

A ZIONIST VIEWS ZOA CONVENTION

By Joseph Brainin

PALESTINE is one of the pivotal spots on the geopolitical map of the world. During and immediately after World War II Great Britain built powerful military establishments there. Today Palestine has numerous military airdromes for long-distance bombing planes, gigantic, strategically placed war arsenals and huge, well-guarded ammunition dumps. No wonder, then, that in the files of the general staffs in London and Washington tiny Palestine is marked "important." The blueprints designate Palestine as the springboard for aerial operations against the Soviet Union in the event of a conflict. One of the reasons for the selection of Palestine as a jumping-off place for World War III is its proximity to Arabia, which has the largest oil fields in the world, with a direct pipeline through the Holy Land. It is no longer a secret anywhere that Aramco (Arabian-American Oil Company) has obtained from King Ibn Saud the oil rights to 440,000 square miles of his country.

Thus Palestine, small as it is, plays an important role on the military, economic and political chessboard of the Middle East. Nobody knows this better than the British Colonial Office and the American State Department. Imperialist interests in Britain and America naturally resent the obstinacy of the Jewish people, who insist on establishing in Palestine a progressive national home. It goes without saying that for years—and now more than ever—these interests have procrastinated the implementation of the Balfour Declaration, contradicting by their actions the eloquent pro-Zionist sentiments mouthed by their own major political parties in England and the United States.

The stakes in the Middle East are indeed huge, and Jewish destiny in little Palestine whirls around rather helplessly on the political roulette wheel which Britain and America operate.

Thinking in a Vacuum

Thoughts about the many political problems confronting Zionist aspirations ran through my mind as I attended the Zionist convention, thoughts that were ever-present because I sensed a total lack of recognition of these political problems on the part of many of the delegates. As far as the delegates to the convention were concerned the Zionist problem was a thing per se, independent of imperialist maneuvers, oil cartels, military strategy and atomic diplomacy. It was rather significant that only one speaker—a non-Jew, Senator Brewster of Maine—referred to the oil in-

JOSEPH BRAININ is former editor of Seven Arts Feature Syndicate and at present chairman of administrative board of American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists and Scientists.

terests in Arabia and violently attacked the Truman Administration for its duplicity in dealing with the Jewish issue in Palestine—and he did so for purely partisan reasons. To the other speakers Palestine existed in a vacuum unconnected with the general political scene.

One could not repress a feeling of sad disappointment and acute futility while listening to the Zionist talk at the Hotel Pennsylvania. There was hardly any link between many of the two thousand delegates to the convention and the Jewish community of Palestine, which is so stubbornly fighting British political chicanery, economic strangulation and military domination.

Frankly, I was painfully struck by the world-political naivete of the spokesmen for Zion. They were woefully ignorant and obviously disinterested in the general political scene. It never occurred to them that Palestine was but one sector on a worldwide front and that the outcome of the struggle against the powerful remnants of fascism would inescapably affect the Jewish problem in and outside Palestine.

It was this political blindness on the part of the Zionist rank and file that dominated my impressions of the convention.

Role of Silver

I listened attentively to the presidential address of Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver at the opening plenary session at Carnegie Hall. There was a great deal of smugness and self-satisfaction in the report of his political stewardship. When he surveyed the beginnings of American Zionism he failed to mention the Nestor of American Zionism, Dr. Stephen Wise—who, incidentally, did not attend the convention. Rather petty, I thought. Later, as Silver spoke of the birth of the Balfour Declaration, he omitted the name of Dr. Chaim Weizmann, its author. These omissions are important indications of Silver's vindictive character. Silver believes that political Zionism began with Herzl and that Herzl's mantle has fallen on his shoulders.

Rabbi Silver sees himself as the molder of world Zionist policy and as the only uncompromising standard-bearer of the Zionist demand for "a Jewish state in the whole of mandated Palestine, undivided and undiminished." He mistrusts David Ben Gurion, head of the Jewish Agency, and sneers at Weizmann, to whom he referred, without mention of name, as one of those "artful political manipulators who outsmart themselves."

In Silver's oratorical deluge one also detected a skillful opportunism. While he referred in restrained words to the "positive and substantial gain for our movement" repre-

sented by "the declaration of the spokesman for the Soviet Union, Andrei Gromyko," calling it an "in a real sense revolutionary statement," he also lauded the United States government. Said Silver: "Our government is not unwilling to assume the role of leadership in the affairs of the world today. Its foreign policy touching many parts of the world is *strong* and *affirmative*. When it wishes to it speaks and acts clearly and forcibly. We wish that our government would take the same clear and affirmative position on the subject of Palestine." Did Silver mean the Truman Doctrine? It was the general consensus of opinion that he did. (At the political session this was confirmed.)

The same equivocal double-talk could also be discerned in his reference to the terrorist activities in Palestine. He spoke of the Irgunists and Sternists as "the members of dissident organizations" without mentioning their names. He condemned their breach of national discipline and then quoted a 1939 speech by Lord Josiah Wedgwood to condone their breaking of laws "that were laws to be broken." At another time he advocated the strengthening of the Zionist middle class and called for more private enterprise—avoiding, however, any disparagement of Jewish labor in Palestine. The presidential address did not refer even once to the tragic position of the DP's. Palestine as a Jewish state regardless of the fate of world Jewry is the Silver line.

There was more of the politician than of the statesman in Rabbi Silver's oratorical performance.

The Danger of Chauvinism

Albert Einstein once told me, "The danger that threatens Zionism from within is deviation towards an ultra-nationalistic chauvinism." These may not have been the exact words the professor used, but the meaning was unmistakably clear to me.

It was an unequivocal warning against distortion of Zionism into a narrow, fanatic Jewish nationalism that would destroy the broad humanitarian fundament on which Zionism must build its destiny if it is to succeed. (Einstein favors a bi-national state in Palestine.)

Einstein's admonition came back to me as I listened to the debates at the political session of the convention in the overcrowded Grand Ball Room of the Pennsylvania Hotel. About two thousand delegates, many accompanied by their wives, packed the auditorium. The atmosphere of the session was that of a mass meeting rather than a deliberative body.

The opposition consisted of a handful of speakers who expressed themselves sharply on the failure of the administration to condemn the Irgun and Stern groups by name. The cry reiterated by each opposition speaker was: "Why not call a spade a spade and designate the Irgunists and Sternists as enemies of the *Yishuv*?"

The revealing aspect of this session was the evidence it gave of the tremendous support these two terrorist gangs enjoy among American Zionists. Whenever the name Irgun was mentioned there was vociferous applause. One

speaker of the opposition who very factually enumerated the crimes of the terrorists against the Jewish community was booed and insulted. Rabbi Silver, Dr. Emanuel Neumann, the newly elected president, and Daniel Frisch, the chairman, sat scowling through the criticism of terrorists, and by their sneering attitude shaped the intolerant temper of the rank and file towards the opposition speakers.

So clearly favorable towards the Irgunists and Sternists was the reaction of the delegates that one speaker, a brilliant young lawyer from Cleveland, cried out in disgust: "If you are in favor of the terrorists why don't you say so outright instead of using double-talk?"

The opposition, which was half-heartedly backed by a speech by Louis Lipsky, dean of former presidents of the Zionist Organization of America, was completely routed by an overwhelming majority. Dr. Neumann, the new president, smashed it with clever sophistry, upholding the administration resolution. While this was going on members of the Bergson group, the American representatives of the Irgun, distributed, in the streets, leaflets with glaring headlines: "ZOA Delegates, Shame! History has recorded your capitulation!"

Taft and Imperialism

There was another incident which passed unnoticed. Greetings to the convention from well-wishers were being read during the interlude. One of these messages that came over the loudspeaker system was from Robert A. Taft. Instinctively quite a few loud hisses arose. Whereupon Silver, Neumann and the entire dais, looking alarmed, demonstratively applauded so insistently that eventually the entire audience joined them in an ovation to the author of the slave labor bill. What happened to the hisses? They were drowned out by protesting cries of "Shame! Shame!" At this point I gained the impression that the delegates were being led by a leadership which regarded them as an unthinking mob to be swayed by emotion only, without arguments. The men on the platform looked pathetically frightened to me. Think of it! Suppose the papers ever published a story revealing that Taft had been booed at the Zionist convention! The Un-American Activities Committee might call them communists, and Rabbi Silver's illusions of Republican support for a Jewish state would evaporate into thin air. . . .

The resolution calling upon the United States government to support the Zionist demand for a Jewish commonwealth was passed unanimously, by acclamation. After this had been done a former revisionist leader grabbed the microphone and shrieked in hysterical tones that the resolution had failed to include Rabbi Silver's demand that the U.S. government "should support its policy on Palestine with the same vigor as it pursues its policy in Greece and Turkey." The chairman assured the gentleman that his request would be taken care of.

When the press director of the ZOA made available the text of the political resolution on "Palestine Policy on the Part of the American Government" I read the last para-

graph: "An amendment was adopted that the United States should support its policy on Palestine with the same vigor as it pursues its policy in Greece and Turkey." An amendment! I did not recall that a vote had been taken on the hysterical interruption by the former revisionist. It seemed to me rather strange that the convention had not been consulted before endorsing the Truman Doctrine. And so I decided to make a test of this undemocratic procedure. I confronted Daniel Frisch, chairman of the political session, with this amazing legerdemain which created the non-existent adoption of so far-reaching an amendment.

"How come?" I asked him. "Instead of passing a resolution paying tribute to the Soviet Union for its support at the UN, you produce an unpassed amendment praising the anti-Soviet policy of our government?" Mr. Frisch agreed that this required looking into, and a few hours later informed me that the mention of Greece and Turkey would be eliminated. Whether the official Zionist publications will revise the text of the resolution remains to be seen.¹

During this most important plenary session of the ZOA convention Professor Einstein's prophetic warning kept insinuating itself into my thoughts.

The Democratic Solution

The 50th Zionist convention, the last important Zionist conference before the UN Special Commission on Palestine will render its verdict, was a lamentable show of political immaturity. It reaffirmed the enormous influence which Rabbi Silver wields over the two hundred thousand members of the ZOA, most of whom are novices in Zionism and

woefully ignorant of the real issues involved. Intoxicated by the slogan of a Jewish commonwealth in the whole of mandated Palestine, blinded by the Quixotic glamor of terrorist activities, many of the General Zionist leaders of America today are in virtually no rapport with the Palestinian pioneers. I can well understand Dr. Stephen Wise's aloofness from the present American Zionist machine. Nor is Dr. Weizmann's sad disappointment surprising. It is tragic indeed that in this decisive hour of Zionism its leadership is at its lowest level, flirting with anti-labor revisionism and intimidated by the fascist-terrorist elements who are girding their loins to take the helm of world Zionism.

In the light of Gromyko's epoch-making declaration it would seem that the policy for a bi-national Palestine, supported by the Hashomer Hatzair (Workers' Party), by the Ichud (Unity) Group of Dr. Judah L. Magnes, by the Palestine Communist Party and other elements, is the only realistic one. The bi-national solution also has the firm support of Professor Albert Einstein, who considers it the only policy which will save Zionism from becoming a narrow chauvinistic Jewish nationalism. I also have more than a slight suspicion that many Zionists in this country who no longer indulge in organizational politics would enthusiastically rally to the bi-national solution as the only realistic policy.

The new president of the ZOA, Dr. Emanuel Newman, is a Silver selection who will religiously follow the Silver political line. And, as a last warning: Don't be misled by any oratorical performance of Rabbi Silver's. He may pour praise on the Soviet Union—as a matter of fact, he has done so—and he may bombastically affirm his liberalism. But it doesn't mean a thing. In the final analysis the Silver line means achieving a Jewish state even if it has to be bought by cooperation with the reactionary anti-Soviet, pro-war forces. Don't forget that!

¹ The "amendment" was not removed from the political resolution as printed in the July 22 issue of *The New Palestine*, official organ of the Zionist Organization of America, despite the promise of Mr. Frisch.—Ed.