GROWING POPULATION PROBLEMS

The number of emigrants from Israel is expected to exceed the number of immigrants to the Zionist state by 3,000 in 1987, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), marking the fifth straight year that more Jews have opted to leave Israel than to go there to live.

This figure, however, is artificially low because it does not reflect those Jews (estimated at several thousand) who have chosen to live in the U.S. and other Western countries, but who still retain their Israeli citizenship. Some 600,000 to 750,000 Israelis are believed now to be permanently residing in other countries.

The population of Israel is expected to increase by 1.2 percent this year, compared to an average of 1.8 percent in the early years of the decade, said Moshe Sicron, director of the CBS.

The CBS estimates Israel's present population to be about 4.38 million, with Jews totaling 3.6 million or 82 percent. The number of Moslems is given as 604,000 or 13.8 percent of the population. Christians and Druze account for the remainder.

During the year, the number of Jews rose about 1.2 percent, but the rate of increase of the Palestinian population was about double that. Nevertheless, this represents a slowdown, according to the CBS. Fertility among the Palestinians has declined from nine to 10 children a woman 15 years ago to four to five today.

If the present trends in population growth continue, said Sicron, the population of Israel will reach 5.2 to 5.5 million by the year 2000. Jews will represent only 78 percent, and the trend is expected to continue into the next century.

While the CBS figures are on the surface mildly encouraging to Zionists, they are highly deceptive. They do not include the huge Palestinian populations of the occupied West Bank and Gaza—estimated to number at least 1.8 million. With these included, Israel's total population numbers something more like 6.5 million, with only about 55 percent being Jews.

Projections based on these more realistic estimates indicate that by the turn of the century, the Palestinians will be in the majority. And the Zionist leaders of the small state are well aware of these facts.

It is because of these trends that the government is desperately seeking ways to rid Israel of the Palestinians. One solution that seems to be gaining some momentum is to pay every Palestinian who is willing to voluntarily emigrate from Israel $20,000. Deputy Defense Minister Michael Dekel has been openly advocating such a policy for some time, and last month Minister Without Portfolio Yosef Shapira raised the issue in the Knesset.

Ethiopian youths, i.e., Falasha Jews, who came to Israel in Operation Moses in 1984, have begun to be conscripted into the Israeli Defense Forces. The first batch of inductees were welcomed at the IDF conscription center last week by Absorption Minister Ya'acov Tsur.

Other more drastic solutions have been advanced by a number of prominent Israeli politicians, such as former Gen. Ariel Sharon and Rabbi Meir Kahane, both of whom would prefer to simply force the Palestinians from their land and into the neighboring Arab countries.

Among those Israelis favoring a quick, drastic resolution of the population problem are the Sephardic, or oriental, Jews. Although they are themselves a deprived minority, they tend to be among the more fanatic Zionists in the hopelessly fractured country. And their strength is growing. They now account for 57 percent of the Jewish population and represent the backbone of the blue-collar work force and the enlisted armed services.

Meanwhile, the traditionally dominant Ashkenazi, or European, Jews continue to decline in number and influence, particularly because they constitute the vast majority of Israelis emigrating to the West. They are also the best educated of the Israeli Jews and are the chief cause of the nation's little-publicized "brain drain."

To counter these trends, the Ashkenazi leadership in the government has been pressing for greater emigration of Soviet Jews. But their efforts continue to be thwarted largely because more than 70 percent of the Jews leaving the Soviet Union choose not to go to Israel. At the same time, however, the Sephardic Jews have been promoting a policy of encouraging the emigration of those Jews still remaining in the Arab countries and Iran, which clearly undercuts the Europeanization goals of the Ashkenazim. □

PALESTINIAN NONVIOLENCE

A new phenomenon is occurring in Israel, and the Zionist authorities do not know how to deal with it. Instead of bloody but counterproductive terrorism, some Palestinians have begun turning to nonviolent passive resistance in their struggle for freedom from Israel's oppression.

The man behind the new movement is Mubarak Awad, who was born in Jerusalem and is now a naturalized American citizen. He tells his fellow Palestinians that the nonviolent methods of Mahatma Gandhi offer the best hope of ending Israel's 20-year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

"I don't want the next generation [of Palestinians] educated in violence," Awad said in a recent interview with the Israeli newspaper Haaretz. "I don't want our flag to have only a rifle on it."

The Zionist government, unable to silence Awad and fearful of his rising popularity, has responded by moving to expel him from Israel. The Interior Ministry ordered him to leave the country by November 20, but he has refused to go and says he will have to be forcibly expelled.

The Palestinian Gandhi is a man without power in the normal sense of the word. He does not yet have a large personal following. Nevertheless, he poses a potentially great threat to Israel's Zionist leadership. He possesses an idea that could render all the guns of the Israeli military useless, especially since the government and its people are stuck in a stalemate over how or whether to move ahead with the peace process. Moreover, the people—the Jewish citizens—are growing weary of the stalemate and the state of siege it continues to foster.

But the realities of the situation will not go away. Foremost is the fact that more than 1.5 million Palestinians live on the West Bank and Gaza. If the Zionist state formally annexed these territories, Israel would become a binational nation overnight—with the population nearly equally divided between Jews and Palestinians. On the other hand, if the Zionists continue to rule over the Palestinians by military occupation, denying them all political rights, it guarantees a sullen and hostile subject people who have but two choices—terrorism or passive resistance.

In either case, it means constant and continued trouble for the Zionist state and the corruption of its loudly proclaimed Jewish democratic ethic. This is the uncomfortable reality of Israel today, and it will not go away—even if the government tries to paper it over with euphemisms, such as "the demographic problem."

This was—and is—the environment in which Mubarak Awad emerged two years ago, when he established the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence in Jerusalem. Using Gandhi as a model, he urged the Palestinian people to resist the Israeli occupation by such means as planting olive trees on land claimed by the Zionist government and refusing to fill out official forms in Hebrew.

As a result, Awad quickly came to be viewed as an enemy of the state. But for a long time, the Zionists could think of no way to counter his efforts. Although they would have liked to treat him as a terrorist and shoot him, they could not. However, when they discovered that he had once lived in the U.S., where he had acquired American citizenship, the government refused to renew the identity card that allowed him to reside in the occupied territories.

It was a clever decision, but one not without a certain irony. American Jews, many retaining their U.S. passports, have played a leading part in the establishment of Jewish settlements on the West Bank. Radical rabbi Meir Kahane is a prominent example. (In a reverse twist on this theme, Jewish criminals from other countries have been protected from extradition because of their residence in Israel.)

Moreover, to complicate the matter, the U.S. State Department has unexpectedly come to Awad's defense. The U.S. Embassy has spoken out against the Israeli government's treatment of this American citizen and has publicly referred to him as a "moderating influence"—much to the embarrassment of the Zionists.

The existence of a nonviolent Palestinian activist like Awad makes it impossible for Israel to ignore or deny the legitimacy of the Palestinian national cause by dismissing it and its advocates as terrorists. □

NJA REJECTED

The Seattle area chapter of New Jewish Agenda plans to appeal the recent rejection of its application to join the Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle. Executive committees of the council and federation unanimously refused the application of the chapter, known as Kadima, because they said Kadima's position regarding Israel did not mesh with that of the mainstream Jewish community.

Kadima leaders, however, claim the rejection was due to their long-held beliefs that resolution of the Arab-Israel conflict can be achieved only through self-determination for Palestinian Arabs, creation of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza and direct negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization.