

August 24, 1984

THE WAR OF WORDS

THE CHRISTIAN world, preoccupied with little Israel, is deeply divided in its attitudes towards her. There are Christians the world over whose identification with Israel is as strong as that of any born Zionist. Thousands come each year for the Succot festival organized by the Christian Embassy in Jerusalem.

There are others completely at one with the worst enemies of the Jewish state. Prominent among these – and perhaps the most active – is the Quaker American Friends Service Committee.

The AFSC first drew public attention to its attitude by a “report” *The Search for Peace in the Middle East*, published in 1970; a vicious attack on Zionism, filled with anti-Israel mendacity.

Moreover it warned American Jews of an anti-Semitic backlash if they did not stop supporting the hard-line policies of the Israeli government (headed then by Golda Meir and Abba Eban).

Two major U.S. Jewish organizations, the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Congress, published a devastating detailed exposure of its falsity – a 71-page “Critical Analysis of the Quaker Report” by Harvard professors Arnold Soloway, Edwin Weiss and Gerald Caplan.

The anti-Zionist, anti-Israel credentials of the AFSC have ever since been in no doubt. It maintains a permanent propaganda campaign in the U.S. on behalf of the Arabs (not to mention its pro-PLO activity in Judea and Samaria). An observer at its 1977 conference, Professor Marvin Maurer, described (in *Midstream*) the open, explicitly-permitted anti-Semitism aired there.

Of its next conference, in 1979, Maurer wrote that “the highlight of the campaign against Israel was reached when Mohammed Milhem gave his eye-witness account. Milhem was introduced as a mayor (of Halhoul) who had been elected because of his “support of the PLO.” Milhem gave a lurid and most imaginative account of the soldiers as Nazis. He set out the Arab demands on Israel: a return of all the “occupied territory” including Jerusalem and recognition of the “right to return” of the refugees (to Jaffa, Haifa, Acre *et al*).

That same year he told the Congress on World Peace in Switzerland that “a conquest like that of Israel had not been suffered by the European peoples even under the Nazis.

A YEAR LATER Milhem was expelled from Israel by the Israeli authorities, together with his colleague Fahd Kawasmeh, mayor of Hebron. They had long conducted a campaign of incitement to public disorder and riot (especially by schoolchildren) – and to violence. Repeated warnings to desist went unheeded; and in interviews with Arab newspapers Milhem boasted that he was an organizer against Israel and a member of the National Guidance Committee, formed illegally “to recruit the masses to act against the Israeli authorities.”

An explicit public call for direct action was pronounced in Hebron in March, 1980. Mayor Kawasmeh declared that “the time for talk has passed” and Milhem added, “This rally will produce many forces and many deeds. The *jihad* must go on.”

Five weeks later, six yeshiva students returning from Sabbath eve services were murdered from ambush in Hebron. Seeing this as the fruit of the activity of Milhem and Kawasmeh, the military administration promptly expelled them.

Milhem then toured Arab countries and Europe. In speeches and interviews (samples from which were submitted to the Supreme Court, where the two appealed, unsuccessfully, against their expulsion) he propounded all the PLO themes. He justified the murders in Hebron, demanded escalation of terror, and repeated his call for *jihad*.

He demanded the world’s cooperation against Israel, threatened to “pursue the Israelis all over the world” and proclaimed the doom of Zionism. He asserted incidentally that there was no difference between the Likud and Labour. There were, he said, “no doves, no hawks, only pigs.”

FOR AFSC purposes Milhem could not be featured personally as a martyr. Somebody there had the bright idea of getting him to address Jewish audiences. To help open Jewish doors he would be provided with an Israeli collaborator.

The AFSC enlisted the cooperation of several like-minded Christian groups and one Jewish: the New Jewish Agenda. This new body had taken on the role of the collapsed Breira and had already made its presence felt by its demonstrations against “Israeli policy.”

The AFSC was thus able last March to announce that in collaboration with other organizations it was bringing to the U.S. both the “distinguished” Mr. Milhem and a prominent Israeli Zionist who would be speaking together for a “real and lasting peace for both peoples.” The Zionist was Mordechai Bar-On, described in the publicity as a member of the Labour Party Central Committee and a Peace Now activist.

THE ZIONIST Organization of America and other bodies acted vigorously to prevent the execution of this AFSC charade, and some potential host bodies declined the honour. The couple did however appear on a number of platforms. Their respective performances (which were tape-recorded are of some interest and significance.

Milhem (in San Francisco and Los Angeles) did a tolerably good job. He used no provocative language. He was just an honest hard-working mayor.

Only once did he lose his “cool.” Asked by the audience (in a San Francisco meeting) about his call for a *jihad*, he denied it. When the questioner reminded him of March 24, 1980 in Hebron, he replied, “Maybe I did call for *jihad*, but you would too. As mayor it was my duty to get rid of the nastiest occupation in mankind.”

Bar-On loyally came to his aid on the *jihad*. It was, he suggested, a matter of semantics. “There is a war-speak and a peace-speak.”

It was Bar-On too who explained the expulsion of Milhem (who refrained from answering a question on the subject). Milhem, according to Bar-On, had done nothing wrong. He, after all, had not committed the murder. He had been deported for purely “political” reasons. Indeed, said Mr. Bar-On, his “good friend Milhem was known throughout Israel as one of the group of the most moderate leaders of the Palestinians on the West Bank.”

Moreover, he declared, he (Bar-On) *had* killed. He had fought in the wars and killed Arabs. Mordechai Bar-On, defending his people against the onslaught of the Arab nations proclaiming their determination to prevent the birth of Israel and destroy its people, equates himself with the aggressor? Mordechai Bar-On, fighting as a soldier to prevent the intended annihilation of Israel in 1967, equates himself with the PLO murderers of civilian men, women and children.

Towards the end of his address Bar-On showed he had taken heed of sarcastic comments from a lively and knowledgeable section of the audience. They had evidently read the leaflets, distributed by protesters outside the hall, containing some of the evidence against Milhem submitted to the Supreme Court in Israel.

Bar-On confesses that for all his friendship with Milhem, he was “very suspicious of what the Palestinians had in mind.”

But, said Mr. Bar-On, there was hope; and it lay in people like Mr. Milhem.

For Mr. Milhem is, after all, a moderate.

ON RETURNING from his mission with Mr. Milhem on behalf of the American Friends Service Committee, Mr. Bar-On ran for election to the Knesset – oddly enough, not for the Labour Party. He had switched to the Citizens’ Rights Movement.

He was elected; and Mr. Milhem must be congratulating himself on a double achievement. First, such a friend in the Knesset; second, he will no longer have to feel uncomfortable about being so friendly with one of the Labour Party “pigs.”

See Letter To the Editor on following page

Reader's letter, 23 September 1984

DISTORTED PICTURE

To the Editor of The Jerusalem Post

Sir, – As he has done in earlier opinion columns, Shmuel Katz on August 24 painted a seriously distorted picture of American Friends Service Committee (a Quaker organization) views regarding the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The AFSC has supported the existence of Israel since its inception in 1948. In all of our publications, we call for direct negotiations between Israel, the Palestinians, including the PLO, and Arab countries; as part of a comprehensive settlement, Israel must be assured of continued existence – free, secure and at peace – with defined and internationally recognized boundaries. A comprehensive peace agreement must also include the right of Palestinian self-determination including the right of Palestinian Arabs for a land of their own, on which they can choose to establish a Palestinian state, coexisting with Israel.

AFSC has no intention of making Mayor Milhem a martyr of cynically using an Israeli of prominent like Mordechai Bar-On to “open Jewish doors” as Mr. Katz charges. The purpose of their joint speaking tour in the United States was to bring about an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue for peace. The dialogue which took place between the two men was real. Mr. Milhem and Mr. Bar-On were able to agree on the basic outline of a peace agreement. Not unexpectedly, they had many differing perceptions about the history of the conflict.

Since Mr. Katz analyses alleged quotations of Mayor Milhem's, I would like to quote Mayor Milhem's words from an op-ed article which appeared in the *San Jose Mercury* and other Knight Ridder newspapers: “Why do I want to return home? To continue to wage a struggle for a just peace between my people and the Israeli people. Around what proposals do we wage a struggle for peace? Since Israelis wish a Jewish state and not a secular state, it seems only fair and just that Palestinians should be entitled to self-determination and the possibility of a state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. I espouse peace and security for all nations in the area, including Israel. I believe this kind of peace is possible.”

As to others of Katz's charges:

- 1) The AFSC has never “explicitly permitted anti-Semitism” at any of our conference. In fact, it was an official of AFSC who publicly repudiated the anti-Semitic remarks of an attender at the 1977 conference.
- 2) We have no “permanent propaganda campaign in the U.S. on behalf of the Arabs.” AFSC is an independent Quaker-based organization which has consistently called for peaceful and mutually acceptable negotiated solutions to conflicts.
- 3) AFSC has no “pro-PLO activity in Judea and Samaria” and we categorically reject the charge that we do.

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