

Nahum Goldman tells of his PLO ties

The end of August issue of the West German weekly Rheinischer Merkur published the magazine's interview with Nahum Goldman, the former head of the World Zionist Organization and a founder of the Israeli state. Excerpts from our English translation of the interview follow.

Q: *Once again you've put the public in an uproar, for the announcement is going through the media that you'll shortly meet with (PLO chief) Yassir Arafat. What do you actually have in mind?*

A: At this moment, there is no appointment with Arafat. ... Various sides are ... making efforts to arrange a meeting with Arafat. Important personalities in Washington have encouraged me to meet with Arafat in the event he is willing. In principle, I have stated my readiness for this, but the modalities must nevertheless still be carefully arranged. ...

(Israeli Prime Minister) Begin has my word that he would be informed before and afterwards. ...

At the moment, my meeting with Arafat is in a state of suspense. A meeting with me poses certain difficulties for Arafat. For one, because I was president of the World Zionist Organization for 12 long years and, furthermore, because I would only be negotiating on the basis of mutual recognition by the PLO and Israel. The PLO would have to change their program and Arafat does not want to risk a split in the PLO if Israel does not beforehand declare itself finally ready to recognize the PLO. ...

Q: *People are talking about the troubled relationship between the Federal Republic of Germany and Israel. ...*

A: I have often spoken with many German politicians about Israel. ... My conviction is that they are all real friends of Israel. The Israeli viewpoint that foreign powers and especially the Federal Republic should not be allowed to have their own opinion and must blindly accept what Mr. Begin wants is absurd. I do not accept that and I am an Israeli citizen. This outlook is one indication of the domestic weakness of the Israeli extremists. ...

Q: *Is Israel's loud criticism about the Germans traceable back to a Masada complex? ...*

A: No. The Israelis are not so dumb that they would fall into a Masada policy. Israel's policy has its foundation, for the most part, in the conduct of the American Jews. The American Jews overestimate their power. ... There is their bad conscience about having reacted

too weakly to the danger of Hitler for, with a different policy, they might have been able to save hundreds of thousands. ... Now their bad consciences are driving them to exaggeration in the defense of Israel. ...

They have the feeling that they must stick to Israel through thick and thin. This conduct damages Israel, because the Israelis get the feeling that they can move the American Congress to sabotage a policy by the President that is not acceptable to them. ...

Q: *What do you think of Arafat's formula in which Jews, Christians, and Moslems could live peacefully with each other in a secular democratic Palestine?*

A: That is unrealistic. Look at Lebanon. There can't be a second Switzerland in the Mideast. ... No. In a state in which Jews and Moslems live together there would always be domestic conflict.

But if America were to support the Palestinians and help them to set up their own state, then what could possibly occur at the end is a Confederation of Jordan-Palestine, and this confederation could form a kind of common market with Israel. ...

Q: *Would Israel then, when the Arab threat no longer existed, sink into domestic conflict? I am thinking of the conflict between Ashkenazy and Sephardim.*

A: No. When peace comes for once, the conflict between (them) will tone down because the younger generation of both groups is no longer so very different from each other as are the adults.

Nevertheless, Israel today finds itself in complete chaos in terms of party politics. Begin has no majority. Actually, he only came to power by mistake and, among other things, because my friend Yigal Yadin suddenly had the ambition to become a politician after he had already gotten a great name as an archeologist. ... Besides, the Likud party itself is totally split.

What this comes to is that, in the long term, the U.S.A. cannot support Begin. Oil plays a role here and so does the latent anti-Semitism promoted in the long term by Israel's hardness. ...

Q: *Back to Arafat. Do you consider him to be a Palestinian Sadat?*

A: According to everything that I know, Arafat is a moderate man. Those in the know tell me that the extremist opposition ... have at the most 15 percent of the Palestinians behind them. ... So it comes down to whether the U.S.A. and Israel are ready to speak with him. ...