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Petegorsky, David W., 1942.

March 30, 1942

To the Members of the American Emergency Committee  
for Zionist Affairs:

In personal conversation with several members of the Emergency Committee, as well as in a verbal statement to the Office Committee, I made clear the fact that my resignation was impelled wholly by my conviction that, in the present state of affairs, I could make no effective contribution through the work of the Committee. In this memorandum, I have attempted to set forth some observations as to the Committee's present functioning and operation, together with certain suggestions for the reorganization of its work and structure.

I should make it quite clear that the memorandum represents absolutely no one's views but my own. No one but myself bears the responsibility for its contents.

David W. Petegorsky



Submitted to the  
American Emergency Committee  
for Zionist Affairs  
by  
David W. Petegorsky

March 30, 1942

### MEMORANDUM

The American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs was conceived as a central political agency for the Zionist movement in this country. Its functions, it is scarcely necessary to emphasize, are of the utmost importance in the critical situation in which we find ourselves. American influence on the policies of the United Nations is considerable. America, too, is bound to play a decisive role in shaping the world of the future. American Jewry, as the most powerful Jewish community in the world, can exercise a very significant influence in molding American thinking and the policy of the democracies on the Jewish problem generally and on Palestine particularly. No group of Jewish leaders, therefore, has a task so urgent or a responsibility so great as the American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs.

#### I

While my relationship with the Emergency Committee was of short duration, I feel myself compelled to state that the Committee at present is failing utterly to cope with its tasks or adequately to discharge its responsibilities. The Committee's activities are conceived on a scale immeasurably too limited for the magnitude of the problems by which we are confronted; and its efforts have scarcely scratched the surface of what must be attempted. Political activity is either wholly unorganized or most loosely conducted. There are vast and vital areas in which no work whatever is being done. Even within the limits of its present activities, the affairs of the Committee are being conducted with grave inefficiency. In only one area -- that of public relations -- have I been able to observe significant achievement. There, too, much more could have been achieved if the conditions, to which I shall shortly refer, had not obtained.

That situation cannot but bring acute distress to all who are concerned with the future of Palestine and the Jewish people. Unless energetic measures are taken immediately to remedy the present situation, our future may be seriously jeopardized.

The failures of the Emergency Committee derive, in my opinion, from at least three factors:

- (1) A defective organizational and administrative structure which makes effective and intelligent action virtually impossible.
- (2) The failure of many members of the Emergency and Office Committees to exercise the responsibility that both their positions and the gravity of the moment demand.
- (3) A conception of the Committee's functions that is utterly



inadequate for the complexity and urgency of the problems we confront.

# 1. ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

The present organization of the Emergency Committee and its operation suffer from:

- (a) A lack of centralized authority and coordination both in policy-making and administration.
- (b) A lack of any clear and consistent political orientation and purpose.
- (c) An unhappy method of selection of the personnel of the Office Committee.
- (d) A misconception of the functions of the permanent staff.

a) Until the present, there has been in the Emergency Committee virtually no centralization of authority, no coordination of effort and no integration of its various activities. That has been due to the fact that there has been, in the Emergency and Office Committees, an extremely loose diffusion of authority, which has amounted in most instances to the absence of any effective authority whatever. On every major issue on which action has had to be taken during my brief tenure as a member of the Committee's staff, such action was delayed until its effectiveness was either minimized or entirely nullified. Here, I need cite only the Struma disaster in which the Emergency Committee's statement was not issued until many days after the news had been received and in which cablegrams to the appropriate authorities were not dispatched until fully ten days after the tragedy. Those delays have been due in small measure to the fact that the permanent staff of the Committee is too limited in size for the work which as an emergency body it should be performing or is called upon suddenly to assume. But it is due in far greater measure to the fact that there has been within the Emergency Committee no adequate centralization of responsibility nor any administrative officer charged with the execution of the Committee's affairs as a whole. Whenever action has had to be taken, a search has had to be commenced to discover the source of effective authority in the Committee. That search consumed valuable time; and in a world in rapid motion, time is of the very essence of accomplishment or effectiveness. Whenever, for example, memoranda or releases or statements have had to be issued by the Committee, they have required the sanction of several persons in widely scattered places. In many instances, those persons have returned to the office widely differing and frequently contradictory versions. More often than not, those versions reach the office directly before newspaper deadlines or meeting time or other similarly inconvenient moments. That process has not only caused the Emergency Committee to be disastrously late wherever immediate action has been necessary; it has equally resulted in gross confusion and inefficiency in the actual administration of the Committee's work.

Even more serious has been the failure of the Emergency Committee to appoint a director or chief executive officer charged with the general administration of the Committee's functions. The absence of such centralized executive authority and responsibility is a violation of the most elementary principle of effective administration. There has been, as a result, no integration or coordination of the Committee's various activities. There has



been no adequate or effective allocation of duties and responsibilities. There has been constant confusion and uncertainty as to what particular tasks particular persons or departments should be performing.

b) The inadequacy of the Committee's work has been due no less to the fact that there has been no clear definition of the Committee's purposes and functions and activities. It is a most distressing -- and almost unbelievable -- fact that absolutely no provision has been made for the systematic organization of political activity or for an effective implementation of whatever programs existed. As a result, areas which should have been explored long ago, have been completely ignored. There has been no clarity of purpose, of method, of goal. And the unhappy results of that situation have been aggravated by the absence of any central administrative authority to which I have already referred. Thus, for example, there has been in the Emergency Committee a distinction between public relations and political work which my brief experience has convinced me is wholly untenable. A statement or a memorandum on the Struma disaster, to cite but one instance, falls to some degree within the province of public relations. But the emphasis of the statement, the demands it should set forth, the responsibilities it should fix, the authorities to whom it should be directed, are all political issues involving complex political factors. It has been my experience to have drafted several of those memoranda and statements. In no instance was there any clear statement from the Committee as to the political content of those documents. In seeking instruction preliminary to drafting those statements, I have constantly received differing and conflicting opinions from members of the Office Committee and representatives of the Jewish Agency at present in this country. That lack of planned political activity and of a clear political orientation has served further to throw the Committee's work into confusion. It has frustrated its every activity. Thus, for example, no effective program of public relations can be carried on by a political movement such as the Zionist movement unless it is based on carefully and deliberately considered political foundations.

Until adequate provision is made for the organization of political activity, for the clarification of our political program and for the definition and coordination of the various aspects of the Committee's work, that disastrous situation will continue to prevail.

I shall deal in a later section of this memorandum with the problem of the reorganization of the Committee's administrative structure. Suffice it here to indicate that what is obviously required is an intelligent departmental organization of the Committee's activities and the centralization in a director of administrative and executive authority.

c) Another source of the present inadequacies of the Emergency Committee lies in the nature of the Office Committee. I should make it clear that none of the criticisms which follows is intended as a reflection on any of its members. But it is overwhelmingly clear to me that the Office Committee, which is empowered to make decisions which involve the most complex and vital social and political issues of our time, is a body which can scarcely be considered competent for that purpose. I ask the members of the Committee frankly and honestly to consider what would happen were an analogous situation to prevail in the State Department. Let us picture Cordell Hull, Sumner Welles, Adolf Berle and the other responsible officers of the Department, as persons excessively preoccupied with personal, business, professional and communal affairs in several widely scattered cities. These men, let us say, meet in Washington for a few hours a week to formulate policy for the American Government. Their individual competence might be of the highest. But it should be



clear even to an infant that no such group of persons could give to a consideration of the issues they were called upon to decide adequate time and study and consideration. And their judgments on those issues could hardly be considered either valid or competent. The Office Committee is attempting to function in precisely that manner. Virtually every one of its members is carrying a staggering burden of professional, business, personal and Zionist duties. All are concerned with the affairs and responsibilities of several national organizations. I shall return to this particular problem at a later stage of this memorandum. But it is abundantly clear that the decisions the Committee is called upon to make are of such a nature as to require nothing less than continuous and full time consideration of the problems they involve.

d) Much delay, confusion and inefficiency has been created by the fact that the permanent staff has been permitted little administrative discretion in the exercise of its functions; that the Office Committee has regarded as one of its functions the closest scrutiny of every item of work done by the staff; that it has been in the habit of making decisions on matters that clearly and unanswerably come within the scope of administrative and executive rather than legislative competence. That conception is fatal to the effective prosecution of political or administrative activity. And the situation has been even further aggravated by the lack of central administrative authority within the office itself. Meetings of the Office Committee are given over excessively to problems of procedure rather than of principle; and trifling details are given precedence over fundamental and vital issues. I shall later set forth certain positive suggestions for the reorganization of the Emergency Committee's work and structure. But, clearly, the work of what is today termed the Office Committee should be limited to general policy-making and supervision. Actual administration and implementation of those general policies together with the formulation of the procedures to be employed should be the responsibility and function of a group drawn from the permanent staff and supplemented by the officers of the Emergency Committee.

## 2. LACK OF RESPONSIBILITY OF MEMBERS OF THE EMERGENCY AND OFFICE COMMITTEES

When I speak of the irresponsibility practiced by many members of the Emergency and Office Committees, I refer not merely to the fact that their excessive preoccupations make for irregular attendance at meetings. I refer to the fact that members of the Committees do not seem adequately aware of the grave and immense responsibilities they bear. Were they sufficiently conscious of those responsibilities, it is unlikely that so much of their time would be consumed with the unimportant and often trivial details to which most of the meetings are dedicated. More than that. Members of the Office Committee have in many instances shown little respect for official decisions reached by the Committee itself. On several occasions during my brief experience as a member of the Committee's staff, decisions formally and officially reached by the Office Committee have been revoked, modified or reversed by unofficial action and pressure on the part of members of the Committee dissatisfied with the official decision. That technique which can only be labelled "subversive" has created the greatest confusion in the administrative work of the office and has gravely impaired the efficiency of the Emergency Committee. I could cite at length the manner in which that process has operated on several occasions within the past few weeks. Decisions, for example, were taken to hold mass meetings on the Jewish army question and the Struma disaster or to insert advertisements and issue press statements on the Struma and Dr. Wise's poll of American rabbis on the Jewish army problem. In each case, the machinery for the implementation of those decisions was set in motion; halls were rented, speakers engaged, releases prepared, memoranda issued, the press and radio contacted, etc. and etc. In each one of those instances, individual members of



the Office Committee have attempted through inadmissible tactics to secure the revocation of those decisions, 24 or 36 hours before meetings were scheduled to take place, directly before newspaper deadlines and, in one instance, almost an hour after a release had been sent to all New York newspapers, city editors contacted, and arrangements completed with the New York Times for the insertion of an advertisement, the text of which had already reached that newspaper's offices. In every instance, such action has caused the gravest confusion and inefficiency within the office and has most seriously hampered prosecution of the Emergency Committee's work by creating serious embarrassment with newspaper offices, editors, etc.

Such irresponsibility, lack of respect for majority decisions of the Committee and tactics designed to secure reversal of official decisions or to hold up their implementation dare not continue if the Committee is to function with any degree of efficiency and responsibility.

### 3. INADEQUACY OF THE ASSUMPTIONS ON WHICH THE WORK OF THE EMERGENCY COMMITTEE RESTS

What I consider to be at the root of the distressing inadequacy of the political work of the Emergency Committee is a complete failure on the part of most of its members to appreciate either the nature of the problems by which we are confronted or the directions in which we should be operating. Most of the present work of the Emergency Committee seems to be based on the assumption that the world which will emerge after the war is over will be organized in very much the same way as it was before the outbreak of hostilities; that its problems will be similar in nature. That, of course, dictates that Zionist political activity follow the line it has traditionally taken: political negotiations in Washington and London; attempts to influence, through personal contact, key persons in governmental and political circles; the attempt to spread goodwill for Zionism and Palestine in non-Jewish groups; a reliance on the traditional forms of Zionist activity; the repeated use of antedated clichés and slogans and generalities. All those functions, let me hasten to emphasize, I deem important. And I should be the last to suggest that they be abandoned or minimized.

I am overwhelmingly convinced, however, that there is another and vastly more realistic assumption to be made about the years that lie ahead. And that is that the postwar world will be a radically different one from the world we knew in the prewar years. The war is unleashing in its course vast and new forces. Social institutions and political and economic relationships are being drastically transformed; and new institutions and relationships are emerging. It is extremely likely that the war will provoke popular revolutionary movements in all of Europe. Momentous developments are under way in China, in India, in Russia--in all of Asia. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that the world of the future will be shaped as much by the people of those countries as by the Anglo-Saxon powers. Certainly, the destinies of Asia will be shaped only partially by Britain and America and probably far more by India and Russia and China. These vast and revolutionary political, social and economic changes mean that we shall have to adjust ourselves to a wholly new world; that the relationship of Zionism and Palestine to that world has to be thought out anew and afresh; that we must embark on an extensive revaluation and reapplication of our concepts; that we must begin to develop new contacts and relationships; that we must begin immediately to plan our program for the postwar world; that we must think "in the grand manner". We must give breadth and scope and vision to our thinking and activity. Of that type of thinking and activity, I have seen little or no indication in the Emergency Committee, apart from Mr. Neumann's work in public relations; nor, with rare exceptions, have I encountered any recognition of its need or understanding of its nature.



At the present time, we are probably the most poorly equipped of all groups in the world to cope with the vast problems by which we are encompassed. I have already indicated some of the forces with which we should be concerned. There are tremendous problems of federation; of regionalism, of world organization; of economic development; of political forms and institutions; of racial and national conflicts; etc. We have in our possession scarcely an ounce of material, hardly a single piece of adequate research, no cooperative or organized effort on which any political thinking or planning can be based. We are failing completely to adjust our thinking to the realities of the contemporary world. We are making utterly no effort to prepare in any adequate fashion for the postwar world. We are making no attempt to align Zionism with the forces to whom the future belongs. We are making no attempt to inject Zionism into the stream of thought about the world of tomorrow. And that, let me suggest, involves much more than research by a single individual, the publication of an occasional article, the delivery of a few speeches or occasional meetings with some political figures. It requires fresh and new personnel; a group of experts immersed in the problems of our contemporary world and not merely a committee of excessively preoccupied individuals concerned primarily with piddling details or problems of personal prestige; the abandonment of preconceptions and prejudices; an intensive program of organized research and political planning; above all, it requires thinking "in the grand manner".

## II

Throughout this memorandum, I have suggested that if the Emergency Committee is adequately to discharge its functions and fulfil its responsibilities, it must undertake serious revision both of its organizational structure and of the assumptions on which it is operating. In this section, I shall seek to set forth certain suggestions for such reorganization. I should emphasize, however, that what follows is less a finished blueprint than a series of suggestions as to the lines such reorganization should, in my opinion, follow.

I have been urging that much of the inadequacy and the ineffectiveness of the Committee's work derives from a complete absence of centralized and effective administrative authority; a lack of coordination and integration; a failure to organize activity in many vital areas; the inability of the Office Committee as presently constituted to cope with the complex issues with which the Emergency Committee should properly be concerned. It is on the basis of that analysis that the structural suggestions I shall set forth have been conceived.

### 1. EMERGENCY COMMITTEE

The realities of Zionist life make it imperative and advisable that the full Emergency Committee be drawn from the four major Zionist groups in accordance with some fixed scheme of representation. The full Committee should meet four times a year. Its functions should be to determine the general outlines of Zionist policy; to indicate in a general way the lines along which the Committee should be operating; to transmit the views of the various Zionist organizations; to pass on the report of the Committee's activities. Its decisions and instructions as to action should concern general policies and not the specific details of their implementation.

### 2. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The present Office Committee should be superseded by an Ex-



Executive Committee composed of the Chairmen and Treasurer of the Emergency Committee together with one representative from each of the constituent organizations in the Emergency Committee. The Executive Committee should meet monthly for the purpose of receiving the report of the Committee's activities as a whole; to indicate and to decide the general policies to be followed; to criticize and discuss the permanent staff's activities. The Executive Committee should appoint a Director who should be responsible to the Committee for the administration and implementation of its activities.

### 3. PERMANENT STAFF

The actual work of the Emergency Committee should be conducted by the Director and a permanent staff organized in a series of departments. These departments should include:

- a) Department of Political Affairs
- b) Department of Public Relations. (American Palestine Committee. Christian Clergy and church bodies. Labor groups. Universities and academic groups, etc.)
- c) Department of Research and Postwar Planning. (Original research, cooperation with other bodies engaged in similar work, with the 'free' movements -- particularly as their work concerns the Near and Middle East)
- d) Department of Publications and Information. (Books, pamphlet series, quarterly, information bulletins, etc.)
- e) Press and Publicity Department. (Radio, general press, Anglo-Jewish press, Christian church press, labor press, etc.)

Each of these departments should be headed by a Director charged with the Administration of his particular department. The Director should in each instance be a full-time employee of the Emergency Committee and selected for his competence for the particular tasks to which he is assigned.

### 4. OFFICE COMMITTEE

The Office Committee should be composed of the Director of the Emergency Committee, the Departmental Directors and the President and Treasurer of the Emergency Committee. The Office Committee should meet two or three times a week to decide the details of administrative policy and to make most of the decisions which come within the jurisdiction of the present Office Committee. Such a Committee, because it would be composed mainly of those actively and constantly concerned with the Emergency Committee's work and would be drawn largely from the permanent staff of the Committee, would be able to act quickly and efficiently in emergency situations. Administrative policy would thus be shaped by those in constant contact with the committee's work rather than by those whose excessive preoccupations prevent them from giving adequate consideration to issues they are called upon to decide. Such a set-up would free the Executive and Emergency Committees from the mass of details with which they are generally concerned and enable them to concentrate on the broader outlines of Zionist policy.

### 5. ADVISORY COMMISSIONS

To each department, there should be attached an advisory commission to be chosen by the Departmental Head and approved by the Emergency Committee.



These commissions should have advisory rather than mandatory powers. They should be selected on their basis of competence in the various areas in which they are called upon to serve. They should meet at the discretion of the Departmental Director who should serve as their chairman. Their functions, as I have suggested, should be purely advisory and consultative ones. An exception might be made in the case of the Department of Political Affairs. There, it might be deemed advisable to give a small committee mandatory rather than advisory powers. Such a committee should include the President and Director of the Emergency Committee and a few other persons selected for their competence in such matters. Here again it is necessary to emphasize that if the members of that committee will be persons overburdened with other duties, without special familiarity with the issues they are called upon to decide, no significant achievement can be expected.

#### 6. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Director should be the central administrative officer of the Committee and responsible to the Executive Committee for the administration of its affairs. His tasks would include the coordination of the various aspects of the Committee's work, the integration of departmental activities, the allocation to the departments of their particular activities.

Such an organizational structure, I am convinced, would enable the Emergency Committee to function on a scope and with an efficiency immeasurably beyond anything it has yet demonstrated. Through the large Emergency Committee, the Zionist parties would be able to maintain supervision and direction of general policy. The Executive Committee would be able to supervise the activities of the permanent staff and to elaborate more specific policies. Centralization of administrative authority in the hands of a Director would eliminate delay, confusion, and make possible an integration of activity. Departmental organization would permit broad planning of programs and intensive and specialized activity in many fields. An office committee, drawn mainly from the permanent staff, would be able to act quickly, to make informed and competent judgments as to the administration of the work and to evolve a consistent and clear orientation on which all work of the Emergency Committee should be based.

### III

If it be argued that what I am suggesting fails to take cognizance of the realities of Zionist life or represents too drastic a departure from the present structure and activities and organization of the Emergency Committee, I can only say that the period in which we live is a drastic and revolutionary one. Nothing less than drastic and heroic action will suffice.

Many of the members of the Emergency Committee have been so immersed in their various functions that it may be difficult for them to form an adequate over-all picture of our situation. But my brief experience with the Emergency Committee, no less than my activities in academic and liberal circles, have convinced me of the tremendous potentialities that exist today for constructive work for Palestine and Zionism. In Christian circles, in the universities, in academic and intellectual circles, among liberal groups, in the various organizations concerned with planning and thinking for the world of the future, there is a great latent appreciation of the Jewish problem generally and of the role of Palestine particularly. There are, too, many people of national reputation, experts in various fields of endeavor, who could be enlisted in our work. Several of them, I can positively state, would be prepared to dedicate all their time and energies to the problems with which an Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs should properly be concerned. That the Emergency Committee has thus far failed to tap those reservoirs or to enlist those persons has been due almost wholly to the



limited scale on which it is operating. The Committee has thus far failed to give to Jewry inspiring and dynamic leadership. It has failed to present to the Jews of America -- and to the non-Jewish world as well -- a substantial and constructive program for the Jewish people -- based on the realities of the contemporary world. It has failed to present them with an inspiring vision of what can be achieved, with a ringing affirmation of what Zionism and Palestine can mean and become in the world of tomorrow.

So long as the Emergency Committee continues to concern itself with the petty details which today are its chief preoccupation, so long as it continues to tread its limited and circumscribed path, it will be able neither to make any impact on American thinking about both the present and the future, nor to enlist the services of those who would be prepared to serve. Unless the members of the Emergency Committee can rise to the heights of leadership and statesmanship that the gravity of the hour demands, unless they can demonstrate the vision and the courage and the fearlessness to undertake those changes through which alone effective and significant results can be achieved, they will have failed the Jewish people in the saddest hour of their history.

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