel and a Jew cannot marry a Christian or a Moslem — nor can a Jew named Cohen marry a divorced woman, because Co-
hens, regarded historically as belonging to the priesthood, must marry virgins. (A Cohen cannot change his name to get out of it either!)

Perhaps more important, the idea of a homogeneous state being inherent in Zionism, any non-Jew is really a foreign element to the Israeli regime, and this has particularly grave consequences in respect to the Arabs. For example, it raises almost insuperable barriers to the settlement of the Arab refugee problem, because Zionist outlook regards it as essential to keep the Arab minority as small as possible.

Perhaps the most striking fact of all is that, after three generations of conflict and 20 years of an actual state of war, there is no Israeli Government department for Arab affairs. These matters are handled by the Middle East section of the Foreign Ministry, which employs only 30 officials out of a total of 900, and some of these deal with questions involving non-Arab Middle Eastern countries such as Iran! Less than 0.05% of the Israeli budget, and less than 3% of that of the Foreign office is devoted to Middle Eastern affairs. The Zionist ideology is overwhelmingly oriented towards the West.

Before outlining the author's approach to the breaking of the vicious circle, some facts concerning the Israeli Establishment need to be given.

Although many aspects of Israeli life are very democratic, the Establishment is deeply — and undemocratically — entrenched. Says Avnery "the Zionist parties ... have power structures almost independent of their members, controlled by professional leaders and financed by outside sources". (p. 68).

This arose for quite understandable historical reasons, it is true, but this makes it no less a blight on today's political scene. Briefly, most Zionist party leaders originally lived abroad; they controlled a growing financial apparatus operating in Palestine but based abroad. The parties established their institutions. The kibbutzim (co-operatives) belong to parties, and thus breaking with the party meant abandoning a home. The Histadruth (trade union organisation) attached to left-wing Zionist parties, operated the labour exchange and an excellent sick fund — but this gave the leaders of parties great power over dissident members.

Considerable financial contributions to the various Zionist parties came from abroad via the Jewish Agency, whose governing bodies are not elected by any normal democratic process:

"It is a Federation of party secretariats ... a system for the division of the spoils. Several million dollars are parcelled out directly among the Zionist parties, ostensibly as compensation for relinquishing their rights to organise their own fund-raising in the United States." (p.175) But the main activity of the Jewish Agency is (with complete agreement of the State) the organisation of immigration, including settlement and absorption of migrants.

"Thus", says Avnery, "parties controlling the Zionist organisation can manipulate vast amounts of money independent of ordinary democratic processes and controls. Small wonder indeed that to all these parties Zionism is sacred. The Establishment could not possibly exist without it. The idea of a non-Zionist Israel is to them heresy, mortal sin:"". (p.176).

And this is the radical proposal for a new course advanced by Avnery and his colleagues — a non-Zionist Israel.

They consider themselves to be representative of a new generation of Israelis who reject the Zionist shibboleths and attitudes. They regard themselves as Israeli (or Hebrew) nat-
ionalists, and not just another part of world Jewry that happens to live in Palestine.

Thus they do not look to a great new influx of Jews from abroad to develop Israel (nor do they believe it will come); they are not motivated by a need to acquire new territory for the settlement of such a flood of migrants; they are not oriented towards the West but to the Middle East, and therefore towards the Arabs, and a merging rather than a clashing of the two nationalisms; they are for a secular state and the overthrow of the existing Zionist establishment.

This new, non-Zionist nationalism is regarded by Avnery as similar to the new nationalism involving a sense of political destiny which developed in Australia for example. A nation, for him, is defined simply and pragmatically as "a group of people who believe they are a nation, who want to live as a nation, have a common political destiny, identify themselves with a political state, pay its taxes, serve in its army, work for its future, share its fate — and, if necessary, die for it". (p.155).

It is from this approach that Avnery draws his main proposal for peace. The Arabs are not one nation, but several. The only Arabs who are not identified with one or other of these nations are the Palestinian Arabs. They satisfy his definition of a nation — they want to live as a nation, and are prepared, if necessary to die for it.

This "would mean that the Government of Israel would offer the Palestinian Arabs assistance in setting up a national republic of their own, this offer being conditional upon a federal agreement between such a Palestine and Israel. The Palestine Republic would comprise the west bank of the Jordan and the Gaza Strip. Transjordan could join if its inhabitants were able and willing so to decide. Jerusalem as a unified city would become the federal capital, as well as the capital of both states... The Federal agreement should be preceded by an economic, political and military pact” (p.187-7).

Avnery answers some of the many objections that spring to mind, though he recognises the long term nature of such a solution, even if it is realisable at all. But what is the alternative? The parallel is drawn by many with the Crusader State in Palestine which lasted for about two centuries, but finally and inevitably succumbed. If this ultimate disaster faces a Zionist Israel, does it offer much comfort to Arab nationalism to have to wait this long for the internal progress to which they look, and which can hardly come while the state of war remains? Can it offer much comfort to the rest of the world which could be drawn into any one of the many future conflicts which will inevitably flare up in the absence of a settlement.

The questions once posed answer themselves, and must increase efforts towards a political settlement somewhere in the direction indicated by Avnery.

Whatever may be the case on the other side — and one can as yet only hope for an equally realistic and forward looking attitude gaining ascendency among the Arabs and some of their supporters — the rulers of Israel, dominated by their Zionist outlook and pro-Western orientation, at present offer no encouragement whatever.

They appear to be "reasonable" (as they wish to appear) by offering direct negotiations with the Arabs. But as Avnery points out, far from being reasonable, this is a sure sign of bankruptcy of their policy in regard to peace. For all the present rulers of Israel want is recognition by the Arabs, which they immediately achieve once direct negotiations are entered into. This gives them "victory" in advance
of any proposals on their part to satisfy legitimate Arab demands. In fact they have no proposals and cannot agree among themselves on any proposals, as Prime Minister Mrs. Meir has recently clearly revealed.

One feels, from reading this book, that Avnery does indeed express the aspirations of the as yet very small number of “new generation” Israelis, and this gives some hope for peace in the future. What one does not know is whether this small number will increase quickly enough to avoid a new disaster.

E.A.

THE HUMANIST OUTLOOK,
A. J. Ayer Ed.
Pemberton/Barrie and Rockliff, $4.90.

IN THE 19th CENTURY, with the discovery of the theory of evolution by Darwin and the general advance of science, the creation of the world as it appears in the Bible was discredited in the eyes of many and a movement developed called Rationalism.

Present-day Humanists are the “intellectual heirs” of such free thinkers. In 1968, British philosopher A. J. Ayer invited 20 members of the Advisory Council of the British Humanist Association to explain, with topics of their own choosing, what Humanism means to-day.

Humanists adopt a scientific method in their approach to analysing the world around them. They affirm the principle that human beings should not be expected to accept as dogma what is not known to be true, e.g. the existence of a deity.

However, the anti-Godism which dominated the outlook of earlier humanists has been replaced with a more all-sided attitude, dealing more with the role of man, dependent as he is, upon natural and social resources. As the N.S.W. Humanist Society puts it, “Humanists hold that human moral and social conduct are best founded on reason and on the value and dignity of man.”

In his introduction to The Humanist Outlook, A. J. Ayer points out that while there is no logical connection between religion and morals this does not entail that there is no causal connection, that is, the highest moral actions may come from those who adopt a religious faith and because of it. Therefore it would be a mistake for the Humanist movement to expend its main energies on an anti-clerical crusade.

Moral conduct receives a great deal of attention in this book — as it relates to war, nuclear weapons, inequitable distribution of wealth, birth control, the right to commit suicide for rational motives such as increasing senility, and the responsibility of each individual for his own actions.

A. J. Ayer points out that if there is no logical connection between religion and any code of morality, neither can science supply us with our values. We can appeal to facts to support moral attitudes but such support is not justification.

If so how do moral values arise? Who is to say which values are right or wrong? Are there any universal moral values? How do we learn to make moral decisions? These are some of the questions discussed.

Morris Ginsberg (Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics) opposes the view of the anthropologist Boas that there is no evolution in moral ideas (derived from Boas’ studies of primitive societies). Ginsberg believes moral codes differ but at the same time this does not rule out that behind diversity there are gen-