

Seventh Anniversary of the Establishment of Israel

May 14

RETROSPECT AND OUTLOOK

The progressive tradition of the war for independence is carried on by the people in order to save Israel independence and keep peace

By Louis Harap

WHO can forget the elation and high hopes with which Jews and democratic-minded people everywhere greeted the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948? This new declaration of independence marked another defeat for colonialism and a victory for self-determination, the casting off of another imperialist yoke, the addition of another sovereign and independent state to the world family of states.

It is now seven years since that happy day. We recall the glorious fighting spirit of the Israeli masses in their war for independence, we recall their fighting forces, the Haganah and Palmach, which exhibited unforgettable courage and determination in their national struggle. In the ensuing seven years a new nation has been forming; there have been strivings for a progressive culture. The masses have labored hard in factory and field; they have applied skills brought from other lands and have learned new skills; they have made desert land in the Negev to bear fruit to feed a rapidly growing people, and they have made the earth yield up its mineral deposits.

On this seventh anniversary we salute the people and the progressive leadership in their country.

The people of Israel have also undergone much hardship in these seven years. So difficult has their situation been, that optimism has given way to apprehension for the future of the little nation. Living conditions have been extremely hard for the masses of Israelis; they too have been buffeted by the chilling blasts of the cold war in its Middle Eastern phase. There were some people of good

will who expected events in Israel somehow to unfold differently from their course in other nations. In an interview with *New York Post* publisher Dorothy Schiff, Dr. Albert Einstein expressed his disillusionment with government as a spokesman for the people and criticized the people for not opposing reaction powerfully enough. This he applied to Israel too. "We had great hopes for Israel at first," Einstein said. "We thought it might be better than other nations but it is no better" (March 13).

A Progressive Tradition

This is the beginning of wisdom: the Jews are no better or worse than other peoples. They are subject to the same forces, act like other peoples under the pressures of material and ideological forces and are class divided. But as is also the case everywhere, the masses of the Israeli people, under the leadership of the labor movement and progressive elements, resist government moves against their interests.

Already the masses of Israel have founded and built upon a tradition of heroic action for the true national interests of their young state. For their independence was not easily won. Despite the United Nations decision of November 29, 1947, which authorized the setting up of a Jewish state, the United States delegation maneuvered in the UN up to the last moment to prevent realization of the decision by the proposal for a "trusteeship" of Israel. But the people of Israel were locked in a war against the Arab

states and irresistibly determined to grasp independence in the face of this sabotage attempt by Washington. Again, when Washington tried to truncate the infant state through the Bernadotte plan by forcing it to give up the Negev as a condition of an armistice with the Arab leaders, the people continued steadfast and were again irresistible. Throughout this period, from the UN deliberations on the question to the achievement of an armistice, the Soviet Union set forth the realistic solution to the problem in the historic Gromyko speech of May 14, 1947. Arms from the people's democracies and their opposition to Washington's diplomatic maneuvers helped the new state to realization. With this aid, by their sacrifice of blood and their intense pressure on their leaders, who at times seemed inclined to yield to Washington, the masses of Israel finally gained independence.

But the labors of the people had just begun. They were beset by gigantic economic problems. Close to a million Jews have immigrated to Israel from Europe, the Middle East and North Africa since the end of World War II. The absorption of these people into the economy of the country, on top of the necessity to develop a national economy after decades of colonial restrictions on economic growth imposed by Britain, would have given rise to great problems at best. The ruling Labor Party (Mapai) leaders, however, followed the policies dictated by the industrialists and big landowners in granting concessions to local and foreign investors, thus forcing the enormous burdens caused by economic difficulties to fall on the masses of the people. The result was a steadily rising cost of living and



An Israeli family celebrates Israel's Independence Day.

an accompanying depression of the standard of living, whose downward slide has not yet stopped. All this the workers resisted with strikes, thus alleviating somewhat the effects of a semi-colonial economy. (For a detailed economic analysis of this situation see Victor Perlo's series in *JEWISH LIFE*, September 1952 to January 1953; also published as a pamphlet, *Israel and Dollar Diplomacy*.)

The Cold War Reaches Israel

Israel's foreign affairs were hardly less difficult than her domestic problems. Once the armistice ending the war of liberation was concluded, the Arab leaders were quiescent, licking their wounds. But Israel inevitably became enmeshed in the toils of the cold war because of her strategic military relationship to the oil-rich Middle East, in which the western powers had such great sums invested, and because of her place in cold war plans of Washington.

So great was the mass sentiment against Israel involvement in the cold war military plans that Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett felt obliged to state on April 24, 1949 that "There is nothing further from the mind of the government of Israel than that Israel should become the base for any power." But Henry Morgenthau, Jr., told the people of Israel on a visit in January 1950 what the big moneyed men of the United States expected of the Israel government: the proposed Middle Eastern Pact, he said, would be "a coalition against aggression by Russia." The people of Israel demonstrated against this threat of involvement. The peace movement found a ready response among the people. The Israel Peace Council had collected 312,000 signatures to the Stockholm Peace Appeal, which registered world-wide approval of the banning of the atom bomb. Another petition campaign launched by the Council in the summer of 1951 in opposition to the rearming of West Germany and in favor of a five power peace pact had by the spring of 1952 collected over 401,000 signatures—43 per cent of the adult population of the country! There could be no doubt of the anti-war sentiment of the Israeli people.

The cold war in Israel operates through the relations of Israel to the Arab countries. The reactionary Arab leaders have not yet recognized Israel's right to exist. They use anti-Israel incitement as a means of diverting the Arab peoples from their own problems and as one technique for maintaining power. For the Arab leaders are forced to cope with a national liberation movement among their own people. The Arab world, long under the dominance of colonial powers, has become part of the world-wide movement of oppressed and dependent lands in Asia, Africa and South America to throw off the yoke of imperialism and colonialism. This powerful postwar movement received great impetus from the victory of the Chinese Revolution in 1949 and the Arab peoples are being swept along in the movement. The Arab leaders therefore have to reckon with this overpowering anti-imperialist sentiment of their peoples and dare not openly ally themselves



An Israeli woman worker in a textile mill.

with the western powers for fear that their peoples will oust them from power. One way of retaining that power is by anti-Israel incitement.

A Build-Up of Tension

It is this anti-imperialist movement that has thus far prevented the formation of the projected anti-Soviet Middle Eastern pact. It is true that the ruling groups in Israel are anxious and eager to join such a pact. The Arab leaders have refused to include Israel in any pact which they join. But this consideration takes second place to the anti-imperialist resistance to such pacts by the Arab people. The State Department was successful in getting Iraq into the anti-Soviet military system through the back door of the Turkish-Iraqi military alliance only because the Iraqi rulers instituted repression against the Iraqi masses and their anti-imperialist leaders. But on April 4 the *New York Times* reported from Cairo that Egyptian dictator "Colonel Nasser said London and Washington had obtained the tenuous allegiance of Iraq at the price of re-awakening Arab fears of foreign domination."

By its endeavor to draw the Arab countries into the anti-Soviet military system, one by one, if necessary, Washington has thrown the area into turbulence and especially has created the tense situation on the borders between Israel and the Arab states. As the Jerusalem correspondent of the *Paris Tribune des Nations* expressed it (March 11), "the Israel crisis is maintained from outside with the aim of hastening the arms race, consolidating the dictatorial regimes in the Middle East in order to integrate them more effectively in the 'defense organization' against the USSR." This was nakedly evident in the recent offer made by Egyptian Minister of National Guidance Major Saleh Salem on March 20 eventually to join an anti-Soviet "defense" pact if Washington and London would support

cession to Egypt of the Negev, that is, about half of the territory of Israel.

What are the prospects of peace in the Middle East? The Arab masses do not want war any more than the Israelis or any other people. That there is hope among the Arab peoples is indicated in the following dispatch by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency at the end of March: "Warsaw radio's Yiddish language broadcast last week attributed to the Syrian newspaper *Al-Faiha* a report that the Syrian and Lebanese Communist Parties had published a joint appeal to all Arab states to recognize the State of Israel." That hope is also encouraged by the news report from Syria on March 26 that thousands of Syrian students had left their classrooms to demonstrate against the Turkish-Iraqi pact. There are strong forces in the Arab countries fighting for peace.

We in the United States can help Israel achieve peace. For it is the State Department of this country that is muddying the waters in the Middle East by sending arms to the Arab leaders and wheedling them into military alliances which endanger the peace. It is therefore up to us insistently to petition our State Department that they stop arming the Arab leaders and cease their efforts to set up military pacts in the area which have so dangerously increased tensions. Our best seventh anniversary gift is to press upon the State Department an end to such policies.

In Israel itself the peace-loving people do not have plain sailing in pursuing an anti-war policy. It is hardly an accident that the deplorable Gaza incident, in which Israel armed forces attacked an Egyptian military post, occurred a few weeks after the return to office of Ben Gurion as defense minister. Ben Gurion is known as a leader of the "Activist" group that operates under the mistaken notion that they can machine-gun their way to a settlement with the Arabs. But this adventurism only aggravates the situation. Israel's hope for peace lies in a policy of refusal to join any military alliances, which only increase tension.

The masses of Israel demonstrate their desire for peace when occasion is granted them to do so and in this they are following their genuinely progressive traditions. Once again in the past months the Israel Peace Committee circulated a peace petition against rearmament of Germany and against Israel participation in aggressive military pacts. At the third annual conference of the Israel Peace Council in Tel Aviv in February, thousands of people overflowed the city's largest hall. Council President Meyer Yaari reported that 423,271 people signed—43.5 per cent of the adult population of Israel. In this country the equivalent figure would be about 50 million. From all walks of Israel life, from the settlements, from the factories, from professional life—they came to impress on the government their demand for peace. "The peace movement," said Yitzhok Greenbaum, veteran leader of Polish Jewry, at the conference, "is increasing and its influence grows stronger." In this growth and influence the masses of Israel are playing their part. This is the most hopeful sign at this seventh anniversary of Israel.