

The Outcome of the Last War Increased the Prospects of  
Dialogue Between Jews and Israeli Arabs

*According to an investigation carried out by the sociologist Dr. Eric Cohen, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.*

After the Yom Kippur War the possibility of a dialogue between Jews and Israeli Arabs increased. The period after the Six Day War had been one of mutual estrangement, such was the conclusion reached by Dr. Eric Cohen, of the Department of Sociology of the Hebrew University, who, over the last eight years, has investigated the character of Jewish-Arab relations in Acre, and the norms influencing these relations.

In a lecture which Dr. Cohen gave to participants in a one-day seminar, organized by 'Levi Eshkol Foundation for the Israel Economy, Society and Politics' on the topic - The Development of Israel's Society and Politics Between the Two Wars (1967-1973) - he revealed some of his discoveries.

Great Success

Dr. Eric Cohen, also dealing with the subject of the last elections in Acre, said that the city returned to normal after the Yom Kippur War more quickly than after the Six Day War. In general, according to Dr. Cohen, the credibility and the preoccupation with the so-called 'crisis over the failure to act in time' characterize the rather small elite of our society, and not the ordinary folk busy with every-day affairs. Although the influence of the protest movements which sprang up after the last war has not yet been investigated, it is safe to say that their influence is greater in the main population centers than in the southern and northern settlements.

As for the effect of the Yom Kippur War on Israeli Arabs, Dr. Cohen points out that during the war, the extent of volunteering by Acre's Arab population for the emergency services was far beyond anything ever known previously. The Arabs participated actively in the city's emergency services - even in the collecting of money.

*"The bombs will fall on us all: they won't make any difference between Jews and Arabs"* - thus the Arab residents explained their motives for volunteering for the city's Civil Guard.

Throughout the War and the relatively drawn-out period of emergency, no increased tension between the Jews and Arabs could be felt in Acre.

After the War, the Arab inhabitants demonstrated a greater frankness and preparedness for discussion than before. According to Dr. Cohen, "war and the outcome of war have paradoxical effects: whereas the tremendous Israeli victory in the Six Day War caused a rupture between Jews and Arabs, the stalemate of the last War furthered the chances of dialogue."

#### Acts of Violence

Since 1966, Dr. Cohen has conducted a number of field-studies in Acre, examining Jewish-Arab relations in this city of mixed population. In particular, he investigated the alternating effect of normal times and of states of emergency on this relationship. His conclusion is that incidents affecting security, especially if they happen locally, such as terrorist gangs and their atrocities, disrupt the relations between Jews and Arabs in the city, even if the deterioration does not manifest itself in acts of violence.

Dr. Cohen referred to one of the findings of his study which shows that in the peaceful period, before the Six Day War, a clear inclination to become closer to the Jews revealed itself amongst Arab intellectuals and youth. No such leaning was apparent amongst the Jews.

The Six Day War left no particular impression of Acre's Jewish population. However, the outcome of the June War generally affected the Arabs, causing them to keep themselves to themselves. This tendency to segregation was the effect of two causes: on the one hand, the disappointment felt by the Arabs at the outcome of the War, and the rapidity with which the Arab armies collapsed; on the other hand, contact with the population in the Occupied Territories gave rise to problems with respect to the identity of Israeli Arabs.



### The Booby-Trap

Especially instructive is the fact that although Israeli Arabs, and in particular those of Acre, benefited from the economic boom, it is just now, after the Yom Kippur War, that opposition to State rule has arisen. This opposition prevails amongst intellectuals and young Arabs, and is created through their growing friendship with radical political groups such as Rakach (*the Israeli Communist Party*).

Tension between Jews and Arabs in Acre reached its climax in 1969, following the uncovering of a terrorist ring; and the blowing up of a car loaded with explosives. Pandemonium broke loose between the Jews and Arabs, which for a long time marred the relations between the two populations and created protracted tension, to the point of the breaking-off of relations. However, the calm at the beginning of the seventies until the Yom Kippur War once more diverted the national problems in the city, and led to increased tension amongst various communities. For a typical example of this trend, Dr. Cohen quoted one of the leaders of the "Panther" movement in Acre: *"When there is war, we are united, and not preoccupied with community problems, but if peace should come, then civil war is likely to break out ..."*

Summing up, Dr. Cohen concluded that as compared with local security violations, such as terrorist activities, war has only a minor influence on the direct relations between Jews and Israeli Arabs.

"At a time when the main war seems a political affair, it is terrorist activities and continual security incidents which markedly affect the nation at the local level, and cause immediate tension."

*(Article in Hebrew by Israel Tamar and published in the Hebrew press)*