

Press Conference  
between  
THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEVI ESHKOL  
and a group of  
German Socialist Journalists invited  
by Mapai, under the auspices of  
Friedrich Ebert Stiftung  
April 28, 1965

MR. ESHKOL: Welcome. I am sure you know the word "Shalom" and what it means. First, in welcoming you here you will have the opportunity to learn another two words and remember them. A very short expression, "Bruchim Haba'im". It is like shalom, but still more than shalom: "Blessed are they who come to us."

How long will you be with us?

MR. SCHULTZ: Two weeks.

MR. ESHKOL: And the two weeks start from today?

PARTICIPANT: Arrived on Sunday.

MR. ESHKOL: I am ready if you want to ask questions.

(Question propounded in German.)

MR. ESHKOL: Yesterday I said in answer to almost the same question from the press that even in the dark days of the Hitler regime there were, at least I believe and I hope, not 100 percent of the German people who were Hitlerites. Surely I believe and I am of the opinion that this is a different Germany. This is a democratic regime. We know people like Adenauer and some of his colleagues in the government and Prof. Erhard and again I say some of his colleagues - I don't know them all. I am sure it is a different approach and



different philosophy, but I am not sure that it is 100 percent different on the part of the population. As a government, as a government that was elected or is elected by the people, and this is the image for us or should be the image, it is a different image. And I hope it is not only an image. I hope that behind the image there is a content.

We have a wise and deep expression in the chapters of one of our Prophets that says, "The parents ate sour fruit and the teeth of the children have been set on edge." This is our philosophy: the children or the sons shouldn't be punished for the past sins.

And then I said it depends on how the new generation, how really the Germans in this decade and the decades to come, and how will Germany appear before the world. How will we, if you ask me as a Jew, see it?

But the basis approach is: there was an era, there was a time (now again a translation) of the "dimming of the lights". There was such an era in Germany. We want to hope and we believe that this is past.

(Question propounded in German.)

MR. ESHKOL: As you know, The Chancellor came up with the proposal. We always thought that Germany has to offer to establish diplomatic relations. Now, a few weeks ago it came up

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And the basic message is that there was an era, there  
 was a time (now again a translation) of the "dimming of the  
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(Laughter prolonged in German.)

Mr. DEGEN: As you know, the Chancellor's came up with  
 the proposal. We always thought that Germany has to offer to  
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all of a sudden. It was a really good surprise: the offer to establish relations. We since then negotiated and I hope that in a few days - I don't know why it is being protracted now. I think that if we are going to have diplomatic relations, we should do it at once. I hope that in a few days the decision will come forward. It is not only a question of establishing diplomatic relations and ambassadors here and there. There are some outstanding hard problems, and here, too, I think we will come to an agreement, although to my taste I would like to see it on broader lines, a more generous approach, and not to bargain sometimes on very small things and very small formulations. But this is a sidelight.

In principle, I think that relations will be established and we will have an exchange of ambassadors.

For instance, we asked that the German Embassy should be established in Jerusalem. We want to have it in Jerusalem. I think it would be a nice gesture on the side of Germany. Nevertheless, they said, the United States and Great Britain are not doing it yet so why we. Although there is nothing binding Germany because she did not participate in the decision of the United Nations and is not bound by it. It is only one example of such small things.

So we will now after 17 or 18 years of our Statehood come to normalize relations between the governments. But when

we are speaking off the record and really entre nous, it is still a long way to go to normalize relations and feelings between peoples. You will find - you will not look for them but I am telling you - tens of thousands of people with numbers on their arms. You have seen the Yad Veshem. It is only a symbol. You have here tens of thousands of people whose parents have perished or relatives. I am from Russia so my parents were lucky to die in a different way. So I hope it is a normalizing relation between governments and to do away with some stones on the road, on the way, between peoples, it is still a long way. The memories of people are composed differently than the electronic computer. To say how and when and what this will really change or be eradicated, I am not a prophet for it.

I have come across a book of Jewish history, an abbreviated book, because Jewish history is so many volumes as is every nation but ours is a nation of 4,000 years, with all its wanderings. And I came across the relations of Jews with Spain, the period of the Inquisition. It was not as tragic as the Hitler period. 1492 was the eviction of the Jews - not in the millions but a few hundred thousands from the days of the Inquisition. And still when we talk of Spain - and I am not a Spanish Jew, a Sephardic Jew - or think of Spain, although

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from my point of view I would be ready. We have no diplomatic relations with Spain and I for various political reasons and realizing that, after all, it is the 20th Century and the world is different and in 14 hours you reach New York and in three hours you reach Madrid - it is an entirely different world - think one day we may establish. But there were other reasons because Franco is not of our taste. We are more progressive or even, I would say, with a Socialistic tinge, at least a deeply democratic people in our way of life. But nevertheless I would think that one day there will be relations with Spain. But after hundreds of years it is still in our memories and in our feelings.

So this is what I wanted to point out: that we appreciate it and I think it is in time to have established these diplomatic relations. It is a step forward, but we all of us should know that still the hearts are bleeding. I don't know how long it will take: one generation, two generations, five generations. I am not going to prophecy. I know that young people, German boys and girls, come to us and we are happy to have them. They are in our villages and collective farms and good relations are being established, sometimes comradely relations. Because we feel that these young people regret the past, the same as I regret, because as I said, my parents did not perish there as I am from Russia since 1913. I am not going to tell their

story there. It was tragic enough too, but in a different way - the revolution, the Nikolai , , and Trotsky and the Bolshevicks. Many people died and perished but on a different basis. So there are different trends. People come and we become friendly with them. I am not going to mention names of grown-up people, people from Hitler's era but we know that they are different or they were different. And when young boys and girls come, we know that our young people become friendly with them. But as a whole, it may take time. And it depends on what will be during this decade, how it will develop.

I would not like to elaborate more. There may come such a day, such a time - but this is really off the record - it is an idea that came to me just at the moment. We live here surrounded not only by friends. That is an understatement, a British understatement you know. But our enemies are the close neighbors. We were lucky to establish very good and very friendly relations with even Arab countries behind this circle. If I will mention Turkey; if I will mention Iran; if I will mention Abyssinia, although it doesn't present itself as a Moslem country there are millions of Moslems there, not to talk about the African countries in the dozens. You know that we concentrate in some cases in the United Nations 60-70 countries that are ready always to work with us or help us.

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 about the African continent in the sense. You know that we  
 concentrate in our case in the United States. I concentrate  
 but are ready always to work with anybody.

So this is why I said, this understatement that we are not surrounded by friends. There is Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan. And even here you can discern and distinguish, if not for the fear from Nasser, that Jordan is different in its attitude, in its heart and deep feelings. Lebanon is entirely different. I won't say about Syria. I am sure you know the opinion of Bourguiba and he is right when he says he is not the only one. He knows what leaders in the Arab world - and maybe even Nasser himself in spite of the fact that he is now raising hell with them - think.

Maybe some day there may occur an occasion that the Western World, be it the United States, be it France - I am not making any suggestion; maybe it's premature - maybe Germany shall be able to play a role in changing these relations, because after all, it stands to reason, it makes no sense all this hatred, because as Bourguiba said - he is not the first one to say it and I hope not the last - Israel is here to stay and it will grow. We count today a population of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  million and at the end of this decade we will reach 3 million, by our natural increase and immigration. In another decade, another million. That is what I will say for the next 25 years and: I am not going to plan and dream after 25 years. Maybe the second or third generation can, maybe you, you are younger. We may grow and

reach a 5 million population, if we will be able to develop an industrial community. We have a little brain, less than we could have had were it not for the tragedy of the Hitler era, because the Jews that were massacred, the brains of those Jews, Polish Jewry, if they studied in universities or in the Jewish-Hebrew old institutions of culture the Talmud, their brains were sharpened very much. And now we have lost them.

So I say: maybe such a thing may once occur and then all of a sudden it could change the attitude and feelings of the people and they might say, let by-gones be by-gones. But this is something which came to my mind at this moment while we are discussing. I am not suggesting it; maybe it is premature. Although I am of the opinion that we shall live in the hope that every day it may come as pious Jews hoped for generations that the Messiah may come every moment, every day. This is one of the 13 principles of the famous Rambam, the Spanish Jew, one of the great teachers and philosophers of those days: to believe and to hope every day but nevertheless to be prepared that it may take so many time and years.

But such a thing may revolutionize the feelings. The Germany people, the German government - I am more interested in people than in governments; governments do change especially in democratic systems, and sometimes very often. Our term is four years between elections but sometimes we have once in two

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years. So the help of the German people in reaching a peace may revolutionize the opinion. But again this is no hint for some realistic or materialistic purpose. I am only talking now from a historiosophical point of view.

QUESTION: Why is the Israel Government holding back on its reaction with regard to Bourguiba?

MR. ESHKOL: There are two or three reasons. First of all - again I am talking about my feeling - I felt that we may spoil and we may endanger him and his life. If Israel will say, There is the Messiah, the savior has come, so in the eyes of the Arab countries it would be a proof that Bourguiba is a traitor; he is selling them down the river, as they say in English. That's number one.

Number two. In Russian there is a good expression though in English/<sup>it</sup> is not so polite. It is a "bloody interesting problem" for us, a "bludic fraga". And we didn't know exactly what does he say and what does he mean. From speech to speech he changed a little. In Amman he said an-and-so. In Jerusalem, when he spoke on the other side, he said a little less. In Turkey, I think, some bitter pills. So during his speeches maybe he is only developing his system, his plan, his suggestions, and at the end what he is now suggesting is utterly unacceptable.

What is acceptable is the one thing that he says to the Arabs: Friends, there is no way to think about war. In war we will not succeed. This is a step forward. So this is the

most important. This is the only one and most important thing: that he says we have to look for ways and means how in a peaceful way to find a solution.

So these are the reasons. For instance, I thought that he is not interested that some of us shall talk to him because he is still afraid. He himself is still afraid. It is against the policy "to greet under the linden". I said it once to Prof. Erhard. I have met him twice when before I was in this office I was the Finance Minister and we discussed economic problems. There came up the suggestion of doing something secretly and I said "I don't like it too much" all this under the table business. Here, too, Bourguiba is still afraid. He wouldn't like, and I can understand him, really to start to negotiate with the Prime Minister or the Foreign Minister, to sit down at a round table.

So this is our attitude now: that this is an interesting development. I myself said some two years ago in the United States on Television that I personally believe that the appearance, the facade of the Arab hostile attitude is an appearance, is a facade, but that I believe that under this cover, or under the surface maybe there is already a new generation, young people, intelligentia, writers, here and there, people with some other attitude and another approach. And when Bourguiba came out with his statement, I found a proof to my prophecy. But again, as they say in Israel, it is very dangerous

to compete with prophecy. Israel was a land of Prophets. Things may again turn to the worse. You can still not know. But I know from various sources that Bourguiba is right in saying: I am not the only one.

But I am now answering your question. These are the reasons. This is an important development. We felt that we have still to try to be quiet, to wait and see how will it develop.

And then, of course, we will have an argument because his practical suggestions are utterly impossible, and while you touched this question - and I will ask from my managers that they will give us another 15 minutes because it is a very important question - Israel was partitioned already three or four times. What we are doing, our activities, as you see us now, with our 2½ million, with a certain degree of development, and some people, some guests and even economists and politicians say we have achieved something during these years. Maybe we are criticizing ourselves more than people coming from abroad. But all this in a territory less than 25 percent of the real Palestine. When Great Britain took over the Mandate for Palestine after the First World War, it was four times the territory it is today. We are not quarreling this. You will understand, because although agriculture and the "back to nature" and "back to the primary sources of nature" was the basic philosophy of Zionism, of coming home, because of the

historical development in which we were detached from nature and were always pushed into the cracks of the existing economies in various countries, we know this cannot be. When I came to Israel as a young boy, my belief was that we will be 80 percent farmers. I came from the Ukraine. What was the Ukraine in those days? Farming - dry farming, using a little the rain in Russia and no more, but this was the philosophy. This was our moral approach to our coming back home.

Nowadays, in this part of the world, with this climate, with the possibility of very intensive agriculture, with the export of oranges and avodado and what not, and when one farmer can produce for a dozen and a half families, as we see it - besides wheat or corn - so for this you need much bigger stretches of land and we are here a country of intensive farming. So it must be industry, tourism - and again we are not very happy to be a nation of servants for tourists, but economics presses us to do it. But industry and farm products, especially for exports, because for our own needs we have more than we need, is our emphasis. So our activities are today only 20-25 percent of Palestine.

So when he comes and says that we will have to give up a part of this, it is an utterly impossible thing because if Israel cannot be the place to solve<sup>the</sup> problem of hundreds of thousands or even millions more people who want to come. If they want to sit in the United States, let them sit. Or maybe

they will come and their eyes will be opened. There is Israel. It is a matter of either-or. Either Israel will be so attractive in the way of life, in the production, that it will attract people even from the affluent societies or affluent countries or, God forbid, somewhere there will be some calamity for Jews that they will run here, as, for instance - again off the record - we see the situation of the future of Jews in South Africa. They number only 100,000 or 150,000 people. They are living in danger. They are blind. Between these two millstones of the Boors or the Whites and the Blacks, and as the Jews always have a more progressive inclination so they are with the Blacks and Verwoerd is very cross with Israel because we voted in the United Nations against him. So if our brethren in South Africa would ask our advice, we would tell them: pack your baggage as soon as possible and come over here. So during the decade we do not know what will happen.

This is why I would like you to know that his practical suggestions are utterly impossible, but it is still a way 'til we reach a stage and sit down around the table - and we are always asking and we are always saying: let's meet around the table and let's discuss. We hope we will persuade them. Maybe they will persuade us. Of course, we will discuss the problems of Arab refugees and there are other questions. Once they accept that Israel is a fact, that they will recognize

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 the problem of Arab refugees and there are other questions.  
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the existence of Israel, as presented in Bourguiba's appearance: here is a fact that we have to take into consideration and that's it; let's find a solution for the secondary problems.

(Question propounded in German.)

MR. ESHKOL: We are not a monolithic people here today. We have parties, political parties. You said a part of the German parties are against the establishing of diplomatic relations, so we have here too parties against relations. There is a right-wing party, 17 among 120 members of the Parliament, and we have still even a left-wing party, so all together some 25 who, for different reasons - one party to the very left, one to the right - are against. And together with the Communists, of whom we have 6 representatives, we have 31 against. The Communist reasons you can understand. When Kosygin or Krushchev or someone of the Russian leaders will find a solution or establish relations with Germany, everything will be all right. You have diplomatic relations but for the Communists we have to be more "Papal than the Pope". We have to be more against Germany than Moscow. So these parties are against.

Again when I speak about intergovernment relations, it makes no difference for us. From the point of view of more cordial relations, when it has to do with the heart already, of course, then it is noted somewhere that Mr. X, a leader of

the party or a part of his party, is against establishing relations for various reasons. Maybe some very hard materialistic reasons or boycott of Arabs or the Arab boycott against Jews, or trading with them, for various reasons or maybe even some with the tinge of racist approach or anti-Semitism. So this goes into the realm of cordial relations between people.

QUESTION: Does the agreement on arms with Germany create difficulties for you internally in your country?

MR. ESHKOL: To tell you the truth, as a Government it makes difficulties. When the over to establish relations came up I felt it necessary to bring the problem before the Parliament. It is not usual. It is not necessary. We have our ambassadors today in some 78 or 83 countries, as some dozens of countries have their ambassadors here. It is not a question of Parliament. But here I felt I had to bring it to the Parliament. And I was happy and glad that we had a fine majority, far from 100 percent, but a fine majority for it. And, of course, the opposition parties will always tell us: You and Ben Gurion said it is a different Germany. These are the sons of those people. Look at the leaders and we need help and we can be helped and Germany is in the heart of Europe and it is a big nation and, after all, the past of Germany - beyond the Hitler past- and the future. Of course, the Opposition

comes and says, We have been promised and this when Israel was in dire need of arms, because the arsenals of Russia are opened for Nasser and he gets what he wants. Where is the promise? Where is the fulfilment of the promise? Or we had a problem. Nasser got a dozen submarines. We don't want submarines. We don't know what to do with them. Maybe we have a pair of them. I am not speaking about submarines. I am speaking about seaboats and Nasser is getting seaboats, missile-bearing seaboats, and this is a serious danger. They can hit Haifa 25 or 30 miles out at sea. And you cannot have them from every country. So we have been told. We have a special committee in the Parliament, which knows everything. It is a committee in which only the Communists don't participate. All the parties, left and right and the die-hard right, sit in this committee and they know everything. So they ask: you said it is so important and you hope you will get help from the German people or the German government. What will you say now? It makes life more difficult, or more complicated, the political life, and again from the point of view of cordial rapprochement.

But nevertheless, we have discussed and we tried to find the solution and take into consideration that the Germany government decided not to supply arms - fine - so we accepted it. We agreed to it. Because we said, this time, with the establishing of diplomatic relations and we thought it is

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a fine gesture, but if you ask me if it makes life easier or more difficult, it certainly makes it difficult.

There is another danger. I regret that the problems are so complicated that I cannot answer short. As I said, the arsenals of Moscow are really open wide for Nasser. If a people or a country, a government, like the German government, says, we wouldn't like to sell arms, from one point of view, it is very nice, very humanitarian, if nobody would sell arms. If Nasser would not get arms. But if Germany says, we are not going to supply arms and tomorrow England - and we had a few years that England wouldn't sell us arms. We had a few years that France was the only one from whom we could buy and pay higher prices. France is not a cheap country and they like money. All of us like money. But they like money. And we started our war of liberation in 1948 with a few, we used to call them "Premus" which is the stove used by the housewife. We used to call the small pipers "premus". We only then had a half-dozen and now we reached the stage where we had to buy a jet for a million and a quarter or a million and one-half of dollars. They are talking now about jets or bombers that will cost 3 and 4 million dollars a piece. So with hat in hand, we are very grateful to France that at least they agreed to sell. So for Israel it is a real danger. We are here surrounded, as I said, not with friends. We are only one. Germany will say: we are not going to supply arms, and the formula is a very



nice one, to areas of tension. In one of my letters, if I may disclose it, to the Chancellor, or in a talk with somebody, maybe with Dr. Birrenbach, when they say "area of tension" the question is who makes the tension. Are we tensing somebody or are we being tensed or pressed to the wall. I would give a guarantee to the Western World, a real guarantee - not the kind of guarantee represented by the tri-partite agreement or promise that when it comes to doing something they start anew to investigate and to ask. We would give the strongest guarantees that we are not going to attack somebody. We need the money. We are spending too much for arms. They too. The Arabs too. I know better uses for the monies. But as it is, Germany says no and tomorrow another country and then a third, and then schlush. We are not too many. It is bad; it is complicated; it is dangerous. But we accepted it. There are things for which you must have two parties, as they say for love. And you must have at least two parties here. If Germany decided not to sell us or to help us in arms -

QUESTION: Will you meet Chancellor Erhard shortly?

MR. ESHKOL: I would be afraid to answer this question because I said several times in public yes after I had some hint from Germany that we will meet, but weeks and months have passed, so I am now refraining from giving you an answer, because for this prupose you need at least two. I don't know what is in

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 that better made for the world. But as it is, certain says  
 of the country another country and then a third, and then  
 again. We are not too many. It is bad; it is not good.  
 It is dangerous, but we accepted it. There are things for  
 which you must have two parties, as they say for level, and you  
 must have at least two parties here. If I am not decided not to  
 sell us or to help us in any -

QUESTION: Will you want to answer the question  
 Mr. Eisenhower, I would be glad to answer this question  
 because I said several times in public that I had some  
 kind of a guarantee that we will not, but we will not have  
 peace, so I am not returning from China as an answer, because  
 for this purpose you need at least two. I don't know what to do

the mind of the Chancellor. I would say in a few months. I would still say maybe yes. If you will have an opportunity to ask the Chancellor and if you will have a reply, I would be glad if you will communicate to me.

QUESTION: In a third place? In a neutral place?

MR. ESHKOL: I don't know what to say. When official relations will exist, the protocol says "why not?" I won't say no. You didn't ask, and I didn't answer. We will see. Life will give its proof. Personally I wouldn't mind visiting Germany. I was there in 1933-34-35. I was in Berlin working in the Jewish Youth Movement, pioneers, and advising grown-ups on the transfer of goods from Germany to Israel. We bought rails, steel and other things.

MR. SCHULTZ: We know that this has been off-the-record. Will you give us two or three sentences on the record?

MR. ESHKOL: I mustn't give it now? Give me 24 hours and we'll see.

MR. SCHULTZ: Warm thanks from all of us.

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the kind of the Chancellor. I would say in a few months, I would still say the same. If you will have an opportunity to see the Chancellor and if you will have a reply, I would be glad if you will communicate same.

QUESTION: In a third place, in a neutral place, Mr. Tolson: I don't know what to say. When official relations will exist, the protocol says "why not?" I want to say, no. You didn't see, and I didn't answer. We will see. We will give the answer. I wouldn't mind visiting Germany. I was there in 1953-54-55. I was in Berlin working on the Jewish Youth Movement, and advising them up on the transfer of goods from Germany to Israel. We have relations, still and that kind of.

MR. TOLSON: I know that this has been off-the-record. Will you give us two or three paragraphs on the record.

MR. TOLSON: I wouldn't give it now. Give it 24 hours and we'll see.

MR. CHURCHMAN: Would you like the rest of it?