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Series V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

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Political work in the United States, 1948.

Address of Dr. Abba Hillel Silver  
Chairman of the American Section of the Jewish Agency,  
on  
POLITICAL WORK IN THE UNITED STATES,

Delivered before the Meeting of the Actions Committee of the  
World Zionist Organisation,  
on Sunday evening, August 22nd, 1948.  
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Dear Friends,

When our Actions Committee met at its last session in April of this year, the future of our movement was considerably beclouded. We were in the backwash of the unforeseen reversal of policy on the part of the American Government. We faced the prospect of an indeterminate postponement of the establishment of the Jewish State. We were considerably depressed.

We meet in a far happier and more confident mood today. Great and historic events have transpired since then: The Jewish State has been established; many governments have recognised it; the American Government has given it de facto recognition, and its special mission accredited to the State of Israel is in Israel today.

These achievements, as we all know, were made possible by a number of factors, first and foremost of course the moral courage of the citizens of the State of Israel, who proclaimed their state, and the physical courage which enabled them to defend it from invasion and attack. If there is a Jewish State in Palestine today, it is due overwhelmingly to the initiative and the determination of the Jewish people here. They created it and they have defended it. Never has a dictum been so completely vindicated that freedom is always achieved, never given. It will be good for the soul of our people in all future time to remember that it was due to their own unfaltering courage that the third Jewish Commonwealth was established. History records that this is exactly how the first and second Jewish commonwealth were likewise established.

The Jewish people of the Diaspora were a source of vast moral and physical strength to the Yishuv in its struggle for independence. The consolidation of the forces of World Jewry for the defence of Israel was one of the minor miracles which attended the re-birth of the nation. Jews in many parts of the world, in important centres of political action, mobilised themselves and became the political and economic army behind the front here. The magnificent achievement was made possible not alone by what was done here, but also by the extraordinary efforts and unfailing devotion on the part of unnumbered Jewish men and women in many parts of the world.

Our most important political as well as economic sector behind the front here was the American Jewish community. It was realised early by us that the position of the American Government would prove decisive in the United Nations on the matter of Palestine. American Zionists were faced with the responsibility of marshalling support, last year, for the settlement which was proposed by UNSCOP. We were not at all sure at the outset what the position of our Government would be. Ever since the Special Assembly of the United Nations, which met in the spring of last year to consider the question of the future government of Palestine, referred to it by Great Britain, the United States had given no indication as to what its position would be, what solution it favoured, and what it would be prepared to do by way of implementing the solution which it did favour. The American Government maintained this unrevealing position even after the report of UNSCOP was made public. Until almost the very eve of November 29th, it was not clear whether our Government would back the partition resolution with that measure of wholeheartedness which would influence other nations to do likewise. American Zionists remained apprehensive almost to the very end. They could not and did not

relax even for a moment their efforts to organise public opinion, both Jewish and non-Jewish, in order to activise the American Government to move in the direction of positive and decisive action. There were powerful forces in our Government who were opposed to the establishment of a Jewish State, who manoeuvred adroitly for a purely formal, half-hearted endorsement, of the partition proposal purely for the sake of the record, a position which would most certainly have insured its final defeat at the United Nations. These forces had to be out-guessed and out-manoevred, and their plans set at naught.

Fortunately, this was accomplished. But the victory was short-lived. Our Government soon reversed itself.

American Zionists were confronted with the grave challenge which called for a new and tremendous expenditure of energy and effort to defend what had once been achieved, but which was now again gravely imperilled. You will recall that the United Nations resolution of November 29th was a signal for the Arabs inside and outside of Palestine to launch a campaign of violence and terrorism in an attempt to alter by force the partition settlement. The Mandatory Government, while formally accepting the settlement of the United Nations, soon declared that it had no intention to assist in its implementation, and before long gave ample evidence of its determination to frustrate the plan in every way possible. This, of course, encouraged Arab aggression and intransigence still further. It made the work of the United Nations Commission nigh impossible, and it so reported to the Security Council on February 16th.

"Powerful Arab interests, both inside and outside Palestine, are defying the resolution of the General Assembly, and are engaged in a deliberate effort to alter by force the settlement envisaged therein", it declared, and it asked for effective assistance from the Security Council.

The unreconciled opponents of a Jewish State within Government circles in Washington re-asserted themselves. The disorders in Palestine were seized upon as an excuse to discredit the United Nations settlement. A conspiracy was hatched in Government circles to scuttle the partition plan and to force a new solution more acceptable to Great Britain and the Arabs. This conspiracy, which was backed by a powerful oil lobby in Washington, by British propaganda, by pro-Arab Near-East missionary groups in the United States, and spear-headed by Forrestal and Henderson, matured in March of this year and brought about a total reversal of the American position. Storm signals of what was impending could be read quite early in the embargo on the shipment of arms to the Middle East which was imposed by our government as early as December 5th, and which, of course, was aimed against the Jewish State, since the Arab countries were being supplied with arms by Great Britain. They could be read also in the failure of our Government to protest the invasion of Palestine by Arab troops from neighbouring countries which was in blatant defiance of the Charter of the United Nations.

The attack upon the partition plan was begun by our Government in the Security Council on February 24th when the legal right of the United Nations to implement partition was challenged by the United States delegation in an elaborate and laboured argument which made crooked what had been straight and which hopelessly confounded the clear and simple facts and duties in the case into a tangled perplexity of legal sophistries and evasive double talk. The American Government called for renewed negotiations and consultations between Jews and Arabs for an agreed settlement.

The failure of the American Government fully and sincerely to back the partition plan at the Security Council and to demand action on the part of the Security Council in the face of the

breach of the peace which the invasion of troops from the neighbouring Arab countries clearly constituted, impressed the members of the Security Council with the conviction that the American Government had decided to throw overboard the partition plan. As a result nothing came of the consultations among the permanent members of the Council. They refused to agree that a threat to peace existed in Palestine or to demand that the countries responsible for the invasion should withdraw their forces immediately.

On March 19th the head of the American delegation declared that, inasmuch as the Security Council was not prepared to proceed with efforts to implement the partition plan, and inasmuch as the plan could not be carried out by peaceful means, and inasmuch as the termination of the Mandate on May 15th would result in chaos unless there was a successor government on hand in Palestine, the United States proposed that a temporary trusteeship for Palestine should be established, that a special session of the United Nations should be convoked to this end, and that, pending this meeting, the Palestine Commission should be instructed to suspend its efforts to implement the proposed partition plan.

This was a stunning blow to our hopes. What had been so painfully and laboriously achieved on November 29th was now in mortal danger as a result of the sudden defection of the most powerful government on earth without whose support the plan could never be carried out.

American Zionists were thus confronted with the necessity of beginning all over again. They had to inaugurate another mighty campaign to fight the attempt to impose a trusteeship on Palestine which would indefinitely postpone the establishment of the Jewish State. Fortunately for us the reaction of the American

press to the shocking reversal on the part of our Government was all that we could have wished for. The vacillation and the instability of our Government were denounced from coast to coast by a bewildered and angered American public opinion. American Zionists found ready allies in their fight to defeat the unsound and shabbily improvised trusteeship proposal of the American Government.

The second special session of the United Nations to consider further the future government of Palestine met on April 16th.

At this session the United States presented no special proposals for a trusteeship, but only a working paper of 47 articles, and invited discussion. Our Government did not wish to assume the onus of responsibility either for formally moving for the revocation of the decision of November 29th or for making a specific substitute proposal of its own. Quite the contrary. To the very last the President and the Secretary of State kept reassuring the American public that they were still for partition. Trusteeship was not a substitute, they said, but only a temporary stop-gap. This working paper of the American Government was subjected to a thorough-going critique on the part of the spokesmen of the Jewish Agency, as well as on the part of certain delegations in the United Nations. The debate on the American trusteeship working paper dragged on for weary days, but it was evident quite early that there was no chance for such a proposal ever to be adopted. Nor was there any chance formally to revoke the November 29th decision.

In fact, the First Committee - that is to say, the political committee of the General Assembly - could not agree on any plan. Finally on May 14th, on the very eve of the termination of the Mandate, a make-shift resolution was proposed by the First

Committee to the General Assembly which affirmed the support of the General Assembly of the efforts of the Security Council to secure a truce and empowered a United Nations mediator to use his good offices with the local and community authorities in Palestine to arrange for the operation of common services, to assure the protection of the Holy Places, and to promote a peaceful adjustment of the situation in Palestine.

But even as the members of the United Nations were futilely debating on May 14th this final emaciated and washed-out resolution, the Jewish people of Palestine, in keeping with their oft-repeated warning that the recognition by the United Nations of the right of the Jewish people to establish their independent state <sup>was inevitable and could not be</sup> may not be revoked or delayed, that the right of the Jewish people to be a nation like all other nations in its own sovereign state was self-evident, and that they would act alone if the United Nations failed to act, solemnly proclaimed the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine and called it Israel. Thus, strong hands took over where feeble and faltering hands were hopelessly fumbling. And while the voting on the resolution was still going on in the Assembly of the United Nations, the news was flashed to it and to the world that the President of the United States had recognised the new State of Israel.

Thus the President of the United States fortunately and dramatically reversed the policy of the American Government and brought it back to the main highway from which it had been detoured, and which was fraught with extreme danger to our movement.

It should be noted in passing that when it became clear to the members of the United States delegation that its trusteeship plan would fail of acceptance, it made <sup>formidable</sup> tremendous efforts to persuade the Jewish Agency to accept a new truce proposal. Jews and Arabs were to agree on a truce for 90 days during which time

another effort would be made to reach an agreement. No indication was given by the American Government as to what would follow if after 90 days no agreement was reached. To all our inquiries as to whether the American Government would then support the Jewish State or whether it would lift the embargo in case the Jews were attacked upon the termination of the truce, no answers were forthcoming. This last-minute proposal was clearly a device to achieve through the formula of a truce what the United States delegation had failed to achieve through the formula of a trusteeship - namely the indefinite postponement of the establishment of the Jewish State.

Some of our own leaders were in danger of falling into this skilfully camouflaged trap. Fortunately, better counsel prevailed.

When it became clear to us that the trusteeship proposal was dead and that the new truce manoeuvre would likewise fail and that the Jewish people of Palestine would, upon the termination of the British Mandate on May 15th, proceed without fail to proclaim the establishment of their State, there remained but one more important step for us to take - namely, to persuade the President of the United States to recognise the Jewish State immediately upon its establishment.

In the period immediately preceding May 14th, while the fruitless debates on truce and trusteeship were dragging on in the United Nations, <sup>uninterrupted</sup> tremendous activity was carried on to enlist leaders of American public opinion and friends and supporters everywhere to persuade the President of the United States to take this wise and statesmanlike step. It was most gratifying that President Truman utilised the precise historic moment for his great act of recognition which, with one clean sweep, brushed aside all the accumulated legal rubbish and clumsy political artifices and stratagems of months, redeemed the honour and

integrity of the United States, and imbued the gallant builders and defenders of Israel with new hope and courage.

It is fully realised by us that the contribution which the American Government could and should make to the strengthening of the State of Israel is by no means complete. The efforts of the Zionists of America are being directed towards completing what is still wanting. We have been working energetically to induce our Government to extend full de jure recognition to Israel, to bring about its admission to the United Nations, and to grant it a substantial loan. Our campaign to induce our Government to lift the embargo has had to be suspended temporarily, in view of the truce which was ordered by the United Nations. We are hopeful that progress will be quickly made in the three directions referred to above. The political climate in the United States and public opinion favour them. Both major political parties in their national conventions recently incorporated splendid planks in their platforms which welcomed Israel into the family of nations, pledged full recognition and aid in the development of its economy. A strong plank was also included in the platform of the party headed by Mr. Henry Wallace. Should the peace negotiations break down, we shall turn to our Government for the immediate abolition of the embargo, so that the defenders of Israel may be able to acquire arms and ammunition from our country which has always prided itself on being the arsenal of democracy. Pressure on the part of Great Britain has undoubtedly been responsible for the delay on the part of our Government in rounding out its full measure of support to Israel. Bevin's relentless opposition to us is still hard at work in Washington, and it has impeded progress there. I am confident, however, as I have always been, that in the last analysis the American Government, regardless of momentary hesitations or lapses, will be found on our side. Regardless of

what the outcome of our national elections will be next November, both the executive and legislative branches of our Government will follow through, at the direction of American public opinion, a *just* pro-Israel policy. The arch-foe of Zionism in the State Department, Mr. Loy Henderson, Head of the Near East Division, is no longer there. The appointment of Mr. James G. MacDonald as head of the United States Mission to Israel is definitely a gesture of good-will and friendly cooperation. Mr. MacDonald has been among our most understanding and helpful friends over a period of many years. I have reason to believe that the President of the United States is determined to go through with a policy of full political support for the State of Israel, as well as of economic support.

The Zionists of America are under no illusions. They fully realise that the struggle here is by no means over, that Israel is still besieged by bitter enemies and is still in imminent danger of attack. Victories have been won, but, as yet, not the final victory. They are aware also that the political struggle is not over by any means, and that their political activity in the United States must continue unabated. Especially are they aware of the fact that the great expense involved in the conduct of the war cannot be met by the relatively small Jewish community of Israel, but that it must be met in the main by sacrificial giving on the part of the Jews of the United States. We have heretofore done not a little; we shall have to do much more.

Furthermore, the largest Jewish community in the world in the most important political and economic centre in the world, stands ready to assume its full share in all the future activities of the World Zionist Organisation, whose work will now, of necessity, have to be reorganised and redistributed. The scope of the American Section of the Jewish Agency, which has served our

movement not unworthily in recent years should <sup>in my judgment</sup> be enlarged in order to marshall the vast potentials of talent and resources - well organised, alert and politically mature - of American Jewry - for maintaining and developing a powerful World Zionist Movement dedicated to the defence and development of Israel. ~~It is not~~

*a question of this is that center, part of the allocation of all the activities and departments of every organization <sup>would</sup> --- to them they can function most efficiently and most fruitfully.*



D R A F T

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The Jewish people of the Diaspora were a source of vast moral and physical strength ~~to~~ to the Yishuv in its struggle for independence. The consolidation of the forces of World Jewry for the defence of Israel was one of the minor miracles which attended the re-birth of the nation. Jews in many parts of the world, in important centres of political action mobilised themselves as the political and economic army behind the effort here. Our collective magnificent achievement was made possible not alone by what was done here, and done so magnificently, but also by the unsparing efforts and dauntless devotion on the part of unnumbered men and women in many parts of the world.

Our most important political sector behind the effort here was the American Jewish community. It was clearly realised that the position of the American Government had proved decisive in the United Nations on the matter of Palestine. American Zionists were faced with the responsibility of marshalling support, last year, for the settlement which was proposed by UNSCOP. We were not at all sure what the position of our Government would be. Ever since the Special Assembly of the United Nations, which met in the spring of last year to consider the question of the future government of Palestine, which had been referred to it by Great Britain, the United States had given no indication as to what its position would be, what solution it favoured, and what it would be prepared to do by way of implementing the solution which it favoured. Our government maintained this unrevealing position even after the report of UNSCOP was made public. Until ~~almost~~ almost the very eve of November 29th, it was not clear whether our government would back the partition resolution with that measure of wholeheartedness which would influence other nations to do likewise. American Zionists remained apprehensive almost to the very end. They could not and did not relax even for a moment their efforts to organise

public opinion, both Jewish and non-Jewish, in order to activate our government to move in the direction of positive and decisive action. There were powerful forces in our government who were opposed to the establishment of a Jewish state, who maneuvered adroitly for a purely formal, half-hearted endorsement, on the part of our government, of the partition proposal for the sake of the record, a position which would insure its final defeat at the United Nations. These forces had to be out-guessed and out-maneuvered, and their plans set at naught.

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The unreconciled opponents of a Jewish state within government circles in Washington soon began to re-assert themselves. The disorders in Palestine were seized upon as an excuse to discredit the United Nations settlement. A conspiracy was hatched in government circles to scuttle the partition plan and to force a new solution more acceptable to Great Britain and the Arabs. This conspiracy, which was backed by a powerful oil lobby in Washington, by British propaganda, by pro-Arab Near-East missionary groups in the United States, and ~~which~~ spear-headed by Forrestal and Henderson, matured in March of this year and brought about a total reversal of the American position. Storm signals of what was impending could be read quite early in the ~~embargo~~ embargo on the shipment of arms to the Middle East which was imposed by our government as early as December 5th, and which, of course, was aimed against the Jewish state since the Arab countries were being supplied with arms by Great Britain. They could be read also in the failure of our government to protest the invasion of Palestine by Arab troops from neighbouring countries in blatant defiance of the Charter of the United Nations.

The attack upon the partition plan was begun by our government in the Security Council on February 24th when the legal right of the United Nations to implement partition was challenged by the United States delegation in an elaborate and laboured argument which made crooked what had been straight and which hopelessly confounded the clear and simple facts and duties in the case into a tangled perplexity of legal sophistries and evasive double talk. The American government called for renewed negotiations and consultations between Jews and Arabs for an agreed settlement.

The failure of the American government fully and sincerely to back the partition plan at the Security Council and to demand action on the part of the Security Council in the face of the breach of the peace which the invasion of troops from the neighbouring Arab countries clearly constituted, impressed the members of the Security Council with the conviction that the American government had decided to throw overboard the partition plan. As a result nothing came of the consultations among the permanent members of the Council. They refused to agree that a threat to peace existed in Palestine or to demand that the countries responsible for the invasion should withdraw their forces immediately.

On March 19th the head of the American delegation declared that, inasmuch as the Security Council was not prepared to proceed with efforts to implement the partition plan, and inasmuch as the plan could not be carried out by peaceful means, and inasmuch as the termination of the Mandate on May 15th would result in chaos unless there was a successor government on hand in Palestine, the United States proposed that a temporary trusteeship for Palestine should be established, that a special session of the United Nations should be convoked to this end, and that, pending this meeting, the Palestine Commission should be instructed to suspend its efforts to implement the proposed partition plan.

This was a stunning blow to our hopes. What had been so painfully and laboriously achieved on November 29th was now in mortal danger as a result of the sudden defection of the most powerful government on earth without whose support the plan could never be carried out.

American Zionists were thus confronted with the necessity of beginning all over again. They had to inaugurate another mighty campaign to fight the attempt to impose a trusteeship on Palestine which would indefinitely postpone the establishment of the Jewish state. Fortunately for us the reaction of the American press to the shocking reversal on the part of our government was all that we could have wished for. The vacillation and the instability of our government were denounced from coast to coast by a bewildered and angered American public opinion. American Zionists found ready allies in their fight to defeat the unsound and shabbily improvised trusteeship proposal of the American government.

The second special session of the United Nations to consider further the future government of Palestine met on April 16th.

When the second special session of the United Nations met on April 16th, the United States presented no special proposals for a trusteeship, but only a working paper of 47 articles, and invited discussion. Our government did not wish to assume the onus of responsibility either for formally moving for the revocation of the decision of November 29th or for making a specific substitute proposal of its own. Quite the contrary. To the very last the President and the Secretary of State kept reassuring the American public that they were still for partition. Trusteeship was not a substitute, they said, but only a temporary stop-gap. The working paper of the American government was subjected to a thorough-going critique on the part of the spokesmen of the Jewish Agency, as well as on the part of certain delegations in the United Nations. The debate on the American trusteeship working paper dragged on for weary days, but it was evident quite early that there was no chance for such a proposal to be adopted. Nor was there any chance formally to revoke the November 29th decision.

In fact, the First Committee- that is to say, the political committee of the General Assembly - could not agree on any plan. Finally on May 14th, on the very eve of the termination of the Mandate, a make-shift resolution was proposed by the First Committee to the General Assembly which affirmed the support of the General Assembly of the efforts of the Security Council to secure a truce and empowered a United Nations mediator to use his good offices with the local and community authorities in Palestine to arrange for the operation of common services, to assure the protection of the holy places, and to promote a peaceful adjustment of the situation in Palestine.

But even as the members of the United Nations were futilely debating on May 14th this emaciated and washed-out resolution, the Jewish people of Palestine, conformity with their oft-repeated warning that the recognition by the United Nations of the right of the Jewish people to establish their independent state may not be revoked and that the right of the Jewish people to be a nation like all other nations in its own sovereign state was self-evident, and that they would act alone if the United Nations failed to act, solemnly proclaimed the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine and called it Israel. Thus, strong hands took over where feeble and faltering hands were hopelessly fumbling. And while the voting was still going on in the Assembly of the United Nations, the news was flashed to the world that the President of the United States had recognised this new state of Israel.

The position of the American government between February 24th and May 14th, when the President of the United States fortunately and dramatically reversed the policy of the American government and brought it back to the main highway from which it had been detoured, was one of extreme danger to our movement, of tragic consequences to Palestine, and of gravest hurt to the prestige and authority of the United Nations.

It should be noted in passing that when it became clear to the members of the United States delegation that its trusteeship plan would fail of acceptance, it made tremendous efforts to persuade the Jewish Agency to accept a new truce proposal. Jews and Arabs were to agree on a truce for 90 days during which time another effort would be made to reach an agreement. No indication was given by the American government as to what would follow if after 90 days no agreement was reached. To all inquiries as to whether the American government would then support the Jewish state or whether the American government would lift the embargo in case the Jews were attacked upon the termination of the truce, no answers were forthcoming. This last-minute proposal was clearly a device to achieve through the formula of a truce what the United States delegation had failed to achieve through the formula of a trusteeship - namely the indefinite postponement of the establishment of the Jewish State.

Some of our own leaders were in danger of falling into this skillfully camouflaged trap. Fortunately, better counsel prevailed.

When it became clear to us that the trusteeship proposal was dead and that the new truce maneuver would likewise fail and that the Jewish people of Palestine would, upon the termination of the British Mandate on May 15th, proceed without fail to proclaim the establishment of their state, there remained but one more important step for us to take - namely, to persuade the President of the United States to recognise the Jewish State immediately upon its establishment.

In the period immediately preceding May 14th, while the fruitless debates on truce and trusteeship were dragging on in the United Nations, a tremendous activity was carried on to enlist leaders of American public opinion and friends and supporters everywhere to persuade the President of the United

States to take this wise and statesman-like step. It was most gratifying that President Truman ~~not~~ utilised the precise historic moment for his great act of recognition which, with one clean sweep, brushed aside all the accumulated legal rubbish and clumsy political artifices and stratagems of months, redeemed the honour and integrity of the United States, and imbued the gallant builders and defenders of ~~Israel~~ Israel with new hope and courage.

It is fully realised that the contribution which the American government could and should make to the strengthening of the State of Israel is by no means complete, and the efforts of the Zionists of America have been directed towards completing what is still wanted. We have been working energetic-<sup>extend</sup> ally to induce our government to ~~grant~~ full de-jure recognition to Israel, to bring about its admission to the United Nations, and to grant it a substantial loan. Our campaign to induce our government to lift the embargo has had temporarily to be suspended in view of the truce, which was ~~now~~ ordered by the United Nations. We are hopeful that progress will be made very soon in the three directions referred to above. The political climate in the United States and public opinion favour them. Both major political parties in their national conventions in recent months incorporated splendid planks in their platforms, welcoming Israel into the family of nations, pledging full recognition and aid in the development of its economy. A strong plank was also included in the platform of the party headed by Mr. Henry Wallace. Should the peace negotiations break down, we shall turn to our government for the immediate abolition of the embargo, so that the defenders of Israel ~~will~~ may be able to acquire arms and ammunition. Pressure on the part of Great Britain has undoubtedly been responsible for the delay on the part of our government in rounding out its full measure of support to Israel. Bevin's relentless opposition to us is still hard at work in

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The Zionists of America are under no illusion. They fully realise that the struggle here is by no means over, that Israel is still besieged by bitter enemies and is still in imminent danger of attack. Victories have been won, but not the final victory as yet. They are further aware of the fact that the political struggle is not over by any means, that their political activity in the United States must continue unabated. Especially are they aware of the fact that the great expense involved in the conduct of the war cannot be met by the relatively small Jewish community of Israel, but that it must be met by sacrificial giving on the part of the Jews of the United States. We have done heretofore not badly; we shall have to do much more.

Furthermore, the largest Jewish community in the world is prepared to assume its full share in all the future activities of the World Zionist Organisation, whose work will now, of necessity, have to be centred largely in the Diaspora and, therefore, principally in the United States.

19.8.48.

