

# Speeches and messages: 1977-1979: [Israel and Jewish history]

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers

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I In recent months, much impatience with the Israeli position on Middle Eastern peace negotiation efforts has manifested itself in the press and elsewhere. Israel's political leadership has been accused of intransigence. My purpose here is neither to support nor to oppose such perceptions of the Israeli position, but rather to set the attitude in its historical context. For only if we comprehend its historical context, can we begin to understand the Israeli attitude toward proposals for peace in the Middle East.

Jewish history is written in the blood of persecution and annihilation from its very inception, i.e. from the casting of all male babies into the Nile by Pharaoh of Egypt to the contemporary slaughter of six million masterminded by Hitler and Nazi Germany. The people of Israel is the only nation in history systematically denied a national homeland for the past two thousand years, having been forced to wander over the face of the earth, establishing Jewish communities in such unlikely places as Susa in Persia and Kaifengfu in China. The result of this consistent expulsion and destruction has been the acceptance of the Biblical prophecy of Balaam, who declared that Israel is "a nation destined to dwell alone." The indomitable will of this nation has enabled it to rise, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of Auschwitz to reestablish its own sovereign state in its ancestral homeland, as a result of our critical assistance at the right moment, and not without the loss of countless Israeli lives. Can any world leader condemn its tenacious desire to maintain a position earned with such struggle and sacrifice? A brief history of world anti-semitism will provide the best key to the psyche of this nation.

II Even during the period of the Second Commonwealth when the Jews were living in Israel (516 BC - 70 AD) the Seleucid Empire, under the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175 - 164 BC), sent armies of Hellenists into Judea to extirpate the people of Israel. The ultimate victory of the Jews is eternalized with the Festival of Chanukah. That victory enabled them to live in Israel until the destruction of Jerusalem and its Second Temple by the Roman Titus in 70 AD.

Following the destruction of the Temple, every attempt was made by the Roman Emperors to stamp out the Jewish people. Their holy books were burned and their teachers were killed. Anyone caught studying the Hebrew Scriptures was executed. As an act of desperation, the Jewish people, in the second century AD, under the leadership of the aged Rabbi Akiva, fought against their Roman captors with their last breath of life. Much of the Jewish community was destroyed, and following the aborted rebellion the anti-Jewish decrees became even more severe. More than 1/2 million Jews were killed by the hosts of the Emperor Hadrian.

In the beginning of the 4th century AD, Constantine was declared Emperor of Rome. In all imperial pronouncements, Judaism was referred to as the "secta nefaria" or the "secta feralis", namely the "nefarious religion" and the "bestial religion." He reinstated the ancient command of the Emperor Hadrian which forbade any Jew to set foot in Jerusalem. He sparked anti-Jewish riots which resulted in the death of numerous Jews.

The Jews then became the proverbial wanderers, begging entry in country after country and rarely finding even a temporary resting place. In the 11th century, there was wholesale slaughter of the Jewish community in France and Germany where most of the Jews at that time were located. In the 13th century Baron Rindfleisch led a great mob-army of Germans, who wantonly murdered the Jewish men, women and children of 146 communities. In 1215 the 4th Lateran Council promulgated a Canon requiring the Jews to wear a distinguishing mark. The Jews in Latin countries were made to adopt a disc sewn onto their clothing, and in the Germanic countries, a distinctive hat. The principle of confining the Jews to a ghetto was established in Europe of the early Middle Ages.

In 1290 the Jews were expelled from England and in 1306 from France. Many were forced to settle in Germany. In 1336, the Armleder Movement, a wild band of marauders, whose only purpose was to destroy Jews, massacred a hundred Jewish communities, mostly in Swabia and Alsace. Twelve years later, on the heels of the Black Death, over 210 communities of Jews in Germany were utterly annihilated and 400 others were attacked and suffered deaths. France and Germany had become virtually Judenrein, with nearly half the Jewish population of the time destroyed.

The one European country which had seemed a promising host to the embattled Jewish refugees was Spain. During the 12th and 13th centuries they had experienced there a "golden age" of great scientists, philosophers and poets. This was a short-lived breather for in 1391 there began the mass extermination of all Spanish Jews, giving them the alternative of baptism or death. About 250,000 Jews -- which was the majority of the population -- were forced to convert. Most of them tried desperately to maintain their Jewish religious identity in hiding and were called Marranos (in Spanish "swine"). In 1478 the Spanish Inquisition was launched to destroy these Marranos, with thousands of Jewish men, women and children burned at the stake. In 1492 the remaining 150,000 Jews of Spain were expelled from the country.

The major refuge for the European Jews became Poland where from 1500 to 1640 the Jews enjoyed a period of prosperity and quiescence in that country. In 1648 their peace was brought to an abrupt end. The Ukrainians, led by a great army of Cossaks under Bogdan Chmielnicki, rose up against the Polish land owner and the Catholic clergy. Once they liberated themselves, they began a brutal, systematic murder of Jews that made the word "Cossak" a symbol of horror until the term "Nazi" overwhelmed it. In the infamous Chmielnicki massacres, 744 Jewish communities were wiped out, representing 1/3 of the Jews at that time.

The enlightenment, led by Montesquieu, Lessing, and Rousseau brought in its wake a principle of common Christian and Jewish humanity which led to the emancipation of the Jews of France in 1791. This was the first opening for Jewish freedom in a world of anti-semitism. However, the more extreme philosophers, such as Diderot, Holbach, and Voltaire poured their scorn on Christianity by reveling its Jewish

origins. Hence in the wake of the French Revolution, while Liberty, Fraternity and Equality was being declared for all French citizens, the sewers of France were reddened with Jewish blood. Similar outbreaks of persecution and pogroms were taking place throughout the "enlightened world."

In 1819 the German peasants rioted against the Jews and asserted that the Jew could never participate in the true German spirit. Richard Wagner expressed this opinion overtly in his anti-semitic tracts as well as indirectly in his operas. Houston Stewart Chamberlain published The Foundations of the 19th Century in 1899 which pronounced the position of Jew in German society to be radically inimical to its very health. These and others were the authorities upon whom Hitler based his Nazi philosophy.

The new center of Jewish life became Russia-Poland where the predominant majority of Jews attempted to find succor. They were restricted to live in a special Pale of Settlement and, in spite of their severe limitations, they established houses of worship and Academies of Great Learning. In 1881 a wave of pogroms occurred in which the majority of the Jews of some 160 cities and villages were destroyed. The situation continued to deteriorate and during the reign of Czar Nicholas II, the Black Hundreds was organized to foment pogroms throughout Russia in 1903 and 1905. The situation became so unbearable that a great portion of the Russian Jews emigrated to America where they found a haven until this very day.

It is certainly unnecessary to elaborate concerning the mass slaughter perpetrated by Nazi Germany against the Jewish people while the rest of the world stood by. Six million Jews, 1/3 of the total Jewish population, were annihilated and countless others were physically scarred and emotionally maimed.

III A census of the Jewish population taken by the Emperor Claudius in 48 AD indicated that there were 6,944,000 Jews within the confines of the Roman Empire. According to all mathematical rules of demographic progression, there should be today approximately 300,000,000 Jews. According to present statistics, there are now 14 million Jews in the world. It is frighteningly apparent that the great disparity in number between what could have been and what is, is the result of the mass persecution and annihilation of Jews in almost every century and in almost every community as we have briefly outlined. Whenever the Jews felt a respite from their tragic persecutions, it was only for the briefest period of time. Whenever they found a haven, they were soon expelled; they experienced peace only to be destroyed.

In light of this historic fact, one can begin to appreciate how dear to the Jewish people is their new found homeland. After 2000 years of continual wandering and persecution they have finally achieved a means of securing their national existence. This, for them, is not a luxury but a necessity. They have come to mistrust the guarantees of any foreign ruler and they rely only upon themselves. They have

continually nurtured the principle of freedom for others as well as for themselves. History has told them that they can be free only in their own country under their own sovereignty. Only upon understanding the history of the Jewish people can we begin to appreciate with what trepidation they approach any peace negotiation and with what insistence they demand ironclad guarantees.