

Recently the author of this article visited our editorial base and the conversation turned on the possibility of cantonal type solutions to the problems of South Africa, Israel, Cyprus, Sri Lanka and other global hotspots. By chance the very next day a letter appeared in the London Times urging a cantonal solution to the problem of Palestine and Israel. What follows first appeared in the San Juan Star more than 20 years ago. Ed. FWR.

Had Israel been as imaginative in diplomacy as in military strategy, she would have sent General Dayan as one of her delegates to the present assembly of the United Nations. It would have turned a gathering of fulminating accusers into a red-faced convention of the beaten paying involuntary homage in word and thought to the one-eyed modern Alexander who rendered them impotent by deed.

It is a pity, Israel failed to climax a campaign without parallel in history with an appropriately dramatic terminal entrance on a stage so conveniently prepared by her antagonists who, in their disarray, could think of nothing better than to take refuge in a United Nations, whose total worthlessness she had herself established by ignominiously driving them out of Egypt only a few weeks earlier.

However, there is another chance for Israel to prove that the imagination she showed in war, she can also display in peace. This is in the question of what to do with her refugees. If her newly acquired population of one and a half million Arabs is expelled, the problem will not be solved but increased. If it is left where it is, the Arabs will prove too numerous to be absorbed in a country which was specifically established, not as a condominium to be shared with other nations, but as a haven for the Jews. But if the Arabs can neither be expelled nor left where they are, what then?

The only way out seems to be in combining the two opposites by concentrating the bulk of Israel's new Arab population in two or three large cities or city-states in the fashion of Swiss cantons such as Geneva, or of the Hanseatic city-states of Hamburg, Luebeck and Bremen within the framework of Imperial Germany. These could then be granted complete internal autonomy while remaining externally affiliated with the rest of Israel in a common market and defence union. In this way, they would remain culturally separate from Israel and politically and structurally separate from the other Arabic countries.

Their settlement in large urban concentrations would also solve a host of other problems. According to the principle named after the 19th century economist Edward Wakefield, more than 80 per cent of a city's inhabitants make their living by engaging in transactions with each other. This would at once terminate the vexing idleness and hatred-creating problem of unemployment. Moreover since urban occupations yield very much higher incomes than rural occupations, the urbanized Arabs would experience a standard of living heretofore unknown not only to themselves but also to the rest of the Arabic world, considering that the remaining 20 per cent would earn their living through the inevitably increasing commercial ties with the other partners of a highly efficient Israeli federation. The result of this would be that the Palestinian Arabs, who have now a vested interest in the destruction of Israel, would in the future have a vested interest in her preservation in order to insure the continuation of their newly won affluence.

Since the three Arabic city-states would in addition have to be set up inside Israel but close to the border, the first victims of any new attack staged by Egypt, Jordan and Syria would be the very populations these states would wish to liberate from Israel. Since the Arabic inhabitants would become the principal guarantee against any further attack from the Arab world.

The only question is how to finance the building of three large cities which, if they are to create a feeling of belonging, must not just be ordinary urbanizations but communities offering all the sophistication of graceful architecture and style of living. They must not be glorified refugee camps in concrete to perpetuate their feeling of subjection, but rivals of the best of Israel's own cities to strengthen the bonds of a union among equals.

But this is no problem either, provided the cities are not built in the modern way, in which case massive aid must be provided so that they might in the end look like the outskirts of Bayamon, so beloved by modern planners. But if they are built in the old-fashioned way like Venice, or Salzburg, or Rome, with the loving hands of those who want themselves to live in them, they will not only duplicate the aesthetic joys of Venice, Salzburg or Rome; by using the material around them which does not require the high cost of tractors, lorries, or superhighways to be transported to the building sites, they can be built with no more than the means of subsistence for a labour force that costs as much when idle in the sand as when fully employed. And they can be built as fast as ancient Thebes which, as Pausanias noted, raised itself after every war from destruction to splendour within the span of two or three years. But of course Thebes had no consultants from the United Nations advising them, in which case it would have taken it generations.