

Palestine Commentary

By . . .

LIONEL FEITELBERG

We have pleasure in informing our readers that we have made arrangements with Mr. Lionel Feitelberg for a regular commentary on events in Palestine. Mr. Feitelberg, who was a well-known Zionist worker in Durban, settled in Palestine some years ago and is at present living in Kfar Shmaryahu. He is a frequent contributor to South African Jewish periodicals.—Editor.

Kfar Shmaryahu,
30th June, 1946.

SATURDAY, 29th JUNE.

It is Saturday night, the 29th June, 1946. There is no moon and it is still and quiet, and from here I can see the lights of Herzliyah, of Rishpon and of Kibbutz Shefayim looking much as they always look; and the searchlights which sweep the countryside are moving to-night as they always move in wide circles probing and feeling into the darkness. Here, in Kfar Shmaryahu, as in hundreds of other settlements and villages throughout Eretz Israel there is little physical evidence of what this day which is now ending has meant to the Yishuv. The brief official communiques apart, we know very little of what has really happened to-day—there is a road curfew and even telephone conversations are subject to censorship. Rumours are flying freely and most of them are based on our knowledge and experience of the policy and inclination that the authorities have evidenced so often of late.

It is the 29th June, 1946—a day much like any other day, and yet a day like no other. At 4.15 a.m. this morning the premises of the Jewish Agency for Palestine were occupied by British Military forces and at the same time many other buildings such as the Workers' Bank and the Wizo Headquarters, both closed not only on account of the hour but also on account of the Sabbath, were forcibly entered by the same forces.

It is the 29th June, 1946—the Chief Secretary of the Palestine Government assured a Press Conference that Dr. Chaim Weizmann had not been arrested and added that he was unaware of what other leaders had been detained, leaving no doubt that such arrests on a substantial scale had been made. Perhaps we should not have immediately felt the inconsistency of this ignorance on the part of the Chief Secretary who simultaneously assured the conference that the operations were being carried out as part of a preconceived plan. We still know nothing of what has really happened and speculation is rife as to whether Shertok, Remez, Goldie Meyerson, Dr. Sneh and others are at liberty or not. "Thank God" some say, "Ben Gurion is still in London." Others regret his absence and his consequent inability to head the list of prisoners and thus give the lie to the statement that the operations are directed against only one small section of the community.

It is the 29th June, 1946—the High Commissioner's statement has been broadcast time and time again, emotionally, perfunctorily and even at dictation speed, (or was that only the curfew notice?). It has been broadcast in Hebrew, in Arabic and in English. The Arabic announcer sounded jubilant and the English announcer self-righteous. The Broadcast Stations from the surrounding Arab states have given the attack on Jewish Palestine headline positions in all their broadcasts, and they at least have shown that they are not taken in by the statement that the operations are conducted solely against the "terrorists."

We have waited all day for some news that would substantiate the

claim that the Government was determined once and for all to put an end to terrorism which has followed campaigns of incitement and vilification "not confined only to one community in Palestine." But the other community is unmolested and its shopwindows are garlanded and display pictures of the Mufti whilst "His Eminence" himself sits safely and comfortably in Cairo and his colleagues are being tried at Nuremberg. There is a story current that a Berliner decorated his car with a large picture of the late Adolf Hitler and on being pulled up by the British Military Police expressed both surprise and bewilderment. "I thought it was alright again now that it is legal to display pictures of the Mufti openly in Jerusalem."

It is Saturday night, the 29th June, 1946—the Chief Secretary admitted that the Government was well aware that the operations were being conducted on the Jewish Sabbath and thought it "probable" that persons arrested would be forced to ride to prison despite their religious susceptibilities. There is a Government appeal to observe law and order and a threat of violence if the appeal is not obeyed. The operations are proclaimed as being necessary to end violence and are therefore initiated with violence! And the Radio from Jerusalem is at the moment broadcasting in Hebrew "Messages from Jewish survivors in Europe!"

FRUSTRATION AND BITTERNESS.

It has been an ordinary hot summer's day in the Holy Land, but for us it is a day that has equivalents only in the dark history which we believed we would never experience here in Eretz Israel where we dreamed of peace and freedom. I have just returned from Northern Galilee and have seen and experienced the frustration and bitterness that followed the murder of three unarmed Jews who dared to approach their brother's house during an attack upon it. It wasn't called murder in the official communiques but it was far more murder than the attack on the Military Car Park in Tel Aviv three months ago which is still constantly being thrown at our heads despite the unanimous condemnation and disassociation of the whole Yishuv from the act at the time. I have heard the exasperation of the women and housewives of Kfar Giladi who had to endure the invasion of their domestic life and home by high-handed and contemptuous officers of the army, people who boast that their home is their castle but who have no respect for that of others.

And to-day I have seen and met people here in our own village, all sorts of different people representative of every possible shade of political opinion and background—members of a young Kibbutz and middle-aged Germans for whom respect for law and order is deeply buried in their very bones, and I have again experienced the same sense of bitterness, exasperation and impatience that the Imperial armies of the present Administration are creating.

It has been no ordinary day, for despite the official avowals, there is no Jew in Palestine who sees in the

attacks anything but an attack on the Yishuv as a whole. While proclaiming that the action is being taken only against the terrorists, action is taken against the community; while proclaiming that incitement and violence from both communities will be suppressed only Jewish homes are invaded and only Jews searched. Radio Jerusalem is giving substitute programmes of recorded music to-night because Jerusalem is under curfew and the scheduled artists are confined to their homes. And meanwhile the Jewish Agency Buildings are occupied by the British Army, over 1,000 Jews have already been arrested, one Jew has been killed and twenty rifles found.

CAMPAIGN OF MISREPRESENTATION AND SLANDER.

We have just heard the news in Hebrew again, together with the High Commissioner's statement, but nothing has been added to that which we have known all day, except that a few more arms have been found and another Jew killed. We therefore still know little or nothing of what has really taken place to-day in our homeland. But we do know of the campaign of misrepresentation and slander that has recently been conducted in the British press, where even "Hatikvah" is described as a "Hymn of Hate," and we can guess some of the reports of to-day's actions that will be printed there. We also know that this is not the way to peace, and to-day knowing nothing of what has already been done and what the Government still plans to do we know

nevertheless that the arrest of some or all of the Executive of the Jewish Agency will not destroy our National will. If they are terrorists then we are all terrorists, and if they are arrested each and every Jew in Eretz Israel is prepared to serve the Jewish Agency until he too is arrested and imprisoned. We know too that Yagur and Ain Harod, Tel Yosef and Ramat Rachel and all the other places that are to-day being searched and attacked are not just villages in Palestine but that they are the very fibres of our national home. We know the chalutzic inspiration and endurance and the sacrifice that created them, not only for themselves, but for what they meant to our people and we shall cherish them and defend them as the very "apple of our eye."

It is Saturday night, the 29th June, 1946—and as I sit and write here I know that this day will be remembered as the day when neither party nor sect mattered any longer among us, when debate as to the rights or wrongs of this or that policy ended—as the day when the Jewish nation was born again in pain and suffering. We do not yet know the price in life and property that those who appeal on behalf of life and property have exacted, or will exact, before the struggle is over, but to-day we know that, as never before, we will go on until our struggle is won, shoulder to shoulder, heads held high, strong with the strength of those whose cause is just—even more just than the High Commissioner's statement.

7th July, 1946.

A WEEK HAS PASSED.

A week has passed since my last letter—at that time I knew very few facts but surmised a great deal of the events that were taking place, and it says a great deal for the situation here that on rereading that letter there is nothing that I would alter to-day with the full story almost told.

(Continued on Next Page).

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PALESTINE COMMENTARY.

(Continued from Previous Page).

A week has passed, an uneasy week during which the tempo and intensity of action slowly died down into an uneasy quiet.

A week has passed and there are signs of misgivings on the part of authority—there have been too many communiqués, communiqués denying this, that and the other. Great pains have been taken to show that Rabbi Fishman was not beaten up and parties of journalists have been taken to Athlit and Latrun to see for themselves how ideal are the conditions of the prisoners. And Mr. Nixon of the Palestine Broadcasting Service has written a despatch denying misconduct on the part of British troops during the searches though he admits he was not present personally during any of the searches.

In the meantime two important meetings of Jews were held in Palestine during this week. A joint meeting of those members of the Jewish Agency Executive and the Vaad Leumi who are still at liberty with heads of Local Councils and Institutions was held in Jerusalem at which a resolution was adopted which has not been officially published in Palestine as yet, though there are many rumours as to its contents, including a report broadcast by the B.B.C. from London that it was a declaration of non-cooperation with the Government. The Histadruth Council also met in special session and as speaker after speaker rose it became very clear that the differences dividing the many parties have disappeared in the face of national danger and that the representatives of Mapai, Achdut Avoda and Poale Zion, Hashomer Hatzair, Aliya Chadashah and the General Zionist Workers all spoke with one voice, the voice of "Am Israel." And to confirm this complete unity of purpose the Aliya Chadashah party notified its intention to rejoin the Vaad Leumi again after its long spell of non-cooperation with this body.

In the meantime however our leaders are still under arrest in Latrun and only a tiny handful of the nearly three thousand Jews arrested has thus far been released. And a party of over 500 soldiers of the Jewish Brigade returning from Belgium for demobilisation were searched for "illegal" arms on their entry into the country!

THERE IS AN UNEASY QUIET.

There is an uneasy quiet—action has given place to speculation and the scene has shifted from the settlements to a wider stage, and naturally there is no dearth of rumours. It is only natural that the week's doings should have given rise to rumours especially when it is realised that there was a complete "blackout" over many points for quite long periods. It is quite natural too that among many rumours some have been without foundation. It was to be expected that when, because of circumstances, a great deal of news was circulated from mouth to mouth that exaggerations and magnifications crept into reports of damage done and casualties inflicted. It is surprising in fact that the reports that circulated were on the whole so completely reliable. There are however misgivings in high places,—there is a pathetic eagerness to fix on every little rumour that can be exposed as groundless, and a valiant seeking to move the spotlight from the events themselves to this so-called propaganda of exaggerations. Mr. John Nixon's official despatch is its own condemnation, for he admits not having been present to witness the events which he denies. But, as the Hebrew Daily "Davar" points out, although Mr. Nixon was not present himself hundreds and thousands of Jews were present. These Jews saw the happenings in the settlements and in the towns. Hundreds and thousands of Jews, and surely among them some

who belonged to that class of peaceful and law-abiding citizens against whom the operations were not directed, came out into the streets of Tel Aviv after the curfew was lifted and saw the very distinct evidence of what had taken place. They saw kiosks and small shops that had been broken into and looted and they saw the wreck of what had been Wizo headquarters. Hundreds and thousands of ordinary citizens saw the wreck of cups and household utensils at Wizo and the smashed stall of a vendor of orange juice, and they find it difficult to reconcile the facts with Mr. Nixon's despatch. There is no denying that there have been exaggerations, and even unfounded rumours, but the facts, the irrefutable facts, are patent enough and no attempt to cover these facts by emphasising that one rumour in tens or even hundreds was false will serve but to give greater credence to the many rumours which unhappily proved to be only too true.

There is an uneasy quiet—many of our leaders are in detention, others are away in America or Britain whilst most significant of all still others are in hiding! Dr. Weizmann was received by the High Commissioner and rumour has it that he was presented with a list of a "Quisling" puppet Jewish Agency Executive, which would prove "acceptable" to the Government, which he naturally refused to entertain. It is only a rumour but its authenticity is borne out by reports and editorials in such British newspapers like the "Observer" and the "Manchester Guardian," the former of which suggests that there must be Jews, moderate Jews, with whom discussions could be carried out, whilst the "Guardian" bluntly reports that it was suggested that certain "bankers and big business men" should be approached to facilitate such discussions. The ordinary man here is asking himself to what end are such discussions suggested, unless it is to complete the task that the Government started on its own, the suppression of the National Home? Such a rumour and its vindication by the reports in the British press have aroused the greatest resentment, and the Hebrew Press points out that the leadership of the Jewish Agency is a freely elected leadership and representative not only of the Yishuv in Palestine but of World Zionism, and that this leadership and no other will be followed by the Jewish people until they, of their own free will, elect a different leadership.

There are reports of tapping of telephone wires and of spies and censorship of letters, and incidents are reported which give credence to the rumours. Two Jews were kidnapped by armed Jews in Haifa on the day following the beginning of operations at Yagur and have not been seen since, though the Government reports that on reliable information it is learned that they were brought before a secret Jewish National Court and afterwards executed as traitors. The Government promptly published a disavowal of having had any contacts with these persons, but the public, which is very familiar with the normal background to every story of the British Secret Service in which the hero is told that he will be disclaimed if he fails, has taken these disavowals with a shrug of disbelief. The facts are not pretty in as far as they are generally known. It is known that the two men were at Yagur for some time and were there on the three days preceding the operations. There are many additional "frills" to the story, some of which may or may not be true, but there are too many coincidences in the tale of the role that they played to leave any doubt in the mind of the Yishuv.

There is an uneasy quiet and a sense of expectancy at present. The decision of the joint Vaad Leumi and Agency meeting is not yet known and a lead is awaited. Yagur has been

partly evacuated by the military and hundreds of volunteers from all over the country have flocked there and to the other settlements to help in the work of restoration. Nearly 3,000 workers have been removed from the settlements and as a result the supply of farm produce on the city markets has been short and prices have risen accordingly. Shops are again open in the cities, and except in Tel Aviv, which is still "out of bounds," British military personnel is again allowed to visit Jewish cafes, restaurants and cinemas—but they do so either nervously or arrogantly as conquerors, which makes the situation even tenser.

A singer in a cafe in Haifa, a woman of 60 years of age, who had established a popular reputation for herself and had even been featured in broadcasting programmes, has been arrested for singing satirical songs on current topics and sentenced to a year's detention in Bethlehem Women's Prison, where she will have as companions the very dregs of Palestine's female criminal society.

There is an uneasy quiet at the end of the first week's operations against the Yishuv and its leadership. Everyday events have strengthened and confirmed the first impression that the attack was aimed at the Yishuv as a whole and not against the so-called law breakers. Eretz Israel has become for the military forces here "enemy and occupied" territory. A singer can be arrested for singing satirical songs and everybody suspects the unofficial censorship of letters, telephone calls and even private conversations which no official denial can dispel. A press and radio campaign is in full swing in Britain to cloud the real issue of Jewish rights in Palestine by the twin issues of the 100,000 certificates, which are treated as an end in themselves, and terrorism. Jewish leaders are under arrest or in hiding and Mr. Every Jew is going about his business waiting for the next move. Jewish soldiers returning from overseas, where they were allies, are being subject to the humiliation of searches of

their persons and effects whilst still in the uniform which they honoured, and British troops sit in Jewish cafes and cinemas hugging their Tommy guns and rifles for all the world like conquerors in a hostile enemy country. More than one Jew has been moved to say this last week that at last he knows something of what it must have been like to be "occupied." Pictures of Rabbi Fishman, Shertok and the others taken in the "cage" at Latrun, and pictures of machine-gun posts stationed around the Jewish Agency buildings, give little ground for other feelings. And the arrest of a venerable Rabbi on the Sabbath Day, even though he was arrested in his "secular" capacity, whatever such an excuse for the profanation of the Sabbath may mean, when coupled with the arrest of a cabaret singer from a public cafe, leaves nothing but unbelief and disillusion in its train.

There is an uneasy quiet, although by the time this letter reaches your columns this may have given way to a different situation, but this quiet is the background against which the next move, whatever it will be, must be seen. A terrible and ghastly mistake has been made against a people that has a considerable experience of deliberate "mistakes" in the past, and statesmanship and not stubbornness or prestige will be required to restore the position. Frankness and not casuistry is needed to re-establish faith and the facts must in future be made to coincide with official statements. The present position is not of our choosing, but it will not do any longer for a police statement to be given out which claims that the total damage to the Jewish Agency building is assessable at £30 whilst at the same time an independent Committee is created by the Government which advises that it will require a week in order to be able to assess the actual damage! Such subtleties are not acceptable any longer, not even as provocation. There is an uneasy quiet over Eretz Israel to-day and even this is not of our choosing!

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