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ISRAEL AFTER SUEZ

By PROFESSOR NORMAN BENTWICH, O.B.E., M.C.

Lecture delivered to the Royal Central Asian Society by Professor Norman Bentwich, O.B.E., M.C., on Wednesday, October 19, 1960, Sir Nevile Butler, K.C.M.G., C.V.O., in the chair.

The CHAIRMAN: I hardly need to introduce Professor Norman Bentwich to this Society, for he is a very senior and distinguished member. As an international lawyer he is in the first rank. Since 1920 he has given service in official and unofficial capacities to Israel, about which he has come to talk to us. Even before that time he served in Cairo, and in recent years he has done great work with refugees.

As well as being Vice-Chairman of the Governors of the Jewish University, Professor Bentwich has further contacts with Israel. In refugee work he has helped Mrs. Bentwich, whom we also welcome here today, and who similarly has a distinguished record of public service and is, I believe, an Alderman on the London County Council. We welcome her in particular today because she has kindly provided the slides that we are to see later.

On the subject of "Israel After Suez" we could not have a more authoritative speaker than Professor Norman Bentwich; and I now invite him to address you. (*Applause.*)

THIS talk will be rather like a suet pudding. You will have all the stodge first, and then the currants—the pictures taken by my wife; and then I hope there will be questions. I am going to speak generally on the development of Israel since the Suez Campaign in 1956.

The main result of that campaign was that Israel gained a much greater sense of security. In the years immediately before Suez, the Israeli Government and people were very worried by the constant raids, particularly from Egypt, and there was a general air of tension. The Suez Campaign was all over in five days—and they were five crowded days. At the end, Israel was in occupation of practically the whole of the Sinai Peninsula.

Israeli troops remained there for two or three months, but the United Nations Assembly had passed a resolution that they should withdraw from the whole of that territory; and our country and the United States were also urging that Israel should withdraw. In the end Israel got an assurance that, when her forces were withdrawn from Sinai, there would be an Emergency Force of the United Nations (which had been brought into being for the purpose) posted over the frontier, in Egypt, and that force would remain to ensure that there was no disturbance of the peace from either side.

What was most important for Israel was that a small part of that force was stationed in the Sinai Peninsula, on its eastern shore, to assure freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Akaba. There, before 1956, the Egyptians had kept up a complete blockade of the gulf which leads from the Red Sea to Israel's tiny stretch of coast on the northern part of the gulf. The Emergency Force has remained there since 1956, and in fact



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shipping has been able to pass freely to and from Israel's port, which is Elath, on that northern shore. It is very vital to Israel to have this kind of "window" out to Asia and the Indian Ocean.

On the other hand, the blockade of the Suez Canal against all ships carrying cargo to or from Israel has been kept up. The Secretary-General of the United Nations has made many attempts to secure some relief from that position, which is a violation of International Law, but so far without success. Vessels not only of Israel but of other countries carrying innocent cargoes, like cement and fertilisers, from Israel have been held up and compelled to unload their cargoes at Port Said or Suez. On that side, therefore, there has not been any improvement.

Generally, since 1956, there have not been serious crises or disturbances of the peace on the frontiers of Israel. There have been a number of small incidents—raiding, and some actual minor engagements; but there is a large body of United Nations observers there to keep watch, as well as the Emergency Force, and they act like the referee in a football match. When there is an offside offence, they come in and stop it. In these last four years that action has been effective in avoiding any grave disturbance of the peace.

Although constant, very violent threats come from Nasser and others, Israel, during all that period, has persisted with her big schemes for development. There has been a remarkable development of the country, agriculturally, industrially and in every way. Let me tell you of a few of the big things that have happened in these four years.

One is a scheme of irrigation for the Negev—which comprises more than half of the territory of Israel and was an empty and arid region. Israel has been settling people in villages all along the northern part of the Negev for ten years now, and this scheme of irrigation brings the waters of a little river, called the Yarkon (which is near Tel Aviv and Jaffa) through pipes to the Negev. As a result, the whole of that northern part of the Negev is now a cultivated and fertile region.

Israel had worked out bigger schemes, in consultation with American Government experts, for using the waters of the Jordan mainly for the development of irrigation in the State of Jordan, but partly, also, for the development of the Negev. Those schemes are held up, however, because there was, and is, obstinate opposition from the Arab States, Syria and Jordan, to carrying them out—because they will give some benefit to Israel.

Another big development in the Negev has been at the port of Elath, on Israel's nine-mile stretch of coastline on the Gulf of Akaba. At the time of the Mandate there was nothing there but a police post. What was then a mere speck in the sand has now become a town and harbour with some 6,000 inhabitants. Two pipelines have been laid from Elath right across the Negev to the Mediterranean, the smaller carrying Israel's own oil requirements; the other, bigger one (which was opened this year) is a supply line of international importance, carrying oil from the Gulf of Akaba across to the refinery at Haifa which may work to its full capacity.

There has also been a big mineral development in the Negev. Mr. Ben Gurion has often spoken of Israel's vital need to develop this arid part of the country—he is a voice crying to the wilderness, not in it—

and these four years have brought a remarkable development of minerals there. The most important source is the Dead Sea itself, which is a great reservoir of chemicals like potash, magnesium and bromide. These are now being worked by a nationalized industry on a large scale, and there is a considerable amount of export. Then the large deposits of phosphates are being worked, the material being carried to Haifa, where it is turned into fertilizers. That is an industry with a growing export trade. Further, there are copper mines, the actual mines which were worked in the time of King Solomon, 3,000 years ago, though the machinery used today—mostly from Germany—is somewhat different. That is another mining development which is bringing great benefit to Israel. Beersheba, the principal town of the Negev, has a population of near 50,000, having increased from 2,000 in 1949. Apart from all that is being done in the Negev, another striking and significant development is the export by Israel of brains and "know-how," particularly to the peoples of East and West Africa and the Far East, especially Burma. Those countries are now turning regularly to Israel for expert advice and help in the development of their economy. They have a great regard for the co-operative farming and industry of Israel, and many officials come from those countries to spend some time in Israel, studying the work that is being done there. I have read that Israel today has some 500 experts and scientific advisers in these African countries and Burma; and there are 200 or more persons from those countries resident in Israel for a year or two, studying these systems.

Turning to other aspects of development, one which is of great importance is the steady growth of the population. In the early years of Israel's existence immigration was on a very big scale, averaging in the first three years about 200,000 a year. That meant that in three years the Jewish population of the country (which, when the State was created, was only about 650,000) was more than doubled by immigration. Since that time immigration has not continued on so great a scale, but since 1956 there has been a total immigration approaching 200,000.

In the year 1957 there was a big immigration into Israel from Central Europe, following the outbreaks in Hungary and Poland, which led to a large exodus from those countries; and a considerable part of their Jewish population got away and reached Israel. Many thousands, too, came from Egypt. The total of immigrants in that year was about 80,000. Again, during the first few months of the following year a considerable emigration from Rumania came to Israel. That was stopped, it is believed, by Soviet intervention and has now practically dried up.

In recent years immigration has been mainly from Eastern countries. Almost all the Jewish population from the Yemen arrived before 1956, but there has been a steady flow from North Africa and Egypt. Today the total population of Israel is over 2,100,000, of whom about 1,900,000 are Jews—three times the population at the time when the State of Israel was created in 1948—and about 225,000 Arabs. The Arabs are largely cultivators, living principally in Galilee.

As to the position of Arabs in Israel, while it cannot be said that they are completely equal citizens, they share in the social services on the same

terms as the Jews. The education, health and other social services are available to them. There is still some restriction on the movement of Arabs living near the frontier (which form a large part of the Arab areas) and also there is in those areas a military administration. One or two of the political parties in Israel are fighting for the abolition of those restrictions. The position of the Arabs now is certainly much easier than it was in the early years of the State, when considerations of public security were powerful.

Just a few words on the economic development. The economy of Israel is very irrational by all general classical economic standards. It is based on two things: faith, which is a powerful force in every aspect of life in Israel, and an unwritten partnership between Israel and the Jewish communities of the world. The Jews of the world feel this strong attachment and desire to help to build up the Home, and to help in the settlement of the vast immigrant population which has come in. So although the economy of Israel is very irrational and full of problems—I have heard it likened to a pomegranate, full of pips—nevertheless the position in these years has substantially improved. In the early years of the State the value of imports into Palestine was three or four times the value of her exports. That could not be allowed to go on interminably. Today her imports are about twice the value of her exports. Food imports are reduced because of a great increase in agricultural production there. Israel today is much more self-supporting. The only big food import which continues is of wheat, for bread; for that cannot be grown on the scale required.

Besides a steady increase in agricultural exports, like citrus fruits and groundnuts, there has been a bigger development in industrial production for export. However, Israel still has an adverse balance of trade, the total difference between the value of imports and exports amounting to about 300 million dollars a year. (I apologize for quoting figures in dollars, but America plays a very important part in helping the development of Israel, and dollars are taken as the standard of currency.) The amount of that difference has to be raised by Israel from outside sources; and they come from four different contributions. The first is the gift contribution of the Jewish communities of the world to Israel, which goes on year by year to an amount of 70,000,000 to 80,000,000 dollars, representing about one quarter of the deficit.

An equal contribution is made by the Government of the German Federal Republic. Some years back President Adenauer declared that Germany wanted to make some material retribution for the terrible things done by the Nazis to the Jews; and West Germany is paying, over a period of ten years, a total of 800,000,000 dollars. That payment is made by Germany in kind, largely in capital goods, like ships. It will continue only for another five years. But in these last four years it has been an important factor in Israel's development. One aspect of it is that Israel has been building up a considerable merchant fleet—now approaching half a million tons. Most of them are new ships, built in German shipyards as part of those reparations or indemnities.

Then the Government of Israel raises loans in different parts of the world—known as "Israel Independence Bonds"—which provide another

one-fourth of the deficit. Lastly, a grant-in-aid is given by the United States of America, and smaller sums come annually from the United Nations in the form of technical help for Israel. In those various ways the deficit of 300,000,000 dollars annually is covered.

Thus the economic position has been greatly stabilized, and in the last two years the increase in exports has been (in proportion) considerable. Israel hopes, therefore, that in the foreseeable future—in, say, ten to twelve years' time—she will be viable economically, assuming she continues to get (as I believe she can realistically expect) the help of Jewish communities outside in carrying through the big developments of settlement and industry.

On the political side, from the beginning Israel has had a Coalition Government. Israel has a very just but extremely complicated electoral system—called *Scrutin de Lister*—under which any party getting a certain quotient of the total votes cast gets a proportionate number of seats. The result is that in the Israel Parliament (or “Knesset”) a dozen or more parties are represented and no party has a majority over all the rest. The core and centre of the Government, from the declaration of independence in 1948 till today, has been the party known as Mapai—a kind of Central Labour Party. Also in the Government is a Socialist Party more to the Left, called Mapam; and a party of religious Socialists. The Prime Minister throughout has been the head of the Mapai, Ben Gurion, except for a period of less than two years, when he went into retreat in a small pioneering, agricultural, collective community. During that period Mr. Moshe Sharett, who was Foreign Secretary, became Prime Minister. The posts of Foreign Secretary, Minister of Labour, Minister of Education and others are also held by members of Mapai, although it has less than half the total members in the Knesset.

Before the last General Election, about a year ago, Mapai had 40 out of the 120 seats. The party now has 47 seats, so that Ben Gurion is in a stronger position with regard to other parties in the Coalition. In Ben Gurion's present Cabinet there is, for the first time, a Jew from this country—Mr. Abba Eban, who was Israeli Ambassador in the United States until last year, and was also Israel's Principal Representative at the United Nations. He is now Minister of Education.

¹²⁹ Lastly, about the cultural development which, again, has been remarkable. The outstanding achievement of Israel on the cultural side is that Hebrew has become and is the language of the whole population. Two-thirds of that population have come in as immigrants from abroad, speaking many different languages—Yiddish, English, Arabic; some even a Spanish dialect, Ladino. The Government has been able to make Hebrew not only the official language but the language in which people actually speak and do business. Three main instruments have been created by which this remarkable achievement has been brought about. The first is that Hebrew has been the language of the primary school, and all the children are mingled together, learning all subjects in Hebrew; and from school they take it to their parents' home.

The second instrument is the period of National Service, which in Israel is long—two and a half years for males, two years for females. That

period is not mainly one of military service. It is used as a period of education. A complete and full course of Hebrew is arranged for those doing that Service, and those who are immigrants, between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, acquire Hebrew as their language, as well as acquiring a knowledge of the history and geography of the country.

The third instrument is the introduction of residential colleges for the intelligentsia among the immigrants—those coming from foreign countries who have been at universities or in professions, like teaching, law, medicine, engineering, and so on. They are enabled rapidly to acquire Hebrew by attending a residential college (called "Ulpan") for a period of six to nine months, according to the ability to learn the language. After this intensive course of Hebrew they are able to carry on their profession in what is the language of the country. Those three provisions, and a wide system of evening classes extending all over the country for the study of Hebrew, have brought about the position that Hebrew is the living language of the people.

¹¹¹ The Hebrew University has grown rapidly. When it was re-opened in 1949, with 1,000 students, work was carried on in all kinds of scattered, improvised premises, because the original university buildings, on Mount Scopus, though occupied by Jewish police and caretakers, are cut off by Arab territory, and have not been accessible for academic purposes. Today the university has not 1,000 but 7,000 students; and a new University City has been built since 1954. It will be completed within a year or two, so that there will then be a complete university with modern buildings and equipment and six faculties: Humanities, Science, Medicine, Law, Agriculture, and the Economic and Social Sciences.

Equally remarkable has been the growth and development of the Technological Institute, which trains engineers of all kinds—not in Jerusalem but at Haifa. That has trebled and quadrupled in size. Then, lastly, the Weizmann Institute of Science at Rehovot is engaged in fundamental and applied research. It was created by Weizmann, the first President of Israel, who was a devoted scientist as well as statesman. That institute plays a big part in the development of the country. In fact, the growth of Israel and the achievement of turning what was a very backward country, in large part arid, into a thriving country has been brought about, in the main, by the application of science of every kind to the working life of the people through the University, the Technological Institute and the Weizmann Institute.

This summer a big international gathering at Rehovot, where Dr. Weizmann had his residence, was concerned with the application of science to the advancement of new nations. It was attended by representatives of thirty new nations of Africa and Asia. Israel is making a scientific contribution not only for the benefit of her own people and country but for these other new States which are as yet undeveloped.

That is the story. I fear that it has been rushed and somewhat rambling; but what stands out is that Israel is, uniquely in the present world, a country of abundant faith. Her people believe they are engaged in building up a better life for themselves and all people, and that makes it go. (*Applause.*)

A series of colour slides was then shown, to which Professor Bentwich provided the commentary, showing the transformation of barren desert areas into richly productive agricultural areas, various old and new buildings in the cities, and aspects of everyday life in Israel. A brief question-and-answer period followed.

Sir RICHARD GALE: Is there much movement of the population out of Israel?

Professor BENTWICH: Since 1949 the total number of emigrants has been somewhere near 100,000, which would represent 9 to 10-per cent. of the total immigration; but the emigrants from Israel do not consist entirely of new immigrants. Some of the older inhabitants have gone.

Mr. CHRISTOPHER SYKES: In what part of Palestine has there been the recent agricultural progress to which you referred?

Professor BENTWICH: That has happened all over the country; but it has been marked along the coastal plain, which today is densely populated; and also in the whole of Galilee, which is within the State of Israel. The most remarkable development, however, has been in the northern part of the Negev, in and around Beersheba, which is today an intensive area of agricultural settlement as a result of the irrigation scheme I mentioned.

Colonel KEIGHLEY BELL: You have said that since the Suez incident Israel has felt more secure. Have the Government of Israel been able to reduce the amount of money set aside for defence in the period since then, or is that still a millstone round their necks?

Professor BENTWICH: I am afraid they have not been able to reduce. Although there has been internal security there are, all the time, threats from the Arab States, who are continuing to arm themselves with the most modern weapons and aircraft. They are a permanent danger, and Israel has had to keep in step, so that her expenditure on armaments today is as heavy as it ever was.

Sir OLAF CAROE: Have the Arabs in Palestine the vote?

Professor BENTWICH: Yes, and in the Israel Parliament there are 8 Arabs among the 120 Members. One of the striking things in the last election was that the Communist Party—which, in the previous Parliament had 5 Members, two of them Arabs—was reduced to 3 Members, with only 1 Arab.

Sir OLAF CAROE: What is the size of the oil pipeline that runs from Elath?

Professor BENTWICH: The original pipeline was of 8 in. diameter. The larger is 16 in.

Dr. BRAMLEY: What is the feeling of the population in Israel in face of these threats from these well-armed Arabs?

Professor BENTWICH: I believe that a general feeling of security is developing. The people accept that there may be incidents, but they are not perturbed. They have faith that things will be all right.

Mr. NEISH: We have heard about the Jews and Arabs, but there are other nationalities in what was known as Palestine. I am thinking particularly of the Armenians. The Armenian Church owned a considerable amount of property in Palestine and when the State of Israel came into existence

they denied access to that property; and representatives of the Armenian Church were not even allowed to inspect it to see if it needed repair. Now, in desperation, it has been forfeited, without any compensation whatever. You spoke about Dr. Adenauer giving assistance, but it seems to me that those people who lost a great deal in Palestine should also be compensated.

Professor BENTWICH: I imagine the difficulty is that the Armenian Church and all the Armenian convents are on the Arab side of Jerusalem, where the Armenian quarter is. The Government of Israel has declared over and over again that Israel will pay compensation for all land taken, whether from the Armenians, the Arabs or anyone else; but until there is some means of negotiation with the Arabs on the other side, it is not possible to proceed with consideration of the compensation for Armenian land in Israel.

Mr. NEISH: Armenians who are personal friends of mine say this property is on the Israel side.

Professor BENTWICH: The Armenian Church had considerable property around New Jerusalem, which is on the Israel side; but there cannot be negotiations because the leaders of the Armenian Church are on the Arab side, and there is no intercourse.

The CHAIRMAN: I am afraid our time is up. It remains for me to thank Dr. Bentwich. We expected a great deal from him and we were not disappointed. We thank him for his talk, and we thank Mrs. Bentwich for the beautiful slides which recalled nostalgic memories and provided an entertaining complement to a most fascinating lecture. (*Applause.*)

NOTE

In addition to the lectures reprinted in the *Journal*, the following have taken place recently:

28.9.60: Mr. Richard Harris spoke on "Myths and Realities in Modern China."

29.11.60: Miss Constance Paul gave an Evening lecture illustrated by films on "The Women of Afghanistan" and "Approach to India."

14.12.60: H.R.H. Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark showed his film "Asian Allies" taken on the tour described in his lecture of May 18, 1960.

8.3.61: Dr. Laurence Lockhart gave a talk entitled "Impressions of the Middle East in 1960," illustrated by slides.

