

Evans

The talk took place at Mr. Sharrett's request and lasted about twenty minutes. Sir Francis had come up earlier in the day together with Ambassador Gilbert and Mr. Russell to call on the Director General with regard to the situation in Jerusalem. Mr. Sharrett referred to some of the events of the morning and said that things seemed to be subsiding. Sir Francis said that he wished to tell him in strict confidence - the observance of which he said involved the immediate future of the British commanding officer of the Legion - that order had been given to withdraw the National Guard from the line; also that the men of the Legion, to ensure that the no-fire order would be rigidly maintained, had been ordered to withdraw the bolts of their rifles and to keep their magazines empty.

Mr. Sharrett said that the Cabinet that morning had had full reports from himself and the Chief of Staff. He had indicated to Sir Francis last night the very serious view which we took of what was happening and that was reflected too in this morning's meeting. One thing they could not understand was the rationale of the Jordanian action. What did they hope to gain from this unprovoked attack. As an indication of how totally unexpected it was he could tell him (he doubted if the Minister of Defence would wish to report this to a Knesset which might be inclined to be wise after the event) that while we had of course sentries at their appointed posts, we were in fact without any defence units in position at the time the Jordanians started their assault.

Mr. Sharrett went on to say that the reason he had asked to see Sir Francis was because he (Sir Francis) was in a unique position here as the representative of the one Government in Treaty relations with Jordan. He did not propose to cite or to attempt to interpret that treaty with which Sir Francis was certainly more familiar than he; nor did Mr. Sharrett know how and by whom decisions were taken in Jordan - there were probably wheels within wheels; but he did wish to suggest that in the light of the underlying purpose of the treaty and of what was now going on it was time that the British put their foot down in Amman.

In emphasizing Jordan's responsibility for what had happened Mr. Sharrett said that he had no great hopes about the outcome of the proposed U.N. investigation. He also referred to the fact that the Arabs had already as he understood submitted a complaint to the United Nations in which connection he was reminded of an Arab proverb to the effect that you should first give the other person a kick and then cry that you are hurt. Sir Francis interjected that there was a similar proverb where he came from. Apart from the clear record of the events there were three reasons why in any fighting in Jerusalem we were in a bad position:

- a) The Arabs had the protection of a thick wall. It was a mediaeval wall but it was thick enough to stop bullets and even mortars.

- b) The Arabs could fire into any part of the New City without risking damage to a Holy Place. Our only two Holy Places were on Mount Zion - virtually pasted on to the Old City Wall. On the other hand the circumstances were such from our point of view, that despite every precaution (and Mr. Laven in at least authorizing a response to the Jordanian fire had specifically ordered such precaution) one could not be sure of avoiding damage some site in the Old City.

- c) It seemed that the Jordanians were less concerned about the lives of the people on their side than was the case with us.

Mr. Sharrett went on to emphasize that if the situation had in fact now been brought under control it was essential that any effort by Jordan to distort the picture and to attribute the blame elsewhere than it belonged - on their own shoulders - should not succeed. They must not be allowed to get away with it.

In general Sir Francis' intervention was limited to what I can only describe as propitiatory noises. He did however make the point that speaking from his own experience in World War I it was possible, on a tense front, for a chance shot coming from heaven knows where to ignite the entire line on both sides in a matter of seconds. He also remarked on the good morale shown by the civilian population on our side as compared apparently with what had happened across the line.

At the conclusion of the talk Sir Francis referred to a report that fire had been directed, possibly unwittingly, by us at a U.N. observer or observers. Mr. Sharrett said that Sir Francis had already brought this incident to his notice and that he (Mr. Sharrett) had caused an investigation to be made. (Later I told Sir Francis that our inquiry had failed to reveal any such incident nor had we received any complaint from the U.N.)