



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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

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

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Ben-Gurion, David, resignation, 1944.

BEN GURION RESIGNATION #1

1944(?) AHS File
Date? ('44?)
Author?

1. It was announced to Actions Committee on or about October 24 Locker had come from London. Weizmann had been invited to come to Palestine. It is many years since he was in Palestine. Locker had reported new government committee had been set up to deal with Palestine including Amory, et. al. Ben Gurion's reasons were that Chaim Weizmann was acting without knowledge of Executive, without taking them into his confidence; there were clear indications he was talking partition and federation; that Ben Gurion could not take the responsibility for carrying on under such conditions. Ben Gurion believes that partition if actively raised again will tear the movement to pieces. It will be remembered that when Ben Gurion was in America he emphasized the point by recalling the circumstances under which Chaim Weizmann was elected President and the express understanding arrived at at that time that the Executive was to act as a collective whole; that the President should have no powers separate and distinct from the Executive, which was to control policy as an entity. Ben Gurion said he could not go on.

2. The quite general reaction in the Executive, in the Actions Committee in the Press, and the Yisshuv generally was of consternation, and unwillingness to accept the resignation, of certain disbelief that it was meant seriously, and of pressure to get him to withdraw the resignation. The Executive at first saw no way out except that Chaim Weizmann come to Palestine where sits the Actions Committee. So urgent cables were sent. These were emphatically declined; Chaim Weizmann said he knew no reason for the resignation and contrariwise Chaim Weizmann invited a delegation to come from Palestine, with intimations that he would invited delegation from U.S.A. This raised again the constitutional question whether the Executive should transfer itself to

London in part or by representative and as to the constitutional right and propriety of Chaim Weizmann inviting persons to come to London. The point was not merely a technical one, because men foresaw the possibility of the movement being torn to pieces by an internal struggle again~~h~~ over Yishub partition.

Men saw disastrous consequences of the breach. Ben Gurion represents to preponderating degree the mood and spirit of the Yishub. They believe in his integrity. Many have come to wonder about Weizmann. They are for Biltmore. Is Weizmann pro-Biltmore? They are anti-British in a certain degree. Is Weizmann too pro-British? The supporters of Chaim Weizmann are (a) The Germans (b) the Hashomer Hatzair (c) the British officials like Cadey. Was Ben Gurion making it impossible for himself to come back? Did Ben Gurion resign because he was the failure of his policy and his resignation was a logical result as Magnes stated? Did Government feel that the Zionists now were divided and they would have better chances of putting thru their plans? Did Ben Gurion think he could, by resigning, force the resignation of Chaim Weizmann? If so, he was profoundly mistaken as everyone, including myself, assured him to the contrary and insisted that no internal questions be now raised, that all forces must work together, that none could be dispensed with, and particularly Chaim Weizmann, is needed at this time because of his prestige, particularly with English leaders.

N. Kirshner, President of the South African Federation, one of the leaders of Binyan and other So. African economic institutions took an active position. He spent much time endeavoring to get Ben Gurion to withdraw his resignation. The So. African Federation sent a very strong urgent message to Ben Gurion to reconsider. Robert Szold took the same line, not as anti-Weizmann, but that no leader such as Ben Gurion may now withdraw, and Weizmann must stay in his position and Ben Gurion in his. We so stated to the Executive and to the Actions Committee.

At the first meeting of the Actions Committee after the resignation, the motion for debate was defeated, because it was then hoped that Chaim Weizmann would come to Palestine and the whole matter considered and adjusted. Meantime, private negotiations were continued with Ben Gurion to arrive at a modus vivendi. When it became clear that Chaim Weizmann would not come to Palestine (an event Robert Szold early foresaw) the Executive then considered sending, not a delegation, but its representative or representatives to England. They decided to send Shertok, Schmarak and Fishman. (The two latter are definitely anti-partition and outspoken full pro-Biltmore). Then they decided to send Shertok, In this situation the matter again came before the Actions Committee.

The Actions Committee approved the decision to send Shertok by about 20 to 5, Mizrachi not voting. The vote was preceded by considerable debate. Hashomer Hatzair wanted a full debate. What were the underlying differences between Chaim Weizmann and Ben Gurion? How could the Actions Committee decide unless the whole matter was out in the open. So the opposition pushed the point that the Actions Committee should not vote until there be full debate. (Personal questions were in the background. e.g. Why was Greenbaum not chosen?) There was uneasiness that Shertok should go, because he was needed in Jerusalem for the daily current work; and there was uneasiness that Shertok should go alone. Finally, after being goaded sufficiently, a few made the point that it was idle to make a mystery of the differences alleged; that everyone knew the differences; that everyone knew Chaim Weizmann very well; they had had experience after experience; they wanted to know what was going on; not to be confronted with a fait accompli etc. and those who urged the full debate should not appear so naive etc. Kirshner added pointed remarks to the same effect, and the vote was taken, to approve sending Shertok alone.

Kirshner's personal view was that the immediate objective was to create a formula where Ben Gurion would return to partake of responsibility as Chairman of the Executive; that this was of utmost importance, or the movement might find itself debarred of Ben Gurion and his influential following in that he might be manouvered or might manouver himself into a permanent position outside; that Shertok's purpose in going to London would be to create a formula for harmonious working of the Executive and Ben Gurion would then return. From this point of view Shertok might be more successful, according to Kirshner if he went alone. From the point of view of representative of principles to which the movement is clearly committed, departure from which will tear the movement to pieces, it were better that Fishman and Schmarak go with Shertok.

Robert Szold did not speak at the Actions Committee. He felt it was time to have a decision; and a decision timely, even if possibly not the best decision, was more important than delay, which might produce a better decision. Robert Szold generally had not been active in the so-called crisis. He stated his position i.e. it was a mistake for Ben Gurion to resign. Ben Gurion should return. He went about his business. He inquired who was to take Ben Gurion's place from the Administrative side; - and was told that Greenbaum was acting chairman of the Executive at this meeting of the Actions Committee. He merely presented and had read, the telegram from the Z.O.A. which referred to the cablegram from the Emergency Committee that Ben Gurion should not resign.

Before he left Robert Szold was informed that Shertok would not leave Jerusalem until January; that he had urgent work in Cairo for a few weeks; and there were transportation difficulties; and that in all probability the Executive would send with Shertok when he goes, Messrs. Schmarak and Fishman to act as a committee of the Executive. The Executive knows that partition inter alia has been a subject of discussion between Chaim Weizmann and the new government Committee.