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Palestine Revisited, 1947.



PALESTINE REVISITED

By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, April 6, 1947

From the reading of the public press one might gather the impression that there is nothing in Palestine today but violence and turmoil and bomb-throwing and explosions. That, I am afraid, is a distorted view, a picture entirely out of focus. Here and there there is a flare-up of violence in Palestine. I arrived there shortly after the bombing of the Officers' Club in the City of Jerusalem where quite a few lost their lives. A few days after I left Palestine, on my return home, the oil tanks at Haifa were set aflame. During part of my stay in that country, the City of Tel Aviv was under martial law. The movement of its civilians was sharply restricted; and of course their business activities were considerably interrupted. During all my stay the City of Jerusalem was under curfew, one could not be on the streets of the city after six o'clock in the evening. This was a considerable inconvenience although it did permit some harassed travelers to catch up on sleep.

While I was in Palestine two ship loads of refugees of so-called illegal immigrants arrived and the soldiers of Great Britain had to carry out Mr. Bevin's dirty work of driving these refugees away from the shores of the Jewish National Home. One ship actually succeeded in evading the blockade while the others were sent back to the detention camps in Cypress.

In Palestine one sees today almost everywhere British military tanks and armored cars, and on the roads, an amazing number. Great Britain is complaining that it can't support its ten thousand troops in Greece and Uncle Sam is invited to come to the rescue of its impoverished Exchequer. But Great Britain is able to finance 100 thousand troops in Palestine, the largest concentration of troops today in an area that small. And in Washington they haven't yet asked the question or found the answer for it -- why should we take over Great Britain's financial commitments in Greece and at the same time watch Great Britain spend huge sums of money, ~~the~~ tens of millions of pounds annually to retain a huge army in Palestine?

One sees barbed wire almost everywhere. I didn't know there was so much barbed wire until I came to Palestine. And behind that barbed wire is the proud British Empire barricaded like a besieged city, barricaded against the Jews of Palestine, the most peaceful folk that ever came to build there with their own labor and sweat and substance. The country that fifty-two nations declared to be the Jewish National Home.

All these are visible evidences of a high state of tension, a degree of conflict and smoldering resentment which one finds in Palestine today. And these are the dramatic facts which make the newspaper headlines which you read in your newspapers here and all over the country. And they are real. They are menacingly real.

But there are other real facts in the Palestine situation. There are other real events which are even more important and which must be taken into account if you wish to get a true picture of the real situation in the Holy Land today. The country today, Palestine, is busily at work and prosperous. There is no unemployment in Palestine. There is a great demand for labor. Trade and industry are expanding in spite of the straight-jacket in which the Sterling bloc finds itself which makes it difficult for the country to import goods and with the consequence of excessively high cost of living in Palestine.

In the cities one sees a great amount of building going on, construction, new business quarters are springing up, new residential quarters, new shops, factories, new public buildings all over the country — at a remarkable tempo.

I had occasion to visit a few of these centers during my short visit in the City of Natanyah which was founded some years ago in honor of Nathan Strauss, a city between Tel Aviv and Haifa on the coast, a beautiful city which has now become the center of the diamond industry in the country and which also has some very important canning factories. In the City of Netanyah I found hundreds of ex-

servicemen, Jews who had fought in the British Army, busily engaged in building great new sections, quarters for new factories, new homes, with the most modern machinery.

In the same town of Netanyah I was privileged to lay the cornerstone of a new residential section that the community graciously founded in my honor and called N'vai Abba. It was thrilling to take the stone and lay the foundation of a new community. And they told me that within a year or so there would be hundreds of new homes in that section. And it will expand.

In another city, a suburb of Tel Aviv, called Ramat Gan, a beautiful city of some 15,000 people which prides itself on some 13 public parks. Ramat Gan is manufacturing today silk and aluminum ware, refrigerators, shoes, plastics and a new chemical industry is developing very rapidly in that city. In Ramat Gan they bestowed upon me an honorary citizenship so in case I should try to leave Cleveland there is a city to welcome me. A remarkable amount of building is going on in that community of Ramat Gan. Not to speak of the great cities of Haifa and Tel Aviv and also Jerusalem where there is a tempo of construction reminiscent of the speed and abundance of energy and the over-flowing confidence of energy of the pioneering life in this country. A great number of public buildings are being erected at this time of turmoil and difficulty. I participated in a ceremony on Mt. Scopus where the foundation was laid for adding to the perfectly magnificent group of hospital buildings of the Hadassah in Jerusalem.

And similarly in the fields of agriculture and colonization, whether it is the colonies of the small holders settlements of the workers or of the collective settlements, the kibbutzim, everywhere you find expansion, growth, new settlements new colonies. I also had the privilege of being present at the dedication of new colonies build on land purchased by the B'nai Zion, an organization in the United States.

An area where new Jewish colonies are springing up almost over night is the Negev which is to the extreme South of Palestine and which up to now was looked

upon as desert. The Negev which is about 45% of the area of the whole country was nothing but waste and sand with a few wandering bedouins. Into that area young Jews of Palestine moved and are moving in today. A few weeks before I arrived, in one day, eleven new colonies were built in the Negev. The colonists had to cart water dozens of miles, water to drink, water for irrigation, water for the cattle. They carted the water in barrels and tanks. But they have now begun to lay a pipe-line. Before long that area will be as beautiful and productive as the Emek.... Given the possibility of irrigation, there is an inexhaustible supply of cultivatable land in the Negev.

So that, everywhere, in spite of the interference of the Mandatory Government there is going on in Palestine today a rapidly evolving expanding enterprise, pioneering life which one ought to bear in mind when one reads the headlines in the newspapers. Life is going on. The Jews of Palestine are not to be deterred. They are full of courage, confidence, plans and dynamics. This is no exaggeration. This is no propaganda.

The day after the martial law was lifted in Tel Aviv I attended a performance in Tel Aviv of the Habimah -- Edifice Rex -- in Hebrew of course. It was a perfectly magnificent production. Here were hundreds and hundreds of Jews from Tel Aviv who had come out of martial law sitting there listening to this magnificent drama as if there were nothing that happened and confident that nothing can happen. They were there.

That night I visited a home where some 40 or 50 of the leading people were present and they spent the evening discussing plans for the future, singing, dancing -- and the British were behind the barbed wire. They were determined to resist this lawless mandatory regime. There is a sharp disagreement as to the form which this resistance should take. And this sharp disagreement may lead to serious consequences. And that is something against which the Jews of Palestine

will have to guard themselves. There is in Palestine the great resistance organization, the semi-official body known as the Haganah which from all reports has some 70 to 80 thousand members which has been devoting itself in recent months exclusively to the task of bringing refugees on ships to Palestine and trying to run the blockade. This body, the Haganah, accepts national discipline and tries to coordinate its activities... And as far as possible, the Haganah tries to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. But the fact that the Haganah has in recent months limited its activities to bringing ships to Palestine has given the opportunity for another resistance movement an underground resistance movement in Palestine which is bent on much more intensive and violent resistance -- that is the Irgun Zvi Leumi. This body has officially declared war on the British Mandatory regime and conducts its activities as though it it faces enemies in the country. And many of its acts, as you know, have led to bloodshed and many of its acts have brought down upon them sharp denunciation of the Yishuv itself, the official representative Jewish body in Palestine. And there is a great danger that serious conflict may develop between these two bodies and that third and most extreme though smallest group, the Sternist group.

There is a great need in Palestine today for great statesmanship which will persuade this Aitzel group to submit to national discipline --- else it might lead to very serious consequences. But all Jews in Palestine are determined to resist the lawlessness of the present regime, who are trying to keep the doors of Palestine shut against the Jews who have every right to enter the country.

The Jews are not fighting the Arabs of Palestine. They are fighting the British not the Arabs. The Arabs have been not only correct in their relationship to the Jews, but from what I was told in many instances friendly and helpful.

There is the story of the prominent Jew in Haifa who owned a store. An Arab friend entered his store and said to him: "You are a donkey." And the man said, "What do you mean?" "You are a donkey. I am a donkey," replied the Arab,

"and Great Britain is riding us both." They understand, the Arabs do, that regardless of what the politicians at the top say, that England's measure against the Jews are not intended to help the Arabs. They intend to maintain the power and might of the British in Palestine. And they are just as much opposed to Jewish independence in Palestine as they are to Arab independence.

The last time I was in Palestine was some fifteen months ago -- toward the end of 1945. The political situation has gravely deteriorated since then...Bevin is determined to liquidate Zionism. Mr. Bevin has a simple line -- very simple. While he is a very shrewd man, on the subject of Palestine, he is grossly ignorant. Mr. Bevin knows the Jews of the world are very anxious to get the refugees from the DP Camps into Palestine. He has heard of the Jews' determination to get at least 100 thousand refugees into Palestine. Mr. Bevin is prepared to agree to that. But there is one condition -- that the Jews sacrifice their entire future rights -- all their rights are to be surrendered for the privilege of bringing in these 100 thousand refugees. These 100 thousand are being held as hostages. That is his line. That is why when the President of the United States urged, nearly two years ago, that 100 thousand certificates be issued immediately to the Jews in the DP camps to permit them to go to Palestine (men, women and children who had never known what the word home meant) -- when President Truman asked on a humanitarian basis that 100 thousand certificates be immediately issued, Bevin and Attlee refused. Instead, as part of a delaying device, a pressure device, they suggested that a committee of investigation make a study of the facts of the DP camps -- facts that everybody knew. They said on the report 120 days and no more would be spent/ because the situation was so grave and urgent. And the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry investigated and brought in its recommendations that these hundred thousand be allowed to go into that country in 1946, that land restrictions be removed. Immediately Mr. Attlee and Mr. Bevin replied -- no -- that before that could be permitted (1) the Haganah should be dissolved, (2) that U.S. must promise material aid in Palestine. And months went

by and none of our refugees were permitted to go into that country. And finally Mr. Bevin came forth with the notorious Grady-Morrison proposals — the liquidation of Zionist Rights to the Jewish National Home. In place of the mandate, it was proposed that the Jews be given provincial autonomy in an area 1/5 the size of Palestine — 1400 square miles. The original Palestine, under the Balfour Declaration was 40 thousand square miles. The first partition took place when Transjordan was removed. In the remaining 1400 square miles ~~x~~ no Jewish state was to be set up but the Jews were to have provincial autonomy. I suppose they would be permitted to have their own fire department in it. And immigration even in that area will be ultimately controlled by the High Commissioner, not by the Jews themselves. Great Britain remains the sole trustee over the whole of Palestine besides staking out for itself a large zone of its own. That was the Grady-Morrison Proposal.

That was rejected and by the American Government, too.

Then there followed within the year, you will remember, the proposals of the Executive of the Jewish Agency as a maximum effort to solve the problem of Palestine. The Jewish Agency proposed a great sacrifice. In my judgment it was an unwise proposals, namely to partition Palestine, to set up two states, a Jewish and an Arab state...The Jewish Agency thought this plan was so fair, so just that Great Britain would grab up this plan. But that wasn't in Bevin's mind at all. He didn't want an independent Jewish state. He didn't want an independent Arab State in Palestine.....

After those proposals were made, the Zionist Congress met in Basle. I reported to you the resolutions which were adopted. Mr. Bevin in the meantime had called a Jewish-Arab Conference in London to discuss the situation further. The Congress said that we should not go to that London Conference unless conditions changed. But some of our people did go not to official meetings of the conference,

but did go to unofficial meetings. And ^{at} the result of these numerous unofficial talks it became clear that Bevin was determined to force upon the Jews his plan and that he would accept no other plan. And he thereupon announced that having failed to bring the Arabs and Jews into an agreement he was now going to turn the entire matter over to the United Nations. He however had no intention of giving the Mandate over Palestine to the United Nations. We discussed this matter in Jerusalem at the meeting of the Executive of the Jewish Agency and we are persuaded that Great Britain has no intention of giving up the mandate. They want to exchange it for another mandate. They want a new model mandate which will relieve Great Britain of all pro-Jewish responsibility ...The Colonial Secretary said as much... Last week there appeared a reported dispatch from London in which he writes:

"The British have definitely decided not to relinquish their mandate in Palestine to the United Nations when the General Assembly meets to consider the Palestinian problem, it was learned in an authoritative quarter today."

"In fact, the British seem determined to reserve their position all along the line and, while they do not say that they would reject any ^{United} Nations' recommendations that they surrender their mandate, they point out that the General Assembly can make only recommendations, not decisions."

"Hence, any decision must, in the final analysis, be made by the British Government and not by the United Nations. This means that the British, in effect, have given up nothing so far as Palestine is concerned. Moreover, it was made clear that they consider the present situation as 'frozen' until the United Nations makes its recommendations, if any,"

"Far from throwing their mandate down on the table of the General Assembly, the British are now in the process of considering whether they should not ask the United Nations to confirm them in their mandate, or to nominate them as trustees."

And in the official text of the British Government's request for a special session of the General Assembly, these are the words:

"His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom request the Secretary General of the United Nations to place the question of Palestine on the agenda of the General Assembly at its next regular annual session. They will submit to the Assembly an account of their administration of the League of Nations mandate and will ask the Assembly to make recommendations under Article 10 of the Charter, concerning the future government of Palestine."

And Article 10 of the Charter says, namely (Quote)

referring
- In other words, Bevin is asking through this move of/the matter to the UN is the approval of this international body to the White Paper of 1939. If Great Britain gets that approval all will be well. She will have the power of the international body to back her up. If she does not get that approval in the same way that she ignored the recommendations of the Anglo-American Inquiry will she ignore the decision of the UN after having given a pledge that Great Britain would implement these recommendations.

We resolved in Jerusalem at the meetings of the Executive to prepare our case to the United Nations when the matter came up, to prepare our case for our full rights under the mandate which gives the Jews the right of free immigration into Palestine and free colonization with the object of ultimately building Palestine into the Jewish National Home. We will present that as our demands. That is our program and on that we stand. We will tell the story of how the mandate was ~~fit~~ violated time and again by a fait accompli. We will demand of the United Nations that if Great Britain wishes to carry out the Mandate in its real spirit, which is the sole its reason for/keeping the mandate --(that is O.K.) Palestine is not part of the British Empire. However if she does not wish to carry out the obligations of the mandate, she must get out. That is what Mr. Churchill said. That is what we shall say when given the opportunity to appear before the UN or the committee to be appointed by the UN. And any other proposals which may emanate as a result of

the meetings of the UN, proposals for settlement, compromise which will safeguard our rights to colonization, immigration, we shall most thoughtfully consider.

Our American Section of the Jewish Agency was authorized to prepare the case, to do all that is necessary to mobilize support for our cause. And in this matter the attitude of our own government will be most decisive. The attitude of our own government -- that is of our own state department, is not very clear, because in the last few weeks, our government seems to have entered upon a radically new foreign policy with reference to the Middle East. The implication of this new foreign policy upon our cause is as yet not clear. The United States is entering in a very affirmative way, not to say aggressive way into the political situation in Greece and Turkey. It means to maintain a definite political line which is part of the Middle East where Palestine is an important section. It is backing up Great Britain in that part of the world. I am not now passing judgment on whether it is right or wrong. I may have something to say about it when I discuss the subject next week. Will this identification of our policy in the Middle East also mean complete identification with Great Britain with reference to Palestine or will the United States with reference to Palestine adopt a line independent of Great Britain and force Great Britain to follow it in a just solution of the Palestine problem. A clear answer has not yet been given in Washington. If the United States enters into the questions of the Middle East on a far larger scale, it is entering the Arab world. It has always had interests in an Arab world. It has interests extensive oil/in that Arab world. Will the United States Government also fall a victim that pro-Arab appeasement policy in these oil interests, or will it come to take the position that the interests of the Jewish National Home and the interests of American oil are not in conflict that oil interests of America do not demand the sacrifice of Jewish rights in Palestine. A response to that fundamental question has not been given. Therefore we do not know what position the United States will

take in the United Nations, whether the United States will take the position dictated by American public opinion, by the Congress of the United States, by its legislators, by the people of America, press for Jewish rights in Palestine..... Should the United States take not a hostile attitude, because I do not think it will every take a hostile attitude, but a neutral attitude, an uncertain ambiguous position, then our cause before the United Nations will be in danger. The line for those who are deeply concerned with believing that Jewish rights are not to be sacrificed in the game of power politics is that Palestine shall be open for our people and that the important work which was begun there years ago shall continue uninterruptedly. The line from here on is very clear. We must continue first to press all along the line for an immediate relaxation of immigration restrictions to enable our unfortunate brothers and sisters to come to Palestine. Discussions in the United Nations might take months or years. Secondly, we must mobilize all of our friends, Jews and non-Jews, and we have many great friends in the non-Jewish world, to see to it that our own government becomes our friendly advocate in the United Nations in conformity with the positions taken by our government time and again. We are not asking our government to do anything which it is unwilling to do or that is contrary to American interests or which the American people would not do.

In December, 1945 the Congress of the United States passed the following resolution: "Resolved by the Senate, the House of Representatives concurring, that the interests shown by the President in the solution of this problem is hereby commended and that the U.S. shall use its good offices with the mandatory power to the end that Palestine shall be opened for free entry of Jews into that country to the maximum of its agricultural and economic potentialities, and that there shall be full opportunity for colonization and development, so that they may freely proceed with the upbuilding of Palestine as the Jewish national home and, in association with all elements of the population, establish Palestine as a democratic commonwealth in which all men, regardless of race, or creed, shall have equal rights."

This was adopted a little over a year ago by the Congress of the United States. In July, 1945, a majority of the Congress of the U.S. addressed a letter to the President of the U.S. in which they said:

"Mr. President, we believe that the time for action is now. We respectfully urge, now that hostilities in Europe have ceased, that all powers of our Government be exerted toward the immediate fulfillment of that policy to which America is so deeply committed. We earnestly request you to use your influence with the Government of Great Britain, the Mandatory for Palestine, to open forthwith the doors of Palestine to unrestricted Jewish immigration and colonization; and we hope that you will urge all interested governments to join with the United States toward the end of establishing Palestine as a free and democratic Jewish Commonwealth at the earliest possible time."

And 40 governors of as many states in the United States a year ago sent the following memorandum to the President of the United States. I read this one paragraph:

"The policy embodied in the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate for Palestine has had the full support of every American President Democrat and Republican alike, from Woodrow Wilson to Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The American people, through the two major political parties have also recorded their unqualified support for this historic objective, for which, further, within recent months, 33 states of the U.S. representing 80 percent of the population of our country have, through resolutions adopted by their respective State Legislatures, also expressed themselves in full accord. In his historic message of October 15, 1944, President Roosevelt spoke for the overwhelming majority of the American people when he said: 'I am convinced that the American people give their support to this aim' and pledged himself to bring about at the earliest practical moment the realization of the Zionist program.

"We believe that the time has come when concrete measures must be taken to open the doors of Palestine to Jewish mass immigration and colonization and to bring about the earliest transformation of that country into a free and democratic Jewish Commonwealth, and we most earnestly urge upon you to take such action as will

contribute to this end. In any steps which, Mr. President, you may take to bring about the realization of this program we desire to assure you that you can rely upon the approbation of the American people and count on our individual support."

This, I take it, is American public opinion and this, I urge, is what the State Department should represent at the forthcoming sessions of the United Nations. Failing to do that, it will represent not the American people, but 10 Downing Street, not the will of the American people, but the oil interests in America. It is our duty in the next few months to remain on the alert to see that such a political wrong such a political disaster does not take place. I don't know what will be the outcome when this comes up before the United Nations. We can't get a worse deal than we have been getting at the hands of the British Mandatory. Of that I am sure. The issue has now been taken out of the narrow confines of one country which has its own interests, its own personal sacrificial interests involved and has been translated, transplanted to an international seat where we will have another opportunity to present the whole story. Whatever the outcome, I say to you my good friends, from what I saw not merely on this visit to Palestine, but from what I know of the temper, the mood of the people and what I know of the Jewish people outside of Palestine -- this heroic, epic, magnificent work which has been going on in Palestine for some years now in such a magnificent fashion will continue uninterruptedly into the future. The Jews are determined to build in their ancient homeland a new land for themselves and their children, finally and at long last to gain for themselves national status, a national position in a world which denied them that for 2000 years...The Jews of the world and its leadership are determined and confident and hopeful.

1/ Nothing but violence, turmoil, bomb throwing and explosions -
Distorted view - a picture out of focus.

Here and there - a flare up of violence.

I arrived shortly after the bombing of the Officers' club^{Jer.}
A few days after I left - oil tanks in Haifa.

During part of my stay - 212k-11 - under martial law -
movement of civilians - restricted; Work + Bus. activities.

During all of my stay - curfew - 6 P.M. - sleep

While I was in Pal - 2 ship loads - one loaded -
Baron's duty work

One sees military everywhere - tanks -
One sees military everywhere - tanks -

Barbed wire everywhere - behind which the crowd
Br. empire is barricaded - a besieged citadel -

2/ These are the visible evidences of a high state of tension -
of conflict - and simmering resentment.

These are the dramatic facts which make the news -
per head lines.

They are real - menacingly real.

But there are other real events + real facts which are
even more important - must be taken into account
to complete a true picture of the situation in Pal.

3/ The country is busily at work and prosperous.
There is no unemployment - demand for labor.

Trade and industry are expanding in spite of the thought-
jacket which the Sterling bloc finds itself - the difficulties
of importing goods - and the consequent excessively
high cost of living.

In the cities - a great amount of building + construction -
bus. quarters - residential quarters - new shops -
new factories - new public buildings -

In DOU - Nathan Hano - 15,000 - new demand
industry - canning factories - ex-service men -
1000 DOU -

In 17 XND - suburb of Tel Aviv - 13 parks -
Hon. Citizenship - manufacture silk, aluminum
ware, refrigerators, furniture, shoes, plastics -
- growing chemical industry - - Building

Not to speak of such other as Tel Aviv - Haifa -
- + Jerusalem - - DO3D -

4) Similarly in fields of agriculture + colonization
whether in 126N - Small holders settlements
1378 126N - workers small holders
13127 - 13127 - collective settlements

New colonies - Raanana - 13 N2 -

Negeri - 45% of area of Pal - only 4-5% of pop.
- given the possibility of irrigation there is practically

an inexhaustible supply of cultivable land". Water-trucks ⁽³⁾
10 columns in order

5/ Thus every when - in spite of interference, mandatory -
- tempo remnant of America -

They will not be deterred - Fuel & Convey, Confidence,
Plans, + dynamics

The day after martial law - 21/22 - early hrs

6/ Determined to resist lawless Mand. regime -

There is sharp disagreement as to forms of resist
which may lead to very serious consequences.

Hogana - in recent months - limited - ships ^{slowed}

This has given the opportunity - Bk - declared war
- invader - Disident - Exacted money -

Statesmanship -

Not fighting the Arabs - in spite of their leaders.

friendly - Know Bk are not doing to help them.

"Doubt" - and the Bk are making us both -

7/ Last in Pal. 15 mo ago - Pol. situation deteriorated

Berlin's determination to liquidate Zionism - ^{use 10000} boycotts

Aug 31-45 Truman - Anglo Amer. Com. April 46 - 25/27

Grady - Morrison - pro-moral authority - 300,000 -
- unimp. subject to control - G. B. Sol T. Trustees -

(4)

9. B - large zone, its area - Reputed -
Partition proposals - - London Conf. -
Zionist Congress - Barclay - Unofficial talks =
U.N. Assembly - Committee - objection - Special Session

8/ We discussed the new situation in Jerusalem.
We were persuaded - no intention to give up Mandate -
exchange it - "a new model" - Berlin

Creech Jones -

N.Y. Times - last Thursday - its correspondent. (Smith)

the official text of B. Gant - (Jente)

10/ She wants approval of U.N. for Which Paper -

If she gets it - all right - if not -

9/ We resolved - full demands - tell story of violation
should not be forgotten

If G. B. wishes to remain - has up - put out

Churchill

Should any other proposals - cannot barter away
our future

Amer. Section -

10/ Attitude, V.I. critical - Green - Eng. Amb

Will U.S. support S. B. - as part of general pro-B.
policy in Middle East - & Near East. (out)

- Amazing how we tag along S. B. - then
~~we were~~ on State Dept. moves double-track
- Rush them - New foreign policy -
- Call the Tune - Used same pay the paper

11) Uncertain outcome - No precedent -

① Press for 100.000 now! - 120 days.

→ ② Watch on State Dept. - mobilize all friends -

③ Amer. policy must be deter. by will of Amer.
people - Congress, etc. Parties -

④ Let 10 joining it - or Standard Oil, Cab
& Texas Co.

⑤ p. 48 - Congress. Rept. Dec. 19-1945

p. 41. Letter - majority to Pres. July 2-1945

p. 44. Governor to State " " "