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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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World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1935-1936.

# WORLD UNION FOR PROGRESSIVE JUDAISM.

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*Hon. Secretary:*

The Hon. LILY H. MONTAGU, J.P.  
31, Alfred Place,  
London, W.C.1.

The Red Lodge,  
51, Palace Court,  
W.2.

20th September, 1935.

Dear Dr. Silver,

We have received the enclosed letter from Dr. Elbogen, and at his suggestion I have pleasure in sending it round to the members of the Palestine Advisory Committee. It throws a rather fresh light on the situation. We are most anxious to begin work in Palestine, but have to wait for the financial difficulty to be overcome. We hope soon to hear from our friends that the sum of £2,000 suggested by the Governing Body has been raised.

Yours sincerely,

*By Anacore*

*Did you have the opportunity to further  
our cause in London.  
I fear Mr. Hurlitz was there*



TRANSLATION OF LETTER FROM DR. MAX ELK TO DR. ELBOGEN

Haifa, August 19th.

.....I have observed conditions in the towns and on the land, have talked to many people, and am confirmed in my opinion that the activities of non-Orthodox rabbis are of immense importance here. The conditions certainly cannot be compared with those in Western Europe. In Europe the Liberal communities have ~~grown out of the~~ developed out of the Orthodox ones.....The question of the conduct of services is not vital here. Whether the service is drawn up on more or less dignified lines, whether it is beautiful or not, is not a question of Orthodox or unorthodox outlook. The conservative services in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, are in every respect dignified, like those in the Heydereutergasse or the Storch in Breslau. They are attended mainly by the same people. Far, far more than with us in Western Europe is the question of non-orthodox religious observance and religious forms one of philosophy. This means that the personality of the Rabbi and his preaching is of vital importance. The sermon and the lecture have here the significance as contributions to fundamental problems, which they have lost in Western Europe. Therefore it is particularly necessary to stress the platitude, that everything depends upon the personality.

The problem is that of the modern Jew everywhere: Is religion possible for the modern man. How does he reconcile it with his citizenship of the modern world and his philosophy. What that comes to is how can religious tradition, as a religious element, be made part of the building up of Palestine.

~~From the~~.....The questions which interested the European thirty to fifty years ago, Science and Religion, Biblical Criticism and Religion, are actual problems here to-day.

The predominating influences are one-sided socialism among the working classes, Americanism and a certain amount of Levantism among the bourgeoisie.....The Rabbi must be the teacher of the people. And then he must influence the young. In the schools they learn much T'nach but little Judaism. I have been to a great many schools, and have substantiated this judgment for the large majority.

The non-Orthodox Rabbi must initiate practical activity. But the point of departure is difficult. He cannot found Liberal congregations; for the present this would be a useless undertaking. I have found another way. I found a place which.....seemed the most suitable, the suburb of Haifa on the hill. In the Synagogue there (Felsensynagogue) I gave regular Hebrew addresses, which was something new and interesting for the people. I developed my ideas before a fairly large circle of people, and we are going to try to put them into practice.



A Cultural circle of Karmel is being formed, which will initiate a campaign to bring as many families as possible within the sphere of a larger educational organisation. I am undertaking the main part of the actual work. I shall speak in the Synagogue, celebrate regular Oneg-Schabbath and Friday evening services, alternatively in Hebrew and in German. As well as this, I am organising study circles, for readings of the T'nach and Achad Haams, here also one in German and the other in Hebrew. The Hebrew T'nach is ~~an~~ course the foundation. Then I will hold bigger series of lectures in German; I think of starting with one on Achad Haam. Further I intend to arrange courses for older schoolchildren, a kind of religion school to deal with the foundations of religion, Jewish ethics, custom and observance. In the ordinary schools the children are not even taught the Siddur.

The members of this organisation will pay a monthly subscription, and we are counting on a subsidy from the Haifa community, so that we can reckon, apart from the expenses, on a modest living for myself. My efforts are to go further. I will get in touch with the higher schools in Haifa, so as to be able to teach the philosophical groundwork to the higher classes, possibly in the form of private lessons. This training in clear, unprejudiced ~~thought~~ <sup>thinking</sup> as the foundation for a religious philosophy of life seems to me to have in Palestine an importance of which one can hardly conceive in the West.

In order to spread this living religiousness, in harmony with the life of the time, and to give it a platform for its discussions, ~~the~~ it is necessary to found a periodical. This seems to me also to be the most important method of approach to the working classes, and also to the Kewuzoth, for they read and discuss. I cannot see a direct way to these circles. This paper should deal with the problems of Palestinian life, but should be written internationally. It should deal with the scientific foundations of the religious problem, practical questions of religious form, the development of customs, current affairs, speeches, books etc. I am giving general ideas, but could put the details of the programme before you. Of course money is necessary.

I should like to mention the question of the founding of our own schools, youth groups (boarding schools, country homes, cultural centres) ; later on the earnestness and strength of world Liberal Judaism will have to be shown just in these ways.

Now for the question of money. For what is it necessary? The forming of these religious cultural circles, and perhaps even the beginnings of congregations may have to be inspired from without, but will certainly have to be supported from without. Many things will collapse if financed from within, even where there is interest. Therefore a general organisation must initiate the formation of such centres, and, at least in part, finance them. There is a chance of success only if our people have the possibility of doing their work over a longish period without ~~the~~ pressing financial worries.



The money will be needed for practical expenses. For instance, the question of rooms in Haifa is a difficult one. Libraries will have to be instituted, even if on a very small scale at first. Chasonim will have to be paid etc. I have already mentioned the paper.

I have had long conversations about all this with Herlitz, and also about the fact that the World Union will put money at our disposal. He is now in Europe at the Lucern Congress and will try and speak to Dr. Silver. I have given him a written exposition of the work to be done and the way to do it. About the question of money we were of the opinion that a small committee under Herlitz' chairmanship should be formed here, consisting of a few people who are interested in the work and who have a good name in the Jewish-Zionist world. In any case I believe this to be the appropriate moment for money to be placed at our disposal, and this means that the funds must now be collected.

In order to arouse more interest, I will myself get in touch with English and American circles. First I should like to write about the whole problem in an American Jewish paper. I should be grateful if you would tell me which is the best paper to approach. Also, which American rabbinical organisations I should approach; and I should be grateful if you could write to the presidents of such organisations, so that they shall know more or less who this Rabbi Elk is who is writing to them, and what he wants. I make the same request for the English organisations.

In this general exposition I have described my own field of activity as an example. But, besides myself, Wilhelm, Ruelf and Ucko are in the country. Wilhelm has a hard fight. His activity with the Sochenuth has nothing to do with the care of souls and rabbinical work. If a general organisation could give him a position, perhaps in Chedera, and partly finance him, an important post would be won for Progressive Judaism.

I read that the World Union had formed a committee to study the religious problem in Palestine. Perhaps this ~~brief~~ would be a *letter* suitable theoretical preparation for practical activity, to be placed in their hands. One must repeat again and again that the need here is to indicate the significance for life of Progressive Judaism, and that the movement, although it is 220 years old, must first prove its value and its meaning here. I beg you to answer soon, and to use all your influence to help us in every way, spiritually through press and sermons, materially through financial support. One sees again and again that the task is immense, and nothing has yet been done.



LAW OFFICES  
AARON LEVINSTONE  
FEDERAL TRUST BUILDING  
24 COMMERCE STREET  
NEWARK, N. J.  
PHONE MITCHELL 2-0150

October 28th, 1935.

Rabbi Abba Hilell Silver,  
The Temple,  
Cleveland, Ohio.

My dear Rabbi Silver:-

There still lingers in my memory the very interesting evening when all of the delegates of the Zionist Convention in Atlantic City, serious faced and profoundly engrossed, have followed the rather novel form of election of delegates to the World Congress. I was very much impressed with the proceedings, but equally so with the fact that Mr. Mintz and I, had the opportunity to talk to you and receive the promise that you will come to Newark some time in the late Fall, to address the Zionist Community of our city.

There were many things in the Zionist Convention which satisfied me and many items which left me dissatisfied. I felt however, that I was amply rewarded by receiving that promise from you and knowing that I have secured a great treat for the Jewish community of Newark. I do not think I have to tell you about the affection that has developed in our city for you, as a result of the few talks you have given to our community in the last few years. Your appearance in our midst is always hailed as a significant event which bring together the finest element of the community, particularly, "those that are thirsty for a word of God" as Bialik so eloquently expressed it.

You most likely remember that we told you about our Zionist District which had about 75 members when we commenced our work and which has grown now to the number of 330. We intend to have about 250 or 300 more by the time you come to visit us, as a tribute to you and as an addition to the Zionist organized forces.

We would like to have you give us a date in the early part of January, 1936 on any day convenient for you. I know that as soon as we receive your kind and



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favorable reply, the army of workers will be stirred with new enthusiasm and vigor to prosecute the campaign to its ultimate success and the community will be very responsive, as all, I feel, will unite in that one aim to make your visit as much worthwhile for the Zionist Movement, as possible.

The Mayor of our city, the Hon. Meyer C. Ellenstein, has been good enough to lend his name and influence to our work and I know that he will be extremely happy to welcome you as the guest of our city.

With kind regards and best wishes for your personal welfare, I beg to remain,

With Zions Greetings,

Cordially yours,

L/C

*A. Levinstone*  
(Pres. of Newark Zionist)



# WORLD UNION FOR PROGRESSIVE JUDAISM.

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*Hon. Secretary:*

The Hon. LILY H. MONTAGU, J.P.  
31, Alfred Place,  
London, W.C.1.

Nov. 15th, 1935.

Dear Rabbi Silver,

At our executive committee yesterday it was decided to recommend the following resolutions to our governing body in January :

1. That we recommend the governing body to invite someone in Germany who is <sup>(a layman)</sup> a progressive Jew and sympathetic to Zionism to go to Palestine for two or three months at the expense of the World Union to investigate the need and desire for a progressive Jewish movement there, and the establishment of an organisation to meet such a need and desire.

2. To authorise him to tell any group that is interested in progressive Judaism that the World Union would be prepared to give it a subsidy for one year for the use of a progressive Jewish organisation. If at the end of the year such an organisation should require further assistance, the World Union would try to obtain some assistance from special sources, but if such assistance cannot be obtained, then the World Union would not be able to give it any further subsidy.

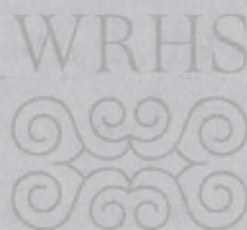
I very much hope that these recommendations will meet with



your approval, and if you have any criticism or suggestion  
to offer, I should be grateful if you would let me hear  
from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

*Hy Anisya*





# WORLD UNION FOR PROGRESSIVE JUDAISM.

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*Hon. Secretary:*

The Hon. LILY H. MONTAGU, J.P.  
31, Alfred Place,  
London, W.C.1.

The Red Lodge,  
51, Palace Court,  
W.2.

5th February, 1936.

Dear Dr. Silver,

I enclose the Minute from the Governing Body meeting of January 14th, dealing with the situation in Palestine, in order to give you the most complete information possible as to the developments with regard to that country. I also enclose the draft of the Statement. Dr. Dienemann has consented to undertake the mission for the World Union, provided that he can get leave of absence from ~~his~~ congregation for the necessary period. We therefore feel that the Statement should be given publicity as soon as possible, and I should be grateful if you would let me have your criticism of it, with any suggested alterations, by return. We should not like to have to send it out without having heard from all the members of the Palestine committee. *but*

*the matter is urgent*  
I should also be grateful if you could give me any introductions you could give for Dr. Dienemann, or any suggestions you could make with regard to his visit.

Yours sincerely,

*Lily Montagu*



## STATEMENT OF POLICY IN PALESTINE

The Governing Body of the World Union for Progressive Judaism have invited Rabbi Dr. M. Dienemann, of Offenbach-am-Main, to visit Palestine on their behalf. They have received many indications that a Progressive Jewish religious movement is both desired and needed in that country, not only by recent settlers who belonged to the Liberal and Reform sections of the communities in the countries from which they have emigrated, but also by people who have been longer resident in Palestine. Dr. Dienemann will proceed to Palestine shortly after Passover in order to investigate the possibility of giving practical expression to the desire for a Progressive conception of Judaism.

The World Union is well aware that the externalities of any Progressive organisation in Palestine would not follow any existing pattern, but would be developed autonomously by its own adherents in harmony with their environment and in accordance with the special needs of Palestine.

The Governing Body of the World Union feels itself fortunate in being able to place at the service of interested groups in Palestine the co-operation of Dr. Dienemann who, throughout his long and brilliant career, has proved himself both a scholar and organiser of outstanding ability.

The Governing Body, in announcing Dr. Dienemann's visit, wish to make it clear that they are in no way deviating from their established policy. They have always stood for, and tried to further, the re-



ligious interests of Progressive groups whenever such groups have invoked their support.

It may be added that the World Union has no political interests or aims, and that both Zionists and non-Zionists have met on its platforms and collaborated in its Governing Body in the furtherance of a common spiritual purpose. Moreover, it is no part of the objects of the World Union to seek to detach adherents from Orthodox Judaism, whose point of view the Governing Body will continue, as in the past, to treat with respect. It is the whole purpose of the World Union to further the development of a Jewish religious life among those whose convictions make it impossible for them to affiliate themselves to existing Jewish congregations, and who, in the spirit of the prophets and teachers of Israel, seek to express the teaching of Judaism in terms of modern life and thought.



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## REPORT OF THE HONORARY SECRETARY: PART II

### a. PALESTINE

At the meeting of the Executive Committee held on November 14th, the following Resolution was proposed by the Chairman and passed for submission to the Governing Body;→

1. That we recommend the Governing Body to invite someone in Germany who is a Progressive Jew and sympathetic to Zionism to go to Palestine for two or three months at the expense of the World Union, to



investigate the need and desire for a Progressive Jewish movement there, and the possibility of the establishment of an organisation to meet such a need and desire.

2. To authorise him to tell any group which is interested in Progressive Judaism that the World Union would be prepared to give it a subsidy for one year for the use of a Progressive Jewish organisation.

3. If at the end of the year such an organisation should require further assistance the World Union would try to obtain such assistance from special sources, but if such assistance could not be obtained, then the World Union would not be able to give any further subsidy.

The members of the Palestine Committee had been informed of the Resolution, and the following Amendment to Paragraph 2 had been proposed by Dr. Morgenstern:-

"To authorise him to establish contacts with one or more responsible groups in Palestine interested in Progressive Judaism, to the end that through them, as a working nucleus, the World Union might support and subsidise for one year the work of Progressive Judaism in Palestine.

Dr. Zepin had cabled that Mrs. Freiberg, Mrs. Nathan and Dr. Philipson were prepared to support the Resolution. It was agreed that before putting the resolutions to the meeting, the whole report about Palestine should be put before the members.

The Secretary said that at the Executive committee it had been agreed to ask Dr. Stern to look around in Germany for the required person, and that if he found someone at present in Palestine, he be authorised to proceed on the lines of the main resolution, without waiting for further authority. So far, however, there had been no opportunity to make use of this permission.

Dr. Morgenstern had written suggesting that six or eight competent people in Palestine should be asked to report to the Governing Body, so that a more authoritative picture of the situation might be available. Unfortunately, although the Secretary and others had communicated with Palestine residents, no reply had been received. Dr. Wechselmann had approached the Executive asking whether his experience as an editor and leader of youth groups in Breslau could be utilised by the World Union, as he intended to visit Palestine, and would be very glad to undertake work on Progressive lines. At the time of the Executive meeting it was thought that Herr Wechselmann was going to America, but his plans had again changed, and he now appealed to the Governing Body for opportunities to work in Palestine. Unfortunately at the moment the Governing Body had no opening to offer him.

In October the Secretary had received through Dr. Seligmann a letter from Dr. Elk, describing his work on Progressive lines both in Jerusalem and Haifa. Some of this work, which had started in a school and



in study circles, had proved abortive, but some work in Haifa seemed to be successful. Unfortunately, so far, Dr. Elk had not made any direct approach to the Governing Body, and did not seem inclined to take advantage of the offer which had been made to him through Dr. Elbogen, to work in co-operation with it.

Mrs. A. Levine, a member of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, London, had visited Palestine and had got into touch with an influential resident there, who seemed most anxious to see Progressive work started, and thought that the author of a Hebrew article in one of the Palestinian papers would give his enthusiastic support to any effort which was initiated. Although the Secretary and Mrs. Levine had approached these gentlemen through letters, there had been no further response.

Dr. Elbogen, on November 26th, had expressed himself as doubtful about the value of sending another investigator to Palestine, and had also shown that he was very much disappointed at the long delay in getting the work initiated. He had visited London in December, and the Officers of the World Union had been able to explain to him that the delay had been inevitable, since so far no responsible committee had been formed, and had been brought in touch with the World Union. Dr. Elbogen then appreciated the advantage of the pioneer work being accomplished by some trusted emissary of the World Union, and on his return to Germany wrote strongly recommending Dr. Dienemann, who intended to visit his family in Palestine after Passover, and would be prepared to undertake this special World Union work. This recommendation was keenly supported by Dr. Seligmann and Herr Stern. Dr. Vogelstein wrote that he considered the time was eminently ripe for the Progressive work in Palestine to be organised, since there were competent people already resident there who could lead the movement. He himself would be going to Palestine this year, if he could make the necessary financial arrangements.

A letter was received on January 10th from the Board of the Juedische Allgemeine Zeitung, emphasising the necessity for Progressive work in Palestine, and saying that the German Liberals would like to take part in it. The Allgemeine Zeitung had lately taken to publishing a supplement to its monthly edition, dealing with fundamental theological problems of Progressive Judaism. The Editors thought a theoretical basis of this kind was particularly necessary in Palestine. They therefore made the following suggestions:-

1. The supplement should henceforth deal with the practical problems of religious life in Palestine.
2. A special edition of the supplement would have to be printed, in Hebrew, and possibly also in English. They suggested that we distributed the greater number of these, through the people in Palestine with whom we were in touch.
3. They would have to ask the World Union to pay for the Hebrew (and English if required) supplements. They gave a table of costs, starting with 150 Marks a month for one thousand copies of a two-page leaflet, and 300 Marks for a four-page leaflet.



4. Something could, if desired, be put in the main paper about Palestine, and copies of the main paper would be available. They would of course be in German.

5. The permission of the Reichspresskammer was required, and this had been asked for. They thought 10,000 copies per month would be necessary, which would cost the World Union 500 to 800 Marks a month. They thought money could be collected for this, particularly through Dr. Schulman and other Americans. Many leading Germans agreed with this plan, particularly Dr. Dienemann and Herr Stern.

After the report had been received and ~~seen~~ discussed, RESOLUTIONS 1 and 3 WERE PASSED without amendment.

The Chairman proposed an amendment to Dr. Motgenstern's RESOLUTION-2 amendment, and this, having been passed, became the substantive RESOLUTION 2, and was PASSED in the following form:

"To authorise him to establish contacts with one or more groups in Palestine consisting of responsible people, interested om Progressive Judaism, to the end that, through them as a working nucleus, the World Union might support and subsidise for one year the work of Progressive Judaism in Palestine."

It was AGREED to invite Dr. Dienemann to undertake the work indicated in these resolutions, with the understanding that the World Union pay his expenses for a visit of two months.

During the discussion Mr. Perlzweig expressed himself in complete agreement with the resolutions, but explained that, in his opinion, the difficulties experienced by Dr. Elk and others were based on a fallacious idea that the World Union would not be in sympathy with Palestinian work in any form whatever. In order to remove this idea completely, it was AGREED that, when an investigator had been found, a statement should be drawn up by the Executive and submitted to the Palestine Committee for their approval, clarifying the relations between the World Union and the Palestinian enterprise. This statement should receive as much publicity as possible.

Mr. Perlzweig very strongly supported the choice of Dr. Dienemann, since he felt that as a Rabbi he would have the necessary scholarship, and that his particular qualities would enable him to be in sympathetic touch with all sections of the Palestine community. It was AGREED that the Secretary, in writing to Dr. Dienemann, should ask him to state the amount of money he would need to cover his expenses for the hourney and for two months in Palestine. He might also be told that as soon as a responsible committee was formed, a small subsidy from the World Union could be promised, and the financial position of the World Union in relation to this subsidy should be explained to him. On the suggestion of the Chairman, it was decided to invite Lady Reading to join the Advisory Committee on Palestine.



# WORLD UNION FOR PROGRESSIVE JUDAISM.

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*Hon. Secretary:*

The Hon. LILY H. MONTAGU, J.P.  
31, Alfred Place,  
London, W.C.1.

The Red Lodge,  
51, Palace Court,  
W.2.

13th February, 1936.

*Dear Dr. Silver,*

I have received the enclosed letter from Dr. Dienemann, and should be glad to have your comments by return. I have re-assured him as to the financial position by telling him that we agree to the expenses he requires, which was in the neighbourhood of £100, although he cannot of course tell exactly.

Yours sincerely,

*Lily Montagu*



# WORLD UNION FOR PROGRESSIVE JUDAISM.

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*Hon. Secretary:*

The Hon. LILY H. MONTAGU, J.P.  
31, Alfred Place,  
London, W.C.1.

I have ascertained that the Jewish Telegraphic Agency has already got hold of the news about Dr. Dienemann's visit, although I don't know at all from what source, so that it will probably be published very shortly in any case. I am telling Dr. Dienemann this, as it may make him alter his view and want the statement published.





TRANSLATION OF LETTER FROM DR. DIENEMANN

Dear Miss Montagu!

.....About the Palestine question.....  
I would ask you most earnestly, not to put anything in the local press for the moment. My reasons are the following: If we write beforehand that someone is coming over, all the circles that wish us ill or are afraid of us will be worked up and made active, and we shall immediately find a well-prepared opposition, which will doubtless work with the old weapons of reproaches and will not stop at abuse. The opposition comes from two sides, from the separatist Agudists and the Misrachi. I have the instinctive feeling, that one ought to produce a certain surprise effect, and that one must be on the spot before the opposition is under way. I think this over daily, and in any case I beg you not to put anything in the press until I write you to do so. (It would be different with the objective articles such as those suggested by the Stern-Simon combination.) But if you do put anything in, I ask you earnestly to omit the sentence about me which appears at the end of the third paragraph. On the other hand, a mention is required of the effects of the work in Palestine on the European and American Liberalism, and this is the most important point. Just ~~because~~ upon that I base my hope of winning people with a sense of responsibility.

I know all kinds of people there, but I ought to know the names of those who you think and know to be sympathetic towards us or already interested. The sooner you give me the addresses etc the better.

At first the three big places Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa are to be considered.

You did not answer the financial point in my letter. You must do so, because I have to offer my congregation something towards my substitute. Until I can do this I cannot approach them.

Yours etc.

DIENEMANN