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World Zionist Organization, 1947.

August 26, 1947
Gemeindehaus Building, Lavaterstrasse 33

Opening Session
Zurich

DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER

I am sure that the members of the Actions Committee are anxious to have some account, however brief, of our activities in the United States and of the political situation in America.

It was always my view during the war years and since that America must be regarded as one of the principal centers of our political effort and in some respects, the most important center. This view was not always shared by all Zionists. But the events of the past few years have demonstrated the correctness of our view and today it is generally felt that America may well be the principal battleground of our political struggle, apart of course from Palestine itself.

While we clearly realized the important, if not decisive role which America might play, we did not delude ourselves into believing that America would necessarily throw its influence into the scales in our favor. On the contrary, we who lived in America and could study the political situation at close range in those years, warned our Zionist colleagues abroad that American support must not be taken for granted; that there were powerful forces tending in the opposite direction and that constant vigilance and effort on our part were required. Even when most favorable pro-Zionist statements were made by Presidents of the United States, it was we who warned our friends abroad that pro-Zionist statements should not be confused with pro-Zionist action and that the day by day policy of the government may not necessarily be conducted in accordance with the letter and spirit of public pronouncements. And we never ceased to demand from our government effective action and not only friendly words. This position which we took was not always popular within the movement. It was thought by some that we were too critical of our government and much too suspicious of the State Department; that our attitude was making us persona non grata with the Administration; whereas another approach and other people who were more friendly to the Administration could accomplish more although they had a good many years to demonstrate this and failed utterly.

I am therefore amused at times when some of our Zionist friends address to us complaints about the attitude of the American Government. They should remember that our appraisal of the American attitude was always ~~most~~ a most cautious one - please recall my appraisal of the American situation at the last Congress. They should not charge us with some of the illusions which others helped to foster in them and against which we repeatedly warned them.

I have said this only by way of introduction and will have more to say about the present situation in America further in my report. I also want to say, by way of introduction, that the arrangements which were made in Basle for the conduct of the work in America have on the whole worked satisfactorily. The American section of the Executive was duly organized, and considering the strains and stresses of the past months, I am glad to report that the members of the American section have worked together harmoniously and in a comradely spirit required by the seriousness of the times. The arrangements have also been satisfactory in that close and harmonious collaboration has existed between the American section of the Executive and the American Zionist Emergency Council, representing the Zionist of the United States. The membership of the Emergency Council was extended to include all parties. The Council and the Agency have worked as a team. As Chairman of both bodies, I was able to achieve a fair degree of coordination between their respective activities.

This has been of the utmost importance, especially during the critical period through which we are passing. The Jewish Agency and American Zionism have spoken with one voice and pursued a common policy. Mr. Shertok, as head of the Political Department in Washington, was a source of great political strength to us, and by his good will and tact contributed to the harmonious conduct of our direct work. I trust that it will be possible to preserve this gain also in the future.

During the past six months, the work of the American section of the Executive has revolved largely around the United Nations, although it should be appreciated that many other matters both of a political and economic and financial character are included in the sphere of our activities. We have well developed offices both in New York and Washington, which deal with many aspects of our complex operations on the American scene. But I will limit myself to the political aspect.

The year began with the London Conference on Palestine and the informal discussions carried on by our representatives from about the middle of January to the middle of February. Two members of the American section, Mr. Shertok and Dr. Neumann, participated in those talks. Some of us, and certainly I personally, expected that little or nothing would come of those discussions. I personally questioned the wisdom of going to London even for ~~consultation~~ unofficial consultation in face of the Congress Resolution. But it was our duty, when the talks were started, to give whatever support was possible from the American end. This we did.

I wish to refer in particular to one important conversation which I had at that time with one of the highest officials of the American Government with reference to the London negotiations. He told me that the opinion of the American Government had been solicited by the British Government and he informed me of the precise nature of the reply. It was not all that I or many of us would have wished for but it was definitely in keeping with the position taken by our Chief Executive in his letter of October 4, 1946. I immediately informed our delegation in London. It is perhaps of some consequence to note that during the London talks Mr. Bevin adhered to his own position though he had been informed of the pro-Zionist solution favoured by the American Government at that moment.

You will recall that the original proposal made by Mr. Trygve Lie, Secretary General of the United Nations, was to obviate the holding of a special session of the Assembly by constituting an ad hoc Committee of Eight, including the five major powers to prepare recommendations for the General Assembly in September. The plan fell through because of the objection of the American Government. These objections were based upon formal and technical grounds, but from discussions which we had with State Department officials it appeared that at least one of the reasons was dissatisfaction with the composition of the proposed committee and a desire on the part of the American Government to avoid serving upon that committee.

This was the first intimation we had that the American Government was inclined to adopt a reserved attitude and to avoid taking the initiative or playing an active and leading role in the deliberations of the United Nations on the Palestine question. All that transpired thereafter has borne out this view. To put it more precisely, the American Government had begun to manoeuvre for a favorable tactical position in the UN. It desired the initiative and suggestions for a solution of the Palestine question to come from others while it reserved to itself the expression of its views if and when definite proposals came to be under consideration.

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The decision to convene a special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on April 26th caught us rather unprepared. The plenary session of the Executive authorized and directed the American section to assume the responsibility of preparing for the meeting of the United Nations. But the interval between the close of the Jerusalem session of the Executive and the Assembly was very brief. - only a matter of a few weeks. We had to undertake a most intensive activity which placed a severe strain upon all of us, including our rather limited staff. It was necessary to send special emissaries to visit many capitols in Europe, Africa, North and South America, as well as Australia and New Zealand. It was necessary to prepare, print and distribute documentary material not only in English but also in Spanish and in some cases also in French. A Legal Advisory Committee, consisting of a group of able lawyers, was organized. Fruitful contacts were established and maintained with the Secretariat of the United Nations and many other officials. At the same time our contact with the American Government had to be preserved and extended.

We also took special pains to call into consultation representatives of the major Jewish organizations in the United States in order to establish a united front and avoid embarrassing division in the Jewish camp. Among those who participated in these consultations with us I would mention the American Jewish Conference - the most inclusive organization of the American Jewish community - also the American Jewish Committee, the World Jewish Congress and Agudas Yisroel.

Undoubtedly, if we had had at our disposal more time and more manpower, our preparations could have been even more thorough than they were. As I look back I cannot refrain from commenting that rarely in all my Zionist experience have I seen so much intensive work done by so few people on so large a scale and in so short a time. And I would like here to express my personal appreciation of the remarkable capacity and devotion displayed by my colleagues during that period.

The situation which confronted us was one of extreme complexity and difficulty. We had no precedents to go by. It was the first time that our movement was attempting to present the case of the Jewish people to the representatives not of a few governments but the entire world. We had to reckon with the currents and cross-currents of the international scene; and at a moment when the world was seriously divided and our problem was inextricably involved in the complexities of an increasingly grave international situation. Obviously the situation required caution but it also required courage and a certain degree of boldness on our part.

As you know, we made a formal request for representation, without a vote, in the deliberations of the Special Session. ~~Again~~ There had been no precedent for the appearance of a non-governmental body before the United Nations. But we made this request on behalf of the Jewish people and we decided to decline an invitation to be seated as guests until our application had been acted upon. You will recall that this question, the right of the Jewish people to be heard, was one of the major issues before the Assembly and was debated at considerable length. Fortunately we, the Jewish Agency, were granted that recognition and given the privilege of participation in the deliberations of the Political Committee comprising as it did the representatives of all 55 nations, and fortunately also no other Jewish organization was thus recognized. I believe that the Jewish Agency emerged strengthened and its position and prestige considerably enhanced by that recognition and ~~other~~ participation in the deliberations.

Two other battles had to be fought out, one in relation to the terms of reference and the other in relation to the composition of the Special Committee. We took great pains to explain our attitude on both matters. We desired the terms of reference to be couched in such broad language as to avoid any prejudging of the issues and we wanted the Special Committee so constituted as to preclude the participation of any Arab state

or the Mandatory power. Substantially speaking, we won these battles. Both the terms of reference and the composition of the committee were about as favorable as could reasonably have been expected under the circumstances.

Without reviewing the course of the debates, I would merely say that considering the aggressiveness and vociferousness of the Arab states, the discussions in the United Nations proceeded and wound up in a manner far more favorable to our cause than we might have expected at the beginning. Certainly a great contribution towards the clarification of the issues was made by the representative of Soviet Russia, ^{in his final address.} It was the most significant and welcome single occurrence at the UN sessions. All in all, the proceedings of the Special Session, far from discouraging us, indicated that there was a considerable reservoir of goodwill towards our people and that confused as the international situation certainly is, there are factors operating ~~against us~~ *in our favor.*

A word about the attitude of the United States delegation at the UN. It took a position which was technically and formally correct, but which unfortunately did not meet ~~with~~ the situation as it developed. The position taken was that ~~the~~ special session of UN was convoked for one purpose only, namely, to appoint a Committee of Inquiry, ~~to study the state government of Palestine.~~ There was nothing else on the agenda of the special session, and it was not intended that the merits of the case should be discussed. This position might have been maintained with propriety if the delegates of the five Arab States on the UN had accepted it and had refrained from discussing the merits of the case. In reality, they exploited every opportunity for days on end ~~and~~ ^{used} the platform of the special session of the UN as a sounding board for their anti-Zionist propaganda and there was no way of stopping them. The Arab case was being heard; the Jewish case was going by default. The United States delegation was not quick to reverse the position which it had originally taken. It required considerable pressure from all parts of the country and instructions from the highest level of government to force the United States delegation to change its position and to agree that the Jewish Agency should be heard.

Once this was accomplished, the attitude of the United States delegation towards our cause was altogether friendly and helpful on all substantial issues. Before the UN session the United States delegation voted, so to speak, with us and against the Arab bloc. It voted against placing the question of the immediate independence of Palestine on the agenda which the Arab bloc favored and ~~it~~ voted for the kind of terms of reference and composition of the committee of inquiry which we favoured. All in all, it may be said that it made a false start but that it righted itself in due course. Its action at the UN cannot be interpreted as forecasting an unfriendly attitude at the assembly of the UN in September.

Now that the work of the Special Committee is drawing to a close, the scene shifts again to America and we must exert renewed efforts in connection with the General Assembly which will meet in a few weeks.

In certain respects our task has become more difficult in the last few years. When we first organized, we laboured under the difficulty of having to overcome inertia and indifference but we had the field largely to ourselves. However, in the course of several years, the factors and forces opposed to our cause have had the time to crystallize, to organize themselves and to launch increasingly vigorous counter-efforts of their own.

One factor is growing interest of America in the oil resources of the Near East. There has been a growing propaganda launched by Arabs with the help and guidance of certain American oil interests. British propaganda has been steadily at work, though in a more underground and subtle form than the Arab propaganda. There are the missionary interests exercising a not inconsiderable influence in the circles of the State Department.

Above all, we now have to operate in the midst of a strong movement tending to ally the United States with Great Britain in a vast international alignment aimed to contain, as they put it, the expansion of Soviet power. This is summarized in the phrase "the Truman doctrine". Under the anti-Soviet slogan American foreign policy is being precipitated into numerous improvisations, many aimed to strengthen the British Empire and some of them inevitably reacting unfavorably upon us.

Add to all these factors the disturbed conditions in Palestine, the violence, the accusations and counter-accusations which tend to confuse the public mind, and you have a situation most difficult, most delicate and one requiring constant vigilance and unabating effort. Constantly and unceasingly, day by day, we must carry on our discussions with statesmen and diplomats who direct American policy. But I am not exaggerating when I say that all these diplomatic efforts will prove fruitless and end in failure if we should lose the battle of public opinion in the United States.

The Zionist Emergency Council is carrying the brunt of that effort in countless ways, too many to enumerate here.

The American Government seems to be halting between two opinions, torn between conflicting forces. On the one hand there is a strong and natural inclination not to quarrel with Britain or with the Arabs over Jewish claims in Palestine - the desire to let Britain have her way with a minimum of change in the status quo, with a minimum of interference on the part of America and a minimum of responsibility for forcing a change of policy. On the other hand, there are clear public commitments in favor of the Jewish people and the Zionist cause and a strong public sentiment demanding the honoring of these commitments and justice to the Jewish people.

As you know, Secretary Marshall and other high officials were repeatedly approached not only by us but by others, by groups of Congressmen and Senators. But they as often declined the suggestion that the American Government give a clearer indication of its present position and its views regarding a just solution of the Palestine problem.

On one important occasion, Secretary Marshall stated that the Government did not consider it advisable at the moment to "develop the policy of the United States" regarding Palestine. He did not use the expression "to adopt a policy" or to "formulate its policy", but "to develop its policy". The position taken by Mr. Marshall has been that the United States has a policy which has been publicly expressed in broad terms. There was never any intimation on his part that this policy has been abandoned or changed or is subject to change but he has insisted that the moment has not yet come to define it in more concrete and detailed form before the report of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine has been received. He also indicated to me that we would not be confronted by a fait accompli but before the United States government announced its position at the United Nations assembly it would consult with us.

What is the American policy on Palestine as a matter of record? There have been resolutions of Congress and statements by various Presidents. But the latest pronouncements were made in October 1946, one in public statement by President Truman indicating support for Jewish immigration into Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state in part of the country, quoting the action of the Executive of the Jewish Agency which was taken in Paris, and the other in the form of a letter from President Truman to King Ibn Saud, stating that the United States is committed to support not only the existence of the Jewish National Home in Palestine, but its continued development through immigration. As to the former of these statements, Mr. Byrnes, then Secretary of State, declared that ~~the~~ policy announced by the President was binding upon the State Department and controlled its policy. As I feared, this proposal of the Jewish Agency now represents the "terminus ad quem" ^{beyond} which the United States Government is not likely to go. ~~It~~ It is not at all clear to what compromises between it and Morrison-Grady it may consent.

I am aware of a widespread feeling of concern that the American Government has receded away from this position, a feeling which was strengthened by the attitude of neutrality adopted by the representatives of the United States on the United Nations and by rumors which have been circulated since. What role the United States will finally play in the coming weeks and months I do not profess to know. But just as it is necessary to avoid undue optimism, we should also avoid undue pessimism. The present silence of the American Government is by no means evidence that it has altered its position, or that it will follow the British line.

I say this not as a matter of surmise alone. On the basis of certain soundings which I have made quite recently, I have reason to think that the attitude of the American Government has not changed. Since we were not able to get a direct public statement from the Secretary of State or from the President for the reasons which I have indicated, it was necessary to sound out through sources not public. Before I left, I had conversations with friends of the Administration and the President, with Mr. Baruch and Mr. Swope. I told them of what our concern was, how greatly we were concerned with the present intentions of the Government. There have been rumors that our Government had changed its mind. Mr. Swope took this up with Mr. Snyder, and he sent me this letter and telegram before I left the United States.

"Dear Dr. Silver:

This telegram arrived Wednesday noon. It seems that it does everything you ask for. It arms you with final authority to deny any charges that America has abandoned her position.

In conversation with Secretary Snyder I told him of your fears of the growing gossip that America's position had deviated from that originally announced by the President. He volunteered to take the matter up with the President and this telegram is a result of that talk.

The Secretary sent it to me with the knowledge that I intended to transmit it to you to use should the necessity arise.

Good luck,

Herbert Bayard Swope".

"HERBERT BAYARD SWOPE
745 FIFTH AVENUE

PRESIDENT CONFIRMS STATEMENT I MADE TO YOU YESTERDAY THAT HE HAS
MADE NO CHANGE IN HIS PALESTINE POLICIES - JOHN W SNYDER "

From other sources we have had similar assurances. We may therefore assume that the position of the American Government ~~will~~ has not deteriorated. There is no reason to assume that the American Government will change its policy. It is likely to favor the optimum proposals which the UN Special Committee will recommend. Senator Austin, Chairman of the United States delegation stated quite definitely that the United States Government is not seeking to avoid responsibility but would assume its full share of responsibility in connection with a solution which would be adopted by the United Nations. Senator Vandenberg has indicated time and again not only friendship to our cause, but his conviction that the United States Government should assume a full share of responsibility in implementing a decision not only politically and financially, but also if necessary in a military sense.

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One more word with reference to the American scene. At certain critical moments in the past our efforts were hampered and at times frustrated by certain divisions of opinion in our own camp; and Zionist policies and action based upon political realism were at times thwarted by those who thought that we were too aggressive or too militant, by men who in this hard and brutal age have clung pathetically to gestures of renunciation and goodwill on our part as a method of overcoming hostility to our cause or indifference to our plight.

Take the matter of our relations with Britain. We in America have long realized that a vigorous political reaction in America against Britain's anti-Zionism is the only effective alternative to an increasingly violent resistance movement in Palestine. We felt that the more passive we were in America, the more cautious and timid we were about exercising whatever political influence we could muster there, the heavier was the burden which we were throwing upon the Yishuv. Britain did not hesitate to strike at us not only in Palestine and on the Mediterranean but on the continent of Europe and in South America, wherever its influence extended. Why then should we hesitate to retaliate by such political means as we could command? Britain was urging war against the Jewish people. Why then should we hesitate to strike back in America, where we were not without some influence? When the British Government sought a loan from the United States a year and a half ago, I and my associates felt that America should, if not refuse such a loan, at least defer it until the British Government yielded to the request of the President of the United States for the admission of 100,000 refugees. And the Congress was in a mood to hold up the loan! But Zionist voices were raised on both sides of the water in defense of the British loan. Fellow Zionists lectured us on duty as loyal American citizens and appealed to Congressmen fighting our battle to desist. The loan was passed and shortly thereafter the British Government arrested the members of our Executive and sent them to Latrun.

The same sort of thing happened when we organized political pressure on the eve of the elections in the fall of 1946. There was an organized movement which threatened to withhold support from the party in power if the Government failed to exert the full weight of its influence in favour of our DP's and their immigration into Palestine. Again we were denounced for permitting our Jewish and Zionist interests to influence our conduct as American citizens. We maintained that as loyal Americans it was not only our right but our duty to demand of our Government that its actions should correspond to its promises. It was as a result of our political action and political pressure that the Government did take certain steps at that time, such as the two important public documents of President Truman.

If I rehearse these facts, it is not for the sake of historical review, but because we are still confronted with the same question of policy. Britain is again approaching the United States for aid, and will continue to do so. There is also a national election in the offing. Shall we or shall we not exert our full strength in the United States? Shall we or shall we not make Great Britain feel the full weight of our potential influence in America in matters which affect her vitally, though not quite as vitally as her policy affects the fate and future of our people? Shall we or shall we not make our own government cognizant of the depth and strength of our feeling regarding her duties and obligations about solemn commitments given to us in the past? And if these are not to be sanctioned as appropriate methods in our political struggle, what else remains, apart from words and more words, protests, speeches, and exhortations? What else remains but a growing sense of frustration among our people and a growing appeal to violence among our youth?

I say these things because it is by no means certain that a decision by the United Nations, even if it is made and even if it is favorable, will necessarily be honored and carried out. I earnestly hope that this will not be the case, but when the United Nations has finished with its consideration of the question, we may find that this is but another passing phase in our continuing struggle. We must face that possibility and gird ourselves for the battle afresh if need be. If the burden of continuing struggle is thrust upon us, then I believe that the Zionists and the Jews of America will be prepared to do their share in the way they can be most effective. But we must lead them courageously. I assure you they are prepared for it and are increasingly impatient. Unless we offer them an effective program of political action, they will seek other outlets for their feelings and energies. Already irresponsible groups have been capitalizing on this craving for vigorous political action.

In conclusion I want to say a word about the "Exodus". Naturally, we have done all that we could possibly do in the United States to urge our Government to intervene in the "affaire Exodus". So far we have been completely unsuccessful in stopping the return of the refugees to Germany. Our latest information is that the President is again going to intervene. Whether he will be any more successful than he was before, that I do not know. Generally speaking, the success of our Chief Executive - and this is said not in criticism - has been in giving and not in getting.

The hanging of the two sergeants made a terrible impression in the United States, and lost us many friends. Not only the act itself, but the attendant circumstances. There was almost an emotional stampede away from us. British propaganda was quick to capitalize on that. We took every means to bring things to an even keel again.

The outburst of Mr. Hecht has done us no good in the United States - intemperate, provocative, insulting of human decency. A great deal of sympathy has been won recently by the more systematic campaign to publicize the work of the Hagannah. Much more of this should be done.

Having said all this I would not be a faithful reporter of the American scene if I were not to tell you that by and large the American Jew is sympathetic with the resistance in Palestine. That does not mean that he approves of the Bergson group. The American Jew believes in resisting not merely through ships, not merely through fasts. And while the American Jew is impressed by all that we have said in condemnation of these groups, he is not persuaded that the policy of these groups is a false one. He hopes for some kind of statesmanship, for some kind of a joining program of resistance coordinated under a central recognized national authority. I hope that it is not yet too late to achieve it. If it is, then I am afraid that we are in for very desperate times.

The road ahead may still be very long and difficult. But I can offer you what comfort there is in the assurance - and this is based on my close knowledge of the American scene - I can offer you what comfort there is in the assurance that the American Jewish community is more firmly united than ever with the Jews in Palestine to achieve freedom and a secured national existence for our people in Eretz Israel.

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