

Year of The Peace Process

YEAR OF THE PEACE PROCESS
BY DR. WALTER EYTAN

The year 5739, now ending, opened barely two weeks after the signing of the Camp David accords - outlining the "framework" of a Middle East settlement and a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. It was the final conclusion of this treaty which without doubt was, for both countries, the outstanding event of the year.

It took several months longer to work out than has been expected, but by March it had become fact. In April instruments of ratification were exchanged, and by May the autonomy talks were under way -- autonomy for "the inhabitants of Judea, Samaria and Gaza." These negotiations are now actively proceeding, without break or crisis so far, while other provisions of the peace treaty are also being carried out.

The Suez Canal has been opened to Israeli shipping (naval vessels and freighter alike), and traffic has moved without a hitch. Israel has begun shutting down her military installations in Sinai and has restored El Arish to Egyptian rule. By January it is expected that full normalization will, according to the agreed time-table, have been attained - symbolized dramatically by the exchange of ambassadors between the two countries. Even now, Israelis can (and do) visit Egypt, while an Egyptian passport no longer bars its holder from entering Israel.

Yet the further Israel and Egypt have advanced on the road to peace, the more violently have most Arab states opposed it. So far this opposition has not modified either Israel's or

Egypt's determination to carry out the provisions of their agreement down to the last detail. If anything, it has had the opposite effect, since both have gone so far that they know there can be no turning back. They know, too, that the peace treaty is wholly in the interest of each and that other Arab states, willy-nilly, will in due course follow suit.

What has been more disturbing has been the unwillingness of the outside world, with the solitary exception of the United States, to lend the peace process its whole-hearted endorsement. It was perhaps to be expected that the Soviet Union and its satellites, intent on making trouble everywhere, would do all they could to attack the treaty -- not only to curry favor with the Arabs, but to belittle and undermine any achievement of the United States.

Far more shameful has been the sulky reaction of the nine-member European Economic Community, led by France, Britain and Germany. These civilized states have been so petrified by Arab threats of oil sanctions (higher prices, boycotts, embargoes and the rest) that they have been able to do no more than shuffle their feet in embarrassment - knowing full well that peace between Egypt and Israel has been a tremendous achievement, but not daring to say so.

In the course of 5739 Israel's international image has not been improved, less by her own fault than by the faint-heartedness of the rest of the world. Even the United States has condemned Israel's settlement policy as "illegal" -- as if this were the point. As a result, Israel has been stressing the new settlements' legality, and a barren argument has been conducted between her and everyone else. The problem, of course, is wholly political - claims of legality or illegality only cloud the issue. It may not have been politically wise to put

up new settlements in Judea and Samaria at this time, but this is a risk the Israel Government has thought fit to take, moved as it is by a perfectly legitimate concern for the country's As things are, Israel can do little right in the eyes of others. This derives inexorably from the balance of international power. Of the more than 150 members of the United Nations, barely thirty are democracies - four-fifths find themselves, therefore, automatically on the Arab side and will normally applaud any Arab cause.

We are determined, however, not to let our case go by default. We know that the treaty with Egypt is the first step to a Middle East settlement and peace with the other Arab states - and we know that they know it. If at present we come up against the classic rejection syndrome we have faced in the Arab camp for the past thirty years, we are confident that in time we shall overcome it. The Arabs have consistently said "no" to anything that might ease or institutionalize their co-existence with Israel, but they have just as consistently had to climb down at step after step.

Whether Jordanians and Palestinians join in the autonomy talks or not, as provided by the Camp David "framework," the year 5740 which we usher in today will doubtless see a strengthening of the drive for peace. Even if it remains restricted to Egypt and Israel alone, it will serve as an example whose force will make itself felt. Egypt more than once led other Arab states to war against Israel, and they followed. They followed, too, when Egypt in 1949 took the lead in concluding an armistice. Sooner or later they will follow again, until peace reigns everywhere along Israel's borders.

AJC ISSUES DOCUMENT ON TRUCE

The American Jewish Committee, ever alert on a multiple fronts affecting the welfare of Israel and World Jewry, has released a significant document analyzing the impact which the Camp David peace process has had on Israeli politics. Worked out by AJC's office in Jerusalem, the detailed analysis describes the far-reaching influence which the party system in Israel. The document constitutes a party-by-party examination. While all the political parties support it, the analysis reveals that there are elements in almost all the parties that object to the far-reaching territorial concessions involved

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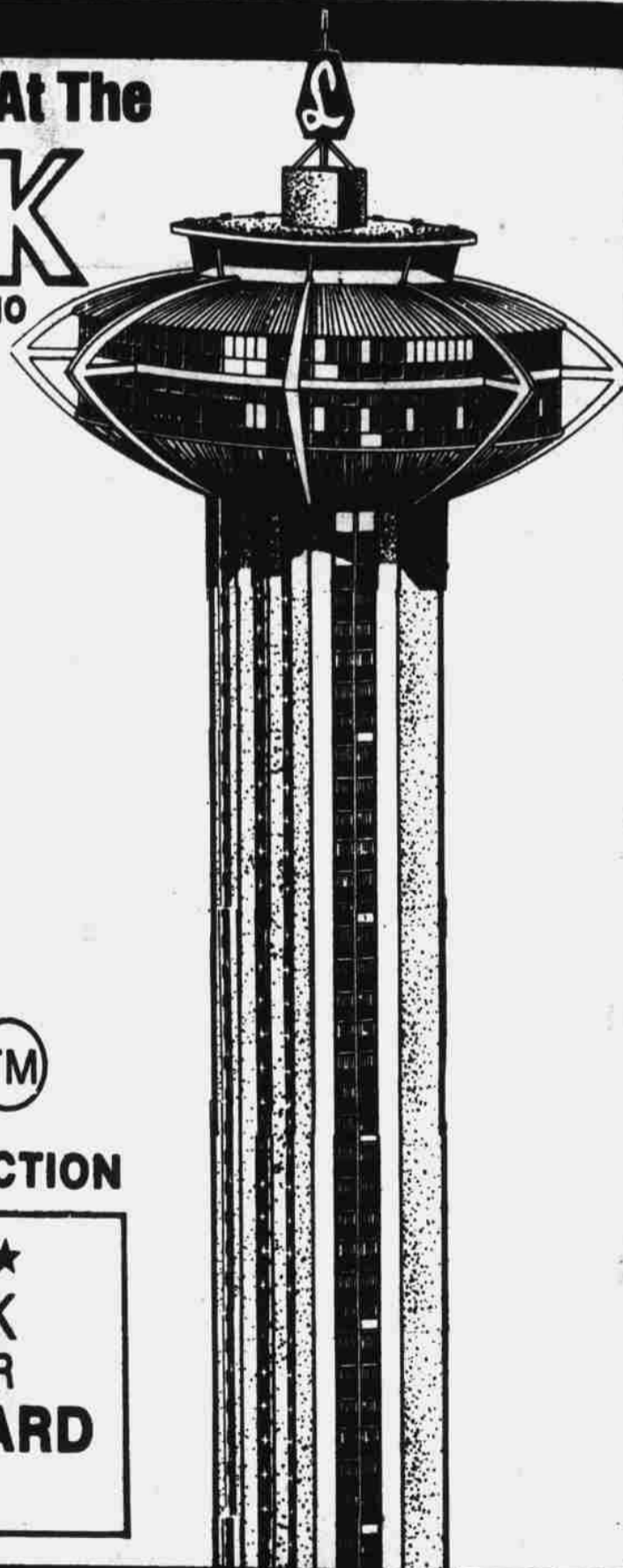
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