

# War and Peace In Israel

*By A. B. Magil*

**T**ALL, gray-haired Count Bernadotte adjusted his monocle. "That's a very tricky question," he said smiling at me. "Perhaps you're trying to lay a trap for me."

The question I had asked at the press conference in Tel Aviv on June 20, 1948 was, what UN decision would form the basis for his forthcoming negotiations with Jews and Arabs at Rhodes? The Count began fumbling among his papers and finally said, "The Security Council Cease-Fire and Truce Resolution of May 14 (he meant 29) would form the basis of negotiations."

I asked, what about the UN Assembly resolution of last November 29, which forms the legal foundation of the State of Israel? "You're trying to get me into that trap," replied the Count.

This answer is typical of Bernadotte's evasiveness throughout the conference. His failure to include the November 29 decision as a basis of the Rhodes discussions strengthens suspicions that Rhodes is another name for Munich with Israel slated to play the role of Czechoslovakia. Despite this, the provisional government of Israel, Bernadotte announced, has agreed to participate in the Rhodes conference.

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The provisional government of Israel had accepted unconditionally, but with openly expressed misgivings, Count Bernadotte's British and United States-inspired plan for a four week truce. At a press conference held early in June, Moshe Shertok, foreign minister of Israel, denied knowledge of any U. S. pressure, official or unofficial, on the provisional government to accept the truce. He insisted the government had acted independently.

But the tragic shadow of Spain hovered over the conference room as Shertok explained to the press his government's reasons for accepting the UN truce and embargo order. The parallel was accentuated when Robert Capa, noted American photographer who covered the Spanish war, asked Shertok, "Do you think this non-intervention will be more effective than in Spain?"

"You are fully entitled to that sad thought," was Shertok's cryptic response.

When he was asked by this reporter whether the government considered the embargo more harmful to the Jews than to the Arabs, Shertok first gave a non-committal answer. When pressed, however, he said:

"It stands to reason that the embargo will be more harmful to the Jews. It will be easier to control little Israel than the vast territories of the Arab states. Second, we also believe we use arms far more effectively than they and denial of even a limited quantity of arms hurts us more."

Asked why Israel accepted the embargo, Shertok replied: "Because this isn't the only consideration. When a body like the Security Council takes action, even though we are under no legal obligation to abide by it, we feel we must agree."

## What Price Truce?

Shertok declared categorically, however, that the government would not accept any revision of the November 29 resolution which would result in diminishing Israel territory.

But the decision by the Israel government to accept the UN truce proposal is not popular among the people, especially the youth in the fighting forces who are in a confident

mood and regard the acceptance of the truce as a heavy blow. The overriding fact is that the government's decision to accept the Security Council's armistice plan with its onerous provision for an arms embargo is like a bucket of ashes on the flaming fighting spirit of the people of Israel.

"Main Street won't like it," said a Jewish Agency official to me even before the official announcement was made. This is especially true of the GIs. I had run into one of the chief commanders of Galilee where Israeli forces had pursued the enemy into Lebanese territory. He told me he was deeply opposed to the armistice plan.

Alarm is growing in Israel over the fact that in one week after the cease-fire order, the country suffered greater defeats than in the four weeks of war. Israel is being denied arms and men. A new White Paper—this time bearing the UN stamp—is imposing humiliating restrictions on immigration. Agents of western imperialist powers are controlling the harbors and roads. And new schemes are being hatched for hogtying military power, reducing the territory and shackling Israel's independence. And many people are beginning to smell a rat in Bernadotte's pious gestures.

## Sneh Warns

Indicative of this is an exclusive statement given to this reporter by Dr. Moshe Sneh, who was former commander-in-chief of Haganah, who was a member of the General Zionist Organization, and who resigned from his post as a member of the World Zionist Executive about a half year ago charging the Zionist leaders with a one-sided orientation to the western powers. He subsequently joined the newly-formed United Workers Party, the second largest party in the country. Because of its importance, I give the statement in full.

"Count Bernadotte's first steps revealed three bad omens which indicate the direction of the negotiations he is planning (at Rhodes):

"First, he gave the Syrian Army, which was the most unsuccessful of the Arab armies, over two days to improve their positions in Galilee. Bernadotte's excuse that he lacked observers can't be considered genuine, because at the time that the Syrians, unhindered, broke the truce, four American observers were controlling Tel Aviv harbor to make sure no immigrants came in.

"Second, the interpretation Bernadotte gave in reference to the immigration question during the truce sharply contradicts the decision of the Security Council, which spe-

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cifically rejected the British proposal to ban or limit immigration of persons of military age. The British ban on the exit of refugees from Cyprus and the American act in returning Palestine-bound Americans on the Marine Carp prove Bernadotte committed his abuse not without the agreement of Britain and the United States.

"Third, Bernadotte invited participation in the control apparatus of only representatives of three countries—all three of the Western Bloc, all three colonial imperialist powers. In this way the international character of the control has been vitiated. Failure to include the Soviet Union and the people's democracies and the more progressive Latin-American Republics which support the UN decision of November 29, stamps Bernadotte's mediation as one-sided Anglo-Saxon in character.

"This is a bad prelude to the political negotiations which Bernadotte will probably conduct in the spirit of the new Anglo-U.S. compromise: Jews to yield Negev, and Israel to be incorporated into a federation with an enlarged Kingdom of Abdullah, with Haifa as a joint harbor.

"For this price, the Arabs are to recognize the Jewish state as an accomplished fact. Such a plan would mean not only a painful constriction of the Jewish territory and of its power to survive economically, but also drastic limitation of Jewish sovereignty, because instead of the economic union with the independent Arab state under UN supervision, which is a necessity for us, there would be a federation with Abdullah, with actual control probably divided between Britain and the United States, with Britain continuing to run Transjordan and the U.S. dominating Israel.

"Against this danger, we can prepare ourselves by fulfilling three tasks: first, by economic and military mobilization of the whole Yishuv population, men and women; second, by introducing a social regime that will place the economy of the country in the service of the defense, for example—a progressive tax system, nationalization, control of production, help of families of soldiers; third, by establishment of the closest relations with the true friends of Israel, above all the USSR and the people's democracies to assure us political, economic and military aid.

"We must free ourselves of the political terror of Washington which prevents the government of Israel from dealing with Moscow. Our government's subordination to Washington has reached such ludicrous and scandalous extremes as failure to exchange diplomatic representatives with the Soviet Union on the pretext that the reply from Molotov has not yet been received.

"If we carry through this program, in the coming weeks, we will be able either to rebuff the danger of the imperialist-dictated settlement at Rhodes or effectively continue war if the negotiations fail."

### ***Demands of the Left***

In this situation, the provisional government is acting like the unhappy husband who, on discovering his wife is

carrying on with other men, decides to be very stern—in his diary. The fact is the UN is being used as a figleaf for the policies of the Anglo-American cabal. And the government's so-called neutrality and insistence on basing itself on the letter rather than the spirit of the UN is facilitating the aims of the Washington-London Axis which—whatever differences exist among themselves—is agreed on keeping Palestine as an imperialist preserve.

It is clear that the provisional government, which is predominantly a coalition of capitalist and right wing social democratic parties, did not wish to break with American imperialism, which collaborated with the British in placing the UN seal on the scheme for short-circuiting the Jewish victory that would jeopardize not only the rule of the feudal Arab clique but the imperialist stranglehold on the Mideast. Confirmation of the dangerous course of the Israel government was given recently at the annual All-Palestine Conference of the Labor Party. Foreign Minister Shertok told the conference: "We can't give up the western concept. America and all those who are interested in the establishment of the Jewish state—and I'm sure Russia is—will understand our tendency to the west."

On June 20, at a meeting of the Provisional State Council, Shertok gave a report in which he sought to minimize the harmful role of Count Bernadotte. The government line was sharply challenged by Berl Repetur of the United Workers Party and Meier Vilner, communist representative.

In the name of his party, which has two members in the cabinet, Repetur presented a resolution demanding no negotiations on the basis of further compromise but only on the basis of the November 29 UN decisions: no territorial cuts, no restrictions on immigration, and of protesting the barring of Soviet representatives as cease-fire observers.

Vilner supported Repetur's resolution and made some additions. He proposed that the government refuse to participate in the forthcoming negotiations which are being arranged by Count Bernadotte in Rhodes because they will not be carried out on the basis of Israel's independence and the November 29 decision. He demanded that the government declare its dissatisfaction with the way Bernadotte is organizing control and request the matter be turned back to the Security Council. He asked why the government is orienting towards Anglo-Saxon powers and was neutral towards Soviet participation in the team of observers. He proposed immediate establishment of genuinely friendly relations with the Soviet Union and an appeal to the USSR and other democratic countries for aid. *Al Hamishmar*, United Workers Party daily, and *Kol Haam*, communist paper, also criticized the one-sided dependence on Anglo-Saxon imperialism.

The person selected to represent Israel in Moscow is Mrs. Golda Meyerson. Mrs. Meyerson, who was brought up in Milwaukee, will have as her first assistant Mordechai Nemirovsky, member of the executive committee of the Histadruth, the Jewish Labor Federation, and head of its trade union department.

The delay in announcing the representative to Moscow, on the pretext that Molotov's reply to Shertok's communication had not been received, had been the subject of sharp controversy here. Progressives had charged that the real reason for the delay was the provisional government's subservience to Washington. They also criticized the choice of Mrs. Meyerson who, though a political personality of first rank, was closely linked to American pro-imperialist circles and had no knowledge of Soviet policy. It was also pointed out that Mrs. Meyerson's present trip to the U.S. was hardly the best preparation for establishing friendly relations with the power which has proved the truest friend of Israel.

In the meantime, life is growing harder for the people of Israel. I visited Jerusalem with the first party of correspondents to travel the new Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road which Jewish ingenuity and heroic efforts cut through Judean hills under the very noses and incessant shelling of Arab legionnaires. After a few days in Jerusalem, I was most impressed not by the achievements of Bevin's and Abdullah's artillery against the walls and buildings of this city, but by their offensive against the stomachs of its people. The food situation in the New City is at the point where the ugly word "starvation" is beginning to pass from rhetoric into fact.

The overwhelming majority of the civilian population is hungry—not with the hunger that bespeaks a good appetite, but with the gnawing pangs that come from lack of food. Every individual gets 160 grams of bread daily—equivalent to about three slices. This is the only food you are certain of obtaining regularly. Every couple of weeks, if you're lucky, you may be able to buy 50 grams of cheese

or 50 grams of margarine. Among the foods that are virtually unobtainable for the average citizens are meat, milk, butter, eggs, citrus fruits, rice, potatoes, onions, vegetables, noodles or macaroni, and canned food. One girl told me that she managed to buy six potatoes—for Passover.

Children up to the age of two are given rations of powdered milk and butter. Coffee, which has hitherto been available, is now becoming scarce. Water is rationed, two gallons per day to a person. No electricity is available for homes and only a few essential enterprises and offices are able to get any.

Despite all this, people do not go around looking cadaverous and defeated. In fact, they look surprisingly well and under the circumstances, their spirits, if not exalted, are certainly hopeful. Neither hunger nor the torment of artillery shelling has disposed Jerusalem's Jews to invite Abdullah to become their emperor.

Food is now being rushed to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv by the new road secretly built during the last days of the cease-fire. I came by this road myself and saw how painfully slow and inadequate it is. The question is whether Count Bernadotte, under the ambiguous terms of his four-week truce, is going to continue the unholy starvation of the Holy City or see to it that necessary supplies are provided—and quickly. Meanwhile, Bernadotte, a Christian whose religion, too, has its holy places in this fabled city, ponders whether Christian charity and the lusts of modern empire require him to sever the precious new lifeline for Jerusalem's mothers and children.

At the same time the American public ought to know the truth as it is today: the diet of the average Jerusalem family is approaching the nazi concentration camp level.