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

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Berlin, Rabbi Meyer, 1943.



הסתדרות המזרחי באמריקה

**Mizrachi Organization of America**

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## CONFIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM

By Rabbi Meyer Berlin

During my three day stay in Washington (Feb. 16, 17, 18th) I had occasion to meet with Sen. Alben W. Barkley, Majority Leader of the Senate; Congressman Joseph Martin, Minority Leader of the House of Representatives; Sen. Robert F. Wagner, Chairman of the Pro-Palestine Committee; and Vice-President, Mr. Henry A. Wallace. I also had a talk with Mr. F. F. and a number of other Zionists in important government posts.

Interview With Senator Barkley

In my 45 minute interview with Senator Barkley, I was accompanied by Mr. Mendel Fisher of the J. N. F. After expressing thanks to the Senator for his sympathetic attitude toward Zionism, generally, and for his splendid services to the J. N. F., in particular, I raised the question of the amazing and utter silence of the United States Government in regard to the terrible situation of the Jews in Nazi-occupied lands. I made mention that at the time when in Great Britain there had been made numerous utterances, both in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, nothing has, so far, been heard either from the House or from the Senate in Washington.

Senator Barkley replied that he had discussed this matter with Dr. Stephen S. Wise as well as with Congressman Emanuel Celler, who brought to him a copy of a resolution which was to be proposed before Congress. He personally was willing, of course, to accept the resolution as presented, but in his desire that the resolution have the support of all members of Congress, irrespective of party affiliation, sought to gain also the consent of the Minority Leader, which



has not yet been achieved.

I then directed our conversation to the question of Zionism and the emigration of Jews who may still be able to leave the Nazi countries. I made reference to the article in the Times, relating to the 70 thousand Jews of Roumania, and added that the Yishuv in Palestine has been of the conviction, although without a definite basis for it, that if a place of refuge were offered to the remaining suffering Jews in Nazi lands, they would be allowed to emigrate. I was surprised to learn that Senator Barkley had no knowledge at all of the above article. The Senator did manifest, however, some acquaintance with Zionist matters. He told me that he visited Palestine, though for only a short time, and was in full sympathy with the Zionist movement. So far, however, he found no possibility for doing something positive to help Zionism politically. As a matter of fact, neither he, individually, nor the Senate, as a whole, have anything to say in matters of preparation for the coming peace-negotiating conference. Even the personnel of the negotiating body is to be designated by the President, requiring no confirmation, even, by the Senate. The Senate steps into the picture only when final confirmation of the policies resulting from the negotiations have to be approved by that body. Some time ago he did discuss with the President, however, the question of a Jewish Army, he himself taking a positive view. The President felt, though, that for many reasons the issue could not be pressed.

Our conversation then reverted to the question of the immigration of Jews to Palestine as well as the States. When I questioned the possibility of the United States absorbing a number of refugees, despite the apparent difficulties involved, the Senator expressed the opinion that with the present set-up in Congress there was no possibility of "opening the doors" of this country.

Senator Barkley then questioned me about the absorptive capacity of Palestine, touching also on the Arab problem. He listened very attentively to my brief outline of the possibilities of settling in Palestine millions of Jews, providing that the economic development of the country as well as the laws regulating



immigration to Palestine be placed fully in Jewish hands. I further emphasized that if and when the Jewish Commonwealth is finally established the Arabs will, self-evidently, manifest at first great dissatisfaction. As soon, however, as they shall have been convinced that it represents the determined decision of the Great Powers, their opposition will soon fall by the wayside.

The Senator appeared most interested and impressed when I spoke to him of the Yishuv's war effort and the large number of its men and women in the army, which even received the praise of the High Commissioner. I further added that the Jewish people is permeated by an ancient and historically confirmed belief that nations who subject it to torture and persecution, sooner or later feel the full measure of God's punishing wrath, and that even the British government was made to suffer because of solemn and sacred promises made to the Jewish people which they did not fulfill. At the same time God Almighty sends his blessing to those peoples who stand by the Jews in their time of peril.

I then proceeded to picture Jewish homelessness and Jewish helplessness, stressing that the only solution to the problem lay with a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine. I pointed also to the fact that according to public opinion and sentiments in this country plans are already being made for the settlement of post-war problems and it is, therefore, his historic duty, as a recognized leader of and spokesman for the people of the United States, to assure that the solution of the world Jewish problem through Zionism be acted upon before it is too late. I stated quite clearly that, at this time and in this instance, we cannot depend on Great Britain alone. Our eyes are, indeed, turned to the United States, its great President and humane leaders to assist us in finally achieving our historic goal.

The Senator mentioned, in passing, the question of the boundaries of Palestine and inquired if this be, in my opinion, the proper time to discuss this problem. I retorted that despite the fundamental importance of this question it is a secondary matter in comparison with the more immediate issues. The main and



primary thing at this juncture is America's unequivocal pledge for the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth.

The Senator informed me then that he has not had an opportunity to see the President during the last few months and to talk to him privately. Since the President's return from Casablanca he did meet with him on several occasions, but only in the presence of other people. Senator Barkley assured me, however, that he will seek, in the near future, an opportunity to see the President and talk these matters over in thorough-going fashion. I expressed the hope that the Senator would confer upon me the privilege of being able to convey to the Yishuv, upon my return home, a hopeful and encouraging statement in regard to the position of the United States Government towards Jewish Palestine and its post-war set-up. When I further informed him that I intended to leave within four or five weeks, he expressed his hope and desire to see me again as soon as he shall have seen the President.

My impression of Senator Barkley is that he is an understanding friend of our cause. He is more or less familiar with Zionism, although quite unfamiliar with many essential facts and occurrences in Jewish life. He seriously desires to be of help to us and it is our duty to acquaint him not merely with the general objectives of Zionism but also with the grim and grave facts of Jewish life in the Diaspora and with all aspects of Palestine as a Jewish Commonwealth.

#### Interview With Senator Robert F. Wagner

The interview with Senator Wagner, which lasted about 35 minutes, was held in the presence of Mr. Shetzer, secretary of the ZOA, and Mr. Levy, secretary of the Senator, a Jewish young man who seems to be a good Zionist.

I extended to the Senator the greetings of the Yishuv, in his capacity as chairman of the American Palestine Committee, and pictured to him the tragic situation of the great bulk of the Jewish people the world over, exclusive of the United States, on one hand, and Palestine, on the other. I again expressed my astonishment that nothing practical has so far been done to help the Jews in their great despair and



emphasized the urgency that the United States Government offer assylum to a number of Jews, either for permanent stay or merely for the duration, within the frames of the quota or by special legislation; and the need of influencing the British Government, on the other hand, to open widely the gates of Palestine, even before the war is ended and the political situation is fully crystalized. I mentioned, incidentally, of my feeling that if horses were being slaughtered as are the Jews of Poland, there would by now be a loud demand for organized action against such cruelty to animals. Somehow, when it concerns Jews everybody remains silent, including the intellectuals and humanitarians of free and enlightened America.

The Senator replied that in regard to the question of immigration to America, the main difficulty lay in the fact that there are too many "anti's" in both houses of Congress. As for Palestine, it really must become the recognized duty of the United States to help settle the situation. He, as an individual Senator, has, however, no direct influence on such matters. Senator Wagner then turned to his secretary, saying: "This is really your department. Undoubtedly you know what has so far been done in these matters."

Mr. Levy, Senator Wagner's secretary, made mention, then, of a resolution, adopted some three months ago by senators and congressmen, deploring the cruelties committed by the Nazis against the Jews. // The Senator himself wanted to know as to whether I was not of the belief that the Jews in Soviet Russia were well situated, enjoying full freedom together with all other citizens. I replied that freedom of a nation is not measured merely by its physical security. Every nation has a soul to think about and to consider. This is surely true in regard to the Jewish nation. If we have no ground for complaint in regard to physical persecution in Russia, we are also of the definite feeling that the Jewish nation, as such, cannot survive there as well as in other European countries. Since he, the Senator, agrees, furthermore, that even in such a great and liberal country as the United States there are now many anti-Jewish forces in operation, where does the solution of the problem of the Jewish nation come in, if not through Palestine.



I then asked Senator Wagner if he ever visited Palestine. Upon his reply in the negative I assured him of the heartiest welcome by the Yishuv upon his visit, which I hope would be very soon and that Palestine shall have achieved by then the status of a Jewish Commonwealth. The Senator repeated his inability to be of practical help in the political situation and after many words of mutual compliments I departed.

My impression of Senator Wagner is that he is a fine gentleman but rather luke-warm in general political questions and knows very little about Jewish problems and Zionism, although he is the chairman of the Pro-Palestine Committee and, as I understand, delivers addresses for our cause quite willingly from time to time.

#### Interview With Congressman Martin

My interview with Congressman Joseph Martin, was only about 30 minutes in duration. I met x him under strenuous circumstances, having been scheduled to see Vice-President Wallace, whose invitation I had received only one hour before, not much later than the time designated for my appointment with the Congressman.

I frankly informed Congressman Martin that having discussed with Senator Barkley the tragic plight of the Jews in Poland and other Nazi lands, as well as the need for immediate action by the House and the Senate in behalf of these unfortunates, I know full well that it was now up to him, as Minority Leader of the House and as spokesman for the Republican Party, to balance the scales in our favor. Congressman Martin stated that though he is familiar with the resolution which Congressman Celler was desirous of proposing, he is not at all posted on the broader aspects of the question. I, consequently, gave him a brief portrayal of the distressing situation abroad, emphasizing that although a few neutral countries, such as Switzerland, Portugal and Sweden (I had no exact information in regard to Spain) have recently been trying their utmost to do whatever possible to admit a number of refugees, their absorptive capacity is so limited as to render them almost of no significance in this matter. A noticeable measure of help can come forth only from



the United States, by admitting a large number of these unfortunates, as well as by influencing the immediate opening of the doors to Palestine.

The Congressman asked me as to whether I was at all aware of the existing immigration restrictions in the United States. I replied that I am perfectly familiar with the circumstances but understand that there are even within the framework of the immigration quotas enough room for about 75 thousand immigrants. Whereupon the Congressman interrupted by stating that he himself is not really acquainted with the exact facts relating to immigration and it, generally, has nothing to do with Congress. It is a matter solely in the competence of the Executive branch of the government.

With tears in my eyes and with uncontrolled emotions I said to the Congressman: "Permit me, in my great inner pain, to state quite frankly that I completely fail to understand your explanation that the subject in question is in no way related to the business of Congress. Is it not the duty of men like you, the benevolent leaders of the greatest nation in the world, to meet together, whether officially or unofficially with those who are able to give you the facts about the greatest tragedy in history and to look for a way to prevent the utter annihilation of the Jewish people. Is it merely a question of formality and division of responsibility? Are those men who are in a position to help and are not helping not guilty to a great extent in what is going on?"

The Congressman was apparently touched by my words and with a changed tone he responded: "I suppose you are right in regard to this phase of the question, now what about Palestine?" I, consequently, began to tell him about the "white paper" and its unjustified limiting of Jewish immigration to a total of 75 thousand Jews. The Congressman intercepted, admitting that he knew nothing about this situation and asked that I explain it in greater detail. In concise form I unfolded before him the background and history of the "white paper", indicating that even of the 75 thousand Jewish immigrants, legally provided by the unjust "white paper", only 45 thousand ~~Jewish immigrants, legally provided by the unjust "white paper"~~ have so far been admitted to Palestine. (Our conversation was held before the matter



took a turn in our favor, as announced in this week's press). The Congressman manifested amazement over this unjustified condition and inquired as to why permission has not been granted for the immediate admission of the remaining 30 thousand, as provided in the "white paper". I replied that all Jews, and particularly the people of the Yishuv, have been asking the very same question, but the fact remains that thousands of unfortunates beg in vain for admittance to Palestine, since the ears and hearts of those in charge remain unresponsive to the needs. "That is surely wrong," exclaimed the Congressman. "Well", said I, "If it is wrong, by your own admittance, I should like your government to convey its feeling in the matter to the British ~~Government~~ authorities. Right now, however, I am concerned particularly with the situation of European Jewry. I shall, indeed, welcome the opportunity of discussing Zionism with you when both you and I will have more time, if such opportunity will be given me before my return to Palestine."

The Congressman assured me of his desire to meet again and even promised to arrange an appointment for a fuller discussion of Zionism. In the meantime, he will do whatever possible in making the Congress resolution in behalf of Polish Jewry an undelayed reality. He mentioned also, incidentally, that he was no longer the chairman of the National Republican Committee and is only the Republican Leader of the House. He is, therefore, not altogether free in his actions. He will try to do his very best, nevertheless.

It is my impression that Congressman Martin has, until now, not been approached at all about Zionist or general Jewish matters and it is truly a pity that we are neglecting people of this calibre. Be they great or small, they are all associated with the United States Government and are instrumental in the shaping of official American opinion. These men must be furnished with proper material which will bring home to them some knowledge of our situation.

#### Interview With Vice-President Wallace

The last, most interesting and also most disappointing interview, I've had



so far, was with Vice-President Wallace. We met on the day of the reception to Madam Chiang Kai-shek and had no opportunity to converse for more than about 40 minutes. Our conversation, in fact, was concluded at 12 o'clock sharp, when Mr. Wallace had to proceed to the Capitol.

(My invitation to visit the Vice-President was, incidentally, made possible by Dr. Stephen S. Wise.)

Mr. Wallace listened to me very attentively but only until I had reached the important decisive point of our conversation. I began by portraying the eagerness, hope and anticipation with which world Jewry and the pioneering Palestine Yishuv have been awaiting the interest of the United States Government in the establishment of the Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine and that they were depending especially upon him as the great visionary of the better post-war world. I added also that Jews are now hoping for the revelation of a second Cyrus, who, if and when found, would be of even greater historic importance than his predecessor since the second Temple was ultimately destroyed together with the annihilation of Jewish freedom but, according to our ancient mystic tradition, the third resurrection of Jewish nationhood is to be everlasting.

I continued to point out that without its historic homeland the Jewish nation is definitely threatened with total extinction, whereupon the Vice-President injected the curt remark: "I cannot agree with you on that." Upon inquiry as to what reasons motivated his utter disagreement, Mr. Wallace said as follows: "I am really a friend of Zionism and regard it as a great experiment which has already shown great achievement, particularly in the agricultural sphere. I cannot see in Zionism, however, that which you see, namely the major solution to the problem of Jewry as a whole." I followed with these remarks: "Permit me, please, to make clear to you the differences that exist between us in regard to our respective views of the role and place of Palestine. I surely agree with you that the Jews have succeeded admirably, as they hope to continue succeeding, in their development of Palestine agriculturally as well as in many other ways. For the Jewish people, however, Palestine is not merely



a question of experiments, successful or otherwise. We feel that there is actually no possibility for our continuance as a people without having a land, where we may live in fullest accord with our ancient, traditional Torah life, speaking our own tongue and doing our fullest share for the millions of Jews who are now persecuted and know not where the morrow will find them. May I ask you, Mr. Vice-President," I continued, "whether you would deem it, for instance, a realizable hope that a million additional Jews be allowed to enter the United States immediately following the war?" Mr. Wallace remained silent for a moment and then remarked: "I really find myself in a difficult position in regard to these questions. I cannot speak as an individual or private person because I am the Vice-President of the United States. At the same time, being the Vice-President I have no authority to speak of something regarding which there has not yet been formed an official attitude and decision." To which I retorted: "Although I am only a few weeks in this country I know that you have, indeed, expressed yourself during recent months on many important questions in your private capacity as a citizen. You surely expect, and many others with you, however, that these utterances made in private capacity shall eventually become the recognized and official policy of the United States Government."

Mr. Wallace smiled broadly and reassured me that he has a great deal of sympathy for the Jewish people as well as for Zionism but it was difficult for him to express a positive opinion when many groups in American Jewry were totally against Zionism and he, apparently, had no right to take the part and consider the opinion of one group in American Jewry in preference to another."

At this point I took occasion to say as follows: "I, as well as all Jews in Palestine, are fully aware of your sympathy, Mr. Vice-President. It is impossible, however, to satisfy ourselves in this crucial period in our history with passive sympathy alone, coming, as it may, even from the hearts of the noblest of people. You are just about to take a leading part in the reception to the First Lady of China and it may be in place to remark and remind that not very long ago the Chinese people were also a mere subject and object of sympathy. That period has passed and now you are giving the Chinese people much more than pity and sympathy. Are we Jews



of less importance than any other people of the world that we should feel complete satisfaction in mere sympathetic expression on the part of important friends and overlook our justified demand for real active help?" At this point Mr. Wallace interrupted me, saying: "But you are expressing only the opinion of the Zionists. There are, however, many other groups who see things differently and are against your demands." I replied: "Permit me to remind you again of something relating to current history, which has a bearing on our situation. The United States is now doing its utmost for the ultimate rehabilitation of the French Republic and together with certain French groups it is fighting the Axis. Are all Frenchmen in agreement with what the United States is now doing for the French people? Are there not many groups in France who are diametrically opposed to your activities? But the United States is the God-appointed liberator of the world and as such is going and fighting hand and hand with the Free French, ignoring totally the other groups. We Zionists are the Free Jews and all other groups, who are against the Jewish Commonwealth and rejuvenated Jewish nationhood, have no significance for us and should have no meaning to you."

The time was drawing near when Mr. Wallace was to join Congress for the above-mentioned purpose and I, consequently, rose to bid him "Good-bye". He escorted me to the door and told me again: "I do not agree with you. The future destiny of the Jews is bound up with the United States, not with Palestine. The Jews of the United States assisted a whole lot in the growth, prosperity and development of our country and their future is right here." Standing at the door, as I was, I merely said: "Surely the Jews of the United States, as true and loyal citizens have done and will continue to do their very best for the welfare of this country and will reap, together with all, the fruits of their loyalty and devotion. There is still, however, the problem of millions of additional Jews, living in other lands, who have no future except in Palestine. We are also thinking of our survival as a people, which is apparently impossible without having a center, spiritual and national in character, which is to serve as the fountain-head of our ancient civilization and culture." Mr. Wallace was silent for a moment, then saying: "Yes, that is really another



aspect of the question." So I took the liberty of adding also this remark: "How long, Mr. Vice-President, can Jews remain Jews without Judaism, in your sincere opinion?" I received no reply to that and following a hearty and friendly handshake, I left his chamber.

During his remarks, the Vice-President mentioned, incidentally, the importance of the continued economic exploitation of Palestine's resources, such as the announced Jordan valley project. I assured Mr. Wallace that upon achieving a Jewish Commonwealth such development will rapidly follow and become another inspiring reality. Otherwise, our hands are tied in regard to real expansion.

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My impression is that Mr. Wallace is a "Zionist", as this term is being interpreted in America. He is, at any rate, in great sympathy with our movement. Such "Zionism", however, on the part of a man of Mr. Wallace's station and, I am afraid to say that it is indicative also of the attitude and sentiments of the man above him, is most dangerous for us and, thus, the intensity of my disappointment. We may hardly expect the assistance of these high government heads in behalf of our fundamental aims so long as we shall not succeed in changing their approach and make them to think of Zionism in terms of a Jewish Commonwealth rather than successful agricultural experiments.

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Incidentally, I also had quite a talk with the Polish Ambassador, Mr. Chechanovsky. Zionist matters were touched upon only in passing. Our main subject of discussion was the situation of the Polish Jews now in Russia and the present as well as future relations between Poles and Jews. I heard many interesting things from the Ambassador, but since I am to see him again very soon for a continuation of our discussion, I shall present the complete memo of our conversation at that time.

As stated in the introductory paragraph of this memorandum, I saw also Congressman Ellison. It was interesting as well as discouraging to note the reaction of a Jewish Congressman to Jewish problems in these decisive days. I should not think that what I have learned from my contact with Mr. Ellison constitutes news to those living in this country. To me personally it presented



additional evidence that there is a definite possibility, not only a dire necessity, to make Zionism clear in its objectives and aims to all in official life and avoid the embarrassing and painful fact of our best friends speaking of Palestine and Zionism as social experiments and agricultural achievements.

