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Christian Council on Palestine, 1943.

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CHRISTIAN COUNCIL ON PALESTINE
70 Fifth Avenue
New York 11, N. Y.

November 26, 1943

M e m o r a n d u m

To Mr. Henry Montor
Rabbi Leon I. Feuer

Strictly Confidential

From Dr. Carl Hermann Voss

I took charge of the activities of the Christian Council on Palestine in May, 1943. Little promotional work had been done prior to that time by a minister of the Christian church, except through the individual efforts of Dr. Henry A. Atkinson as Chairman of the Christian Council on Palestine. He was ably aided in his efforts by Abram Magida who made available every facility possible and was of immeasurable assistance. The Council then consisted of about 400 members, recruited for the most part after the organizational meeting of the Christian Council on Palestine held last December 14, 1942 in the Hotel Pennsylvania. For a half year prior to that the Committee had been known as the Christian Committee of Clergy, Leaders and Laymen On Behalf of Jewish Immigration into Palestine.

As soon as it was possible, I began work on a mailing campaign for new members. The mailing material consisted of (a) a set of eight resolutions adopted by the Executive Committee of the Christian Council on Palestine at a meeting on June 18, 1943; (b) a reprint of an article from "Christianity and Crisis" by Dr. Henry A. Atkinson, a statement of purpose to which I contributed the greater part of the manuscript; (c) a membership card; and (d) a personal letter from both myself and Dr. Atkinson. This went out to a mailing list of about 9500 during the summer. In this effort, I was hampered not only by the unbearable heat of New York, to which I was slowly and painfully adjusting myself, but more so by lack of aid which Mr. Magida's office endeavored to remedy as best they could even under the severe pressure at 41 East 42nd Street. Further, the offices of the Church Peace Union and the World Alliance for International Friendship Through the Churches were being moved upstairs two floors, a transfer of tremendous confusion and no little chaos. At times the work was completely stymied, and lack of secretarial aid in my office made it very difficult for me and Miss Morris to complete the work satisfactorily.

By September the membership had reached a total of about 700, and a follow-up card was sent out to about 8500 names on this same list. Innumerable inquiries came in and I was soon swamped, a situation that has been remedied only in these last few weeks. I hope such a situation will not arise again because the work of the Christian Council on Palestine suffers thereby.

The summertime was, of course, not propitious for regional meetings.

The first regional meeting of any sort was held four days after I entered upon my new work. This meeting was held in Portchester, New York, with

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about 17 people present, 9 of whom were Jewish and 7 Protestant ministers, and one a Catholic priest. The meeting was not too satisfactory because the local rabbi took the meeting in his own hands and carried on the discussion. Strangely enough, however, almost all those men present joined the Christian Council on Palestine at a later date, so that the meeting may not have been quite as much of a "dud" as was first expected.

During the summer, I spoke twice to Jewish groups on the subject, once at Mr. Montor's invitation before the Jamaica, Long Island, meeting of Long Island leaders of the U. P. A., and another time in Durham, N. C. before a group of leaders of the Jewish community gathered together by Mr. E. J. Evans. We attempted similar meetings in Chapel Hill and Raleigh, N. C. and Richmond, Va., but to no avail because the local rabbis were on their usual two months' vacation and were unable to offer the aid necessary to gather a sizeable group of Jewish leaders together. I had hoped that through these leaders I might have some insight into the opinions and constituency of the Christian clergy so that later regional meetings might be held with the Christian ministers.

In September I spoke before the Conference of Jewish Women's Organizations in Pittsburgh, Pa., a large and influential meeting where the issues of the Christian Council on Palestine were presented.

It might be mentioned that last spring, on May 10th, a week before I came to New York, I spoke to a sizeable audience of Jewish leaders in Pittsburgh, trustees of the Y. M. & Y. W. H. A., and presented the work of the Christian Council on Palestine as I foresaw it before entering upon my new position.

This autumn there have been a number of opportunities to discuss these questions in local institutes, and I have presented the case before both ministers and laymen in several meetings at the Institutes in Detroit, Michigan in October, and Toledo, Ohio in November, in much the same fashion as these discussions were carried on before a seminar of 200 people last June at the North American Institute in Toronto, Canada.

This fall I worked with Dr. Atkinson on regional meetings specifically for the purpose of arousing interest among the members of the clergy on behalf of the Christian Council on Palestine in the cities of Cleveland, Chicago, Denver and Omaha. It is with these meetings that this report is primarily concerned.

I. CLEVELAND

The Cleveland meeting was held on November 2nd as described in a separate memorandum which has been previously submitted. Should there be any questions, kindly feel free to call me.

II. CHICAGO

A meeting was held in Chicago on November 9th -- the date not too satisfactory because of conflicts on every side of the schedule but the least objectionable date for all concerned.

Dr. Daniel Day Williams of Chicago Theological Seminary, a former classmate of mine and one of the outstanding younger theologians in American Protestantism, sent out the call for the meeting and gathered together about 30 ministers from

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Chicago and some towns as far distant as a hundred miles. A carefully chosen list of some ninety names was gathered by writing to local rabbis and the members of the Christian Council on Palestine.

The meeting was held in the Top Of The Town restaurant beginning at 10:30 A. M. and concluding at 3:00 P. M. Rabbi Jacob J. Weinstein, of Kehillath Anshe Mayriv, spoke at the luncheon in a very effective fashion, complementing what Dr. Atkinson and I had tried to do in the morning. We found deep concern on the part of the ministers and a genuine urge to do something. The group decided definitely to continue its work, and is working toward the holding of a large meeting with 500 to 600 local ministers present to hear Prof. Reinhold Niebuhr or some similar outstanding figure discuss Palestine as a homeland with all of the implications with reference to a battle against the White Paper. There was some hostility on the part of a few people present, some confusion on the part of others, and an uncertainty at times as to the program to be followed. Those present and those who sent in regrets will have information sent to them concerning the questions raised, literature will be dispatched to them in successive waves over the next month. A similar procedure is to be adopted in Cleveland as well as in Denver and Omaha (to be discussed later in this memorandum). At Present, I am not convinced that a wholesale circularizing of all the local clergymen in a community is of any avail. It is a sheer waste of money as well as of paper, and furthermore, arouses suspicions on the part of these clergymen as to the purpose of the organization. It is much better to circularize the outstanding clergymen whose names have been suggested by interested members of the Christian Council on Palestine as well as by local rabbis. From the list of confidential reports on key men in these centers it will be apparent that there is a large group in Chicago who will be available for future activity. The outstanding men are Prof. James Luther Adams of the Meadville Theological School; Dr. Prince of Lake Forest, Ill.; Dr. John Gordon of Rockford, Ill.; Dr. Dan Williams (mentioned above); Prof. Henry Nelson Weiman, and Dr. James Yard, local director of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. The latter, Dr. Yard, wrote me a very enthusiastic letter thanking us for coming to Chicago and promising cooperation in every way possible.

We had no publicity at the Chicago meeting, because we did not know where to turn in that city to secure an interview on this question. Our experience in Cleveland, Denver and Omaha will doubtless enable us to secure publicity in similar situations at later dates. It often helps immeasurably when some local Zionist tips off a reporter who enables us to secure the necessary interview.

III. DENVER

The Denver meeting was held on Monday, November 15th, and resulted in the best meeting we have yet had. Mrs. L. Allen Beck, Executive Secretary of "Citizens For Victory" planned the meeting at the request of Dr. Atkinson and myself.

It was held in the Albany Hotel, with 35 people present, including several Jewish representatives who contributed greatly to the effectiveness of the discussions. As usual with such meetings, both Dr. Atkinson and I spoke at length, and we asked Rabbi Kauvar to speak at the luncheon, which he did most eloquently and movingly. That group was greatly aroused, and they plan to take definite action by organizing in community-wide activities to combat anti-Semitism in Denver as well as abroad, and to create public opinion against the White Paper, and to hold public meetings of protest. A committee headed by the Rev. W. Scott McMunn will

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carry on the work. Any further questions I can answer personally.

IV. OMAHA

The Omaha meeting was held the next day, November 16th, in a city where we knew no one. Dr. Niven, a member of the Christian Council on Palestine, was in New York during our stay in Omaha, and thus was compelled to decline the job of organizing this local meeting. He turned it over to Dr. Pressly and Dr. Rowsey, both of whom are leading Presbyterian clergymen in the city. They sent out invitations which we prepared for them, to names which we had gathered together from the local rabbis and our own members of the Christian Council on Palestine in that city.

Some 20 men gathered and discussed the issue with us, and at the luncheon sessions lasting until the middle of the afternoon. An atmosphere of suspicion with which the meeting began contrasted markedly with the wholehearted enthusiasm and complete confidence which marked the conclusion of the meeting. Rabbi Goldstein and Rabbi Lelyveld were of real aid at the luncheon in presenting the cause from the Jewish viewpoint and in winning the confidence of the ministers. They, too, under the guidance of Dr. Waltmire, will carry on the permanent work in that community.

Considering how we came to that town de novo, we felt heartened by the results. We remarked to each other on the train as we sped toward Chicago and the East, "We came, we spoke, we conquered!"

As we look over these programs, we are eminently satisfied with what we have accomplished and acutely dissatisfied with how far short the real stands in contrast to the ideal. We know that our aspirations are as nothing in comparison to what we hope to accomplish. The prime need of the moment is not secretarial aid as had been the case a fortnight ago, but rather the selection of an executive associate to myself. We have several men in mind, but they are not adequate. We hope to have more success later. When we have found the man, we shall communicate further.

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