

Back to Arab-Israel "Normalcy"

Next to these evidences of progress must be set other aspects that are not so praiseworthy. Intransigence-as-usual is the continuing Arab approach to Israel. Nasser's reasserted promise to bar Israel ships from the Suez Canal and his new threat against Israeli cargo being carried on neutral shipping hit the headlines when we were in the area. Israel's rapidly developing port at Elath has partly offset the Suez blockade. Important trade centers in East Africa and the Orient are being tapped through this outlet. But use of the Suez Canal is still a vital need, and one whose fulfillment most maritime powers, including the U.S., agree in believing that President Nasser should not obstruct. The Cairo government, however, retains physical possession and refuses to honor its commitment against political interference with the free use of the canal. [For a rebuttal to these claims see Dean Alfange's letter to The New York Times, reproduced on page 3 of the Newsletter.]

The Arab states appear to be equally obdurate on the matter of the Arab refugees, whose plight continues to dominate the propaganda front. Again, we were in the Middle East when the U.N. Secretary General's report on U.N.R.W.A. was released. In this report Mr. Hammarskjold sought to place the refugee problem within the framework of the general economic development of the area. He carefully noted that the "de facto economic integration [of the refugees] would not prejudice any rights [of repatriation] established by the [U.N.] resolution." The proposal was rejected out of hand by the Arab states -- even before they had had a chance to study it. [For a summary of the Secretary-General's report see page 3.]

Yet the physical conditions in the refugee camp are improving each year. Health records, as shown to us by a leading UNRWA doctor, were impressive. The health of the refugees on the whole is better taken care of than that of the non-refugee villager. At the Calandria Vocational School (near Jerusalem, Jordan) over 100 boys were receiving training in the various building trades. The school is being expanded to take in 300 more. Three years ago both the supervisors and the boys were secretive about where the latter would find jobs after graduation. This year without hesitation or embarrassment they said that they would seek work in the Persian Gulf area -- among the oil companies. An UNRWA teacher, in another camp school, in this case a training center for girls, also indicated that a number of their graduates had left for Iraq and elsewhere to the East.

Finally, we found a most disturbing situation in our embassy in Jordan concerning the Arab-Israel conflict. U.S. diplomatic personnel were taking a very active partisan role in the dispute, to the extent that they seemed to be compromising our Government's efforts in behalf of an Arab-Israel reconciliation. I shall not go into detail here on what prompted this concern as I have written at some length to Secretary of State Herter about this whole problem. [A copy of Karl Baehr's letter to Secretary Herter is to be found on page 5.] But I would not like to end these brief travel impressions on a note of criticism. The Middle East is a "quieter" area than it has been in some time and nowhere is this truer than in Jordan. King Hussein has survived to scoff at the almost daily predictions of his demise that used to be made by foreign observers. U.S. aid -- more than \$60 million annually -- has made that survival possible and the Jordanians, I am glad to report, are on the whole grateful. Another positive indication: Israel's economic progress continues to be most encouraging, but more about that in the next Newsletter.