

# The Strange World Of UNRWA

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**P**ROBABLY the most significant result of the Six Day War to date is the direct confrontation of the State of Israel with its political antibody, the Arab refugee community, as institutionalized in UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. The confrontation was inevitable because the solving of one moral issue—the resettlement of the Jewish victims of Nazism—inadvertently begot the moral counterissue of the repatriation of the Palestinian exiles; but it was critically prejudiced when the Palestinian refugees became, in effect, wards of the United Nations. The degeneration and final corruption of this wardship is exposed—in a kind of agony between reticence and resoluteness—in the seventeenth annual report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, released to the public on October 18.

In December, 1948, shortly before the first Arab-Israeli war ended, the U.N. General Assembly adopted Resolution 194, which stipulated that the refugees be permitted to return to their homes and that compensation be paid to those not choosing to return. To care for the refugees, the United Nations Relief for Palestine was set up as a temporary mission. In 1950, in response to the recommendation of a U.N. economic survey that employment be found for the refugees, "Works" was coupled with "Relief" and UNRWA was born with a three-year mandate. Its latest report recalls that the 1948 resolution "has been reaffirmed year after year by the Assembly but has remained unimplemented." Instead, the refugee community has grown steadily from 800,000 in 1948 to some one and a quarter million at the time of the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war in June, since when it has increased by 220,000.

On June 14, hardly three days after the Syrian cease-fire, the Security Council passed Resolution 237, which stipulated that the second

wave of refugees be permitted to return to their homes. Meanwhile Arabs continued to flee from the West Bank to the East Bank of the Jordan by the thousands, most of them in army trucks provided by the Israeli government. Only half of these 200,000 refugees were already registered with UNRWA; and with the overrunning of the Golan Heights in Syria and the Sinai Peninsula by the Israeli Army, their ranks were swollen by Syrian and Egyptian nationals.

Despite the resolution, there has been no question of returning this last group, numbering some 150,000, to Syria and the United Arab Republic, since the Syrian and U.A.R. governments have refused to enter into negotiations with the Israelis. With Jordan the case was different. In early July, it was arranged through the Red Cross intermediary to repatriate refugees there to the West Bank once they had filled in applications and been investigated. After a number of delays, on August 6, at a meeting on the Allenby Bridge, representatives of the Israeli government, the International Red Cross, and the Jordanian Red Crescent agreed on the format and text of the applications, which were then printed in Hebrew, Arab, and English. August 31 was set as the deadline, apparently for the submission of applications only and not the physical return.

During this period the Israelis set up a refreshment stand for the refugees under the trees just off the approach to the Allenby Bridge. Since the bridge is about seven miles from the Dead Sea, where temperatures register more than thirty degrees higher than in Amman or Jerusalem, the refugees, most of them couples with small children, proceeded across the bridge in the cool of the morning. When necessary, Israeli soldiers lent a hand. The operation proceeded smoothly. There were no incidents, but neither

were there ever very many refugees. Only slightly more than fourteen thousand—less than a tenth of those who fled—have returned over the Jordan to the West Bank. The Israelis have agreed to admit the remaining six thousand of those they have authorized to return, but negotiations seem to hang fire.

## Conflicting Aims

Apart from the fact that the deadline of August 31, announced as the cutoff date for repatriation itself by Foreign Minister Abba Eban on August 14, was deplored as entirely out of keeping with the spirit and the wording of the two United Nations resolutions, something was obviously wrong.

In the two weeks between the announcement of the deadline and the deadline proper, UNRWA in Jordan, by working day and night, had processed forty thousand applications of at least 150,000 people for return to the West Bank. Only about thirteen per cent of these were returned by the Israeli authorities with the requisite pink passage slips denoting acceptance. The Jordanian authorities complained that they were usually given only twelve hours to round up and present several hundred refugees scattered throughout nine camps. When the Israelis, as they often did, accepted some and rejected others of the same family, the entire family usually refused to go. Old refugees from the townships of Jericho, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem were rejected out of hand: the report states that only three thousand of the 93,000 old refugees were permitted to return.

From the beginning, the furtive, almost clandestine behavior of the Jordanian officials in negotiations was accompanied by publicized incitements to the returning refugees to act as saboteurs, "as advance guerrilla groups," or as mere practitioners of civil disobedience. One Amman newspaper quoted a Jordanian cabinet minister in an impassioned plea to all West Bank residents to resist the Israeli occupying authority by every possible means. The minister denied that he had ever made such a statement, but such incitements were repeatedly broadcast by Radio Amman. These were branded by the

Israelis as “completely contrary to the spirit of the Allenby Bridge agreement,” and they announced that the campaign had necessitated a severe screening of all the applicants for return.

The Israeli conduct of the repatriation of the West Bank refugees was an attempt to make more of “the Allenby Bridge agreement” than it actually was; to use and develop it, that is, as a precedent for direct negotiations between the two governments. Part and parcel of this attempt was the ensuing demonstration that it lay within the Israelis’ power to make the agreement considerably less than what it should have been. The same rationale applied to the 1948 resolution stipulating the return of and full restitution for the original Palestine refugees, which has remained “unimplemented” for nineteen years. In 1958 the Israelis, with the backing and encouragement of John Foster Dulles, did make a definitive offer of compensation at \$200 million. It was rejected by the Arabs. The 1948 resolution, the Israelis point out, also calls for negotiations. The Arab governments concerned have steadfastly refused to negotiate—until Jordan’s half-voluntary, half-forced move late this summer.

**W**HEN another round of negotiations was arranged in order to accommodate the remaining six thousand of those accepted, the Jordanian officials failed to appear. A second meeting was arranged; again the Jordanian officials failed to appear. The Jordanians then sent apologies and asked that the original negotiator for the Israelis, Yosef Tekoah, Assistant Director General of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, be sent to negotiate at a third meeting. Tekoah was flown back to Israel from New York for the occasion.

When the meeting finally took place, it developed that there had never been so many as six thousand—it was more like 3,500; the rest of the applications were admitted to be fabrications or duplications. But the Jordanian officials had no cogent explanation for their failure to find the majority who did exist.

The Israelis claim that the Arab refugees habitually fabricate additional family members in their docu-



mentation so as to secure additional camp rations. Since this fabrication often consists in doubling the number of children, such families would turn up at the crossing point with half their registered children missing and claim they had got lost.

Indeed, the great continuing scandal in UNRWA has been its consistent failure to carry out the investigations necessary to insure that rations are distributed according to need. As both cause and result, there has been a Gogolian chicanery with dead souls, unborn children, and professional impostors. By far the worst offender in this regard has always been Jordan, where the ration rolls have not been verified since 1953—and scarcely even then, since rioting in the refugee camps caused the Jordanian government to stop UNRWA’s attempts “to carry out a general scrutiny of ration entitlements.”

To date, all four host countries—Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and the U.A.R.—have foiled UNRWA’s every attempt to rectify the situation. (“In Jordan, a programme of eliminating the most flagrant abuses of the ration system . . . was less successful than had been hoped, as its introduction coincided with parliamentary elections.”—UNRWA Report, 1967.) According to the UNRWA report for 1966, attempts to deal with particular elements of the problem, such as “the so-called merchants who traffic in ration cards and rationed

commodities and who have a vested interest in the inaccuracies of the rolls, have also often failed, owing to adverse reactions among the refugees.”

Largely because of this broadly co-ordinated skulduggery, “It has not proved possible for UNRWA to reflect adequately the extent of . . . rehabilitation in its published statistics of the number of refugees who have been rendered self-supporting and from whom relief assistance has therefore been withdrawn.”

Most of the host countries have added insult to injury by taxing services, imposing import duties on the agency’s relief supplies, and refusing payment for riot damage. To prevent this “double take,” UNRWA has almost continuously pressed claims against Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Total claims against Lebanon now amount to 466,674 Lebanese pounds; against Syria, 272,780 Syrian pounds; against Jordan (including a claim for the cost of electricity consumed by the Arab Legion but charged to the agency), 20,768 Jordanian dinars. Moreover, the agency reckons that in the past sixteen years it has paid \$1.5 million in excess rail charges to Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. A complicating factor here is UNRWA’s employment of an unusually high proportion of locally recruited staff (11,500 Arabs compared to 112 recruited internationally). Says the report, “The concept of an international organiza-

tion functioning independently of, but in co-operation with, the local Government in fields of activity which are normally the domain of the Government itself is not easily understood."

UNRWA officials tend to have great respect for the Israelis, who are past masters of resettlement and rehabilitation within the program of the Ingathering of the Exiles. For their part, however, the Israelis deplore UNRWA as "a self-perpetuating bureaucracy" with a "refugee-camp fixation." As a senior member of the Israeli Foreign Office put it, "I will tell you what the UNRWA report will say: 'All our beautifully kept and impeccably run refugee camps, which are really prosperous little villages—self-contained and almost self-supporting—have been vacated and left standing unused; if we could just get our people back into their "villages" all would be well.'"

### The Israeli View

The Israelis make no secret of the fact that the camps are anathema to them. Beginning in August they purposely allowed the Arab refugees of the Gaza Strip to visit relatives and friends on the West Bank. The result is that an increasing number—already several thousands—of the Gaza refugees have left the camps, never to return. In fact, the Israelis are repatriating refugees to the West Bank from the opposite direction, integrating them into the economy and clearing the strategically important Gaza Strip as well.

The camps are the domain of UNRWA and hence of the United Nations. To the Israelis, they are installations as well as symbols for the deliberate preservation of refugees as refugees in the soul-destroying enforced idleness of camp life, the better to make political pawns of them.

In 1964, the Syrians, with Egyptian compliance, created the Palestine Liberation Organization, a terrorist "army" under the leadership of the fanatic Ahmed Shukeiri dedicated to the Return and specializing in commando raids. The PLO recruited its members largely if not exclusively from the UNRWA camps in the Gaza Strip, Jordan, and Syria. Likewise, Al Fatah, the Syrian-sponsored terrorist organiza-

tion, drew most of its members from West Bank refugee-camp inmates. The Israelis are inclined to account for the flight from the camps on these grounds: "They were afraid of what we would do to them because they knew what they would have done to us."

Last year's UNRWA Report devotes a curious paragraph to this situation, noting that some governments have expressed doubts about "the propriety of the Agency's issuing rations which may be consumed by young men in military training under the auspices of the Palestine Liberation Organization. . . . In light of these differences, arrangements have been made for special added donations to the amount of \$150,000 which meets the total cost of any rations consumed by the young men in question. . . . Contributors to UNRWA who may have been concerned about this matter, may thus be assured by the Agency that their contributions will not be used to furnish assistance to refugees receiving military training under the auspices of the Palestine Liberation Organization." Not directly, that is.

The central significance of the confrontation between Israel and the refugee community is this: Jordan, the artifact refugee state, the territory of the old British mandate become territory of the new UNRWA mandate, must come to terms with Israel or die. It is instructive to note that King Hussein and his Hashemite Bedouins have been held virtual captives by the intransigence of the refugees maintained and administered by UNRWA but organized and inspired by Cairo and Damascus. The government of Jordan, for example, had to refuse a rectification of the UNRWA ration rolls, held in thrall as it was by the consolidated power of the refugees who constituted a foreign body under foreign control. For the same reason, UNRWA was frustrated in its essential mission and transformed in spite of itself into a kind of international vehicle of Arab nationalist aims. The "works projects," which were the original *raison d'être* of UNRWA, never materialized (funds for the purpose were diverted into vocational schools) because the host countries would not allow them, knowing that such projects

would lead to the integration of the refugees in the local communities and hence to the dissipation of Palestinian irredentism.

As a result of the Six Day War, two-thirds of the Jordanian population consists of Palestine refugees. Beginning in the second half of August, Arabs from the Gaza Strip appeared in ever-increasing numbers on the East Bank. From mid-August to mid-October, probably as many as seven thousand new refugees (roughly half the number of those repatriated) crossed to the East Bank, and approximately half of these were from Gaza. They continue to come.

According to the UNRWA report, "This influx added to the formidable problems facing a country threatened with economic collapse because of the loss of a large part of its main sources of income." In fact, economically, Jordan was cut in half by the war: forty-eight per cent of its industrial plant was situated on the West Bank, and sixty per cent of its fruit, sixty-five per cent of its vegetables, eighty per cent of its olives, and thirty per cent of its cereals were grown on the West Bank. In addition, Jordan lost possession of the holy places of Jerusalem, which brought an annual revenue of more than \$30 million. Israel's determination to keep the camps empty and prevent the return of registered cases is strongly resented by the UNRWA officials in particular. Instead of returning to the West Bank "where UNRWA's installations and facilities already exist," they and their charges are faced with the necessity of folding the tents of the nine encampments in the Amman area and moving to equally makeshift quarters on the shores of the Dead Sea before the onset of winter.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, Israel is in a position to effect solutions of the Arab refugee problem by mass repatriation and resettlement, as it is doing in the "insoluble Gaza situation," integrating the refugees into the West Bank economy by means of the perfected Israeli system of founding agricultural communities. The Israelis mean to use the Arabs, residents and refugees, acquired or displaced during the war, as instruments of Israeli policy, as pres-



sure points against the Jordanians in order to force a regional settlement—either by direct negotiation with Hussein or by engineering the emergence of a separate Palestinian Arab state or semi-autonomous Arab economic entity. (Either of the latter would ultimately spell the doom of Jordan.)

As for UNRWA, many, including more than one Commissioner-General, have recommended as one alternative, in the words of the current report, “that the Agency should be relieved of the responsibility for distributing relief and that other arrangements should be made for the purpose (which might take the form of inviting the host government to undertake the re-

sponsibility).” It has been suggested that the relief for the Arab refugees should be distributed by an association of the western nations that contribute ninety-three per cent of the donations to UNRWA’s budget, which has averaged \$35 million annually. The agency’s report, requesting an additional \$7 million for next year, goes before the Special Committee of the United Nations at the end of this month. In spite of the diminishing enthusiasm of the chief contributors to its budget, the United States and Great Britain, UNRWA is expected to squeak through. The demiurge of humanitarian emotion, that “not absolutely intelligent deity,” is likely to cover the budget once again.

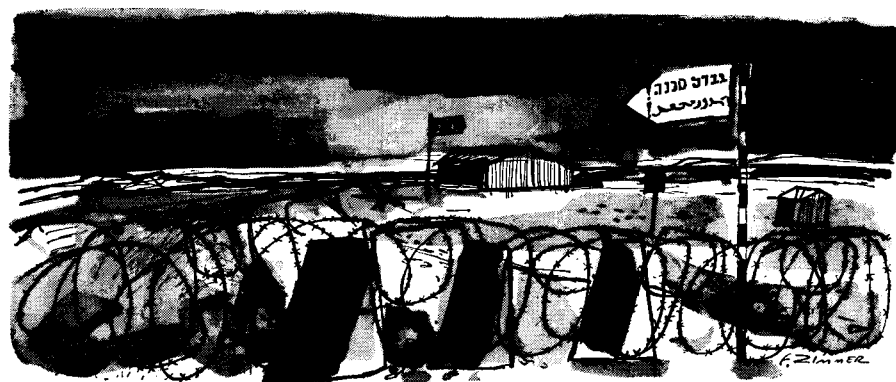
end of the domestic boom, but they had little success in stimulating the manufacture and sale of products for the international market and the slide of the economy accelerated. The balance of payments improved somewhat in 1966, reflecting the reduction in imports because of the domestic slowdown as well as favorable export markets for cut diamonds and citrus. But the structural transformation that the policymakers hoped to achieve through a forced deflation did not occur. The substantial increases that the Israelis hope for in the export of leather goods, knitwear, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, food, jewelry, and electronic and scientific instruments remain goals; they are not yet accomplishments.

What did happen was a marked rise in unemployment that struck particularly hard at young people entering the labor market, at the immigrants in development towns, and at married women.

The politicians and the experts have been fighting about the scale of unemployment. The former talk about a peak of thirty thousand early this year, the latter of four times that figure, out of a work force of more than 900,000. The politicians count only those who appear at the labor exchanges looking for jobs; the experts calculate unemployment on the basis of a quarterly survey of the labor force.

### The Economic Push

Without acknowledging that its earlier economic policy to shift employment into export industries had not worked, the government has introduced two successive budgets this year, one before and one after the war, containing provision for large-scale expenditures for public works. The consumer economy has turned the corner. But it is far from clear that the investment climate has improved to a point where the public will be willing to risk its savings either in new construction or in industrial expansion. The government, recognizing the need for encouraging private investment from local sources and from abroad, has passed legislation making funds available for new plant and equipment, reducing the interest that must be paid on borrowed funds, special



## The Manpower Problem

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AFTER a long period of rapid expansion based on large-scale immigration and on the consequent pressure to house, employ, and provide modern services for the newcomers, the Israeli economy stopped expanding in 1965 and was in recession until the outbreak of the June war. In retrospect, it is clear that with immigration reduced to a trickle, with major development projects (such as piping water to the Negev) and the speculative construction boom nearing their end, the Israeli economy would have turned downward without any interference from the policymakers. But the end of the boom coincided with a new economic approach: the leadership determined that new efforts

to reduce and eventually eliminate the gap in the balance of payments had to be made if economic independence were to be assured. Not even \$7 billion of capital imports (mostly grants) since the establishment of the state in 1948 from overseas Jewry, U.S. governmental assistance, and German reparations had achieved this goal. And so in 1965-1966 the leadership turned off one after another of the domestic taps until all sources of new money dried up. The economic planners were determined to shift labor and capital out of enterprises serving the domestic market—construction and consumer-goods production—in favor of export industries.

They succeeded in speeding the