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Israel at Fifty
FORWARD FROM THE JUBILEE



===== THREE LIVES =====

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SINCE 1934 • A LABOR ZIONIST JOURNAL

JEWISH Frontier

SINCE 1934

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Israel's 50th

By Susan Hattis Rolef

According to the American historian Edward Lienental of the University of Wisconsin the general atmosphere of depression and disharmony prevalent in Israel as it starts celebrating its 50th anniversary, is nothing unusual in the experience of nations, due to the different perspectives from which different generations view such events.

This observation might well have a certain amount of truth in it, but it does not fully explain the mood in Israel today. Part of the mood has nothing to do with the celebrations *per se*, but rather with a harsh economic reality, in which the number of unemployed is rapidly approaching 200,000, while the Government is busy liberating foreign exchange deals, to the benefit of the wealthy. Another contributing factor is the rising level of violence, which manifests itself most markedly in an increase in various forms of violence against women: rape, beatings and murder, totally uncontrolled gang wars, in which many innocent people have been hurt, but worst of all, growing violence in schools — though the problem in Israel has not yet reached the dimensions that it has reached in the United States.

The stalemate in the peace process is another cause for dismay among the more left-wing and liberal parts of the population, while right-wingers are worried about the small concessions the Government appears willing to make to the Palestinians in response to American pressure — concessions which they oppose altogether. In addition, despite deliberate efforts by part of the leadership of the National Religious Party and some of the *haredi* politicians, to demonstrate a more tolerant attitude towards the non-religious parts of the population (some of the NRP leaders actually went to the trouble of spending a highly publicized weekend at the Shomer Hatza'ir kibbutz of Shomrat towards the end of April), the rift between the religious and secular parts of the population has never been

greater, and seems to be threatening to turn into a full scale *kulturkampf*.

Nothing emphasized the latter reality more than what happened at the official celebration of the 50th anniversary: "Bells of the Jubilee". Why it was specifically this event that brought about the opening shots in this *kulturkampf*, probably had more to do with the shortsightedness of the organizers than with the occasion being celebrated. But the genie now seems to be out of the bottle, and it will be extremely difficult to get it back in again. What happened was that the Bathsheva dance group was invited to participate with a dance piece performed to the song "*ehad mi yode'a*" — one of the songs sung at the end of the Passover Seder. Every verse in this song ends with the words "*ehad elohenu*" — (one is our God). In the course of this dance, in which the movements are sharp and provocative, as those in all the dance pieces choreographed by Bathsheva's director and house choreographer Ohad Naharin, the dancers take off most, though not all of their clothes.

Someone reported this fact to Haim Miller of Agudat Yisrael, one of the deputy mayors in Jerusalem, following the final dress rehearsal several days before the performance, and he insisted that the piece be removed from the program, even though it was unlikely that any *haredim* would be present at the celebrations, and there was no chance that anyone in the *haredi* community would see it on television, for the simple reason that the *haredim* do not watch television. A last minute effort to get the dancers to agree to wear long underwear beneath their costumes, was finally rejected by the Bathsheva dancers at the very last moment, and the show took place without them.

Many other performers, who were not completely aware of what was going on, were furious when they found out what had happened, while large sections of the secular population — though more Left-wingers than Right-wing-

ers — declared that the whole event signified a brutal interference by the religious parties in artistic freedom and freedom of expression. This was undoubtedly true, but the fact remains that the organizers should have understood that this particular dance — most suitable for high quality international festivals and enlightened, sophisticated audiences — is not suitable for a popular show, watched by “the masses”. Bathsheva itself should also have understood, that *a priori* it was beneath its dignity and artistic qualities to participate in such an event. The extreme reactions on both sides indicate that while the majority might be inclined to compromise, some of the artists on the one hand and some of the *haredi* political figures on the other, are not, and are pulling other sectors of the population behind them.

To many secular Left-wingers this event strengthened the feeling that 50 years after the establishment of the state, “their state” is slipping out of their hands and into those of “the forces of darkness”. It is a genuine feeling, but one that is extremely dangerous, because it can only lead to greater alienation, rather than accommodation with the fact that their vision was only partially realized, that reality is much stronger than any vision, and that they, like everyone else, must fight for their place under the sun or start sinking. The main difference between the vision and the reality is that the notion of Israel being a melting pot in which the dominant stream will be the secular, enlightened universal culture is still predominant and still receives much support from the state, but large parts of the population neither identify with it nor consider it superior in any way to other forms of culture. To some, at least parts of that culture are offensive.

This does not mean that the secular, enlightened, universal-minded parts of the population should fold up their flags — merely that they should realize that certain aspects of their culture should remain in theaters, museums and selective events, which every citizen can decide to attend or not to attend. There will be cause for real concern only if theaters and museums start being closed down or their budgets cut, and that is currently not the case.

Though Israel today is far from resembling the model envisioned by A.D. Gordon, Berl Katznelson or David Ben-Gurion, or that of

those who would like it to shed its Jewish-Zionist mantle and turn into “a state of all its inhabitants”, it is nevertheless a major success story by any objective standard. Despite some temporary economic difficulties, it is a prosperous country with a viable economy and excellent future prospects. Despite the extreme heterogeneity of its population, it has a democratic system that functions efficiently, within the framework of the law, even though the system could be improved and strengthened, by means of added checks and balances.

Ben-Gurion, in whose day all the civilian and military élites of the state were Ashkenazi and in whose government there was only one token Sephardi, dreamt of the day in which Israel would have a Yemenite Chief of Staff. Well, it will soon have a Persian one, operating under a Minister of Defense who is of Kurdish origin. The commander of the air-force is also of Persian origin, and several additional senior commanders are of Moroccan origin. Also, five of the current 16 government ministers are of Sephardi origin. (On the other hand both the women and the Arab citizens of Israel are seriously under-represented in the centers of power.) In a regional environment which is still more hostile than friendly, and despite major differences of opinion over issues of war and peace, Israel is strong and steadfast. In terms of its scientific, technological and even cultural achievements — it is one of the world leaders.

The fact is that Israel today does not resemble the old Labor vision or that of the “post-Zionists”. The Labor vision was, without doubt, a grand vision, and it dominated the policies of Israel’s government for the first 29 years of its existence, while leaving a deep impression on most aspects of the state’s life to the present day. However, in certain respects — especially its economic and social aspects — it was not a realistic vision for the long term, and in other respects it simply lost many of its attractions, even within the Labor movement itself.

In the Labor vision, Israel was to be an egalitarian socialist state, even though private enterprise and bourgeois culture were tolerated and allowed to flourish. In the early years of the state it was the unique creations of Labor Zionism — especially the Histadrut, the kibbutzim and other forms of collective settlement — that were the pillars of the Israeli society and economy, willing to mobilize and

sacrifice in order to serve the general public's welfare. But alas, one by one all these glorious institutions started going both financially and ideologically bankrupt. Histadrut, under Amir Peretz, is now struggling to remain a trade union federation, no different from those that exist in other countries. Histadrut's former industrial conglomerate, "Koor", is now completely privately owned and run on the basis of *laissez faire* principles, and its last CEO from former days — Benny Ga'on — has been eased out with a golden parachute. The kibbutzim are rapidly turning into community rather than communal settlements, within which capitalist rather than socialist principles are becoming increasingly predominant, and there is little left of the cooperative spirit of the moshavim.

Nobody has a definitive answer to the question whether the old Labor-inspired and created social and economic institutions have fallen because they simply could not survive in a competitive world (in other words, because there was something inherently faulty about them), or because as taught by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, by the nature of things the fate of every system and institution is to become corrupted and fall under misrule (or mismanagement) that finally weakens and destroys it. The fact that the Labor Party lost power back in 1977, to be replaced by a political movement with little sympathy for Labor inspired system and institutions, started the actual process of disintegration and accelerated it, though this process would probably have taken place in any event.

Labor was not ousted from power back in 1977 as a result of a *putch*. Labor lost power because it was defeated in the polls by perfectly democratic means. In 1992 it was brought back again to power by a very narrow margin, even though more voters voted for Right-wing and religious parties than for Left-wing and Arab ones, and in 1996 it lost again by a narrow margin, largely because it failed to give more people the feeling that the peace making process was "good for the Jews" — not just for the Arabs. Laborites who feel that "their state" has been stolen from them, simply do not understand the essence of democracy and pluralism, and there is something more than a little Bolshevik in the notion that one can only identify with the state if it is run by a

certain population group under a particular set of ideological principles.

None of this means that there was nothing right or good in the Labor vision, or that certain parts of it have not been realized in full. For example, in the Labor vision "conquest of the land" was always important, but never more important than certain other goals such as receiving international acceptance and peace. Thus, in 1947 the Labor movement was willing to forego large parts of Eretz Yisrael for the sake of obtaining a Jewish state, which was internationally recognized. In 1957 it was willing to withdraw from the Sinai peninsula in order not to fall out with the superpowers. After 1973 it was willing to start handing back part of the territories conquered in 1967 in order to attain peace with Egypt and Jordan, and since 1993 in order to attain peace with Syria and the Palestinians. Though the peace making process is certainly not progressing at the moment as Labor would have liked it to, all moves in the process have followed the Labor vision. This was true in 1977-1979, when Menachem Begin made peace with Egypt, and in 1996-98, when Binyamin Netanyahu is willy nilly being dragged to make at least some progress in the negotiations with the Palestinians.

The conclusion is that the 50th anniversary should not be spent by Labor remembering the lost paradise (which to many was never a paradise) but looking back with satisfaction at its long term achievements, while adapting the vision to reality and doing the utmost to win the next general elections — or at least to avoid losing them. What this means is that Labor must stop all the internal squabbles, rally behind its democratically elected leader (unless the majority feels that he should be replaced) and decide on what fronts it should wage its external battles. Ehud Barak's decision to open the summer session of the Knesset by tabling a bill which calls for the enlistment to military service of most of the religious youngsters who currently shirk service on grounds (frequently the bogus grounds) of being Yishiva students, is a step in this direction. Labor should also decide what its messages are and what vision it has to offer, as Israel embarks on the second 50 year stretch of its existence, and together with the rest of the world enters the 21st century. □

Forward from the Jubilee

By Misha Louvish

As on every Independence Day, the celebration of Israel's Jubilee was preceded by two significant anniversaries: the Passover festival, which celebrates the nation's emergence into freedom, and the memory of the most agonizing tragedy in its history. (On the eve of Independence Day, too, we pay tribute to those who paid with their lives for the rise of Israel.)

Before the culmination of the Jewish people's millennial effort for liberty, it had to endure the most agonizing trial any people had to face: the Holocaust of European Jewry and the systematic effort of the German Nazis to exterminate the Jews. It is not correct, however, to say that the rise of independent Israel was the end-result of the Holocaust. This is not so: throughout the centuries Jews longed to return to their ancestral homeland, and the organized Zionist movement was already forty years old at the beginning of the Holocaust.

The Proclamation of Independence on May 15, 1948 meant that, for the first time in some two thousand years, a sovereign Jewish commonwealth had been established in the country where Jewish kings had reigned and Jewish prophets had proclaimed the fundamental principles of righteousness.

The Holocaust, however, has its special place in the history of the Jewish national revival: it was an almost mathematical proof of the Zionist analysis of Jewish destiny. Here was the most direct and deadly imaginable assault against a people's existence: the perpetrators of the atrocities proudly proclaimed their purpose, and the victims were utterly defenseless because there was no place on earth that they could call their own.

The Jubilee of Israel's proclamation of independence is of world significance. Many visionary utopias have been conceived in the last two centuries; many blue-prints have been drawn for man's progress towards perfection. None of them has succeeded; communism, in

particular, which promised to solve the problems of the Jews as part of the redemption of humanity, has collapsed in ruins.

The jubilee celebrations have not, to put it bluntly, been an unalloyed success. They have been accompanied by a TV documentary series called *Tekumah* ("Rebirth"), which started several weeks before Independence Day and still continues. The editors have not been content with a litany of achievements: they have emphasized the problems that still remain to be solved, and almost every episode has been accompanied by controversy.

The debate was particularly heated after the episode entitled "Biladi, biladi!" which gave the Palestinian Arab point of view. At the same time the Arabs themselves, including Arab citizens of Israel, have marked the occasion as "Nakbe" ("the Disaster"). This is not unreasonable: we can call on the Arabs to accept the situation, but not to rejoice in the historical developments that have resulted in the exclusion of Palestine from the areas that achieved Arab independence after the break-up of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the Arab refugee problem.

It is true that this suffering might have been avoided if a wise Arab leadership had accepted the United Nations recommendation that an Arab state be set up in alliance with Jordan, but today's Arabs cannot be blamed for their leaders' errors fifty years ago, and in any case, the lamentable facts remain.

There was also the heated debate over a dance, regarded as offensive by the ultra-orthodox, which was scheduled to be performed at the program of songs and sketches that was staged to celebrate the jubilee. This was one of the silliest controversies, on both sides, that I can remember, and I will not burden *Frontier* readers with it.

As the Jewish people celebrates the Jubilee

it can afford to forget such ephemeral arguments: they can look back on many trials and tribulations, and look forward to many problems; but as they look forward to the next stages in their country's progress they can be confident that its success in tackling the difficulties of the past is a good omen for the future.

Immediately on the proclamation of independence the infant state was confronted by three major challenges.

First, on the departure of the British armed forces the small Jewish community — numbering about 600,000 — had to fight for its life against the attacks of the Palestinian Arabs and the neighboring Arab countries.

At the same time it had to organize the machinery of government and the economy to replace those built up by the British in the thirty years of the League of Nations Mandate.

As if those challenges were not enough, newborn Israel had to take in hundreds of thousands of the survivors of the Holocaust, who were left free but destitute by the victory of the Allies over Nazi Germany.

These were continuing challenges, and it cannot be said that any of them has been completely overcome, but great progress has been made with the development of Israel as a dynamic, self-supporting society.

There has been much talk recently of a "post-Zionist era" in Israel. Everywhere, it is argued, ideologies are bankrupt, and Israelis, like people in other countries, are on the lookout for Number One, and not for any alleged national interest.

Israel's victory in the Eurovision might be taken as a case in point. Dana International is not exactly a characteristic representative of a country in which every fit male does a month's army reserves duty every year and has been described as "a soldier on eleven months' leave." "Diva," the song that brought her victory, does not express any kind of patriotism or national pride.

There is one simple fact, however, which shows that Zionism is still a crucial factor in the national experience. Natan Sharansky, who spent years in a Soviet gaol, is now a senior minister in the Government of Israel. And this, of course, is only an outstanding fact in one of the most extraordinary developments of the past decade: about 730,000 have left the countries that once belonged to the Union of

Socialist Soviet Republics and settled in the national homeland, Israel.

The millions of Jews in the Soviet Union were once described as "the silent Jewry." Not only were they forbidden to express their Jewish identity, but they had been brainwashed by seventy years of Soviet education from the kindergarten to the university. And yet, when the Soviet system collapsed, it was as if their eyes were suddenly opened, and they flocked to the ancestral homeland to take part in the jubilee celebrations of the Jewish National Home. At the same time tens of thousands have come from Ethiopia.

The Jewish Agency was mainly responsible for contact with the potential immigrants and their transport to Israel, and the Government Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, headed by a recent arrival, is responsible for housing, education and employment.

On the whole, this enormous influx has proved an asset rather than a burden. Among the newcomers are nearly 80,000 engineers, over 36,000 teachers, 16,000 physicians and 17,500 nurses and other medical auxiliaries. There are also problems, it is true. Israel's Law of Return gives immigrant privileges to relatives of Jews making their homes here, even if they are non-Jews, and questions of conversion to Judaism have arisen. These cannot, however, overshadow this immense Zionist achievement.

The most crucial task that faces Israel today is the achievement of peace with the Arab world. We still have to send our soldiers to protect part of our frontier with Lebanon against the Hizbullah movement, which is openly dedicated to the elimination of the "Zionist entity," i.e., the independent State of Israel, and although there are no open hostilities on our frontier with Syria, that country, which will, undoubtedly demand withdrawal from the Golan Heights, is the major obstacle to a peaceful settlement with Lebanon.

Moreover, we are still engaged in the effort to get peace and understanding with the Palestinian Arabs, and until that is achieved there is no hope of arriving at a comprehensive peace.

We should not underestimate the difficulty of that task. In 1964, three years before Israel occupied the "West Bank" and the Gaza Strip in self-defense, the Palestine National Council elected Yasser Arafat as its leader and

adopted the genocidal National Covenant, which called for the annihilation of Israel. After their defeat in 1967, the Arabs met at Khar-toum and resolved unanimously: no negotiations with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no peace with Israel.

Every Israeli government called for unconditional peace negotiations, but it was only after the failure of more than twenty years of terrorist warfare that Arafat declared that the Covenant was obsolete and recognized Israel's right to exist. Israel responded, and a Declaration of Principles, which provided for peace negotiations to be completed by May 1999, was adopted at Oslo in 1993. In the meantime Israel would carry out three further redeployments (FRDs) of its forces and an elected Palestinian Authority would do all in its power to combat terrorism.

The anti-Labor Government of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has ostensibly undertaken to carry out the commitments adopted at Oslo, and Israeli forces have been withdrawn from the Gaza Strip and the Arab-inhabited cities of the "West Bank," so that over 70% of the Palestinians now live under their own elected authority. It is difficult, however, to see how Netanyahu can make any further progress.

Israel has now been asked to withdraw from a further 13 per cent of the area. Netanyahu argues that such a withdrawal would endanger Israel's security, while the Hamas organization, which still calls for the destruction of Israel, continues to operate undisturbed. Even if Israel complied with the Palestinian demand, which is backed by the United States, however, only forty per cent of the area would be under Palestinian control and Israel would be left with sixty per cent.

Challenged with the question of how Netanyahu expects to get agreement on such a basis, a senior Government spokesman retorted: How do you expect to get agreement on the question of Jerusalem, where the Palestinians want to establish their capital? Extremist government supporters, especially those in the Jewish settlements in the "West Bank," object in principle to any withdrawal from even a small part of the area. How, then, can Netanyahu expect to reach any permanent agreement with the Palestinians — let alone with the Syrians.

The situation is serious. We can only hope that an explosion will be averted until a new government, prepared to take risks for peace, takes office. □



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The Signing of Israel's Declaration of Independence

By Elli Wohlgelernter

Growing up in the United States, every pupil from an early age is taught stories about the founding fathers — the 56 men who attached their names, and thereby their destinies, to the Declaration of Independence.

It is not surprising, then, that when Golda Meyerson — later Meir — waited to step up to the podium to add her name to Israel's Declaration of Independence, her thoughts went back to the legends she learned as a child in Milwaukee:

"From my childhood in America, I learned about the Declaration of Independence and the geniuses who signed it. I couldn't imagine these were real people doing something real. And here I am signing it, actually signing a Declaration of Independence. I didn't think it was due me, that I, Goldie Mabovich Meyerson, deserved it, that I had lived to see the day. My hands shook. We had done it. We had brought the Jewish state into existence.

"Whatever price any of us would have to pay for it, we had recreated the Jewish national home. The long exile was over. Now we were a nation like other nations, masters — for the first time in 20 centuries — of our own destiny," she continued.

"All I can recall about my actual signing of the proclamation is that I was crying openly, not able even to wipe the tears from my face . . . David Pinkas asked me why I was crying and I said, 'one, because of the honor, and two, because there are people missing here . . . who had more of a right to be here and sign' . . . I wept almost beyond control." Others may not have wept, yet they felt their date with destiny.

Moshe Shertok (later Sharett), soon to be the first foreign minister, later recalled

that he signed with "a sense of excitement together with a clear premonition of danger such as a man might feel while standing on a cliff, ready to leap into a yawning chasm. We felt as though we stood on a very high crest, where roaring winds were brewing about us, and that we had to stand fast."

Others were biblically inspired. Haim Shapira, a leader of Hapoel Hamizrahi, a forerunner of the National Religious Party, said later that he felt he was reliving the words of the Psalmists: "When the Lord caused us to return to Zion, we were as dreamers." [Psalms 126:1]

It was, said Shapira, "a dream, a dream which we had never believed would come true in our lifetime. A miracle had happened."

Like the milestone of July 4, this too was a hard-fought miracle. Three historical dates led up to it: August 30, 1897, when the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, adopted the Basel Program resolutions, which proclaimed Zionism's aim "to establish a home for the Jewish people in *Eretz Yisrael* to be guaranteed by international law;" November 2, 1917, when the Balfour Declaration gave voice to British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine; and November 29, 1947 — 30 years after Balfour and 50 years after Basel — when the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state.

While the UN vote granted the right, it was Britain's decision to leave on May 15, 1948 that gave the founding fathers their impetus to proclaim independence.

Not that the decision was taken automatically. There was strong opposition from Zionist leaders in the U.S., who lobbied for postponement, partially due to pressure from the State Department.

On May 12, the National Administration (*Minhelet Ha'am*), the quasi-cabinet known also as "the 13," met in Tel Aviv to discuss a draft of the declaration, which had been crafted mostly by Sharett with help from other appointed members of the drafting committee: David Remez, Felix Rosenbleuth, Aharon Zisling and Shapira.

It is not surprising that with such disparate backgrounds among "the 13," there was much wrangling over many specifics. The first argument was over what exactly should be declared.

Shertok, following discussions in the United States with high-ranking officials of the Truman administration, proposed the formation of a government rather than a state. Rosenbleuth proposed the declaration of a state within the framework of the UN partition resolution. Ben-Gurion decided on declaring a state "on the basis" of the UN vote.

Rosenbleuth and Behor Shitrit wanted the borders to be defined, but Zisling and Ben-Gurion were opposed. Ben-Gurion pointed out how the United States had not defined any borders when it declared independence, and besides, who knew where the borders would be at the end of the then-upcoming war?

"We accepted the UN resolution, but the Arabs did not," Ben-Gurion said. "They are preparing to make war on us. If we defeat them and capture western Galilee or territory on both sides of the road to Jerusalem, these areas will become part of the state. Why should we obligate ourselves to accept boundaries that in any case the Arabs don't accept?"

Ben-Gurion's motion for non-designated borders passed by a vote of 5-4. (There were four members who couldn't make the meeting.)

Then an even bigger question came up: What was the state to be called?

Proposals included "Zion," the "Jewish State," "Judea," the "Land of Israel," "Yehuda" and "Ever," from the Hebrew "*Ivri*." Ben-Gurion put forth "Israel," and the name passed 6-3.

It was also agreed that independence would be declared at the Tel Aviv Museum on Friday at 4 p.m. — so as not to conflict with Shabbat.

Shertok worked with the committee on revisions the next day, presenting a final version when the National Administration met that

evening at 6 p.m. Criticized as too long, and with details still being debated, the document was handed to Rabbi Yehuda Fishman of Hamizrahi, Zisling, Shertok and Ben-Gurion to finalize. Ben-Gurion worked overnight preparing a final draft, cutting out a quarter of the prose and adding a new opening paragraph:

"The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and national identity was formed. Here they achieved independence and created a culture of national and universal significance. Here they wrote and gave the Bible to the world." The next morning, Ben-Gurion submitted his text to the subcommittee, which approved it.

Shertok, meanwhile, had decided the night before that there should be an English translation of the text for distribution worldwide. Beginning at 10 p.m., after the National Administration meeting had ended, and working until 4 a.m., Shertok and his aides, using the Bible, the American Declaration of Independence and Winston Churchill's speeches as models, drafted the English text.

At 1:50 p.m. the next day, 25 members of the National Council (*Moetzet Ha'am*) — 11 members were stuck in besieged Jerusalem and one was overseas — met at the Keren Kayemet building to approve it. There were only two hours left before the signing ceremony was to begin.

Meir Wilner, representing the Communist Party, proposed adding denunciations of the British Mandate and British military bases. Shertok argued that it would be out of place. Wilner also protested that the council's procedures weren't democratic. Ben-Gurion replied that "there isn't time for meetings in the emergency crisis."

Meir Grabovsky wanted to include mention of Displaced Persons Camps in Europe, and to add the word "language" to the paragraph guaranteeing freedom of religion, conscience, education and culture to ensure that Arabic would share equal status with Hebrew. Ben-Gurion agreed in principle, while stressing that Hebrew should be the main language.

Perhaps the biggest argument, which had come up at each preceding meeting, was over including "God" in the declaration. David Pinakas, a representative of Mizrahi, wanted the document to begin, "The Land of Israel was promised to the Jewish people in the Torah

and by the prophets." Others wanted no mention — or even a hint — of a deity.

A compromise was reached to use the phrase "*Tzur Yisrael*," now translated as "Rock of Israel." (Shertok had translated it as "Almighty God," and those words were used until an official version in 1962 changed it to "Rock of Israel.") But objections were raised even to the "*Tzur Yisrael*" idea.

"The strongest opponent of the use of God's name was Zisling," recalls Zerah Warhaftig, then of Hapoel Hamizrahi, and one of two surviving signers.

"Even when we decided already, and came to a compromise on '*Tzur Yisrael*,' he was trying up to the last minute to make a change, to take it out," Warhaftig recalled.

But Ben-Gurion stepped in: "Each of us, in his own way, believes in the 'Rock of Israel' as he conceives it. I should like to make one request: Don't make me put this phrase to a vote."

He then asked the council for a vote on the document by two ballots, and added that council members stuck in besieged Jerusalem had approved it that morning.

"Now I ask all those in favor of the present text as a whole to raise their hands," Ben-Gurion said.

Everyone did.

The council also voted to repeal the White Paper of 1939, and the Mandatory ordinances of 1939, 1940, 1941 and 1945 that limited immigration, land transfer and the Haganah. All other laws were to remain in effect pending future legislation.

The meeting adjourned at 3 p.m., leaving council members about an hour to change clothes, freshen up and get to 16 Rothschild Boulevard.

The declaration of statehood was not a publicly declared event, as there were fears that the British — who still held nominal authority until midnight — might try to stop it, and that Arab armies would move up plans to attack.

The one-page invitation to the ceremony, sent out by messenger earlier in the day, included a paragraph saying:

"We urge you to keep secret the contents of this invitation and time of the council meeting."

It urged guests to arrive at 3:30 p.m. and instructed them on the bottom: "Dress: dark festive attire."

Ben-Gurion wore a suit, tie and tie clasp. Three delegates, sticking to Palestinian tradition, wore jackets sans ties.

Despite the secrecy, hundreds of people began gathering outside the hall as soon as military guards started to cordon off the street in early afternoon. Thousands more tuned in to the Voice of Israel to hear the station's first direct broadcast.

The guests — estimated at 250 — including representatives of the Jewish Agency, the World Zionist Organization, leaders of political parties, cultural personalities, the chief rabbis, the Haganah chief of staff, Yigael Yadin and others — were all tightly packed inside the small hall. Newspaper editors and correspondents made up the largest group of those present.

Ze'ev Sharef, secretary of the National Administration, had stayed at the Keren Kayemet building, waiting for the final draft to be typed. While speeding to get to the Tel Aviv Museum on time, his driver was stopped by a policeman, who tried to give them a ticket. The officer reneged after it was explained to him how there was no authority behind the ticket, and that he was delaying the proclamation of statehood.

At exactly 4 p.m., Ben-Gurion banged his walnut wood gavel to open the session. The crowd rose spontaneously to sing *Hatikva*. "I shall now read to you the Scroll of the Establishment of the State, which has passed its first reading by the National Council," Ben-Gurion announced.

He proceeded to read the first 10 paragraphs, in essence the preamble, which explained the background for declaring independence: the history of the Jewish people, its struggle to renew a national life in its own land and international recognition of its right to do so.

Ben-Gurion's voice then rose as he read the decisive 11 paragraph: "Accordingly, we the members of the National Council, representing the Jewish People in Palestine and the World Zionist Movement, are met together in solemn assembly today, the day of termination of the British Mandate for Palestine; and by virtue of the natural and historic right of the Jewish people and the resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations, we hereby proclaim the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine, to be called *medinat Yisrael* [the

state of Israel].'

Members of the audience rose in unison, cheering and applauding. Some burst out in tears.

Ben-Gurion then read on, outlining the principles of freedom, justice, peace and equal social and political rights that were to guide the new state; and the last section, which called upon the Arabs to preserve peace while extending an offer of peace and good neighborliness to all neighboring states and their peoples — and appealed to the Jewish people in the diaspora to rally round the Jews of the land of Israel.

"With trust in the Rock of Israel, we set our hand to this declaration, at this session of the Provisional State Council, on the soil of the homeland, in the city of Tel Aviv, on this Sabbath eve, the fifth of Iyar, 5708, the 14th of May, 1948."

It had taken him 16 minutes to read the 979 words of the declaration.

"Let us accept the Foundation Scroll of the Jewish state by rising," Ben-Gurion told the assembled dignitaries; and he then called on Fishman to recite the *Shehechyanu* (prayer of thanksgiving).

Ben-Gurion also read out the resolution annulling the White Paper, which was adopted unanimously. Then he signed a blank parchment attached to Sharef's typed version of the declaration. Sharef read out the council members' names alphabetically in Hebrew. Each one rose and approached the podium to sign.

As an act of defiance against the exclusion of God's name in the text, Fishman added the initials for "with God's help" before signing his name.

When Herzl Vardi (Rosenblum) went up to sign, Ben-Gurion barked, "Sign 'Vardi,' not 'Rosenblum,'" referring to the journalist's writing pseudonym.

Ben-Gurion explained later that he had wanted more Hebrew names on the document.

Rosenblum subsequently had his name legally changed to Vardi, but he never really used it, and lamented about how Vardi was to remain his name in history.

"Oh, he was cursing himself," recalls Wilner, the other surviving signer. "He really regretted doing it — I made such a mistake. How could I do it?"

"Kaplan refused [to change it], but he had a good idea. He said, 'Call me KapLAN. Now I have a Hebrew name,'" Wilner adds.

Warhaftig recalls Ben-Gurion trying to pressure him as well.

"At the beginning he was calling me 'Amitai,' but I never agreed to change my name, because my parents [who emigrated before him] didn't change their name. My father was a great Torah scholar, and he published books with his name. These books were already my legacy, and I also published under my name.

"I said, 'I am an *oleh* to *Eretz Yisrael*, with my name, as I am — I don't have to change my name.' I was against it, I didn't agree. He tried to fight — he tried to convince me once, twice, three times. I said no. He knew I was going to sign 'Warhaftig.'"

Space was left by the 25 signers for the 12 council members not present. When Wilner signed, he left a line blank for Warhaftig, who should have preceded him alphabetically.

But when Warhaftig came to Tel Aviv three weeks later, he put his John Hancock not in the reserved spot, but next to Ben-Gurion's name. The blank space that remains has been the subject of rumor and fable ever since.

"There were all kinds of explanations," says Wilner. "They wanted to isolate me, to stress that even a communist agreed — I heard all kinds of opposite commentary.

"But the truth is simple," he says, laughing. "They asked to leave room for Warhaftig — his '*vav*' came before mine. I signed where they asked me to sign."

So why was the space left blank?

"According to the alphabet I should have been there," Warhaftig says shaking his head, still puzzled by this asterisk of history 50 years later. "There was a place in the first column, I don't know why he [Ben-Gurion] didn't let me sign there. But he had me sign next to him — he was the first in the first column, I was the first in the second column. Why he did it I don't know, he didn't say."

When Shertok, the last of the 25 signers that day, penned his name, the crowd rose and began singing *Hatikva* again, accompanied by the 70-member Palestine Philharmonic Orchestra.

(continued on page 30)

Before and After

May 14, 1948

By Yosef Criden

I was home at last — after almost 6 years in His/Her Majesty's Forces — in "The Jewish Brigade" after more than a year and a half in Canada — on behalf of the *Hagana* — engaged in work which not even now can be discussed openly, and finally — Home — Kibbutz Kfar Blum in Upper Galilee — Home — a tent, but with family and friends. This time, I stated firmly, I was home to stay. I was a pacifist by conviction, and had even once signed "The Oxford Pledge" remember? Home — but for 4 days only.

The call came to come to Tel Aviv for a short meeting. The address — the offices of *Aviron* (airplane). What did I have to do with airplanes? Nuttin. Zilch. It must be all a mistake. The meeting was with Yosef Rochel (later General Avidar, Head of Logistics in the Israeli Defense Forces, and Ambassador to Russia). *Aviron* — a cover for the nefarious activities of the *Hagana*. "Joe," said Yosef, "listen carefully." So I listened carefully. He told me that I was lucky in having been an engineering officer in the British Army. Therefore I knew all about cars (true), trucks (true), tanks and armored vehicles (untrue). "Therefore," he continued, "since there will be a war soon, **OUR WAR** — you have to design and build armored vehicles — this time, for us!"

To such a request, one can not say "no". So I said — "Yes".

"There are one or two minor problems," he added, "but I am sure you will overcome them with no difficulty."

"Problems?" I asked, "such as?"

"Well" — he answered, "We have no armor plate, and as a matter of fact, we have no vehicles either, the cars have to be able to carry at least a three ton load, a squad of soldiers, and be able to travel cross country, and fire heavy machine guns or mortars and the British demand that the trucks be painted grey — and to make them more easily identified to have a 12 inch wide white band painted all around."

"No problem," I said, just before I passed out.

Do you want to hear what happened? Well, that is a different story altogether. And since this is about the 14th of May — what I have written is only to explain what I, an Upper Galilee Kibbutznik, was doing in Tel Aviv on that momentous day. (If you are really interested, you can see some of the results of my labors, rusting quietly along the side of the road to Jerusalem.)

D-Day. The 14th. We all knew the British were leaving. Tel Aviv was silent. I cannot remember how the word got around but crowds began to gather around the "old" Opera House, temporary headquarters of the Jewish Agency. In silence the people watched as Ben-Gurion, Moshe Shertok, Golda and other well-known leaders appeared and entered the building. Remember — there were no TV sets then, nor, as a matter of fact, were there many radios. The small portable transistorized set was as yet unknown.

The crowds waited impatiently, and then a loudspeaker began to function. One could hear, outside — the proverbial pin drop — and then BG's voice was heard — steady, unwavering, clear, as he read the Declaration, ending with the naming of the new state — ISRAEL.

The masses (at least several thousand) were quiet. Here and there a flag was waved. Strangely enough, there were very few children and those who were present were silent as though the solemnity of the occasion was felt by them, too. Somehow — voices were lifted with the words of *Hatikva*. Everybody sang — or at least mumbled the words as if they were praying. People smiled, but there was not the heated discussion of groups excited and animated. Slowly the audience dispersed. I looked around and found familiar faces — other women and men who were serving in the Defense Units —

we were not yet an army. We had no uniforms. We nodded in recognition, and each went his way.

There was a strange, even weird feeling — one of exultation, one of trepidation. After all, after 2000 years we had a State. But tomorrow the British were leaving, and the Arabs were massing on the borders. My mind was in a state of confusion. Could it be that we had a State — a Homeland of our own? And, would the armored cars I had built stand up to the attacks of well-equipped, organized armies?

May the 15th. I had been staying with friends who had a lovely home on Rothschild Boulevard. They had a penthouse and we all went out on the roof to see whatever there was to see. From the distance came the roar of aircraft — and as they flew over us it was easy to see that they were not ours. They were real war planes. All of us, everybody, knew the enemy was going to drop bombs — on the port, on army camps, on other strategic objectives. What we didn't know was what our answers would be. Did we have anti-aircraft cannon? Would our hidden fighter planes

swarm in the air? Did we have camouflage balloons, rockets, Ack-Ack, light or heavy? We heard the enemy bombs dropping, saw mushrooms of smoke rising not too far from us. We waited for the response. And waited. And waited. From far away we heard the snapping of rifle fire — no more. An hour passed, a second flight of enemy bombers swooped over us. Only then did we realize — that was it. We had no adequate defense. All we had was hope, and optimism, and the determination that somehow — someday — we would have what we needed.

May 14 passed — and brought into being *The State of Israel*.

May 15 passed — the British left, and we were *attacked* by the combined forces of the Arab Nations about us.

May 16 — I awoke, brushed my teeth, and went back to building armored cars and trucks — with ancient chassis on which to build — no armor plate, but plenty of hope and the help of many who had "A Yiddishe Kopf". Our secret weapon? *Ain Breirah*, and an old Jewish morsel of wisdom — *Az Gott vill — shiest a bezem* . . . □

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A Long-Delayed Answer

By Haim Chertok

What we forget our block out is of equal significance to what we can recall. I know that on May 15, 1948, I was a reasonably alert ten-year-old, living in the predominantly Jewish West Bronx. Looking back, I sometimes wonder how broad of a grasp of worldly affairs I could have had. In later years I came to realize that my earliest knowledge and opinions about "current events" originated with James Weschler, editor of the *New York Post*, as filtered through my father's approving commentary at the dinner table. But they had little to do with my real concerns. Judging from my oldest grandson Itamar, a sharp little ten-year-old, not much has changed.

My earliest memory of the greater world was the VJ-Day hoopla out the window on Morris Avenue, and some time earlier of my mother crying bitterly when FDR died. "What will become of the country?" she repeated for what seemed endlessly. "I've never voted for any other man for President."

As for the founding of the State of Israel, she must have been joyful and perhaps tried to communicate her feelings to her son, but I have not the slightest trace of recollection.

I do remember that during that school year I did not shy away from pursuing an argument with my fifth-grade teacher at P.S. 86. During our unit on Latin America, Mrs. Godfrey insisted that not sugar but something else (I forget what) was the main crop of Cuba. I was certain she was mistaken, but even when I pointed to a paragraph in the textbook, rather than admit her error she blustered. To the best of my recollection, Mrs. Godfrey told us nothing at all about the founding of the State of Israel. It was not part of our unit on Latin America.

The autumn of the year I was ten, rumor spread in the schoolyard, repeated authoritatively for weeks: if Dewey with the dumb, skinny mustache won, he would institute a six-day school week. None of us wanted Dewey to win. That November I was elated by confirmation that the American democratic system worked unerringly to elect the best man. Four years later, Eisenhower burst that soap bubble. This time it was I who would cry bitterly.

The windowsill at my grandparents' apartment always displayed several metal *pushkas*, one of them for the Jewish National Fund. There were never any *pushkas* in our apartment. Nor in my Aunt Claire's. Nor in the apartments of any of my friends. My parents, these others were not Zionists. Nor were they "anti-Zionists." Save for a single unusual, somewhat mysterious connection, they were simply "American Jews" for whom events Over There did not register personally. If my parents were notably pleased or moved by the founding of the State of Israel, it had so little to do with their real lives that they communicated none of their passing excitement to their ten-year-old son.

In the fall of the year I was ten I started Hebrew classes for three afternoons a week at the neighborhood synagogue. Although I recall there they hung on the wall a map of the State of Israel, I don't recall studying anything about it. Nevertheless, I remember one incident with awesome clarity. Rabbi Barras, the principal, entered our classroom, observing from the back of the room for a while as we read Hebrew aloud for Blossom Kramer, our young, pretty teacher. Suddenly, to my immense discomfort,

he approached me and patted my head.

"Very good, Harvey. When you grow up are you going to be a great man like your Uncle Moshe and go to live in Israel?"

Unlike my earlier encounter with adult authority, I was doubly stunned into silence. I had no intention to go to live in Israel, an idea less rejected than wholly inconceivable. What bewildered me more was that I couldn't imagine to whom he was referring. I had no "Uncle Moshe." I repeated the incident to my parents, but it didn't seem to make any impact. Yet for me, during my three years of studying after school at Beth Shraga Institute, no memory is nearly as intense as that puzzling encounter with Rabbi Hyman Barras.

As I write, to my left I am staring at an artifact. It is a frayed photo, one of the very few I have in which Joseph Chertok, my father's father, appears. In the back row stand my Uncle Leo, my Aunt Bess, my father and mother, and my grandfather. In front of them sit my cousin Kenny (about 15), my mother's mother, and a man who wore what looks to be almost a mustache more substantial than the despised Dewey. More like Charlie Chaplin's. Seated in the very front are my seven-year-old sister Stephanie and myself, about ten. We had all come for a rare visit to the house of Grandfather Joseph, where he lived with his third wife on Foster Avenue in Brooklyn, for a family gathering with his nephew Moshe, who to me mysteriously spelled his name oddly as "Shertok."

I remember nothing more about that day except making myself obnoxious on the ride home with endless inquiries about Moshe Shertok, a public figure: as Foreign Minister of the State of Israel, he had come to address the

United Nations. But who *was* he, I persisted, at last settling for him being the son of my grandfather's brother. Therefore, I painfully ascertained, like Kenny and me, he and my father were first cousins. Therefore he was really not my uncle but my . . . uh . . . second cousin. Such was the formulation that fully satisfied the curiosity of that ten-year-old. As for the State of Israel, it simply did not signify, not yet.

Many, many years have passed. Of those in the photo, only my sister and I remain alive. I have, of course, not achieved anything on the scale of Moshe Sharett. On the other hand, given the upbringing of that Bronx ten-year-old, is it not just short of miraculous that I have now lived in Israel for twenty-two years, that two of my four children were born here as have all five of my grandchildren? With all of Israel's shortcomings, we do not feel short-changed.

Fairly impulsively, our Zionism still half-baked, my wife and I departed from America in the midst of its bicentennial festivities. Always a reluctant patriot, on this fiftieth anniversary of the birth of the Jewish State I nevertheless expect to fly the flag and make a helluva lot of noise. In spite of the fact that most of my children and grandchildren attend school or kindergarten six days a week, all will be cheering as well for their land and their people.

Rabbi Barass, it has taken me a long time, but I hope you'll accept this late answer, homework from my home in the Negev. And after fifty years of statehood, in spite of enormous achievements, the chief crop of Israel remains hope — *tikva*. □

"It is not easy to forget the past. But let us try to overcome the bad memories and the obstacles in order to light a new, unique, historic horizon — an opportunity which may never come again — for a different life, a life without fear, a life without hatred, a life without the frightened eyes of children, a life without pain, a life in which we shall build a house, plant a vineyard and live to a ripe old age, side by side as neighbors. We all hope that we shall wake up tomorrow morning to a new day, a new future and new opportunity for our children.

"For them, we had to fight. For them, we have to achieve peace."

— The Late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin

Are the *Haredim* Jews?

By Saadia Gelb

A population is defined by the bell-shaped curve. The bulge which can contain from 65% to 90% — an arbitrary decision — is the delineating factor. In any case, the extremes on both sides are not considered within the designation.

A Jew is considered to be one who is of Jewish descent and identifies herself (himself) with the Jews as an entity, as well as with the aspirations of a Jewish future.

Jews are divided into Conservative, Orthodox, Reform, and Reconstructionist in practice, as well as those who are religiously unaffiliated.

Historically, there have been sects who opted out of the consensus prevalent at the time. The Karaites and the Samaritans are well-known examples of fringe groups. Tolerant Jewry maintained good relations with the fringes albeit there was no doubt about who is who.

What about the *Haredim*?

Are they Jews?

At best they are between 5% to 6% of world Jewry. Their distinctive dress stems from an imitation of 16th and 17th century Slavic (Polish) nobility. Their skullcaps are copies of those worn by the Roman Catholic clergy. They live in segregated residences and follow authoritarian clerical dynasties. Their educational methods and their ways of imposing discipline include excommunication from the community. Their very name — *Haredim* — means fearful and denotes huddling. The life style is a combination of extreme stricture of Talmudic commandments accompanied by superstitions, curses, evil eyes, belief in the heaven and hell after death. The largest concentration of *haredim* is in Israel where they have achieved substantial political clout. Their greatest achievement is the fable that they are the "real" Jews and all the rest of us are innocents who have not seen the light.

That achievement came about by the strange Israeli political structure created by the even division of the voters. The *Haredim* were able by extremely clever manipulation to achieve a status as the holder of the balance of power in the Knesset, and thus squeeze vast sums of money from the national treasury. They were able to intimidate the Orthodox, who in turn dominated the official government Rabbinate, to impose restrictive religious practices. That domino effect escalated with the years.

But are the *Haredim* Jews?

They are anti-Zionists although their leaders were saved from Nazi Europe by the Zionists. They don't identify with the vast majority of Jews in their life style, in their strivings. They are a closed sect with all the attributes of a cult. Aren't they closer to the Karaites than to mainstream Jews?

That is the difficult question for Israel to decide. The problem surfaced as the aggressive minority declared its intention to dominate the majority.

Were it not such a sad phenomenon, it would be most interesting to observe. □



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Before It Is Too Late . . .

By Dr. Gustave Pearlman

Although much has been written about the Holocaust, it is only a miniscule fraction of the personal stories which are still untold. Many survivors of the Shoah have passed away without revealing what happened to them. Some have a strong sense of unworthiness expressed as "why did I survive when so many good people perished?" Others wished to blend into society, not to call attention to themselves they never even told their children about their past. But some have told their relatives and friends of experiences never before documented. It is urgent that we commit to writing as many of these as possible before it is too late.

As a young child in the 1920s, I remember accompanying my father to the Post Office, where he mailed a large burlap bag full of old and not so old clothing to cousins named "Perla" in Lodz Province. Sometimes, instead of the package a money order was sent to the same address. Two months later a letter would arrive on thin onion skin paper in a strange brown envelope with exotic stamps. Then there would be another trip to the Post Office, followed by the answering letter two months later. Just before Rosh Hashana 1939 a money order was sent, but no acknowledgement was received. Early in 1940, my father sent another letter to the Perlman of Payoinitz, as their small village near Lodz was known, but no answer was received. "*An Umglück hat zay getruften*" my father said. A misfortune happened to them.

German forces entered the city of Payanice Sept. 8, 1939, and immediately introduced a series of repressive acts against the Jewish population. On Rosh Hashana the synagogue was destroyed and the building converted into a stable. On Yom Kippur intensive kidnapping was carried out in the streets and in the clandestine places of worship. In November many Jews were evicted from their homes to make room for German and Polish Nazis. In Feb. 1940, 8000 Jews were crowded into a ghetto in the old district of town. They could still work at their trades and attempt to earn a living. But in 1942 they were sent to the Lodz ghetto. Those Jews in the "B" category, probably including my vanished cousins, were sent to the Chelmno Concentration Camp, where they all perished.

Sosnowitz was a bustling town in South Poland. The family of our dear friend Yakov — olav hashalom — lived prosperous and fulfilling lives. Parents and children were observant; Shabbat offered opportunities for social as well as religious interaction. Yakov was a young Yeshiva student. His father and uncles reviewed with him the passages of Talmud he had studied during the preceding week.

On Sept. 9, 1939 the German Blitzkrieg army entered Sosnowitz, burned the Great Synagogue and set up a ghetto. In 1942 and 1943 the Jews were deported to Auschwitz. There, the entire family except for Yakov were murdered.

Yakov was overwhelmed with great sorrow, embarrassment and guilt feelings as he told me how he had escaped. When the Jewish prisoners were lined up for the selection process, the German commander had shouted "Any bricklayers here?" Yakov's friend, standing next to him had shouted him out and they both raised their hands.

They were sent to the right. "We'll watch how the others do it" they thought. The work was grueling but they survived.

After the war, Yakov was married in a displaced persons camp. Relatives of his wife sponsored them to Syracuse NY where he worked in their scrap metal business. But he had always dreamed of making Aliyah to Israel and they did. Yakov worked there as a foreman for Koor Industries where his knowledge of scrap metal technology was invaluable. He was a life member of ZOA and Friends of Na'amat.

Many sagas like that of Madeline Albright and that of the French Cardinal have been reported, i.e. children of Jewish origin in order to avoid the Holocaust committing to their adopted religion—Christianity. But not all did so.

Sophia (she did not want me to use her real name) always thought she was Catholic. Her parents, with their two children, regularly attended Mass. Their name sounded Slavic, but Sophia noticed something peculiar. They all

ways left church before Communion. When she became an adult, inquiries led to her receiving a Yiddish letter from Czechoslovakia. She asked me to translate it.

The writer was an uncle who revealed that her parents had been Jewish. They had successfully posed as Catholic to protect themselves from Nazi roundups. This masquerade was very difficult to maintain and there were some close calls. After the war, when they came to America, the fear of being captured and being forced to reveal that they were Jewish, strongly persisted. "If it happened there, it can happen here too" Sophia's father felt. They continued to deny that they were Jewish.

When confronted with the letter the father rejected it. But her mother, in a private conversation with Sophia confirmed its contents. She prevailed upon Sophia not to discuss it with them anymore.

Sophia consulted our Rabbi, who told her since her parents were Jewish when she was born, halachically she was still Jewish and did not need to convert.

"But, until now, I did not live my life as a Jewish person," Sophia replied. She insisted on conversion and after two years study with the Rabbi, she pronounced the prescribed Blessings at the Mikva, and now considers herself fully Jewish. Her parents and sister are still Catholic.

The following story was told to us by C.G., as we were driving her from Syracuse to Oswego NY to visit the grave of her husband. He had died 43 years previously.

They and their 5-year-old son, were part of the 982 refugees rescued from Yugoslavia by the U.S. government, via Italy and shipped to a "temporary haven" on the shores of Lake Ontario in the U.S.A.* She volunteered to tell us how she got to Italy from Yugoslavia.

I lived in a small town composed of Bosnians, Moslems and some Jews. From childhood I was friendly with a Moslem girl. We grew up together and remained friends. When the Nazis began to round-up and deport Jewish men, I resolved to escape. I asked my friend to loan me and my son, some Moslem clothes. I asked her to take a few photos of me and my son dressed in these clothes in front of the Mosque. Someone also photographed myself and my friend, together.

I kept these pictures with me always. After a while I became suspicious that sooner or later someone would betray me to the Nazis. I left the town and wandered north with my son. The roads were choked with refugees from bombed-out areas and it was not unusual for people like me and my small son to mingle with these crowds. Peasants from the areas we traversed spared us bits of food so we could survive. I had returned the Moslem clothes to my friend — it would arouse too much suspicion to dress that way.

I heard that there was a border up north between Yugoslavia and Italy. That was where most of the wanderers were headed. At the border we were questioned by guards.

I showed them the pictures and said we were Moslems going to our family in Libya. Suddenly he turned to my son and yelled "What is your name?" The little boy was frightened but knew that he dare not say "Moshe Yossel." I recovered and shouted angrily at the guard. "Why are you screaming at my boy? You've scared him. Tell the man your name, Mohammed." And Moshe Yossel said "Mohammed."

We were passed through and by a stroke of luck were among the 982 chosen to sail to America, where we were interned in former Army barracks in Oswego, NY.* The winters were very cold. My poor husband caught pneumonia. They didn't have penicillin, so he died. C.G. never told us how she met up with her husband in Italy before they embarked.

Some survivors of the Holocaust found their husbands and wives in the displaced persons camps which were set up in Europe after the war. Others started life anew with new partners, burying the hidden secrets of their past in their subconsciousness. Some children who had been left in convents were discovered and returned to their parents and to Judaism. Others remained committed to the cultures of those who had hidden them. Every single story of the Holocaust deserves to be revealed so that humankind will never again plunge to such depths. □

* For the full story of Oswego see Ruth Gruber's "HAVEN" Coward-McCann Inc. 1983.

Mordechai Strigler

Editor of *Yiddisher Kemfer* and *Yiddish Forward*, Dies at 76

The editor of the *Yiddish Forward* and former editor of the *Yiddisher Kemfer*, Mordechai Strigler, whose burgeoning career as a writer was ruptured by the Second World War and who began writing furiously when he emerged from Hitler's death camps and didn't stop for more than 50 years, died May 10th at the age of 76, leaving a monumental *oeuvre* of journalism and belles-lettres in Yiddish and Hebrew.

Strigler succumbed at the intensive-care unit of Roosevelt Hospital in New York, three weeks after a fall at his home from which he regained consciousness only fleetingly. His death came 11 days before he was to be awarded an honorary doctorate by the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, which decided to make the award posthumously at graduation ceremonies scheduled for Thursday afternoon.

The death of Strigler marks not only a sad transition for his colleagues on the Yiddish, Russian and English editions of the *Forward* but also a milestone in the arc of Yiddish-language journalism and the literature of the Holocaust. Strigler had spent the 53 years since his liberation from the Nazi death camps as a man obsessed, turning out tens of thousands of newspaper dispatches in Yiddish and Hebrew. He produced an *oeuvre* of biblical commentary, analysis of rabbinic responsa, fiction and poetry so voluminous that it is measured not in volumes but in "cycles," to use the word with which it is described by the Encyclopedia Judaica. He accomplished much of this while editing not only the *Yiddish Forward* but also the Labor-Zionist journal known as the *Yiddisher Kemfer*. His frenzy of writing took place in the context of his own inner journey from

his religious upbringing to disillusion with God to a renewed interest in spiritual matters.

"He was a small and quiet man," the general manager of the Forward Association Inc., Samuel Norich, said at his funeral Tuesday. "But when he spoke, whether face to face or before an audience, you saw immediately the sources of his literary and polemic power, his knowledge and his memory. He knew what an *iluy* [talmudic genius] knows, and could summon sources and quotations as if he had studied them an hour before."

Strigler was born in 1921 at Zamosc, Poland, and, according to a biographical sketch prepared by his daughter, Leah, was sent at age 11 to a *mitnagid* yeshiva. He was graduated in 1937 and began to work as a rabbi and teacher at Warsaw. When the Germans occupied Poland in 1939, Strigler tried to escape to Russia, only to be caught at the border. He was for a few months in the Zamosc ghetto with his parents. He spent five years at several concentration camps, including Maidanek and Skarzhiszko. In Buchenwald, he was a member of the resistance and served as a covert teacher for the children incarcerated there. He was liberated on April 11, 1945. Meyer Levin met Strigler during the liberation of Buchenwald and wrote about him in "In Search."

It is said that the young survivor, having lost all his pre-war literary output during the war, set about writing with a fury that never abated until the accident that left him unconscious three weeks ago. The Encyclopedia Judaica called him "one of the most articulate and prolific young Yiddish writers to survive the Holocaust," of which he chronicled the

slave-labor camps and death factories in a six-volume cycle in Yiddish called "Oysgebrente Likht," which means "Extinguished Candles." The cycle comprises two books brought out in 1948, "Maidanek" and "In the Factories of Death," two volumes called "Factory 'Three'" brought out in 1950, and two more called "Destinies," published in 1952. All are autobiographical works written in a poetic style. Strigler had also published in the postwar years a volume called "In a Strange Generation: Songs and Poems" and a novella, "The First Love of Kopl Match."

In 1955, Strigler brought out two volumes called "Arm in Arm with the Wind," a historical novel about Jewish life in Poland in the 17th and 18th centuries. He went on to publish a volume of novellas called "Islands of the Earth" and of essays called "Dialogues with the Time." A bibliography compiled by his daughter includes a selective list of books published in serial form, including "A Yeshiva Comes to the Shtetl," which was serialized in *HaDoar*; "On the Tanakh According to the Sages of the Talmud," which was serialized in *Moznayim*, the monthly journal of the Hebrew writers in Israel; a novel called "Conspirators," and a novella called "Deep in Us Hides the Prophet," which was serialized in the *Kemfer*.

Strigler's newspaper career, which began at Warsaw just before the war, flourished at Paris, to which he had accompanied a group of child survivors after the war. He found work there as the editor of *Unser Vort* ("Our Word"), a Yiddish daily. He toured Europe, the Americas and Israel, and became active, with the founding of the state of Israel, in the Labor Zionist movement. The editorship of the *Kemfer* was offered to him when he was in New York for a lecture tour, and he remained at the publication until 1995. While there, he published such great Yiddish writers as Abraham Reizen, H. Leivik, Chaim Grade and Jacob Glatstein. He became editor of the *Yiddish Forward* in 1987, following the retirement of Simon Weber, and he remained at the helm until he was hospitalized last month.

The editor's journalistic output was immeasurable, including tens of thousands of dispatches, editorials, reviews, rabbinic responsa, commentaries and *feuilleton*. The double editorship — of the *Yiddish Forward* and the *Kemfer* — was one of the more remarkable

feats in American journalism. "It is as if one man," wrote David Remnick in *The New Yorker*, "were running (and largely writing) both the Times and the New York Review of Books." And his interests were extremely broad, ranging from Talmud to Israeli politics to New York City politics to philosophy to family. Mr. Norich recalled at the funeral how he had once inquired of Strigler why the editor had insisted on running on the front page of the Yiddish paper an article about Indonesia. Strigler explained that the fact that Indonesia was the largest Muslim country with a rapidly expanding high-tech trade with the Jewish state required informed Jews to take notice.

Not long after publication of the *Forward* began in English, suggestions began to surface that the new paper carry as a special feature each week several columns in the Yiddish language. The editor of the English-language paper, Seth Lipsky, has often told what happened when the suggestion was put as a formal proposition to the board of the Forward Association. The board turned to Mr. Lipsky and asked him for his reaction. He recalls saying he had no objection in principle and was concerned largely with the practical questions of how the typesetting and production would get done. When Strigler was asked for his opinion, however, he said he would recommend against it. He declined to offer an explanation. So Mr. Lipsky told the board that perhaps Mr. Strigler didn't want Yiddish to be reduced to an entertainment item in the English paper like, say, a crossword puzzle. Everyone looked across at Strigler, who said, "Exactly!"

Early in Strigler's stay in America, he began, at the suggestion of a friend, corresponding with a young woman in Israel named Esther Bonni. Their letters ranged from what was happening in Israel to university affairs to organic chemistry, which Miss Bonni was studying. When they finally met in Jerusalem, a romance began. Strigler visited Miss Bonni in England, where she was working on her doctorate. They were married at New York in 1967 by the Bluzhiv Rebbe, who had lost his family in the war but whose stepsons had been saved by Strigler at Buchenwald. Their daughter, Leah, now assistant director of the education department of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, spoke of her father's extraordinary abilities as a mentor and teach-

er. He was, she said, "my walking concordance and Jewish encyclopedia." Yet, she said, he would always insist, when presented by her with a question on Bible or Talmud, of going back and checking his references, even though he knew them by heart.

In 1978, Strigler was awarded the Itzik Manger Prize in Jewish Literature, one of the most distinguished prizes in the field. The prize was presented to Strigler by President Katzir. It was a source of great pride to the writer, whose most enduring attachment, Mrs. Strigler said this week, was to Israel and to the unity of the Jewish people.

Strigler's editorship at the *Yiddish Forward* coincided with some of the most trying years at the paper, and he had talked in recent years of wanting to retire. He wanted to write another book and settle in Israel, with which he kept in touch by reading a raft of Israeli newspapers each day. As more and more of the work of putting out the paper fell to him, his retirement was put off while the Forward Association searched for an editor who could eventually replace him.

Strigler had been a writer for the *Forward* in its last three decades and its editor in its 10th decade. He sustained its voice into the beginning of its second century. "He will not have been the last editor of the *Yiddish Forward*, as he had feared," Mr. Norich said. "But none that follow him will know the world he knew, none will evoke it as he could and did, helping us understand our days as he did." ☐

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In Tune with *Sinatra*

by Nahum Guttman

Judge Samuel S. Liebowitz welcomed me into this chamber at the Kings County Court House in Brooklyn in his usual friendly manner. We had met frequently at functions of the Israel Histadrut Campaign, to which he rendered invaluable service as a speaker and as head of the Landsmanschaften Division in New York.

"What can I do for you, Nahum?" he asked as I sat in front of his magisterial desk.

"Get me Sinatra."

The judge picked up his phone and in a few minutes had Frankie on the line. He told Ol' Blue Eyes that he would like him to host a documentary film about Israel and that Nahum Guttman would send him the script shortly.

Such was my first contact with the man who was to become a legend in the pop world. My responsibilities in those days — the early 1950s — included preparation of Histadrut documentaries for use in our fund-raising efforts on behalf of its institutions in Israel. Each film was to have a celebrity as host. We began with Eddie Cantor, and eventually the roster included such as Edward G. Robinson, Melvyn Douglas, Shelley Winters, and finally, Eleanor Roosevelt.

Needless to say, I rushed to Sinatra the script for his intro, and we got back his recorded message on film. He was dressed in cowboy regalia, as he was then making one of his lesser films, *Johnny Concho*.

After an interlude overseas with the U.S. army during World War II, in March 1946 I was back at the Labor Zionist HQ in Manhattan. Somehow, in a chat with Hayim Greenberg, then editor of the *Jewish Frontier*, he asked me about the goings on in Times Square. The hordes of bobby-soxers at the Paramount Theatre.

"Who is this Sinatra?"

At that point in time I knew less about popular music than the Labor Zionist guru, and I couldn't help him much and gave little thought to the phenomenon that sent so many females of all ages into a frenzy. But all that was to change in 1962.

We got word that Sinatra was to embark on a world tour, to raise funds for youth centers in a number of countries. His appearances in Israel were to be under the auspices of Histadrut, the labor federation, and proceeds of his concerts were to help build an international youth center — for Jewish and Arab kids — in Nazareth. So it was that in May 1962 I was dispatched to Israel to see to it that some filmed account of the venture was made.

At the Sheraton Hotel in Tel Aviv, Sinatra received me in his room and as we chatted he poured me a Jack Daniels. The discourse led to the subject of minorities; Frankie was known to be totally free of racial discrimination. But when he asserted that there was no such thing as an absolute majority, I challenged him. When asked to give an example, I said: "There are more women than men in the United States." After a moment's reflection came his response: "Touché!"

Then his concert tour started in earnest. Two appearances in Tel Aviv, one each in Jerusalem, Haifa, Ein Gev (the kibbutz on the shore of Lake Kinneret, home of Teddy Kollek), Beersheba and in an army camp. In Tel Aviv, the curtain raiser was the renowned Zadikoff Choir, a chorus of a hundred boys and girls. When I asked Frankie about the quality of their singing, he gave them a high mark.

Besides singing, the honored guest took in some sights and met with Israeli dignitaries. While at Ein Gev, he visited nearby De-

gania, Israel's first kibbutz, where a disabled Syrian tank was on exhibition. The fearsome weapon (by standards of those days) had been blocked by the valiant kibbutz defenders. Since Degania is in close proximity to Afikim, where my brother lived, I contacted the family there. Surprisingly, my Chicago-born sister-in-law, and her sabra daughter, showed the same ecstasy about Sinatra as did the bobby-soxers in Times Square. I promised to try to get an autograph from their idol. Frank obliged, and I hope that Nehama now in Maoz Hayim still has that precious document.

In Jerusalem, the plan was to call on Israel's president Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. I went ahead and was welcomed in by the First Lady, Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi, who knew me from years back (she was my mother's guest at our home in Minneapolis when touring on behalf of Pioneer Women). President Ben-Zvi (with whom I had shared a hotel room in 1948) then asked me about Sinatra — was he a serious person? I responded that in the matter of helping youth, he was.

The tall, scholarly head of state, whose main interest was the Oriental Jewish communities, then spent a half hour with the American popular singer.

Aside from singing, Sinatra spent much time getting to know the country and its people. He met with the top labor leaders, including Aharon Becker, secretary-general of Histadrut, to whom he said, "I think I must be the highest union dues payer in the world, as I belong to eight unions."

Nazareth declared a "Sinatra Day" when the guest was received by Mayor Seifadin Zu'abi'at a formal luncheon. Then came the laying of the cornerstone for the Sinatra Youth Center. Among the attendees was Abba Eban, then Minister of Education. (Several years later, as I visited the institution, it was no longer a youth center. For various reasons, it was being used as a vocational center for Arab women; there was a sewing class in session.)

Sinatra also visited an Amal vocational school, was received by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and saw the as-yet incomplete Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, where he donned a yarmulke as a memorial prayer was chanted. After a helicopter flight out of Jerusalem to the Histadrut forest at Neve Ilan, he lost no time in scooping out a hole in which to plant a sap-

ling in honor of his daughter, Tina.

The last stop was Beersheba. As everywhere else, there was a full house. Yet, the proceeds were modest, as the citizens of the capital of the Negev were mostly new immigrants with modest means.

After the concert, Sinatra was to fly to the Lod airport, to board his private plane. He had flown to Israel in his own plane, with his entire entourage from Greece but was not allowed, for security reasons, to use it in the country. The Israel air force provided transportation inland, as Sinatra refused to go by car.

So, there were only two passengers in the plane from Beersheba to Lod — Sinatra and myself. The seating was simple, a bench on either side of the craft. He sat on one, I on the other. After a few minutes aloft, he came over to me and asked what was the matter. It seems that I had a dour look on my face.

"We didn't raise enough money for the youth center," I revealed. He had promised \$100,000, and that sum was not yet in sight.

"If we have a fund-raiser in New York, would you come?"

The answer was a firm yes . . .

Back in the States, there is unfinished business — the film. Sinatra had brought his own cameramen and other technicians. Nelson Riddle was in charge of music. Someone had to be in charge of editing the material and composing the script. There goes Nahum.

In Hollywood, the Sinatra crew, ensconced in MGM facilities, cuts the raw material down, from skillions of yards of negative they select about two reels worth. They include some of the songs, recorded live in Israel. However, there was one missing, a tune that especially caught my non-musical ear. For it had a phrase about the River Jordan. A film with Sinatra in Israel and no musical reference to the site was unthinkable. But I couldn't remember the title of that song. Fortunately, while strolling along Hollywood Boulevard, the Voice came out of an open door, from a music store. And there was the river Jordan. I ascertained the title and hastened to my colleagues in the editing room, to make sure it was included, and it was.

While traversing the courtyard in the vast studio complex, I saw Loretta Young walking by, with a confused expression on her pretty face. As we neared each other, she pointed to her head and said something in Yiddish which

translates into buttocks. She then apologized for the vulgar Yiddishism and went on her way, hopefully in the right direction. So it seems that Yiddish is still alive and functioning in Hollywood, even if on the level of such terms as *Chutzpah* and *Shlemiel*.

Back to the film: I did draft the narration which went off to Lake Tahoe, where Sinatra was whiling his time, and the finished two-reeler did him and us proud.

A year passes. It is 1963. The 40th anniversary of the National Committee for Labor Israel. The committee in New York discusses plans for a major celebration. Sidor Belarsky comes up with an idea — Madison Square Garden! But who is to do it? The ball is passed to Nahum Guttman. He accepts on two conditions: that Sinatra be on the program, and that Golda Meir attend, since she was in the country anyway.

Sinatra gives the date: October 14, 1963.

Golda accepts.

Himan Brown, who had staged annual shows at the Garden for Israel Bonds, agrees to produce. We start to line up talent. Millard Lampell, of *Eternal Light* fame, writes the script, "Act of Faith". Among those to appear are Pearl Lang and her dance troupe, Leslie Uggams,

Joseph Buloff, Sidor Belarsky, and others.

Things seem to go smoothly, when a bomb-shell strikes. Golda refuses to come! Headlines blare that Sinatra has links to the Mafia, and Israel's Foreign Minister could not share the spotlight with an associate of the underworld.

After much haggling, reassuring Golda that Frank was kosher, she relented and agreed to drop in, say a few words and take off that night for an important meeting in Israel. In any event, she came, she spoke, and stayed the entire evening.

On the afternoon of October 14th, Hi Brown was stomping around the Garden, upset that Sinatra had not arrived for a rehearsal. I assured him that Frank would be there at the appointed hour. Lo and behold, so it was: Frank showed up on time, and I ushered him into the room where Hi was waiting on pins and needles.

Soon, Brown emerged, with smiles: "He's great!" Sinatra had studied his lines beforehand and delivered them with aplomb.

We had a great time that night. The 16,000 persons in the Garden were the largest crowd ever to attend a Labor Zionist function in America, even if half of them were Italians from Hoboken.

Thanks, Frankie, for being such a good sport and a great humanitarian. □

Sinatra Scorns Arab League Boycott

Upon hearing that the Arab League headquarters in Damascus had issued a proclamation boycotting his films and records, Frank Sinatra stated: "If it is true, I am deeply disappointed that statesmen anywhere would condemn anyone for aiding children of whatever faith or origin. In Israel, my recent visit there was to raise money for an inter-faith Youth Center in Nazareth — a primarily Arab center where the recipients will be primarily Arab children. My world tour which included Israel was dedicated to benefiting children of all faiths. I had hoped that adults everywhere had one thing in common — a love of all children."

The National Committee for Labor Israel, which sponsored Sinatra's eight concerts in Israel, confirmed that his trip to the Holy Land was entirely devoted to the promotion of a non-sectarian, humanitarian project in conjunction with Histadrut, the Israel labor federation, which counts thousands of Arab workers among its members.

Israel at Fifty

Y
ou were born of a prayer of centuries
you were the dream
and dreamers made you
built you
brought you into being
when the realists said no
Our eyes turn to you
with hope
and worry
Are you all you meant to be?
No
But you are here
you live
So does the prayer and dream
— John Oliver Mason

Chaim Arlosoroff

65 Years After His Assassination

By David Rosenthal

It was a sunny Sunday morning, the 18th of June, 1933, when the newspapers in Poland brought us the news of the tragic death of Chaim Arlosoroff on a sand dune near the beach at Tel Aviv. This report shocked the Jewish population, which was still under the impact of Arlosoroff's recent visit to several Polish cities. His meetings with Jewish youth had raised such bright hopes and led to such extensive plans. Now grief, bewilderment, and suspicion were commingling in the public mind.

In this murky atmosphere, the predominant opinion was that the shot which had put an end to Arlosoroff's young life had also been aimed at the finest Jewish and Zionist-chalutz dreams. The storm of controversy which burst out over the question of whether or not this was an act of fratricide and whether this particular Cain could be found in the ranks of his own people — a controversy which has not been resolved to this day — overshadowed any perception of Chaim Arlosoroff's personality in all its moral and ideological magnitude.

The bitter dispute also resulted in a situation where, to this day, whenever the name of Chaim Arlosoroff comes up, it evokes an association primarily with the mystery shrouding his death.

Chaim Victor Arlosoroff (1899–1933) was blessed with many talents. He was the type of leader who had the capacity of thinking in intellectual terms while at the same time acting in practical ones. Fused within him were the visionary imagination of the poet and the pragmatism of the political activist. It was therefore quite natural that at the time he took his first steps in public life, a book of his should appear with the title of "Spring Secrets" — a selection of his lyrical and subjective poems, as well as some of a national character.

These poems testify to Arlosoroff's deepest thoughts and to his creative vision, qualities which are very clearly reflected in his ballad about the "Jew-hunts" that took place during the Roman carnivals in the Coliseum:

"Twelve Jews, old and young, / pursued by riders. . . . Now we see the clouds of dust / Now we hear their groaning. Like beasts enraged, with mocking laughter / the Roman gentlemen make sport. Suddenly — something's happened — see: One of them has fallen to his knees! Listen: A frightened and bewildered shout / arises from the Romans. Before the Jews runs Jesus, persecuted and pursued like them!"

Already in his early youth, Chaim Arlosoroff had a premonition of the tragedy that lay in wait for him. He wrote: "Suddenly on a summer night — my heart — it beats no more. Forever stilled. Mercilessly they put an end to me, cut short my dialogue with the world."

This premonition, however, did not stifle his faith in the ultimate victory of his ideas, which stood higher than the physical passing of the man. "You know, when flowers fade / there is a scent of non-existence. / Higher, though, than Time's own mountains, / fly the products of the human spirit."

(The foregoing excerpts are from the book published by *Am Oved* on the 25th anniversary of Arlosoroff's death. "Spring Secrets" was published when he was 18.)

Arlosoroff spent his student years at the University of Berlin, where he received his doctorate in economics. However, this was not a period in which he devoted himself completely to his studies. Even then he was involved heart and soul in Jewish communal life. He was one of the most skillful organizers and ideologists of the German Hechalutz and Ha-poel Hatzair. As editor of the party organ, *Di*

Arbet, he had a marked ideological influence on both movements.

The class ideology of Marxian Socialism was foreign to Arlosoroff. Influenced — as were many leaders of Hechalutz and Tz'ire-Zion — by Gustav Landauer, he brought to the Jewish scene the concepts of Folk (People's) Socialism, whose slogan was not the dictatorship of the proletariat but a social order which would harmonize with the interests of the broadest masses of the people — workers, peasants, all who are involved in both the physical and cultural productive processes of society.

In theory, socialism is not a class matter, but an idea with which anyone who has a social conscience must associate himself. Folk Socialism did not stress economic motivation as the most important factor in the development of the social order. One could come to socialism from any ethical and religious starting point. Those who accept the idea are also influenced by reasons which have their root in the ethical nature of man.

As regards Eretz Israel, Hapoel Hatzair did not base its Zionism upon a scientific foundation, as Poale Zion did upon the theories developed by Ber Borochov. Hapoel Hatzair rejected that view according to which the industrial proletariat would be the vanguard in the struggle of the Jewish people for its national liberation. It questioned the teaching that Zionism would be realized as a result of purely objective developments.

Eretz Israel — Hapoel Hatzair taught — would be built by people ready to devote their total resolve and energy to the idea. Instead of operating with slogans about “the stychic processes” which would bring Jews to Eretz Israel, or with the “laws” of proletarian class struggle, or with slogans about strengthening “the aggressive capability and spirit of the labor movement,” Hapoel Hatzair — under the influence of Chaim Arlosoroff and Eliezer Kaplan — put forward the idea of devoting greater attention and deeper understanding to the problems of constructive deeds, of morale and education, which would bring us closer to the fulfillment of Zionism and Socialism. With this Zionist-Socialist concept, Chaim Arlosoroff began his campaign to win the hearts and minds of the Jewish masses and particularly Jewish youth.

Yosef Sprinzak was the first Zionist labor leader to be elected to the Executive of the World Zionist movement. This occurred at the 12th Congress in Carlsbad in 1921. Eight years later, after an interim in which Executives were elected without the participation of Labor, there were elected at the 16th Congress in Zurich (1929) two members of the Labor wing, S. Kaplanski and Y. Sprinzak. One can say definitely, however, that in this period Chaim Arlosoroff was already beginning to surface as the central figure in Labor Zionism.

At the 13th Congress in Carlsbad (1923), he amazed the delegates with his thoroughgoing analysis of the problems of Eretz Israel's economy and with his well-conceived proposal to create massive funds for the upbuilding of the Land. “Zionism,” warned the 24-year-old Arlosoroff, “will vanish if we persist in our old methods.” A few years later we see him leading the struggle against the “Socher regime” which was hostile to the popular character of Zionism and to the strivings and activities of the Chaltutz movement.

Chaim Arlosoroff was elected, together with Berl Locker, to the Zionist Executive at the 17th Congress in Basel (1931). The great respect he enjoyed can be seen in the comments made by Chaim Weizmann in his memoirs:

“Chaim Arlosoroff . . . was a man of brilliant mind, and was particularly fitted to present our philosophy of Zionism to the younger generation. He did it with great zest and power and with indefatigable energy. It was a privilege to watch him at work. He became later the political officer of the Executive — this was in the time of the Wauchope administration — but already at the Congresses and Conferences of 1922 and on, he was one of the leading spirits. He was merciless in his attacks on the extremist group, which later crystallized into the Revisionist faction.

“Arlosoroff had received an excellent education, and his Jewish background was solid. He was one of the few who knew the East and the West equally well, and was therefore most suitable for the office which he filled. He was fundamentally good-natured, but did not suffer fools gladly, and was severe in his attacks on his opponents. But he took as well as gave . . .” (Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error*)

As Eliyahu Elat relates, Chaim Arlosoroff took over the political department with “a meager inheritance of ideological content and with very limited personnel.” His predecessors were Dr. D. Eder, a British psychoanalyst, and Frederick Kisch. Both were lacking in Jewish knowledge and in an understanding of Eastern European life. Dr. Eder was far removed from political Zionism and he often

expressed contradictory ideological opinions. Thus, for instance, he insisted that Tel Aviv should not become a symbol of Jewish exclusivity and that Jews in Eretz Israel should give up their European cultural identity and integrate themselves in the cultural-political world of the Near East.

Colonel Kisch had the virtue of being able to establish contacts easily with the assimilated Jews, because he did not bear the stamp of an Eastern European Jew, and because they had great respect for his high office in the British military hierarchy.

Arlosoroff was first to introduce Jewish and Zionist content into the Political Department, the most important section in the entire structure of the world Zionist movement. With extremely limited financial resources — the Department in the time of Kisch operated with a budget of 13,000 Palestine pounds annually and under Arlosoroff the budget was reduced to 3500 pounds — he not only drew into the work highly talented individuals like Moshe Shertok, but also broadened the scope of all spheres of activity under his aegis.

A painful controversy divided the Jewish people during the time of Chaim Arlosoroff's term on the world Zionist Executive. It related to the question whether Jewish representatives — more concretely, whether the world Zionist movement — should establish contacts with Nazi Germany for the purpose of getting Jews and Jewish property out of the country. The official Zionist response was: Yes, because there were no chances of a quick end to Hitlerism, and the very physical existence of a half million Jews was at stake. Chaim Arlosoroff was one of the major proponents and implementers of this position, which found its practical expression in the Transfer Agreement.

The opponents of the Transfer argued: Jewish national and human honor could not tolerate the slightest dealings with the Nazis. The controversy was explosive. The Jews in Palestine and the world Zionist organization were accused of breaking the anti-Nazi economic boycott, of "demoralizing" the struggle against Germany. The very usefulness of the Transfer Agreement was questioned — it could at best rescue only selected individuals along with their meager possessions. Naturally, the opposition was directed primarily against Labor,

which was in the leadership of HaVaad Ha-Leumi and the world Zionist organization, and against Chaim Arlosoroff personally, the "architect" of the agreement.

The supporters of the Transfer Agreement replied: Jewish tradition has created two principles, highly moral commandments and standards for Jewish behavior in cases where Jewish lives are being threatened: *Pikuakh Nefesh* and *Pidyon Shevuyim*. (*Pikuakh nefesh*: saving a life. The preservation of life takes precedence over all commandments. *Pidyon shevuyim*: ransom of captives, even if it means negotiating with criminals.)

The transfer was being undertaken in that spirit. In modern Jewish history there is no lack of examples of sending emissaries even to our persecutors. Did not Herzl go to St. Petersburg to negotiate with the Russian Minister Plehve? Did not Jabotinsky negotiate an agreement with Petlura's chief lieutenant Slavinski in the hope of saving the Jewish communities in the Ukraine from slaughter? Transfer was the practical meaning of Zionism. Herzl himself defined Zionism as a "transport organization."

In such an atmosphere of sharp debate pro and con, of inflamed emotions against sober and practical calculations, the negotiations concerning transfer were begun with the Heinrich Bruning government as far back as the summer of 1931. Because of the financial panic and the bank crisis in Germany, the government had set a limit of 200 marks on the amount of money that could be taken out of the country.

Chaim Arlosoroff, together with a number of leaders of the German Zionist organization, attempted to have the regulation repealed. But it was not until September 1933 that the German government gave its consent to the Transfer Agreement. From that moment until the outbreak of World War II, the *Haavara* (transfer) carried out annually 50,000 transactions. Most of the 50,000 German Jews who emigrated to Palestine utilized the Transfer Agreement, taking out with them 140 million Reichsmarks.

60% of the capital invested during that period in Eretz Israel came from these funds. All of the colonization in Emek Hefer was due to the transfer. All these accomplishments strengthened the yishuv. They helped to create on the internal front many of the advances

necessary for a successful policy in the years of struggle for the establishment of the State.

Thus history settled the argument and showed that in the new economic and political realities created by the Transfer, there was more foresight than in all the opposition which had created such a perfervid hostility toward Labor and particularly toward Chaim Arlosoroff.

When Chaim Arlosoroff took over his political office, Jewish relations with England had reached a critical point of distrust. The Passfield White Paper, the prohibition of immigration, the Simpson Report, were all clear evidence that England was reneging on her responsibilities to the Jewish National Home. Nor could this impression be overcome even by Ramsay MacDonald's letter to Chaim Weizmann in which he listed certain modifications favorable to Zionist aspirations.

This situation, and his conviction that a new war would break out in five or ten years which would put the yishuv in great peril, aroused serious doubt in Arlosoroff's mind concerning the advisability of continuing the Weizmann doctrine. During all these years he had shared Weizmann's view that the Jewish struggle lay not only in the mobility of the Executive, in its "resoluteness" and its "strong word," but that it stemmed chiefly from the colonizing and economic realities of the yishuv.

The first signs of a revision in his reasoning appeared in 1931. The idea began to mature in him that for the realization of Zionism it would be necessary to use "revolutionary means." This opinion he expressed in several letters to Chaim Weizmann.

"For the time being I see no other path except the one upon which I have been following you, but this path is nothing more than a palliative. In my opinion, it will not lead to the political solution of our problems." (June 10, 1932)

He drew this thread of thought further in a letter dated July 30, 1932. "I myself am ready at any moment to accept, for my private use, every maximalist formula, exactly as I am ready to vote *against* such a formula at the Congress. . . . It is clear that if we don't wish to set up anew in Eretz Israel the conditions of the galut, we must strive to settle the land ever more quickly with hundreds of thousands of Jews, in order to secure at least a substantial equality between both peoples in the coun-

try. Such a broad Jewish colonization requires an effort which is not much different from the effort required to establish a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan. . . . The discussion about strivings and goals therefore has not the slightest basis in reality."

Arlosoroff came to the conclusion that in the existing circumstances of the Mandate government there could be no talk of large scale immigration and mass colonization. He therefore called for a re-examination of the evolutionary path of Zionist policy, to determine if it were still possible, with the methods acceptable heretofore, to achieve the Zionist goal.

"If it is not possible, then we must conclude that the whole effort is useless and that we then do not need to maintain the evolutionary system of Zionist policy, and that we must not base on it the belief and the survival of the Zionist movement. My own leaning is toward the idea that it is no longer possible."

He was especially disturbed by the thought of what might happen to the yishuv in case of a world war, when the League of Nations and all its established government systems would no longer be able to function and would be doomed to extinction. In such a case he foresaw an open British-Arab alliance or an Arab uprising which could put an end to all the ties of the yishuv with world Jewry. This analysis led him to the following conclusions:

Zionism could not be realized without a transition period in which "the Jewish minority would maintain an organized revolutionary rule. There is no possibility of achieving a Jewish majority through aliyah and systematic colonization, or even a balance between both peoples, without an interim national minority government which would take over administration and military power, in order to prevent the danger of domination by the non-Jewish majority and an uprising against us. . . . During the transition period there would be a systematic policy of land development, aliyah, and colonization."

Arlosoroff was aware that his views were close to a certain political philosophy which Labor had for years categorically rejected, and that the whole plan might sound like a fantasy without the slightest chance of ever being realized. However, Zionism was faced

with the danger that it would not be in a position to achieve its final goal, at precisely the moment when the truth of his diagnosis would be confirmed.

In such circumstances, he said, an attempt must be made to save the hopes of the people, an attempt "which should in its zeal be equal to the gravity of our struggle for the renewal of our national life and to the sacredness of the pledge which the Jewish people has entrusted to us. We dare not forget that every turn of events in the world, or in the Middle East, every exceptional situation, can force a course of action upon us which we would in no case have chosen out of our own volition. We must reckon with this in all our political preparations, whether we like the idea or not."

These theories, which could have created the impression — as Arlosoroff himself put it — that he was "out of his mind," represent an important stage on the way to changes in the forms of Zionist struggle. The subsequent developments which led to the Biltmore Program, to accepting the theory of *Maavak*, and to the struggle for the establishment of the State, were nurtured by Arlosoroff's arguments and predictions.

In this lies the greatness of his life, the historical merit of his activities, which were in such a brutal way brought to an end in the bloom of his 34 years. Today it is clear that even after Arlosoroff's tragic death the embers of his spirit still continued to glow in the world of Zionist thought and deed. □

SIGN 'EM UP!!!

There are thousands of Jews in every community who share the Labor Zionist vision and should share in implementing our program here and in Israel.

SIGN 'EM UP as members of the Labor Zionist Alliance . . . The Time is NOW.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

(continued from page 12)

When they had all finished, Ben-Gurion declared, "The state of Israel is established. This meeting is adjourned."

After 1,878 years in exile, it had taken 32 minutes for the Jewish nation to be declared reborn.

Seven and a half hours later, when the British mandate in Palestine expired at the stroke of midnight, Israel officially came into existence. It was 6 p.m. in Washington. Eleven minutes later, the White House released a statement signed by President Harry Truman:

"This government has been informed that a Jewish state has been proclaimed in Palestine, and recognition has been requested by the provisional government thereof. The United States recognizes the provisional government as the de facto authority of the state of Israel."

Guatemala was next to offer recognition, followed by the Soviet Union, which went one better than the U.S. by granting de jure recognition.

At 5:25 a.m. the next day, May 15, 1948, the first Egyptian bombs fell on Tel Aviv. Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq joined in the attack.

The War of Independence had begun. □

(Courtesy JPNFS)

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MAZAL TOV!

from
Sid & Shula Troy

Lakewood, New Jersey

Labor Zionist Alliance of Philadelphia
mourns the passing of our longtime,
dedicated Chaver
Joseph Yenish
He Will be Missed



We Honor our Chaverim in Israel.
May Peace prevail!

•
Dena & Irving Greenberg
Southfield, Michigan

The Labor Zionist Alliance of Chicago

sends greetings to our
Chaverim everywhere . . . we
are proud of past accomplish-
ments and look forward to
a time of Peace as we salute
the State of Israel on its
50th Anniversary.



Let us rejoice in this —
**ISRAEL'S
JUBILEE YEAR**

•
May it be blessed with
peace and good cheer!

Martin & Ruby Vogelfanger
New York City



Our Group of young
alumni veterans of
HABONIM salutes the
Builders and Defenders
of a social democratic
Israel.

LZA – AHA of New York

The Messianic idea, crowning glory of Biblical prophesy,
envisioning the return of Israel to its Land and the redemption
of mankind from oppression and war, is the
challenging goal of this generation and of
generations to come.

— **ZALMAN SHAZAR**, 3rd President of Israel

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