

WASHINGTON DATELINE

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Golda Meir Off Camera

Even though some eight million people might have listened to the Israeli Prime Minister on "NBC's 'Meet The Press,'" only eight had the privilege and opportunity of witnessing an exchange--which, at times became heated--between Golda Meir and two members of 'Meet The Press' panel.

Once the television lights in the NBC studio were turned off, Mrs. Meir began her "private" 'Meet The Press,' and continued where she left off on the televised program. One panel member, Rowland Evans, author ("Nixon In The White House"--Random House) and syndicated columnist, who has often visited Israel, and who is known in some circles as not always agreeing with the Israeli point of view, began a discussion with Mrs. Meir on the sources of conflict between the Israelis and the Arabs. Whereupon Mrs. Meir began to give historical facts to back the Israeli position.

Among other points, Evans brought up the fact that the Egyptians are merely asking for weapons to regain their occupied territory. Mrs. Meir countered Evans by pointing out that the Egyptians had asked for Soviet arms well before Israel even occupied a square inch of Arab land!

In a later interview at The Hotel Sonesta here, Evans said Mrs. Meir is a "very powerful advocate of her position...and even though I don't always agree with her, I have tremendous respect for her..."

Richard Valeriani, NBC's Diplomatic correspondent, debated with Mrs. Meir on some of the points she didn't have time to answer during the broadcast--and particularly questioned her on the flexibility of Israel's negotiating position.

When Mrs. Meir asked Valeriani when he would visit Israel, he quipped: "The closest I came to it is working for two years at a kosher hotel..." (Hotel Altman, Asbury Park, New Jersey).

One studio guest, Dr. Michael Vermess, who sat in on both the on-camera and off-camera sessions with Mrs. Meir, observed: "I've seen her repeatedly on TV. But, in her presence, one senses--much more obviously--her greatness. I never before realized what an extremely sharp mind she possesses. She is strong, tough and brilliant..."

Helmut Rampp and Laura Comeau of Washington's Le B Le Beauty Shoppe--who had just designed a hairdo for Mrs. Meir's look-alike--thought they were seeing 'double' until they

heard the Premier speak in her "eloquent and articulate manner."

"She fielded tough questions in a most dynamic and intelligent way," said Helmut and Laura. "It's amazing how a woman school teacher from Milwaukee rose to such heights in Israel. She's a credit both to Israel and America..."

According to Betty Cole Dukert, Associate Producer of "Meet The Press," few heads of Government ever linger in the studio as did Mrs. Meir.

"They usually have to rush along," Mrs. Dukert added. "But Mrs. Meir graciously stayed around and answered further questions from the panel and studio guests."

Before the TV program began, the NBC engineer was testing Mrs. Meir's voice level and asked her to say a few words. Bill Monroe, Washington Editor of 'Today' program, who acted as "Meet The Press" moderator in the absence of producer Lawrence Spivak, gave Mrs. Meir a few chuckles, to relax her, by relating the story of a previous program when voice levels were being tested: "When Cong. James O'Hara (D.Mich) was asked to say a few words to test his voice level, he began... 'Four Score and Seven Years ago...our forefathers...' etc. When it came time for Gloria Steinem, leader of Women's Lib, to recite a few words, she began, 'Four Score and Seven years ago, our fore-mothers.'"

Mrs. Meir concluded the day here by meeting informally with a group of Jewish leaders from the Washington area including Seymour Wolf, President, Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington; Dr. Isaac Franck, Executive Vice President, JCC; Dr. Harvey H. Ammerman, First Vice President, JCC; and Morris Rodman, President, United Jewish Appeal of Washington. They presented her with a gold necklace as a token of the esteem and affection of the Jewish Community of Washington. After a discussion on the progress and problems of Israel, they had--according to Dr. Franck--a "heimishe and informative" chat.

Mr. Wolf said: "Mrs. Meir gave us the feeling that we weren't visiting with a person of her stature, but rather someone we loved, someone in our family..."

"To me, Mrs. Meir--who is working in a man's world--never loses her feminine and maternal concerns," continued Wolf. "What impressed me is her feeling for the individual. It's not a question of who wins what war... she doesn't want death and destruction for anyone--Israeli or Arab. To her, life is valuable..."

"I'd call her Israel's BEST saleslady. She has a tremendous ability to rally people to a cause..."

Dr. Ammerman said he found her to be "brilliant and charming--with characteristics of a world leader..."

Morris Rodman, who owns the Park Central

Hotel in Washington, said he was particularly impressed with the evidence of her great moral strength and her purposefulness. "She has this great ability to simplify complex situations by her direct and explicit thinking," Rodman added.

Covering Mrs. Meir from the airport to the Shoreham Hotel; from the State Department to the White House; from Capitol Hill to the Washington Hilton Hotel; from the Kennedy Center of the Performing Arts to National Broadcasting Company studios; from the Israeli Embassy to the Ambassador's residence--and observing her every move and mood--has enabled this writer to be in the proximity of one of those few great women figures who make history.

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Left to right: Sarge Holbert, Paolo Scinni, and Bobbie Ennis.

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