

The Future belongs to the Optimists

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IF I WERE a cartoonist, I would draw Israel as a length of hose pipe.

At one end, Jews are flowing in, encouraged by anti-Semites and a large Zionist apparatus.

At the other end, young disappointed Israelis are flowing out and settling in Berlin and other places.

By the way, the numbers entering and leaving seem to be about equal.

FOR SOME weeks now, I have felt like a boy who has thrown a stone into a pool. Rings of water created by the splash get larger and larger and expand more and more.

All I did was write a short article in Haaretz, calling upon Israeli emigrants in Berlin and other places to come home and take part in the struggle to save Israel from itself.

I readily conceded that every human being has the right to choose where he or she wants to live (provided the local authorities welcome them), but I appealed to them not to give up on their home country. Come back and fight, I pleaded.

An Israeli who lives in Berlin, the son of a well-known Israeli professor (who I appreciate very much) answered with an article entitled “Thank you, No!” He asserted that he has finally despaired of Israel and its eternal wars. He wants his children to grow up in a normal, peaceful country.

This started a furious debate which is still going on.

WHAT IS new about this verbal fight is that both sides have given up pretense.

From the first days of Israel, there have always been Israelis who preferred to live somewhere else. But they always pretended that their stay abroad was temporary, just to finish their studies, just to earn some money, just to convince their non-Israeli spouse. Soon, very soon, they would return and become full-fledged Israelis.

Not anymore. Today's emigrants proudly proclaim that they do not want to live and raise their children here, that they have finally despaired of Israel, that they see their future in their new homelands. They do not even pretend that they have any plan to return.

On the other hand, Israelis have ceased to treat the emigrants as traitors, deserters, scum of the earth. It was not so long ago that Yitzhak Rabin, who had a talent for

turning a Hebrew phrase, called emigrants “the fall-out of weaklings”.¹

The almost official designation of emigrants was “yordim”, those who go down. Immigrants are continuing to be called “olim”, those who go up.

Nowadays, emigrants are not cursed anymore—something that would be hard to do, because many of them are the sons and daughters of the Israeli elite.

THERE WAS a time when it was the fashion in Israel, especially among historians, to draw analogies between Israel and the medieval Crusader kingdom.

Most people believe that the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem existed for about a hundred years and was destroyed by the great Saladin in the historic battle of the Horns of Hattin near Tiberias.

But that was not the case. The kingdom lived on for another hundred years, without Jerusalem, with its capital in Acre. It was not destroyed in battle—but by emigration. There was a steady stream of crusaders—even sons and daughters of the 6th or 7th generation—who called it quits and “returned” to Europe, after despairing of the enterprise.

Of course, the differences between the two cases are immense—different times, different situations, different causes. Yet for me, a dilettante student of the crusades, the similarities are significant. I am worried.

Among historians, there was a debate about a crucial question: Could the crusaders have made peace with the Muslims and become an integral part of the medieval Orient?

At least one prominent Crusader, Raymond of Tripoli, seems to have advocated such a course, but the very nature of the crusader state prevented it. After all, the crusaders had come to Palestine to fight the infidels (and take their land away). Except for some short armistices, they fought from the first to the last day.

The Zionists, until now, have followed the same path. We are engaged in a perpetual war. Some feeble efforts by some local Zionists, right at the beginning, to forge an alliance with the Arabs against the Ottoman Turks (who ruled the country at the time) were ignored by the Zionist

¹In Hebrew it sounds far more insulting.

leadership, and we are still fighting.²

True, from before the founding of Israel to this day, there have always been some voices (mine among them) advocating our integration in the region, but they have been ignored by all Israeli governments. The leaders always preferred a perpetual state of conflict, which allows Israel to expand without borders.

DOES THAT mean that we must despair of our state, as do those youngsters in Berlin?

My answer is: not at all. Nothing is foreordained. As I tried to tell our friends *Unter den Linden*, it all depends on us.

But first of all we must ask ourselves: What kind of solution do we want?

My friends and I won a historic victory when our concept—Two States for (the) Two Peoples—became a world consensus. But now some people have decreed that “the Two-state Solution is dead”.

This always amazes me. Who is the doctor who has issued the death certificate? On what grounds? There are many different forms this solution can take, regarding settlements and borders, who has decided that they are all impossible?

No, the death certificate is a forgery. The two-state ideal is alive because it is the only viable solution there is.

THERE ARE two kinds of highly motivated political fighters: those who are looking for ideal solutions and those who will settle for realistic ones.

The first kind is admirable. They believe in ideal solutions that can be put into practice by ideal people in ideal circumstances.

I do not underrate such people. Sometimes they prepare the theoretical path for people to realize their dream after two or three generations.³

I will settle for a realistic solution—a solution that can be implemented by real people in the real world.

The form of the One-state Solution is ideal but unreal. It can come about if all Jews and all Arabs become nice

people, embrace each other, forget their grievances, desire to live together, salute the same flag, sing the same national anthem, serve in the same army and police, obey the same laws, pay the same taxes, adapt their religious and historical narratives, preferably marry each other. Would be nice. Perhaps even possible—in five or ten generations.

If not, a one-state solution would mean an apartheid state, perpetual internal warfare, much bloodshed, perhaps in the end an Arab-majority state with a Jewish minority reduced by constant emigration.

The two-state solution is not ideal, but real. It means that each of the two peoples can live in a state it calls its own, under its own flag, with its own elections, parliament and government, police and education system, its own Olympic team.

The two states will, by choice or necessity, have joint institutions, that will evolve in the course of time and by free will from the necessary minimum to a much wider optimum. Perhaps it will come close to a federation, as mutual relations widen and mutual respect deepens.

Once the borders between the two states are fixed, the problem of the settlements will be soluble—some will be attached to Israel by exchange of territories, some will be part of Palestine or be disbanded. Military relations and joint defense will be shaped by realities.

All this will be immensely difficult. Let's have no illusions. But it is possible in the real world, worked out by real people.

IT IS for this fight that I call the sons and daughters in Berlin and around the world, the new Israeli Diaspora, to come home and join us again.

Despair is easy. It is also comfortable, whether in Berlin or Tel Aviv. Looking around at this moment, despair is also logical.

But despair corrupts. Despairing people create nothing, and never did.

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²Just today, while reading the morning paper, I noticed again that some 70% of the news directly or indirectly concerns the Zionist-Arab conflict.

³One historian once wrote that every revolution has become irrelevant by the time it has achieved its goals. Its foundations are laid down by a few theoreticians in one generation, it gathers adherents in the next generation, and by the time it is realized by the third generation it has already become obsolete.