



# PRIME MINISTER

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BEN-GURION CENTENARY  
MELBOURNE - 8 NOVEMBER 1987

Tonight brings to a close a year's celebration in Australia of the hundredth anniversary of the birth of David Ben-Gurion - a man through whose vision the state of Israel was born, through whose efforts the Jewish people throughout the world were united in a common cause, and through whose ideals the world was given a society of enduring commitment to the free and egalitarian principles of democracy.

David Ben-Gurion personified the traditions, the aspirations, and the achievements of the Jewish people. Indeed as the founder of the modern state of Israel he can claim to have brought those traditions and aspirations to their just and logical fulfillment in the achievement of nationhood and independence for the Jewish people.

The letter from Shimon Peres that has just been read provides eloquent testimony of the achievement and legacy of David Ben-Gurion.

Ben-Gurion was born in the Diaspora - in Plonsk in northern Poland. From an early age he became imbued with the spirit of Zionism. He went to Palestine as a pioneer in 1906 and his whole life thereafter was spent in the struggle of the Zionist cause as it sought to establish a Jewish national homeland there.

He served for 14 years as secretary of the Confederation of Labour, the Histadrut. Under his guidance it became not only a trade union representing the interests of workers but also a means of mobilising all pioneers, farmers and workers in the endeavour to create and foster a Jewish state.

And I know from my personal contacts with the Histadrut, built up over a number of visits to Israel, what an impressive and effective organisation it is in the achievement of those goals.

All Australians can identify with the work Ben-Gurion and his fellows faced in successfully challenging the deserts to bloom; and I mention in passing the appropriateness of the inauguration of gardens in his honour, having had the pleasure of opening one such garden in Perth and, together with

President Herzog, another at the National Jewish Memorial Centre in Canberra.

David Ben-Gurion worked all his life for the Israeli working class. He was a great socialist, a man of great vision, an inspiring leader for Labour Parties every where.

After Ben-Gurion proclaimed the independence of the State of Israel on 14 May, 1948, he became its first Prime Minister, and his inspired leadership over 15 years guided the new nation through many of its early trials.

But David Ben-Gurion also knew that more than physical labour was needed to recreate the Jewish homeland - and more even than the idealism of Zionism.

What was also needed, regrettably, was the capacity to defend itself. So he became not only the first Prime Minister of the new nation but also its first Defence Minister.

And in the forty years since that proclamation, he and his successors as Prime Minister and Defence Minister have had to call on Israel's armed forces to defend the very existence of the nation.

When I made my first visit to Israel in 1971 - two years before Ben-Gurion's death - nothing could have been more apparent than that Israel was then a country surrounded by nations committed to its destruction. Israel's very survival was in question.

Now, as a result of the brilliance and courage the Israeli people exhibited in fighting for their collective survival, the security of their nation is assured.

Throughout the whole cycle of the establishment and entrenchment of the Israeli nation, one theme emerges as a constant. It is a theme with which Ben-Gurion was familiar: political courage.

I mean courage to take the risks inherent in the huge human drama of Zionism; courage to fight when necessary - a need made all the more stark by the horror of the Holocaust; and - of complete relevance to today's Israel - courage to know when negotiation, not confrontation, is the right course.

Earlier this year I had the pleasure of making an official visit to Israel, Jordan and Egypt which allowed me at first hand to gain an up-to-date perspective of the current position in the Middle East.

The Arab-Israeli dispute has resulted in four wars between Israel and its neighbours since the Second World War. If it is left unresolved, the dispute still has potential to involve the rest of the world should the region become a stage for conflict between the super powers.

Yet it is my judgement, developed before my visit and strongly confirmed by it, that the leaders of Israel and of two of the main Arab States that are party to the dispute - Jordan and Egypt - are committed to the achievement of peace in the region.

I don't mean just the achievement of a formal peace which would bring an end to the fighting. I mean, more importantly, that they are committed to a constructive peace which would advance the economic and social wellbeing, as well as the political freedoms, of all the peoples in the region.

There is no simple panacea or ready formula that can be applied to resolve a conflict that goes back more than 40 years. But I believe some necessary elements are within reach, which suggests strongly that the path to peace could be opened up by courageous leaders.

I have already referred to the most important of these elements. First, I believe, that the question facing Israel is no longer the question of whether it has the capacity to survive. Its survival is assured - thanks in part to the risks Israel was forced to take in fighting the wars of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973.

The question now facing Israel is whether it can take similar risks in entering negotiations, on the basis of its assured survival, to achieve lasting peace.

And second, there may never again be a situation in which Israel has, in King Hussein and President Mubarak, two leaders who are unequivocally and sincerely committed to an end of the fighting and tensions and to the creation of a constructive peace in the region.

Accordingly the convening of an international peace conference stands as a constructive possibility which must be addressed if a settlement of the Middle East's problems is to be found. Such a conference should not impose solutions on the parties but would provide a framework within which discussions between the parties could take place.

The actual mechanics of holding the conference - whether for example, the conference is attended by the five permanent nations of the UN Security Council or held under the joint auspices of the United States and Soviet Union - are less important than that the conference genuinely seek to achieve the desired result of peace.

The question of the PLO's involvement in a conference would have to be determined in the process of discussions between the parties.

The capacity of the PLO to play a role would depend on their preparedness to accept Israel's right to exist - and to translate their tacit acceptance that Israel is going to

continue permanently to be part of the map of the Middle East into a formal statement of that position.

This would require, first, that the PLO shall in fact accept and recognise UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. This would lead, second, to recognition of Israel's right to exist within secure and internationally recognised boundaries. And, third, they should repudiate the strategy of terror and accept the process of negotiation.

If these three things were done, there would be in my judgement an obligation upon Israel to reciprocate contemporaneously by recognising the fact of the PLO's representative capacity and its entitlement to participation in the process of negotiation.

It is no secret that there is division within the Israeli Government over the future course of events, and, in particular, over the merit of an international conference.

Australia is not of course a party principal to the Middle East dispute, but within our capacity, we stand ready to help if that is the wish of the countries most directly involved.

Let me repeat that it is a sine qua non of Australian involvement in peace effects in the Middle East that our purpose is to achieve the necessary conditions by which Israel can be totally secure and that peace is constructive and hence lasting.

Ben Gurion spoke often of the common interests of Israel and the Arab world, of the Middle East's potential to become the world's richest garden, of how by standing together in friendship and good will the countries of the Middle East could aspire to an independence and economic self-sufficiency never achieved in all its history. In his memoirs written in 1970, he said:

"Our desire for peace is constant ... We are prepared to envisage important concessions in the name of a true negotiation with the nations that surround us. Certainly we stand ready to mobilise all the energy and skills we have been forced to develop and invest in defence, for the far more fruitful purpose of materially aiding our neighbours to attain levels of peaceful development ...".

Today, the same challenge faces the State of Israel. Let us hope that the vision of Ben Gurion inspires her leaders to accept that challenge.

I do not underestimate for a minute the difficulty of the course I am recommending.

But let me put to you the factor which compelled my conclusion that Israel must take the path of negotiations.

It revolves around the simple and inexorable arithmetic of demography.

The population of Israel, including the occupied territories, consists roughly of 3 million Jews and 2 million Arabs. Of those 2 million Arabs, some 1.3 million live in the occupied territories.

The population projections between 1985 and 2015 are for a population growth among the Arab residents of some 2.7 per cent and among the Jewish population of about 1.3 per cent.

What we must understand therefore is that by the turn of the century the Jews could be a minority in their own land.

In such an outcome, Jews would then have to make the choice between remaining a Jewish State or a democratic state.

That choice is unpalatable - indeed it is unacceptable. It is certainly not the choice that the founders of the State of Israel - including David Ben-Gurion - dreamed of, or died for. But unless the process of negotiation is pursued and embraced, it is the choice that will face the next generation of Israeli leaders.

Ladies and gentlemen

As many of you will know, I will be making an official visit to the Soviet Union later this month, accompanied by my Foreign Minister Bill Hayden and a delegation of Australian businessmen.

It is a very timely visit for many reasons, not least that it will immediately precede the summit meeting between Secretary-General Gorbachev and President Reagan, at which the INF treaty is to be signed.

We can all, I believe, take deep satisfaction at this manifestation by the superpowers of their intention and capacity to work together constructively in their mutual interest to the advancement of the safety and security of us all.

In particular, the signing of the INF treaty is very welcome since it will be the first time the superpowers have agreed to reduce, as opposed to slow the rate of growth of, their nuclear arsenals.

In my talks with the Russian leadership I will be taking every opportunity to advance the cause of further arms control negotiations with the United States.

Bill Hayden and I will also be pushing very strongly an issue of even greater significance to this audience, namely, the right of Soviet Jews to emigrate.

Since we came to office, the Government has made clear to the Soviet Union its concern about human rights there, including the question of the rights of Soviet Jews.

Bill Hayden did this directly in Moscow in 1984. Both Bill Hayden and I have raised the issue with Soviet representatives in Canberra on a number of occasions.

I spoke with Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze about our concerns on this during his March visit. Mr Shevardnadze gave me his assurance that he would look into the cases which we had passed to the Soviets.

And the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Joan Child, presented a list of refuseniks to the Chairman of the Council of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet on 4 July 1986.

The latest figures to hand show that 782 Soviet Jews were granted exit permission in August 1987, bringing the total for the year to 4681.

Jewish emigration since April has averaged about 800 per month.

This is a welcome advance on the total of 914 for all of 1986, but less than the 2000 per month allowed to leave during the 1970s.

There has been, happily, movement in regard both to refuseniks on the Speaker's list and to family reunion.

All in all, we welcome the progress which has been made, and the more open-minded attitude being shown by the Soviet authorities, for example in recently facilitating a visit to Moscow by Mr Isi Liebler of your community, a gesture which I believe is significant.

But there is clearly a great deal more to be done in this area and I am looking forward to my visit to Leningrad and Moscow to advance this cause.

Ladies and gentlemen

I am grateful for your generous invitation to me to deliver this address in honour of David Ben-Gurion.

There is an integrity, clarity and decency about him, which continues to cast a wholesome reflection on humanity in general and on Israel in particular.

This makes it all the more regrettable and remarkable that perversions of the truth persist into our day. We have recently seen the discreditable ideas of Mr David Irving receive far more attention here and abroad than they could conceivably deserve.

And we still encounter too frequently the obnoxious equation of Zionism with racism which was asserted by the United Nations itself, through its 1975 Resolution 3379.

It is my very great pleasure however that the Australian Parliament last October passed a motion, unanimously, which seeks to overturn the perverted logic of that UN Resolution.

I took even greater pleasure and pride in the fact that last month on the first anniversary of the Australian Parliament's decision, the US Senate passed a motion in identical terms to our Australian motion. The motion was referred to in debate in the US Senate as "the Australian Resolution."

By the terms of the resolutions, Australia and the United States now stand together committed to lending support to efforts to overthrow the UN Resolution.

If this effort allows us to look with clearer eyes at the original notion of Zionism as it was conceived of by the pioneers of Ben-Gurion's generation, then so much the better.

Israel, as I have said, faces profound choices about its future. The deliberation on these issues by the current generation of leaders may well be aided by reference to the thoughts of their predecessors.

So let me close with two quotations from David Ben-Gurion. They are not too lengthy and I believe they are of direct relevance to the issues I have raised this evening.

In these words, from an interview of 1965, Ben-Gurion described the goals which he wanted to fulfill as Prime Minister of the State of Israel.

"For myself, long before I took office as Prime Minister, my goal was the creation of a model society which could become, in the language of the Biblical prophets, 'a light unto the nations'. I wanted the new Israel to be a democratic society; to be idealistic; to follow the injunction of helping thy neighbour; to work hard in pioneering the desert spaces and rebuilding our long neglected land; for all to work in harmony with each other without the one being exploited by the other; to give homogeneity to the diverse immigrant groups to whom we opened our gates on the very first day of our State; to raise the educational, social and economic levels of those who came from primitive lands to a standard of equality with the veteran settlers; to harness the boons of modern scientific discovery to the ancient moral teachings of our forebears. These were my goals, and the goals of my colleagues."

And to conclude, let me quote again from Ben-Gurion's memoirs of 1970:

"What is Israel? It is two things: an Ark and a Covenant; in other words a refuge and a dynamic. I think the dynamic, the Covenant, takes precedence over the concept of refuge.

"... the State of Israel will not be tested by its strength of economy alone - but by its spirit. We have inherited a great heritage, and it is binding. We have revolted against all regimes, religions, laws ... which the powers of the world have attempted to impose on us ... [The State of Israel] will be tested by the moral image it will lend its citizens, by the human values which will determine its international and external relations, by its faithfulness, in deed and work, to the supreme command of Judaism: "Though shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

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