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SILWAN - MEMORIES OF SIXTY YEARS AGO

IT was the early Zionist pioneers' good fortune 60 years ago that there was no Israel TV. It would undoubtedly have gone overboard, projecting a picture of poor Beduin being "driven off their land" by members of that insensitive predatory settlers' organization, the Jewish National Fund (yes, the Keren Kayemet). The picture would have been a lie - like the ITV picture several years ago of Jewish settlers at Eilon Moreh in Samaria grabbing land belonging to Arabs.

There was considerable public protest, whereupon ITV sent an investigator. He discovered that it was all a mistake: a poor innocent reporter, who knew every inch of the ground, had innocently pointed the camera in the wrong direction. Meanwhile, the world media had pounced on a new juicy story of Zionist rapacity.

What happened in December 1931, just 60 years ago, was not claimed by anybody as an error. It was an event representative of the time of the British Mandate; and the Mandate itself is an important component of the story. Central to the Mandate, devised as an instrument for the "reconstitution of the Jewish National Home," was the obligation imposed on Britain to place at the disposal of the Jewish People "state and waste lands" with a view to their "close settlement." When the time came, the British did indeed set aside substantial tracts and allocated them - to Arabs, usually to absentee, large-scale landowners.

The Zionists, hungry for land, protested in vain; and went on, willy-nilly, to buy it from those Arabs at (you guessed it) outrageously exorbitant prices. Thus the Jewish National Fund acquired 5,000 dunams at Wadi Hawareth (the original Emek Hefer) in the Sharon. The Beduin living on the land were paid their compensation, as agreed, and went away.

Soon afterwards, Jewish pioneers began working the land. Then the Beduin came back, attacked the settlers and drove them off by force. The British administration reacted promptly.

It advised the Jews to get off the land and lease it to the same Beduin until the Beduin could be "relocated." The Jewish National Fund declined - and Wadi Hawareth became the subject of a worldwide Jewish protest. The British officials, however, did not relent. They warned the Zionists that they would have a law passed in London to confiscate the lands.

Whereupon the JNF capitulated. Instead of calling the officials' bluff, they leased 60 percent of the land. It must be added in fairness, and not irrelevantly to our own day: the British, as part of their policy of undermining Jewish rights and positions, were spreading a major fairy-tale about Jews "driving the Arabs off their lands." The "experts" of the Palestine administration - collaborating, in effect, with the Arab politicians - even produced a fabricated "statistic," which the British home government unquestioningly adopted, of 10,000 Arabs who, they claimed, had been "dispossessed" by Jews.

The day came when the bubble burst; but only after years of propaganda. Then an examination of facts revealed that the total number of Arabs who even claimed they were dispossessed was not 10,000 or even 1,000. It was 600.

Such stratagems are explicitly sanctioned in Moslem culture; and now we have a fresh

example - in Jerusalem. THERE IS no reason in law, logic or decency why Jews who want to do so and who pay the agreed purchase price should not be free to live in the village of Silwan (the original Kfar Hashiloah). Quite apart from other considerations, Jerusalem - as is constantly reiterated - is one united city, governed by the laws of Israel.

Interestingly, there were Jews living in Silwan not only at the end of the 19th century, but up to about 10 years ago. (One of them, Yigal Tzur, told his story of happy coexistence in Ma'ariv a week ago.) In recent years, evidently because of the Arab violence in the neighborhood, the village was denuded of Jews. (And, in the past, under British anti-Zionist rule, didn't Arab violence and mass murder empty Hebron and Jerusalem's Old City of Jews until, with the rise of Israel, Jewish communities were re-established?) Now, a number of Israeli Jews decided that they would like to live in Silwan.

It is true they have been accused of harboring idealistic motives, that is, that they are not merely looking for a more comfortable apartment or a house with a swimming pool, but are emulating the earlier Zionist pioneers in enhancing the Jewish presence in the national capital. Whatever their motive, these would-be residents of Silwan negotiated with the former owners, paid the purchase price, and are entitled to take possession. Of course, some of the neighbors and the Arab politicians do not like the idea.

Such dislike is not a new phenomenon. The Arab doctrine is, after all, that the Jews have no right to live anywhere in the Jewish homeland; and thousands of Jews have given their lives in resisting the consummation of this evil doctrine - itself based on the demonstrable hoax of a historically non-existent Palestinian "ownership" of the country. Nobody in Silwan was forced to sell his house.

The feared threat of force was all on the other side - fear that the seller might be murdered by his fellow Arabs - as hundreds of Arabs have been murdered by the executioners of the intifada for "collaborating with the Israelis." In the event, all but one of the sellers honestly arranged their departure expeditiously - and were not molested. That single family, primed no doubt by the politicians, did a Wadi Hawareth act. When, according to the arrangement, the buyers came to take possession, they found two members of the seller's family in bed in the house and refusing to leave.

The police had to be called, which enabled Faisal Hussein - believed to be a commander of the intifada - to stage a no-doubt premeditated public relations act. Backed outside the house by a crowd of Silwan residents, he delivered a speech briefing the eager media with the story of "racist" Zionists driving poor Arabs out of their homes.

TO COMPLETE the Wadi Hawareth syndrome, one component must be added: the Jewish ally.

At Wadi Hawareth in 1931, the role was filled by the Communist Party, engaged for years in a vicious campaign against Zionism. They extolled the Beduin of Wadi Hawareth as heroes. Here, in Silwan, the part was played by a crowd of Peace Now members and other "leftists" who came to demonstrate "in favor of coexistence" - by demanding the expulsion of the new Jewish residents.

They went into an orgy of joy when it appeared momentarily that the Jews might indeed be prevented from living in that one house. When Peace Now organized a second demonstration the next day, Faisal Hussein told a crowd of participating Arabs that they could now see they had "partners on the other side, and we can fight together to establish

a Palestine state alongside Israel." That, of course, is the unvarnished truth underlying Peace Now activities and propaganda. Silwan is only a microcosmic reflection of their desire to see the Jews now living in Judea and Samaria thrown out and back behind the 1949 Armistice Lines.