

PALESTINE VISITED

By G. Koenig

WHEN our ship left the docks of Haifa at the end of February the last preparations for the establishment of martial law in Palestine had been completed. The whole country and especially the big cities had been transformed into a huge military camp. The Palestine highways were clogged with British trucks, carrying troops, tanks, cannon and all kinds of ammunition.

Soldiers with red hats, black hats, and uniforms from all parts of the British empire were visible everywhere. A modern and well equipped army of at least 150,000 soldiers was at hand, an army larger than any in Palestine during the most critical days of the war when it was necessary to drive back Rommel's armies from the gates of Alexandria.

I had spent four months in Palestine. In that time I

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witnessed the brutal, disgraceful domination by the British occupationists. In Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Rishon Lezion, Nathania, Rechovoth and many other places I saw bands of English soldiers play havoc with the peaceful and innocent Jewish community. They attacked Jews coming out of the movies and cafes—beating, robbing and leaving them lying in a bloody mess on the streets. The British forced their way into private houses; they destroyed and burned automobiles after throwing passengers into the gutter. These were daily occurrences during my stay in Palestine.

"Normal" Brutality

The situation deteriorated every day and every week. In the "good" days before martial law was established, people traveling from city to city had to put up with serious delays. Busses were held up in mid-journey. The people were

forced to step out, were searched and their papers scrutinized. Very often a journey that took one hour under normal conditions, lasted three or four hours. One was never certain at the start of a journey if one would return or whether some new "emergency law" would suddenly be declared. Every few days rumors spread that a new "emergency" was to be proclaimed, and immediately men and women would rush about getting essential foods to tide them over the "emergency." At such a time prices would naturally sky-rocket and the working masses would immediately feel the effects on their lean budget. The economy of the country as a whole began to deteriorate very quickly.

I remember one Thursday evening in January in Tel Aviv. Hundreds of Jewish women with their children are in the market place, buying food for the Sabbath. The streets all around are alive with people. Workers are returning home from work. Suddenly the sound of firing is heard. Electricity is turned off. Darkness everywhere. Police and soldiers pour in from all directions. Terrific confusion reigns. Cries and shrieks of pain fill the market place. People trip over each other. Children cry, women faint. Stores are hurriedly bolted. People rush to the security of the nearest house. The shooting grows more intense and continues late into the night. The next day it becomes known that some Jewish districts in the poor part of Tel Aviv had been encircled. Thousands of Jews were driven out of their homes. Hundreds were beaten by the police.

Pogrom by Error

A particularly barbaric incident was the raid on Sochnos Montefiore. In addition to beatings and the looting of homes, the troops dragged dozens of Jews into the streets, made them form in columns and forced them to run the gauntlet of soldiers who beat them brutally. Other Jews were forced off the busses and put through the same torture. In this way the Jews were driven to the place where they were questioned. At the entrance hundreds of English soldiers began the sport all over again, beating their victims with clubs, with rifle butts and kicking them with their feet, crying: "We will kill all of you. We will do a better job than Hitler did."

Most of the Jews were a bloody mess. Many fainted from the effects of the blows. Some suffered concussion of the brain. The Jews were then taken to Jaffa where, after a long investigation, they were declared innocent and freed. The pogrom was declared to be the result of a misunderstanding.

Such murderous acts were re-

peated in a number of Jewish communities in Palestine. And all of this occurred in so-called "normal" times, before martial law was officially declared.

Simultaneously, thousands of Jews were ordered to get out of their homes within 24 hours. It is impossible to describe the tragedy of these people who found themselves overnight without a roof over their heads. At the stroke of a pen many who had saved for years and years and had scrimped even on food to buy some kind of dwelling, now found themselves robbed of their home. Whole sections were cut off and occupied by soldiers. In Jerusalem early in February one could hardly take a step without running into barbed wire and machine guns. "It is forbidden to enter this area," was the order one heard everywhere from the lips of Bevin's soldiers.

Of course all this was done with the excuse of fighting the terrorists of the Irgun and the Stern gang. Without trying to analyze this terrorist movement, one thing is clear: the whole British military apparatus and martial law were not inflicted on the Jews because of terrorist activity. The acts of terrorism were rather used by the occupation power as an excuse to realize its plan of *militarizing the Near East, of protecting the oil concessions, of establishing military bases and of destroying the economy of the country.* Not only Jews, but also Arabs were thrown out of their homes, and not only in Jewish communities but also in Arab communities such as Shchem and Azah. Military fortifications are being built in non-Jewish as well as Jewish areas.

Since June 29, 1946, when the bloody deeds of the occupationists were brutally stepped up to persecute the Jewish community militarily and economically, the Zionist leadership has shown no other initiative than to run about the corridors of the British and American government offices. While thousands of families were being driven out of their



TEL AVIV — a Modern City

homes and new divisions of soldiers were being brought into Palestine, the Palestine Zionist press was mainly concerned with the question of whether Dov Gruner's sister was coming by airplane or not. With shrieking headlines the Jewish community was informed that a number of Jews had been beaten up in a little town in—Rumania. All proposals of the Communist Party to turn to the United Nations were systematically rejected by all Zionist parties. Zionist circles began to talk about the UN only when the proposal was made by Bevin.

The leader of the Zionist executive, Goldie Meyerson, issued a call to the British government in February which read as follows: "We appeal to common sense and hope that this call is heeded; as a result it will become easier both for the government and for ourselves to achieve the goal of peace and security in this country." Obviously Goldie Meyerson is still convinced that the aim of the British government is to bring peace and security to Palestine.

During the war the Jewish community of Palestine participated all-out in the struggle against fascism. The Jewish community, by its work, its voluntary contributions, and its daily acts of aid to the allied armies placed itself in overwhelming majority on the side of democracy. Over 25,000 Jewish men and women went into the army where they battled heroically on the far-flung battlefields of the world.

Already in 1939 over 3,000 Jews had enlisted as sappers' aides. In 1940 when the British government allowed Palestinian citizens to enter the RAF, 2,000 Jews enlisted immediately. When the government called for chauffeurs and craftsmen for the army, 4,500 Jewish chauffeurs volunteered at once and were organized into their own brigade with Jewish officers.

Bravery of Jewish Soldiers

In the battles that raged in the Lybian deserts Jewish soldiers played an important role. They fought in bloody battles against an enemy that was already storming the gates of Alexandria, and were among the troops who drove Rommel's armies back to Tripoli and Tunis. It should suffice to mention that the system of defenses of El Alamein was built by the Jewish Sappers Brigade 462. When the armies of Rommel broke through the Egyptian city of Salum, the British general staff ordered this very same brigade to Syria in order to bring back reinforcements, and the brigade fulfilled its mission gloriously. It crossed over Egypt, Palestine and Syria and brought back a whole Australian brigade on trucks. And those who had enlisted as chauffeurs took up arms and participated in driving back the enemy.

This very same Brigade 462 suffered tremendous casualties. When it sailed for Malta, its ship was torpedoed by plane and submarine and several hundred Negroes and 138 Jews were killed.

In addition to the men who enlisted in the army, 2,500 Jewish women also enlisted for work in the hospitals, field kitchens and as chauffeurs.

In 1943 two Jewish companies fought at Salerno and helped free southern Italy. In 1944 the Jewish Brigade was created, incorporating the existing "Palestine Regiment." This brigade consisted of three infantry battalions, a company of chauffeurs, two artillery companies and a company of sappers—in all between five and six thousand men. English and Canadian Jews also belonged to this brigade. It went into action about two weeks before the end of the war in northern Italy. In its assigned sector of ten kilometers it so distinguished itself that the general staff of the 6th Army gave it special mention in an order of the day.

The brigade remained in Italy for a time after the conclusion of hostilities and was then sent to Belgium and Holland. When the Jewish brigade went through Germany they used the occasion to take care of some Nazis. The British commanders didn't like this very much and the Jewish brigade was quickly removed from the occupation zone.

Plight of Jewish Veterans

These Jewish soldiers of Palestine who voluntarily enlisted in the British army because they wanted to fight fascism were forced to endure insults and discrimination by the British military leaders during the war. For instance, in the beginning they received much lower pay than British soldiers. It was only later after much protest that the Jewish soldiers won equal pay. In the canteens, wash-rooms, etc., there were two sections—one for English troops and one for non-English troops. During the entire war, families of Palestinian soldiers received two-thirds of the monetary help given to families of British soldiers. Actually the discrepancy was much greater, because the cost of living in Palestine was two or three times as high as that in Britain. After many demonstrations and protest actions there was formed in the Yishuv a special "League for Aid to Soldiers" which gave one to two pounds a month to the families of soldiers. This of course could not help very much to alleviate the plight of families whose husbands and fathers had fought so heroically under the British banner.

During the war about 5,000 invalided Jewish soldiers were demobilized. I spoke to many of them who by the end of 1946 had not yet been able to settle down. After their demobilization no one paid any attention to them. They organized demonstrations and began to occupy empty rooms wherever they could find them so as to have a place to sleep. They took over a number of bridge clubs where the wealthy people of Tel Aviv came to amuse themselves, but the British police attacked these invalids and many were horribly beaten. The police killed one of them and wounded many others.

As wave after wave of demobilized soldiers returned to Palestine the protests of these fighters for their rights grew stronger. But they had to fight alone to get a job and a place to live. Not until January 1946, was a special bureau created by the Jewish Agency to help them in housing and

rehabilitation, and then only as a result of pressure by the veterans themselves. In March 1946, a law went into effect requisitioning empty rooms in larger houses, but the requisitioning moves at a snail's pace. One delegate at a conference of veterans exclaimed, "In the month of April 1946, twenty demobilized Jewish soldiers committed suicide!"

Conference of Jewish Vets

These facts I learned only after I began to investigate more closely the fate of these Jewish fighters. Clearly the main responsibility for the situation rests with the British administration, which spends millions of pounds for prisons and police and practically nothing for those who volunteered and fought in the British army.

My visit to Palestine coincided with the campaign to elect delegates to the country-wide conference of demobilized soldiers. The elections were not very democratic. The election committee ruled that there was to be one delegate for every 60 veterans in the larger cities and one delegate

for every ten veterans in the smaller communities. As a result one-third of those entitled to vote were able to send 160 delegates while two-thirds could send only 60 delegates.

The outcome was interesting. In Tel Aviv the communists got 22 per cent of all the votes and elected seven of the 31 delegates. They ran second to the Mapai (Jewish Labor Party), which had twelve delegates, and left far behind them the Achdut Avodah (movement for the Unity of Labor) and the Hashomer Hatzair (Zionist left wing party) who received three delegates each. In Haifa the communists received 18 per cent of the votes and elected four delegates. In contrast to this, in Jerusalem, where the voting was not by proportional representation, the communists could not elect a single delegate despite the fact that they received 25 per cent of the votes. And in Rishon Lezion where the communist candidates received 42 per cent of the votes, they were also unable to get even one delegate.

The main speech at the opening of the conference was delivered by the political director of the Jewish Agency, Moshe Shertok. He had very little to say about the demands and



HAIFA — a City of Contrasts

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the needs of the Jewish veterans. He did not criticize the Palestine administration's treatment of the demobilized soldiers. Not one word of protest came either from him or from any other official speakers at the opening session against the barbaric pogrom perpetrated by British troops against the Jews of Tel Aviv only the day before. They spoke as if nothing in the world had happened. The impression created during the whole conference was that an attempt was being made to exploit these ex-soldiers for political ends, rather than to help them solve their immediate problems or to help make this important organization a great democratic movement. One incident that evoked intense indignation among many delegates was the refusal of the chairman to put to a vote of the conference a resolution against the Anders bands which demanded their withdrawal from Palestine and the turning over of their homes to the demobilized soldiers.

Of all the cities in Palestine, the most interesting, colorful and dynamic is Haifa, with the ocean at its foot and Mount Carmel towering over it from the other side. It is a city of contrasts. I loved to stand in the city and look up into the hills where thousands of houses and huts clutter up the hillside that gives the impression of hundreds of streets suspended in mid-air. But even more enthralling is the view looking down from the hill. The whole city and the broad span of the ocean lie before one's eyes. One sees large modern homes and small barracks, factories and small stores, ships and schooners, autos and busses, winding narrow lanes choked with loaded camels and a mass of humanity in constant motion. Ocean and mountain, factories and business, Jews, Arabs and Christians—an international port-city stretched out over an area of 75,000 dunams (a dunam is one quarter of an acre).

The ocean, however, is guarded by huge British battleships. Mt. Carmel is cut off by thousands of British soldiers. The city is surrounded by British forts and a network of barbed-wire. Smoke from the oil factories reminds one that here is the heart of the interest of imperialism. The tanks and the cannon one sees speak clearly in the language of military bases and plans.

Twenty-five years ago Haifa had 24,000 inhabitants of whom 9,000 were Mohammedans, 9,000 were Christians and 6,000 Jews. By 1931 there were 50,000 inhabitants of whom 20,000 were Arabs, 16,000 Jews and 14,000 Christians. Today Haifa and its environs have about 145,000 population. According to figures given me by the president of the Municipal Council, Shabsai Levy, there are now 80,000 Jews, 40,000 Mohammedans and 25,000 Christians. Arab informants told me that there were over 50,000 Mohammedans.

Jews and Arabs Work Together

The non-Jewish community is concentrated in the heart of the city itself, along the port and a little higher up almost as far as the beginnings of Hadar Hacarmel. In this community of 70,000 inhabitants live 12,000 Jews. During

the day, however, the proportion of Jews is much higher, for the Jewish workers and businessmen who live in Hadar Hacarmel come down to the town.

Jews and Arabs work together in business, in various undertakings in the port, in the refineries and in the surrounding military camps. On the main street, Rechov Hamlochim (Kings Highway), Arab and Jewish shoeshine boys sit on little stools or on the ground. The Jews are mostly from the East and look very little different from their Arab neighbors. And more than once you will find a good Zionist, who wanted to gain the *mitzvah* (blessing) of giving work to Jews, getting fouled up and committing the terrible "sin" of allowing his shoes to be polished by an Arab kid whom he mistook for Jewish. Incidentally, these very same Jews who are so scrupulous when it comes to letting an Arab worker earn a piastre, are not at all scrupulous about closing a good thousand pound deal with some Arab capitalist.

On Hadar Hacarmel, which is 25 years old, approximately 45,000 Jews live. They represent 90 per cent of the population in this area. Here you will find Jewish shops and stores, schools, technical institutes and other important institutions.

What contrasts are encountered in Haifa. What a mixture of wealth and poverty, of elegance and filth. Beautiful six or seven story buildings stand next to dirty and decrepit little huts in which seven or eight people live in squalor and poverty. The town has palatial homes of wealthy Jews and Arabs and also the dingiest shacks. On the mountain are sumptuous villas bathed in sunshine and bedecked with flowers, while a little lower down in Hadar Hacarmel and in the city hundreds of families are jammed together in small dark rooms without air or light or proper sanitary conditions. Behind the city of Haifa there are rows upon rows of tents. Here Arab workers of the port and of the military camps live. But I also saw many, many Jewish families living under the most horrible conditions. To get a place to live one must pay hundreds of pounds, a sum beyond the dreams of the poor working family. The situation is particularly hard for many veterans, students and new immigrants, who very often live five and six to one hotel room and pay four or five pounds a month for a place to lay their heads.

In Haifa and the vicinity the greatest industries of the country are concentrated, employing more than 40,000 Jewish workers and officials. Of these about 80 per cent are members of the Histadruth (Jewish Federation of Labor), 10 per cent of the Hapoel Hamizrachi (orthodox trade union movement). The Revisionist unions have very little influence.

At the beginning of this year the Histadruth in Haifa, according to the information given me by its secretary, had 34,000 members among the following categories: 2,000 construction workers, 4,000 metal workers, 3,000 military camp workers, 1,000 oil workers, 3,000 workers in collectives, 1,000 transport workers, 500 in cooperatives, 300 communications workers, etc.

The Histadruth owns a number of enterprises and is also in partnership with capitalists in others. It also runs outfits in the city such as an employment bureau, a restaurant, a workers bank, a library and lecture hall, a sick-benefit institution, a building for Histadruth offices. At present it is building a large theater. The Histadruth budget is £70,000.

Sabbath in Tel Aviv

Any Friday evening one can observe a Jew riding about the streets of Tel Aviv trumpeting forth the news that the Sabbath is about to arrive. Soon all shops close. All busses stop running. In many Jewish homes candles are lit and a little later old Jews can be seen wearing silken *kapotes* and *shtreimlech*, promenading up and down. From the synagogues and the little houses of worship established by the Chassidim, and later from homes, one can hear all sorts of melodies. From other homes can be heard radios blaring full blast the Sabbath prayers sung by leading cantors.

But the majority of Tel Aviv Jews are not religious. The devoted orthodox Jews are agitated over this fact and speak of Tel Aviv as a "goyish" city where the Sabbath is openly desecrated. I remember an incident in a large square in the city's center where an old Jew with a long beard cried out to a large group: "Jews, don't you see that all our troubles come from the fact that the Sabbath is desecrated, that the cafes and restaurants are open, that young men and women bathe together in the ocean!" A few earnestly agreed, but the majority smiled indulgently.

Nevertheless the atmosphere on Saturday is decidedly different from the rest of the week. The theaters and movies are closed. Music is forbidden at any affairs held on Saturday. The people therefore have little to do but promenade, visit friends, or go to a lecture. The busses do not run. But taxis are available to take you from one end of Tel Aviv to the other. This makes transportation hard for the workers who can hardly pay the taxi rate, which is at least five times the bus rate.

On Saturday the city employees also rest. The streets are not cleaned on Saturday. Consequently the main streets of Tel Aviv, which are cleaned every day of the week, are quite filthy on Saturday, particularly because on Friday evening the storekeepers sweep all their refuse into the street.

"Why don't you clean your streets around here on Saturday?" I asked one Jew.

"What do you mean? This is a rest day. Who's going to do the cleaning?" he answered.

"Why don't you hire some Arabs on this day if you don't want Jewish workers to work on the Sabbath?"

The Jew stood there speechless. He looked at me with a mixture of contempt and pity. "What a greenhorn! What kind of talk is this of hiring an Arab in a Jewish city?"

Both in summer and winter most people of Tel Aviv promenade at the edge of the ocean. The *nouveau riche* of Tel Aviv get all decked out in fancy clothes and jewelry

and try to outdo each other. Much more simply but just as clean, the workers walk with their wives and children to get a few hours of well-earned relaxation after a week of work in factory or shop. From time to time you might see a young girl from a *kibbutz* (collective) in a *halutz* blouse and shorts. The girl will very often be stopped and scolded by an orthodox Jew: "Tfu—you witch, aren't you ashamed of yourself—a big girl like you walking around with bare legs in public."

City of Two Councils

Almost twelve years have passed since the last elections for the city council were held in Tel Aviv. At that time there were 65,000 people in the city and 22,000 were eligible to vote. It is clear that the 15 councilmen then elected are no longer representative of a population which now has 70,000 eligible voters. It is said that new elections will take place this year. It is no secret that there is much dissatisfaction with the present administration both in the matter of taxes, which fall most heavily on the poor, and with its political line. Demonstrations of unemployed and of demobilized soldiers, who receive no aid, often take place before the council.

The city budget for the current year amounts to £2,000,000. Normally the government should cover 50 per cent of the budget, but it has in fact contributed less than £200,000.

The general secretary of the city council, who gave me detailed information about city council activities told me of plans to build a park near the edge of the ocean, a modern hospital, a new central auto bus station, new schools, etc. At the present moment, however, the park cannot be built because the British have set up a military camp on the location. Although the Tel Aviv city council could do much to fill the needs of the majority of its citizens, the present administration claims lack of funds. And no wonder. Jews like Mr. Rokach, the mayor of Tel Aviv, are careful not to disturb the wealthier Jews or to dig too deeply into their pockets.

But Tel Aviv has another parliament of its own. The deputies of this parliament are not elected. Reports and discussions are not recorded. The newspapers write nothing about it and outside of Palestine very few people know that it exists. But the people of Tel Aviv know it quite well. This parliament holds sessions on the benches and around the trees of Rothschild Boulevard. Here gather on weekdays and particularly on Saturdays Jewish workers to discuss local and world problems. Here you will hear a real Polish Yiddish. The order of business of this parliament is very full. Here the community leaders and Mayor Rokach are hauled over the coals. And when this is finished, the workers start on the British. And believe me, when they get through with the British very little is left. Then comes the atom bomb, the problem of war and peace, the strategy of the Soviet Union. Latest news reports are discussed and analyzed.

The parliament of Rothschild Boulevard is a very important institution in Tel Aviv.