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

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

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Billikopf, Jacob, 1926-1927.

C O P Y

November 18th, 1926

Mr. Matthew Woll. Vice President
American Federation of Labor
166 West Washington Street
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mr. Woll:

I read with a great deal of interest your letter to President Coolidge, commenting on the Sherwood Eddy report on Russia. I trust you will not consider me presumptuous in presenting my own impressions of the situation in Soviet Russia and thus in a measure, perhaps, help clear the atmosphere.

Last July I went to Russia for the express purpose of studying the back-to-the-soil movement among the Jews and, incidentally, to familiarize myself with industrial conditions, because, as Impartial Chairman of the Men's Clothing Industry in the City of New York, I have been coming into intimate relations with various industrial groups. With me I carried letters of introduction from Mr. Samuel Vauclain, President of the Baldwin Locomotive Works, to Tchitcherin, Commissar of Foreign Affairs, and to other important officials in the Government. When I reached Moscow, I decided not to make use of any of these letters for fear I would become so charmed with the personalities of these high officials and so swept away by their enthusiasm that, instead of getting at the objective facts, I would obtain a distorted view of the situation.

All my contacts, therefore, were with non-Communists and anti-Communists---men and women of culture and great intelligence. They were men and women who, as a result of the October Revolution of 1917, suffered indescribable tortures, both mental and physical. The wonder is how they managed during the past nine years to survive the trials and tribulations under a government whose social and economic philosophy left them penniless. With them I discussed not only the back-to-the-soil movement among the Jews and matters relating to my own people, but, primarily, social and political conditions.

Interpreters were unnecessary, as I was able to converse with them either in Yiddish or in Russian. To me they poured out their hearts as they would not, under any circumstances, have done to their neighbors, for fear of being accused of anti-revolutionary tendencies. And in the light of my intimate contacts with these persons, I want to say that the Sherwood Eddy statements which appeared in CURRENT HISTORY and in the NATION, are substantially correct. I accept with but few minor qualifications not only the facts, but the interpretations arrived at by Sherwood Eddy, whom, by the way, I met casually for the first time either in Moscow or Leningrad, and of whose commission I was not a member.

I carried away the definite conviction that the Soviet Government is stable---much more so than many other governments in Europe; that there is no possible likelihood of its being overthrown, and that Communism has undergone at least three or four distinct stages of evolution since 1917. The Communism of 1926 no longer corresponds to that instituted by Lenin and his disciples, and does not even resemble the modified Communism of 1921, known as the New Economic Policy.

Let me record a conversation I had with one of the leading lawyers in Russia, who, though an anti-Communist, has been asked by the Soviet Government to rewrite the Civil Codes of Russia in conformity with changed social and economic conditions. Incidentally, there are many non-party men employed by the Government in purely technical positions.

After this gentleman presented in detail the reasons why he was not a Communist, I said to him, "What in your judgment is the trend of the Government? Whither is it drifting?"

The reply was, "We are evolving a system which will, in all probabilities, be a synthesis of that which is best in all the governments."

Query: "Do you know any group of people who crave for a reversion to the old Czarist days?"

Reply: "Not if you used the lamp of Diogenes could you find any such group in Russia. There is not a soul who is not supremely happy that the days of Czarism are over."

Query: "If you had it in your power to create a new Order, would you put the Communists out of power?"

"No," was the prompt answer.

"Why not?"

"Because Communism has, during the past nine years, so woven itself into the social, economic and political fabric of our people that the overthrow of the Bolshevik Government would result in another revolution---and we have had so many revolutions that we would rather bear the ills we have than fly to others we know not of."

"Are conditions, then, improving?"

"Decidedly so! From year to year there have been noticeable changes. Production is increasing greatly. The transportation system is almost up to par, etc. etc. With Stalin and his group at the head, we are going more and more to the Right and away from the Left."

"How do you account for this tendency?" I asked.

"Because the leaders, faced as they have been with stern and grim realities, discovered that they could not enforce the Marxian principles and, consequently, have been compelled to make more and more concessions---such as they would never have dreamed of making when they were merely theorizing and evolving systems out of their inner consciousness."

With slight verbal variations, the foregoing sentiments were expressed by practically every individual with whom I discussed the

situation and reinforced by the citation of a number of what seemed to be incontrovertible economic facts. And please bear in mind that these expressions did not emanate from Communists.

I must confess that I went to Russia filled with prejudices such as I have been fed upon for nine years by a hostile press. These prejudices were in a degree strengthened by my contact with a certain type of American Communist who in the past few years has attempted to create so much mischief in the Trade Union movement and destroy that which you and others have so painfully built up. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers, for instance, have suffered a great deal from their chicanery, as you have reason to know. It was only through the wise statesmanship of Sidney Hillman and his associates that the propaganda of the Communist element in their midst was weakened. Because I was aware of the mischievous tactics and vicious propaganda of the Left Wing groups in the Needle Industry in the United States, I naturally brought to Russia many sentiments and convictions far from favorable to the Soviet Government. But, after studying the situation in Russia, I was forced to the same conclusions arrived at by Sherwood Eddy and other thoughtful observers who had gone to Russia to get facts at first hand.

It must be remembered that while the Communist in Russia has abandoned the political and economic ideology preached by Karl Marx and adopted by Lenin in 1917, the Communist in America still clings to an ideology which Lenin and his disciples discarded as long ago as 1921. How quickly the American Communist would be disillusioned if he went to Russia! Although the American Communist (I am referring to a certain type) resorts to tactics which may be reprehensible, this is no reason why any one should be blinded to the changes which have been made and which are taking place in Russia. And it is on account of these changes that I feel we should assume a more sympathetic attitude.

In your letter to the President you make the claim that there have been no acts of the Soviet Government indicating a fundamental change of policy, but that, on the contrary, Stalin has continued his revolutionary and anti-foreign pronouncements. The NEW YORK TIMES, by no means pro-Soviet, was right when, commenting editorially upon your letter, it said: "What Stalin does is more important than what he says." How easy it is to pick excerpts out of Stalin's and Bucharin's speeches and pronouncements published for local consumption, and on the basis of these build up a great case! But it is no less absurd to adopt such a method than it would be for the English and French to base their opinion of America upon those excerpts in "Americana" compiled by H. L. Mencken and which appear monthly in the AMERICAN MERCURY.

I hope you will pardon my candor when I say that to me, as a deep sympathizer with the Labor Movement in America, it is a source of keen regret and disappointment that you and men like you, who represent that which is best in the Trade Union movement in this country, should be accepting, without inquiry and intensive study, all the reports concerning Russia which come largely from Riga, Berlin and London, particularly Riga where so many intriguing stories are concocted. If there is any one group in America which should approach this or any other kindred subject calmly and dispassionately, it is the Labor group because, as you

know only too well, there is no element in our population which has been and still is so maligned and vilified in many quarters as the Trade Union group. In this connection, let me cite a bit of personal history.

About three years ago the Clothing Manufacturers, the Contractors and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers asked me to serve as Impartial Chairman in the industry in the City of New York. I was then, and am now, the Executive Director of the Federation of Jewish Charities in Philadelphia. As soon as I accepted this post of honor and great responsibility, those manufacturers in Philadelphia who have fought strenuously for the open shop (and Philadelphia is notoriously an open-shop town), entered protests against my accepting a position which involved, in their judgment, an identification with a dangerous anti-social institution. They honestly believed that I was doing something which was distinctly un-American; that I was giving aid and comfort to the enemy; that a lot of "anarchists" and "Bolsheviki" would invade the City of Brotherly Love where the Republic was created. In fact, the local Chamber of Commerce appointed a committee to wait on me and urge me to give up this position. With pride they pointed out that in Philadelphia, more than in any other city in the country, the so-called American Plan prevailed. How could I, a supposedly decent individual and holding a responsible position in the Charities, ally myself, even indirectly, with a Trade Union? Several prominent contributors to our Charities threatened to withdraw their contributions if I did not give up the Impartial Chairmanship. It was only after I addressed the Executive Committee of the Chamber of Commerce and explained the nature of my position and all of its implications, that they ceased regarding me as an enemy of society and placed me on "probation," so to speak.

I mention the foregoing incident to show to what an extent prejudice and passion play an important part in our lives; to what an extent we are averse to facing facts and realities.

May I say that I did not go to Russia as a self-constituted agent to make a study with a view to advising the President or Congress as to what action should or should not be adopted with reference to recognition. I have no particular interests in the matter. I was merely in search of Truth. I can not help deploring that the American Federation of Labor rejected, in the manner in which it did, the proposal to send to Russia a committee composed of such keen observers as yourself. What folly to suppose that you and your associates would have been seduced by the supposedly honeyed words of a Stalin or a Trotsky, or that particular institutions would have been brought momentarily into existence, merely to create a favorable impression upon the American delegates!

And if such a commission had gone to Russia, if it had studied the factors which led up to the Revolution of October, 1917, if it had familiarized itself with the notable social and economic changes which are taking place, if it had come into contact with tens of thousands of human beings who are making a desperate effort to create a Better Life, if it had judged the interplay of forces in terms of Russian and not of American psychology, then the commission would, on its return, adopt virtually the same conclusions which you will find in the two reports submitted

Mr. Matthew Woll - page 5

two years ago by the Men and Women's English Trade Unionists, who sent separate delegations to Russia. Your recommendation to President Coolidge would then be: Recognize Russia, provided the Soviet Government is prepared to adhere to the conditions outlined by you and Charles E. Hughes in 1923---and the Soviet regime is prepared to meet every one of those conditions. Why not, in any event, meet around the conference table and discuss the situation calmly and dispassionately?

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) Jacob Billikopf



JACOB BILLIKOPF
Impartial Chairman

Telephone, Stuyvesant 4083

MEN'S CLOTHING INDUSTRY
OFFICE of the IMPARTIAL CHAIRMAN
NEW YORK MARKET

41 Union Square
NEW YORK, N.Y.

December 2nd, 1926


Rabbi A. H. Silver
Cleveland, Ohio

My dear Rabbi Silver:

Mr. Billikopf has asked me to send you a copy of his
letter to Matthew Woll of the American Federation of Labor. I
wonder if you would be good enough to let Mr. Billikopf know what
you think of it.

Sincerely yours,




Frances Levin
Secretary to Mr. Billikopf

THE FEDERATION OF
JEWISH CHARITIES OF PHILADELPHIA
330 SOUTH NINTH STREET

PHILADELPHIA, PA. December 10, 1926.

Dear Silver:-

I do not think the death of any individual affected me quite as much as that of Jules Mastbaum in Philadelphia. He was in many respects the most unique personality I ever met--certainly the most creative force in the community at large.

I am not in a mood, therefore, of commenting on your letter of December 7th, particularly paragraph #2. You will pardon me if I say you are not well acquainted with the facts in the situation. I shall be glad to present them to you when we meet, and then you will get a different slant on the whole matter.

As ever, yours,

*meantime assume a judicial
attitude and withhold judgment.*

Billikopf

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

UNITED STATES SENATE

Washington, D. C.
February 13, 1927.

Dear Mr. Billikopf:-

Your letter of January 17th, reached my office in due time. I have been so busy with matters pending in the Senate and before the Judiciary Committee of which I am Chairman, that I have not been able to even read the letters that come to my office and which require my personal attention. I devote the Sabbath Day in an attempt to clear my desk of the accumulated correspondence, and on this day, late in the afternoon, I have just reached and read your letter, together with the enclosures.

I have read these enclosures with a very great and deep interest. I am impressed and deeply moved with what to me seems to be the logical and judicial attitude that you have assumed in this correspondence. You have, in a very polite and courteous way, called to the attention of those with whom you have been corresponding, a weakness of human nature with which nearly all of us are afflicted. Those who are not thus afflicted are exceptional because they have the ability to take a fair and logical view of a difficult situation, when all the tendency of propaganda and publicity would lead them to look at the question in a more superficial way.

Your correspondence demonstrates that you are fearless in the expression of your opinion, and that you are ready to submit your ideas to the criticism and the judgment of those who oppose you, and that when you are convinced of an error you are likewise ready to acknowledge it. I wish the American people had more men with minds as fair, and that they could all read what you have said in regard to Russia. A man hardly dares to say anything in favor of Russia without being denounced and condemned as a bolshevik or an anarchist; and when I see the head of our Government taking a course that I believe to be of that kind I am deeply grieved and shocked.

I have talked with so many people from Russia, have read so much about it, and have tried to digest so many opposite opinions, that I confess I have often been in a dilemma to form a candid judgment of my own as to just what were the conditions over there. I have found so many men - and women too, who have been in my judgment unreasonable, and who have only a superficial view even after they have visited the country, that I doubted whether it was possible to get the correct situation in view. There are so many divergent opinions on behalf of those who have apparently had equal opportunities to form correct judgment! Reluctantly and much against my will I have been compelled to believe that many of our own people, high in official life, including our President and Secretary of State, have been misled by false propaganda which they had the ability, and should have had the willingness, to analyze in a fair and judicial way, and which it seems to me they did not - and do not - do. The attempt of the Secretary of

State to have circulated over the country, thru the principal news agencies, propaganda which he would not dare admit came from the State Department because he did not have sufficient evidence to show that the sources of his information were either true or reliable, is an evidence - a painful evidence - of the weakness of men in high official life, where the people have a right to demand a judicial and a fair-minded temperament. If our information must be gathered from our State Department under these conditions, I fear we will never get the truth.

To my mind it is humiliating to thin that our Secretary of State would undertake to have circulated, unreliable information which would have a tendency to work our people up into a mental attitude of unfriendliness toward a nation with which we were at peace, - a feeling that would naturally grow and might easily lead to war.

After all, how feeble are the safeguards that keep us at peace! And how dangerous it is that those who have the shaping of our destiny should be moved by such illogical and unfair methods in creating a sentiment of hostility and hate against our fellow men! By what tender threads does hang the sword of hate that might so easily drive us to the horrors and the suffering of an unreasonable and cruel war.

I regret that those high in Union Labor circles did not accept your advice. I can see no reason, if our cause is just, why we should fear a fair and honest discussion of it. Neither can I understand why we should deny, before we act, the right of those who disagree with us to be heard and to have the right to show what they claim to be the righteousness of their own conduct.

Again thanking you, I am,

Very truly yours,

(signed)

G. W. Norris

Mr. Jacob Billikopf,
Executive Director,
Jewish Charities of Philadelphia,
330 South Ninth Street,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Federation of Jewish Charities

MEMORANDUM

Philadelphia, Pa. February 23, 1927.

From Billikopf

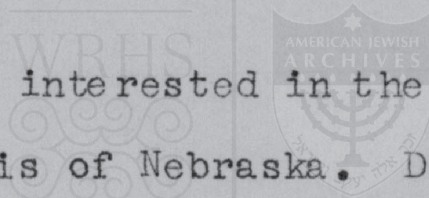
To Silver

Subject:

You will be interested in the enclosed letter from Senator Norris of Nebraska. Don't you wish we had more men like him in the Senate?

B.

Billikopf



UNITED STATES SENATE

Washington, D. C.
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Mr. Jacob Billikopf,
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330 South Ninth Street,
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Federation of Jewish Charities

MEMORANDUM

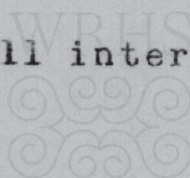
Philadelphia, Pa.

Mar. 23, 1927.

From Jacob Billikopf

To Rabbi Silver

Subject: Dear Silver: The attached copy of a letter
to Matthew Woll will interest and perhaps amuse you.



Billikopf

C O P Y . .

13.

Billikoff

March 21, 1927.

Mr. Matthew Woll,
American Federation of Labor Building,
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mr. Woll:-

You and I have had some correspondence regarding the Sherwood Eddy Report on Russia. Today I am addressing myself to you on an altogether different matter.

For some years I have been deeply interested in the subject of Old Age Pensions. Having been identified with various types of philanthropic endeavor, both of a secular and non-secular character, city-wide and country-wide, I have naturally come intimately in touch with the problems affecting the poor. Though a strong believer in private charities, yet I have come to feel that there are certain fields of philanthropic endeavor which should be supported and financed by Society at large.

Thus, in 1912, I advocated the Widows' and Orphans' Allowance in Missouri - the first State in the Union to adopt the idea - with the result that hundreds of millions of dollars are spent annually today by organized society in the care of widows and orphans in their own homes instead of institutions. Needless to say, that when this measure was first proposed it met with a great deal of opposition from the vested interests, who attacked it on the ground that it was 'paternalistic' and 'socialistic'. In those days the term 'Bolshevik' did not exist; otherwise this favorite expression would have been applied to those of us who were sponsoring so 'revolutionary' a doctrine as the care of widows and orphans in their own homes, out of funds provided by the municipality or State.

In our present efforts to bring about Old Age Pensions for the aged and infirm - and they present as acute a problem as dependent and delinquent childhood - we are again met by opposition on the part of those who regard any type of social advance as revolutionary. In our State, an extraordinary report of Old Age Pensions was issued by the Pension Commission, of which Mr. James H. Maurer, President of the Pennsylvania Federation of Labor, and whom you probably know, is the Chairman. Senator Flora M. Vare, sister-in-law of Senator-elect William Vare, recently introduced a measure in the Senate, calling for the creation of an Old Age Pension system. But some of the leading manufacturers' organizations, particularly the one dominated by Mr. Grundy, are bitterly opposed to this legislation. It is "vicious; it is subversive of.....; it corresponds to the dole system in England, etc."

I attempted to prove to a friend of mine, a prominent manufacturer, that the Old Age Pension measure is a perfectly respectable one; that it is in line with modern, progressive thought. "But," said my friend, "to show you how vicious the proposal is, even the American Federation of Labor is bitterly opposed to it." I was amazed. Coming from Missouri, I wanted "to be shown." Thereupon my friend called my attention to a letter addressed to governors and legislators, by the National Civic Federation, to the effect that "state pensions have increased pauperism, possess little practical value," and therefore should be ignored. "Inasmuch," added my friend, "as Mr. Woll is the acting President of the National Civic Federation, is it possible that he, being one of the two or three strongest leaders in the American Federation of Labor movement and its spokesman, does not speak for his organization? Surely such a communication as was sent by the Civic Federation must have had Mr. Woll's approval!"

I confess I was a bit nonplussed to think that you should ~~oppose~~ legislation which, in the judgment of those of us who are close to the problem, is so absolutely necessary and in line with "orthodox economics." Yet, in the light of what I know of the Federation and the activities of Mr. Ralph Easley, who signed the communication, I am loath to believe that you had any previous knowledge of the letter written over Mr. Easley's signature, just as I am, to be perfectly candid, disinclined to believe, in the light of internal evidence, that you were actually the author of the communication addressed to President Coolidge, commenting on the Sherwood Eddy Report.

I hope I shall be in a position to inform my friend, the manufacturer, and others who are making so much capital out of your identification with the National Civic Federation, that you are in no way responsible for the Easley letter; that the American Federation of Labor should certainly not be held accountable for the views expressed by Mr. Easley, and that, in truth, the American Federation of Labor or some of its constituents, like the United Miners Workers of America, have for years and years been agitating for the establishment of Old Age Pension Legislation.

Sincerely yours,

(signed)

Jacob Billikopf