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9.3.43

N E W S

A M E R I C A

AMERICAN JEWRY DEMANDS JEWISH COMMONWEALTH IN PALESTINE

Programs for Rescue of Jews And Postwar Status Described in Resolutions
Adopted by American Jewish Conference in New York;

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Only 4 Out of 502 Delegates Dissent from Palestine Resolution

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New York (JPS) -- For the second time in twenty-five years the Jewish community of the United States, represented by democratically chosen delegates to the American Jewish Conference, has gone on record as favoring the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine. The momentous action, its importance enhanced by the low political fortunes of the Zionist movement and by the warnings against the decision coming from a small number of delegates representing the American Jewish Committee, was the climax of the American Jewish Conference, which had brought 502 delegates from all parts of the United States and representing every major national organization and Jewish community.

Because the Palestine resolution had been the core of contention even before the Conference had opened and was the subject of the most intense debate during the proceedings, the atmosphere in which it was finally presented on the floor was charged with the deepest emotion. As Dr. Abba Hillel Silver, Chairman of the Palestine Committee, read the resolution that represented the composite of all the groups, an extraordinary burst of cheering, applause and finally the singing of Hatikvah in the very midst of the resolution greeted his mention of the phrase "Jewish Commonwealth."

Other major resolutions adopted by the Conference before it concluded its sessions on Thursday night, September 2nd included several devoted to the rescue of the Jews of Europe, outlining a program for the postwar status of European Jewry and demanding Jewish representation on international bodies to be set up to deal with relief, rehabilitation and resettlement.

It was also decided that the Conference would be subject to recall, not later than one year from the date of adjournment, at the request of a body known as the Interim Committee which was set up to consist of one member for every ten delegates plus eight at large. The Interim Committee

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would implement the decision of the Conference. However, if peace should be declared, the Jewish delegates to any peace conference would have to be selected by another session of the entire American Jewish Conference and not by the Interim Committee, a name chosen in deference to those who disliked the name Executive Committee on the ground that it implied broad powers to act.

One of the chief issues that dominated the behind-the-scenes discussion -- and virtually every major decision was ironed out in committee meetings rather than on the floor of the Conference -- revolved around the question of the permanence of the Conference. Several of the existing organizations felt that converting the Conference into an established and permanent body would jeopardize their own scope of activity. The only group which strongly favored making the Conference an all-time assembly for the expression of views by American Jews on all important Jewish problems was the Zionist labor bloc.

Resolution on Palestine

Prior to the reading of the resolution on Palestine, Dr. Silver called attention to the fact that the Jewish Labor Committee and the National Council of Jewish Women representatives were abstaining from voting. He read a declaration by each. The Jewish Labor Committee declared its solidarity with Jewish labor in Palestine on the subjects of Palestine immigration and colonization, demanded the revocation of the White Paper of 1939 and a guarantee of free immigration, land purchase and colonization in Palestine. As to the ultimate constitutional status of Palestine, the Committee could not express any opinion because there is no unanimity of view among its members. The Council of Jewish Women statement pointed out that its membership is widely divergent and that its program does not specifically cover the subject of Zionism. Under the circumstances the three delegates would have to refrain from casting any vote.

Three resolutions had been submitted, Dr. Silver observed. All had been incorporated into a single resolution. He did not report what was commonly known that in his committee the vote on the resolution was 62 to 2. The resolution read as follows:

"We, Jewish citizens of the United States dwelling in security in this our beloved land, which, because of its democratic institutions and just laws 'gives to bigotry no sanction and to persecution no assistance,' and dedicated in undivided loyalty to the noble spirit of our country, are gathered here as an American Jewish Conference, a democratically elected body representative of American Jewry to cope with the tragic problems of our fellow Jews all over the world. We make the following declaration of principles as to the relation between the Jewish people, the Homeland in Palestine and the world need for postwar reconstruction.

"The Jewish problem has been made one of the central elements in the present assault on civilization. In a world-wide Nazi-Fascist conspiracy its exploitation has constituted the initial phase of the assault. Its solution is an integral part of the conditions needed for an enduring peace.

"In the first World War, the civilized nations pointed to a solution of the Jewish problem through the reconstruction of the Jewish Homeland in Palestine

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with which the Jewish people has been bound up historically and religiously throughout the centuries. This was expressed in the Balfour Declaration issued by the British Government, after consultation between the Allied and Associated Powers, on November 2, 1917, and in the Mandate for Palestine accorded to Great Britain in 1922, with the consent of the fifty-one member nations of the League of Nations and with the unanimous approval of the Congress of the United States.

"On the basis of this international covenant the Jewish people set itself to the task of recreating its historic Homeland in Palestine. In the course of twenty-five years, it has demonstrated a constructive capacity which has already had a profound effect both on the hopes and outlook of the Jewish people, and on a country which had for centuries been regarded as one of the derelict areas of the world. The progress of all sections of Palestine, Arab as well as Jewish, under the stimulus of the developing Jewish Homeland is one of the most notable phenomena of our time; the contribution of democratic Jewish Palestine to the victories of the armies of the United Nations in the Near East has been a significant vindication of the policy initiated by world opinion and carried out in the labors and sacrifices of the Jewish people.

"This period of reconstruction, however, has coincided with a general deterioration of world order and international morality. Chief among the victims of this deterioration have been the millions of Jews in Europe. Yet despite the fact that the conditions which made imperative the re-establishment of the Jewish Homeland a quarter of a century ago have been intensified beyond the darkest forebodings, the rights internationally guaranteed to the Jewish people with respect to Palestine have been progressively whittled down on grounds of administrative and political expediency until, with the promulgation of the White Paper of May 1939, the solemn promise made to the Jewish people was virtually nullified and the last hope of millions of homeless Jews threatened with extinction.

"The American Jewish Conference, meeting at a time when the policies of the peace are in the making, and conscious of its historic responsibility and of its position as representative of American Jewry and spokesman for the silenced Jewish communities of Europe, calls for the loyal and faithful fulfillment of the covenant entered into between the nations of the world and the Jewish people.

"We call for the fulfillment of the Balfour Declaration, and of the Mandate for Palestine whose intent and underlying purpose, based on the 'historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine,' was to reconstitute Palestine as the Jewish Commonwealth.

"We demand the immediate withdrawal in its entirety of the Palestine White Paper of May 1939 with its unwarranted restrictions on Jewish immigration and land settlement. The White Paper is a violation of the rights accorded to the Jewish people under the Mandate for Palestine. It was characterized by Mr. Winston Churchill in the House of Commons as 'a breach and a repudiation of the Balfour Declaration.' The Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations refused to recognize its legality or its moral validity.

"The Conference demands that the gates of Palestine be opened to Jewish immigration,

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and that the Jewish Agency, recognized under the Mandate as the authorized representative of the Jewish people, be vested with authority to direct and regulate immigration into Palestine, to develop to the maximum the agricultural and industrial possibilities and the natural resources of the country, and to utilize its uncultivated and unoccupied lands for Jewish colonization and for the benefit of the country as a whole.

"The measures here urged constitute the essential prerequisites for the attainment of a Jewish majority and for the re-creation of the Jewish Commonwealth.

"In the pursuit of its objective of a Jewish Commonwealth, the Jewish people has steadfastly held before it the ideals which shall integrate Jewish Palestine within the new democratic world structure. The Jewish people pledges itself to scrupulous regard for and preservation of the religious, linguistic and cultural rights of the Arab population of Palestine, and to the civil and religious equality of all its inhabitants before the law. The inviolability of the Holy Places of the various religions shall be guaranteed.

"The Jewish people reaffirms its readiness and desire for full co-operation with its Arab neighbors in Palestine, and, in the work of its own national redemption, welcomes the economic and political development of the Arab peoples of the Near East.

"On the basis both of the part it has played in the history of civilization, and of its present achievement in Palestine, the Jewish people believes that the Jewish Commonwealth to be established will represent another fundamental contribution to the social and political ideals of the world. It will finally answer the agonized cry of the most martyred of peoples, and enable it to take its rightful place in that progressive order of mankind which, we pray, may issue from the present struggle."

Throughout the reading of the resolution applause greeted virtually every sentence, until at the end the audience rose, cheered and broke into the singing of Hatikvah. Henry Monsky, president of B'nai B'rith, rose to say that the resolution would become an historic document vital to the future of the Jewish people and he wanted to claim the privilege, one he would cherish all his life, of seconding the motion. The vote was then taken by the showing of the blue delegate cards. A vast sea of upraised arms replied to the call for affirmative votes. There were four negative votes by Rabbi Louis Mann, of Chicago, and the delegates of the American Jewish Committee, Joseph M. Proskauer, New York, Jacob Blaustein, Baltimore, and Fred Lazarus, Columbus.

Dr. Stephen S. Wise, who presided at the session, expressed gratification at the vote and noted that although he had voted against the resolution the President of the American Jewish Committee had remained in the hall as a delegate. At this, Mr. Proskauer received a rising ovation. He then read the Committee declaration which said, in part:

"It is with profound regret that, for the American Jewish Committee and my two fellow-delegates from that organization, I must register dissent from the resolutions which have been introduced and which I have no doubt will receive the vote of this Conference.

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These resolutions at this critical time call for vesting in Jewish authority the full power to regulate and direct immigration into Palestine and presently call for the creation of a Jewish Commonwealth. Quite apart from the validity or invalidity of these proposals were they to be considered in the interval between the cessation of hostilities and a Peace Conference, we believe that at this time, when the gravest and most delicate military and world-wide political questions are involved, the present issuance of these proposals contained in the resolutions is unwise because it may carry with it embarrassment to the governments of the United Nations, and is calculated to jeopardize the status of Jews and even prejudice the fullest development of the Jewish settlement in Palestine itself. . . .

"In entering this Conference, the American Jewish Committee acted on the condition that the then so-called 'Assembly' should be called the 'Conference' and that the right of any participating organization to dissent from and, so dissenting, not to be bound by the conclusions of the Conference was recognized. Pursuant to that provision, for myself and for my two fellow-delegates and the American Jewish Committee, and for the reasons I have mentioned, we regret fully dissent from concurrence with these resolutions."

Although it was evident that there was resentment among many delegates at the phrases Mr. Proskauer used to describe his dissent, the audience seemed to regard the action of the American Jewish Committee delegates in remaining part of the Conference despite their dissent as sportsmanlike.

At other sessions of the Conference, major addresses were delivered by Rabbi Irving Miller of Far Rockaway, L.I., Rabbi Philip S. Bernstein of New York, Rabbi Wolf Gold and Halpern Leivick, the poet.

One of the significant resolutions presented by Judge Levinthal at the closing session expressed the support of the Conference of the labors of Dr. Chaim Weizmann as President of the Jewish Agency for Palestine. A series of tributes to individuals associated with the Conference was heard at the final session, with Dr. Stephen S. Wise being given a warm ovation and praise being given also to his fellow-members of the preliminary praesidium, Henry Monsky and Joseph M. Proskauer. The mood of the Conference was also reflected when, after Judge Harry M. Fisher of Chicago had delivered a speech in praise of America and its blessings, the audience broke into the singing of Irving Berlin's God Bless America. Rabbi Wise paid tribute to the survivors of the first American Jewish Congress peace delegation, which comprised, besides himself, Rabbi B. L. Levinthal, Philadelphia, and Judge Julian J. Mack. At Dr. Wise's suggestion the latter two were elected honorary delegates to the Conference and Bernard G. Richards was named honorary secretary. The spirit of high resolve on which the Conference ended was enhanced by a brief message spoken by Dr. Silver, who expressed the hope that the next time the Conference met it would be in a time of redemption and peace.

Resolutions On Postwar Status

A wide-ranging program affecting the political status of the Jews in the postwar world was adopted by the Conference at the next to the last session. It read as follows:

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"The catastrophe which has overwhelmed the Jews of Europe has its roots in the international anarchy which contributed to the assault of the Axis powers on civilization. No people anywhere can hope to establish its life on permanent foundations of security and justice unless the same fundamental rights are accorded equally to all.

"We earnestly hope that a world order based on the Four Freedoms and the Atlantic Charter will also find its expression in an International Bill of Rights embodying:

"1. Full and complete protection of life and liberty for all inhabitants of all countries without distinction of birth, nationality, language, race or religion.

"2. Unequivocal equality of rights in law and in fact for all the citizens of every country.

"3. The inalienable right of all religious, ethnic and cultural groups to maintain and foster their respective group identities on the basis of equality.

"Anti-Semitism was a major instrument used by the Nazis in the establishment of a totalitarian regime in Germany and as a spearhead in the warfare against the democracies of the world. Anti-Semitism is incompatible with the democratic way of life and threatens the freedom and the very existence of liberty-loving peoples throughout the world and consequently undermines the foundations of civilized order.

"Anti-Semitism as an instrument of internal and international policy, should be outlawed. In order to be made effective, this outlawing should be implemented by international conventions and national legislation.

"We urge that proper and adequate machinery be established to effect and safeguard these objectives.

"A survey of conditions created in Axis-controlled or occupied countries, among which are countries of age-long Jewish settlements, reveals the undeniable fact that in addition to sharing all the disabilities suffered by their non-Jewish fellow citizens, Jews have been singled out for ruthless extermination. We therefore urge that special attention be given by the United Nations to the distinctive Jewish problems created by this policy in the application by the United Nations of the following measures to repair the ravages caused by the war.

"1. Immediate abrogation with retroactive effect of all measures discriminating on racial, religious, or political grounds against any section of the population, including all acts of denaturalization.

"2. Recognition of the right of all refugees, deportees, and other victims of Axis persecution, if they desire to do so, to return to their places of de facto residence and to the opportunities of which they have been deprived, and provision of financial and other measures enabling them to do so.

"3. Recognition of the right to indemnification for all those who have suffered the loss of property

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and/or livelihood as a result of discriminatory measures, including the loss of communal property by Jewish organizations, such indemnification to be a charge on public funds.

"4. Detention of persons charged with crimes against international law and humanity, such crimes to be understood to include all those committed by the Nazis and their followers, designed to despoil, enslave and destroy civilian populations under their control, and the completion of arrangements for the trial of such persons immediately following the cessation of hostilities in accordance with procedures agreed upon by the governments of the United Nations."

A six-point program was submitted by the Rescue Committee. read as follows:

"More than three million Jews have been done to death by the blood stained Nazi tyranny and the four million Jews who survive in this Europe live daily in the shadow of an inexorable doom. The American Jewish Conference solemnly declares that if the Nazis and their accomplices are permitted to achieve their avowed purpose, which is the total destruction of Jewish life in the territories under their control, civilization will have suffered an overwhelming disaster beyond the power of victory to repair. Military victory cannot recall a murdered people from their mass graves.

"The Conference records its deep concern that, four months after the Bermuda Conference, and eight months after the Collective Declaration of the United Nations condemning the mass murder of the Jewish people in Europe, the democracies have as yet failed to institute sustained and vigorous action to rescue those who may yet be saved. The situation remains unchanged, save that in the meantime many additional tens of thousands of Jews have been hurried to unnatural death.

"The Conference asks in the name of the common faith in the brotherhood of God and of the ideals for which the United Nations are fighting that the Governments shall recognize that a distinctive Jewish problem has been created in Europe which imposes an inescapable moral obligation on the democracies, and that such moral obligation must find expression in special practical measures which must be commensurate with the gravity and urgency of the situation. The Conference accordingly urges that the following measures be taken immediately:

"1. A solemn warning addressed by the leaders of the democracies to the Axis governments and their satellites must make it clear that the instigators of crimes against the Jews, as well as the accomplices and agents of the criminals, will be brought to justice; that all who prevent the release of Jews from Axis captivity and their departure to havens of refuge will be punished for their complicity in the policy of extermination; and that resistance to the policy of extermination and aid given to victims of Nazi policy will be taken into consideration on the day of reckoning.

"2. This warning should be given force and substance by the immediate constitution of the Allied Commission on War Crimes in London which, though its formation was announced nearly a year ago, has not yet set. And it should be a primary task of the Commission to bring home to the people of Germany the enormity of the crimes committed in their name and the certainty of retribution.

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"3. The democracies should recognize and proclaim the right temporary asylum for every surviving Jewish man, woman and child who escape from the Hitlerite fury into the territories of the United Nations.

"4. There should be public acknowledgment of the right of every Jewish refugee who can reach Palestine not only to find a haven to establish his permanent home in that country.

"5. The neutral nations bordering on Axis occupied territories should be encouraged by financial help, by additional supplies and by appropriate guarantees on the ultimate disposal of the refugees brought to their territories, to secure the release of Jews, especially children, and give them hospitality in their own lands or the right of transit to havens of refuge.

"6. A special intergovernmental agency should be created which, working in consultation with Jewish organizations, should be provided with the resources and armed with the authority to seize every opportunity to send supplies through appropriate channels, provide the means for Jewish self-defense and co-ordinate and expand the work of rescue through the underground.

"The Conference recognizes that all the victims of Nazi oppression, irrespective of race or faith, are entitled to aid and succor from the United Nations. But the situation of the Jews in Europe is unique in its tragedy. They have not only been more deeply wounded than any other people, but alone among all the subject communities they have been doomed to total destruction by an act of state. For every one of them -- men, women and children -- the alternative to rescue is deportation and death.

"In the name of the Jews of America, the Conference respectfully addresses a most earnest appeal to the President of the United States not to suffer democracy to go down in defeat on the first front opened by Hitler in his war on civilization. The Conference affirms its faith that democracy has it in its power to deny victory on this front to Hitler and take the fate of the Jewish people in Europe out of his hands.

"It is not yet too late. But time presses."

A resolution asking for Jewish representation on United Nations assistance agencies was adopted after presentation by Dr. Hayim Weizmann of Philadelphia.

It requested "recognition by the United Nations of the justice of the Jewish claim for representation for the purposes of advice and co-operation on agencies that have and will be set up by the United Nations to deal with problems of relief, rehabilitation, resettlement and other aspects of postwar reconstruction."

Interim Committee

Pending the completion of selection by each of the blocs, the names of the Interim Committee members include the following:

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