

Eichmann

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Report from Israel

for the month of April 1961

Note: []

Israel has just celebrated its thirteenth anniversary, its Bar Mitzvah, amid a welter of political, economic, historical and civic events of unprecedented gravity, importance and variety.

Every activity in Israel during the past month was overshadowed by the Eichmann trial, which started on April 11 in Jerusalem. The stark revelations of horror, the terrible tales of personal suffering told by surviving witnesses and the description of the Nazi plan to wipe out the Jews of Europe cast gloom and sorrow over the entire population. Meanwhile, developments in other areas included the following:

In the United Nations, Israel was first ordered to stop a proposed anniversary parade in demilitarized Jerusalem, and then told by resolution of the General Assembly "with deep regret that repatriation of Arab refugees, or compensation, as provided by previous resolutions, had not been carried out." King Hussein of Jordan made overtures to President Nasser of Egypt, which worried Israel greatly until the King was snubbed by Nasser. Within Israel, the teachers' strike was settled after 55 days of idleness for both teachers and students. The arrest of a key government adviser on military affairs on charges of spying caused widespread concern. With elections scheduled for August 15, a new Liberal Party was founded by two existing parties, but no program has yet been announced. Industrial strikes were averted by a new industrial wage agreement, raising wages by 6 per cent. The question of Sabbath observance arose again, this time in connection with theatre performances in Tel Aviv. Misunderstandings concerning Israel's relationship to Jews in other lands were ironed out in the new Blaustein-Ben Gurion agreement signed in Jerusalem on April 23. And, by way of contrast, April was a month of special festivals, ranging from Passover week through Independence Day and Labor Day.

Eichmann Horrors Israelis are now re-living the terrible past of the Nazi era in Europe, as the Eichmann trial focuses everybody's consciousness on many things which had either been forgotten or had never been fully known. The trial has presented evidence so horrible that it almost defies the imagination. The only connection between the frightful accounts of

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cruelty, maltreatment, bestiality and planned murder and the reality of the courtroom are the surviving witnesses who describe what happened to them personally. Under the rules of evidence of Anglo-American Common Law, which are in force in Israel and are minutely observed by the court, only first-hand accounts are admissible as evidence. Every one of the dozen witnesses who were called up to the end of April had a personal history of flight from ghetto to ghetto, of humiliation, hunger, privation and fear of facing his end in the death camps, and of escape by mere chance. The woman who ran after the truck in which her father was carried into the woods, and found him murdered, and kissed his dead face, came to tell her own story in the Jerusalem court. So did the former leaders of German Jewry who had to deal with Eichmann under conditions of humiliation and terror. The survivors of the desperate uprisings in the Warsaw ghetto in April, 1943, who fought with crude improvised weapons against unspeakable odds and knew they were doomed -- they too told of their experiences.

Object Lesson The trial of Adolf Eichmann has become the indictment by the Jews, and by humanity, against the Third German Reich. It is meant to serve as an object lesson for all the world, an example -- extreme in its kind, but unfortunately true -- of man's inhumanity to man, of the tragic results of power given to hate-filled tyrants and of the terrible ruin which can be inflicted by one people upon another.

The trial makes this fact crystal clear: If a civilized people like the Germans were capable of such crimes against millions of their fellow men in the middle of the twentieth century, there is no guarantee that similar outrages, killings and persecution will not happen again in other places where positions of authority are held by men who hate their fellow human beings because of differences in color, religion, outlook or way of life. The Eichmann trial must serve as a warning against such attitudes of hatred and hostility between man and man, in order that the world may never again witness such outrages.

Public is Overcome As one listens to the evidence in the courtroom or over the radio, one hears the heart-rending cries of the hundreds of thousands condemned to die and to be buried on top of fellow-victims murdered a few minutes earlier. One hears the screams of little children, clinging to their mothers as they are forced to the graveside to be shot. One cannot bear it any more, one wishes it had never been, one hardly believes it was possible. Then one looks at Eichmann, sitting erect in his glass box, listening to the terrible tales with not a sign of emotion on his face, making little notes and sending them to his counsel. And one is jolted into the realization that this is the man, or at least one of the men, who ordered, planned, supervised these monstrous and unspeakable deeds. One does not know whether to cry, to hate or to grit one's teeth. Most people who hear the evidence just cry.

The legal points of objection which marked the opening of the trial have long since been swept away. The court found that it has

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jurisdiction to try Eichmann, no matter by what irregular or illegal means he was brought from Argentina to Israel. (Indeed, before the trial began the German Chancellor declared that he recognized Israel's right to try Eichmann, that the full truth should be revealed, and that he was confident the trial would be a just one.) The trial is being conducted in great detail and with meticulous fairness by the court and the prosecution. Under the impact of the evidence, legal niceties about jurisdiction, retroactive legislation, extraterritoriality, etc. have paled into insignificance and are generally ignored by the public.

The prosecution's presentation is likely to last until the middle of June. It is not known how long the defense will take. Evidence from several former Nazi witnesses will be taken in Germany and Austria at the request of the court, since these men would be arrested if they set foot on Israel soil. No information is available about other witnesses the defense may call, and whether Eichmann himself will give evidence. Thereafter, some time will be needed for the writing of the judgment. Thus the trial will probably continue into the Fall.

Public Reactions It has been interesting to watch the effect of the trial on people in Israel and abroad. In Israel, there have been three distinct reactions. Survivors of the Nazi regime and their contemporaries who have some knowledge of the facts re-live the past as in a nightmare. Israelis of non-European origin, such as those from Mediterranean countries, are profoundly shocked and can scarcely comprehend it all. The Israel-born sabras respond with both understanding and incredulity. Why, they ask, did not the Jews of Europe fight back? During the war, when Rommel was at El Alamein and threatened to overrun Palestine, the Jews dug defenses, gathered arms, and prepared to fight. Why did not the Jews in the ghettos also fight? The answer was given by some of the witnesses: The Nazis played a devilish game of deception combined with terror. They deceived their victims until it was too late to escape. And anybody who showed spirit enough to hit back, if only by spitting at an SS man, was treated to torture worse than death. His children were smashed to death before his eyes. To this the sabra answers: The Jews in the ghetto always lived in fear. But we have a different spirit, we are fighters. Come what may, we shall stand up for ourselves and fight for our existence.

Abroad, as the reports have it, there is general sympathy with the Jewish case. In Italy, for instance, the Nazi crimes against the Jews are being studied for guidance in preventing a revival of Fascism there. In France, the macabre stories have aroused universal sympathy for the Jewish survivors and for Israel. In Germany, there is widespread breast-beating, but apparently pro-Nazi sentiments still exist in many places. In the Soviet Union, official propaganda treats the Jerusalem testimony as "parables," according to Pravda, and the conduct of the prosecution as a conspiracy between Israel and Adenauer's government. A Dr. Kaul, an official observer from East Germany, is doing his best to make West Germany appear as the chief culprit in

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the trial. In Cairo, the revelations must have caused some embarrassment since Nasser has given shelter to many Nazis and some notorious anti-Semites, and up to now his regime has refused to comment on the trial.

Trouble at the U. N.

The Arabs have created a number of difficulties for Israel during April. They found a useful tool in the "new" United Nations which is dominated by Afro-Asian states, some of which were influenced by the Communists. The first move came from King Hussein of Jordan, who began to make overtures to President Nasser of Egypt, obviously because he felt pro-Nasser sentiment in Jordan was so strong that it would be wise to improve relations between them. Hussein wrote Nasser a brotherly letter upholding the common Arab cause, but did not mention Israel. Nasser's response stressed the necessity of dealing with common enemies, notably imperialism (the West) and Israel. This produced a wave of popular pro-Nasser feeling in Jordan, which must have been a shock to Hussein. Hussein thereupon wrote another letter, ignoring Nasser's anti-Western approach, and Nasser snubbed him by sending no reply. Hussein's plan to visit Cairo was dropped. Meanwhile, Hussein had embarked on a more aggressive policy toward Israel, to impress his fellow Arabs. He complained to the Security Council against Israel's proposed Independence Day army parade in Jerusalem. At first, Israel was not especially concerned about the complaint, since Hussein himself had held such parades in the Jordan sector of the city. But the Armistice Commission pronounced the proposed parade a breach of the armistice with Jordan and the Security Council ordered Israel to cancel it. Israel refused, but rerouted the parade out of sight of Jordan's border guards.

Resolution on Refugees

Then came the Palestine Arab refugee question. Israel was criticized in the Political Committee of the United Nations for not having permitted refugees to return and for not having paid them compensation. Resolutions were also passed to set up a guardian over the property which Arab refugees had left behind in Israel. The main resolution was passed by the necessary two-thirds in the General Assembly, but the operative resolutions failed to secure sufficient support. These developments constituted a great political setback for Israel. The refugee question is certain to come up again at the Fall meeting of the U.N., and Israel will have to prepare herself for the next stage in the political battle. The Russian bloc guided the Arabs and voted solidly with them. The West wavered most of the time.

Observers in Israel and abroad are now asking how much longer the comparative calm in the Middle East will last. They believe that it may soon be followed by an outbreak of fighting. Nasser said in April that he is waiting for the first suitable moment to deal Israel a surprise blow and wipe it off the map. Israelis believe that Nasser means what he says, and they are taking no chances.

Policy Reappraised

Thus a debate on the need for a change in Israel's foreign and defense policy is now under way. Leaders of Mapam, who are always deeply worried about Israel's relations with the Arabs, and men

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like Dr. Nahum Goldmann, who commutes between Israel and New York, have said that Israel must change her foreign policy. They believe Israel must somehow try to come to terms with the Arabs, because she cannot forever be an isolated enclave on the Asian mainland. They also feel that Israel's defense budget puts too great a strain on her finances. Those who favor a change look to the new administration in Washington as a factor in the eventual relaxation of East-West tensions and consider this an auspicious moment to relax tensions in the Middle East as well. They urge that Israel become more neutral than she has been hitherto, seek a way of coming to terms with Abdul Nasser, and offer concessions on these three points: the return of some Palestine Arab refugees, the granting of access to Eilat harbor to Egypt and Jordan, and the establishment of a land passage between Egypt and Jordan through the Negev. Dr. Goldmann has coupled these recommendations with an attack on Prime Minister Ben Gurion, and has said that so long as Ben Gurion is in power, no change is likely.

Ben Gurion's lieutenants have replied through Moshe Dayan, who upholds the basic government policy based on full military preparedness and no concessions. The Ben Gurion group particularly disapproves of any territorial concessions, holding that Israel is small enough and cannot afford to part with any of its land. As for gestures of conciliation, Dayan thinks that Nasser would not be ready to accept them in the proper spirit, would interpret them as signs of Israel weakness, and would exploit such overtures to further his own aggressive ends. The debate continues.

Liberal Party

Dr. Nahum Goldmann is now in the Israel picture in connection with the forthcoming elections. The new Liberal Party was founded recently as a merger of the Progressive and the General Zionist parties. Both groups suffer from lack of popular and imaginative leadership and apparently regard Goldmann as just the personality to provide leadership at the top level. They asked Goldmann to head the new party, but he has given no final answer yet. Goldmann cannot decide whether to enter Israel internal politics, for this would affect his activity in world Jewish affairs. Meanwhile, the new party is facing two major difficulties. First, the two groups in the merger cannot agree on a fusion of their many offices, funds, machines and power positions without one group becoming dominated by the other. In order to avoid lengthy disputes just before the elections, all offices in the new party will be filled temporarily by two parallel appointments. Second, the policy of the new party is not at all clear. It does not differ from Mapai on foreign affairs, which is regarded as regrettable. With regard to internal affairs, the party opposes socialism, state controls, Histadrut domination. But will it become a true opposition or will it try to join the next government under Mapai? And what will it stand for?

Spy Sensation

Defense matters, which are always delicate, became even more so in April, when Israel Beer, a top-level military aide, was arrested for spying. He

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is said to have had contact with the Russians, mainly in West Germany, since 1957, and to have passed along many defense secrets which may have been transmitted by the Russians to the Arabs. Nobody quite knows how much Beer actually divulged. He was very well versed in Israel's defense and the Israel authorities can determine only from him how much information he handed over. The announcement of the spy charges, which were held back by censorship for two weeks although by then they were public property, shocked the entire country. It was followed by a call for a drastic overhaul of military security practices and a form of mass hysteria which made other persons in high places the focus of a whispering campaign involving wild charges of spying, embezzlement etc. All these rumors were unfounded, but they reflect the anxiety and confusion of the public. A cabinet committee was set up to examine secrecy procedures and the handling of secret materials, although Ben Gurion objected to this method of investigation. The Prime Minister himself was deeply shaken when he learned of the charges against Beer. It now appears that Beer has been a Communist for a number of years, and some say he never took a degree in military history, or was an old-time fighter in Vienna and Spain, as he claimed. He had been trusted without question, because he was one of the "old fighters" in the Haganah. Past comradeship counts very strongly in Israel -- too strongly, some people feel.

Teachers' Strike Ended

The high school teachers' strike was settled at the end of April, after 55 days in which the pupils attended no classes. Young people scheduled to graduate were very tense, for fear of failing their final examinations because their studies were interrupted. The teachers were granted most of their demands for differential pay, but the strike left a good deal of bitterness in its wake.

Kibbutz Comes to Town

A sign of the changing times in Israel was the recent exhibition, "The Family of the Kibbutz," in Tel Aviv. Only ten years ago the kibbutzim were still Israel's social and intellectual spearhead. Since then they have become politically split and socially isolated. Today most of the members of the kibbutzim are well settled and lead their own lives either as farmers and/or as budding industrialists, for some settlements have started to produce industrial goods. The exhibit was aimed at bridging the growing gulf between kibbutz dwellers and townspeople by providing a picture of kibbutz life today. It will probably not inspire many townspeople to move to the kibbutzim, but it will serve to create better understanding.

Another sign of new trends in Israel life was the "Twins' Convention" which took place during Passover. Hundreds of twins, mainly from the kibbutzim (which organized the event) met at the Ramat Gan stadium for fun and games. They did not discuss any of the problems of twins, such as preferential treatment or mutual jealousies, nor did they ask the government for special treatment for twins as such. They just had fun and basked in their special status.

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Archeology

On the more serious side, Israel hailed an important new development in the field of archeology. A four-man expedition headed by Professor Yigal Yadin returned from the Judean desert with 60 more documents from the time of Bar Kohbah's Jewish rising against the Romans, and 439 vessels and tools, most of them made of copper and all well preserved. The documents have been opened and read. None are as important as the original Dead Sea Scrolls, but all shed light on the life of the first century of the Christian Era.

Feast and Memorial Days

Throughout April, Israelis have been observing one holiday after another, even though they were simultaneously faced with such sombre matters as the Eichmann trial. The long Passover week was followed by Independence Day, a national holiday, and then by Labor Day on May 1. Many exhibitions and conventions, including some international meetings, took place during the month. There were also two serious days -- a legal holiday, Remembrance Day, for the victims of Nazism and a memorial day for Israel's fallen soldiers.

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