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The Deputies in War-Time

INTERVIEW WITH MR. B. A. ETTLINGER, K.C.

"It was only to be expected that the war would impose many new tasks and responsibilities upon the Board of Deputies," said Mr. B.A. Ettliger, K.C., President of the S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies, in an interview with the "Zionist Record."

"We took it to be our duty—and still do—to mobilise the community behind the country's war effort. The vast majority of South African Jews realised immediately where their duty lay. This is shown by the fine record of our young men and women in the forces who brought credit to the entire Jewish community. But with us, as with other sections, there have been some who have lagged behind and we have never hesitated to remind them continually where their duty lay. We are glad to know that the military authorities have appreciated and taken advantage of the readiness of the Board to co-operate with them."

Fighting Anti-Semitism

Mr. Ettliger was asked whether, because of the war, the Board had been able to abate its activities in counteracting anti-Semitism. He replied that the war had naturally made a difference, but chiefly in that a new emphasis was placed upon the Board's work. After the declaration of war against the Axis powers, most of the openly pro-Fascist, anti-Semitic organisations were driven underground, but that did not make it less necessary to be on guard against anti-Semitism. First, there was the evil harvest of Nazi propaganda continued even during war-time through Zeesen and other German channels. Secondly, there was the propaganda conducted by anti-war elements in this country which had pronounced National-Socialist sympathies. It was, therefore, necessary to continue the fight against anti-Semitism and to use all appropriate occasions to remind the public that anti-Semitism was the spearhead of the Nazi attack upon the democracies.

"We found," continued Mr. Ettliger, "that even some people sympathetic to the cause of the United Nations have been infected by Nazi propaganda. There has been a good deal of loose talk, in particular, about the alleged insufficiency of the Jewish war-effort and we have had to keep the facts before the public. I am afraid our task is not over. In the difficult readjustment to post-war conditions there will always be reactionaries ready to exploit racialist sentiment. We must expose their tactics and in doing so I am convinced that we shall strike a blow for freedom, because racialism and 'scapegoatism' are the most handy weapons with which reactionaries will seek to cheat the people of the fulfilment of their hopes for a better post-war social order."

"Moreover, we are alive to the fact that anti-Jewish prejudice is but one manifestation of a deeper disease in the body politic and that we Jews must play our part in combating all forms of racial intolerance."

"To be on the alert," added Mr. Ettliger, "does not mean being either alarmist or defeatist. I hope that the defeat of Hitler will mark a powerful setback for anti-Semitism, but I am sure that it will not automatically bring about its elimination. We have to join with all democratic forces to ensure a more humane and more tolerant post-war world. While the Board as the instrument of the community can do

much, it is helpless without the support and co-operation of every Jew.

"Each in his own sphere has a contribution to make. Each, by his and her own conduct, can advance the cause of decency and goodwill and, contrariwise, can cause illwill."

For the Jewish Soldier

Speaking on the Board's work for the Jewish soldier, Mr. Ettliger said: "It has been a great privilege to us to keep in touch with Jewish men and women in the army, to make them feel we are with them in spirit. We have kept in close contact with the Jewish Chaplains and have tried to supply the men with their specifically Jewish needs, and with gifts and comforts."

"Some idea of the scale upon which it has been done can be gauged from the fact that during last year we sent no fewer than 30,000 books, pamphlets and journals either to individual Jewish soldiers or to the Chaplains. We have been glad to hear that these have often been shared by our men with their Gentile colleagues. In this way not only have the Jewish men benefited, but a better understanding of the Jewish outlook and problems has been fostered among the men in general."

"Our responsibility does not, however, end when the men leave the army. On the contrary, through our Welfare Office we seek, on demobilisation, to give advice on personal problems, help in regard to employment and so on. Our Soldiers' Assistance Committee, administering funds provided by the S.A. Jewish War Appeal, also endeavours to help the men on their return to become fully integrated into civilian life. This Committee's work is carried out in cooperation with the Governor-General's Fund and applicants are first required to exhaust their right to benefit from that fund and from other Government bodies."

Gaps in Communal Organisation

Mr. Ettliger also had something to say in regard to communal organisation. More and more, he said, the Board was finding itself involved in all sorts of internal communal matters which were not primarily its concern. This was due in part to the fact that there were some obvious gaps in our communal organisation. For instance, there was no central body which dealt with synagogue questions, and until such a body was created (as he hoped might soon be the case), the Board was forced to handle these matters.

"At the same time there was a stirring of new life. People were groping for new ideas and new forms of communal activity which had not yet become crystallised. We shall continue to explore the possibilities of communal reorganisation," said Mr. Ettliger.

"But I must emphasise the dangers of over-centralisation; particularly in the cultural and congregational spheres there is scope for the initiative and activity of public-minded citizens."

The Board's Budget

In conclusion, Mr. Ettliger referred to the Biennial Campaign of the Board which is about to be launched. He said it was an anomalous situation that the premier Jewish organisation had to rely on peri-

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