

Israel's Image

Agreement on Refugees

By Alfred Friendly

JERUSALEM, Aug. 7—Final agreement, expected within a day or two, permit-

somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 Palestinians who fled to Jordan will apparently constitute another in the series of public relations defeats Israel feels it has ting the return to Israel of suffered since its military victory in June.

Based on their assessment of world opinion, the Israelis feel that it is they who appeared unreasonable throughout the controversy and King Hussein who appeared generous.

Israel's public relations woes with the refugees began when it removed, before it found adequate housing elsewhere, scores of East Jerusalemites from houses that had formerly been synagogues or that were destroyed to open up space in front of the Wailing Wall in the Old City.

The change of expulsion was immediate and widespread.

At about the same time, the former Jordanian governor of East Jerusalem, Anwar Khatib, called to the Israelis' attention the fact that many East Jerusalemites wished to decamp for Jordan, and asked for help in transporting them to the Allenby Bridge crossing. Israel obliged, perhaps too eagerly.

The accusation of forced

expulsion exploded. Slow in recognizing the consequences—being damned for a second dispossession of the Arabs—Israeli officials took some weeks before they announced that they would permit all the evacuees to return except those who might be security risks, i.e., members of the militant Palestine Liberation Front.

In order to screen them, Israel drew up a simple questionnaire, with the cooperation of the International Red Cross, asking the name, age and residence of the applicant, the name of his father and mother, and the nature of his identity papers, whether they consisted of a passport, identity card, refugee camp ration card, etc.

Almost certainly not by design, and apparently in a fit of routine bureaucratic absentmindedness, the questionnaire was headed, "State of Israel—Ministry of Interior."

The Jordanians refused to let the documents be distributed among the evacuees, on grounds that the wording implied Jordan's recognition of the existence of the State of Israel. The heat of bad public relations already scorching them, the Israelis were dismayed, and privately admitted they would have printed the questionnaires without any heading or upside down on flowered wallpaper if they had been Jordan's desire. But once the issue was made, they felt they could not recede.

The solution, it is reported, is to reprint the documents under the names of Israel, Jordan and the Red Cross.

The fact that the two governments appear as joint sponsors of the return project would seem to be more of a recognition by Jordan of Israel than before, but apparently Jordan does not see it that way.

But meantime, Israel has been charged with lack of sincerity in its offer, for having offered an "obviously unacceptable" document.

In an editorial today, the Jerusalem Post bitterly observes that the episode "must be one of the most curious in the history of wars and victories.

" . . . it is clear that King Hussein, by remarkable political sleight of hand, stands to gain quite considerable credit for his 'reasonableness' in permitting refugees whom he does not wish to keep in Jordan to return to Israel, and actually use Israeli forms for this purpose . . .

"There are sufficiently good humanitarian and also political reasons for allowing these refugees to return but there is no reason why King Hussein should get the credit for it. He did little enough before for those who were refugees while they lived under his control on the West Bank, when they crossed the Jordan to Amman, and now when they want to return."

Joseph Kraft, Art Buchwald and David S. Broder, whose columns usually appear on this page, are on vacation. Their columns will be resumed on their return.



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