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MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series I: General Correspondence, 1914-1969, undated.

Sub-series A: Alphabetical, 1914-1965, undated.

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Balar correspondence, 1923.

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SILVER QUILTS CHAMBER IN PROTEST

STAND ON LABOR IS CAUSE OF RESIGNATION

Open-Shop Letters, Exchanged
With Newton D. Baker,
Made Public by
Jewish Leader

Objecting to the labor policy of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce, Rabbi Abba H. Silver of The Temple has resigned from that body, outlining his attitude to chamber officials, it was announced Wednesday. In correspondence with former President Newton D. Baker, Rabbi Silver said:

"I am not in sympathy with the position taken by the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce on the subject of the open shop, and more especially of the propaganda which the chamber has been conducting thru newspapers and pamphlets to universalize it.

"I do not believe that it is the function of a chamber of commerce to become a propaganda agency for ideals such as are advocated by organizations of the type of the American Plan Association.

"The desire on the part of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce to serve the public would perhaps be less subject to question if the chamber had shown a similar alacrity and apostolic zeal in ferreting out and exposing the abuses in the camps of employers, bankers, mortgage sharks and profiteers in our city.

Calls Chamber "Partial"

"As an association of employers the Chamber of Commerce is true to its mission, but it assumes to be a civic organization, representing the interests of the public at large. As such it is decidedly partial.

"After your very stimulating and comprehensive correspondence with Mr. Gomper on the subject of the open and closed shop, it would serve no purpose to go over the ground again. I am, however, enclosing herewith a brief summary of my position which was published some time ago in a Cleveland paper.

Commenting on the controversy, Rabbi Silver said Wednesday:

"I don't believe the Chamber is playing fair. Its activities seem focused on smashing the closed shop, neglecting other phases of its program.

"To carry this out, the Chamber masquerades under the guise of the high-sounding phrase, A Labor Policy for Cleveland."

Urged to Withdraw

The above letter was sent by Rabbi Silver, in reply to a request from Baker that he withdraw his resignation.

In his request, Baker said: "The directors, reluctant to accept it, have asked me to use any influence I may have to persuade you to withdraw it.

"This I am happy to do because, while I have not always agreed with the Chamber in the past and may not in the future upon some particular matters, I realize how little any of us can do singly for Cleveland, and the incalculable value of our work when we co-operate in such groups for the practical realization of civic and social ideals."

Upon receipt of Rabbi Silver's explanation of his move, Baker wrote, in part:

"I like the downright manner of your attack upon the Chamber's policy, and I am sure you will like it best if I reply in an equally downright way. You say you are not in sympathy with the position taken by the Chamber on the subject of the open shop and more especially of the propaganda which the Cham-



MORE INFORMATION ON RABBI SILVER RESIGNATION

papers and pamphlets, to universalize it."

Discusses Open Shop

"Referring to the first part of the paragraph: 'There are three kinds of shops—the closed union shop, the closed nonunion shop, and the open shop.' If you do not believe in the open shop, which is the shop in which every worker's chance is as good as every other worker's chance, the open shop from which no worker is shut out because he holds the union card, and from which no worker is shut out because he has no union card, I say, if you do not believe in the open shop, then you must believe either in the closed union shop or the closed nonunion shop.

"I will not indulge in an idle discussion of the closed nonunion shop. Of course, you do not believe in that, and, knowing you as well as I do, I do not see how you can believe in the closed union shop.

"You will have to tell me in so many words that you do before I believe that you do.

"The closed union shop, like the closed nonunion shop, is absolutely against the public interests. I have urged this question at such length in the correspondence between Mr. Gompers and myself (copies of which you have received) that I will not inflict the argument upon you again. But will you not answer me frankly this question: Are you in favor of the closed union shop?

"Referring to the second (quoted) part of your paragraph: You recognize, of course, that if the Chamber of Commerce does believe earnestly and sincerely in the open shop, it is explicitly its 'function' to work for what it believes in and try to make its beliefs effective.

"The Chamber of Commerce is not a chamber of resolution, merely. It is a chamber of action, and I think you will agree with me, on second thought, that however much you may disagree with a policy, it is the chamber's duty, having decided upon a policy, to endeavor to make that policy effective.

On "American Plan"

"I note your reference to the American Plan Association. I have no acquaintance with this association whatever.

"I suppose that I know personally some of the gentlemen who compose it. I have been informed of the labor policy of the factories represented by some of the members of its executive committee.

"I have not tested the accuracy of this information. But, if I am correctly informed, these factories are operated so nearly upon the closed nonunion shop basis that I share your doubt about the ideals (as you call them) of such associations.

"I am compelled to emphasize the fact that my information with regard to these factories is second or third hand, and may be inaccurate.

Raps "Same Gentlemen"

"But if you knew of the ardent efforts of the same gentlemen who now compose the active element in the American Plan Association, to prevent the Chamber of Commerce from having a program of labor relations, you would suspect with me that those gentlemen did not care to have the REAL open shop preached to this community with the sincerity and effectiveness with which the chamber is preaching it.

"I cannot agree with your statement of this Chamber's mission. The Chamber of Commerce is not an association of employers. It is a civic organization.

"It does not pretend to represent the public, but it tries, perhaps; mistakenly at times, but always with sincerity, I think, to represent the public INTERESTS.

"With reference to the next paragraph of your letter, it seems to me that two observations might be made—first, that you are not wholly familiar with the record of the Chamber in ferreting out and endeavoring to correct abuses of the character that you mention, and second, that it is not a sound argument against the validity of one policy to accuse the Chamber of dereliction in others.

"Hypocritical Cloak"

"I have carefully read thru the little pamphlet you were kind enough to send me as expressive of your views.

"This pamphlet seems to me, if you will permit me to be quite frank about it, to assume that the advocates of the open shop desire to destroy organized labor and to eliminate collective bargaining.

"I believe in labor unions, and yet I believe in the open shop. I believe in collective bargaining, and yet I believe in the open shop.

"And I find that my associates

in the Chamber of Commerce—the members of its Board of Directors and its committee on labor relations—are in accord with my views, or rather, perhaps I should say, I am in accord with their views. And their views are representative of the great preponderating majority of the members of the Chamber of Commerce.

"In other words, it seems to me that the basic assumption of your pamphlet is inaccurate and results from the undeniable fact that there are employers and there are employers' associations who would use the slogan of the open shop as a hypocritical cloak to cover their efforts for the closed nonunion shop.

"With such employers, neither the Chamber of Commerce nor I have the slightest sympathy, and we have said so repeatedly and in the most public way.

Hits Closed Shop

"I enclose a letter to the editor of the Cleveland Citizen, written by Alexander C. Brown, the chairman of the Committee on Labor Relations, covering the point. Please take the time to read it carefully.

"Having taken an assumption as your basis that I believe to be incorrect, your pamphlet goes on to denounce the open shop as tho it were synonymous with the destruction of trade unionism. The Chamber of Commerce is in agreement with you that trade unionism should not be destroyed, that it has a useful field to fill, that it is necessary to the prosperity of the worker, and that any efforts, however concealed in whatever specious disguise, that attempts to destroy trade unionism, is against the public interests. But we are for the open shop just as unqualifiedly.

"My associates in the Chamber of Commerce are joined with me in the belief that the hope of the trade unionism for future growth and future usefulness rests on its abandonment of its monopolistic closed union shop policy. We are convinced that the failure of organized labor to make any real progress in recent years is due to the defection of public sympathy caused by the principle of the closed union shop and the evil practises resulting from it.

"I have tried in this letter not to avoid any arguments you have made, either in your letter or in your

pamphlet. If I have omitted any point, it is not intentional. Unless you have become convinced that the closed union shop is right in principle, I can see no reason for your resignation from the Chamber of Commerce—nor indeed, should you resign in any event, for the chamber is a many-sided organization, and disagreement with one policy, even so important a one as this question of labor relation, should not necessitate your resignation. Tom L. Johnson disagreed with the Chamber of Commerce on many public issues, but he remained a member of it as long as he lived. Will you not do me the personal favor of reconsidering the question in the light of this letter, and then advise me whether or not I may have your permission to withdraw your resignation.

Baker Quit Once

In resigning because he is out of sympathy with the chamber's views, Silver, it was pointed out, followed a precedent set by Baker, who quit the chamber when he was mayor of Cleveland, because at that time he disagreed with its policies.

Later, the former secretary of war again became a member.

"I no longer represent the Chamber of Commerce," said Baker Wednesday. "Whatever statement may be given out in connection with Rabbi Silver's resignation should come from those in authority in the Chamber of Commerce."

Richard F. Grant, president of the chamber, Wednesday refused to comment on the action of Rabbi Silver.

"The matter occurred during the administration of Mr. Baker, and I feel that nothing I could say would have any direct bearing on the issue," he said.



CHAMBER STILL FOR OPEN SHOP DESPITE SILVER

CLEVELAND TIMES

**Resignation of Rabbi from Civic
Organization Fails to Alter Con-
ditions; Correspondence
Is Made Public.** APR 26
1923

Resignation of Rabbi A. H. Silver of the Temple, from The Cleveland Chamber of Commerce, because of its open shop labor policy, has made no difference in the organization's stand upon the question. This became known yesterday, following the giving out of correspondence between Rabbi Silver and Newton D. Baker, then president of the chamber.

Following the resignation, a series of letters passed between Rabbi Silver and Mr. Baker. In these the Rabbi attacked the chamber because of its activities in behalf of the establishment of an open shop, which would exclude neither union nor nonunion men. Pointing out that the chamber is an organization for action, Baker replied that, since the chamber was against closed shops of any kind, it became its duty vigorously to advocate its belief.

Chamber Is Silent.

It was stated Wednesday by R. F. Grant, new chamber president, and Munson Havens, secretary, that officials of the organization would have nothing to say in the controversy. They declared neither the organization nor the office of Baker, had anything to do with making public the correspondence.

The letters resulted from a desire on the part of the chamber to retain Rabbi Silver as a member, it was reported. Baker pointed out that he himself has not always agreed with the action of the body, but that he did not consider this sufficient reason for withdrawal.

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CHAMBER FOR OPEN SHOP DESPITE SILVER

(Continued from Page 1.)

Silver wrote in his letter.

Silver accused the chamber of not playing fair, and of representing simply the manufacturers' viewpoint. He said that the attitude of the chamber is one of "smashing the closed shop, neglecting other phases of its program."

Replying to Silver's letter, Mr. Baker stated, "I like the downright manner of your attack upon the chamber's policy, and I am sure you will like it if I reply in an equally downright manner." He then indicated his belief that the rabbi did not fully understand the issues and stated that there was danger of confusing the real open shop, which allows both union and nonunion men the right to work, with the closed non-union shop.

"The closed union shop, like the closed nonunion shop, is absolutely against the public interest," said Baker.

Baker stated that, while he was acquainted with some of the membership of the American Plan association, that he had no acquaintance with the association. He stated that if the rabbi knew "the ardent efforts of some of the gentlemen who compose the American Plan association to prevent the chamber of commerce from having a program of labor relations, you would suspect, with me, that those gentlemen did not care to have the real open shop preached to the community with the sincerity with which the chamber is preaching it."

The chamber is in no way attempting to destroy organized labor, but simply to permit all men to have an equal opportunity, Baker declared. He said that the body is working for the best civic interests, and not for a group of manufacturers alone.

Rabbi Silver's statement drew the fire of the American Plan association. Through William Frew Long, executive secretary, its position was outlined in a statement made public yesterday.

"The American Plan association is not out to crush labor unions, as charged by Rabbi Silver," the statement reads in part. "It is no new thing, however, for men like Rabbi Silver, who realize that there can be no honest objection to conditions of employment where both organized and unorganized men work side by side, to charge the advocates of the open shop with bad faith."

(Continued on Page 2, Column 6.)

MORE INFORMATION ON RABBI SILVER RESIGNATION

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Favors Organized Labor

Rabbi Silver then made this reply, in part:

"You asked me whether I favored the closed union shop. I favor the complete organization of American workingmen in their respective trades. I believe that the public will be better served if it is under the necessity of adjusting itself to organized and accountable groups rather than to unwieldy and unorganized masses.

"I therefore, favor a condition in industry which will induce organization by giving preference in employment to organized over unorganized men.

"I also favor REAL collective bargaining, thru the chosen representatives of the men, whether these be of a particular shop involved or not; not a SORT of collective bargaining, which makes the selection of the representatives dependent upon the consent of the employer.

"Strictly speaking, then, I do not favor the closed union shop. However, while not favoring it, I do not seek to destroy it where it now exists. Rather would I apply my energy to the organization of the 90 per cent of American labor which still remains unorganized.

"These masses are a real hindrance to the development of a code of group conduct and responsibility.

"When labor is completely organized it will be completely controlled—if not by law, then by a sensitized and directed public opinion, by competent leadership, which organization in time develops, and by the vast corporate responsibility of keeping men employed and content by keeping industry going.

"You assume that if one does not believe in the closed shop, one must proceed at once to destroy it. That is a hurried conclusion. I do not believe in the Soviet system of Russia, yet I would do nothing to hurt it; for one readily can surmise what horrors would follow the collapse of the Soviet government today.

Suffering Recalled

"What assurance can you give the organized men, say of the miners' union of the central competitive field, that upon the voluntary surrender of the closed shop plank, they

would not be taken by operators whose cynical regard of agreement was made not so very long ago, into the very conditions of serfdom from which they, by organization, escaped and under which their fellow workingmen in the open shop fields of West Virginia are still suffering?

"The closed union shop should not be destroyed nor fought. It should be made unnecessary by the organization of industry on the basis of the preferential union shop idea, and real collective bargaining.

"You say you are a trade unionist. You say that the Chamber of Commerce believes that the trade union is necessary for the prosperity of the workers; that any effort that attempts to destroy trade unionism is against the public interests.

"A trade unionist is one who believes in the ultimate organization of ALL workingmen in each trade. He works for that end, not by resolution only (as you say) but by action. What action has the Chamber of Commerce taken in recent years to stimulate the organization into union of the workingmen of Cleveland?

"The pamphlet of the Committee of Labor Relations of the Chamber makes mention of 546 open shops in Cleveland, and of 126 closed non-union shops, as against 16 closed union shops.

"The public knows of the persistent attacks which the Chamber has lost against closed union shops, such as those of the Building Trades, and of the manner in which it utilized an industrial conflict, like the milk drivers' strike, or the plumbers' strike, for the alienation of public sentiment from the cause of the strikers.

"The public has yet to learn of any forceful and persistent action on the part of the Chamber of Commerce to fight the closed nonunion shop, which you say is absolutely against the public interests, or to establish real collective bargaining, or to encourage trade unionism, by urging employers to give preference to union labor in their shops, or to combat organizations like the American Plan Association, which is seeking to destroy unionism, and which is therefore against public interests.

"Why the Silence?"

"Why was the chamber silent during the steel strike in 1919?

"Here men were fighting for the right of collective bargaining, and for conditions of employment which the report of the Commission of Inquiry of the Interchurch World Movement declares that the sine qua non of decency, concluding their report with the statement 'that conditions in the steel industry gave the workers just cause for complaint and for action,' and that 'these unredressed grievances still exist.'

"They were not, as you know, fighting for the closed shop. Comparatively few strikes have been called for that purpose. Here was an opportunity for real service and for a real vindication on the part of the chamber for its claim to impartiality.

"But the chamber, which was very vocal in the case of the building strike, and the milk drivers' strike, and the plumbers' strike, and in each instance condemning the strikers or their unions, was eloquently silent here.

"Not only was there no action—there was not even resolution. The only action which you did take was to advise your membership to disregard completely the ordinance passed by the City Council to regulate employment of special guards

during strikes, and to provide for the licensing of such guards; an ordinance, which as you know, avoided much bloodshed in our community.

"Similarly was the chamber silent in the case of the coal strike, where the president of the United States himself felt constrained to express his displeasure of the flagrant violation of agreement on the part of the coal operators.

Cannot Reconsider

"I said in my letter that the desire on the part of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce to serve the public would perhaps be less subject to question if the Chamber had shown a similar alacrity and apostolic zeal in ferreting out and exposing the abuse in the camps of employers, bankers, mortgage sharks and profiteers in our city; and you replied that I am not wholly familiar with the record of the Chamber in ferreting out and endeavoring to correct abuses of the character that I mentioned.

"What is the record and where is it to be found?"

"You further say that it is not a sound argument against the validity of one policy to accuse the Chamber of dereliction in others.

"No, not the validity, but the sincerity!

"When an organization sets out to represent the interests of the public at large, and then proceeds to ignore perhaps the most vital task affecting the public weal, and prominently centers its energies upon smashing union shops, it decidedly lays itself open to suspicion.

"You ask me to reconsider my resignation. I wish I could see my way clear to do so.

"I feel, however, that I cannot conscientiously lend my support to an organization which has made such a labor policy its chief function. I shall, perhaps, find opportunities for co-operation in civic matters with you and the good men of the Chamber, thru other agencies and other channels."

Baker Quit Once

In resigning because he is out of sympathy with the chamber's views, Silver, it was pointed out, followed a precedent set by Baker, who quit the chamber when he was mayor of Cleveland, because at that time he disagreed with its policies.

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