

IN A LETTER FROM PALESTINE

Our Correspondent

discusses

AFTER CZECHO-SLOVAKIA — AIR AND SHIPPING

ADVANCES — OPERA OLD AND NEW.

Jerusalem, October 14, 1938.

IN my letter of a fortnight ago I described some of the more immediate reactions of the Yishuv to the fear of war. That has now passed, but another fear is taking its place — the fear that we shall be let down as the Czechs have been let down. In the background of our day-to-day life, while going about our tasks of maintaining the economic front and the security front, lies the shadow of the negotiations taking place in London. There are persistent rumours that the British Government will find it easier to give way to the Arab terrorists, in spite of all talk of firmness, than to face the problem which their own hesitations and incompetence have created. Palestinian Jews are civilized and can exercise self-control, they do not cause trouble, and even if they do they are more vulnerable than the Arabs. Let us give them praise for all that they have achieved, but let us sacrifice them because it is the easiest way out for us. This interprets the Yishuv's fears of the intentions of the Mandatory Power. No solution which denies to the National Home the right of living and expanding will be accepted. The Yishuv will stand firm on this, but it expects the Jewries of the world to remember that the National Home exists not merely for the 450,000 Jews in Palestine but for all the Jews, everywhere in the world, even where for the time being they may feel secure. The Yishuv's danger is the danger of all Israel, and Jews in every country must now, before it is too late, make their voice heard and their pressure felt, so that England may know what betrayal of the National Home will cost her.

This view, felt if not yet fully expressed by the Yishuv, is perhaps too dark. Yet the Yishuv cannot help but remember Czechoslovakia, and the issues in London are too uncertain and too threatening for Jewry not to declare itself clearly.

Jewish Air Service

MEANWHILE, as I have said, the Yishuv is living its day-to-day life and maintaining its various fronts, even pushing them forward. While new colonies are being established neither the sea nor the air are being neglected. After years of obstruction by the Government Department set up to encourage civil aviation, Tel Aviv has at last been granted the use of its own airport, though with

bad grace. Just as the officials tried to belittle the Tel Aviv port by insisting on calling it a lighter basin, so they are now belittling the airport by calling it a landing ground. This is not a quarrel about the niceties of terminology; the words used express on the one hand Tel Aviv's determination to have its own unhampered air services and on the other hand the Government's attempt to limit Tel Aviv's, that is, the Yishuv's independent development. Permission to use the Tel Aviv landing ground was wrung from the Government only after Jewish prediction that the Lydda airport was not safe, was proved true by the terrorists burning it down. Even then Tel Aviv was informed that the permission is only temporary. The consideration that Lydda — owing to its out-of-the-way situation — is in practice useless for flying between the three principal towns, Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem, appears not to have concerned the Government.

Jewish Shipping

CONSIDERABLE advances have to be reported in Jewish shipping enterprise. By this I do not mean companies with Jewish shareholders owning boats manned by non-Jews. I mean Jewish owned companies with boats manned by Jews. The Jewish Agency have recently acquired a financial interest in the Atid Navigation Company. Founded two years ago with a capital of LP. 30,000, of which LP. 18,000 is paid up (plus LP. 9,000 debentures) this firm owns two cargo boats, with complete Jewish crews from Captain to cabin boy, which ply regularly between the various ports of the Levant and call twice weekly at Haifa and Tel Aviv. In 1936 they carried 115,000 tons of cargo. A new share issue is to be made, of which a Dutch group will take up LP. 10,000, and a modern freighter is to be added to the service.

The Zevulun Society, inspired largely by Mrs. Henrietta Diamond, of Brighton, England, has for several years been encouraging an interest in the sea among Jewish youth, and a Revisionist group has been receiving training under Italian Government patronage at Civita Vecchia. (That chapter has probably now closed, or it should be). Now at Haifa regular courses in seamanship, lasting two years, have been opened. 180 pupils have enrolled, each one having undertaken to enter the Jewish maritime service at the end of the course.

Opera

THE home front is being maintained in other directions, too. The Palestine Orchestra, to which Huberman is giving such devotion and which has earned the deep regard of Toscanini, is already firmly established and gives regular seasons not only in Palestine, but also in Egypt. Now we are to have a Palestine Opera, two friends abroad having provided sufficient funds to maintain the company for two years. The opening performance is to be given in Tel Aviv next month. The art director will be Mr. Walter Eberhard, who has been connected with opera in Germany for 20 years. Soloists for the coming season will include Norbert Ardelli, first tenor of the Vienna State Opera; Andreas Leopold, first baritone of the Royal Opera, Budapest; Julia Charol, contralto of the Rome Opera; Anni Lehmann, mezzo-soprano of Vienna and Prague; and others of the Operas of Milan, Athens, Warsaw, Rome and Budapest. Mr. Paul Breisach of Vienna will be the general musical director and Mr. Golinkin will be the first orchestra conductor.

This will not be the first attempt at establishing Opera in Eretz Israel. Golinkin, who had been a conductor in St. Petersburg and who came to Palestine in 1923, was the pioneer. Along with Tel Aviv's first motor-bus (but that is another story) Tel Aviv's first Opera is among my most precious memories of those days. The piece chosen was Faust, and it was played with a piano and five singers. I also remember Romeo and Juliet, with Juliet, traditionally prima donna in her proportions, falling off the balcony and through the flimsy boards of the stage floor. Later many other Operas were done, with greater success though still with many shortcomings. Those were great and brave days, with wildly enthusiastic audiences, with the High Commissioner and British officials attending in state and a good show of tarbushes among the

ticket holders. Criticism of singing, acting, orchestration and staging alike was suspended, the public realizing that the Opera Company, like everything else in the Yishuv then, was new and had to learn by its mistakes.

After two or three attempts at revival the company finally died, for Opera even in great centres like New York and Milan can only be kept going by subsidies. Everybody was desperately poor. I remember one day visiting the house of one of the principal singers—she had played important roles in Moscow — and finding her scrubbing the floors. And one winter the conductor's shoes were worn down to their uppers and he could not afford a new pair. But everybody was light-hearted and full of enthusiasm and high hope.

In one other matter Golinkin was a pioneer and deserves to be put on record for it. He was the first man to insist on punctuality at a public function. Until his day, for a performance or a meeting to begin before an hour or an hour and a half later than scheduled time was unheard of. I remember one prominent citizen battering at the closed doors and shouting: "What do you mean by beginning already? It was timed for 8 o'clock and it's now only a quarter to nine!"

With their difficulties and their joys those days have gone, at least in the Yishuv's towns.

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