

INAUGURAL SAM COHEN MEMORIAL LECTURE

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"MASADA, MOSCOW AND MELBOURNE"

When we gather together two years after the death of Sam Cohen to do honor to the memory of a man so widely and deeply loved, no doubt each of us who had the privilege of knowing him personally is unconsciously asking ourself the question - what of all his qualities is the one for which we best remember him? For some, because of his great range of attributes, this may be difficult, but for me the answer is simple. The exuberance - constructive, compassionate, outgoing exuberance of Sam Cohen always dominates my recollections of the man.

This is perhaps because it was so evident in our last meeting just three or four hours before he died. I met Sam unexpectedly in Adelaide after he had already completed a long and hard day of engagements during the 1969 Federal election campaign, in the brief spell before he was going on to that fateful evening meeting and I was to catch a plane back to Melbourne. Instead of the few minutes of relaxation I had expected, Sam Cohen spent the time urging me to go the next evening up to the Latrobe Valley to speak with him in support of our candidate in that area.

My pleas of tight timetables and other pressures were of little avail and more or less resignedly I indicated my acquiescence. This seemed to dispose of the matter but as I was getting into the car to go to the airport, Sam must have had some doubts as to my intentions for he burst through the door, grabbed my arm and said with his infectious enthusiasm, "I'll see you in Melbourne tomorrow. We've got to do everything we can. The people need a change of Government". There it all was. The exuberance, the determination, the concern not for himself but for the needs of others - and who could resist him?

There is not time nor is it expected that I shall dwell at great length on the various aspects of Sam Cohen's remarkable life and career. As a Jew he was proud of and was a source of great pride to his people. This sense of identity, from an early time, made him an activist in the fight against fascism and anti-semitism.

At the time of the creation of the State of Israel he was Chairman of the Public Relations Committee of the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, and as such, at the time, he was also Chairman of the Public Relations Committee of the Victoria Board of Deputies. In this role he played a leading part in the Jewish Community's efforts to explain and gain support for the newly created State of Israel in the general Australian Community. From 1947 to 1951 he travelled constantly all over Victoria addressing local groups, church groups and Labor Party branches on the subject.

He was particularly active in explaining the newly created State of Israel in the Trade Union Movement and the Labor Party.

He saw his work with the Jewish Council as the most effective way he could work to combat anti-semitism in its various manifestations, and he remained a staunch and devoted supporter of the Council to the end of his days. He was one of its most active workers, able and willing to go anywhere at any time to explain Jewish issues to Non-Jewish groups, to build up understanding and communication between the Jewish Community and the general community. He became Vice-President of the Council in 1952 and President in 1956 and remained so until he took his seat in the Senate when he had to resign because of pressure of work.

Called to the Bar in 1946 and created Queen's Counsel in 1961 Sam Cohen had a distinguished career in the law which need have known no limit had he not chosen to devote himself to the political arena. He had a remarkable ability to absorb facts in the briefest space of time; yet I am told that seen through the eyes of fellow practitioners he had one outstanding and endearing quality - never to solicitor, client nor Court did he ever lay any blame on his junior for anything which went wrong or any mistake which was made. In sharp contrast to the practice of some of his learned brothers who were apt to run for cover, any blame involved Sam Cohen always took to be upon himself.

Perhaps the best measure of the impact made by Sam Cohen in the Federal parliamentary field is that his colleagues, within five years of his entry to the Senate in 1962, elected him to the position of Deputy Leader of the Labor Party in that Chamber. This reflected at once their estimate of his worth as a forceful, constructive orator and also the affection and loyalty he inspired in men. From the wide range of his parliamentary contributions and interests he will, I believe, be longest remembered for his passionate commitment to the creation of an excellent Australian education system relevant to the future needs of this country. Senator Lionel Murphy, in paying tribute in the Senate to his late Deputy, spoke truly when he said that Sam Cohen's philosophy in this regard was best captured in his 1967 Curtin Memorial Lecture at the University of Western Australia when, speaking of the educational system of the 1970's, Sam said:

"It must also ensure that the student of tomorrow does not become the dehumanised prisoner of a frenzied drive for efficiency and material achievement in the world of technology and invention. Our education system must be concerned with people and therefore with the quality of life. The 1970's will require not merely a quantitative response to national needs for trained professions in many fields. What will be needed is a capacity for understanding both ourselves and the peoples of other countries, especially those in our part of the world, Asia. Australia cannot live in a vacuum and massive changes are taking place not only in our country but among all our neighbours.

.....

The products of our education system should be trained for living in this new world and capable of coming to grips with its realities. They will be living in a comparatively wealthy country in an area where millions upon millions of people go to bed hungry every night; where the battle against poverty, disease and illiteracy is only just beginning. They will be living in a world whose population will double by the end of this century So the student of tomorrow must come to feel part of a new environment with new challenges. The narrow utilitarian concept of acquiring knowledge and skills useful in earning a living can be no more than a part - an essential part, of course - of the education of Australians in the future."

The translation into reality of Sam Cohen's vision is within our resources. He would seek, and there could be no greater memorial.

No sketch of this man, however summary, can be left without reference to his devotion to his family. This was known to be a source of constant sustenance to him and the love which he inspired in turn in them is still to be witnessed in their faces at the mere mention of his name.

Judith Cohen's understanding of her late husband's character is well reflected in the nature and purpose of this Memorial Foundation. When approached by those responsible for the idea of a memorial to Sam she rejected any thought of something in the unchangeable forms of bricks and mortar.

For her the memory of Sam Cohen is the memory of a man concerned with people and of a man with a particular concern for the people of Australia and Israel, their survival and their full development.

And so emerged the concept of an annual memorial lecture to be delivered by a person given the opportunity of first going from this country to Israel; no memorial could be so nearly apt for a man who was convinced that education and communication are fundamental to this survival and this development.

From what I have said to this point you must know therefore how deeply conscious I am of the honor that has been done in asking me to be the inaugural Sam Cohen Memorial lecturer. I thank the Trustees of the Foundation for that honor; and may I, on behalf of my daughter Susan and myself, thank them for their generosity and imagination in enabling her to accompany me on this journey. It was I think as much to my benefit as hers that she went with me; with my wife I would add this one rider - Sue's stay in Israel has fired her with such a single-minded determination to return at the earliest opportunity that our expectations as to how long we might reasonably have expected to keep her within the family circle seem to have been considerably foreshortened!

With the honor goes the responsibility - not merely the normal responsibility of any lecturer to attempt to speak well but to be astringently relevant on this inaugural occasion to the essential character and interests of the man whose memory we honor.

I have told you what I believe these were and the title of this lecture, "Masada, Moscow and Melbourne", has been chosen accordingly. Sam Cohen, as I have just said, had a particular concern for the survival and full development of the people of Israel and Australia. It is of these things that I wish to speak.

Many of you in this audience know well the story of Masada. You will forgive me if I tell it briefly and, necessarily, inadequately. Masada is an immense outcrop of plateaued rock on the edge of the Judean desert with a sheer drop of some thirteen hundred feet falling away to the western shore of the Dead Sea. In 66 A.D. the people of the Jewish Maccabean kingdom in Palestine which had been overthrown by the Romans in the previous century, revolted throughout the country. During the next four years the revolt was crushed, culminating in 70 A.D. in the sacking of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. The one remaining centre of Jewish resistance was Masada which had been seized by a small group of Zealots in 66 A.D., and from this high fortress they continued to harass the Romans after the revolt had been generally put down. In 72 A.D. the Roman Governor, Flavius Silva with what according to the historian Josephus amounted to some fifteen thousand troops and slaves marched on Masada to exterminate these last resisters, numbering in all nine hundred and sixty-seven including women and children.

After the building of encircling camps, ramparts and a seige that went into the following year a breach was made by battering ram in the fortress wall and the Romans withdrew that final evening after the hastily substituted timber replacements were aflame from their avalanche of burning torches. Clearly the Romans would overrun the Zealots on the following day. They would be history, but their commander Eleazar ben Yair exhorted them to a course of action unique and memorable in the history of their people. According to the Josephus, Aleazar 'had a clear picture of what the Romans would do to men, women and children if they won the day; and death seemed to him the right choice for them all'. Eleazar concluded his exhortation in these words:

"Let our wives die before they are abused and our children before they have tasted of slavery; and after we have slain them, let us bestow that glorious benefit upon one another mutually, and preserve ourselves in freedom, as an excellent funeral monument for us. But first let us destroy our money and the fortress by fire; for I am well assured that this will be a great grief to the Romans, that they shall not be able to seize upon our bodies, and shall fail of our wealth also: and let us spare nothing but our provisions, for they will be a testimonial when we are dead that we were not subdued for want of necessaries; but that, according to our original resolution, we have preferred death before slavery."

Each man then despatched his own family and lay beside their bodies to be slain in turn by the ten who had been chosen by lot for this purpose.

Nine of the ten were then killed, and to take up the words of Josephus "he who as the last of all, when he perceived that they were all slain, he set fire to the palace, and with the great force of his hand ran his sword entirely through himself, and fell down dead near to his own relations".

When next morning the Romans expecting battle were informed by two women who with five children had survived by hiding in underground caverns of what had happened they - again to use the words of Josephus - "did not believe it could be as they said; they also attempted to put the fire out, and quickly cutting themselves a way through it, they came within the palace, and so met with the multitude of the slain, but could take no pleasure in the fact, though it were done to their enemies. Nor could they do other than wonder at the courage of their resolution, and at the immoveable contempt of death which so great a number of them had shown, when they went through with such an action as that was".

Masada has become more than a memorable part of the history of the Jewish people. The spirit of Masada imbues Israel today; those who do not understand this fanatical determination of the Israelis to defend their territory or perish, do not begin to understand that country or the nature of the crisis in the area of which it is such a crucial part.

As soon as we speak of "territory" it is necessary to understand exactly what the Israeli position is in regard to her ultimate borders. As a result of the Six Day War, 5th - 10th June, 1967, Israel found herself in control of territory now referred to as the "Administered Areas", which increased her pre-war dimensions by more than two hundred per cent. This additional territory comprises the Golan Heights area in the north, Jerusalem and the West Bank of the Jordan in the east, the Gaza strip in the west and in the south the whole of the Sinai peninsula from Sharm el-Sheikh up to the Suez Canal.

Two points need to be made about this additional territory comprised within the 1967 cease-fire lines. First, Israel has no desire or ambitions to retain all this territory as a permanent part of that State. Second, Israel has no intention of withdrawing from these areas other than in the full context of Security Council Resolution 242 of 22nd November, 1967 which asserted that "the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East should include the application of both the following principles:

- (1) Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict;
- (2) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognised boundaries free from threats or acts of force"

The Israelis say, and I believe rightly, that the two questions - withdrawal and the achievement of secure and recognised boundaries - are inextricable and that the exact phraseology of the Resolution in referring to "territories" and not "all territories" is deliberate and meaningful. They are able to quote in support the British Government which was the author of the Security Council Resolution. Speaking in the House of Commons on 9th December, 1968 the then Foreign Secretary, Michael Stewart, said:

"..... there is reference in the vital United National Security Council Resolution both to withdrawal from territories and to secure and recognised boundaries. As I have told the House previously, we believe that these two things should be read concurrently and that the omission of the word "all" before the word "territories" is deliberate."

It is difficult to imagine anything more unrealistic than the attitude of those who in the face of these clear words, and in the face of history since the proclamation of the State of Israel on 14th May, 1948 simply say that the answer to the present crisis is for the Israelis meekly to withdraw to the pre-1967 Six Day War lines. For what were those lines and what was that history? Those lines were in fact the Armistice lines drawn up in 1949 between Israel and the States of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq after the armies of those States invaded Israel on the 15th May, 1948 just a matter of hours after its proclamation as an independent State in accordance with the United Nations General Assembly decision of 29th November, 1947.

It was a history of continued and adamant refusal by her neighbours - if one can use that euphemism - to accept the right of Israel to a secure and independent existence. It was a history of nineteen years indiscriminate shooting and shelling of the kibbutzim in the northern Galilee area from the Syrian held Golan Heights. Could anyone who has been into the remnants of the gun emplacements of the encampments on those Heights - now destroyed in the Six Day War - but from which death and devastation was rained down for those nineteen years seriously suggest that the Israelis who now in controlling those Heights are able to afford protection to their people below should pack up and quietly walk away? It was a history of commercial blockade of shipping to and from Israel with the action by Egypt in regard to the Straits of Tiran at the entrance to the Gulf of Aquaba on 23rd May, 1967 precipitating the war that broke out a fortnight later. Having got rid of the U.N. Emergency Force President Nasser on that day barred the Straits to Israeli shipping. Three days later he declared - unhappily I must say in a speech to the Trade Unions - "I have always known that we will be in a position to demand the removal of the U.N. Emergency Force, when we have completed our preparations. And this is exactly what happened. Now the war will be general, and our aim - the destruction of Israel".

Again could anyone who has stood at Sharm el-Sheikh beside the two shattered artillery pieces which dominated the Straits of Tiran - the instruments of war by which her enemies sought to effect her economic strangulation - bring themselves to the absurdity of suggesting that the right thing for the Israelis is to walk away again?

The Israelis are simply not going to do these things as a preliminary to some form of negotiation imposed from above; and they would be out of their collective mind if they contemplated doing so. Their State is still not accepted by those with whom they have twice been in violent conflict. Indeed, the leading spokesmen for those who have already sought by war to destroy Israel continue to repeat this intention. Understandably her Foreign Minister, Abba Eban, said on 7th March, 1971: "What is at stake is our lives, our destinies, our vital interests, so that Israel must be an active partner in fashioning the peace. We are not the passive object of this process."

In making that statement Abba Eban accurately reflected the spirit and mood of his countrymen. They want desperately to talk to those whom they are prepared to regard as their neighbours. They want to do this with the aim of achieving "secure and recognised boundaries free from threats or acts of force". In no sense do they identify such boundaries with the 1967 cease-fire lines. But those who would believe that these lines can be changed by force of arms or, ultimately, that Israel can be liquidated forget at their peril the lessons of history. If these forces are allowed to be unleashed the world will surely witness a holocaust, a modern Masada which should take even our tortured conscience beyond its bearing point.

Masada - but why Moscow? It is perfectly clear that without the massive military and technological support being supplied, particularly to Egypt, by the Soviet Union there would be no realistic likelihood of a major attack upon Israel that would have any chance of success. It is to a redirection of policy by Moscow that we have to look if we are to see a meaningful lessening of tension between Israel and the Arab States - if not the creation of a full and co-operative peace at least the removal of the imminent threat of war. For whether the Arab States will in fact sit down in conference with Israel will be decided I believe not in Cairo, Damascus or Amman but in Moscow.

There are I think some reasons for optimism, for the present Soviet position is something of a paradox. The Soviet Union within three days of the proclamation on 14th May, 1948, was one of the first countries, with the United States of America, to recognise the new State of Israel; and it, with the U.S., denounced strongly the invasion of Israel by the Arab States on the day following the proclamation of its independence. And the Soviet Union without doubt is still committed to the concept of a separate, independent, and viable State of Israel. It has I believe no interest in or desire to see war break out between Israel and the Arab States. And yet it supplies the materials of and capacity for war to a country whose leadership continues publicly to declare its objective remains the liquidation of Israel. Presumably the Soviet feels that it can restrain its allies but this must become more difficult as the growing tensions within and between the Arab States causes them increasingly to fashion Israel and a commitment to its destruction as the basic, indeed only, unifying element in their otherwise precarious alliance.

Indeed the potential dilemma for the Soviet is apparent. While itself not wishing the obliteration of Israel it is supporting forces which include substantial elements with this objective. If conflict breaks out it is clear on the evidence of the past that those forces could only be successful if the Soviet committed some of its own people. Where then does the Soviet stop? If it stops at the point consistent with its assertion of the viability of Israel it is immediately offside with a significant section of those whom it presently supports and who presently support it. If on the other hand the Soviet goes further it both risks a wider conflict that would be against its own interests and destroys for all time its international credibility.

The Soviet Union has no economic imperative to sustain its present policies in the Israeli-Arab confrontation. It does not need oil, being already a net exporter and likely to become a large net exporter. Similarly it does not need cotton and indeed the same can be said of any of the significant products of this region.

Quite clearly the Soviet has chosen to pursue its present policies as part of its own total security concept. The Soviet would argue that no one nation - the United States - has any more right to be in the Mediterranean area with its strategic air power supplemented by its fleet armed with Polaris missiles capable of being deployed on the Soviet Union than has the Soviet itself to be in the area. And here is the essential paradox.

No nation more than Israel understands and accepts this argument. No country better than Israel understands the Soviet position vis-a-vis Germany which has dominated the whole of that country's post-war European policies. Like Israel, the U.S.S.R. is a State of recent origin with only one generation separating their recognition in this century within the international community. Like Israel, the U.S.S.R. has twice had its very existence threatened in armed conflict, the first occasion in each case being during the very birth-pangs of the State. As with Israel, these experiences formed in the Soviet a complex about their territorial security and fashioned a determination that the integrity of their borders was not going to be left to the wishes and caprice of other people. No Soviet leader with any sense of the history and policies of his own country could stand on the Golan Heights or at Sharm el-Sheikh and say to the Israelis:

"Walk away from here and then we'll arrange some talks about a peaceful settlement that will be guaranteed by someone else."

Masada may be difficult to comprehend in some of the capitals of the world. It should be well and easily understood in Moscow. This does not mean that consistency or the parallelism of history will or should finally determine the foreign policies of the Soviet Union any more than these considerations have determined the policies of the United States or any other power in the world. I am suggesting however that the remarkable comparisons that can be seen in these respects between the two countries should enable the Soviet Union fully to appreciate the Israeli attitude - as is certainly the case in reverse.

I believe it would not be unreasonable to hope that the Soviet from that appreciation would see its own self-interest to be served by using its considerable influence in an attempt to bring the Arab States to the negotiating table with Israel. The dilemmas and the paradoxes of its present position are apparent. The benefits for the Soviet of such a new emphasis as I suggest are manifest. First, it would go far to remove the threat of war which is no less against its own interests than any other nation. Second, in the striving for some degree of normalisation of international relations it would give the Soviet an initiative and credibility at a time when the centre of the stage has been taken by the United States and China. Third, it would secure an acknowledgement by Israel of the right for a Russian presence in the area. Fourth, if associated with a resumption of diplomatic relations with Israel it would enable a closer and better understanding of developments in the region.

Achieving such changes in policies and relations between countries is not something that happens quickly. It is something that I believe is vital for the certain viability of Israel and the defusing of what is now the area of greatest danger to world peace. It requires much patient talking and negotiation. It does not require or demand either on the part of the parties principal or those concerned to assist them the endorsement of unacceptable ideologies and practices; merely an understanding that the price of refusal to communicate and negotiate is too awesome to contemplate. Sam Cohen, I know, would approve and hold these things to be central.

Masada, Moscow - and Melbourne. This inaugural memorial lecture to Sam Cohen could not be complete without talking about Australia, the country which with Israel he loved so deeply and for whose future he was so much concerned. We who are residents of this city hasten to assure our fellow Australians who do not have that privilege that we know it is not formally recognised as the capital of Australia. But Sam Cohen was a man of Melbourne, this inaugural lecture to honor his memory is being delivered in his city and I know I will therefore on this occasion be excused for using it as synonymous with Australia.

It is most appropriate that I should develop these observations in relation to what is happening within Israel not merely because as I have said these were the two countries closest to Sam Cohen's heart but because the comparisons and contrasts are I believe intrinsically useful. The most obvious contrast between the two countries is the cohesive, dynamic sense of purpose that pervades Israel. There is a number of reasons for this but undoubtedly the most significant is the common consciousness of the citizens of Israel that they are part of a country under siege. And here of course is another paradox. The Israelis are dedicated to achieving a peaceful settlement with the Arab States; they will to the extent of their success in reaching this objective blunt the edge of this dynamic. But this effect will be marginal because Israel is a young nation, pragmatic, intent upon structuring its methods, institutions and resources to the needs of the future.

By contrast Australia brings to mind the story of Sheridan, the playwright and Whig politician renowned both for his wit and independence of mind which often led him to vote against his Party in the House of Commons. On one occasion when trenchantly attacking a piece of proposed Whig legislation he observed: "I have often heard of people banging their heads against brick walls. This is the first occasion I have heard of people building walls expressly for that purpose."

We have in this country built and perpetuated a structure of walls in the forms of our Federal-State constitutional arrangements against which the heads of our Australian people are being needlessly banged every day. For the Israelis their history is an inspiration, an impetus to progress. For Australia our history and the present constitutional and institutional manifestations of that history are a constant brake upon economic growth and the full development of our human and natural resources. Is it possible to imagine anything more absurd than that our present structure of government and division of constitutional powers should reflect the meanderings of explorers in the British colonies of more than a century ago.

When will we understand that this is no academic lament? I have referred on innumerable occasions to the 1959 Report of the federal all-Party Joint Committee on Constitutional Review which asserted that the Commonwealth whose responsibility it was "to safeguard and promote the economic welfare of the community of Australia" possessed limited powers which "did not permit the development of an integrated economic policy".

We have paid a heavy price for this stupidity. Despite the trumpeting of those who during almost a generation have been "responsible" for our country, that Australia has had an outstanding rate of economic growth - the latest offering I believe of our current Prime Minister is that we have "an economy that can lead the world" - the facts are hard, indisputable and comfortless.

The World Bank shows us as twenty-first out of twenty-four in the rates of growth of countries with a per capita income of \$U.S.2000 and over. The contrast with Israel is stark. Between 1950 and 1969 the per capita rate of growth of the Gross National Product in real terms in Israel was 4.8%; in Australia at 2.4% it was exactly half.

The particular reflection of this constitutional insanity which concerned Sam Cohen above all else was in the field of education. Here the history of buck-passing between Commonwealth and States has produced, in this country which could afford the best, in fact a shambles of an education system. Under this system which involves by international standards a parsimonious percentage allocation of our resources, hundreds of thousands of young people are being deliberately denied the full training to which their intrinsic talents entitle them. Sam Cohen knew that this was not only morally wrong but that in wasting your most valuable resource - human talent - it was sheer economic madness; and he thundered against it.

Sam Cohen fought all his life against discrimination, against the attempts by society to alienate and divide itself with hatred by group against group. This was in part a reaction to the persecution and destruction of his own people. But it also came from a realisation that no society, national or international, in which the deliberate creation of divisiveness is made a cornerstone of policy can hope to realise its full potential. This did not mean for him that there should not be sharp criticism of those to whom you were opposed or, in particular, that there should be restraint from a forceful advocacy of his profound belief in a socialist society. These things he could, and did, **rightly** distinguish.

I believe therefore that Sam Cohen would be profoundly concerned at the emerging pattern of politics in this country.

To the deliberate perpetuation of constitutional anachronisms which he so well knew operated against the interests of the people for whom he cared is being added a new dimension - the divisive and diversionary dimension which involves the deliberate creation of bitterness and hatred, the refusal to debate issues on their merits.

Sam Cohen more than most men knew the potential danger of this tactic. His people in many lands had paid the ultimate sacrifice in situations which had developed from its usage. If he were still alive he would be warning us all against a cheap and easy resort to the tactic in this country.

Sam Cohen had an acute sense and knowledge of history. He used that sense to see how men could best fashion their relations and institutions to release the full stream of their creative talents. If that thought can in any way inspire our actions, we will well remember him.

To conclude:

In a word that no man could utter with more sincerity than Sam Cohen -
Shalom.