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Memorandum, from Harold P. Manson and Harry L. Shapiro, on
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver's Resignation, American Zionist Emergency
Council, undated.

DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER'S RESIGNATION

A MEMORANDUM

The appalling and long festering situation within the American Zionist Emergency Council which led to the resignation of Dr. Abba Hillel Silver as co-chairman of the Council and as chairman of its Executive Committee is known to very few. Those of us who had been in daily contact with the political work of our movement but who could not in conscience continue after Dr. Silver and his program were ruthlessly sacrificed, have resolved that you shall have the facts. You who have done such a magnificent job during the past year, are entitled to the truth.

In a memorandum dated December 12th, you were informed of much that had transpired in Washington in connection with the Palestine resolutions. That memorandum avoided any reference to the shocking conditions which obtained in official Zionist circles during this period. But after all that has taken place, and with wild rumors agitating our people throughout the country, we regard it as a solemn duty to pass on as many of the important facts as can be encompassed within the space of this memorandum.

At a meeting of the American Zionist Emergency Council on October 30th and at a subsequent meeting, it was agreed that the "green light" should be obtained from the State Department and the President before we pressed for action on the resolution. This was done, not out of a desire to avoid offending the State Department or the President, but to protect ourselves against the kind of opposition which we encountered last Spring. No one anticipated any serious difficulty in view of Secretary Stimson's letter lifting the military ban, the President's own statement of October 15th, etc. Accordingly, Dr. Silver, Dr. Wise and Dr. Nahum Goldmann called on Mr. Stettinius on November 9th to get the "green light."

Mr. Stettinius had no opinion of his own, but said that he would consult with the President. It is altogether false to suggest, as has been suggested, that Dr. Silver or the other members of the delegation which called on Mr. Stettinius gave any promise, expressed or implied, that we would give up the resolution if the State Department or the President registered objections. If anyone gave such a promise, it was done before or after the interview with Mr. Stettinius - and not by Dr. Silver.

At a meeting of the Emergency Council on November 21st, Dr. Wise reported that on November 15th Mr. Stettinius had telephoned to him and had said that the President thought we should not proceed with action on the resolution and that the matter should be left with him for a little while longer. In the discussion that followed, it was clear that the Council was not satisfied that Mr. Stettinius' reply definitely closed the matter. On the contrary, it was felt by quite a few that a mistake had been made in going to Mr. Stettinius in the first place, that we should have assumed that the "green light" had, in fact, been given by President Roosevelt in his statement of October 15th. Dr. Silver urged that a strong effort should be made to induce the President to change his mind, but Dr. Wise argued against such action, declaring that the President was leaving the country almost immediately. Dr. Wise emphasized further that Congress would adjourn in a few days and that he had been assured that our resolution could not possibly be acted upon in the closing days of this Congress. Dr. Wise was badly misinformed in both of these matters.

The Council agreed that a strong effort should be made to reach President Roosevelt. It was clear from Dr. Wise's attitude that if the matter were left to

him, no earnest effort would be made to urge the President to change his mind. As far as he was concerned, the resolution might just as well die.

The President was not in Washington and could not be reached. It was not until December 2nd, 11 days after the meeting of the Council, that Senator Wagner, who was deeply committed to the resolution, wrote a personal letter to the President, in which he explained the situation as he saw it and appealed to the President to withdraw his objections. Meanwhile, important events had already taken place -- without any pressure on Dr. Silver's part. For many months your committee, along with the other local Emergency Councils, had been interviewing your Senators and Representatives, Congressmen-elect and other public officials, and obtaining pledges from them to vote for our resolution. All members of Congress received our book, "America and Palestine" which contained the printed opinions of nearly 400 members of the 78th Congress. Senator Wagner informed the Convention of the Zionist Organization of America that the President's statement clears the way for Congressional action on the Palestine resolutions. Secretary Stimson had lifted the military ban. The ZOA Convention called for speedy action on the Palestine resolution. Congressman Bloom had announced that he would summon a meeting of his Committee to consider the Palestine resolution on November 15th. In short, the Congress, which all of us had been cultivating for a full year, was set for action and the sponsors of the resolutions insisted upon discharging their obligations to the Jewish people.

Dr. Silver had wired Dr. Wise on November 22nd, the day after the Council's meeting, to this effect: "Because of strike here (in Cleveland) could not reach you by telephone. Strongly urge you to contact Bloom immediately and urge him to see the Chief and persuade him to give clearance to resolutions... Please inform me by telegram or telephone results of conversation with Bloom."

Dr. Wise never replied to this telegram.

On the very day that Dr. Silver arrived in Washington (Nov. 27) he went to see Congressman Bloom to urge him to get in touch with the President. Congressman Bloom, a staunch supporter of President Roosevelt, declared that he did not need any new "green light." He had already made his own soundings. He stated that he was going forward with the resolution. Congressman Bloom requested that Dr. Silver write him a letter indicating approval of the course he was following. Dr. Silver complied with Mr. Bloom's request in order that the resolution be kept alive pending negotiations with the Administration. As you know, favorable action was taken in the House Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday, November 29th.

When Dr. Silver met with Senator Wagner on Tuesday, November 28th, the Senator had no plans to see the President to persuade him to remove his objections, despite the fact that Dr. Wise and Mr. Shulman had seen Senator Wagner in Atlantic City on November 26th. But Senator Wagner was, nevertheless, determined to go into the meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee the next morning and have his resolution considered. On that same Tuesday, Mr. Shulman telephoned Senator Wagner's secretary in Washington and gave him many reasons as to why the Senator should use his efforts to postpone consideration of the resolution by the Senate Committee. This was not Mr. Shulman's mission. Three men -- Dr. Silver, Dr. Wise and Mr. Shulman -- had been authorized and directed to try to persuade the Administration to change its mind, not to urge Senators and Congressmen to desist from working for the passage of the resolution.

As on earlier occasions, our leaders were working at cross purposes. Dr. Wise and Mr. Shulman were pressing Senator Wagner to have his resolution shelved, and

Dr. Silver, following the clear line indicated by the Council, was urging the Senator to get in touch with the President. Senator Wagner found himself the victim of two opposing forces pulling in different directions. He was telephoned a score of times from New York by people, all of whom spoke in the name of the Emergency Council or of Zionists. Senator Wagner was baffled and confused -- and understandably so.

On Saturday evening, December 2nd, when Dr. Silver arrived in Pittsburgh to attend the American Jewish Conference, the situation was the following: the resolution in the Senate was hanging fire, pending word from Mr. Stettinius and a reply from President Roosevelt to Senator Wagner's letter. Senator Wagner and Dr. Silver were awaiting an appointment with Mr. Stettinius scheduled for noon on Monday. There was little doubt that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was determined to act -- without being prodded or pressed. The House Foreign Affairs Committee had already acted favorably and its action had been warmly hailed by the Jewish press, by the Jewish public and by most of the leaders of the Zionist parties.

When he arrived in Pittsburgh, Dr. Silver planned to call together the members of the Interim Committee, consisting of the co-chairmen of the Council and the representatives of the Jewish Agency, which, the Council had ruled, was to consult on urgent political affairs between meetings of the Emergency Council. To his amazement he discovered, upon his arrival, that Dr. Israel Goldstein had during the day called a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Z. O. A. to discuss the Palestine Resolutions, despite the fact that neither the Interim Committee nor the Council had as yet discussed the matter, and that Dr. Silver, who was closest to the whole situation, was not present to supply accurate information. The halls of the William Penn Hotel in Pittsburgh were buzzing with rumors, fragments of information and misinformation. What Zionist purpose Dr. Goldstein intended to serve by calling this meeting, at such a time and place, where hundreds of delegates including non-Zionists were gathered not for a Zionist convention but for the American Jewish Conference, is incomprehensible. Nothing but mischief could result from such hasty and ill-considered opinions expressed on insufficient and largely inadequate data. Here was the start of a campaign to "run down" the resolution passed by the House Committee and to discredit Dr. Silver, whose name had been so closely identified with the resolution.

Dr. Wise declined to attend the meeting of the Interim Committee which Dr. Silver had called in Pittsburgh. The other members of this Committee who did attend received all the essential facts from Dr. Silver.

Dr. Wise called an unauthorized meeting of the Emergency Council in Pittsburgh for Sunday evening, December 3 (the Council's Constitution clearly provides that no special meeting of the Council can be called without three days' notice.) This meeting resulted in nothing except a request that Dr. Silver meet with the heads of the four parties represented in the Council to consider what should be done in case the President persisted in his objection. Dr. Silver had to leave for Washington immediately after his report to the American Jewish Conference, and rushed from the platform to the train.

On Monday, December 4, Dr. Silver, together with Senator Wagner, had an interview with Mr. Stettinius. Both were shocked and amazed when they were shown a telegram sent by Dr. Wise from Pittsburgh to Mr. Stettinius, which in so many words stated that while Dr. Wise wished the resolution passed, he was prepared to acquiesce in its deferment if the Administration so desired. This, in effect, told the Administration that the Jews of America would quickly reconcile themselves to the deferment of the resolution, and that Dr. Wise, co-chairman of the American Zionist Emergency Council, could be counted upon to defend the Administration's stand.

When considered in retrospect, it becomes quite clear that Dr. Wise's unauthorized telegram, sent without the prior knowledge of the Council or of Dr. Silver, sealed the fate of the Palestine resolution.

Mr. Stettinius told Senator Wagner and Dr. Silver that he would immediately transmit to the President the case as presented to him by them. (He characterized the case presented by Dr. Silver as "unanswerable.")

It must be borne in mind that every member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee received telegrams from the President of the ZOA, urging favorable action on the Palestine resolution. Similar telegrams were sent by the heads of the other parties. The telegram sent by Dr. Israel Goldstein on December 5th opened with the statement: "We earnestly urge you to report favorably the Palestine resolution for adoption by the present Congress." As of Tuesday, December 5th then, the presidents of the Zionist parties in the United States -- including Dr. Goldstein -- were officially urging the Senate Committee to act, not to defer action! If there was a decision against taking such steps and if the decision was binding and unalterable, then clearly the sending of such telegrams by the Zionist leaders was either a violation of these decisions or a reversal of earlier decisions. It is as clear as a pikestaff that if the resolution had been approved, all the Zionist leaders would have eagerly shared the credit for that achievement. Now that it has been deferred, the situation is, of course, quite different ...

What happened in the meetings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, you have learned from our earlier memorandum. It was quite clear to the State Department that the Committee was intent upon reporting favorably on the resolution. The State Department then adopted another method to achieve its end, the deferment of action on the resolution. They tried to get the Zionists themselves to withdraw the resolution. The Zionists were to assume the role of lobbyists against their own measure. Someone got in touch with Dr. Wise, presumably on Wednesday, December 6th or early Thursday morning, December 7th, for by Thursday noon Senator Connally was informing Senator Taft that the resolution would not pass the Committee, because Dr. Wise and the Zionists of New York would soon be heard from. On the afternoon of the same day, Mr. Stettinius telephoned Senator Wagner and asked him whether he had already heard from Dr. Wise and the Zionists of New York about withdrawing the resolution.

Dr. Wise lost no time in complying with the request made of him. He called two meetings, again in violation of constitutional principles, and at these meetings it was decided to send a delegation representing the 4 parties in the Council to Washington to arrange for the deferment of the resolutions. The Mizrahi Organization voted against this proposal and refused to participate in the delegation. The delegation, headed by Dr. Israel Goldstein, arrived in Washington on Friday morning, December 8th. It had been instructed to see Dr. Silver before going to the Capitol and that nothing was to be done until they had spoken with Dr. Silver. But by 8:30 A. M., Dr. Wise had already telephoned Senator Wagner, again urging him to ask for deferment.

The delegation was advised by Dr. Silver that it should not make the Zionist movement ridiculous in Washington by requesting the shelving of a resolution which all of us had been urging upon Congress for almost a year. Dr. Silver pointed out that the Senate Committee was pressing for it, that it was not the duty of Zionist leaders to press for deferment, that it was enough to indicate to the State Department that the Zionist leaders were not pressing the resolution but that the matter was in the hands of the Senate Committee, which was bent on action.

The delegation saw Mr. Stettinius, Senator Wagner and Senator Connally, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and discussed various compromise proposals which had been considered in the discussion with Dr. Silver. The delegation made it clear to Mr. Stettinius that the Zionist leaders were not pressing for action. While the Secretary of State thought well of a compromise whereby the resolution would be voted out by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee with the understanding that it would not come to the floor of the Senate for final action at that session of Congress, this proposal was turned down by Senator Connally. The anti-Zionist elements in Washington who were anxious to see the resolution shelved, felt very confident -- the very presence of the delegation of Zionist leaders outside the doors of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee indicated that the plan to get the Zionists to disown their own measure was succeeding. Members of the Senate Committee saw what was happening. The Jews themselves were divided and did not know what they wanted after they had conducted an intensive campaign in behalf of the Palestine resolutions for almost a year -- and all this was happening only 48 hours after the very same Zionist leaders had sent telegrams to every member of the Senate Committee urging favorable action on the resolution!

The delegation of Zionists was actually invited by Senator Connally to come in and address the meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Fortunately, they refused this invitation.

What took place at the last two meetings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee you have learned from the earlier memorandum. You know that the State Department has assumed full responsibility for the deferment of action. You have seen the statement issued by the State Department. You know, too, the attitude of the members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as indicated by the statement which twelve of its members -- seven Democrats and five Republicans, constituting two-thirds of the Committee members who considered the resolution -- made: "... we wish to record our own personal approval of the Resolution."

When Dr. Silver presented a complete report of what had transpired in connection with the resolutions to the Emergency Council on December 20th, he made a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the present situation and submitted a program of action which he urged the Council to consider. He also urged that a sub-committee be appointed to make a careful study of the Council's organizational structure with an eye to the greater efficiency and the smoother functioning of the Council and the avoidance of such tragic pulling at cross purposes in the future.

Dr. Silver's statement and an account of what transpired at the last two meetings of the Council cannot be covered adequately in this memorandum. Suffice it to say that the small group which had been quietly opposing Dr. Silver and frustrating some of his most important efforts almost from the very moment he was named to lead American Zionist political work, refused to deal with questions of policy. They were out to "get" Dr. Silver. This clique, composed chiefly of the representatives of the Zionist Organization of America on the Council, created an "issue" -- Dr. Silver had "contravened" the Council's decisions. They could not wait to settle their score with him immediately. A motion to censure Dr. Silver was squarely rejected. However, a motion calling for the resignation of "all officers" of the Council was made, following which another motion to table this last proposal was defeated. Dr. Silver then resigned.

The ludicrousness of the trumped up charges against Dr. Silver becomes obvious after one surveys the account of what really took place in Washington. It should be added that there have been occasions when there was contravention of the Council's decisions, when Zionist leaders had acted independently and broken

discipline, and when such actions had damaging effects on our work -- but the gentlemen of the Z. O. A. in the Council not only refrained from censuring such acts, but condoned them, actually gave them moral support and encouragement. Dr. Silver was not one of the leaders whose actions were under fire. But that is a story requiring a chapter of its own.

Here, then, is an important part of this tragic story. We have dealt with first things first, and have given you an account of some important happenings in connection with the Palestine resolutions. Other important aspects of this critical situation, as well as a discussion of the basic and vital question of policy involved here (which is really the core of the problem) must be dealt with separately. This basic question of policy should be fairly clear to you from this memorandum and from Dr. Silver's statement of resignation: "I shall continue to advocate ... a policy in which timidity, appeasement and backstairs 'diplomacy' will have no place."

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