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American Zionist Emergency Council, minutes, 1949.

3/7/49

AMERICAN ZIONIST EMERGENCY COUNCIL

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AMERICAN ZIONIST COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING

June 16, 1949

A meeting of the American Zionist Council was held on Thursday, June 16, 1949, at 9:00 P.M., at 342 Madison Avenue, New York City.

PRESENT

Dr. Abba Hillel Silver (presiding), Miss Juliet Benjamin, David Breslau, Benjamin Browdy, Pinchas Cruso, Beinish Epstein, Miss H. Goldberg, Paul Goldman, Mrs. Benjamin Gottesman, Mrs. David B. Greenberg, Rabbi Max Kirshblum, Dr. Harry Levi, Dr. Samuel Margoshes, Avraham Schenker, Louis Segal, Harry Torczyner, Yehuda Tubin, Mrs. Abraham Tulin, Yehuda Tyberg, David Wertheim, Baruch Zuckerman.

Mrs. Zelda Funk, Judge Bernard A. Rosenblatt, Dr. Ignacy Schwarzbart, Abraham Tulin, Rabbi Jerome Unger, Leo Wolfson.

Dr. Benjamin Akzin, Eliahu Ben-Horin, Beatrice Cohen, Arnold K. Israeli, William Kaufman, Dr. Benjamin Shwadran, Harry Steinberg, Abe Tuvim.

REPORTS ON POLITICAL SITUATION

Dr. Silver reviewed the political developments of the last few weeks centering around the negotiations in Lausanne, the armistice negotiations between Israel and Syria, and the problems of boundaries, status of Jerusalem and the Arab refugee situation. It is clear from many indications, and most especially from the official statement of the Israeli Foreign Minister made before the Knesset, that the relationship of our own government towards the political interests of the State of Israel have in recent months undergone grave deterioration. The outcome of the Gaza proposal is another indication of the negative attitude on the part of our government towards Israel. It seems that a proposal was made by the Egyptian Government to the State of Israel to take over almost one-quarter of a million Arab refugees now found in an area known as the Gaza Strip, and in compensation for the economic burden which Israel would take on, the Egyptian Government would be prepared to turn over to the State of Israel that strip of land of about 125 square miles. The proposal was made by Egypt and approved by Mr. Ethridge, as far as we can gather. After serious deliberation, the State of Israel was prepared to accede. Later the United States changed its mind and the proposal, which would have solved a considerable part of the Arab refugee problem, was left suspended in mid air.

Aggravating the political situation here is the pressure of the Catholic Church, which is directed two ways: first, towards the internationalization of Jerusalem, and secondly, in the matter of the refugees.

Mr. Tuvim reported on the activities of the Council in drawing the attention of several influential persons to the present crisis. The Council has not yet appealed for widespread public support because it felt that this should not be done without consultation with other interested parties, and these consultations are still proceeding. But the Council has prepared for such action. The local Councils have been alerted through material sent out by the Council both on the refugee question and on the political issues.

Another difficulty is indicated in a report from our Washington office that Senators and Congressmen have been flooded with messages from Catholic constituents on Jerusalem and on the refugee question. In reply, it is planned to prepare a memorandum, preferably using the material contained in Mr. Eban's last speech before the U.N. and also material out of Msgr. McMahon's report.

Dr. Akzin reported that a circular memorandum was sent to the local chairmen with material with which they were asked to acquaint their local editors, and that personal contacts were made with certain important newspapers. He further reported concerning the attitude of President Truman at this time and concerning further plans of contacts in Washington.

Mr. Ben-Horin said that the developments of the last few days confirmed the impression that everything hinged on the two problems of the refugees and Jerusalem. If a definite solution of the refugee question had been found, such a situation as has arisen would have been impossible. If the question of Jerusalem is solved, then the Catholic campaign against us is finished.

On the question of refugees, Mr. Ben-Horin saw a considerable number of people in the last few weeks, speaking to them about the advisability of a speedy inauguration of the "Hoover Plan" in line with his recent memorandum. He met generally with approval, and in some cases with enthusiastic approval. The latest news was that at a meeting in the State Department with the participation of McGhee, new Assistant Secretary of State in charge of the Near East, representatives of oil companies, of the Catholic Near East Relief, of Protestants, of Quakers, etc., it was agreed that a committee to study Arab refugee resettlement was necessary. Mr. Hoover was generally favored as chairman. Should he refuse, William Clayton and William Batt were mentioned. Mr. Ben-Horin was able to give assurances to the person who told him of the meeting and who participated in it, that Mr. Hoover would accept. This person said he would immediately communicate this information to Mr. McGhee.

Mr. Ben-Horin further reported that according to a reliable source, friendlier influences are gaining the ascendancy in the Vatican.

DISCUSSION

Mr. Segal urged that mass action be undertaken immediately, in addition to the individual contacts already made.

Mr. Cruso questioned the inclusion of a certain passage in a recent circular to local Councils containing Mr. Ben-Horin's memorandum on Arab refugee resettlement. He thought corrective action should be taken.

Mr. Tuvim thought a new circular to the local Councils would only draw more attention to the questioned passage.

Mr. Ben-Horin explained that the statement in question was not originally written for local chairmen, but was a memorandum for the President. He said that the section objected to might have been omitted from the circular to the local chairmen, but that once sent out it could not be withdrawn.

Dr. Silver said he was inclined to agree with Mr. Cruso. It was an oversight, but an understandable one.

Mr. Segal suggested that immediately after the consultations concerning mass action are completed, a special meeting of the Council be called to consider specific proposals.

Dr. Silver said that this would be done if possible, but that the Inner Committee of the Council was empowered to act at a moment's notice.

REPORT OF NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Mr. Torczyner, reporting for the Nominating Committee, said that the resolution which he would submit was the result of serious effort by all the parties on the Committee to find a solution which would insure the continuation of the work of the Council in a spirit of cooperation and harmony. Some of the organizations made sacrifices in order to arrive at a solution. It is a temporary solution, to cover a period of three months, and then the problem will have to be reconsidered. The solution arrived at is a praesidium. The resolution was adopted by the Committee with six votes in favor and one abstention, which marks the large area of agreement reached after lengthy debate and negotiation. At no time before the final vote was it necessary to take a vote or to pass on any nomination. No nomination was made, no vote was taken, and there was no division.

RESOLVED that a Praesidium consisting of four individuals with equal status and equal (later amended to: joint) authority be designated for a period of three months, at the expiration of which the permanent leadership of the Council will be determined. The four individuals nominated by the Nominating Committee are: Mr. Benjamin G. Browdy, Mrs. Judith Epstein, Mr. Baruch Zuckerman and Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein.

Mr. B. Epstein said that his party voted for this arrangement but did it very reluctantly, because they do not consider the arrangement a practical one. It will result in inefficiency and indecision. The responsibility for this situation must be placed squarely on the ZOA, on Hadassah and on the Poale-Zion. It was the persistent stubbornness and maneuvering of these three groups that did not permit the Nominating Committee to nominate a chairman.

Mr. Goldman said that his party, Achdut Avodah-Poale Zion, had abstained in the Nominating Committee vote. They did this not because they were opposed to the solution, which at this juncture may be the only solution possible, but because, once a praesidium was proposed, provision should have

been made to include a fifth member to represent the smaller parties in the Council. The vote of Achdut Avodah, therefore, is not against the praesidium, but its abstention is a protest against the omission of a fifth representative.

Mr. Wolfson asked how it was possible for four people to function individually with individual authority. Does the Council really contemplate having four presidents or has some rule been adopted setting forth how these four are going to function?

Mr. Torczyner said that the point was well taken. It was considered by the Committee. The four chairmen are to have joint responsibility and they will act jointly and not severally. To clarify the point, the words "equal authority" in the resolution were changed to "joint authority."

Mr. Schenker of Hashomer Hatzair pointed out that the affirmative vote by the representative of his party on the Nominating Committee had been withdrawn, and Hashomer Hatzair wished it recorded that it abstained from voting for the resolution of the Nominating Committee.

Motion made, seconded and carried that the resolution of the Nominating Committee, with the change noted above, be adopted, four votes (Achdut Avodah and Hashomer Hatzair) abstaining.

Rabbi Kirshblum appealed to the parties that had abstained from voting that they refrain from making a public statement to this effect. Such a statement would weaken the new leadership of the Council and would be unjust to the four members of the Praesidium. The action of the abstaining parties should remain an inner record of our deliberations and not be placed on public record.

Mr. Goldman replied that he did not know what his party would decide to do and he could not be bound by Rabbi Kirshblum's recommendation.

Dr. Silver pointed out that it was only a suggestion and was not binding.

Mr. Torczyner presented the following additional resolution unanimously adopted by the Nominating Committee:

In recognition and appreciation of the eminent service to the Zionist cause by Dr. Abba Hillel Silver as Chairman of the American Zionist Emergency Council, the Nominating Committee resolves that Dr. Silver be elected Honorary Chairman of the American Zionist Council.

Motion made, seconded and unanimously carried that the above resolution be adopted by the Council.

REMARKS BY DR. SILVER

Dr. Silver: A word about the set-up for the next three months, which will be perhaps my last word to you as active Chairman. I want to thank this body not only for the marked honor which you have conferred upon me in electing me Honorary Chairman, but for the privilege you granted me in these last great years in the history of our movement to be your Chairman. These have

been precious years of my life and I shall treasure them. And while our meetings occasionally were stormy, it was due, I am sure, almost entirely to the fact that the political waters were very stormy, and when the storm breaks upon the seas, ships sometimes go up and down in an uncontrolled way. We have had our set-tos and sharp differences of opinion, at times very sharp, because we are all determined people and we have strong convictions. But for a body that represented five and, towards the end, six different political orientations, different political, economic and social points of view, we have worked together calmly to a remarkable degree, and we were able to accomplish that which our movement summoned us to accomplish.

I am not entirely happy over this arrangement for the next three months, as I am sure you are not. The kind of organization we are, the kind of problems we will have to face, require a more streamlined type of organization. I have personally been accused from time to time of being a dictator. I assure you, by temperament I am not a dictator. But this work in which we are engaged cannot be accomplished successfully unless there is the closest kind of coordination and the strongest kind of leadership. I have always looked upon this position not as that of a presiding officer, but as the head of an organization, who must give guidance and must assume responsibility, though not in an autocratic way. The man who does the work here will not be able to do it unless he has a great deal of authority and unless you permit him a great deal of authority and initiative. Therefore, dividing authority among four people may be a satisfactory stop-gap because you were unable to reach agreement on one man, but it is not a good solution and it cannot be a permanent solution, and you will realize that before very long. You ought to get together on one person. Give him a chance. If he is not good, substitute somebody else for him. Get a man for this position who has energy, a great deal of time to devote to it, who will not take it as an additional job but will make this, as I believe I have made it, his life's work. Nothing stood in the way -- not professional duties nor family. That is the kind of person you must find. If you find him, and if he doesn't have all the qualities you would like to see in a person, remember that nobody has them. Give him support, give him loyalty, give him a chance to work. Our work for the next few years, I believe, will be, on another level, on another terrain, as arduous, as pressing, as urgent, and, next to the establishment of the State of Israel, as important as anything we have done in the past. The greatest problems which a new State can face are being faced today, and we are up against the same situation which we were up against with our government time and time again, a withdrawal on the part of the Chief Executive from leadership and a negative, hostile attitude on the part of the State Department.

I think you should not deviate from the lines you have pursued in the last few years. They have been tested and found reliable. Rely upon the masses, upon the people, upon the American people, upon the Jewish people. Work with them and through them, and call upon them whenever you need help. That will register. I do not mean that we should ignore contacts with important people. But the main strength of our position in Washington will be the support of the people. The influence of the individuals that you will send will depend on whether you can keep alerted on the American scene a great friendly public.

Finally, as I step out of the active chairmanship, I want to express

my profoundest appreciation for this extraordinary group of men and women that this Emergency Council has providentially succeeded in gathering in to do our work. I do not know of any organization in America which has been as fortunate in having the right people for the right job in the far-flung activities in which we have engaged in the Emergency Council. To the same extent the Government of Israel has been extremely fortunate, that when it needed the right people in key jobs, it got them. As you know, my attitude has always been, and I am handing it down to you as a testament and a legacy, once you find the right professional personality, don't ride him, let him do the work, give him the freest and fullest scope. Lay down policy, naturally, but don't sit on his sleeve and look over his shoulder every minute. Get the best men, as you have done, and give them free scope to work, because that brings out the best in a person. We have had in our organization, many of them are still here, men like Manson, Shapiro, Tuvim, Ben-Horin, Akzin, Isreeli, Shulamith Schwartz, Kaufman, Shwadran, Steinberg, Sternstein, Mrs. Shepard, Miss Cohen, and -- in Washington -- Leo Sack and Schulson. Each one had a big job and each one did it well. I want to thank them personally, more than words can express, for the extraordinary devotion they have given to our work, day and night. At a moment's notice, men were torn away from their homes and sent to another city or another country, and they went without question, and they are still doing it.

I am happy that I will remain in your midst and not only as Honorary Chairman. I hope I will be an active member and sit around the table and think through our problems together with you.

Mr. Zuckerman, speaking for his group, said that he, too, was very unhappy that one man could not be found to head the Council. He believed, however, that such a man would be found before the three months had elapsed, and it would be everyone's aim to look for him.

B.A.

Meeting adjourned 10:15 P.M.