**B.Z. Goldberg**

*Few people have had the direct experience and the personal acquaintanship with the leading figures of the most tragic dramas of modern Jewish history as has the writer of this article, condensed from a longer piece originally written in Yiddish. Those who view the growing liberalization of the Khrushchev era in the Soviet Union with hope and anticipation cannot fail to remain concerned with the complete rehabilitation of the great Jewish cultural leaders murdered during the Stalin era.*

# Ten Years Later

AUGUST 12 marked ten years since the great Jewish writers and other great figures in Soviet Jewish cultural life were put to death. Of twenty-five leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, only one came out alive, the famous professor, Lena Stern. In addition to these, several hundred others were also arrested — writers, cultural leaders and such, and those who did not die in the concentration camps or were not executed have now been freed and rehabilitated.

I knew many of those who were executed; several were close acquaintances. For example, I made several journeys around the Soviet Union with Itzik Feffer, and spent some time with him in Moscow. I used to meet Solomon Mikhoels three-four times a week in Moscow. I knew Solomon Lozovsky very well—so well indeed, that he reserved hotel rooms for me in several cities right after the war when it was almost impossible to get accommodations, and we exchanged gifts on my departure for home.

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## What Happened

Their fate, naturally, touched me deeply. Alone, and in company with colleagues of the Jewish Writers' Committee and YKUF (Yiddisher Kultur Farband), I tried to find out what had happened. I thought that showing an interest in the matter might help those who were in trouble. That there was trouble was indicated by the closing of *Einikeit,* organ of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, and by the shutting of the Jewish theatre, and by the fact that we no longer heard from the individual writers who used to send us letters once in a while. But we could not conceive in our wildest dreams that the trouble had been so great—not until Leon Crystal of *The Forward* in the winter of 1956 brought the tragic news of what had happened on August 12, 1952. It was not until then that the Kremlin was ready to make the tragedy known.

My false optimism regarding the writers had not rested on faith in the Kremlin but on two considerations. One was a remark from a noted Jewish writer to me in 1946 which I took to be a joke, but which three-four years later, I found to have been in earnest. Knowing of my friendship for Feffer, he told me; "You know? Itzik wants to resign as secretary of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, but they won't let him."

"Why does he want to resign?" I asked. And the answer was, "Itzik knows that the day of punishment will come, and he does not want to be around when it happens." And punishment is a natural thing there for all jobholders, past, present and future.

I did not give this much thought then, but when the bad tidings began to come in, I began to remember his words; the "punishment" had begun, and one of those who had been punished must have been Feffer because he had been the secretary and had carried the committee's burdens. But I did not believe that the punishment would be harsh because of the second factor. This factor was Solomon Lozovsky.

Lozovsky was the *patrone,* or commissar, over the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. Feffer did not stir without him. At every turn Feffer used to say, "We have to telephone Solomon Abramovitch." Lozovsky's interests were so broad, that, in my naiveté, I came to him with the following proposition: I said I saw that what was going on in the Anti-Fascist Committee was a great deal more than merely matters dealing with anti-fascism. The fact was,

I said, that it was a Jewish committee such as our American Jewish Congress or American Jewish Committee. And in view of the fact that the fight against fascism was becoming increasingly less important, and the Jewish problem was becoming more acute all over the world, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee should change its name to the Soviet Jewish Committee, and begin to function as such officially both in the Sovet Union and abroad.

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### Dangerous Idea

Lozovsky heard me out with his usual calm patience, but did not answer or comment. He turned the conversation adroitly to other subjects. Who could have thought, who could have foretold, that it was precisely this, the functioning of the Anti-Fascist Committee as a general Jewish committee—that was to be one of the charges against the leaders of the Anti-Fascist Committee, including Lozovsky?

I followed the press carefully about news of Lozovsky, and I asked about him at every opportunity, of every one whom I had known, Lozovsky was an important man in the Foreign Ministry; Molotov's right hand. Here in America his position would be called Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. I thought that with Lozovsky in such a high position, nothing important could have happened to Feffer and the others.

Parenthetically, Lozovsky was sentenced and put to death together with Feffer and the others. I have learned that he held himself very proud at the trial. But there was no news that anything had happened—until 1956.

As the alarms from Russia became greater and greater, as the war against Jewish culture grew, we began to knock on all doors, great and small, from Vishinsky's to Gromyko's, believing that privately, on a friendly basis, we would get some news and facts about the situation in the Soviet Union.

The smaller fry listened to us with the greatest sympathy, and wrote down every word we spoke to them. We said that so long as the alarms were not answered fully, they would be taken as truth, and that this would be not only a tragedy for Jews but harmful also to the interests of the Soviet Union. The more important officials also heard us out sympathetically, but tried to wash their hands of the whole matter.

At one meeting with the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, where I had gone from New York especially for the interview, he said: "Do you really believe that in the Soviet Union innocent people are being punished for crimes they did not commit? When one is arrested in Russia, he has to be guilty."

I remarked: "What you are saying, then, is that the writers who have been arrested are guilty of something?" He answered, "I only meant to say that if these people have committed no crimes, then you need not worry that anything will happen to them."

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### A Call on Gromyko

Characteristic was a call on Gromyko during one of his visits to the United Nations. He said he knew nothing but could not see what might have happened to cause such distress here. He did not know if *Einikeit* was still publishing or had been closed. He said that it happens frequently that a newspaper closes and another one opens; this is a usual occurrence. The same regarding the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. He did not know if it still existed or not, or if there had been any arrests or not. He asked me: "How should I know? Does your ambassador in Moscow know who has or has not been arrested in Chicago?"

I replied, "Yes, he certainly does not know, but all one has to do is to write to the police chief in Chicago, and he will answer immediately, yes or no."

He looked me straight in the eye and said: "It is the same with us. Write a letter to the police in Moscow, and they will also reply, yes or no."

It had become clear in the winter of 1956 what had happened to the Jewish writers and other cultural leaders, but not "how" and "why". This curtain of silence persists to this day in the Soviet Union. Until very recently, anything written about the occurrences has been circumlocutory. Writers spoke only of "tragic deaths"—a description that could be applied just as easily to victims of an automobile accident—except for the fact that the "cult of the personality" was mentioned.

The description of Peretz Markish in the first number of *Sovietish Heimland,* on the publication of one of his poems, for example, says only: "In the time of the personality cult, Peretz Markish died tragically, but his great voice still rings in our literature."

Why wasn't it said plainly that he was ex-

ecuted, shot on this or that day, in this or that year, at this or that place, on this or that false charge?

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## Not "How" or "Why"

I heard recently that *Pravda* had carried an article about the tragedy, but I could not get from it just what had happened. Evidently the "how" and "why" are still taboo.

When I was in the Soviet Union in 1959 and met with people who should have known what had happened, and why, I did not hesitate to question them. But in truth they knew only the technical "how"—i.e. how the victims were arrested, and how they were tortured to confess, but not how the trial came about and why. Here they, like all the others, ran into a blank wall.

It was decided, for example, to throw the blame on Beria. But this is not as easy as it might seem. Beria, a half-Jew, was not himself an antisemite. The Jews in Georgia, from whence he came, always spoke in friendly terms of him. He helped establish the Jewish museum, for instance (which was later closed down), and he saved a synagogue for them.

It was Beria who had to build the structure of the "conspiracy", but it was never his plan to bring the Jewish people to book.

It has also been said that the great demonstration the Moscow Jews staged for Golda Meir, the first Israel Ambassador to the Soviet Union, shocked Stalin, and that this "disloyalty" of the Soviet Jews had frightened him. This also is not entirely so. Golda Meir came to Moscow after Ilya Ehrenburg's article which laid down the ideology for bringing an end to a national cultural Jewish life, and which coincided with the closing of *Einikeit*. The new course concerning the Jews could not have been forged overnight. Such matters are decided long in advance. And the murder of Mikhoels in Minsk came about long before Golda Meir arrived in Moscow. The Jewish enthusiasm over Israel, as shown in the demonstration for her, played into the hands of the plotters against the Jews, but was not the cause of the tragedy.

The entire matter can be laid to Stalin's firm belief that there would be a third World War, between the Soviet Union and the capitalist world, and that in this war some peoples would not be loyal to his regime but would aid the enemy, just as there were collaborators in World War II. This was the error of the new policy concerning various peoples, and from this also came Stalin's Great Russian patriotism.

It is not generally known that in Georgia also, writers and cultural leaders were arrested in a no-less fantastic slander—that the Georgian intellectuals were nationalists and had conspired to cut Georgia away from the USSR and give it to Turkey.

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## Far-Fetched

If the charge had been that the Georgians wanted to sever their country from the USSR and to become independent, it would have been believable. Actually they had a constitutional right to do this. The Stalin constitution declares that any Soviet Republic is free to leave the USSR whenever it so desires. But it is hard for me to believe that there could have been so many unrealistic intellectuals in Georgia who thought they could tear the country away from the Soviet Union, especially since the Communist Party of Georgia is under the firm control of Moscow. It might have been possible theoretically, but what sane Georgian would allow his fatherland to go back to Turkey? What kind of an exchange would that have been?

But the arrest of the Georgian intellectuals did no harm to the Georgian culture. The Georgian press, literature, theatres, publishing houses continued to operate as before, although in other hands. With the slander and arrests came no command to Georgians to assimilate into Russia. But with the downfall of the Jews came also the downfall of their culture.

The Tatars were removed from Crimea and their intellectuals were also arrested and executed, but no anathema was placed on the Tatar language. No Tatar burned a Tatar book because he was afraid he would be arrested, as Jews did with their Jewish books.

With the slander against the Jews came an anathema against their entire national cultural life—a maximal program, so to speak. Perhaps that that is why the matter is still taboo. Perhaps the taboo comes from the fact that Russia is not yet quite ready to rid itself of this maximum program.

How did the cultural and personal Jewish catastrophe occur, and why?

No official, or semi-official, word has come from any quarter, but some of the "how" can be gathered from those who were arrested but

remained alive, and who have talked. The "why" remains in the realm of guesswork and analysis.

The libel was woven from a skein wrapped around a sort of Jewish national conspiracy, tied to a world conspiracy, against the Soviet Union to bring about a third World War. The Soviet Jewish conspiracy consisted of taking over part of the Crimea, from which the Tatars were expelled in 1944, as an autonomous Jewish region, and turn it over to the Americans as a base for the coming war.

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### Smaller Conspiracies

To this was tied several smaller and larger conspiracies, such as "Jewish chauvinism", i.e. to force Jewish culture on people which did not want it. In Biro-Bidjan this was called an attempt to "Yiddishize" the region and in other places it consisted of anything that might stand in the way of the assimilation process. The conspiracy also consisted of a tie to national Jewish organizations in other countries. And since the American Joint Distribution Committee was known in the Soviet Union through its activities over a period of fifteen years, it was "natural" that the ties between the Soviet Jewish intelligentisa should be with "Joint" and therefore it was also natural that "Joint" should be a branch of U.S. intelligence. The "doctors' plot" was also woven into all of this.

It was to these crimes and conspiracies that the Jewish intellectuals were pressed to confess. If they had confessed, it might have resulted in open trials, as in the 1930's.

From what sort of a gossamer web was the libel woven?

That the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee wanted the regime to give part of the Crimea for a Jewish territory was correct. But certainly not for any anti-Soviet reasons. They wanted the Crimea because after the end of the war, there arose an earnest question as to a Jewish territory, because a new Jewish problem had arisen. Jews were beginning to come back from the partisan camps, from the front, from distant places and found that their old homes had vanished, or had been taken by others, non-Jews, who had been bombed out of their own homes and had no place to go. It also happened frequently that the non-Jews were found to have been infected with a more virulent strain of antisemitism than before the war. Also, Jews were not always given the positions they had occupied in peace time. And above all, having lost their nearest and dearest, through the Nazis, there was a desire to be with others of their own people.

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### Territorialists

It was somehow similar to the days in the late 1920's when Jewish territorialism arose, and the question was whether to establish the Jewish territory in the Crimea or in Biro-Bidjan, and the Communist Jewish leadership was divided between "Crimeans" and "Biro-Bidjaners." The latter won.

The new Jewish problems enumerated above resulted in a large Jewish emigration to Biro-Bidjan in the first few years after World War II. The Jewish poet, Israel Emmiot, who found himself at the time in Biro-Bidjan, wrote that the Jews there said they had never seen so many Jews come to Biro-Bidjan and heard so much Yiddish spoken as in 1946.

But the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee knew that this was only a temporary thing. Jews would not concentrate in Biro-Bidjan, but they would flock to the Crimea which has a salubrious climate. Since the Crimean territory was free from the Tatars, the old project of the "Crimeans" was revived.

It must be remembered that Biro-Bidjan was never the sole place of Jewish colonization in the USSR. Even in the 1930's, Jews were settled on the land in other places. So it was possible to colonize Jews in the Crimea without giving up Biro-Bidjan.

The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee wrote a memorandum on the Crimean project and gave it to Lozovsky who took it up with Molotov. Molotov thought the plan made sense, and that it should be taken before the Politburo. And that is what the leaders of the Anti-Fascist Committee did. Although I was close to Mikhoels and Feffer, I knew nothing of this until my trip to the Soviet Union in 1959.

In retrospect, I see a connection between this and something I heard from Mikhoels in 1946.

I spent more than five months in the Soviet Union then. It was a difficult period physically and morally: The fearful destruction all about in the first period after the war, the great poverty and the loneliness of millions of people, and on top of this a terrible Russian winter and the lack of any adequate accommodations for a tourist. Without the warmth

of the Anti-Fascist Committee my visit would have been impossible. There was no possibility of seeing anything: all around us was destruction, poverty, sadness. Everywhere was the desire to begin the great task of rebuilding a new life.

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### Asked to Stay

I wanted to leave after the first few months, especially since I had a number of other countries to visit. But my friends in the Anti-Fascist Committee always managed to find another reason for me to stay. A new trip with Feffer or with some one else of the committee was projected. Then the hope was raised that we could go to Biro-Bidjan; it needed only the special permission from Molotov. After four months I told Mikhoels I would leave the following week. He began the old story over again—another while, another week. I said, "Tell me the truth. Why do you always try to keep me from going?"

His answer was in a hopeful tone: "We are awaiting good news from the Kremlin. You were the first to cable the news from Moscow that Biro-Bidjan had become a Jewish autonomous region (in 1934), and you will be the first to cable this other good news." When I asked him what this "good news" was, he replied, "Let us better have a drink." I did not press him because I had learned that if he did not want to tell me something, it was a waste of time to get him to try. I soon forgot about it in the routine of the days, and particularly because the "good news" never came about.

As we now know, the memorandum on the Crimea was taken before the Politburo, and that Stalin tossed it back. As Khrushchev has since revealed, he also was against the project. Why? Because of security reasons. But why should the Crimea be less secure with the concentration of Jews in a portion of the peninsula than with another element of the Soviet people? This question was never asked.

The single thread in the libelous web spun around the Jewish cultural leaders was spun from a distorted fact—a fact so blown out of proportion that it no longer had any resemblance to itself.

According to this slander, Feffer and Mikhoels plotted to dismember the Crimea from the Soviet Union at the behest of the American Joint Distribution Committee.

How did they come to "Joint?"

The answer was that "Joint," at the behest of the U.S. government, maneuvered during the war to bring them to America, and there made the Crimean deal.

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### Stretching the Truth

It is indeed true that Mikhoels and Feffer came to America in 1943 and that while they were here they met leaders of the "Joint." But "Joint" had absolutely nothing to do with them coming to America, and the American regime had no hand in "maneuvering" their visit. Just the opposite: When Mikhoels and Feffer arrived they complained that the U.S.A. had put a number of roadblocks in their path to this country. "They treated us as though we were enemies, not friends," Mikhoels complained. It was only at the prodding of the Soviet Union that the U.S. arranged to bring them to America. Civil aviation did not exist at the time.

The original idea to have them visit America actually came from Moscow. Reuben Saltzman, who was then the Secretary of the pro-Soviet Jewish Workers' Order, came to a meeting of the Jewish Russian War Relief Committee with the plan. He suggested that the committee, in conjunction with the American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists, invite the two leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee to America, and reported that the Anti-Fascist Committee would like to send a delegation to help the work of the Relief Committee, and had suggested Mikhoels and Feffer.

No one could have any objections to this, Saltzman said. Any one who ever had anything to do with the Soviet Union, from a secretary in a Soviet Consulate to a former general, was used in the relief campaign, so how could anyone object to the presence of two Soviet Jewish leaders?

Some saw in the visit an opportunity for something more than aid to the relief campaign, for a chance to forge a closer relationship between the Soviet Jews and the world, as the Soviet Jewish leaders themselves had hoped when, over Moscow's international radio, they greeted world Jewry as "Brother Jews!"

Sholem Asch, who was a leading member of the committee, took up the idea of the visit with enthusiasm, but he said that the invitation should go to Mikhoels and David Bergelson, not to Feffer. I could not understand why

he was so persistent about not wanting Feffer, since this was not to be a literary mission. Saltzman enlightened me. He said that when Asch got a medal from Pilsudski, Feffer had written a poem called, *A Bullet in Your Head, Sholem Asch.* Saltzman declared bluntly that the Anti-Fascist Committee would send these two men or no one. So it remained Mikhoels and Feffer.

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### Hatchet is Buried

To Asch's credit, it must be said that when Mikhoels and Feffer arrived and came to visit Asch in his home in Stamford, Conn., he forgot what had occurred and kissed Feffer, as he did Mikhoels, and kept up a friendly relationship with the two men during their entire visit here.

Thus, the "maneuver" to bring Mikhoels and Feffer to America came from Moscow, not from America. And Mikhoels told me how he and Feffer went to see President Kalinin before their departure. As they were talking, Stalin entered without warning from a side door. He slapped them on the shoulders and wished them a happy journey. *Pravda* printed long dispatches from America about Mikhoel's and Feffer's activities. In the U.S.A., the two men were under the aegis of the then Soviet Consul, Yevgeny Kisselev (who was later the Ambassador to Cairo where he made the arms deal with Nasser, and is now in U Thant's cabinet at the U.N.).

Thus it can be seen that the visit of Mikhoels and Feffer was arranged for and taken care of by the Soviet regime. But at the trials, it was said that this had been a maneuver of "Joint." Mikhoels and Feffer did meet with "Joint" leaders, but it was only to discuss how it could do work with the War Relief Committee. A plan was put before it to send food and clothes to the civil population at a cost of about $25,000,000, with the understanding that the relief should be given in cities where there are Jews, but that the food and clothing should not go exclusively to Jews.

I am sure that Mikhoels and Feffer did not suggest this on their own, but only after a discussion with Kissilev, or some one even higher. "Joint" found that this could not be done, and the project was dropped. At the trials it was stated that Mikhoels and Feffer got their orders from "Joint" to tear the Crimea away from the Soviet Union.

There were other slanderous threads woven around the writers and others to bolster the charges against the Anti-Fascist Committee that it had conspiratorial ties with "Joint" and the U.S. regime, and two 1946 visitors from America also were entangled in the web.

I came to the Soviet Union in 1946. I was to be there in December, but was delayed in Poland. I was the first American Jewish writer to visit the Soviet Union after World War II. Since I was the head of the Jewish Committee in New York to welcome Mikhoels and Feffer, it was natural for them to be my hosts. This was especially so because the Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists in America and the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the Soviet Union had a joint project, the *Black Book.* Also cooperating in this was the Va'ad Leumi in Palestine and the World Jewish Congress.

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### The Purpose

It was for these reasons I could meet so often with the leaders of the Anti-Fascist Committee, if not to give them instructions from "Joint" to tear the Crimea away from the Soviet Union. I telephoned home several times, from Moscow to New York, once from the U.S. Embassy, and the others direct from my hotel room. What else could I have talked about but the plot against the Crimea?

One of the calls was to extend greetings to the annual meeting of Ambijan (the American Committee for Biro-Bidjan) of which I was then a vice president.

A short time after I departed, the second Jewish writer came to Moscow from New York. He was the editor (and still is) of a Communist newspaper. For what other reason did he come but to spy for the U.S.A. about matters concerning the Crimea?

But, as one can see, there was "something" to all of this. I actually was in the Soviet Union, and so was the other writer.

Of the same character were the charges of Jewish chauvinism, i.e. to "Yiddishize" the people who wanted to assimilate .There was also "something" here. What was it?

After the war, a number of Jews came to Biro-Bidjan, for the reasons I gave above. These were Yiddish-speaking Jews. Jewish life therefore became more prominent there—not, of course, in the Jewish schools for children, but only in hearing Yiddish spoken by the masses at gatherings and concerts. Therefore, was this not the fruit of a conspiracy to foist Yiddish

on the Biro-Bidjan people?

Attempts were made to restore Jewish life in Great Russia, the Ukraine and other areas as before the war. There were still several Jewish schools in existence, and new textbooks were prepared for them, but it was impossible to get them from the printer. They were to be ready in the middle of the Summer, according to the plan, but Fall had arrived and the books still were not done. The school leaders protested against the printer for not delivering the Yiddish books. The complaints were duly noted, and later used to show that the school heads went all out for Yiddish!

After the war, the publishers of *Einikeit* tried to get more paper to increase the circulation of the newspaper. I saw for myself in several cities how Jews came to Feffer, who was with me, to complain over the lack of enough copies to cover the demand. The paper was literally grabbed up from the newsstands. The requests for more paper were cited at the trials as an act of "Yiddishizing" by force the Jewish people.

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### "Yiddishization"

Of all the threads of libel, only one had some sort of a base—that of "Yiddishizing." Jewish consciousness had deepened during the war and after because of the antisemitism they had gone through, because of the loss of so many loved ones, because of the difficulties of Jews to re-establish themselves on returning from the front, the partisan forests and the evacuation centers. So there was "Yiddishization" not only in speech but in the feeling of identity with other Jews.

All this was "rationalized" in the Stalin regime in the years 1948-1953, if it is possible to use "rational" in talking about murder. The brutal and barbaric tactic of Stalin was plain; it was to halt the national Jewish apparatus, to keep the Soviet Jewish people apart from the Jews in the rest of the world, and to pulverize the Jewish people into grains of sand, each grain separate, so that they may be scattered by the wind. And this is still the policy today.

There will come a day when some one will give a rounded, all-sided story of the writers who were murdered—not only of their literary work but of their historic role in Jewish cultural life and in their battle for a Jewish existence under a dictatorial socialist regime.

Until then, it is quite proper to keep asking "how?" and "why?"

# Refugee Problem Up Again

**—Richard Yaffe**

THE Seventeenth General Assembly, which is still in its opening weeks, must decide what to do about the refugee problem since the U.N. Relief and Workers Agency's mandate expires in June, 1963. So far, there is no plan in sight. The fact that the refugee question will go to the bottom of the Special Political Committee's agenda and will not come up until probably late in November is indicative of the vain search for some "new plan" or bit of magic which might provide new paths towards a solution of this old and sticky problem.

Dr. Joseph Johnson, the special emissary of the Palestine Conciliation Commission, has submitted some sort of plan following his recent visit to the host countries and Israel to discover, in his own words to this correspondent just before he departed, whether the glimmer of hope he saw "at the end of a long, dark tunnel" was a real light of peace or merely a will-of-the-whisp.

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### The "Plan"

What he has submitted is a mish-mash plan which is not acceptable either to the Arabs, to Israel, nor to the three members of the P.C.C., France, Turkey and the U.S.A. The only question concerning it now seems to be that of giving it a decent burial without hurting Dr. Johnson's feelings or having him lose face. What he has proposed is simply this:

He would set up a series of P.C.C. offices in the refugee camps and advertise that they were open for business to take the "preferences" from the Arabs as to what they want to do—go to Israel, or be resettled in the Arab states or elsewhere, with due compensation for the property they may have left behind when they or their families fled from their former homes.

Dr. Johnson avoids the phrase so beloved of