

# An Answer To Jewish Defeatism

## A Veteran Zionist's Letter And A Reply

### THE OBLIGATIONS OF THE GALUTH TOWARDS THE YISHUV

Upon being asked to prepare himself well in advance for the work of the Keren Hayesod in his particular territory, a valued Zionist worker somewhat discouraged in spirit, wrote the following letter to the Zionist headquarters in Johannesburg.

#### The Letter

"IN all sincerity and honesty and with all the will at my command I cannot possibly co-operate in a campaign for funds for the Keren Hayesod in the light of existing conditions that prevail in Palestine as well as in the face of the Arab-Jewish talks which will shortly take place in London. The result of these talks is a foregone conclusion and will react unfavourably towards the Jewish National Home. There is only one redeeming feature which could be advanced in favour of the National Home and that is the heroism and self-sacrifice which is displayed by the pioneers in that country. But that spirit will not last for ever and will not butter parsnips. No pioneer or body of pioneers can consistently go on planting orange groves and building water installations only for them to be destroyed and uprooted during the night.

"There were occasions when every Jew had the right to be optimistic, but the time has arrived when we can dream no more and must face realities in their true form, no matter how unpleasant such feelings may be.

"To thine own self be true and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

#### The Reply

To this letter the following reply was made by Mr. J. Alexander, Secretary of the S.A. Zionist Federation:

"I AM in receipt of your letter of the 19th instant, which I have carefully read.

"Whilst I appreciate that it is written in all sincerity, I cannot but deplore the tone of defeatism and despair which runs through it. Not in that spirit does the Yishuv, which you admire so much, carry on its daily life and its creative efforts in Palestine; not thus did the early Zionists of forty and thirty years ago face the self-imposed tasks which their ideals and their convictions imposed upon them in spite of the fact that there were then no 450,000 Jews settled in Palestine but only a mere fifth of that number and many of them

of a backward and semi-mediaeval type.

"If I am not mistaken your association with Zionism runs back for many years; surely then you are not one of those new-fangled prosperity Zionists who only think Palestine worth while supporting in the piping days of boom when it does not need their support, and who turn away from it with a shrug of the shoulders when slump or danger comes; when, in other words, it needs support most.

"You speak of the heroism of the pioneers in the front line. Have you ever known of an army whose front lines and advance posts could hold their ground without a large reserve to lean upon, without supplies and commissariat and ammunition ready to be supplied to them from behind; without the moral encouragement of masses of comrades at their back? And these are precisely the obligations of Chutz la'Aretz towards the Yishuv.

"And it is precisely in these days that the Yishuv most requires that backing; and it is precisely such a moment you choose to throw up the sponge.

"And what of your facts? How do you know that the talks in London are a 'foregone conclusion'? And whatever their upshot may prove to be can make no difference to the Jew who is convinced that in a Jewish Palestine and a Jewish Palestine alone lies the Jewish future: for if that will and conviction are in him he will work on and strive on in the face of every obstacle knowing firstly that there is no other way and, secondly, that world conditions, so far from being immutable, change from day to day, now in our favour, now against us; above all knowing that

every inch that we advance by our own efforts not only brings us a step nearer to our goal but gives us a bigger bargaining counter in our efforts to wring justice from the world.

"Who told you that the orange groves and water installation were being planted only to be destroyed and uprooted during the night? The amount of such damage during the past thirty-two months of disturbances in Palestine has been absolutely infinitesimal in proportion to the total number of settlements and the total area under cultivation.

#### BETTER YIDDISH PLAYS

The aim of the newly-formed Jewish Theatrical Society is to encourage the better class of Jewish play and to promote performances of cultural and literary value. The first venture will be the production of "Der Dorfs Yung" at the Jewish Guild on February 25th and March 1st.

This play, by Leon Kobren, is a story of the life of fisher folk in the Ukraine and has been performed in many centres in Europe and America. It is based on the theme that it is possible for Jews and non-Jews to live in friendship and co-operation side by side.

Mr. B. Ozynski is producing the play and Mr. René Shapshak is responsible for the costumes and decorations. Mr. J. Drutman is the musical director. Miss Grayce Ginsberg will be in charge of the dancing side of the production.

#### Mr. Adolf Davis, K.C.

Mr. Adolf Davis, who is a South African by birth, has received the official nomination as the United Party candidate in the forthcoming Pretoria City Parliamentary by-election.

"How absolutely opposite to your conclusion is the true application of the quotation with which you close — 'to thine own self be true'. You say we must awaken from our dream and face realities. What reality is there for the Jews today outside of Palestine? Who are the dreamers? Those who have gone to Palestine and built and carved out a life and a hope and a destiny for hundreds of thousands with a possibility of millions more to follow them or those who, ignoring like ostriches the patent signs of the times, can offer nothing to the Jews except to 'bow their heads like bulrushes' to the storm in the hope that it will pass and that they will have a breathing space until the next storm comes? A less appropriate slogan than the one you have chosen to attach to such advice it would be impossible to find. It is only the Jews who face the situation as it is with open eyes, who, even in the days when anti-Semitism was weak, had sensed the position and realised that only a Jewish national revival would bring self-reliance, self-respect and self-help to the scattered members of the House of Israel, — it is only they who are the realists; it is only they who are obeying the poet's injunction to be true to themselves.

"I hope you will excuse this lengthy letter. But Jewry is at bay; and I could not refrain from expressing to a fellow Jew who, conscientiously if, to my mind absolutely mistakenly, has voiced his views to me, the answer which I feel is the only one that must be made to faint-heartedness and defeatism."

#### ZIONIST YOUTH ACTIVITIES

##### Post Mariculant Function

A gathering of over 200 young people attended a very successful function last Sunday night organised jointly by the Herzlian Zionist Youth Society and the Students' Zionist Association under the auspices of the Transvaal Zionist Youth Executive.

The function was the second of its kind to be held and will now take place annually. Its purpose is to introduce into the Zionist Movement young persons who have just left school.

Mr. "Sheppy" Ostrofsky was in the chair and succeeded in creating a happy informal atmosphere from the start. In his speech he dwelt on the necessity for South African Jewish Youth choosing their careers wisely.

Mr. S. M. Levin, Organiser-Secretary of the S.A. Zionist Youth Council, was the speaker of the evening and in a vigorous address, stressed the necessity for Zionism in a troubled world. His address was enthusiastically applauded by the audience.

The talkie film "The Land of Promise" was then shown and was also thoroughly appreciated. A highly enjoyable evening was brought to a close with refreshments and dancing.

East Rand Council: Under the auspices of the Benoni Society also, the Council organised a Post-Matriculant Function which was addressed by Messrs. S. Hirschmann and L. Freeman of the Transvaal Zionist Youth Executive.

#### HEBREW CLASSES FOR BEGINNERS.

Hebrew classes for beginners are held in the Coronation Hall, c/r. Plein and Claim Streets, Johannesburg, every Monday and Thursday nights at 5.30—7 p.m. and 8—10 p.m. respectively. The classes are under the auspices of the Transvaal Zionist Youth Executive and tuition is given by Mr. S. Bakst.

The charges for tuition are nominal. Further information may be obtained from the Secretary, Transvaal Zionist Youth Executive, Coronation Hall, Phone 22-6821.

#### A MOZART PERFORMANCE

An excellent performance of the Mozart Jupiter Symphony was given at the first concert of the present season at Broadcast House on Tuesday evening. Mr. J. Schulman conducted and demonstrated again the fine power of his baton, to which the orchestra responded in fine style.

It was delightful to hear Mozart played with so pure an effect and such delicacy of finish. A competent rendering was given of Edward German's "Theme and Six Diversions". The orchestra played this with a fine abandon and attack, which brought out all the vitality of this vigorous composition.

A Swedish Rhapsody on the programme was both new and unusual. It is hoped that Mr. Schulman will have the orchestra play this again, for better acquaintance with this work may lead to better understanding of it.

The conclusion of an evening of fine music came with the presentation of Cesar Franck's "Chasseur Maudit". A notable feature of this performance was the fine work by the horns. D.