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Sulzberger correspondence, 1943.

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THE NEW YORK TIMES
TIMES SQUARE

November 2, 1943

Dear Dr. Silver:

I presume that in the long history of Israel other leaders also permitted their fire to consume their judgment and that they, too, misrepresented those who did not see eye to eye with them.

I have read your recent attack upon me and The New York Times in the columns of that paper -- that is where one does read Zionist as well as other news -- and I am prompted to write you because I think you should have certain facts, all of which easily could have been obtained had the religious spirit of the Rabbi not been dominated by political considerations. But, since you won't seek the truth, I send it to you.

Up to twelve months ago, I was not an anti-Zionist. I have never approved of the conception of Jewish statehood, but I have classed myself solely as a non-Zionist, and made this distinction because I could not bring myself affirmatively to deny to any group, no matter what its common denominator, the right to seek a country of its own. And then last November I made a speech in Baltimore, in which I urged upon my fellow countrymen who were not of Jewish faith the need of exercising care before lending their names to the cause of a Jewish Army or extreme Zionist positions. I am enclosing a copy of that speech, which I read. I did not interpolate. I urged this course because I knew that we were about to land in Africa and fight in a Moslem country (we did so a week after) and the lives of my countrymen and the cause of the United Nations were my sole concern.

You probably will not agree that agitation for a Jewish Army or a Jewish state makes trouble in Arab lands. That is your privilege. All I ask is the right to speak my mind without having a Zionist barrage of misrepresentation directed against me, for that is what happened; and, interestingly enough, the result was my conversion from a non to an anti-Zionist. I believe that it would be fundamentally bad judgment to entrust the responsibility of statehood to any group which so willfully perverts and distorts facts -- a group which seeks to destroy the character of individuals who differ with it, or the reputation of newspapers which report that which the group would rather have suppressed. I am opposed to Goebbels' tactics whether or not they are confined to Nazi Germany.

You are inaccurate when you associate me with the American Jewish Committee. I have never been a member of it, nor have I any influence upon its policies. If I had, the Committee would never have sent delegates to the American Jewish Conference, for it was obvious to me from the beginning that the Conference was a Zionist maneuver -- and I have no lack of respect for your political astuteness. Believing, as I do, that Judaism is a faith and a faith only, it was with real regret, that I tendered my resignation as a member of the Executive Committee of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations when they, too, agreed to send delegates to a strictly Jewish meeting gathered together for other than religious purposes.

You don't know - and you couldn't have known without asking me - that I was originally associated with the American Council for Judaism. I helped prepare its statement and am entirely in sympathy with it. On the other hand, when they determined to release the statement during the period of the Conference I withdrew my support. I did this because I felt that the news at that time belonged to the Conference.

I suppose you find it difficult to comprehend that I am concerned with equity for Zionists as well as for others, or that The Times values its warranted reputation for objective reporting too much to stoop to your methods. But then I'm not a religious leader - merely a working newspaper man who takes pride in his own and his journal's integrity.

Faithfully yours,

(Signed) Arthur Hays Sulzberger

Rev. Dr. Abba Hillel Silver
The Temple
E. 105th St. and Ansel Road
Cleveland, Ohio

Enclosure

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P.S. I am sending copies of this letter to several people and do not regard it as private.

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November 9, 1943

Mr. Arthur Hays Sulzberger
Publisher, The Times
Times Square
New York, N. Y.

My dear Mr. Sulzberger:

I would not reply to your intemperate letter of November 2nd but for the fact that you broadcast it. This compels me to reply in order to correct certain false impressions which your letter might create. I trust that you will send copies of my letter to the people to whom you addressed copies of yours.

1) I did not state in my address before the Hadassah Convention that you were a member of the American Jewish Committee and that you urged the withdrawal of the Committee from the American Jewish Conference. I traced the attitude of the American Jewish Committee since the issuance of the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and showed that under the statesmanlike leadership of men of the type of Louis Marshall, Felix Warburg and Cyrus Adler, it had been possible to achieve friendly collaboration which culminated, in 1929, in the enlarged Jewish Agency when Zionists and non-Zionists together, and on the basis of equality, assumed responsibility and authority in the upbuilding of Palestine. This action, I stressed, was predicated upon the acceptance by all of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate which recognizes the historic connection of the Jewish people with Palestine and their right to establish their national home there. I read at length the resolution which was unanimously adopted at Zurich on August 15, 1929, by the Council of the enlarged Jewish Agency in which it "rejoices that all Israel is united for the upbuilding of the Jewish National Home in Palestine and calls upon every Jew throughout the world to rally to the sacred cause". The resolution expressed "its appreciation to Great Britain for the issuance of the Balfour Declaration", and confidentially hoped "that the Mandatory will cooperate with the enlarged Agency in fully realizing the great aim set by the Declaration and the Mandate."

I then stated that there has been a sharp departure from the historic line of the American Jewish Committee in recent months, a definite break with the past, and that a new leadership has taken hold of that organization which represents not the earlier attitude of non-Zionists, but that of anti-Zionist bitter-enders in our country. Among these I mentioned Lessing Rosenwald, the chairman of the American Council for Judaism, Judge Proskauer, present head of the American Jewish Committee, and yourself, in your capacity as president and publisher of the "New York Times". I regret the fact that by bracketing your name with the other two who are members of the American Jewish Committee an impression was conveyed that you, too, belonged to it.

But wherein have you been wronged by such an unintentional identification? And why do you feel that I and other Zionists have "perverted and distorted" your position? Surely you approve the action of the American Jewish Committee in with-

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drawing from the Conference. You state in your letter that you would have urged the American Jewish Committee, in the first place, not to send delegates to the Conference because you were convinced that the Conference was a "Zionist Maneuver". You say that you resigned from the Executive Board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations because that body did choose to send delegates to the Conference. Wherein, then, has your position been misrepresented? And why do you act the part of innocence abused?

2) You complain that Zionists are out to destroy your character because you differ from them. Actually you as an individual and your character do not interest the Zionists, nor the Jews of America, at all. No reference was made in my address to you or to your character. I mentioned you only in your capacity as president and publisher of the "Times", and my strictures were not against you personally, but against the "Times". I made certain definite charges against the "Times", none of which you take the trouble to answer in your letter. I will here enumerate them again so as not to permit you to shift the issue on to a plane where it does not belong.

3) The "New York Times" has not reported Zionist news impartially and objectively as befits a responsible newspaper. Your anti-Zionist bias has colored its news and determined its editorial policy. It is not a true statement of fact nor, for that matter, much of a tribute to the manner in which you arrive at fundamental conclusions, when you state that up to twelve months ago you were a non-Zionist but that as a result of the "barrage of misrepresentations" directed against you since your Baltimore speech in November 1942, you have become an anti-Zionist. You have a short memory, my dear Mr. Sulzberger. As far back as January of that year, nearly ten months before your Baltimore address, the "Times" published that well known editorial on the "Zionist Army" in which you attacked not only the movement to create a Jewish Army of Palestinian and stateless Jews, which your editorial in a very unfair and jaundiced manner called a "Zionist" army, just as on another occasion the "Times" coined the phrase the "Zionist" instead of the Jewish National Home, but the whole idea of the Jewish National Home. "The primary reason for the creation of a separate Zionist Army at this time would be of course to establish a Zionist state as one of the official war aims of the United Nations... But the wisdom of the Zionist objective has been questioned by many people including many who are themselves of the Jewish faith; and much misunderstanding may arise among people of other faiths if this objective comes to be regarded as an expression of the full hopes of Jews and of those who fight the wrongs done them. These hopes can not be achieved by the creation of a Zionist (sic!) state. They can be achieved only by the fulfillment of the Atlantic Charter, etc. etc."

This editorial, you will recall, aroused great resentment among the Jews of America and called forth an official statement of protest from the American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs. It is therefore not accurate to state that the attacks made by Zionists on you, since your Baltimore address, have converted you from a non to an anti-Zionist. You and your newspaper have been anti-Zionist right along. In fact the "Times" was fighting Zionism back in 1917. The sole editorial reaction of the "Times" to the issuance of the historic Balfour Declaration was an expression in its columns on November 24, 1917 of a fear that the Zionist project might involve the possibility of a recurrence of anti-Semitism, and further that "multitudes of Orthodox Jews still cherish the belief that the return to Zion is to be preceded by the coming of Elijah, and among these there is either indifference to the proposed establishment of the Jewish state, or doubt as to the wisdom of the movement"... Under your piloting in recent years the hostility of the "Times" to the national aspirations of Israel in Palestine has been sharply intensified. You seem to have dowered the "Times" with a mission to fight Zionism.

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We Zionists can not all match your own unimpeachable integrity, but if your anti-Zionist position has any intellectual consistency at all, we must assume that even if all of us were like yourself, without blot or blemish, you and your paper would still be opposed to the Jewish National Home in Palestine because, as you state in another part of your letter, you believe that Judaism is a faith, and a faith only. It follows therefore that the Jewish people, or sect, should not seek any political or national solutions of its problems.

Your bitter reaction to criticism suggests that you are laboring under some strange delusion. You seem to think that attacks on Zionism and Zionists such as are made by the American Council for Judaism of which you are a member and with whose program you say you are in complete sympathy, constitute a legitimate exercise of free speech. It is perfectly proper to brand Zionism as inimical to the welfare of Jews everywhere, and as responsible for keeping Jewish refugees out of Palestine. It is perfectly proper to brand Zionists as guilty of a double allegiance. But to attack those who make such statements and to express indignation at such brazen falsehoods is, to use your own elegant phrase, "Goebbels' tactics". You would like immunity from criticism while indulging in criticism yourself to your heart's content

A friend of yours in the American Council for Judaism, Mr. Lessing Rosenwald, recently took the same position which you take. He, too, is indignant at criticism levelled against him. Recently he came to Cleveland for a meeting of the American Council for Judaism, preceded by a flock of telegrams sent out from Philadelphia to many people in Cleveland inviting them to attend. The public press likewise carried the announcement of the meeting. The meeting was held and Mr. Rosenwald and his friends had their say. No one interfered with their right to utter their views. But because the Cleveland Jewish Community Council decided to utilize the occasion to express its own views on the American Council for Judaism and to inform the community concerning the composition, purpose and tactics of the Council, Mr. Rosenwald was moved to address a communication to the president of the Cleveland Jewish Community Council, since published by him, sharply criticising that body for "having forgotten the right of free speech" and for putting itself in opposition to "one of the basic tenets of our Constitution"....

Free speech must be responsible speech, and no man should expect immunity from criticism if his opinions and utterances on vital Jewish issues are regarded as false and misleading. Those who are too thin-skinned should not enter the arena of public discussion and controversy or should not whimper when they are hurt.

4) Again and again the "Times" has transformed itself into a transmission belt for anti-Zionist propaganda. It never misses an opportunity to focus attention on the anti-Zionist viewpoint. Last May and June, the "Times" carried a series of articles by Cyrus L. Sulzberger. The evident purpose of these dispatches from Cairo, Baghdad and Ankara was to press for a crystallization of American policy in the Middle East when it could only be in the interest of the Arabs. Mr. Sulzberger was not here functioning as an objective reporter, but as a commentator seeking to affect policy in an anti-Zionist Direction. It was quite apparent that Mr. Sulzberger was collaborating for the issuance of that joint statement by Great Britain and the United States which would have done irreparable harm to Jewish life in Palestine as well as affecting unfavorably the status of the Jews in this country. In the "Times" of August 22, Mr. Sulzberger reported finally, and with ill-concealed disappointment, that the governments had refused to issue such a statement for which he had been so zealously plugging.

5) The series of stories which appeared in the "Times" beginning on July 30 and carried through to August 3, also from the pen of Cyrus L. Sulzberger, and

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which carried such scare headlines as "Palestine Fears Deeds of Despair", "Palestine Faces Clash After War" and "Palestine Arabs Fear Loss of Land", was patently designed to create the impression that there was a state of terrible tension, verging on civil war, in Palestine and that therefore no changes should be made in the White Paper policy closing the doors of Palestine to Jewish immigration early next year, because such changes might endanger the security of the armies of the United Nations in the Near East. This, of course, was the official line taken by the Palestine Administration, which is determined at all costs to save the White Paper. "The Times", alone among the papers in the United States, lent itself lock, stock and barrel to this panic propaganda.

This series of articles also suggested that the overwhelming desire of the Jews of Palestine to assist in the prosecution of the war was motivated not by their wish to help destroy Hitlerism in the world, but by a cunning calculation to militarize the Jewish population of Palestine in preparation for the threatened conflict with the Arabs. These articles, you will recall, likewise elicited a formal protest from the American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs.

6) In August and September of this year, there appeared the notorious series of articles in the "Times" on the arms trials in Jerusalem. The "Times" devoted an amazing amount of space to the routine trials of a few gun-runners in Palestine. It went to great lengths to present the anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish opinions of the British Major who transformed the trial into an anti-Zionist propaganda putsch and into a smear attack on the Jewish Agency. The "Times" correspondent, A. C. Sedgewick, took it upon himself to editorialize the news and to express judgment on Mr. Ben Gurion's criticism of the trials and his description of Major Verdin's address as "characteristic of the lowest type of anti-Semitism". Mr. Sedgewick opined that "many find it hard not to consider such a description exaggerated, especially when the Nazi excesses in Berlin and Warsaw are borne in mind", and further, "that there are many, too, who feel that any charge of anti-Semitism in its accepted sense is most noticeably incompatible with the military court proceedings against the Jewish defendants which are carried out with a scrupulousness and courtesy designed to preclude any such castigation."

But on November 3, the Jewish Council of Palestine felt constrained to call for a two-hour strike during which work in all Jewish enterprises throughout the country stopped, in order to protest the incitements and false accusations against the Jews of Palestine voiced by British military officials during the arms trials....

7) It has now become a commonplace in news about Zionism emanating from Palestine and appearing in the "Times" to find the word "extremist" employed as an adjective to describe the official policy of the Zionist Movement and the Jewish Agency. "Extremist" has an ugly connotation, and the trick now is to present the official and classic Zionist position which calls for the fulfillment of the Balfour Declaration in letter and spirit, and the establishment of the Jewish National Home, as "extremist".

8) From the very beginning the "Times" became the mouthpiece of the American Council for Judaism. No other paper in the United States found it necessary to give that insignificant group the space and publicity which the "Times" gave it. It was the "Times" and only the "Times" which devoted so much space to the release of the American Council for Judaism during the week of the Conference. You stated that you did not approve of the release of that statement during the Conference. But the "Times" did give it a large and provocative display which no other paper in New York City, or in the country, found it necessary to do on the basis of objective reporting. Similarly, an examination of the "Times" coverage of the American Jewish Conference

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will disclose that an unusual effort was made to give prominent display to the viewpoint of the very small minority in the Conference which dissented from the Palestine resolution.

9) In the "Review of the Week" published on Sunday, September 5th, the "Times" conveyed an erroneous impression when it declared that speakers at the American Jewish Conference demanded the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine while neglecting to say that the Conference voted almost unanimously in favor of it. Continuing, the "Times" dismissed the American Jewish Conference with forty-two words and then gave twice that space to the position of the American Council for Judaism. The device is transparent. This insignificant handful of individuals is not only paralleled in importance with the Conference which represented every Jewish community and nearly every national Jewish organization in the United States, but is even rated above it.

It is clear, my dear Mr. Sulzberger, to any impartial observer, that the "Times" has been following a definite anti-Zionist policy. The Jews of America who are overwhelmingly in sympathy with Zionism, as the recent Conference clearly demonstrated, resent this fact, and are making their resentment audible and will continue to do so. Their criticism is due not to any hostility to you personally or to your paper. It is due entirely to the wrong and hurtful policy which your paper has been pursuing and which is calculated to do great harm to a cause which is dear to the hearts of our people all over the world, and which has now entered upon its historic hour of decision.

Very sincerely yours,

(Signed) Abba Hillel Silver

AHS:BK