



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

Featuring collections from the Western Reserve Historical Society and
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

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

Series II: Harold P. Manson File (Zionism Files), 1940-1949, undated.

Sub-series A: Main Manson File, 1940-1949.

Reel
100

Box
35

Folder
20

Oumansky, Ambassador (Soviet policy), 1941.

File: UPA - USA 1941 to 1942
Folder: Emergency Committee

MURRAY HILL 2-1160

Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs

41 EAST 42nd STREET
ROOM 1121
NEW YORK CITY

July 23, 1941

Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver
The Temple
Cleveland, Ohio

Dear Rabbi Silver:

The enclosed minute of the conference
with Ambassador Oumansky speaks for itself.

Cordially yours,


Emanuel Neumann
Emanuel Neumann

MINUTE OF CONFERENCE WITH AMBASSADOR OUMANSKY

AT THE RUSSIAN EMBASSY, WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, JULY 17, 1941, 11 A.M.

Rabbi Perlzweig representing the American Jewish Congress and I representing the Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs, were received by the Ambassador in a friendly and even cordial spirit.

We began by pointing out that the recent developments which have ranged Soviet Russia on the side of the democracies seemed to offer an opportunity for establishing better working relations between representatives of Jewish organizations and the Soviet Government.

Mr. Oumansky expressed his agreement. He took occasion to say that Jewish groups and organizations and the Jewish press particularly in the United States have in the past heaped attacks on the Soviet Government. There was a bulky file on the subject. However he felt that the only way to proceed was to draw a line through the past and think of the future. If we were to get into a discussion of the past, we would get nowhere.

We then proceeded to discuss two particular questions. The first was the question of permitting certain Jews to leave Russia for Palestine or other countries. Mr. Oumansky took the position that Jews who were residents of territories occupied by Russia since the beginning of the war had become citizens of the Soviet State, and that the overwhelming majority of them - 95% - were happy with their new status. There was therefore no point in attempting to intervene on their behalf. We then proposed that to begin with facilities be granted for the departure of certain Jews who had come into Russian territory from points west of what Mr. Oumansky called the "Curzon line". We mentioned by way of illustration several names including that of Rabbi Schorr from Warsaw, Dr. Sommerstein from Lemberg, and Mrs. Tartakower. Mr. Oumansky remarked that according to his information, Rabbi Schorr had been in Moscow and free for the past four or five months. He did not know whether there were many who wished to leave Russia or where they would go, but suggested that we submit to begin with a list of names which he would be glad to take up with his government. This we agreed to do.

The second question we raised was regarding facilities for extending relief and assistance to such Jews as may be in need of it because they did not fit in with the social and economic system. Mr. Oumansky did not deny that such cases existed, but asked that we submit our ideas and plans that we had in mind, so that they might be given consideration.

In the course of the discussion, the Ambassador took occasion to refer to the satisfactory condition of Russian Jewry in general. He referred to street signs in Yiddish, to the existence of synagogues, to the Jewish republic in Biro Bidjan, etc. In reply to an inquiry as to the number of Jews in Biro Bidjan, he called in his secretary who produced figures to the effect that the total number was 108,000 of whom seventy odd thousand/ were in cities and 30 odd thousand/ in the country. It would seem that these figures included non-Jews, but we did not raise the question.

Some remarks were exchanged regarding the Zionists, Mr. Oumansky

taking the position that it would be better not to enter upon a discussion of that subject. He insisted that the Government was not arresting or detaining Jews because they were Zionists; that any one could be a Zionist and believe in Zionism without being molested. The Soviet Government, he said, took measures only against those people, whether Jews or non-Jews, whose activities were inimical. As we had previously agreed not to raise the fundamental issue regarding the Soviet attitude toward Zionism and the Zionists at this time, we did not pursue the subject.

At the end of the interview which lasted almost an hour, Mr. Oumansky asked a few desultory questions about the situation in Palestine at the moment which seemed designed to lead up to his remark that the future of Palestine would of course be determined at the coming Peace Conference and that Soviet Russia would have a place and voice at the Conference. To this I replied that we would be glad of course to have as many friends at the Peace Conference as possible.

We left with the understanding that we would submit in due course the material suggested and that there would be further discussions.

The Ambassador preserved a rather friendly tone and attitude throughout the meeting.



EMANUEL NEUMANN