

# The Threat of Revisionist Irresponsibility

• by Hayim Greenberg

FOR YEARS we pleaded with the Revisionists and we demanded of them: "Don't light matches where there are barrels full of powder; don't imitate the tactics of struggle of our non Jewish neighbors; suppress your desire to make life "spectacular." They always answered us with gnashing teeth, with hatred and with condemnation. They said: "You are traitors and cowards; you are lackeys of the British government and agents of the Communist International; you are vegetarian pacifists who seek the friendship of the Arabs. Shall we learn from you? Shall we heed your advice and your demands?"

As Jews and as Zionists we parted ways with the Revisionists. Each did what he believed in

and what he was capable of. Our people built and guarded that which they had built; our people sought to create opportunities for the large reserves of Jewish youth throughout the world. The Revisionists, on the other hand, played with armies and navies; they trained their youth to pose in a spectacular manner; they educated their followers toward a type of heroism which sees valor in destruction and in death. They attracted all kinds of people and it would be unfair to say that their ranks consisted only of the refuse of society and Jewish youth. Hundreds of brave and honest boys and girls were hypnotized and charmed by their slogans. The energy of these young people, which could have been directed to constructive

deeds, was transformed into an instrument of evil and of political irresponsibility.

The results of this training have become apparent during the events of the last few weeks in Palestine. For over two years the country has been engulfed by a wave of violence. The Zionist movement and the Jewish community in Palestine are vitally interested that the violence should cease. The entire world was amazed at the ability of thousands of brave, red blooded young Jewish men and women to control their actions, their sorrow and their just bitterness. But the "extremists" are dissatisfied with this attitude of self restraint. They are displeased with the leading institutions of the movement and with the spirit which imbues Zionism. They teach their youth other methods of putting out the conflagration. Pour more oil, they say; don't spare kerosene; add fuel to the flames and the fire will burn itself out sooner. Revisionist youth, which is capable of sacrifices and whose energies and temperament have not found a normal outlet but have been guided in wrong directions, does as it is commanded. It shoots where shooting is a crime. It throws bombs where these are a provocation. It attacks where attack merely increases the danger.

Now is not the time to argue with the Revisionists concerning the significance of self restraint. If they refused to understand it so far and have closed their ears and minds to its implications, they will not now comprehend it. It would therefore be naive on our part to appeal to them again. But Jewish public opinion must not be misled and it must be reminded again that self restraint was of necessity our only policy in the past and if it is fated that the tragic events of these days should continue for some time to come, self restraint will still remain our sole policy.

Self restraint commands to meet direct attacks with the maximum of resistance but not to permit a single shot to be fired where it is not absolutely necessary for the defense of Jewish life and possessions. It also implies that we reject the barbarous rule that all Arabs are responsible for the acts of some. We do not want the non Jewish world to treat us according to this rule and we have no right to apply it to our Arab neighbors in Palestine. It is true that the Arab terrorists acted otherwise and considered the murder of any Jew to be a political achievement. But we do not consider the Arab terrorists as our teachers; we hold it to be beneath our dignity to imitate them and to adopt their morals. Their strategy may be "practical" and "understandable" from their point of view. They consider every Jew in Palestine, even if he is the best one, to be an "enemy". His very existence in the country strengthens the "alien" element in the land and weakens the position of those Arabs who seek to

be the sole rulers of Palestine. But can we regard each individual Arab in this light? May we consider any Arab in Palestine to be an enemy merely because he is an Arab and he lives in the country? Let us not forget that even today, after our bitter experiences of the past two years, we still have no reason to generalize our attitude toward our Arab neighbors. We have no friends among the Arab politicians and leaders. But there exist thousands upon thousands of Arabs among the common people who do not participate in the brutal terror and savagery against the Jews. There are Arabs who risk their lives to warn Jewish settlements of impending danger. There are many Arabs who themselves suffer from the terror of the Mufti's legions and many lost their lives because of their active or passive resistance to the terrorists. Must we also mention the large number of Arabs who are indifferent politically, simple everyday people who look forward to the cessation of violence, to peace in any form, so that they could peacefully continue to live and to work and to earn their bread? We remember, and we want others to know, that we have no feud with these inarticulate, anonymous Arabs. Indiscriminate firing on an Arab in retaliation for a crime that was committed by another Arab who cannot be found; firing on an Arab bus which contains women, children and men, whose names are not known and who may have aided us; planting a bomb in a cafe or a market place merely because Arabs congregate there, these are not acts of Jewish or Zionist valor but are imitations of the "heroism" of the Arab terrorists.

Are we motivated by moral considerations? Certainly! We have not yet fallen so low, we have not yet been infected by fascist and zoologic-nationalist nihilism that we should be ashamed of moral motives. We are also convinced that our moral considerations coincide with our practical interests. Every intelligent being will understand that the more the unfortunate events in Palestine assume the nature of a civil war, a race war between Jews and Arabs, the worse it will be for us and for Zionism; it will be easier to pull political strings from one Arab center to another and the Arab demagogues and provocators, as well as our enemies in Europe, will be encouraged. (The excitement among some Transjordan tribes, which was so noticeable on the border of Palestine, may be considered as a threatening consequence of the occurrences in Haifa and Jerusalem.)

Does it mean that Arabs may do things which we may not? Yes, we accept such inequality. History brought us into a country with a backward and misguided population. The situation is such that at present we have nothing to learn from them and we must consider as prohibited many things which Arabs allow themselves. We

must also bear in mind that the Arabs can lose little through their mistakes and crimes while every misstep on our part threatens our vital interests. Palestine is surrounded by Arab and not by Jewish lands. The Arabs in Palestine have a certain advantage in that it is possible to stop Jews from coming into Palestine while Arabs are already there.

We can imagine single instances when a person may lose his self control, when suffering may dull his moral sense and dim his political consciousness, when patience gives out and a revolver fires "of itself" so to speak, even where no shot should be fired. After all, we deal with human beings who sometimes may be unable to govern the temptations of revenge and similar emotions. But there is a difference between a deed committed in a moment of excitement and a system of action, a theory and a slogan which is used to train sensitive and self sacrificing young people. There is a difference between lenience in condemning the tragically executed Ben Yoseph—we assume that he could bear it no longer and in a moment of weakness he lost his self control—and transforming him into a national hero to serve as an example for others. The feeling of sorrow and mourning which swept the Jewish world on the morning that the British executioner tightened the noose about the neck of Ben Yoseph must not be transformed into glorification of the victim. Not every one who breathed his last upon the gallows, even if he did so bravely and with a clear realization that he was a sacrifice upon the altar of national interests and national honor (according to his conception of honor), as was the case with Ben Yoseph, should be made into a symbol for others. Inspiring as self sacrifice may be, it is still not enough to transform the victim into a saint. The fact that he was execut-

ed by the government and that the government committed an unforgivable crime does not erase his guilt of shooting from ambush on unknown people. It certainly does not erase the guilt of the movement which, perhaps consciously, prepared him for such deeds.

But is it merely a matter of actions in the past? Has not the "Fuerer" of the Revisionists predicted that acts of Jewish retaliation would follow the execution? His prediction was soon realized in the morally and politically mad events of Haifa and Jerusalem. These events resulted in many victims on both sides; they strained the political situation and they complicated the position of the British government—that government whose record is full of injustices committed against us but with which we must cooperate even against our will for without a certain minimum of its good will we could not at present survive in Palestine.

We know of no language that would be understood by the Revisionists. We also do not possess today the government machinery to discipline by force that small group whose very existence is a threat under the present unbalanced conditions. They are used to ignore the will of the majority, to ridicule the Jewish community and its representative institutions and to declare the sane demands of the Jewish Agency as conscious treason. But there exists Jewish public opinion and it is capable of saying its word concerning their mad and irresponsible deeds. Jewish public opinion can place these "super patriots" in a position of moral isolation. They must be made to feel that they are alone in Jewish life, that their methods are condemned, that their "heroism" is a menace and that there is no room for their "saints" in the national pantheon.