

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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No. 52/20 ISRAEL'S ANSWER TO RACIAL PERSECUTION

A speech by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. L.B. Pearson, delivered at a meeting of the Jewish community of Toronto, on June 1, 1952, sponsored by the Jewish National Fund in the interests of the Forests of the Martyrs.

There may have been at some period of human history in some regions of the world fortunate generations which have not had to struggle against oppression. Our own generation, however, has had no such fortune. The minds and indeed the very lives of many men, to whom pursuit of the arts, letters and sciences would have been far more appealing, have been and continue to be absorbed by the effort to limit the spread of despotism, and prevent man's inhumanity to man. It is therefore fitting that we should reflect tonight on the circumstances that have made this necessary; on the tragedy of loss and destruction sustained by the civilized world in the recent past and on how we may help to prevent its recurrence in the future.

An essential part of this task is to find ways of diminishing the force of hatred in the world. Another part is to assert and protect the right of civilized human beings to plan and live in their own environment, remembering that those whose history and traditions differ from our own have an equal right to develop along lines which they consider to be right for their own needs.

There are many other things waiting to be done. Progress throughout the world, both in the development of national life and in the sphere of international co-operation, must be protected by plans for effective resistance to possible attacks from totalitarian barbarism. Yet the very purpose of that protective effort would be defeated if we allowed it to swallow up all our energies to the detriment of constructive pursuits; or if in the name of protection we sacrificed tolerance and freedom. The basic problem will not be solved until the principles of democratic liberty are embraced everywhere; a liberty which is far wider and deeper than the right merely to govern ourselves. This subject is a large one; tonight I can touch on only one small segment of it, our response to the challenge of savagery and oppression.

An inspiring symbol of this response to oppression in its basest forms is the Forest of the Martyrs, the first groves of which have already been planted in Israel. They commemorate those six million Jews who perished in the holocaust in Europe before the tide of barbarism was stemmed by the arrival of Allied military forces, who themselves suffered grievously in their struggle to defeat a brutal, powerful foe and bring aid to the survivors. The Forest of the

Martyrs will be a memorial whose meaning even the passing stranger cannot fail to mark. To the kinsmen of those whose memory the forest keeps green and to all who have dedicated themselves to the struggle against hatred and the oppression of one people by another this forest will be a source of living inspiration. In a thirsty and eroded land it will help to replenish the soil and to hold in it part of the moisture which will give it life and growth. These trees will protect the countryside from searing winds, give refreshment in the heat of summer and comfort and warmth in the winter cold. They will represent those twin principles of conservation and creativeness on which all genuine human progress must be based.

In our own day scientists have taught us to recognize the direct relationship between forest preservation and the maintenance of a sound economy. Not all of the many peoples, however, who have inhabited Palestine in the past three thousand years of its changing and cosmopolitan history have understood this; and not all who did understand have had the means to plant forests or to protect them after they were grown. Subject to repeated invasions by warring armies from other lands which used Palestine as a battlefield or a convenient corridor for invasion torn by internal conflict among the descendants of the many peoples who had come to stay, Palestine has had its cycles of conquest and development, of colonization and war, of fertility and barrenness. It has known the flow and the ebb of production and destruction which reflect man's striving after orderly development and witness his failure hitherto to achieve on any permanent basis that stable international society which has now become essential if civilization itself is to survive.

In the various periods of colonization and upbuilding in Palestine, the gains were laborious and slow, while the tale of recurrent disaster and destruction was often quickly told. We recall that from the time when the Jews of Babylon financed the first Jewish colonies which returned to the Jerusalem area until the time when the Jews recovered Galilee there passed some four hundred years, marked not only by internal conflict but also by the warring against each other on Palestinian soil of the Great Powers of that day. Nevertheless, the movement was upward. In particular the practice of agriculture improved and by the time Josephus wrote he was able to say, perhaps with some poetic licence, that in the Galilee of his day not an acre of land lay unfertilized. Palestine filled up with a busy and prosperous population. In the parched land south of Beersheba and the Dead Sea, moreover, another people, the Nabataeans, had, even earlier, invented means of using subterranean water for irrigation purposes and for conserving the infrequent rainfall. For several generations they built those terraces and water-courses whose faint traces are sometimes noted today by the new settlers in the Negev. They cultivated every acre of land in the area, and supported in prosperity a sensible, orderly and healthy population who lived at peace among themselves, and proved to their world that this desert area was capable of supporting many thousands of inhabitants in comfort. Israel is about to prove this again, although for long before and after the Nabataean period the Negev remained an empty and desolate waste.

As the fortunes of the cultivators of the soil varied in Palestine so did the history of its forests. Among the catastrophes still remembered are the destruction of the forests covering the hills near Jerusalem by the soldiers of Titus just before the city itself fell and the temple was destroyed. Then the crusaders hacked down the fine oak woods that grew between Jaffa and Nablus. Some of the earlier Turkish invaders, pushed westward from beyond the Caspian Sea by the restless Mongols, burnt over the whole of Palestine in the 13th century. Napoleon in his day set the torch to whatever grew on the plain of Sharon. More trees were lost three decades later during the effort to contain an Egyptian revolt against the Ottoman sultan. What escaped the attention of invading armies or of browsing goats or of the raiding herdsmen, fell victim to local cultivators whose fields had become exhausted and who needed more land in order to live, and so the last forest groves were sacrificed, although some orange and olive orchards continued to flourish and were carefully tended throughout all the troubles of the later days.

Inevitably, during the centuries while Palestine's impoverished soil was being washed down unchecked from the denuded hills by the winter rains, and while sand dunes, blown by the vagrant winds, were encroaching on the plains, the once teeming population declined. Mr. Ben Gurion's phrase "the turning back of nature" may thus refer properly not only to what the people of Israel are now doing for their land, from Galilee in the north to the Negev in the south, but also, by implication, to the life-giving influence of a restored soil on the people who care for that soil. There is a natural and inevitable connection between the two. The soil gives back life to those who tend it well.

The dual task of reclaiming a land placed as Israel is placed today and of restoring a dispersed people to normal living involves both economic and what one might describe as purely human problems of such extreme difficulty that responsibility for dealing with the issues concerned could hardly have been assumed by present-day Jewish leaders were it not for the intensity of the Jewish feeling of revolt against cruelty and discrimination suffered in Europe since medieval times. That revolt is an expression of the stubborn hope in adversity, of that inflexible determination to survive which has typified Jewish life and inspired Jewish legend.

You recall perhaps the story that in the latter days the Almighty, being discouraged by the wickedness of mankind, decided to send a new and more destructive flood to put an end to what seemed after all to have been an unsuccessful experiment in the creative field. This time there would be no Noah and there would be no ark. There were, however, three good men in the world whom God wished to warn - a Moslem, a Christian and a Jew. To them in turn he sent his angel bearing the message that floods were about to descend and that even the highest mountains would soon be covered by deep waters. The Moslem addressed himself to prayer and the Christian to confessing his sins. The venerable Jew, however, stroked his beard and said reflectively to his heavenly visitant, "Very interesting indeed! But is it not going to be something of a problem to find a way of surviving under thirty fathoms of water?"

It is a small area - no larger than Lake Erie - which the Jewish people are now seeking to use as the geographical territory within which their national survival shall be assured. Nor is the present population of Israel large. As a result of mass immigration in the past four years the total has now reached approximately the level it had attained before the Arab exodus, but even now, after these four years of heroic rescue work, it is only about twice the population of Toronto.

The stature of a land, however, is not measured by a surveyor's instrument, nor the greatness of a nation by the census-taker. Israel's future rests on many things which mere statistics cannot show. This land now represents for a gifted but scattered and often frustrated people the possibility of realizing the twin principles of self-liberation and self-help which were advocated in the last century by Leon Pinsker as the only adequate answer to anti-Semitism. And in that land Achad Ha'am's ideal of the re-education of the Jewish people for normal living -- their inner rehabilitation -- is already beginning to be realized.

That great Jewish sociologist, the late Dr. Arthur Ruppin, to whose courageous work as one of the builders of Israel Dr. Weizmann has paid special tributes, stated in his book "The Jews in the Modern World" that the original source of anti-Semitism is the group instinct, which like the herd instinct of animals welds men connected by common descent, language, customs and interests into a cohesive community, but causes them at the same time to distrust members of other groups. When the Jews first migrated to Europe, he went on to say, they came as outsiders and long remained strangers by reason of differences of race, religion, culture and occupations. They had to make their way as representatives of one of the ancient eastern civilizations in the midst of a more primitive western culture. Anti-Semitism had its rise then in Europe as part of the general fear of and prejudice against strangers which permeated ancient and medieval society and is still with us in one form or another. The Jewish people arriving in Israel today from various points of the compass represent different levels of civilization, from the early patriarchal to the most sophisticated modern. The majority, however, are westerners, who are reversing the situation described by Dr. Ruppin, since they represent in the Eastern Mediterranean region, whose fortunes have declined so greatly since the Mongol invasions, the now materially more advanced civilization of the West. A question that exercises the minds of many Jewish and other thinkers is how this return and this re-establishment can be brought about without giving rise to epidemics of fear and race hatred in the new environment which might prove as destructive a force in the Middle East as anti-Semitism has been in Europe.

Civilized man has learned a good deal more today than was known a thousand years or even a hundred years ago about the deep and secret springs of human fear and about the most effective means of securing release from that fear, either for groups or for individuals. In this case there are factors which enable one to hope that the initial struggle to secure the establishment of a Jewish state, and the fears and the tensions which have inevitably accompanied that struggle are not to be a permanent feature of the environment in which Israel finds itself. It was in the belief, indeed, that these fears and tensions could be removed, that the majority of governments represented in the United Nations General Assembly

judged it to be neither an imprudent nor an unfriendly act toward any of the neighbouring peoples to encourage the establishment of a Jewish national state in Palestine.

An analysis of the fears which beset human beings in various stages of their development is often a useful means of reducing the scope of the fears themselves. I do not propose to go into this question in any detail this evening, although it is germane to a discussion of the response of civilized man to oppression, the subject we are now considering. I do want to say just a few words, however, about one special fear that has caused a great deal of harm already, leaving it to you to reflect on the nature of other fears of which I shall not have time to speak. I am thinking of the very deep-seated fear of Israel's Arab neighbours that a high rate of Jewish immigration, if continued for any length of time, may impel Israel to adopt a policy of both territorial and economic expansion.

I do not myself think that this territory, preferred above all others by the Jewish people for the purpose of national regeneration, will necessarily prove to be inadequate for their national development. Even in the past, without the aid of modern scientific progress, the same land has supported a dense population in comfort, and we are assured by scientists and agronomists that it can do so again without threat to the territorial integrity or the economic and cultural self-determination of neighbouring peoples.

This should remove the fears of Israel's neighbours, whose fears and whose rights of course, we should recognize. Moreover, the same principles of self-help and self-liberation which are valid for Jews who have endured persecution in Europe for centuries, but who come back to the Eastern Mediterranean bringing with them the skills and the outlook of the West-- these same principles of self-help and self-liberation are valid also for the Arabs who have long endured other forms of oppression since their great civilization fell into decline at the time of the Mongol invasions, and who today suffer many consequent disabilities from which it is now their desire, indeed their determination, to escape. In the secure international society that we are struggling to create there must be recognition of the intensity of the desire of all peoples to develop along lines of their own choosing. There must also be a corresponding recognition of the need for mutual understanding and accommodation. So one welcomes the characteristic good sense behind the words of Mr. Sharett, the Foreign Minister of Israel, when he said to newspapermen in London last March; "It remains a cardinal principle of our foreign policy to seek integration in the region to which we belong, on the basis of mutual recognition and good neighbourliness, for the protection of the national interests of each state and for the advancement of the region's common interests".

I think I am right in saying that most of the delegates who voted in the United Nations General Assembly in November 1947 in favour of the resolution recommending the partition of Palestine, within the framework of economic union, did so because of an underlying feeling that it had been made necessary by the slaughter of Jews in Europe during the Second World War. This was a warning that it would be unwise to continue any longer an experiment tending toward bi-nationalism or a forced federalism in the whole of Palestine, since that experiment had already led to complete deadlock in Palestinian

affairs. It seemed imperative, moreover, after the annihilation of six million Jews in various countries in Europe, that arrangements should be made in at least one country in the world for the Jewish people to be definitely freed from the limitations and the fears imposed by minority status. One in Palestine were the Jews willing and able to undertake the heavy responsibility of establishing an independent Jewish state. It was not only Jews who were convinced that salvation lay in the principles of self-liberation and self-help. That concept had now gained a wider acceptance and we had to do something about it.

It was also, I think, the general belief of those who voted in the United Nations General Assembly in favour of the principle of creating an independent Jewish state that the Jews of Israel would one day be able to establish friendly relations with the Arab world, although time would obviously be required to achieve the necessary mutual adjustments. All men of good will must have been glad to note, therefore, that already, only four and a half years after the adoption of the partition resolution, there are indications that areas of wide agreement may soon be established between Israel and its immediate neighbours. These may be mere straws, but I hope that they show from which quarter the currents of air are blowing.

Co-operation between Arab Governments and the Government of Israel has taken place in the past month, spontaneously and as a matter of course, in the face of a threatened plague of locusts. Fresh agreements have been reached within the past few weeks for the prevention and control of illegal crossing of Israel's borders in either direction. Similarly, when ships of Israel or Lebanon are in distress, each may now take refuge in the territorial waters of the other state and then proceed on their way without hindrance. These agreements were reached without the publicity that seems always to accompany bad news and represent the sort of quiet adjustment to a changed situation out of which stable conditions often grow.

Speculation, as you know, has been rife within recent months regarding the possibility of a negotiated settlement of political problems between Israel and its neighbours. Of this speculation Mr. Sharett has said, "The mere appearance of such reports in an atmosphere charged with hostility is a hopeful omen". I have no intention of discussing here, and it would be improper for me to discuss here, the problems which would require consideration before such a peace settlement could be achieved. There is one point, however, which I think I might make now because Canadians interested in this question may feel they have some personal responsibilities in relation to it.

There can be no doubt that Israel requires a background of peace against which to work out to its fullest development the national life of its own people. The Prime Minister of Israel has often said so, and emphatically. There is also no doubt that the Arab position, as defined during the last Session of the United Nations General Assembly, represented, as Arab spokesmen themselves have pointed out, the concession of much which they had refused to concede before, particularly when they offered to sit down with representatives of Israel to discuss a peace settlement if, as a starting-point for the discussions, Israel would reconsider certain past recommendations of the United Nations General Assembly, some of which the Arabs had formerly rejected out of hand.

This would seem to indicate that the position in the Middle East is not at least a static one. Mr. Ben Gurion expressed the opinion in an address to a group of visitors from the United States last March that elements in the Arab countries do indeed wish to conclude peace with Israel, although internal political difficulties make this still impossible. About the same time, on the 19th of March, the editors of The Times in London said, "...if only a handful of Arab statesmen are beginning to see that the adjustment of relations between the Arab world and the Western powers and the making of peace between the Arab states and Israel are two parts of the same problem of Middle Eastern defence, there is some hope of advance".

We in Canada who are anxious for real peace to come in the Middle East might perhaps help in a small way to create a climate within which mutual adjustments would gradually become easier if we avoided in our speaking and writing, any easy generalizations about Arab leaders and the Arab people which may prove on closer examination or in the light of a future rapprochement to have been unrealistic. It is easier, of course, to repeat a generalization than to examine its authenticity, but a constant effort to be accurate - that is to say, to understand human beings who are different from ourselves - is likely to pay dividends out of all proportion to the effort itself. While in Israel Jewish leaders, civilized men and women, are trying in the midst of overwhelming difficulties to give the civilized answer to racial persecution, we should ourselves do what we can to aid their effort.

There was an Irishman once whom we might describe as the prototype of those who consider inter-racial rapprochement to be impossible. It was the end of summer and an English professor of botany, just emerging from an Irish bog with his specimens and his notes, was ready to head back to his university in England. He told the Irish peasant he wanted to go to Dublin and asked if this was the right path to take. "To Dublin!" the Irishman exclaimed, "Why, man this is a bog! If I was going to Dublin I'd never start from here!"

If, however, we want badly enough to reach the goal of mutual understanding we can start from any point. The main thing is the civilized wish. With that wish, converted into a resolve on both sides, a way out of the bog of fear and misunderstanding between Israel and its neighbours can be found. This would make infinitely easier the work of those pioneers who are building the new Jewish nation, and those whose untimely and tragic death we lament tonight would rest more peacefully. So we are glad that the outlook here is not as dark as it was and that there are grounds for hope of better things.

There is more than hope, however. There is the fact of proud achievement in what the people of Israel have already done to create their own national home and assure their own national destiny. Here they are in no bog, but marching steadily forward on firm ground. The temple of liberty and national respect has been restored. The forests of freedom have in sad truth been nourished by the blood of millions; but they grow and they spread. And to symbolise this new life that has emerged from cruelty and oppression, the flag of Israel waves proudly now among the banners of the United Nations.