



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
107

Box
37

Folder
399

Silver, Dr. Abba Hillel, 1946.

April 26, 1946

A REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE AMERICAN ZIONIST EMERGENCY COUNCIL

by
DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER

It might be well to trace back the history of our work for the past few months to understand what transpired, and the role which American Zionists played in the developments of recent months.

(1) During the early part of August 1945 a World Zionist Conference was held in London. This Conference met under the constellation of the new Labor Government which had recently come into power. Because of the publicly professed friendship of the British Labor Party to the cause of Zionism a mood of optimism prevailed. Following the Conference, a Committee representing it called upon the new Colonial Secretary and presented to him the resolutions which were adopted at the Conference, especially the political declaration which was a re-statement of the Biltmore program, and the Jewish Commonwealth which our movement in this country had adopted and aggressively advocated.

(2) It was at this time that President Truman returned from his Conference at Potsdam. At the Press Conference on August 16 he was questioned whether there was anything about the Jewish National State discussed at Potsdam. He said that there was and that he had discussed it with Mr. Churchill and Mr. Attlee, and that they were still discussing it. He was then asked what was the American view on Palestine put forth at Potsdam. His reply was "The American view of Palestine is that we want to let as many Jews into Palestine as it is possible to let into that country. Then the matter will have to be worked out diplomatically with the British and the Arabs so that if a state can be set up there they may be able to set it up on a peaceful basis. I have no desire to send 500,000 American soldiers there to make peace in Palestine."

(3) At the meeting of the Emergency Council, held on August 28, this statement of the President was discussed and various views were presented. It was at this meeting that I expressed the thought - (as reported in the minutes.)

"Dr. Silver thought we were all agreed that the President's statement did not represent any great victory for our cause, or any considerable step forward for the movement. The one encouraging announcement in the statement was that the President of the United States took the matter up officially with the British Government and that the discussions are going on, so that the matter is no longer shelved. And clearly the purpose of the discussions is to change the status quo. The President repeats his general good will with regard to Jewish immigration into Palestine. There may be some welcome note in the fact that he speaks about a Jewish State. Beyond that there is nothing more in the statement. There is, however, that menace which has been pointed to - tremendous Arab opposition which might necessitate sending large numbers of troops to Palestine, with the implication that if there is a choice between the two, the President is prepared to give up the idea of a Jewish state.

"It is clear that we have to continue our work with increased energy and speeded up tempo. Nothing has happened to lead us to believe that we can lessen our efforts. If what we are waiting for is concerted effort on behalf of the Jews of America, and knowing that discussions are going on which might face us with a fait accompli, there is need for immediate action on the part of American Zionists. That action must comprise all approaches, to Government officials at the highest level, to intellectuals, etc. Every avenue of propaganda should be utilized.

The members of the Committee felt that an interview with the President should be sought forthwith, and that an intensive program of political pressure and public education, including perhaps a national petition, should be inaugurated.

(4) On August 31 President Truman wrote his letter to Prime Minister Attlee on the basis of the report which he had received from Earl Harrison, requesting favorable consideration for 100,000 immigration certificates for the displaced Jews in the internment camps of Germany. This fact was not made publicly known until two weeks later.

(5) In the meantime we received a cable from the Executive of the Jewish Agency in London, stating that they had been offered by the Colonial Office 1500 certificates as the balance on the White Paper, and that a monthly maximum of 1500 would be maintained thereafter. The Agency refused to accept these permits inasmuch as its application for 100,000 certificates had been before the Government for two months. It had also informed the Colonial Office that now that the war is over the Executive could not possibly be party to or enter into discussion of any arrangements which were based on the White Paper of 1939. It also informed us that all its discussions with the Government had led to no change, and that this means in effect that the White Paper is continuing in force, that immigration into Palestine was practically at a standstill, and the land regulations remain unrepealed. In the meantime, the position of the inmates of the camps in Germany and Italy remain unbearable and liable to become critical with the advent of winter. The Executive requested us to do our utmost regarding immediate grant of our immigration claims and the abrogation of the White Paper "even before consideration of the position of our main proposals."

The Emergency Council meeting on September 19 was greatly impressed by this cable and proceeded to outline a campaign of action, but in the meantime (quoting the minutes of that meeting) "Danger of pressing the demand for 100,000 certificates instead of fighting for the full program was stressed. It was agreed that we cannot have one line here and another in London, and it was therefore moved and passed that we communicate with the Jewish Agency Executive in London by telephone and indicate to them the danger of placing all the emphasis on the demand for an immediate allocation of certificates and the exclusion of a fundamental solution at this time."

On September 18 there was a dispatch from Jerusalem, stating that Jews there were alarmed by a dispatch from "Reuters" which revealed that all major Zionist demands had been rejected in a report submitted to the cabinet by a sub-committee, appointed by Prime Minister Attlee, to draft Labor Government's policy with regard to Palestine.

This report, according to Reuters, made the following recommendations, among others:

(1) that Jewish demands for the abolition of the Jewish White Paper should be rejected. The demands for free immigration under Jewish control, as well as for the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish State, were declared to be unquestionable. (2) the future Palestine policy of the British Government should be based on the White Paper, but amended for the time being to permit a maximum of 1500 Jewish immigrants monthly. Similarly, the restrictions on land acquisition should remain in force and be amended only "by some delimitations on three zones."

(6) On the basis of the request of the Jewish Agency and the press reports which had reached us, reinforced by another cable received from the Executive in London on September 23 in which it was stated that "proper, immediate reaction of Jewish and general American opinion may perhaps still avert this catastrophic step," the Emergency Council determined upon launching a vigorous nationwide protest action to arouse the country and to bring pressure upon our Government. Great demonstration meetings were held all over the country. In New York City two huge rallies took place on September 30 in Madison Square Garden, and on October 24 at the big open-air demonstration in Madison Square Park. A national Emergency Council of representatives from all over the United States was convoked in Washington on October 4, and a full-dress debate took place both in the House and in the Senate on October 1 and October 16, in which numerous Senators and Congressmen participated, denouncing the White Paper and championing the cause of the Jewish Commonwealth. In addition, impressive full-page advertisements appeared in many of the principal papers of the country.

A large number of important American personalities were contacted, including Mr. Bernard M. Baruch, who saw both the President and the Secretary of State. Arrangements were made from this end to have Dr. Weizmann meet with Secretary Byrnes, who was in London during the latter half of September.

(7) It was not until September 29 that we were able to get our interview with President Truman. The interview was not a very satisfactory one. The President seemed to be under

great strain because of the failure of the London Conference. We must have patience, he told us. He cannot be rushed. There was too much pressure. He does not feel himself bound by past commitments. When we asked him whether he thought that his request of Prime Minister Attlee of 100,000 certificates would be granted, he said he was very hopeful.

(8) But on October 18 President Truman told his Press Conference that the British had not granted his request.

On the same day Secretary Byrnes made public the Roosevelt-Ibn Saud correspondence, in which the President assured Ibn Saud that he "would take no action in my capacity of Chief of the Executive Branch of this Government which might prove hostile to the Arab people." Secretary Byrnes emphasized that Roosevelt's assurance was also the policy of the Truman Administration.

A week later the Emergency Council presented to Secretary Byrnes a comprehensive memorandum, outlining our grievances against the State Department and the Executive Branch of our Government for its failure to take effective action to protect the interest of the Jewish National Home in the face of clear and unmistakable commitments and its general negative attitude towards our cause.

(9) It was at this time, at the meeting of the Emergency Council on October 20, that I urged upon the Council to proceed with the re-introduction of the Palestine Resolution in Congress, and the Executive of the Council voted unanimously to authorize the introduction "of an appropriate Joint Congressional Resolution." After Senators Wagner and Taft had seen both the President and the Secretary of State, the Palestine Resolution was introduced in the Senate on October 26.

(10) But while the discussions were going on about the pending Palestine Resolution in Congress, President Truman and Foreign Secretary Bevin announced the appointment of the Joint Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry. Both the President and the State Department now declared themselves publicly as opposed to the passage of the Palestine Resolution in Congress since this Committee was to ascertain the facts. Mr. Bevin's

covering statement in the House of Commons and a subsequent statement at a press conference, aroused both the fear and the indignation of Zionists all over the country. In the light of his statement that he was opposed to a Jewish State in Palestine and his failure even to mention the Jewish National Home, Zionists everywhere came to look upon the Committee of Inquiry not only as a device for procrastination but as a vehicle through which the Jewish rights in Palestine were to be curtailed or liquidated.

At this time, too, President Truman declared himself as being opposed to a Jewish State.

(11) When the reports first appeared in the press to the effect that a Joint Committee was to be appointed, which was to investigate the position of the Jews of Europe and in Palestine, Dr. Wise and I were authorized to send a telegram to the President, with a copy to the Secretary of State Byrnes, opposing the appointment of such a commission. A lengthy telegram was dispatched to the President on October 30 from which I quote the following sentences: "We beg of you not to countenance further commissions and inquiries at a continued cost in human life and human misery, which can only ascertain facts already well known. What is urgently needed is not another roving expedition or a further time-consuming investigation, but immediate concrete measures in conformity with a policy long established and clearly defined by valid international agreements . . . We would like to stress as forcibly as we can the dangers of further postponement and evasion of the central inescapable issue. That issue is the fulfillment of the international pledges given to the Jewish people, based on their historical connection with Palestine, to facilitate their settlement in that country and the re-establishment there of their National Home. It is evident that commissions are no substitute for action clearly indicated." Copies of this cable were also sent to Dr. Weizmann and the London Office, and our friends in Washington were apprised of the contents of the wire to the President.

(12) At the meeting of the Emergency Council on November 14, attended also by Dr. Weizmann, the statements of Mr. Bevin and the President, in connection with the announce-

ment of the appointment of a Committee of Inquiry on the day before, were fully discussed and analyzed. While there was some difference of opinion as to whether we should ultimately appear before the Committee or not, there was no disagreement on the decision that we should violently condemn and protest the appointment of such a committee and the President's yielding to British pressure. Suggestions were made to hold protest meetings and the closing of shops, that newspapers should be flooded with letters of protest, that constituents should descend on their Congressmen, that a large scale advertising program be undertaken, etc.

(13) The appointment of the Committee was almost universally condemned by the Jewish press as a stalling device and one fraught with political danger to our movement. There was a widespread opinion that the Zionist movement should not cooperate with the committee. I shared that view. There was a difference of opinion among the members of our Executive Committee. The representatives of the Poale Zion, speaking for their body, were in favor of appearing before the Committee. The Hadassah reported a majority opinion of its Board as favorable to appearing before the Committee but there was a minority opinion against. The Mizrachi was opposed. The ZOA, by majority vote, expressed its opposition. The Emergency Council as such, however, took no final action.

On November 23 I left for Palestine to attend the sessions of the Executive of the Jewish Agency. At its meetings this subject was thoroughly discussed, and the Executive was evenly divided on the issue. Mr. Ben-Gurion, Chairman of the Executive Committee, strongly urged that the Jewish Agency should not appear before the Committee. The Smaller Actions Committee, by a small majority, decided in favor of participation.

(14) Upon my return from Palestine I reported to the Emergency Council on December 24 of the discussions which took place in Palestine on this subject, and of the decision which was reached. It was then clear that we must do two things: (1) Make as thorough and effective a presentation of our case before the Committee of Inquiry as possible.

(2) Bring the maximum pressure upon our Government so ^{as} to influence the recommendations of at least the American members of the Commission that their recommendations will not harm our cause. It was my view that whatever good would result from the Committee would be brought about, not by the dictates of Justice, but by political considerations of importance to the Administration and the Democratic Party. Both of these tasks were carried out energetically.

The entire machinery of the Emergency Council was put into high gear to prepare a proper presentation of our case before the Committee in Washington. You have received a complete report of that.

In the face of the opposition of the President and the Secretary of State, action on the Palestine Resolution in Congress was aggressively pushed and the Resolution was finally adopted by an overwhelming vote in both Houses of Congress.

(15) Every avenue was explored to make the proper approaches to our Government in connection with the report of the Committee of Inquiry. We employed important counsel in Washington, who followed through with their assignments professionally. Key people in the Administration were seen. From various sources and through people close to the Administration and to the Democratic Party, it was brought home to those who could make decisions that an unfavorable report would create widespread indignation and resentment among the Jews of the United States, whose political help could not be ignored in 1946 or in 1948. Two delegations, one representing the Speaker of the House and the Democratic Majority Leader of the House and the Majority Leader of the Senate, and the other composed of six Democratic Senators, called on two successive days and saw the President in connection with the report of the Committee of Inquiry. A detailed report of Mr. Leo Sack, of how these meetings were arranged and prepared for, was presented to the Council at the meeting of April 18, and is appended herewith. In April 1946 the President had a far better understanding of the whole situation and of the attitude of American Jews to the question of Palestine than he had when we saw him at the White House in September of 1945. There is no

doubt but that it was his two telegrams, sent from the White House to Switzerland, which followed the intensive work done by us, which were responsible for the change of heart on the part of some of the members of the American Delegation after they left Jerusalem. We were appealed to time and again by our friends, especially members of the Jewish Agency who followed the hearings of the Committee and who were in close touch with some of its members, to do our utmost to bring pressure from the White House upon the Committee. We did our utmost and, to a degree, we succeeded.

(16) We sent Mr. Arthur Lourie and Mr. Gerold Frank to accompany the Committee to England, the Continent, Palestine, and other countries of the Middle East. Both Mr. Lourie and Mr. Frank remained in Lausanne, in constant touch with friendly members of the Committee, while the report was being prepared. It is clear from Mr. Lourie's reports that both staff members played vitally important roles throughout the Committee's deliberations, and supplied American members with much-needed information at crucial moments. Indeed, it can be gathered that Mr. Lourie has served in the capacity of unofficial American Zionist consultant to Committee members Crum, McDonald and Buxton. Mr. Frank arranged the interview with Msgr. Moubarek, Lebanese Christian leader, whose pro-Zionist statement was widely reported in the press. Other of Mr. Frank's press dispatches proved most helpful in advancing the Zionist case.

(17) At my direction, Mr. Harry Shapiro achieved the active cooperation of a prominent Southern lawyer, a non-Jew who is very high in the councils of the Democratic Party. In January 1946 this man spoke with James Farley, pointing out that among American Jews the trend was against the Democratic Party because of the Administration's handling of the Palestine question. In February, the same gentleman spoke along the same lines to Postmaster General Hannegan. On April 7th, this man and Mr. Abe Tuvim met with Judge Moore, of the U.S. District Court of Missouri, a close friend and confidant of both President Truman and Mr. Hannegan.

Mr. Tuvim, speaking as an Administration supporter who was ^{"losing} ~~lost~~ faith" declared that this feeling was general among American Jews and that some way must be found to restore Jewish confidence in the Administration. Judge Moore expressed a desire that Mr. Tuvim meet with Mr. Hannegan immediately. Inasmuch as Mr. Hannegan was then in Arizona for his health and Mr. Tuvim was engaged in organizing an important Christian Conference for Palestine, Judge Moore advised our Southern friend to fly to Arizona without delay. This was done, and the urgency of the situation from the Democratic Party's point of view was driven home to Mr. Hannegan.

(18) Towards the end of March, Mr. Shapiro contacted another key figure in the Democratic Party leadership - a New Yorker whose views command the respect of men like Mr. Hannegan and Richard B. Nacy, vice-chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Mr. Shapiro pointed out to him that the last Presidential election might have been lost to the Democrats if the Jews had voted against the Administration. This argument was substantiated by a table of figures, compiled by Mr. Leo Sack, of our Washington Office, which proved conclusively that if an organized effort had been made to express Jewish resentment against the Administration at the polls, the Republicans might have won the election. After studying the figures, the gentleman was quick to agree that Mr. Shapiro's evaluation was correct. He asked for a copy of the breakdown, stating that he wanted to call it to the attention of Party leaders. Mr. Hannegan was then in Arizona and our friend did not wish to delay action on the matter, so he decided to see Mr. Nacy, vice-chairman of the Democratic National Committee, who is a personal friend and adviser of the President. He left for Washington immediately and showed Mr. Nacy the figures which he had obtained from Mr. Shapiro.

Mr. Nacy then went to see the President and gave him the aforementioned breakdown of the 1944 vote. The President was deeply impressed and asked that a memorandum be submitted by our New York friend covering the points raised by Mr. Nacy. On April 4th, Mr. Shapiro and Mr. Harold Manson met with the gentleman from New York and discussed what should be included in the memorandum. Following this,

Mr. Manson prepared a letter which was sent to Mr. Nacy for transmission to the President over the signature of the Democratic leader from New York. The text of this letter is appended.

