

Middle East proves a hot issue as emotional temperatures rise

by Greg Neiman

Discussion reached a highly emotional level, at yesterday's forum held in SUB theatre, and lasted long after the main speaker Zieden Atashi, consul of Isreal in New York, left to return to New York.

The main thrust of Atashi's speech was that there was little discussion between Arabs and Jews in their own country of Isreal.

He stated that many Arabs within the new state are often loyal Isrealis, but discrimination and racism within Isreal is creating internal tensions that could be settled only if both parties would come together and talk as countrymen.

Another major point he brought forth was that Isreal as a country is willing to sit down with its Arab neighbors and talk of international peace, but the Arab nations have repeatedly been unapproachable.

"How can I sit down and talk to a man who says he will kill me if he can?" he asked.

Ziedan Atashi was born in 1940 in Osifiya, one of the two Druze villages on Mount Carmel in Isreal. He is the youngest in a family of six sons, and lost his father when he was nine years old.

After he finished elementary school his older brothers sent him to a missionary school in Nazareth where he completed his secondary education in 1960.

In May 1961 Mr. Atashi joined the Isreal Defense Army and served two and a half years.

When the Histadrut inaugurated its first program of courses for the training of Arab youth in 1963, Atashi started working among the youth of the Druze community, and soon after was appointed Deputy Director General of the Arab and Druze Workers Youth Movement in which he was active until 1969. During the same period he attended Haifa University, specializing in Arabic studies and political science, and obtained his B.A. degree in 1969.

A year later Atashi began working in the Arabic department of Isreal television in Jerusalem, while continuing his studies for an M.A. degree at the Hebrew University, and in 1970 he was put in charge of Arabic television for the northern area of the Haifa District. At the same time he held a teaching position in the Political Science Department of Haifa University.

He was appointed to his present post of Consul with the Consulate General of Isreal in New York in August of 1972.

The history of the present situation has its beginnings in the ancient past.

Ever since the days of the Roman Empire, and the dispersion of the Jews from Palestine, it has been the dream of the Jewish nation to reunite itself as a state.

On the heels of the Romans came the Arab conquerors, further dispersing the Jews, who either fled, or were converted.

However, the dream of a reunited Isreal lived on.

Centuries later, the French Revolution brought forth the view of the equality of men, a view that persists philosophically to this day.

Many Jews saw this as an opportunity to become assimilated into the societies wherein their forefathers settled during and after the dispersion.

By the end of the 19th century, and with the writing of a book by Theodore Heazl many became convinced that assimilation was a vain dream, and began again to work towards the reunification of the Jewish people.

By some he was denounced as a lunatic, but other hailed him as a messiah.

The first Zionist Congress was called in 1895, and the hope of a nation was given new life.

The Jewish National Funds was set up by the World Zionist Organization, and through worldwide contributions much land was bought in Palestine mainly from absentee landlords who were willing to part with the swamplands or deserts that they owned.

In 1917, the British issued the Belfour Declaration stating they would "favour the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine," however, not at the expense of other nations living there.

In 1920 the League of Nations came up with a mandate giving the British jurisdiction over Palestine and was charged with overseeing the establishment of a Jewish national home.

However, it is the contention of many Jews today that the British did not act in good faith, showing partiality to the Arabs, but many Arabs would argue against that.

At the end of World War II the United Nations took over the problem (the British had cut legal emigration into Palestine to a trickle, leaving thousands of Jews who had fled Germany with no place to go, the streets were unsafe for anyone to travel, and terrorism was rampant).

The UN approved the establishment of a Jewish state in 1947, and the British pulled out leaving chaos behind.

The Arab nations attacked the new country, and for about nine months fighting was on an on-again-off-again basis.

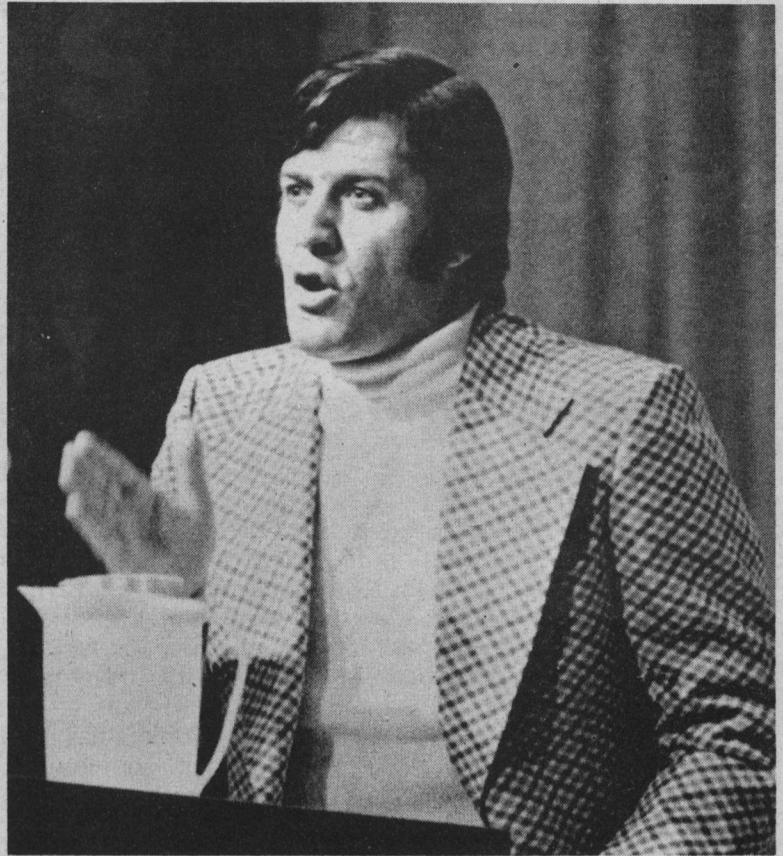
An armistice was agreed upon in 1949, and many Jews left the Arab states to become Isrealis, and were more or less assimilated into the new country but discrimination as to race within Isreal still is a real entity. They were confined to camps in Lebanon, Gaza, and Jordan.

For the next 13 or so years, there was an uneasy truce with intervals of fighting across borders.

Under UN orders Isreal relinquished the Sinai desert in 1957, which was patrolled by UN troops until 1967, when Egypt ordered them out and began fortification in the area.

War broke out, and since then borders have been fought over and moved, fought over and moved back, Isreal asserting herself more strongly as a national militarily and politically.

The wars have been expensive for both sides, and the bitterness that exists was amply shown at the forum as charges of Isreali militaristic expansionism were laid, vigorously denied, and necessitated the stoppage of the forum which continued outside of the SUB theatre even after Atashi left.



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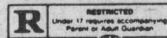
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