

A LETTER FROM ERETZ ISRAEL

(From Our Own Correspondent).

Jerusalem, May 16, 1937.

A LABOUR AGREEMENT.

Faced with the possibility of labour trouble in the construction of a new power plant at Tel Aviv, Mr. Pinhas Rutenberg took the initiative in bringing about an agreement between the Histadruth and the Revisionist workers. Its consummation is by no means ideal in form, for instead of being a constructive step towards the creation of a single general trade union divested of all party colour and confined to promoting the occupational interest of its members, the present agreement definitely recognises the political colour of the labour problem. Yet since it promises to result in the elimination of the friction which in recent months began to assume menacing proportions between Histadruth and Revisionist labourers, the agreement is generally welcomed.

According to its terms, which hold good in the first place for a year, building work and employment in public undertakings will be divided to the extent of eighty-nine per cent. to members of the Histadruth and eleven per cent. to the Revisionists. The joint labour exchange which will execute the agreement will comprise on its staff no more than sixty per cent representation of the Histadruth. Unless the Revisionists prefer to have the joint office assign employment on a purely individual basis, that is, eleven Revisionist workers chosen together with every eighty-nine members of the Histadruth, the contracts themselves will be divided between the two organisations in the agreed upon proportions.

While the new arrangement is an undoubted advance in the direction of immediate peace, one cannot help wondering whether the definite alignment of trades union on a purely political basis will not still further remove the prospect of the only abiding solution—a single trade union unconcerned with the politics of its individual members.

THE SCHEDULE.

For over a month there has been general speculation as to the half-yearly Jewish immigration schedule due to be announced at the beginning of April. The last schedule (this word has but one meaning for the Yishuv) was ruthlessly reduced to 3,200 certificates in spite of the Jewish Agency's reasoned application for 10,000. The object of the Government in so drastically limiting the immigration of Jewish workmen during that half-year was manifest; it was another concession to the perpetrators of Arab violence who were at that time growing particularly active again, principally in Galilee. The recognised principle of regulating Jewish immigration according to the absorptive capacity of the country had been jettisoned—not for the first time—as a stop to the Arab leaders to terminate the renewed acts of murder and brigandage.

Despite general fears that the High Commissioner would not grant the number of certificates requested for the present half-yearly schedule, it was hoped that the prevailing quiet, and the prejudicial effect that any change of system would have before the impending appearance of the report of the Royal Commission's findings would prompt the authorities to maintain the principle of absorptive capacity as the determining factor in the granting of certificates. The Agency had applied for 10,000, and it happens to be known that the Government's own experts assessed the present absorptive capacity at 8,000. The new schedule would therefore be at least larger than the last, so thought the Jew-in-the-street.

The reaction of the community when it was known that only 770 certificates had been allocated for the coming four months (instead of six) was one of frustration and disgust. The press described the schedule as a mockery and insult and declared that this paltry allocation was an ominous augury of the political struggle that lies ahead of us. Nor were the Arab leaders and press satisfied with this newest sop, stating that it was not the smallness of the number of certificates granted but the principle, to which the Arabs object. Actually, however, they may with some right regard the present allocation as predicting the liquidation of the principle of absorptive capacity as a whole.

The Jewish Agency is still deliberating upon whether to accept this grant or not. There is a strong section in favour of refusal. Yet the minority's claim that 770 certificates still means that over a thousand individuals would be able to leave the hell of Poland and Germany for the freedom of Eretz Israel in the coming four months cannot be lightly disposed of. In the meantime the Yishuv is smarting, and wondering what this absurd schedule really foreshadows.

PALESTINE EN FETE.

His was a grim humour who determined that the new schedule should be announced in a special Government Gazette the day before the Coronation festivities. Its effect was to cast a gloom over the whole community, which was sensible enough, however, not to permit its depression to affect the plans it had prepared for celebrating Coronation Day. For it realised that its loyalty to the British Crown is not dependent upon any act of His Majesty's Administration in Palestine. So the impressive chain of functions were held next day, and since according to plan.

Each of the towns dressed itself up in a blaze of colour and light hitherto unprecedented. To this was added the light of 111 bonfires burning on hilltops all over the country, and firework displays in every town. Bonfires, of course, are nothing new in Palestine, and Jews are familiar with them from the many references in the Talmud to this means of conveying news from district to district in ancient times.

Jerusalem was the most effectively dressed up of all, although Tel Aviv, always ready to go gay, came a close second. The great Old City walls of the capital were floodlit, as were also the Jewish National institutions, Government House and several smaller buildings. The main thoroughfares were a mass of red, white and blue lights, patterned in crowns or legends

(Continued on Next Page).

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(Continued from Previous Page).

wishing Their Majesties long life, festoons of lights across streets and building facades, streamers, banners, pennants, bunting, and everywhere the dominating feature, Union Jacks and the white and blue of the Zionist colours. As anticipated, the Arabs kept aloof, merely joining the vast crowds that came out after dark to inspect the unusual display.

The military parades in the principal towns, the Synagogue and Church services, luncheons, balls, garden parties, children's entertainment and special broadcast programmes were doubtless little different from the similar functions held in a thousand cities the world over. Even the splendid Coronation Concert of the Palestine Orchestra, under the baton of the distinguished British conductor, Dr. Malcolm Sargent, who is specially visiting the country for the purpose, is probably more or less paralleled by Coronation Concerts elsewhere. But the subconscious feeling underneath all the gaiety, that the Government of the Monarch whose coronation we are so warmly celebrating may very shortly place before him for signature an edict whose effect may be irreparably to injure our movement and dash to the ground the solitary hope of salvation of hundreds of thousands of our people—that is an element in the Yishuv's festivities that will be found in no other land where the Coronation is being commemorated.

RECOGNITION OF MERIT.

Cordial congratulations are being extended to the twenty recipients in Palestine of Coronation Honours. The list includes well-known figures in the Administration, municipal officials, the police force, the Transjordan Frontier Force and figures in public life. Of the total, four are Jews, Mr. Emil Hauser, Director of the Jerusalem Conservatoire of Music, Mr. Michael Aleinikoff, Chairman of the Hadar Hacarmel Council in Haifa, Mr. Chaim Solomon, a Jerusalem Municipal Councillor, and Lt./Corporal Sus, of the Transjordan Frontier Force. Included in the list are policemen, British and Arab, who showed bravery or exceptional devotion in time of crisis. The Government officials selected for decorations range among different districts and in divergent services, showing that a watchful eye is kept on all branches of government.

The opinion has been expressed in the press that the honours awarded would lose nothing of their value if in Palestine, too, the British practice of stating the cause of merit were published in each case together with the announcement of the decoration. If such procedure is considered right in Great Britain, it is suggested, it is certainly to be commended in the East, where public opinion is less stable and rumour more rife.

THE TEL AVIV PORT.

Next week the first birthday will be celebrated of the Tel Aviv Port (of which the Secretary, incidentally, is a former Capetonian Mr. Herzl Zuckerman). The occasion will be observed in grand style; and, indeed, there will be every reason for enthusiasm, for in no sphere has the Yishuv made such striking progress in the past twelvemonth. The port now occupies an important position not only in the economic life of Tel Aviv, but of the whole country. Thousands of tons of imports and exports pass through it weekly, and it is confidently expected that it will not be long before passengers, too, will embark and disembark there. Originally, only a few categories of merchandise were permitted to be handled at the Tel Aviv port. To-day the number of categories comprises sixty types of merchandise ranging from motor-cars to molasses.

The annual meeting of the Marine Trust which is the body responsible for the construction and maintenance of the port, is due to be held in a few days. The shares in this enterprise were acquired on its establishment by all sections of the community, many of which bought a small number out of moral support for the project rather than as an investment. These shareholders are not likely to be actively interested in the meeting of the Trust, and the Labour Party hit on the bright idea of sending canvassers to shareholders, particularly such as live outside of Tel Aviv, with a view to securing a transfer of their voting rights to the Party. In this way the Labour Party has assembled in its hands considerable voting power. It was not to be imagined that other Parties would stand by and witness their rival attempt to obtain control of this important new enterprise, and the Union of General Zionists (the B group) promptly followed the Labour Party's example with, however, far lesser results. It is a lamentable fact that the new port should, in the first year of its existence, become the object of a conflict for control between political parties. That, at least, should be the one enterprise reserved for the people as a whole, and outside the sphere of political influence. But at present its destiny threatens to be otherwise.

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