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Biographical information, journal articles, "Activism versus Moderation: The Conflict Between Abba Hillel Silver and Stephen Wise during the 1940s" by Zvi Ganin; "Abba Hillel Silver: A Personal Memoir," by Leon I. Feuer, 1984, undated.

and bring it up to date, in order to make the people face the cruel truth of disintegration and decadence in Jewish life abroad. But this time it is incumbent upon us to beware of one-sidedness in our criticism, as in the versions of Brenner and Berdyczewski. We must develop a combined approach that remains faithful both to the organic view, which is essential in the self-consciousness of the Jewish people, and to the positive traits by which the Jewish people maintained its creative vitality even under conditions of exile, for those traits can also give support to the aspiration to renew independent Jewish life in the State of Israel.

## Activism versus Moderation: The Conflict between Abba Hillel Silver and Stephen Wise during the 1940s

Zvi Ganin

HITLER'S RISE TO power and the outbreak of World War II marked the end of an era during which European Jewry had stood at the forefront of the Zionist movement. Henceforth Zionist leaders in Palestine turned increasingly to the American Jewish community for the political, economic and organizational support they required. However, neither the Jews of the United States nor the American Zionist movement were prepared, either mentally or organizationally, to take the place of European Jewry. Moreover, American Jewry itself had been deeply affected by the worldwide financial crisis, by the rise of the Nazis, and by the increase in American anti-Semitism. The process of transforming the American Jewish community into a pro-Zionist political force was therefore slow, complicated, painful, and rife with internecine struggles and failures.

The danger that threatened the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine), its fear of being cut off from the Zionist centers (as had happened during World War I), and the desire to concentrate political activities in the United States combined to bring about the establishment, on September 19, 1939, of the Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs. At its head were members of the Zionist Organization of America (Z.O.A.): Solomon Goldman (Z.O.A. President), Louis Lipsky, representatives of the other Zionist organizations (Poalei-Zion, Hadassah, and the Mizrahi) and—as the dominant figure in its leadership—the veteran Zionist leader Rabbi Stephen Wise.<sup>1</sup>

However, the Emergency Committee never managed to become an effective instrument of Zionist political activity. Its failure was double: a failure in leadership on the part of its chairman, Wise, who did not obtain

\* I wish to thank Professors Ben Halpern and Arie Gartner for their useful comments.

<sup>1</sup> Report on the activities of the Zionist Emergency Council, 1940–1946, Zionist Archive, New York (henceforth Z.A.-N.Y.).



a sufficient budget or establish an apparatus worthy of the name; and a failure of the four Zionist parties, and particularly of the Z.O.A. whose leaders were deeply engaged in personal disputes.

The state of the Emergency Committee, wrote David Ben-Gurion in February 1942, could not be worse. The personal relations among the leadership were poor, and the lack of a strong chairman hamstrung the Committee, preventing the development of effective political activity. Wise was the best liked leader, but he was too busy to concentrate on political affairs. Ben-Gurion, who unsuccessfully tried to create a new leadership, was impressed by Reform Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver:<sup>2</sup> "... he is firm in his opinions, proud to be a Jew, he knows Hebrew, he is well acquainted with Palestine (better than other leaders), and he is not afraid of dual loyalty." However, Ben-Gurion added, "he is not well liked by the Zionist public, and is not well versed in Zionist diplomacy."<sup>3</sup>

Chaim Weizmann, also in the United States during 1942, was well aware of the grave state of the Emergency Committee. He too came to the conclusion that an heir must be found for Wise, and turned to Silver. Silver and Weizmann came to know each other better when Silver travelled to England in 1942 to lecture in behalf of the Keren Hayesod (Palestine Foundation Fund). Silver's oratorical powers and his resolute Jewish and Zionist stand impressed Weizmann. In April 1942 at a meeting of the Emergency Committee, Weizmann described Silver's visit to England as "a signal success."<sup>4</sup> Wise also knew of the leadership qualities with which Silver was endowed, and at that time considered him as his possible heir.<sup>5</sup>

In June 1942 Weizmann contacted Silver (with Wise's agreement and through the intervention of Meyer Weisgal), with the aim of getting Silver to agree to head the Emergency Committee,<sup>6</sup> although the first public expression of Weizmann's intentions came only seven months later. It took a further eight months of pressure on Silver before he agreed to take on this post.

2 Silver was an interesting phenomenon, an enthusiastic Zionist leader in a large Reform community which was indifferent to Zionism. He had demonstrated his superior organizational abilities as head of the United Jewish Appeal and as President of the Palestine Appeal since 1938. Silver had been a member of the Executive of the Emergency Committee since its inception and was younger than Wise by about twenty years.

3 Ben-Gurion to Moshe Shertok, Washington, February 8, 1942, Ben-Gurion Archives.

4 Protocol of the meeting of the Emergency Committee, April 17, 1942, p.1, Z.A.-N.Y.

5 Wise to Bakstansky, September 29, 1942, Stephen Wise Archive, American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, Mass. (henceforth Wise Archive).

6 Weizmann to Wise, June 20, 1942, Weizmann Archive (henceforth W.A.).

Silver made his acceptance conditional on the full centralization of authority in his hands, and on appropriate financing, which was to be guaranteed by the heads of the Jewish National Fund and the Keren Hayesod.<sup>7</sup> His demand that he exercise control over Zionist political activities in the United States encountered opposition among the other leaders and became a source of contention between him and the Executive of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, which at that time (May 1943) had decided to open an office for political activity in Washington, headed by Dr. Nahum Goldmann.<sup>8</sup>

Other obstacles also stood in Silver's way to the leadership of the Emergency Committee. Personal relations between him and some of his colleagues in the Executive of the Z.O.A. were poor. Silver, who had an authoritarian personality, was known as a difficult and sharp-tongued person who had made many enemies in the course of his work as rabbi in Cleveland and as a Zionist leader. He was also exceptional in the Zionist leadership in that he was known as a Republican (although he had voted for Roosevelt in 1932 and 1936) having close ties with Senator Robert Taft, one of the leaders of the conservative wing of the Republican Party. The opposition to Silver amongst prominent American Zionists had frustrated Weizmann's year-long efforts to place him in a leadership position.

The barriers to Silver's election as head of the Emergency Committee were finally overcome in July 1943 when Emanuel Neumann, his close friend and confidant, with the help of Meyer Weisgal and other supporters of Silver, formed a movement to "draft" Silver as candidate for the presidency of the Z.O.A. In fact Weisgal's true aim was more devious. In return for Silver's agreement to withdraw his candidacy, Weisgal hoped that Silver's opponents would agree to support his appointment as chairman of the Emergency Committee and its Executive.

The scheme worked well at first. Silver's candidacy for the presidency received broad support and demonstrated his great popularity among the members of the Z.O.A. But in accordance with Weisgal's ploy, Silver did not run for the elections. Dr. Israel Goldstein remained the only candidate for the presidency, with the guaranteed support of Silver's people, and in return the backing of the Z.O.A. was assured for Silver's nomination to the Executive of the Emergency Committee. Both Poalei-Zion and the Mizrahi supported Silver's nomination, and only Hadassah remained

7 Silver to Weisgal, March 28, 1943, Central Zionist Archive, Jerusalem (henceforth C.Z.A.), Z5/653.

8 Silver to Weisgal, May 13, 1943, C.Z.A., Z5/653.



ambivalent.<sup>9</sup> However, at the end of July a new obstacle arose when Wise, the veteran head of the Emergency Committee in its old form, reversed his original decision to resign from its leadership and make way for Silver. In the end Wise responded to the pressures of the Z.O.A. and the crisis ended in a compromise (August 1943), the results of which, as we shall see, were to be disastrous. Both Wise and Silver were appointed as cochairmen to the Emergency Committee, and Silver's special status was given organizational expression as chairman of its Executive Committee.<sup>10</sup>

Weizmann sent a warm telegram of congratulations to Silver, in which he emphasized that Silver's appointment constituted "an event fraught with significance for our cause at this critical moment when the Zionist world looks to America and American Zionism for political support."<sup>11</sup> In his telegraphed reply Silver promised Weizmann the support of the American Zionists in carrying out the Biltmore Program, and he declared his own loyalty and that of his colleagues to Weizmann's leadership.<sup>12</sup>

The first clash between Silver and Wise took place a few days after the final agreement between them had been reached, at the initial meeting of the American Jewish Conference (August 29–September 2, 1943). At that meeting, which was intended to create a united Jewish front against the White Paper of 1939, Silver and Neumann thwarted the secret agreement that had been arrived at previously between Wise, Nahum Goldmann, and the leadership of the American Jewish Committee (the most important non-Zionist organization), according to which the Biltmore Program would not be included in the Conference's resolutions. In a short but moving speech, Silver, who was the chairman of the Committee on Palestine of the Conference, attacked both Zionists and non-Zionists who, for the sake of Jewish unity, had shown themselves willing to abandon the issue of the establishment of a Jewish state. Silver's speech, which was delivered on September 1, 1943, electrified the delegates at the Conference, who rose to their feet at its conclusion, cheered, and sang "Hatikva." In response to Silver's demand, the Conference resolved, by a large majority, to adopt the Biltmore Program, with only the four representatives of the American Jewish Committee opposing.<sup>13</sup>

9 For a detailed description of that maneuver see Weisgal to Weizmann, August 11, 1943, W.A. See also Emanuel Neumann, *In the Arena*, New York, 1976, pp. 186–189; and Silver's unpublished autobiography, Silver Archive, Cleveland.

10 See Doreen Bierbrier, "The American Zionist Emergency Council: An Analysis of a Pressure Group," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, vol. LX (September 1970), p. 85.

11 Weizmann's telegram to Silver, undated (August 1943?), C.Z.A., Z5/727.

12 Silver's telegram to Weizmann, undated (August 1943?), W.A.; and see Silver's warm telegram to Weizmann, September 1, 1943, after the vote of the American Jewish Conference for the Biltmore Program, *ibid*.

13 Isaac Neustadt-Noy, "The Unending Task: Efforts to Unite American Jewry from the

Silver's fiery speech and his uncompromising attitude with regard to the Biltmore Program are important landmarks in his career. Together they established him as the outstanding leader of American Jewry, giving authentic expression to their anger and frustration at the Holocaust and Jewish impotence. He became the foremost American Zionist activist who was not willing to compromise his fundamental political position even to achieve a united Jewish front.

Silver's leadership was quickly felt in the organizational sphere as well. He first obtained what was then a large sum (about half a million dollars) to finance the expanded activities of the Emergency Committee, which had been reorganized in the summer of 1943 and renamed the the American Zionist Emergency Council. These funds permitted him to hire a professional staff of public relations men, propagandists, and organizers, headed by Henry Montor of the United Palestine Appeal. Silver also drafted Rabbi Leon Feuer, his former assistant at the Cleveland Temple, to set up the Washington office of the Emergency Council and head it. Feuer, in turn, hired a retired Jewish journalist, Leo Sack, as a lobbyist in Congress.<sup>14</sup>

Silver and Neumann had ambitious aims. They wished to obtain support for the Biltmore Program in the Christian community and in the two Houses of Congress. When that was accomplished the support of most American Jews would be guaranteed. Furthermore, favorable public opinion and support in Congress were means of exerting pressure on the Roosevelt administration, which was indifferent and sometimes even hostile to Zionist aspirations.

While the Emergency Council became more active and more effective, as Weizmann and Ben-Gurion had hoped it would, relations between Wise and Silver deteriorated rapidly.<sup>15</sup> It was clear to all that a complete breakdown of the relations between the two leaders would not be long in coming. Their differences of opinion were not based merely on their personal rivalry. It soon became apparent that their conflict centered on questions of principle regarding Zionist tactics in the United States, the urgency of which was increased by the proximity of the 1944 presidential and congressional elections.

American Jewish Congress to the American Jewish Conference," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Brandeis University, 1976, pp. 314–321. Neumann, *In the Arena*, pp. 189–192.

14 Sack was an interesting figure: a Jew born in Mississippi, with very little Jewish background but many contacts in Congress and the administration. Cf. Leon I. Feuer, "The Birth of a Jewish Lobby—A Reminiscence," *American Jewish Archives*, vol. XXVIII, November 1976, pp. 107–118.

15 Weisgal to Weizmann, November 9, 1943, W.A.



During the election year Silver and Neumann decided to implement their new political tactics, based on ending the traditional Jewish identification with the Democratic Party and striving to obtain support from both of the big parties; and at the same time mobilizing congressional support for revoking the White Paper in favor of the Biltmore Program. The intention was to create a new political situation in which the two parties would compete for the Jewish vote, which would allow the Jews to seek support for the Zionist cause in return. The effectiveness of these tactics depended, of course, on the willingness of Jewish voters to vote as a bloc according to the stand of the Democratic and Republican Parties vis-à-vis the Biltmore Program.

The first step toward obtaining congressional support was taken in January 1944 when identical resolutions were introduced in both Houses of Congress. They opened by recalling the support of the Sixty-seventh Congress in 1922 for the Balfour Declaration. The operative clause of the resolutions argued that the "ruthless persecution of the Jewish people in Europe has clearly demonstrated the need for a Jewish homeland" for Jewish refugees. The United States should take "appropriate measures" to open the gates of Palestine and promote settlement activities, "so that the Jewish people may ultimately reconstitute Palestine as a free and democratic Jewish commonwealth."<sup>16</sup> However, two months later, the Zionist effort was defeated by the intervention of the President, the State Department, and the War Department, requesting that discussion of the resolution be suspended under the pretext that it might be detrimental to the war effort.<sup>17</sup>

Silver was not disheartened by this first serious setback. On March 14, 1944, he even succeeded in having a resolution passed by the members of the Zionist Greater Actions Committee resident in New York, confirming their support for the activist approach in the areas of propaganda and the congressional resolution.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, Nahum Goldmann opposed Silver's tactics. "It was not wise," he claimed, "to use high pressure methods continuously." It would be advisable to go over to more effective measures of quiet persuasion. Silver rejected Goldmann's proposal, claiming that Roosevelt's declaration that "the American Government has never given its approval to the White Paper of 1939" had been obtained as a result of the powerful pressure of public opinion, and that

16 Protocol of the Emergency Council, no. 11, January 31, 1944, pp. 1-2, Z.A.-N.Y.; the original formulation of the resolution H. RES 418, the 78th Congress, Second Session, was published on January 27, 1944, Elihu D. Stone papers, Brookline, Mass.

17 Elihu D. Stone, "The Zionist Outlook in Washington," *The New Palestine*, March 17, 1944, pp. 305-306.

18 Protocol of the Emergency Council, no. 18, March 20, 1944, p. 5, Z.A.-N.Y.

they had to persist in the effort in order to influence the President to take practical measures and "give evidence of his good will."<sup>19</sup>

Along with his efforts in the Congress, Silver worked for the inclusion of pro-Zionist clauses in the Democratic and Republican platforms, whose conventions had met in Chicago in the summer of 1944. Wise, a veteran supporter of the Democratic Party, opposed the inclusion of a Palestine clause in the party platforms because of his basic objection to Silver's tactics. But Silver forced him to cooperate. As Wise himself explained: "Since Silver insisted [on the inclusion of a Palestine clause in] the Republican plank, with its terrible insult to Roosevelt [which that entailed], I had to have a similar plank [in the Democratic platform]."<sup>20</sup> Thus while Silver and his supporters were persuading the Republican platform committee meeting in Chicago to include a pro-Zionist clause, Wise, Goldstein, and their friends among the Democrats worked successfully for the adoption of a similar clause by the Democratic platform committee.

The clause in the Republican platform was distinguished from its Democratic rival not only by its length but also in several important substantive respects. The Republicans deleted the key word "Jewish" from the formula of the Biltmore Program, "a Jewish commonwealth." They also added a passage containing a sharp attack against President Roosevelt, who was described as two-faced and hypocritical. The Democratic clause, in contrast, was taken almost word for word from the resolution proposed in Congress in January 1944, which explicitly called for a Jewish commonwealth. In the view of many Zionist leaders the passage attacking President Roosevelt in the Republican platform was virtually sacrilege. Wise spoke out against it publically, and in a private letter to his friend in the White House, the presidential assistant David K. Niles, he expressed his outrage against Silver for his "contemptible" act, together with an assurance that Silver's Zionist friends would not lend their hand to it.<sup>21</sup>

However, Silver was not satisfied with the simple adoption of the Palestine clause in the Republican platform. He worked for the publication of declarations of support for the position of the Emergency Council by Zionist bodies and Jewish newspapers.

19 Protocol of the Emergency Council, no. 19, meeting of the night of March 20, 1944, p. 2, Z.A.-N.Y.; telegram from Nahum Goldmann to Wise, March 11, 1944, Wise Archive. In the telegram Goldmann expressed his fears of Silver's "hasty decisions." Wise and Silver succeeded in obtaining the President's statement at a meeting on March 9, 1944. For the text of FDR's statement, cf. Reuben Fink, *America and Palestine*, New York, 1944, p. 103.

20 Wise to Solomon Goldman, July 31, 1944, Wise Archive.

21 Wise to Niles, June 28, 1944, Wise Archive.



The conflict over tactics was not restricted to Wise and Silver. An Emergency Council debate on July 10, 1944 on the question of the Republican platform revealed differences of opinion between the activists and the moderates. The women of Hadassah and some of the members of the Z.O.A. were not prepared to publish a declaration of support because of the condemnation of Roosevelt, while the representatives of Poalei-Zion, Mizrahi and other members of the Z.O.A. supported Silver's position and the compromise formula he proposed. It stated that the Emergency Council "hailed with satisfaction the section [emphasis in the original] in the plank on Palestine which was included in the Republican Party platform ...."<sup>22</sup>

Silver had won by a small majority (six to four) in his first confrontation at the Emergency Council; however, many members of the Zionist leadership found it very difficult to accept the new tactics. The two goals of Silver's approach (detaching American Jewry from the Democratic Party; and forging an ethnic Jewish voting bloc) were innovative and unconventional. They also flew in the face of the Jewish political tradition which had taken shape during the early 1930s, with Roosevelt's election. It was inevitable that Silver's tactics would cause dissension and even crisis within the Emergency Council.

The inclusion of the pro-Zionist clause in the Democratic and Republican platforms encouraged the Emergency Council, in September 1944, to renew its activities in the matter of the congressional resolution which had been stifled in March. Once again its leaders began to establish quiet contacts with senior officials in the State Department and the War Department in the hope of gaining their approval for proposing the resolution in Congress. But, to the surprise of the Emergency Council, a competing resolution was proposed at the same time to the Foreign Relations Committees of the two Houses of Congress by the "Hebrew Committee of National Liberation," the organization of Peter Bergson [alias of Hillel Kook, the head of the *Ha-Irgun Ha-Tzevai Ha-Leumi* ("The National Military Organization") delegation to the United States]. The Bergson resolution called for the immediate establishment of "mass emergency rescue shelters" for "Hebrews" able to reach Palestine, and it even called upon President Roosevelt and his administration to influence the British Government to permit free immigration of "Hebrews" from Hungary to Palestine. Some of the strongest supporters of Zionism in Congress backed the resolution, including the House Majority Leader

22 Protocol of the Emergency Council, no. 26, July 10, 1944, p. 4., Z.A.-N.Y. Cf. also the protocol of the plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 12, July 24, 1944, p. 2, *ibid.*

John W. McCormack, and Senator Robert Taft from Ohio, a friend of Silver's.<sup>23</sup>

Silver, Wise, and their colleagues in the Emergency Council took a grave view of Bergson's resolution and worked vigorously to convince both its congressional supporters and the Jewish community that it could not produce concrete results. Moreover, they strongly criticized the artificial distinction between "Hebrews" and "Jews," and the representation of Palestine only as a place of refuge, thus weakening, in their opinion, the fundamental Zionist position, which saw Palestine as the national home of the Jewish people. In the end, as a result of Zionist intervention, Bergson's resolution was stillborn. However, his initiative once again illustrated the challenge presented to the Emergency Council by the constant competition of the Bergson organization.<sup>24</sup>

At the end of October 1944 Silver expressed moderate optimism about the fate of the pro-Zionist resolution in Congress. The local Emergency Councils were working for the support of Congressmen in their states, who responded positively. Sol Bloom, the Jewish chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee, declared his intention of reconvening his committee immediately, although the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Tom Connally, had not yet announced the convening of his committee. Silver's optimism derived from three factors: (1) the withdrawal of the War Department's opposition; (2) the adoption of the pro-Zionist clauses in the platforms of the two large parties; (3) the pro-Zionist statements that had been made during the course of the presidential election campaign both by President Roosevelt and Governor Thomas Dewey. Nevertheless, Silver warned against excessive optimism as the State Department had not yet declared its position, and some opposition was expected from several members of the House Foreign Relations Committee.<sup>25</sup>

In the Emergency Council as well there were those who doubted both the usefulness of presenting the resolution and the tactics which were meant to bring about its acceptance by Congress. Some thought that in the light of the pro-Zionist clauses in the two party platforms and the declaration by President Roosevelt, little good would come of the initiative in Congress. On the other hand, the debate in Congress might be

23 Protocol of the Emergency Council, no. 30, August 31, 1944, pp. 2-4, Z.A.-N.Y.

24 On the preventive action taken by the Emergency Council to thwart the resolution proposed by Bergson, see the joint letter of Silver and Wise to Senator Elbert D. Thomas, September 8, 1944, Files of the Emergency Council, Z.A.-N.Y.; protocol of the plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 13, September 14, 1944, p. 1, Z.A.-N.Y.

25 Protocol of the plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 14, October 30, 1944, Z.A.-N.Y.



detrimental because those hostile to Zionism would be given a new opportunity to express their opposition. Neumann responded by arguing that the Emergency Council had to consider the psychological and political ramifications should it retreat from the resolution. Wise claimed that only after the meeting which he and Silver were to hold on November 9 with the Secretary of State would it be possible to come to a final conclusion. Nevertheless, Silver strongly advocated presenting the resolution. Nearly a year had passed since the presentation of the first resolution, and extensive propaganda efforts had been invested in gaining the necessary public support. If the initiative was not taken at this time, when all the signs were positive, it would be impossible to do so in 1945. Despite Roosevelt's and Dewey's pro-Zionist statements, Silver argued, the congressional resolution was highly significant.<sup>26</sup>

On November 9 Silver, Wise, and Nahum Goldmann met with Edward Stettinius, the acting Secretary of State. Stettinius declined to endorse the resolution until he had consulted with President Roosevelt, and the Emergency Council was once again forced to wait. Subsequently, Roosevelt informed the State Department that he did not favor the resolution, and his position soon became known.<sup>27</sup>

At the meeting of the Emergency Council on November 21, 1944, Wise told his colleagues that the President had "urged that nothing be done about the Bill at this time, and that the matter be left in his hands for a little while longer."<sup>28</sup> The Council therefore decided to make another attempt, through Senator Robert Wagner of New York, to gain the President's approval. Wagner did call up Secretary of State Stettinius and asked him to clarify the position of the State Department. Stettinius explained to the Senator that "in view of the recent murder of Lord Moyne in Cairo and the generally delicate situation in the Middle East, it would be unwise to bring out the resolution at this time." Moreover, Roosevelt was about to meet with "high representatives of other governments" (at Yalta), where, the President hoped, it would be possible to find "a suitable solution." Wagner expressed agreement with the President's position.<sup>29</sup>

By now the two chairmen of the Emergency Council, Wise and Silver, were no longer working in tandem. Wise had full confidence in President

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944*, Washington, 1965, vol. V, n. 55, p. 637 (henceforth F.R.U.S.); plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 15, November 9, 1944, p. 1, Z.A.-N.Y.

<sup>28</sup> Plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 16, 1944, November 21, 1944, p. 1, Z.A.-N.Y.

<sup>29</sup> F.R.U.S., p. 640.

Roosevelt's support of the Zionist cause and on December 3, 1944 he telegraphed Stettinius that while he hoped the President and the Secretary of State would support the presentation of the resolution, he agreed in advance to accept any decision they might make. He also asked Stettinius not to reveal the President's position to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Why was Wise so concerned lest the President's position be revealed? From his meetings and contacts with Roosevelt and the White House (especially through Niles), he knew of Roosevelt's doubts about the Zionist cause in view of Arab opposition and given the paucity of Palestine's resources. In early March 1944, in a meeting with Wise and Silver, Roosevelt expressed his fears that the Zionist enterprise was liable to end in mass killing. "To think of it," warned Roosevelt, "two men, two holy men, coming here to ask me to let millions of people be killed in a jihad" [emphasis in original].<sup>30</sup> The President expressed that view in greater detail in a letter to Senator Wagner dated December 3, 1944, where he explains his opposition to presenting the resolution in Congress:

There are about a half million Jews there [in Palestine] .... Perhaps another million want to go .... On the other side of the picture there are approximately seventy million Mohammedans who want to cut their throats the day they land. The one thing I want to avoid is a massacre or a situation which cannot be resolved by talking things over. Anything said or done over here just now would add fuel to the flames and I hope that at this juncture no branch of the Government will act. Everybody knows what American hopes are. If we talk about them too much we will hurt fulfillment.<sup>31</sup>

Wise, in relating to Roosevelt's position, obviously tended to be more impressed by the end of the President's statement ("American hopes") than by its pessimistic beginning. He was afraid that the revelation of Roosevelt's true opinion would deny the Zionist movement the benefit it derived from the widely held belief that within the administration the President was the only ally of Zionism. Furthermore, the truth would also severely damage his position of leadership, which was partially based on his close relationship with Roosevelt and the White House. Therefore he also preferred to accede to the President's request to put off the presentation of the resolution.

<sup>30</sup> Report of the meeting between Roosevelt and Wise and Silver, March 9, 1944, p. 1, Wise Archive, and see the protocol of the Emergency Council, no. 17, March 13, 1944, pp. 1-2, Z.A.-N.Y.

<sup>31</sup> Richard P. Stevens, *American Zionism and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1942-1947*, New York, 1962, 1970, p. 85.



For his part, Silver continued to pressure Senator Wagner to work for congressional approval of the resolution without delay. Wagner finally yielded and the two of them visited the Secretary of State on December 5, 1944, arguing that "no damage would be done by its passage now and that it does nothing more than endorse the statement" the President had made on October 15 to Senator Wagner, supporting in fact the Biltmore Program.<sup>32</sup> For the time being then the President and the Secretary of State had failed in their effort to wean Wagner away from Silver's activist position. In contrast, Senator Tom Connally supported the position of Roosevelt and his administration. Silver, who was not daunted by the opposition of the President and the State Department, continued to work indefatigably and on his own in both Houses of Congress. On November 30, 1944, the House Foreign Relations Committee voted in favor of a proposal to pass the resolution on to the House Rules Committee, where it failed as a result of the opposition of the State Department.<sup>33</sup> But the main struggle took place in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where Silver led the campaign by maintaining close contacts with Senators Taft, Wagner, and Vandenberg. However, Silver's willingness to soften the phrasing of the draft resolution was not sufficient to overcome the pitfall implicit in the wording of the Biltmore proposal ("Jewish commonwealth") or the opposition of the State Department. On December 11, 1944 the Senate Committee decided, by a majority of ten to eight, to "kill" the resolution.

During the last days before the final decision of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Emergency Council in New York was involved in a series of feverish consultations. At the meetings of the Council Wise served as chairman, while Silver was absent in Washington lobbying Senators. The deliberations of the Emergency Council followed Wise's moderate line in favor of deferring the presentation of the resolution. When Silver was subsequently consulted he refused to agree, but the plenum of the Council, at its meeting on Saturday night, December 9, reaffirmed its original decision of October 30, that "... we do not proceed with the Resolution without the green light from the President."<sup>34</sup> In fact the decision of December 9 prepared the way for the inevitable confrontation between the moderates and the activists. Silver's active pressure for the resolution was now contrary to the policy of the body of which he was cochairman.

32 *F.R.U.S.*, pp. 641-642.

33 Memorandum from Harry L. Shapiro, Executive Director of Emergency Council, December 12, 1944, Manson File, Silver Archive.

34 Protocol of the plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 17, December 9, 1944, p. 2, Z.A.-N.Y.

The crisis in the Emergency Council broke out the day after the failure in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. On December 12, 1944, Wise announced his resignation from the post of chairman of the Council. "I cannot remain Chairman of a body," he declared, "one of the leading officers of which has, in a matter of supreme importance, deliberately and persistently contravened the decisions of the Plenary Council, with the resultant hurt which has thereby been inflicted upon our sacred cause."<sup>35</sup> Wise's letter of resignation provoked a series of discussions in the Zionist organizations. The main confrontations took place on December 19 at a meeting of the Executive of the Z.O.A., and the next day, at a plenary session of the Emergency Council. At those meetings Silver stood accused in the dock. His many enemies, both personal and ideological, exploited the failure of his initiative to settle accounts with him.

The meeting of the Executive Committee of the Z.O.A. was particularly dramatic, both because of Silver's refusal—despite repeated requests—to report on the sequence of events that brought about the failure of the resolution in Congress (he claimed that he was going to submit a full report to the Emergency Council the following day), and because of the harshness of the attacks against him. He was rebuked both because he had been willing to modify the wording of the resolution and also because he had violated discipline, had acted independently, had been unwilling to cooperate, and had spread false optimism. Several speakers demanded Silver's dismissal, but in the course of the discussion more moderate voices were heard, calling for a considered approach and for the preservation of unity within the Zionist camp. It was certainly difficult for a proud, energetic, and autocratic leader like Silver to have to listen to the violent criticism from his colleagues within the movement. It is not surprising that after a while he left the meeting.<sup>36</sup>

The comments of three of the participants are worthy of special attention: Rabbi William Greenfeld, A. K. Epstein (a close associate of Weizmann's), and Nahum Goldmann. Those three attempted, each in his own way, to discuss the problem of Silver not on the organizational-legalistic level—lack of cooperation and violation of Zionist discipline—but on the level of personal political leadership. In the opinion of Greenfeld, Silver was a failure in every one of those respects: "The Zionist movement in general needs people who can get along with other people, who are capable of getting along with the President of the United States, people who can abide by the discipline of the Zionist Organization or of the Zionist Emergency Council."<sup>37</sup> Epstein argued that, "it is Palestine

35 Wise to the Emergency Council, December 12, 1944, Wise Archive.

36 Protocol of the Executive Committee of the Z.O.A., December 19, 1944, Z.A.-N.Y.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 5.



we are interested in primarily ... not a question of the prestige of individuals or an organization involved."<sup>38</sup> Goldmann, the protégé and ally of Wise, offered the most profound criticism. He analyzed Silver's activist tactics, the application of massive and vociferous pressure on President Roosevelt and his administration. Those tactics, Goldmann warned, were liable to bring about "complete political disaster." Historically, he argued, Silver actually had adopted the traditional Revisionist tactics of applying pressure through public opinion—which ultimately led to a dead end:

What we are doing here is what Revisionists have done for twenty years. It is exactly Revisionist tactics. Revisionists are very good Zionists. There has never lived in the world a better Zionist than Vladimir Jabotinsky, the incarnation of passion and devotion to Zionism, but if we would have adopted his tactics we never would have had six hundred thousand Jews in Palestine; we would have remained with resolutions, protests, and emotional outbursts of the so-called Jewish masses and would never have achieved the little or the much that we have achieved in Palestine.<sup>39</sup>

For years and years, Goldmann continued, those two schools had struggled over the correct way of accomplishing the aims of Zionism. On the one hand, there were the proponents of practical politics, who sought to achieve realistic goals in Palestine—and that was the path which Zionism had taken for twenty years; and, on the other hand, there was the school that emphasized success in winning public opinion, but its actual achievements in Palestine were worthless. Finally, he discussed the problem of Silver in the light of the central role ordained for the United States in determining the future of Palestine, and he claimed that the American Zionists could not permit themselves to have a leader who was in conflict with the architects of policy in the White House and the administration in Washington.

Silver had few defenders. At the head of those who supported him was, of course, Neumann. There is no doubt that Neumann and the rest of Silver's followers (Elihu D. Stone, the veteran Zionist leader from Boston, the journalist Jacob Fishman, and Rabbi Irving Miller) found themselves in a difficult position. It was clear that Silver had not cooperated with the Executive of the Emergency Council and had gone against an explicit decision. The goal of Neumann and his friends was thus to prevent Silver's dismissal at the meeting planned for the next day. They

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

suggested deferring the decision in the hope that tempers would cool, but were unsuccessful.

In summing up the discussion, Dr. Israel Goldstein rejected Neumann's proposal, arguing that deferral would permit Silver's supporters to conduct a public campaign, by approaching the press, with the inevitable result that the name of the Zionist movement would be discredited.<sup>40</sup> Goldstein's last words graphically illustrate the anger and resentment aroused by Silver, both because of his insensitivity to the opinions of his colleagues in the Executive and because of his activist tactics. Goldstein claimed that Silver had concealed vital facts from his colleagues on the Emergency Council and, moreover, was not welcome at the White House—to which the Zionists turn for assistance. True, if the Republican Governor Thomas Dewey were sitting in the White House, there would be a good reason for retaining Silver as a leader, but in the existing conditions, Goldstein argued, Silver must resign.<sup>41</sup>

After Goldstein's summary, an amended resolution was put up for a vote. It found Wise's protest resignation justified as a response to Silver's acts, and requested that Wise continue in office. Seventeen people voted for the resolution, and only four of Silver's supporters opposed it. That overwhelming majority demonstrated the control of Wise and the moderates over the Z.O.A. Executive. The fate of Silver's short and stormy period of leadership was decided; the majority clearly wished to dismiss him.<sup>42</sup>

The climax took place on the following day, December 20, 1944, when the Emergency Council met from eight in the evening until three the following morning.<sup>43</sup> The heads of all the Zionist parties were present. On one side stood the accuser, the elderly Wise, a veteran of fifty years of Zionist activity in the community, a brilliant speaker, the most prominent American Jewish leader of his generation, beloved and accepted by all his colleagues and known to be close to President Roosevelt. Opposed to him was a younger leader, also a Reform rabbi and a brilliant orator—but from distant Cleveland, Ohio—with Republican political leanings, who had dared to strike at what was most dear—the friendship and support of President Roosevelt. From the start it was clear that there would be a large majority in favor of dismissing Silver, for most of the members of the Z.O.A., Hadassah, and the other parties were against him.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Summary of the protocol of the plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 18, December 20, 1944, Z.A.-N.Y.



After speeches by Silver and Wise, which were heard in absolute silence, a motion was put forward stating that Dr. Silver had "acted in contravention of the decision of the Emergency Council in pressing the resolutions in Congress."<sup>44</sup> An amendment was proposed to that motion, suggesting that any decision regarding Wise's resignation should be delayed, that all officeholders on the Emergency Council resign, and that within a week a special meeting would be convened to discuss the reorganization of the Council and the holding of new elections. While the discussion of the motion and the various amendments was under way, Silver stood up. He did not wait for his formal dismissal but announced his resignation and left the meeting room. The struggle had ended with the victory of Wise and the moderates.

Wise's victory wrought great changes in the Emergency Council. He was chosen as the single chairman, and Silver's followers in the administrative staff resigned and were replaced by Wise supporters. The reorganization was achieved quickly,<sup>45</sup> although the controversy continued in the Jewish and Zionist press for some months afterwards.<sup>46</sup>

Silver's support came from two small Zionist parties, Poalei-Zion and the Mizrahi, and, to an extent which was not yet clear, from the Jewish press and the Jewish public. His central problem was therefore to consolidate his centers of power outside of the Z.O.A. and transform them into a means for taking over that organization. That was of course a long-range task, which was beyond the reach of an individual leader. Moreover, Silver attempted to shift the focus of his controversy with Wise and the moderates from the legalistic and formal issue of his violation of discipline, where he was at a disadvantage, to the questions of principle—populist activism versus personal intercession ("shtadlanut") with the authorities; and the relations of the Zionist leadership with the Roosevelt administration.

After Silver's resignation from the leadership of the Emergency Council he had, Neumann explained to him, two options open: admit defeat and leave the arena (perhaps forever), or fight back and transfer the struggle to the Zionist community throughout the United States. Silver opted for the latter, and gave his blessing to the formation of a new power base in the guise of an organization that would compete with the Emer-

44 Ibid. See the description in Neumann, *In the Arena*, pp. 202 ff.

45 Protocol of the plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 19, December 28, 1944, Z.A.-N.Y.; protocol of the meeting of the Emergency Council, no. 37, January 2, 1945, ibid.

46 Cf. articles in Independence Jewish Press Service, December 26, 1944, Wise Archive; and *The Day*, December 31, 1944. See also Silver's press release, December 28, 1944, Manson File, Silver Archive.

gency Council. On February 13, 1945 the American Zionist Policy Committee was established, ostensibly within the framework of the Z.O.A. It received considerable financial backing from Silver's supporters, thus enabling it to undertake extensive propaganda activities parallel to those of the Emergency Council. Obviously, its activities provoked the immediate angry reaction of the leadership of the Z.O.A. and the Emergency Council.

In the meanwhile the Yalta Conference (February 7–12, 1945) had ended. The Zionists had hoped that it would come to a pro-Zionist decision with regard to Palestine.<sup>47</sup> That hope proved unfounded, however, and on February 27, 1945 Winston Churchill announced in Parliament that the question of Palestine would be decided only at the end of the war. President Roosevelt astonished the Jewish community with his short announcement to Congress on March 1: "I learned more about the whole problem of Arabia—the Moslems—the Jewish problem—by talking to Ibn Saud for five minutes [on February 14] than I could have learned in the exchange of two or three dozen letters."<sup>48</sup>

This was a harsh blow to the hopes of Zionists, especially to the expectations of Wise and the moderates, who were dependent upon the two leaders of the English-speaking world. However, it offered a golden opportunity for Silver and his activist supporters to prove that their basic position had been correct, and that they had been right to warn against attributing exaggerated importance to relations with heads of state. Now Silver could defend his exercise of political pressure through public opinion. The method of the "diplomats," Silver claimed, was bankrupt. What was left to be done?

Are we to be doomed again to subsist on pledges while fulfillment is repeatedly deferred? ... it is now almost six years since the White Paper was issued, and almost five years since Mr. Churchill took office. During these years Jewish blood has flowed in torrents, but the Palestine issue still remains where Chamberlain left it.

47 On the great hopes pinned by the Zionists upon the results of the Conference of the three Great Powers at Yalta, see the protocol of the Executive Committee of the Z.O.A., January 6, 1945, p. 3, Z.A.-N.Y.; protocol of the plenary session of the Emergency Council, no. 20, January 25, 1945, p. 5, ibid. On the Palestine question at the Yalta Conference, see Joseph Heller, "Roosevelt, Stalin and the Palestine Problem at Yalta," *The Wiener Library Bulletin*, N.S., vol. 30 (1977), pp. 25–35; Amitzur Ilan, "The Conference of Yalta and the Palestine Problem," *The Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Fall 1977), pp. 28–52.

48 Quoted in Zvi Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry and Israel*, New York 1979, pp. 16–17.



In the light of Zionist disappointment with the Yalta Conference, Silver declared that the only path that could be taken was to shake free of illusions:

This is no time for weakness and cautious "moderation." The moment calls for great courage and a return to a vigorous, militant policy.<sup>49</sup>

Wise was bitterly disappointed with Roosevelt's comments on his meeting with Ibn Saud, and he quickly requested a meeting with the President. He was well aware that his victory over Silver would be questioned—for it was largely based on his ties with the President. Wise met with Roosevelt on March 16, 1945. The details of that meeting, in which Herman Schulmann also took part, are scant, but the two Zionist leaders left encouraged because Roosevelt agreed to sign a short draft declaration in which he reaffirmed his pro-Zionist declaration of October 1944.<sup>50</sup>

However, Wise's success in no way weakened the counterattack by Silver and his supporters. Silver's statements and speeches were masterpieces of brevity, clarity, and acuity. Their central motifs were anchored in the horrors of the Holocaust, in the abandonment of the Jews and, especially, in the messianic vision of Jewish sovereignty in Palestine. These themes, aided by Silver's impressive and tempestuous oratorical powers, touched the deepest strains of the Jewish soul and aroused enthusiastic reactions among the Jewish masses. Thus, for example, on April 29, 1945, at a huge Zionist rally held in Lewisohn Stadium in New York, in which thousands of Jews took part, Silver received long and enthusiastic applause.<sup>51</sup> His group rapidly became a Zionist force which Wise and the moderates could not ignore.

At the same time Wise was subject to direct appeals to settle his differences with Silver. Weizmann telegraphed both Wise and Silver from Palestine,<sup>52</sup> begging them to end the controversy within the Emergency Council. Wise, who suspected that Weisgal had instigated the dispatch of the telegram he received, concealed its existence from his

49 Silver's press release about his new organization, the American Zionist Policy Committee, March 4, 1945, Silver Archive; on the confusion and frustration among the leaders of the Z.O.A. after Roosevelt's announcement, see the protocol of the Executive Committee of the Z.O.A., March 6, 1945, pp. 8–9, Z.A.-N.Y.

50 For photostat of Roosevelt's signature on the draft resolution, see Zvi Ganin, "The Diplomacy of the Weak: American Zionist Leadership during the Truman Era, 1945–1948," Ph.D. thesis, Brandeis University, 1974, p. 40.

51 Protocol of the Hadassah Executive, May 2, 1945, Hadassah Archives, New York.

52 Weizmann's telegram to Wise, February 22, 1945, Wise Archive.

colleagues in the Emergency Council. But pressure for a reconciliation continued to mount. Wise received letters from all over the United States asking him to heal the rift, and, in addition, 146 Zionists sent a telegram to the Executive of the Z.O.A. and the Emergency Council calling for a closing of the ranks and requesting Silver's return to active leadership of the Emergency Council.<sup>53</sup> Weizmann too was not inactive. He telegraphed Louis Lipsky, the veteran Zionist leader, and asked him to mediate between the two camps.<sup>54</sup>

In response to these pressures the Executive of the Z.O.A. convened a "Peace Committee" on April 1, 1945 to examine the possibilities for ending the controversy—although it had decided to reject categorically any proposal that could be interpreted as lack of confidence in Wise's leadership. A former President of the Z.O.A., Judge Louis E. Levinthal, of Philadelphia, was chosen to chair the committee, and its members included Daniel Frisch of Indianapolis, Louis Lipsky of New York, Ezra Shapiro of Cleveland, and Dewey D. Stone of Brockton, Mass.<sup>55</sup> The Peace Committee acted very slowly because its formation and meetings took place at a time when Zionist activities were concentrated on the San Francisco Conference (April 25–June 26, 1945).

Nevertheless, the internal Zionist pressure on Wise and his leadership did not cease. In early June the President of the American Mizrahi, Leon Gellman, sent an ultimatum to Wise, announcing that the great interest aroused by the San Francisco Conference could not conceal the grave political situation of the movement. Gellman's letter constituted a sharp indictment of Wise and his leadership, detailing his failures: the congressional resolution had not been submitted anew; anti-Zionist tendencies within the State Department had not been condemned; no attempt had been made to confront the administration via public opinion; and Wise had depended too much upon private and public promises of individual statesmen.

On June 15, 1945, a few days after the dispatch of the Mizrahi letter, a harsh blow was dealt the moderate camp when Hayim Greenberg, the respected ideologue of Labor Zionism in America and the chairman of the Emergency Council's Executive Committee, announced his immediate resignation because "the sharp cleavage in our ranks and the manner in which it manifests itself publicly is bound to undermine whatever remains

53 Protocol of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Z.O.A., April 1, 1945, p. 6, Z.A.-N.Y.

54 Ibid.

55 Summary of the discussion of the Executive Committee of the Z.O.A., April 1, 1945, Z.A.-N.Y.



of the prestige or reputation of our leadership."<sup>56</sup> Whatever motivated Greenberg's resignation (which was unanimously rejected by the Emergency Council), it made the leadership of the Z.O.A. and the Peace Committee realize that the position of the moderates had worsened, and that the Committee must finish its work quickly.

At the end of June 1945 the Peace Committee finally presented its recommendations to the heads of the Z.O.A.; it accepted Silver's basic demands for reorganization of the Emergency Council, the practical significance of which was his return to an unchallenged position of leadership. However, Silver and Wise were once again designated as joint chairmen, although Silver was made chairman of the Executive Committee, the decisive operative body. Moreover it was decided that Neumann and Lipsky would be included in that committee.<sup>57</sup> In mid-June Wise had written in a personal letter that he would not endorse an agreement proposed by Silver if the latter insisted that authority be concentrated in his hands,<sup>58</sup> but in the end he had to give in. To appease him three vice-chairmen were nominated, representatives of Poalei-Zion (Hayim Greenberg), Mizrahi (Leon Gellman), and the Z.O.A. (Herman Schulman—one of Wise's most ardent supporters).

Finally on July 16, 1945 the Emergency Council published a press release about its reorganization, announcing that Silver had been called upon to return to the chairmanship.<sup>59</sup> His chief assistants also returned to their former posts. The next day the American Zionist Policy Committee circulated a memorandum among its members expressing great satisfaction:

We have achieved one of our major objectives. Dr. Abba Hillel Silver has been recalled to leadership and the American Zionist Emergency Council has been reorganized in a manner that will insure the carrying forward of a militant Zionist program without obstruction.<sup>60</sup>

The memorandum also lauded Neumann, this praise being fitting, as Silver's return was largely the result of his labors. A brilliant political

tactician, Neumann successfully piloted Silver and the activist camp to a central leadership position in the political struggle of American Zionism for the establishment of the Jewish state.

Zionist leaders in the United States generally came from the ranks of the Z.O.A., the main Zionist organization, whose President was changed every two years. But in addition to those presidents (whose personal and political weight varied), four key figures with great influence and authority were also active: the native leaders, Justice Louis Brandeis and Rabbi Wise; and the foreign leaders, Chaim Weizmann, the President of the World Zionist Organization, who spent a considerable part of the war in the United States, and David Ben-Gurion, the Chairman of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, who was also in the United States for prolonged visits. After Brandeis's death in 1941 the key figures were Wise, who held several titles and positions, the ageing Weizmann, with his enormous prestige and authority, and the tough and zealous Ben-Gurion, who never made a place for himself in the American arena and failed in his attempt to have Weizmann removed from office. That chaotic leadership situation lasted for four years (from the summer of 1939 to that of 1943), four terrible years, in which Rostow's axiom was demonstrated: "The need for leadership ... is proportional to the distress of the followers."<sup>61</sup>

The distress of American Jewry and Zionism, which found expression in Wise's failure to revive the Emergency Council, brought about Weizmann's appointment of Silver. That appointment underscored the inability of American Zionism (and above all, the Z.O.A.) to cope with the ineffectuality of Wise's leadership and to produce new leaders on its own. Moreover, Wise's decision to remain in office as joint chairman of the Emergency Council at the time of Silver's appointment in the summer of 1943, had far-reaching negative effects upon the Zionist political effort and proved the unwillingness of the veteran moderate leadership to give up its influence and position.

The dire straits of the Jewish people and of Zionism during World War II also led to unceasing discussion of the strategy and tactics to be adopted by American Zionism. Among the Zionist leaders in the United States there was basic agreement that the central goal of the political struggle should be the deferral or cancellation of the ordinances of the White Paper, and that the strategy to be adopted should concentrate on bringing President Roosevelt to exert maximum pressure upon Whitehall with the aim of making the British Government change its policies in Palestine.<sup>62</sup>

56 Hayim Greenberg to Wise, June 15, 1945, appendix to the protocol of the meeting of the Emergency Council, no. 53, June 19, 1945, Z.A.-N.Y. Cf. also the protocol of the Political Committee of the Mapai Central Committee, July 13, 1945, pp. 17-18, file 26/45, Beit Berl, Archive of the Labor Party.

57 Protocol of the Executive Committee of the Z.O.A., June 24, 1945, pp. 2-6, Z.A.-N.Y.

58 Wise to Solomon Goldman, June 14, 1945, Wise Archive.

59 Press release of the Emergency Council on its reorganization, July 16, 1945, papers of Robert Szold, Z.A.-N.Y.

60 Memorandum of the American Zionist Policy Committee to the members of the its national council, July 17, 1945, Manson File, Silver Archive.

61 Dunkwart A. Rustow (ed.), *Philosophers and Kings: Studies in Leadership*, New York, 1970, p. 21.

62 Protocol of the meeting of the Emergency Council, no. 20, April 3, 1944, p. 3, Z.A.-N.Y.



After the adoption of the Biltmore Program in May 1942, and especially after its ratification by the American Jewish Conference in the summer of 1943, an additional question arose: should the Zionist movement combine the struggle against the White Paper with the claim for a Jewish commonwealth and thus run the risk of division within the ranks of American Jewry, in that the American Jewish Committee was strongly opposed to the idea of a Jewish state?<sup>63</sup> Silver's attitude, even at the beginning of his leadership, toward the claim for a Jewish state was not coincidental. It clearly indicated his maximalist conception, which will be discussed below. However, in the moderate camp there were not many who shared that conception, and the prominent leaders such as Wise and Nahum Goldmann were actually sharply opposed to it.

In the extensive polemical literature that was published at the time of the confrontation between Silver and Wise, Silver's followers described the struggle as one between activism and *shtadlanut*, or a confrontation between "Aggressive Zionism" and "the Politics of the Green Light [from the White House]." One wonders whether that popular definition might not be too simplistic. For what is *shtadlanut*? As it is widely used the term is pejorative, the "opposite of a policy worthy of the name," as a mode of action taken by the representatives of a weak people "who stand at the gates of ministers and patrons, begging and interceding to obtain comfort and salvation by asking for mercy."<sup>64</sup>

We must therefore assess whether Wise's *modus operandi* can be classified as *shtadlanut*, for it is well known that he was a proud Jew and experienced in bitter public struggles within the American Jewish community and in using the masses to achieve Jewish and Zionist goals. In the early 1930s he was not deterred from a sharp public confrontation with Franklin Delano Roosevelt, then Governor of New York. Generally, Wise was not known to be one who begged favors (although in his relations with President Roosevelt during the 1940s there are certain conspicuous exceptions to this generalization).

Thus Wise was not a *shtadlan* in the common sense of the term. His methods during the period under discussion (like those of Weizmann) were those of personal diplomacy, which did not underrate public opinion, but which attempted to cope with a difficult basic dilemma: how to

63 See Silver's remarks, protocol of the Emergency Council, no. 6, November 29, 1943, p. 4, Z.A.-N.Y.

64 Eliezer Steinman, "Eight Chapters in Policy" (Hebrew), in: *Ahdu Ha'avoda, Articles Collected by Mapai in Memory of Chaim Arlosoroff*, Tel Aviv, 1943, p. 91; for a harshly critical article against Silver and his presentation of the controversy as one between the activists and the *shtadlanim*, see Shlomo Grodzinski, "Dr. Silver and His Militantism" (Yiddish), *Yiddisher Kemfer*, April 6, 1945, pp. 4-7.

obtain President Roosevelt's support and sustain it even though the Zionists held no bargaining chips and despite the animosity of the State Department and the Defense Establishment. Wise (and Weizmann) understood very well that, given the structure of the U.S. Government, only the President and the White House could neutralize that animosity.

Wise believed that continued personal contact with the President and granting him unconditional and unlimited political support for his reelection, in addition to the demand that justice be done to the Jewish people following the Holocaust, and placing trust in Roosevelt's basic integrity, would create a personal and political obligation which would be translated into pro-Zionist measures on the part of the White House. That method of action was based primarily on the carrot rather than the stick. It emphasized the obtaining of privileged access to the President,<sup>65</sup> and was accomplished by holding as many meetings as possible between Wise and the President and his Jewish associates in the White House and in Washington.

Silver and Neumann gradually developed a different approach. They began to view Zionist political activity as normal political activity by an American pressure group, which could use both the carrot and the stick with politicians. As opposed to Wise and the moderates, Silver and Neumann refused to act within the traditional framework of personal diplomacy. They gradually started to develop new rules of play and a new *modus operandi*, based on forging political power and wielding it. That system can truly be called activist and aggressive.

The activist tactics of Silver and Neumann had seven basic elements:

1. a basic belief in the importance of mobilizing the masses (in protest meetings, demonstrations, and processions);
2. emphasis on gaining public opinion and the Congress as central allies;
3. by means of the latter—exertion of constant pressure upon the President and the administration, being willing to appear to be a nuisance which, though unpleasant, demands consideration;
4. abandonment of the traditional bond with the Democratic Party and the creation of freedom of maneuver between the two major parties for the purpose of increasing Zionist bargaining power;
5. willingness to voice public criticism of the President, emphasizing the principle "put not your trust in princes ...";

65 David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process*, 2nd ed., New York, 1971, p. 399. The *modus operandi* of attempting to convince Roosevelt's Jewish associates is well illustrated by the detailed report of Dov Yosef to the Executive of the Jewish Agency on his trip to the United States, protocol of the Executive of the Jewish Agency, no. 28, February 4, 1945, vol. 40/2, C.Z.A.



6. encouragement of Jewish bloc voting to be used as a stick to goad the White House, the criterion for the Jewish vote being the relation of the White House and the administration to Zionist demands;
7. on the level of the American Jewish community: unwillingness to compromise with non-Zionists (especially the American Jewish Committee), and in lieu of that—making a concerted effort to weaken their influence in the American Jewish community.

We have seen that Silver's path to activist leadership as head of the Emergency Council was not an easy one. His willingness to confront the State Department and the White House directly was novel, daring, and too fraught with danger for a generation of leaders who were not used to Jewish-Zionist ethnic politics. When did it become clear to the American Zionist movement that Silver actually did possess the key to real achievements? The upheaval took place in the half year between December 1944 and the summer of 1945, when Wise returned to leadership of the Emergency Council. The deep disappointment with the Yalta Conference, the bad impression made by Roosevelt's speech after his meeting with Ibn Saud, the increasing revelations about the death camps, and, in addition, the constant propaganda of the competing organization established by Neumann, and, gravest of all from Wise's point of view, President Roosevelt's sudden death, which abruptly deprived him of one of the foundation stones of his position—all of these hastened the collapse of the moderate leadership. In the summer of 1945 it seemed as if the moderate line had proven itself bankrupt.

In the controversy between the activists and the moderates, Silver and his faction won partially because of the unbroken series of failures on the part of the moderates, but principally because there was full accord between the personality of the leader and the psychological needs of American Zionists during the Holocaust. Silver created the foundation upon which Zionist power politics were built in the United States. The results of that policy were garnered by the Zionist movement during the presidency of Harry S. Truman, who called for the immigration of a hundred thousand refugees to Palestine, in the thwarting of the Morrison-Grady plan of the summer of 1946, and in other important initiatives.

Moreover, Silver liberated Zionist political activity in the United States from the guardianship both of the World Zionist Organization (Weizmann) and of the Yishuv (Ben-Gurion). In so doing he transformed American Zionism into an autonomous body, closely tied to Palestine but with its own strategy and tactics.

Nevertheless, Silver did not demonstrate sufficient understanding and sensitivity, during the Roosevelt period or under Truman, of the great

importance of personal diplomacy—and even of traditional *shtadlanut*—in the relations of the Zionist movement with the White House. For in the equation of forces which were vying with each other for the support of the President, the Zionist cause was in a weaker position than that of its powerful opponents both within the administration and outside it.

It remains true, as we have stated, that Silver created the basic currency of bargaining, but his aggressive, activist tactics toward the White House angered President Truman so much that from the summer of 1946 onwards he viewed Silver as a personal enemy and refused to receive him. The anger of the President and the White House might have had dire consequences at decisive points in the political struggle, if not for the assistance of David Niles (the presidential assistant), Eddy Jacobson (Truman's personal friend), and Weizmann (the former President of the World Zionist Organisation). The traditional approach of the *shtadlan* used by Jacobson, and Weizmann's personal diplomacy and charm, supported by Silver's power politics, created in dialectical fashion a delicate balance in the relations between the Zionist movement and the White House, which, on November 29, 1947 and May 14, 1948, brought Truman to support the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.





## Abba Hillel Silver: A Personal Memoir

LEON I. FEUER

My first recollection of Abba Hillel Silver goes back to the age of sixteen. I had gone with my father, who had heard about his oratorical prowess and admired the skill, to hear him preach. My impression of that morning, even though I heard him innumerable times thereafter, is vivid and indelible. The tall, lean, gaunt figure in the cutaway coat — he never permitted himself or me to wear any other apparel in the pulpit or on ceremonial occasions — the dark eyes on fire with passionate conviction, occasionally tightly closed as though peering intently inward, the arms outstretched, the long talon-like but beautifully molded fingers seeming to encompass the entire audience which sat tense and utterly silent for fear of breaking the hypnotic mood, the incomparably beautiful voice gliding over the tonal range: It seemed to me as though the ancient prophet of Tekoa had been reincarnated before my very eyes. The awe of that moment has never really left me.

I was then beginning my first year at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, lukewarmly intending to study law in the absence of any real, convinced choice of profession, but unable to shake off the suggestion planted in my mind a few years earlier by my mother that I consider the rabbinate. That Sunday morning probably decided me. My family had in the meantime joined the Temple. My father, no more than I, could resist the spell of that young — although he never really seemed young — overpowering personality. He suggested that I solicit Rabbi Silver's advice. Neither of us had ever heard of the Hebrew Union College.

Rabbi Silver — I have never been able to bring myself to address him or even think of him in more familiar terms — neither encouraged nor discouraged me. In retrospect, it occurs to me that, having been in the ministry barely four years, he was hardly in a position,

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Dr. Leon I. Feuer, a past president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, is spiritual leader of Toledo's Collingwood Avenue Temple (Shomer Emunim).



or perhaps he did not want, to give such crucial and definitive advice. His attitude was that if I was determined to prepare for the rabbinate — the decision had to be exclusively mine — he would help and guide me. He recommended a Hebrew teacher, suggested that I take some courses in Jewish history being offered by his friend and neighbor, the Conservative Rabbi Solomon Goldman, with whom there would later be an irreparable and regrettable break, and offered to place at my disposal the annual Temple Sisterhood scholarship. Without this financial help, I could not even have entertained the idea of going out of town to school.

The following September, 1920, at the age of seventeen and in my Sophomore university year, I entered the Hebrew Union College. I was the first of a long series of rabbinical candidates whom Silver sponsored. Probably no other rabbi sponsored as many. My contacts with him during my student years were quite regular, and — as far as that was possible with this, to me, awesome, silently strong, and not always outgoing man — fairly intimate. During midyear and Passover vacations, I would lunch with him at least once or twice. These meetings followed a set and rather curious pattern. There would be a few laconic inquiries about the progress of my studies. He would then unfold a newspaper, often one of the daily Yiddish papers then being published and of which he was a regular and careful reader, and generally leave me to my food and our separate thoughts. He almost seemed to take a special kind of delight in flaunting that esoteric Yiddish type before the gaze of the non-Jewish diners around us. It seemed to be a kind of symbolic act expressive of his fierce Jewish pride. I soon got used to this procedure — I suppose indulging my own pride in being in the company of this already prominent public figure — and so I did not feel neglected. There was always a sort of unspoken communion between us, at least I liked to think so, which did not require much verbal communication. During the summer months, when he was often abroad with his family, I conducted Sabbath services and officiated at funerals. I dared to hope, and I was not wrong, that this was my preparation for my later association with him in the rabbinate of the Cleveland Temple.

During Passover of my Senior year, I was summoned to a



luncheon meeting with him and four or five members of the Temple board. I suspected the reason for the occasion, but I could not be certain, since I had not been informed. There was some informal conversation, not too much of it relevant to the purpose at hand. The meeting, so far as I could tell, was largely devoted to eating, and he did not let much interfere with that pleasure, but when it broke up and we found ourselves on the sidewalk outside, Rabbi Silver turned to me, proffered his hand, and congratulated me upon just having been elected his assistant. I was, if one can describe it that way, pleasantly and excitedly taken aback and mumbled something probably incoherent in response. I had been through an experience which was to become typical of our lifetime relationship and certainly characteristic of Abba Hillel Silver. He had not consulted my wishes in the matter. He had assumed, correctly, of course, that I wanted to be his assistant. Nor, as far as I could gather, had there been any lengthy consultation with the board. I was to be his first assistant. He simply told them that I was his choice. The rest was formality. Their function was to get acquainted with me, not to approve of me.

I dwell upon this episode because it is somewhat revelatory of his attitude toward the laymen of his congregation. He was often accused of being arrogant and high-handed with them. I think this is an oversimplification. Once having made up his mind, he had supreme confidence in his own judgment, particularly in the areas of Jewish life where he considered himself the expert and, therefore, the authority. He was the leader, laymen were the followers, and where he believed a principle was at stake, he seldom brooked opposition. That was likewise later true of his relationship with his peers in the rabbinate and in the political arena of the Zionist movement. He feared no man and no opponent, no matter how highly placed. When his eyes flashed anger and his voice seethed with indignation, the opposition generally wilted and faded away. It was only in the Zionist world, where the views of others were equally dogged and the tactics were rough, that he was not always, although remarkably often, the winner. He did not know how to compromise with or to conciliate his opponents. This may have been a weakness, for his adversaries often became his enemies, determined at the



opportune moment to strike back. This was the case with Stephen S. Wise, Chaim Weizmann, David Ben Gurion, and Nahum Goldmann. Whether it was a public weakness, history will have to judge. He was far more frequently than not vindicated by events. His talent for making enemies was, of course, the reason why he failed to achieve his ambition to become the formally elected leader of World Zionism. After a short period of frustration, he was quite able to adjust himself. He had no obsession about office holding. If official honors came to him, he accepted them as his due. If not, that was that. He wasted very little time brooding. Though a very complex person in many ways, he was in this way, as Mrs. Silver once commented, a very simple and uncomplicated man. But we are getting a bit ahead of the story.

#### A SPIRIT TO ABSORB

I served with Rabbi Silver at the Cleveland Temple from June, 1927, until January, 1935. While there was no real practical difference in my status, he insisted that I bear the title Minister of Religious Education; he suggested that, in view of my youth — I was twenty-four — this would give me an added aura of authority with the faculty and supervisors, most of whom were older. He apparently later changed his mind about this, because none of my successors bore the title. He also insisted that I must have an automobile, and since I did not have the money with which to purchase one, he loaned me three hundred dollars for which he later refused repayment, brushing me off with the remark that he did not recollect the loan. The car was a used Chevrolet, and I have fond memories of that automobile with its defective, whistling clutch. I courted my wife in it, and when he officiated at our wedding in 1929 during my second year with him, he was visibly pleased with my choice. He had confirmed her, therefore he approved of her, and a kind of camaraderie grew up between them. One of her ways to his affections was through her ability to cook and to consume potato pancakes, and between them they were able to make unbelievable quantities disappear. He was a gargantuan eater, and at midnight after an emotion-packed address or a tension-filled meeting he could



and did frequently sit down to a full meal without any untoward result or any ill effect on his sleep. This ability to relax almost instantaneously accounts for the amazing and almost profligate way in which he could discharge energy in speaking, working, and traveling, especially during the crucial years of the Zionist struggle for the establishment of the Jewish State. He paid a price, of course, in the illness of his last few years and in his sudden and unexpected death. But in those earlier years he often teased me about my more delicate digestion. It was a favorite joke of his that "they don't make rabbis like him anymore." Do they? I doubt it. He had a robust sense of humor to match his appetite, and was especially fond of Jewish dialect and Yiddish stories, often bursting into second and third rounds of laughter which convulsively shook his large frame.

As I have already indicated, he was exceedingly generous in financial matters. He could not resist a bearded *shliach* or a Hebrew book vendor. He had the means and never spared them. This may have been a kind of defiant reaction to a poverty-ridden boyhood on the East Side of New York and virtually penniless years as a student. He was always a lavish tipper. His contributions to charity were unusually large. He and his family lived very comfortably and took almost yearly trips to Europe or Palestine, later Israel. He must have made during his lifetime at least twoscore visits to the Holy Land, and a trip there always seemed to reinvigorate his strength and refresh his spirit. Travel generally was a source of intellectual replenishment for him and a means for satisfying his avid curiosity about history and other lands. Some of his best sermons drew their material from the observations and impressions he garnered on these trips.

I spent nearly eight years at The Temple. The length of my service was not unusual, though it may seem so in these days of two- and three-year apprenticeships. This was the average tenure for Silver's assistants. It will not be easy, but I must try to telescope my recollection of those years into a few vivid impressions of the remarkable and also in ways strange personality with whom I had become associated during the formative years of my professional life. His influence over me was, and over the years would increasingly



become, deep and pervasive, conscious and subconscious. My views about Jewish life, about human problems generally, my philosophy of the rabbinate, my reactions to people and events, were immutably fixed during those years. I am aware now that my days at the College had simply been a prelude to this period of my real training for the rabbinate. There was very little that was planned or formal about my learning. Rabbi Silver never had enough spare time for that. The experience was for me rather a kind of sustained mood, an intellectual environment, a spirit that I was expected to absorb. It consisted largely of listening, observing, learning what to do or to refrain from doing and when. Whatever tasks were assigned to me had to be executed as nearly perfectly as possible. He was very intolerant of mistakes or errors of judgment. Youth and inexperience were no excuse. Even so seemingly trivial a matter as a misprint in the weekly bulletin which I edited could arouse in him a Jovian and to me fearsome wrath. I am told that as the years and assistants wore on, he grew more amiable about his colleagues' shortcomings. I was like the oldest son who paves the way for his brothers.

#### STARCHED COLLARS AND BLACK TIES

This is probably the place to dispose of a myth about Silver which I have frequently run across, that he really did not care much about his rabbinical vocation or his congregation, but merely exploited them as bases from which to pursue his career as platform orator, public personality, and Zionist leader. There could be no greater distortion of the truth. Every Sabbath morning when the upper grades of the Religious School were in session — on Sundays he was in the pulpit — and prior to the Sabbath morning service, he would visit classrooms and after the service would present me with a list of critical notes about teachers, texts, classroom methods, and even the temperature in the rooms. He believed profoundly in Jewish education, with considerable emphasis upon the Hebrew language, as the chief instrumentality of Jewish survival. He was an advocate of straight, forceful, well-informed teaching and business-like learning, a program which he personally applied to his own sons who, during the year as well as during their summer vacations, had



to spend a number of hours daily studying Hebrew sources. He had nothing but contempt for "projects" and playmethod pedagogy, and the currently popular proposition that the school was a place for "pleasant Jewish experience" often aroused his ireful scorn.

Every program of every Temple organization, adult or youth, was carefully scrutinized and had to have clear relevance to what he considered the main business of a synagogue — the teaching of Jewish values and their applicability to current issues. He was uncompromisingly opposed to the institutional or synagogue center philosophy. Activities for their own sake or for their "folk" value had no appeal for him. He might be said to have been at the opposite end of the spectrum from the Reconstructionists. Because of his intense Jewish nationalism, he was certainly not a "classical" Reformer. Nevertheless, he shared with that school the conviction that Judaism as a religio-ethical way of thinking and living was the central fact of human existence, superior to all other religious and philosophic systems. Rational and pragmatic about most matters, he possessed more than a touch of mystical passion about this view and about his God faith. Even his Zionism must be viewed in this light, as a perusal of his writings and addresses will clearly reveal. It was the incarnation of the Messianic drive of the people of Israel, rooted in a long past of racial experience and dreaming, for spiritual hegemony in the world.

He exercised the same scrupulous care with regard to the selection of congregational personnel to man the boards and committees of The Temple, Brotherhood, and Sisterhood, as he did about activities and programs. No matter how occupied he might be with larger and more urgent affairs, he took a personal hand in their choice. Ability, popular following, tested loyalty to the institution and the effort to maintain family continuity in the congregation were the chief criteria. It might be said with some justification, although not altogether, for Jews are not that easily regimented, that these people simply served as rubber stamps for Silver policies. On the other side of the coin, the result clearly was a congregation and a program functioning with an unusual degree of smoothness, efficiency, and cooperation, with a minimum of internal bickering and politicking, and with all eyes focussed on the main objectives. There



was no question, of course, as to who was the boss of the total operation: the rabbi. It has been said of Silver that to him people were secondary to causes. In a sense this is true. I myself heard him on several occasions paraphrase that sentiment. It was not that he was lacking in the softer human emotions and sympathies. That would be a grave misjudgment, as I have personal cause to know. But he had sternly disciplined himself to maintain outer calm and composure — inwardly he was as tensely wound as a watchspring — and the ability to reason logically and carefully to face the many crises and emergencies of his public life. He believed firmly that people, especially Jews — and he was his own hardest taskmaster — were put upon earth to serve great causes and to achieve noble goals and that, therefore, they had to be prepared to face and to endure whatever exigencies or hardships ensued. He expected this kind of service of me and of his other associates. I think the secret of his influence over us, the reason for the lengthy terms we remained with him, is to be found in the fact that he exacted nothing of us by way of work that he did not expect of himself, sometimes manyfold. Not one of his assistants ever worked as hard as the senior rabbi.

I learned a great deal about preaching from him. Yet I cannot recall that he ever reviewed in detail the contents of a sermon with me. Just a suggestion here and there, mainly his theory that during the first five years of preaching sermons should be carefully written out and memorized. The vocabulary thus acquired, he contended, would provide the flexibility that would enable one to become emancipated from the written manuscript, to speak from notes or outline. The technique has worked, at least for me. He himself took sheaves of notes into the pulpit or onto the platform, but so great was his mastery of words, of timing, of dramatic pause, of voice inflection, that the audience was rarely, if ever, conscious of their presence. I even heard him read addresses or papers, at the rabbinical conferences, for example, so effectively that he could make his hearers forget that he was doing so. He was neither particularly critical of my preaching nor offered any special commendation. He always took my achievements, whatever they may have been, more or less for granted. I do not remember receiving a note of congratulation from him when I was elected vice-president of the Central



Conference of American Rabbis. I think that he just assumed I would be elected, and that he would have been surprised, if not disappointed, had I not been.

He was very insistent that religious services should be conducted with the proper dignity and solemnity, that rituals like confirmation should be executed as perfectly and impressively as possible. To this day I follow the habit, acquired from him, of drilling confirmation classes until they have reached the peak of mastery. He often said it was much better to work to avoid slipups and to worry about them ahead of time than to regret them later. Generally his view was that it was not new liturgies we needed, but the reading of prayers in the kind of earnest and exalting way that could not help but uplift the mood of the worshippers. He himself conducted every service as though it were fresh, revelatory, almost with a Hasidic touch of intensity — with *kavvanah*, which was one of his favorite words. He constantly urged me to read, to study, and to write. It was during my service in Cleveland that I collaborated on the preparation of a confirmation manual and a two-volume anthology of post-biblical literature, begun as experimental texts in our school. I was forced to acquire the habit of painstaking attention to detail. He simply would not endure sloppiness or shoddiness in work, in personal appearance, or even in the condition of the Temple building. He had a strong sense of the dignity of the pulpit. He insisted on the same formal attire in the pulpit, for weddings, and for funerals: cutaway, striped trousers, starched collar, and black tie. It is not an apocryphal story that in an effort to introduce some variety into his dress, his wife once asked a haberdasher for the "loudest" black ties in his stock. He once looked rather crossly askance at me because I went into the pulpit with a black and white patterned tie. His devotion to his rabbinical duties set a pattern for me which I have not always been able to emulate, but which, when I have failed, has always given me a severe case of bad conscience. He often preached with a high temperature, being subject to frequent bouts of colds and sore throat. During the hectic period of the 1940's, when he was leading the Zionist campaign for American support and was compelled to spend nearly every week from Monday to Thursday in New York and Washington, he insisted upon being home except in



emergencies every weekend, to meet with his confirmation class which he disliked missing, and to occupy his pulpit on Sunday mornings. I wondered then how he stood up under the strain. I know now what the cost was. I have often been amused by the disbelieving reaction of colleagues when I would tell them that it was his weekly custom to inspect the Temple building from furnace room to dome, and God help the staff if everything was not in place and spic-and-span.

#### PRIMUS INTER PARES

One of the difficulties — perhaps the only unpleasant aspect — of my stay in Cleveland was the strained situation which existed between him and some of his local rabbinical colleagues, first Solomon Goldman and then Barnett R. Brickner. I sometimes found myself in the middle, because I liked both of them. I thought that he was at times unnecessarily unyielding and stubborn in both of those situations, and sometimes I even summoned up enough nerve to say so. As is always the case in these tangled, personal rivalries and relationships, it is impossible to assess any share of the blame one way or the other. Part of it was certainly due to the psychological difficulty with which a rabbi who is himself quite capable struggles when he finds himself in the same community with an outstanding personality like Silver whom he cannot hope to overtake in popular esteem and prominence. So he falls victim to the temptation to indulge in acts of petty jealousy and backbiting. As a completely overshadowed assistant, I could be sympathetic at times — but not always. They should have reconciled themselves to the fact that in his generation he was *primus inter pares*. Perhaps he should have been more generous in his understanding of them.

I do not believe that I would ever have known whether my service during those years had been satisfactory to him. I was confident that there was a basic understanding and affection between us, but I was never really certain how he felt until the night of the farewell dinner tendered me by the Temple Brotherhood. During his address he was clearly swallowing a few lumps, and one or two tears trickled down his cheeks. When the tender of the pulpit of Colling-



wood Avenue Temple in Toledo, to which he had recommended me without my knowledge, had come and I solicited his advice, his response was that it would be much more convenient for him if I remained, but that, on the other hand, he felt that it would be much better for me to accept, that the time had come for me to strike out on my own. When I told him that some of my friends, including members of the College faculty, had advised me against accepting because that congregation had a rather poor reputation, his characteristic reply was: "There are neither good nor poor congregations. Jews are the same everywhere. There are only good or poor leaders."

In January, 1935, he installed me as rabbi of Collingwood Avenue Temple. Thereafter he was with me and I with him on virtually every important milestone in our professional lives. Our families spent several summer vacations together in a rustic camp in Maine to which he was very fond of going when he did not go abroad. There he could relax and become informal enough even to wear a soft-collar shirt. He enjoyed walking, swimming, card playing in the evening, and most especially fishing. He loved to boast of his prowess as an angler. Outdoor picnics were a regular feature, and he always insisted that our wives forage for the makings of potato pancakes. Our guide became an expert in Jewish cookery. A regular part of each day was spent in perusing the daily press, study, writing, and his sons' Hebrew lessons. The kindling of the Sabbath lights and the recitation of the Kiddush were always observed by our two families in the Silver cabin before we went to the public dining room.

In 1943, he assumed the chairmanship, during the most dreadful and dangerous period of modern Jewish history, of the American Zionist Emergency Council, the action arm of the various cooperating Zionist organizations and groups in the United States. He was to lead the effort to win American support for the abolition of the British White Paper of 1939 and then for the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine. This was to be the climactic and, both physically and emotionally, the most desperately difficult period of his life and Jewish leadership. I do not propose to go into any detailed recital or analysis of the events of those years, except



perhaps as a different perspective may be cast upon them, for some curious twisting and rewriting of history have emanated in connection with them from certain quarters. How he swung the temporarily assembled American Jewish Conference to the support of the aim of Jewish political independence, despite the opposition of the leaders of the American Jewish Committee and others, is a matter of record. His forthright public criticism of the Roosevelt Administration for its inaction in the face of the European Jewish tragedy is also clearly on the record. He did not altogether trust Franklin D. Roosevelt's public professions of support for the Zionist movement, and said so publicly. The recent publication of State Department papers dealing with the Roosevelt-Ibn Saud consultations amply justifies the position which he took. He was severely critical of Zionist leaders, whom he described as being in the pockets of Tammany Hall and the Democratic Party. He made strenuous and successful efforts to cement personal friendships and to win political, nonpartisan support from both political parties. This gave rise to another Silver myth, the amusing notion that he had become a Republican conservative because he opposed the third-term candidacy of Roosevelt to support Wendell L. Willkie and later endorsed Dwight D. Eisenhower. This is indeed an ironic and very wide of the mark estimate of a man who had voted for Norman Thomas, Robert M. LaFollette, Alfred E. Smith, and Roosevelt himself for two terms; who throughout his life had been an advocate of radical social and economic reforms, and in the last years of his life was even charged with being pro-Soviet. In this struggle for Jewish statehood, Silver also strongly opposed as futile the conventional, *shtadlanut*, back door approach of Jewish leadership, and argued for and succeeded in developing mass Jewish pressure upon the United States Government. That this could be done in war time was, to put it mildly, phenomenal. Newspapermen and political figures in Washington were unable to contain their astonishment at the effectiveness of it.

#### PUT NOT YOUR TRUST IN PRINCES

The plight of European Jewry and the desperate urgency for opening the gates of Palestine brought Silver and me back into intimate daily association. He requested the board of my temple to



grant me a year's leave of absence, so that I could become the Washington representative of the American Zionist Emergency Council. He spent part of every week with me, in Washington, discussing the Jewish situation with leaders of the Executive and Legislative branches of the government, the press, and other influential personalities and directing there and in New York the strategy of the campaign by which he hoped to mobilize American public and official support for combatting the British White Paper and for a Jewish State. We organized branches of the American Zionist Emergency Council in scores of American cities and towns, concentrating on larger urban centers where there were substantial numbers of Jewish voters with whom senators and representatives running for election had to reckon. Then we arranged to have bipartisan resolutions proclaiming American sponsorship for the objective of the establishment of a Palestine Jewish Commonwealth introduced in both the Senate and the House. Our local councils were charged with the task of organizing their Jewish communities and of obtaining help and moral support for our cause from non-Jewish sources — the press, civic and church groups, and academic circles. To aid in this general effort, we sponsored nationally, with numerous local chapters, an organization known as the American Christian Palestine Committee.

I went to Washington in the fall of 1943. My job was to interview, to solicit, and to organize the support of senators and congressmen, to pave the way for interviews by Silver of the more influential Congressional and governmental leaders, to arrange for local deputations to come to Washington to speak with their representatives, and, along with my colleagues in the Emergency Council who were operating out of our New York office, to stimulate the sending of messages from local communities to the national capital. I also arranged for the presentation of our case before the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate and the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House.\*

\* Parenthetically, I should like to make at least this passing reference in gratitude to the enormous assistance which we received from the late Senator Robert A. Taft, whose contribution to the Zionist cause has been unjustly obscured and should someday in all fairness be brought to historical light.



It was during this year and those which followed that I really had an opportunity to gauge Silver's ability as a popular leader. His single-minded devotion to the task is simply indescribable. He traveled constantly, addressed literally hundreds of meetings, interviewed scores of prominent personages, and fought like a tiger to make the cause and his judgment of events prevail. His political acumen and sense of timing were faultless. Again and again things happened and people reacted as he said they would. Not only his sweeping eloquence, but the sheer logic and cogency of his arguments, as well as his mastery of the facts, were irresistible. I recall particularly his appearance to testify before the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate. The impressive figure, the compelling voice, the earnest argument, the verbalizing of the desperate plight of the Jewish people, held that group utterly spellbound for more than an hour. Afterwards, senators from all over the country, in agreement or not, crowded around to congratulate him on his presentation. Nevertheless, the Resolution was tabled for the time being. Testifying both to the efficacy of our organized efforts and the loyal response of American Jewry, both that year and in 1946 when the Joint Resolution was finally passed, hundreds of thousands of messages poured into the mailrooms of congressmen. One Washington reporter told me that he had never seen a more efficiently organized lobby in operation. Responding to the urging of the British Government, Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall took the unprecedented step of going up on the hill to request that the Palestine resolution be tabled. His argument was that it would cause an Arab uprising which would hamper the war effort. Using personal pressure, President Roosevelt persuaded several New York Zionist leaders to come personally to Washington and to testify before the Foreign Relations Committee that they did not think it would matter too much if the Resolution was postponed for a time. I do not believe that I have ever seen Silver so agitated as on that day. He paced back and forth, complexion white, teeth clenched, lips pale and trembling. He literally regarded them as traitors to the cause. My own reaction was akin to that which I had felt some weeks previously, when hearings of the House Foreign Affairs Committee were in progress, on seeing American Arabs and spokesmen for the American Council for Judaism in whispered consulta-



tion. The Resolution was passed about a year and a half later after the exertion of considerably more political pressure during the next Congressional elections of 1946 and the influx of a phenomenal number of additional messages both from Jews and from non-Jews. Except for the intervention of the Executive Branch, there can be little doubt that it would have passed the first time around.

Silver was now convinced that there had to be a showdown on policy and leadership, and that the only way to achieve it was to capture direct control of the largest of the Zionist bodies, the Zionist Organization of America. He resigned his chairmanship of the American Zionist Emergency Council to campaign for the presidency of the Z. O. A. Emanuel Neumann, his lifelong friend and in those days his second-in-command; Harold Manson and Harry Shapiro, who had been officials of the Emergency Council; and I managed the campaign, visiting Zionist districts and debating the opposition verbally and in the Jewish press. Silver was overwhelmingly victorious at the Zionist Convention of 1945. The Jewish masses demonstrated that they were with him and supported his policy of popular political expression and action. "Put not your trust in princes," was the rallying slogan. The opposition literally melted away. We were now preparing to go to the Zionist Congress in Basle where, in 1946, the battle was to be joined on a larger front. The issue again was whether to engage in militant, public agitation on a worldwide scale including Palestine or to follow the Weizmann policy of reposing confidence in Winston S. Churchill's promises and in the good faith of the British Government; whether to attempt to achieve a united front of the Haganah, the Irgun, and other groups which were conducting the struggle for independence and for a Palestine open to hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees, or to follow Weizmann's advice to placate the British by condemning the "terrorists." Silver led the Z. O. A. delegation, and I was acting in the capacity of delegation whip. What transpired at the Congress is history. In a superlative address, he castigated British policy, scored Weizmann's reliance on British friendship, and pleaded with the Congress not to denounce the militants, whom he characterized as Jewish patriots. Repudiated by the Congress vote against him, Weizmann had no choice but to withdraw from the presidency.



Silver emerged as chairman of the American Section of the Jewish Agency. He was now the undisputed leader of American Zionism and one of the most powerful Zionist leaders, perhaps the most powerful, in the world. The climactic hour of his career came with his dramatic and unforgettable presentation of the case for the Jewish State before the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1947, and then the two-thirds majority vote by which the Assembly adopted the report of its Palestine Commission setting up Jewish and Arab States. It was just prior to and following this epochal event that Silver made one of his few errors in political judgment and tactics. After his victories in the United States and at the Zionist Congress, he could have placed his supporters in every key Zionist position in this country. We who were his advisers strongly urged him to do so. We knew that David Ben Gurion, who had emerged after independence as the head of the government in Israel, feared that, if Silver became the president of the World Zionist Organization, he might decide to settle in Israel and become a dangerous political rival. Whether such an ambition was ever in Silver's mind is unknown, at least to me. My own guess is that he was quite ambivalent about it. At any rate, Silver decided to conciliate his erstwhile opponents by supporting them for a number of crucial leadership posts. The complicated details of the manoeuvring which followed need not be recounted. Using his American supporters, still smarting from their previous defeats, Ben Gurion took advantage of the earliest opportunity on a difference of policy to see to it that Silver was outvoted and thus forced from public Zionist leadership. I was with him on the night of that vote, taking the train back to Cleveland with him. He said very little. He was too stunned and unbelieving of what had happened so suddenly. I had an instinctive feeling that he was also in some measure relieved. The difficult decision about the future course of his life had been taken out of his hands.

#### THE FINAL YEARS

In the meantime, of course, the State of Israel had been proclaimed and established in 1948 and the War of Independence fought and won. This is as good a place as any to dispose of a legend assidu-



ously cultivated by Silver's opponents, by President Harry S. Truman whom it suited; and by the B'nai B'rith which benefited from the public relations angle, namely, that it was B'nai B'rith member and haberdasher Eddie Jacobson's friendship with the President which caused him to defy the opposition of the State Department and to recognize Israel on the day of its proclamation as a state. Those kinds of political gestures simply do not take place. This was no miracle stemming from the coincidence that a man from Missouri named Truman happened to be President and his erstwhile partner and friend, Jacobson, happened to be a Zionist. What occurred was more prosaic but far more in line with the political realities. Truman was a candidate for President. He knew that the election of 1948 would be, as it was, uncomfortably close. He suspected that the Jewish vote in the populous states would be crucial. He knew all about, and as a politician respected, even if he was often visibly annoyed by, the pressure of the tremendously effective and responsive nationwide organization which Silver had created. He had an opportunity, by recognizing Israel, to make a grab for those votes, State Department or not. He saw his main chance and he took it. It was as simple and natural as that.

Silver settled back in Cleveland, as I had two or three years earlier in Toledo, to be what he was born to be, a rabbi. He wanted to write, and produced several fine books. Although no longer holding office, he was still the most prestigious Zionist personality in the country. He attended Zionist conventions and was carefully consulted on policy and leadership. Whether he hoped for a comeback and whether this was behind his constant urging of me to become a candidate for the presidency of the Z. O. A., I cannot tell. This counsel he kept to himself. He visited Israel frequently, and was immensely heartened by her remarkable growth and achievement. Relations between him and the prime minister, Ben Gurion, at first cold and hostile, later became more formally correct, and in the last years of Silver's life there was something of a reconciliation between them. Because of his known friendship with President Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, his services were often utilized, especially during the Suez crisis, by the Israeli Government and its embassy in Washington.



During the final years of his life, he traveled widely, wrote constantly, continued his studies in the Hebrew books which he loved so much, and enjoyed his family and the growing roster of his grandchildren. The last large project in which he engaged, significantly, was the expansion of the physical facilities of The Temple. He was especially interested in its lovely museum of Jewish art and antiquities. His formerly robust health and constitution had declined, unquestionably the price of the severe strain which he had placed upon them in the Zionist effort. He preached, but less frequently, and took a less active part in the administration of congregational activity, being content to leave this in the hands of his son Daniel, who had now joined him in the rabbinate of The Temple and in whose maturing abilities he took great pride. In January, 1962, I represented the Central Conference of American Rabbis on the occasion of the seventieth birthday tribute tendered him by the congregation and the Cleveland community. It was a remarkable outpouring of affection and esteem. An overflow congregation attended the Sunday morning service, and that evening the huge ballroom of the Cleveland Hotel was filled to capacity. As program chairman of the C. C. A. R., I also persuaded him to make what in my heart I felt would be his final appearance before that body which he had also served as president from 1945 to 1947. He was very reluctant, because public appearances were becoming a difficult chore for him as well as a severe drain on his emotional resources. The program was to take the form of a dialogue on the subject of their rabbinical careers between him and Solomon B. Freehof, his distinguished classmate and lifelong intimate friend. I believe that most of the large audience of rabbis who attended that evening at the Conference of 1963 in Philadelphia will recall it as an unforgettable experience. I last saw Rabbi Silver alive on Sukkoth of that year, when our grandchildren were consecrated, a service in which Daniel and he, my son and I, participated. On Thanksgiving Daniel called to tell me that his father had passed away. I recited the Kaddish at the graveside committal service, the final duty his first assistant was called upon to perform and the end of nearly half a century of association.