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American Zionist Emergency Council, appraisal of work of AZEC,
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WASHINGTON SECTOR IN ZIONISM'S BATTLE

By BERNARD LERNER

In the following article an Independent Jewish Press Service staff writer reviews a year's activities of the reorganized American Zionist Emergency Council under the joint leadership of Dr. Abba Hillel Silver and Dr. Stephen S. Wise, and points to external dangers menacing the Zionist positions and the Council's achievements.

. . . The Editor

Iraq's former Premier Nuri es-Said Pasha is reported coming to the United States to establish headquarters for the advocacy of his Greater Syria plan which rules out sovereignty for Palestine and would abolish the Jewish National Home. Arab politicians are meeting in Damascus, Beirut and Cairo, and are scheduled to meet in Alexandria for the purpose of camouflaging, by concerted attacks on Zionism, their failure to bring about cohesion among their states. Arab parliaments have protested the adoption of the Palestine planks by America's two major parties. Fortune magazine points out the urgency of the United States determining its Middle East policy, especially with regard to Palestine. In this complex picture, American Zionism faces new tests, new obligations. It is therefore appropriate to review, as the year is coming to an end, twelve months' activity by the reorganized American Zionist Emergency Council under the joint chairmanship of Dr. Abba Hillel Silver and Dr. Stephen S. Wise.

During 1942 and the first half of 1943, the years when the cause was anathema in Washington, Officials quarters there grew increasingly reticent on the subject of Zionism, and messages addressed to Zionist gatherings became increasingly cautious, vague and non-committal. At the same time representatives of the Government, or at least the State Department, were engaged in an effort to discourage Senators, Congressmen and others from expressing themselves in favor of Zionism.

Matters went so far that a joint statement was planned by Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt, demanding a cessation of all discussion of the Palestine question, a plan which was fortunately shelved after strenuous efforts made by Zionist leaders. The effort was repeated in another form, when a little later it was suggested by the State Dept. that the projected holding of an American Jewish Conference be "postponed" as being untimely in view of discussions with Ibn Saud. By the summer of 1943 the political situation was at an extremely low ebb. The Zionist Emergency Council had done some good work and a considerable amount of propaganda and agitation had been carried on. The American Palestine Committee had been organized as far back as 1941 and subsequently the Christian Council for Palestine was established. Other significant steps had been taken. There was nevertheless a widespread feeling that by far not enough was being done.

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Reorganized Council

The feeling of concern and even bitterness among Zionists was enhanced by the growth of the Bergson group. It was felt that they were thriving on the inadequacies of Zionist political activity and were building up for themselves an increasingly strong position in Washington and throughout the country.

It was at this time that the American Zionist Emergency Council was reorganized with Dr. Abba Hillel Silver as co-chairman. The Emergency Council, reorganized with a comprehensive program of activities, and increased personnel, and a permanent office in Washington, established a new procedure of Zionist presentation.

The new program and the new policy required also a new budget ten times as large as the budget with which the work had been carried on in the past. An adequate staff was installed in Washington. Throughout the country local Zionist Emergency Committees were established in hundreds of communities who received constant direction and inspiration from headquarters.

Community Organization

By December the first conference of representatives of the local Emergency Committees was held in Cleveland. There detailed plans and programs were discussed and agreed upon and the local leaders given full instructions to make a strong bid for winning public opinion and insuring support of influential citizens and political leaders everywhere. A second conference took place in May in Washington, D.C. There had thus come into being a powerful machinery, representing hundreds of communities, highly organized, and closely knit.

The Palestine Resolutions

An important step, of course, was the introduction of the Palestine Resolutions in both houses of Congress. Through the introduction of the Resolutions, and the hearings on them, one great and immediate objective was realized. The conspiracy of silence was broken and the Zionist issue was placed upon the agenda as one of the great and burning questions of the day and part and parcel of the great debate going on regarding the shape of the postwar world.

The deferment of action on the Resolutions precipitated something of a crisis, the first serious crisis which the American Zionist Emergency Council had to face since Dr. Silver assumed leadership.

Apart from the great public agitation and education, the Resolutions also produced the historical declaration of President Roosevelt on March 9 that the United States Government had never approved the White Paper of 1939 and that "full justice" would be done to those who were seeking the Jewish National Home. The statement was given by the President to Drs. Silver and Wise as a sort of compensation for the temporary shelving of the Resolutions. To the present day it is the only hopeful official statement of a public character which the Zionist leadership has been able to obtain either here or in England and a promissory note bearing the signature of the President of the United States.

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The Palestine Planks

The agitation in connection with the Congress Resolutions also carried over to the Republican and Democratic National Conventions held in Chicago, both of which adopted excellent Palestine planks in their platforms. This was the result of months of careful preparation undertaken under the leadership of Dr. Silver, who attended the Republican Convention. After the adoption of the plank by the Republican Convention, came the plank adopted by the Democratic Convention, which was attended by Dr. Stephen S. Wise. In both cases, however, a great deal of work was done by the representatives of the Emergency Council on the spot. This is the first time in American history that Palestine was included in the party platforms, which strengthens the Zionist position immensely and paves the way for the eventual adoption of a Jewish Commonwealth Resolution by Congress.

This is a brief summary of the achievements and inevitable frustrations of the American Zionist Emergency Council. In considering what the Council has done in 1944 against the background of the restricted activity of 1942-3, one cannot omit reference to the personality of Dr. Abba Hillel Silver who stood at the helm of this reorientation of American Zionist propaganda toward more militancy in its presentation.

Whatever the obstacles and impediments in the past, the American Zionist Emergency Council is faced with even more serious ones in the near future as the determination of a Palestine policy is placed on the agenda of Great Britain, the United States and, probably, other United Nations governments.

THE AMERICAN ZIONIST EMERGENCY COUNCIL ^[undated]

In order to present an accurate appraisal of the political and public relations activity carried on by the American Zionist Emergency Council over the past year, it is necessary to recall the situation which existed in American Zionist political life before August 1943, when Dr. Abba Hillel Silver was named chairman of the Council's Executive Committee and co-chairman with Dr. Stephen S. Wise of the full Council.

During 1942 and the first half of 1943, Zionist political prestige in the United States reached a new low. Messages from prominent Government officials addressed to Zionist gatherings had become models of fence-straddling and vagueness, and every effort was made to impose silence, not only on Zionists, but on members of Congress and the general public as well. It is no longer a secret that certain official quarters went so far as to advocate the issuance of a joint Anglo-American statement demanding a cessation of all discussion of the Palestine question. This plan was shelved only after the most strenuous efforts on the part of Zionist leaders.

Plagued by the absence of strong centralized direction, the lack of an aggressive policy, and an unbelievably small budget and program of activities, the American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs was naturally the target of severe criticism. Particularly great was the dissatisfaction over the fact that the Washington front was being neglected. As late as 1943 the Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs had no Washington Bureau, nor could it boast of a single resident representative there. This glaring deficiency led the Jewish Agency to establish its own representation in Washington, even though it had been previously contemplated that American Zionists themselves would conduct all political work in the United States.

To add to the already widespread feeling of gloom and mortification among Zionists, the irresponsible Bergson committees appeared on the scene and attempted to usurp leadership of American Jewry from accredited and recognized organizations. Naturally the popularity of these young men from abroad soared during this period of Zionist political inadequacy, for although their methods were unscrupulous and their

designs selfish and dangerous, these people were also militant, imaginative and resourceful.

It was at this point --August, 1943 -- that American Zionist political activities were revitalized. Assuming leadership during the darkest period of recent Zionist history, Dr. Silver set out to mobilize public opinion behind the Zionist program. Rejecting "backstairs diplomacy" as the sole technique for achieving our goal, he insisted on a broad, all-inclusive program of public relations which would create nationwide agitation for a Jewish Palestine. Such pressure from an aroused and educated public would produce results in the "highest places," both here and abroad, he maintained -- and this conception was to govern the Council's approach throughout the exciting months which were to follow.

Following the tremendous victory scored at the American Jewish Conference, when Dr. Silver led the drive for the adoption of a Palestine resolution which included the demand for a Jewish Commonwealth, the stage was set for a program of Zionist public relations and political activity on a scale undreamed of heretofore.

To begin with, the American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs (now called the American Zionist Emergency Council) was reorganized completely. A new, larger budget, which would cover an extensive program designed to reach out into every state of the Union, was requested -- and secured. The central office in New York was set into effective motion with breathtaking speed. A number of special departments, directed by experts in their respective fields, were established immediately. These included departments dealing with Community Contacts, Information (Press and Radio), Publications, Speakers, Research, Intellectual Mobilization, Christian Opinion, American-Jewish Religious Forces, Special Events, Labor Relations, etc. A permanent bureau was set up in Washington, and within a few days official circles began to recognize that a new, vital, dynamic force was on the scene -- a responsible organization, representing all major Zionist bodies in the United States, and speaking for an overwhelming majority of the Jews of America.

Almost overnight there was an end to the wavering and vacillation which a disillusioned rank and file had come to associate with American Zionist political efforts.

Perhaps the most significant new development was the establishment throughout the country of more than three hundred local emergency committees, which received regular direction, guidance and inspiration from the New York headquarters. So speedily and effectively was this network of emergency groups established that within a few months (December, 1943) the first conference of local committee chairmen was held in Cleveland, where detailed plans to mobilize American public opinion behind the Council's program were formulated. The hundreds of editorials in papers ranging from country journals to metropolitan dailies, the large numbers of resolutions adopted throughout the country, the myriads of telegrams and letters which bolstered the Council's political work in Washington, the rallies, the radio addresses and articles by hundreds of Jewish and non-Jewish leaders everywhere -- these and other activities attest to the marvelously effective work done by the local groups. A second highly successful conference of local committee chairmen took place on May 23 and 24 in Washington.

The most important step on the political front was the introduction of the Palestine resolutions in both Houses of Congress. The technical or strategic purpose of this move was to set up a specific target upon which the Council could effectively concentrate the fire of its propaganda. The Council decided to take this bold and daring step only after long and critical deliberation, after the exploration of every possible means of ascertaining official views, after a systematic canvass of Congressional opinion, both through the local Emergency Committees and through the Washington Bureau, had been conducted.

Of course this involved risks, but the Council had become convinced that the risk of inaction was even greater. The stirring days of February and March, 1944, when, during the hearings before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Zionist leaders presented our case brilliantly and obliterated the arguments of the Arab and American Council for Judaism spokesmen -- when Zionist public relations evoked nationwide

admiration -- those days made history.

The local committees performed magnificently. From large cities and hamlets, thousands of letters, postcards and telegrams poured in upon the members of the Senate and the House. Every member of the Foreign Affairs Committee was contacted several times by his constituency. Congressmen were unanimous in exclaiming that they had seldom seen such amazing public interest in a piece of legislation.

One great objective was realized instantly. The "conspiracy of silence" was broken and the Palestine question was placed on the agenda of public opinion as one of the vital issues of the hour. What is more, the American people became aware of the justice of the case for a Jewish Palestine as never before, and large numbers of influential non-Jews became champions of the Jewish National Home.

The story of the deferment of action on the Palestine resolutions is too well known to bear repetition here. However, one thing should be made emphatically clear -- the resolutions are not dead. The initiative is still in the hands of the Council, if and when the Council chooses to exercise it. When the proper moment arrives, the resolutions will be called up for action.

But the story of the Palestine resolutions does not end here. Apart from the tremendous amount of public agitation and education which they produced, the resolutions also brought about President Roosevelt's historic declaration of March 9th that "the American Government has never given its approval to the White Paper of 1939...and that when future decisions are reached, full justice will be done to those who seek a Jewish National Home." This was the first clear-cut expression of sympathy with Zionist aims to come from a leader of any of the Great Powers since the war began. It came after a long and disturbing silence -- a silence broken forever by the public agitation which accompanied the introduction of the Palestine resolutions.

The same public relations program, conducted in Washington before and during the hearings on the Palestine resolutions, was largely responsible for the gratifyingly friendly attitude towards Zionism on the part of most political leaders who were encountered at both the Republican and Democratic National Conventions, held in Chicago.

The magnificent Palestine planks included in the platforms of both major political parties represent achievements of the greatest significance. On June 27, 1944, the Republican National Convention declared:

"In order to give refuge to millions of distressed Jewish men, women and children driven from their homes by tyranny, we call for the opening of Palestine to their unrestricted immigration and land ownership, so that in accordance with the full intent and purpose of the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and the Resolution of a Republican Congress in 1922, Palestine may be constituted as a free and democratic Commonwealth..."

This clear-cut pronouncement made a tremendous impression on the American Jewish community, and was followed three weeks later, on July 20, by the Democratic National Convention's forthright declaration, as follows:

"We favor the opening of Palestine to unrestricted Jewish immigration and colonization, and such a policy as to result in the establishment there of a free and democratic Jewish Commonwealth."

The period of intense, feverish activity spent by Dr. Silver at the Republican Convention and by Dr. Wise and his associates at the Democratic Convention was thus rewarded. With both major political parties giving their unqualified endorsement to the Jewish people's efforts to rebuild their national life in Palestine, Zionism had become a declared objective in the postwar program of the United States.

This report of activity on the political front would not be complete without at least brief mention of one or two other important developments.

Of special significance is the fact that the Legislatures of twenty states, comprising more than 60% of the country's population, have adopted resolutions condemning the White Paper policy and urging support for Jewish aspirations in Palestine.

Not only legislative bodies, but groups representing all walks of life have joined in equally vigorous pronouncements. For example, on March 17, 1944 -- the fifth anniversary of the issuance of the White Paper -- a strongly-worded petition was submitted to the White House by 1700 outstanding American university professors from 250 different institutions of learning in 44 different states. This petition made a tremendous impression on the general public, and attracted widespread newspaper coverage.

Space limitations do not permit a detailed description of the Council's various departments which implement decisions arrived at in meetings of the Executive Committee. Indeed, a full report on each department alone would be required to do justice to the manifold activities which have been performed over the past year. Suffice it to say, that the tremendous program of public relations which has electrified the American scene did not result from pious hopes and good intentions alone, but that the energies of a large and devoted staff were required to make the Palestine question the burning issue which it is today. The effectiveness with which this work has been accomplished can best be gauged by noting that whereas even a year ago one pleaded for the inclusion of even passing reference to Zionism in the public press, on the radio, in legislative chambers, etc., today molders of public opinion often approach the Council for additional information on the question.

Much has been accomplished to date, but however significant the victories won by the American Zionist Emergency Council, they represent milestones on a long and difficult road. How near we are to the end of that road and how quickly we shall hurdle the obstacles which remain in our way depend in large measure upon our ability to plan intelligent political action and to exert the energy required to attain our objectives.

9/6/44