

For Israel's Arabs, the twelfth hour approaches

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IN 1965, Levi Eshkol abolished the military government to which the Israeli Arabs had been subject since the establishment of the state. Had it not been for the Six Day War which erupted two years later, it is reasonable to assume that they would have been slowly integrated into Israeli society, though it is clear that there can be no full integration before the Arab-Israeli conflict is resolved.

The consequences of the 1967 war, followed by the Israeli policy of creeping de facto annexation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, combined with a preservation of the status quo, changed the whole direction of development. Instead of the Israeli Arabs being integrated into Israeli society, they started to become integrated, in terms of national consciousness, with their brethren in the occupied territories. Within the delicate balance between allegiance to their people and loyalty to their country, which are in a state of war with each other, the scales started to tip in the former direction.

The reaction of the Israeli Arabs to the outbreak of violence in the occupied territories demonstrated that while the balance has not been irreversibly broken, one cannot take for granted that it will not be in the future. The 12th hour is approaching.

Two separate public acts by two Israeli Arabs in the last month clearly indicate the gravity of the situation. The one was the announcement by Knesset member Abdel Wahab Darousha, during a demonstration in Nazareth on January 23, that he had decided to leave the Israel Labour Party since, in his words, he could not be in the same party with Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The second was an interview given by Castro Watad, the 26-year-old son of Mapam Knesset member Mahmoud Watad, to the Jerusalem local paper *Yerushalayim*, published on January 30. Of the two acts, that by the young Watad, a nonpolitical MA student of microbiology at Rehovot, is the more significant and the one which should cause us more concern.

DAROUSHA'S decision to join the Labour Party in 1965 was based less on personal considerations than on the belief that the Israeli Arabs have a better chance of improving their lot by working with the Jewish establishment than by working against it.

From the moment he entered the Knesset in 1984, Darousha made it clear that he did not accept that part of the party platform which speaks of the Jordanian option, that he views the PLO as the sole official representative of the Palestinian case, and that he favours the establishment of a separate Palestinian state.

Several months ago he brought to the Knesset plenary a motion for the agenda calling for the establishment of an Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian confederation within which the Palestinian component would have less than full independence.

Darousha's position was well known in the Labour Party and was tolerated even though on many occasions his activities, such as the decision to address the Palestine National Council meeting in Amman at the end of 1984, were strongly disapproved of.

When the Labour Party decided to enter the National Unity Government, Darousha considered leaving the party, but was finally convinced that he would have greater influence inside than outside. However, his frustrations increased as financial constraints and complacency prevented any improvement in the Arab sector even in those spheres in which Labour ministers were in control.

After the outbreak of the disturbances in the territories last December, his public position, as a member of a party in the coalition and directly responsible for the iron fist

policy, became intolerable. Like all Israeli Arabs he couldn't but sympathize with his brethren across the Green Line, and with the frustrations which had caused the unrest. Even if Rabin had chosen a kid glove policy it would have been difficult for Darousha, as an Arab political figure, to sympathize with the Israeli establishment.

This was superimposed on his personal belief that the status of the Palestinians west of the Green Line could not improve unless progress was made in resolving the Palestinian problem as a whole. Within this context, he had supported the Peres initiative. But with that initiative apparently dead and with Rabin's policy of quashing the violence with an iron fist, Darousha felt he had no place in the Labour Party.

While the background of his move was generally understood in Labour, there was little sympathy for the hysterical way in which he did it. Darousha won a moment of popularity within the Arab public but lost the moral effect which he might have had within the Labour Party.

Many Labourites felt that the Party was well rid of an undependable, compulsive colleague who is fast to draw, and never thinks his moves out to the end.

It was also pointed out that Darousha had played into the hands of the extremists in both camps, who could try to use his case to prove either that inside every moderate Arab there is a fanatic, or alternatively, that moderation will not make the Jews budge.

THE CASE of Castro Watad is different. Watad has no public or polit-

ical position to defend. All he has is his own accumulated truth which the events of the last few weeks brought to a head. Even though he is a graduate of the Jewish Mikveh Yisrael agricultural school and of the faculty of agriculture at the Hebrew University, and the son of a public figure who is well received in Jewish circles, Castro has personally experienced the discrimination and humiliation to which Arabs are frequently subjected, as individuals and as a community in our society.

In his interview, he said: "True, you have given me things which I might never have had, had I lived in an Arab country. But you have also given me all the reasons to hate you - to hate you as a collective, not as individuals."

The young Watad knows that the Arabs in the territories would like the Israeli Arabs to give them more than just moral and material support, and the implications scare him. He indicates that it would be much easier for Israeli Arabs to cope if they felt they were equal citizens, in

which case it would be inconceivable to consider throwing Molotov cocktails or trying to close the Wadi Ara road in expression of sympathy with the struggle to end the occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. "We would simply get into buses and go to Jerusalem to demonstrate."

Under what circumstances would he consider bearing arms, he was asked. "When my dignity as a human being is crushed, and when I do not have the right to express my opinion and do as I wish in a state which is mine as well. When someone will try to move me away from my place by force," was the answer. For the young Watad, this is not merely a theoretical possibility but one which could become reality if the current trend continues.

Castro has no doubt that if this nightmare comes true and people like himself decide that they have no alternative but to fight, the Jewish state will be doomed. "Israel must fear us more than it does the people of Gaza and the West Bank. We are more dangerous because we know where your soft belly is." It is not a threat - it is a warning by someone who admits that every Israeli soldier who is killed could be a personal friend, just as every Palestinian killed could be a cousin.

Jibril and Kahane are listening. Are the rest of us?

The writer is editor of the Labour monthly Spectrum.

DEAR... I...

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 אחרי שסגן ראש הממשלה דוד לוי הופיע בתוכנית הטלוויזיה "מסק אושי", בו סיפר כי אחד מבניו קרוי על שמו של ראש הממשלה המנוח לוי אשכול, כאות הערכה לאיש, המד תין שליו מיוחד בפתח משרד ראש הממשלה בירושלים וחיבה לסיים ישיבת הממשלה כשיצא לוי, ויגש אליו השליח, והגיש לו מעטפה מהודרת. זה נשלח ממרים אשכול, אמר האיש לשד. שהסתקרו, פתח את העי טיפה ונילה ספר אודות לוי אשכול. במבוא לשפר הכתון בכתב יד ענוג - הקדשה. היה סתם, שם מלוי אשכול לאש כול לוי.
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