

Arab-Israeli War

National pride and national conflict are always destructive of human values. It is doubly so in the Middle-East. When I saw the accomplishment of the Israelis inside their country, I could envisage the immense contribution they could make to the economic and social development of the entire area. What a tragedy for Arabs and Israelis alike that they do not concentrate their energies on advancing the standard of life of people now living in poverty and insecurity.

The war is tragic, the consequences are dangerous, but human history has known tragedies which have produced positive results. I can only hope that this may be the result of the present war. I am as desolate about the loss of Arab blood as I am about the loss of Jewish blood, but I say, Sir, Israel must not be abandoned by the civilized world, particularly in view of the ruthless attitude of the Soviet Union.

My final word is to say to the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) that his statement tonight was dignified and realistic. He can rely on the support of all members of the House in anything Canada can do to resolve the war. I speak not only as a Jew but as a Canadian who believes in international justice and, above all, in a sense of justice and decency in my fellow Canadians.

Mr. Ralph Stewart (Cochrane): Mr. Speaker, I believe that Canada can best serve the cause of peace in the Middle East by adopting a completely neutral, objective and unbiased attitude. This is the posture that should be adopted by our country in all of the international situations in which Canada is not directly involved. But I insist that it is singularly important for us to try to understand both sides in this unfortunate conflict in the Middle East, because it is my contention that up to now we have not been as objective as we should be and this kind of attitude will tend to reduce our credibility in world affairs rather than enhance the privileged position we have around the world.

It is difficult to be unbiased at the best of times, but it appears to be particularly difficult to be anything but pro-Israel in Canada because of the various pressures that have been brought to bear. First of all, most Canadians know little or nothing about the Arab point of view, and of course this is not surprising. For years the media in general have taken a pro-Israel stand, and only those Canadians who have been interested enough to find out the facts for themselves have been able to hear more than one side of the story.

Every question, every argument and every conflict in the world has at least two sides. It is up to us to realize this in Canada, and we should be doing everything we can not to be seduced by the one-sided reporting of the press. We cannot all have the privilege of visiting both sides in the Middle East, but it seems to me that at least our government should be objective enough to give the opportunity to members of parliament to be exposed to the whole story rather than to one point of view.

Since my entry into parliament I have made a particular effort not to take sides in any matter. I deplore taking sides in domestic matters for purely partisan reasons, and it is even more distasteful to me to be forced into a biased

[Mr. Lewis.]

position in international matters. For this reason I made it my business to study both sides of the Nigerian-Biafran conflict and I have made it a point to visit Israel and some Arab countries in order to be appraised of the complete picture.

Similarly, although I find discrimination distasteful, unlike many of my confreres I refuse to make an out-of-hand condemnation of apartheid without knowing all of the facts and the points of view that exist in South Africa. I make a point of mentioning these things because I feel very strongly that the only way Canada can maintain its position of prestige in the world is by being open-minded and ready to accept all points of view.

It was in this context that I wrote a letter to the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) last spring. My letter was a culmination of the frustration I had experienced as a member of parliament, particularly with respect to objectivity or lack of it in the Middle East situation. I quote as follows the contents of that letter:

My dear Minister:

On several occasions I have expressed my views regarding an apparent one-sided attitude with regards the Middle-East crisis. Even though Canada purports to be completely unbiased, there appears to be much less understanding for the Arab point of view than there is for the Israeli point of view.

The world was shocked and made a great outcry over the tragic events in Munich last year. Rightly so. I suggest to you however that some of the incidents that have taken place recently, not by a group of hot-headed terrorists, but by a government, were far more serious than the Munich tragedy. I refer to the shooting down of the civilian airliner and more recently to the Israeli raid in Beirut which was highly organized by the armed forces of Israel into the heart of Lebanon's capital where people were massacred in their beds. I have heard no outcry, nor has there been a debate in the House of Commons, nor has the committee been seized of this murderous act.

You are aware that I was a member of the external affairs committee for some time but have not been involved on that committee for the past two years. The reason is not because I have lost interest in the international affairs affecting Canada, on the contrary, I am probably more active in this regard than most of my colleagues. The reason is because that committee has done nothing or very little of importance since I have been an M.P. The Middle-East situation and what Canada's posture should be in that regard has never been a subject in that committee even though it is probably the most important international situation in the world today. Several other items of great importance have been ignored or haven't been considered worth bothering about.

With regards the Middle-East, if the population in Canada and the United States are not aware of both points of view it can be attributed to a superior skill at propaganda of one side over the other but surely members of parliament and your department cannot be placed in the same category as those subjected to the ordinary media. Surely the members of this House should be given the opportunity to understand both points of view and one of the best ways would be to have a complete and objective study in the committee. As far as I am concerned personally, you know that I have always insisted on exposing myself to both sides of every controversy. During the Nigerian civil war, I refused to return to Canada before having seen both sides. I have done everything in my power to keep an open mind regarding communist countries and went to Cuba for that reason. In the case of the Middle East, I made sure to visit Israel as well as the Arab countries and in this way I have practised what I believe should be Canada's attitude in maintaining a neutral, non-partisan point of view. I must say however that with the overwhelming evidence of Canadian indulgence regarding several crimes committed by Israel while at the same time condemning every act of even a remote terrorist makes it very tempting for me to take a partisan attitude in favour of the Arabs.