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The Swiss Observer

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NEUTRALITY MEANS SOLIDARITY

“Pro Israel”

On 14th May 1948, Israel's “Grand Old Man”, David Ben Gurion, declared the independence of the Israeli State at the Museum of Tel Aviv. An hour later, at United Nations Headquarters, the delegate of the United States of America read a declaration by the American President that the U.S.A. Government acknowledged the temporary Israeli leaders as the *de facto* Government of the new State of Israel.

The vision which Theodor Herzl had presented to the Zionist Congress in Basle 50 years previously had become a reality — the Jews had a homeland. After centuries of devastation and waste under the domination of the Turks and the Arabs, Israel had once more become “Garden of God”.

But only a few hours after the declaration of independence, the Arabs attacked the new Republic, and the fight of the Jews for Jerusalem, surrounded by the enemy, had to be fought in earnest. Under bombardment of Arab guns, the “Burma Road” was built in order to supply the population of the Holy City with vital food. Armoured vehicles tried to break the Arab barrage. Today, many monuments stand along the “Road of Bravery”.

In 1956 again, the Arabs were beaten in the Sinai Campaign. And now, in spring 1967, the UN troops were withdrawn from the Gaza Strip, and Egyptian forces marched up to the Israeli frontiers. Wolf Littmann asked in an article in the “Basler Nachrichten” on 3rd June, would the “Burma Road” have to be defended once again? He praised the admirable morale of the Jewish population — no trace of panic. Without any appeal by the authorities, the people volunteered: whole school classes applied at post offices for sorting and delivering letters; private cars took on passengers to relieve public transport; dozens of other examples could be given.

And then the war began. A small country of 2½ million inhabitants took on 40 million Arabs and triumphed victoriously. The war was over after 100 hours. A small State had fought for its existence and achieved a miracle. The Western Powers had stood aside, and Switzerland suddenly found herself surrounded by any number of neutral States — for the first time in history.

The Federal Council made a statement at the opening session of the two Chambers. The Government had been concerned at the situation in the Near East and was now alarmed that war had broken out. The Federal Council regretted that military action had to be taken instead of a peaceful settlement. “The Swiss Federal Council as

Government of a State which keeps out of foreign concerns and is used in all cases to going the path of international law, negotiation and arbitration for the solution of differences, sees in this the only settlement of international disputes. It expresses the hope that negotiations within the United Nations Organisations or a special conference of Power States will find a peaceful solution of the conflict. Switzerland, true to her tradition of good services has been ready to co-operate as far as possible in any action which is suitable to re-establish peace. The Federal Council is at one with the sentiments of the Swiss people who have realised anew and strongly these last few days that a neutral small State finds a first prerequisite for securing its existence and the right to live in loyalty to justice and in the affirmation of its determined preparedness to defend itself.”

In their formal opening addresses, the Presidents of the two Federal Chambers referred to the war in Israel. *Ständeratspräsident* Rohner (Liberal, St. Gall) recalled 5th June 1947 when the American Secretary of State George Marshall made his famous speech which was the beginning of the economic reconstruction in Europe. That event had obviously been forgotten by many of the recipients of generous aid. Today's events spoke a distinct language, said Councillor of States Rohner. In an unequivocal way, he valiantly spoke up for Israel and declared that the fight for existence of a small people could not leave the Swiss indifferent. “Certainly, we don't want to judge from a lofty standpoint. Nor are we to give unasked-for advice to anybody, but it is also our concern that peace and freedom do not disappear in the world.”

Not one word of criticism from any source that the Leader of a Federal Chamber in a neutral country should openly declare his sympathies. But the Swiss saw an analogy, and when they talked of Israel, they thought of Switzerland.

The Basle Parliament condemned Arab aggression and declared its sympathy and support for Israel. It asked the Federal Council to appeal to the United Nations to introduce all suitable measures to safeguard the right to live and the national home of the Jewish nation.

Spontaneous readiness to help was evident all over the country: Ecumenical Church services, statements and resolutions, collections, hundreds of letters of sympathy to the Israeli Embassy, pro Israel demonstrations and imposing manifestations from political Parties to Church organisations, from schools to trade unions, from large

industrial concerns to small Commune Councils. Money began to pour in. In the Münsterhof in Zurich, over 12,000 francs was collected during a demonstration, over 10,000 on the Münsterplatz in Berne, over 8,000 francs in Lucerne. Church collections, meeting allowances of parliamentarians, proceeds of cinema and other performances were given over; the town of Zurich donated Fr.1000,000.—. This sum is earmarked for the re-building of Jerusalem.

News has just come in that the Federal Council has made a first donation of a quarter of a million francs to the International Red Cross Committee for the immediate relief of suffering in the Near East. This has since been increased to a million.

A campaign "Pro Israel" was started which, by 8th June, had already over twenty branches, some in such small Communes as Murten and Mellingen. The initiators of the campaign were prominent men and women from all corners of the country, publishers, politicians, judges, presidents of organisations, clergymen and journalists. Within a few hours almost, nearly 700 personalities had signed the manifesto, of whom 94 federal parliamentarians, and 360 University professors and lecturers. Their address is *Muenzgraben 2, 3000 Berne, Telephone (031) 22 74 64*. The four ways by which they organise help are: 1) opening of a fund for humanitarian assistance to Israel (*Postal cheque account 30-4620*); 2) blood donation scheme; 3) gifts of medical instruments and drugs; 4) a nation-wide "Day for Israel". The executive organ of the campaign consists of the publisher Peter Lang, Berne, National Councillor Peter Dürrenmatt, Basle, former Councillor of State Jean Treina, Geneva, and *Regierungsrat* Dr. Erwin Schneider, Berne.

The "Pro Israel Day" was held on 15th June. As news of the result of that special concerted effort did not reach us in time for publication, we shall report on it in our next issue. For the moment, all that can be said is that the enthusiasm and the determination with which this day was organised supports once more the view that the neutrality of a State is by no means *Gesinnungsverpflichtung* for the individual.

The special appeal for blood donors has been most successful. The Swiss Red Cross has given 1,000 units of blood plasma from the blood bank which had been started for emergencies. They are being replaced constantly, and amongst the donors were numerous Arabs living in Switzerland, mainly students. The Red Cross carried blood plasma to Nicosia with a DC-4 machine of Balair. At the same time, a Red Cross delegation flew to Cyprus where they installed a depot. Another Red Cross plane left Geneva with 6 tons of material, bandages, surgical instruments, milk for babies and drugs. Many national Red Cross Societies have sent substantial amounts of money to Geneva.

Two to three years will be needed to make good the damage suffered by Israel. In Jerusalem alone there are 500 seriously injured. Over 1,000 houses have been destroyed; three large hospitals, the new museum and the University, synagogues and the Government Building have suffered. Suburbs of Tel Aviv and other towns have been damaged, as well as over forty villages and *kibbuzim*. It is estimated that the rebuilding of Jerusalem alone will cost 225 million Swiss francs.

When the big powers remain neutral, the small neutral State has to come out of its reserve and help. The Swiss

Evangelical Federation of Churches voiced the opinion of many in a resolution sent to the Federal Council. They asked the Government to pay the greatest attention to the obligations and possibilities which are anchored in the maxim of neutrality. The idea of solidarity should find expression in a positive contribution to peace. This thought is beginning to be more and more important in an ever changing and imperilled world. They appealed to the Swiss Government to study ways and means by which an effective Swiss contribution could be made towards negotiating a settlement between enemy parties.

The Western Powers neutral — the British Government, supported by the Opposition, adhering to a policy of non-intervention in the fight for life of a small State for whose existence Britain is largely responsible. When the Russian Zionist leader and great physicist Chaim Weizmann, at that time in England, discovered a new formula for the production of acetone for the British Admiralty, he asked for something *for his people*. On 2nd November 1917, the Foreign Minister Mr. Arthur (later Lord) Balfour wrote a letter to the British Zionist leader Walter Rothchild, in which he promised help for a home for the Jewish people in Palestine. The "Balfour Declaration" made history. At that time it would have been unthinkable that Great Britain would remain passive when the Suez Canal is threatened. What would the outcome have been today had the Israel forces not been victorious?

The happenings in the Near East have given Switzerland a beneficial jolt. A sudden interest in politics has flared up, and the apathy noticeable amongst the young citizens in particular has given way to active concern. But voices have been heard that warned of complacency and self-righteousness. Not everyone has cut a fine figure — what about the hoarders of vast quantities of food and golden coins ("Vrenelis")? Such materialist attitudes leave a bad taste behind.

The sad spectacle the world witnessed is the failure of the United Nations. Switzerland has taken note of it. For the time being, at least, the voices advocating Switzerland's entry into UNO have been silenced. It now remains to be seen if United Nations will be the forum where the difficult peace in the Near East can be established.

A miracle has happened and has upset the theory that nowadays the small nations are "condemned to complete passivity in the shadow of the Atom Giants" (National Councillor Peter Dürrenmatt, "Basler Nachrichten"). The courageous fight and superb morale of the Israeli have shown that faith and the true will to defend is still more important than superiority in numbers and first-class equipment.

The Chairman of the Basle Campaign Committee "Pro Israel", *Regierungsrat* Dr. Lukas Burckhardt, said that the Swiss should have special understanding for Israel's plight. 24 years after the Confederation came into being, the Swiss had to fight against the aggressors at Morgarten in 1315 — the young Israel was now facing the same fate 19 years after its foundation.

"Der Kleine hilft dem Kleinen — Switzerland helps Israel."

(Compiled by the Editor from news and information received by courtesy of the Agence Télégraphique Suisse and "Basler Nachrichten".)