

A LETTER FROM ERETZ ISRAEL

(From Our Own Correspondent).

Jerusalem, May 2, 1937.

POLITICS AND CITRUS.

The plenary session of the Zionist General Council has ended, and while the approach of many individual members varied on different important issues, they were unanimous in adopting the major political resolution introduced by Mr. Ussishkin, reiterating the fundamentals of Zionist policy and of the Mandate, and rejecting any proposed whittling down of the Mandate and the Balfour Declaration, and any attempt to dismember the country either by cantonisation or partition. Other important resolutions were adopted dealing with settlement and organisation matters. With the Council meeting over the next event awaited is the publication of the Royal Commission's report, which is expected before the end of the month. In the meantime a mist of uncertainty has descended on the whole country, and everyone is feeling the tension. Politically, little can be done in Palestine until the Commissioners' findings become available. In London, however, the present centre of political gravity, there is hardly any end to the political "nursing" that may be done, and to Dr. Weizmann, Mr. Ben Gurion has now been added to carry out this task. Mr. Dov Hos, the Deputy-Mayor of Tel-Aviv, and one of the leaders of the Histadruth, has left to conduct political activity among British Labour circles, while a member of the Arab Department of the Jewish Agency will also be in London to contact representatives of the Arab and Moslem countries who will be in London in connection with the Coronation.

In the economic sphere, the country is looking back over a record citrus season, record, that is, in point of number of cases exported, which reached close on eleven million, bringing Palestine to second place in the list of citrus-exporting countries of the world. The record did not extend, however, to prices, in spite of the rosy prospects with which the season opened. The growers' and shippers' organisations are now pooling the experiences of the past six months in order to profit by them next year. The exact accounts will not be made up until the end of the month, but already the general results are known.

London was again the principal market, with Liverpool and Hull not far behind. Continental markets grew during the present season, but are still far behind the English. The prohibition of export of exchange from 16 countries of Europe does not render easier the process of citrus exports from Palestine, and this discourages any large-scale attempts that might have been made to develop these markets. As it is, the shippers' associations have been obliged to take payment for their fruit in many countries in the form of timber for cases, machinery and packing materials.

New traffic problems were created this year by the record export. Of the total quantity shipped, 6½ million cases left from Haifa, 3¼ million from Jaffa (all Arab-grown fruit), and about 300,000 from the lighter basin at Tel-Aviv. Unfortunately, the railways were inadequately equipped to meet the increased demand, and the shortage of rolling-stock made itself felt at frequent intervals. Similarly with the storage accommodation at Haifa, which is being extended, but too late for use this year. Insufficient steamers equipped with refrigeration systems were available this season, and plans will have to be evolved to increase their number next season, when the harvest will be larger still than it has been in the past.

A central exporters' organisation to embrace all citrus growers is still sorely missed, but so long as politics continue to invade the sphere of economics, Arab growers will not readily agree to unite with the Jews in such an organisation. Failing such a central body, the Jewish growers have created their own organisations, but their carefully planned efforts are often set at naught by the Arab growers, acting independently and only for the proceeds of the moment.

THE PASSING OF THE S.S. TEL-AVIV.

Wednesday was a sad day for the growing "maritime conscious" section of the Yishuv. On that day the S.S. *Tel-Aviv*, the first all-Jewish passenger boat of more than minor tonnage, was sold to a firm of Japanese ship-brokers for £31,000, after having been laid up in Haifa harbour for nearly a year. Originally, the *Tel-Aviv*, which had a tonnage of 10,000, had been a cargo boat carrying motor-cars from America to Germany. In

1934 the vessel was acquired by the Palestine Shipping Company, a subsidiary of the Arnold Bernstein Lines of Hamburg, at a cost of about £80,000, converted into a passenger liner and put into commission on the Haifa-Trieste route. It had accommodation for 350 passengers, and soon won popularity among Palestine residents travelling to and from Europe. In the 18 months of its service, 15,000 passengers crossed the ocean in it to their unbounded satisfaction with both its service and its atmosphere.

Its fate is a rude reminder of the difficulties which beset every new and adventurous enterprise in Palestine. The founders of the Palestine Shipping Company, which owned only the *Tel-Aviv*, dared a great deal. They were inspired by the knowledge that they were pioneers in a new field, but certain inexorable factors were minimised. All the big Italian, French and other shipping companies plying the same or similar routes, and with which the *Tel-Aviv* had necessarily to compete, are the beneficiaries of heavy subsidies from their Governments. The Jewish steamship had no such source of support, and could not, therefore, maintain the fare-cutting competition into which it was drawn. The fact that the service consisted of one boat only added further to its difficulties since its overhead expenses were proportionately so much larger than those of the other services.

The present is not the first failure of a pioneer undertaking in Palestine. Many an enterprise in this country flourishes today only on the ruins of previous unsuccessful undertakings. That is not unnatural and will not dismay the Yishuv. Jewish steamship services will not long be absent from the Mediterranean, but when the new services begin to function means will have to be assured in advance to make good the deficits which under present circumstances appear unavoidable.

LAG B'OMER.

The traditional Lag b'Omer festivities this week at Meron, near Safed, the burial place of Simon bar Yohai, was, to a certain extent, a test of the possibility of preventing disturbances in times like these, since they were held in a district which has been the centre of Arab terrorism ever since the riots of last year were "officially" terminated. That the all-night celebrations passed off completely without interruption, despite the isolated situation of their venue, was doubtless due to the presence of several hundred Jewish *ghaffirs* (supernumerary constables) who have been stationed in Upper Galilee during the past two months. Also deserving of credit in this respect is Mr. L. Andrews, the Director of the Development Department, who has been seconded temporarily as special Commissioner for Security in the North. This officer is a bluff, red-faced Australian, who works hard, drinks hard, and stands no nonsense. These qualities may account for his general unpopularity in the Government service, but they, or some of them, also account in no small measure for the quiet that now prevails in the North. Once more it has been demonstrated that public order can be properly maintained once the authorities make up their minds to adopt the necessary precautions and appoint suitable men to apply those precautions.

The number of participants in the Meron festivities this year fell far short of the masses that make the pilgrimage in normal times. There were about 2,000 celebrants, the overwhelming majority of them Oriental Jews, to whose hearts Lag b'Omer is very dear, and a lesser number of Hassidim from Safed and Tiberias. But their smaller numbers did not discourage them, and the singing and dancing through the night, with the great oil bonfire ignited at midnight, were conducted with that same ecstasy for which the festival has become famous.

CORONATION CELEBRATIONS.

The position of Palestine in relation to the British Empire is somewhat anomalous. On the one hand it is subject to certain restrictions such as might apply to a British Colony; on the other it enjoys few of the privileges that accrue to such a Colony. Yet for the purposes of the Coronation, Palestine feels itself an integral part of the Empire. Not only is the British King the ruler of Palestine by virtue of the Mandate, but he is the head of the nation that first introduced the practical concept of the Jewish National Home into international diplomacy by

way of the Balfour Declaration. Although we have had bitter difference with Britain in practical politics, and are likely to have still more bitter differences in the not distant future, we do not forget that initial action. So when the peoples of the British Empire will celebrate this great event in their national life next week the Yishuv will not be absent from the general rejoicing.

The Vaad Leumi has called upon all Jewish residents to decorate the outside of their houses and places of business with flags and bunting on Coronation Day. The head offices of the national institutions will be floodlit during the whole of Coronation Week. All Jewish schools will be closed on the principal day, and a variety of sporting and social functions held, the latter including balls and garden parties. The shop windows will carry Coronation decorations, and huge crowns and portraits of the King and Queen will decorate public halls, cinemas, etc. The Palestine Orchestra will give a Coronation concert under the baton of the distinguished British conductor, Dr. Malcolm Sargent. The British community will have its own series of gala functions, including such affairs as balls, dinners and children's parties. The military will hold a great tattoo that day after which the "Tommys" will have a number of functions of their own. Whether the Arab community will participate in the festivities or organise festivities of their own is not yet known. After having so disrespectfully refused the invitation to send a representative to the Coronation, they can hardly change their tune now. But they have been known to do far stranger things.

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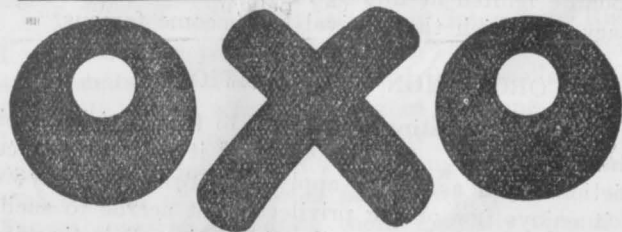


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