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### Nazism, The Jews and American Zionism, 1933-1948

Aaron Berman

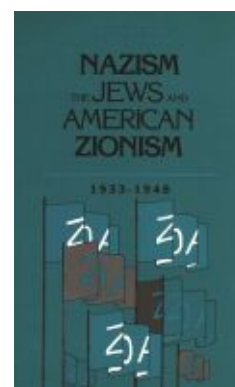
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## THE AMERICAN ZIONIST LOBBY, 1943-1945: A SUMMARY AND A CASE STUDY

Zionists' Hegemony in the US was

### THE ZIONIST LOBBY: FINDING FRIENDS

After their success at the American Jewish Conference in August 1943, Zionists claimed to represent over 90 percent of American Jewry. While the American Jewish Conference gave Zionists the opportunity to have "American . . . Jewry speak for us,"<sup>1</sup> it did not provide an effective political lobby organization capable of making the voice of American Jewry heard. This did not prove to be a serious handicap because the Conference surrendered responsibility for pro-Zionist political work to the American Zionist Emergency Council (AZEC) under the leadership of Abba Hillel Silver and Stephen Wise.<sup>2</sup> Zionist leaders hoped that the AZEC would prove to be a more successful public relations machine than its troubled predecessor, the American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs (AECZA).

Bitter factional disputes had handicapped the AECZA since its creation in 1939. The Poale Zion, Hadassah, Mizrahi, and the Zionist Organization of America feared that a powerful Zionist umbrella committee would weaken their autonomy and perhaps lower their prestige.<sup>3</sup> The history of the AECZA seemed to prove that the multiplicity of Jewish organizations in the United States made it difficult for the community to achieve any goal. However, by the summer of 1943, the major Zionist organizations were prepared to pool their resources and accept the discipline of an executive committee headed by Wise, the most prestigious American Jewish nationalist, and Silver, the most dynamic. While they might disagree about the political, religious, and economic nature of the reconstituted Jewish nation, American Zionist groups had agreed at the Biltmore Conference that the immediate creation of a Jewish state was

At the Baltimore Conference, American Zionist groups chose to fight the white paper of 1939, not fight Hitler, w

absolutely vital. The extermination of European Jewry, the continuing British enforcement of the White Paper, and the Zionist triumph at the American Jewish Conference, all combined to convince Jewish nationalists that they were in a life or death struggle. Either they would succeed in recreating a nation in Palestine, which would revolutionize the Jewish experience and end the long chain of catastrophes that made up their history, or they would fail, dooming Jews to centuries more of anti-Semitism and persecution.

Once they decided to cooperate in a unified political campaign, Zionist organizations found that their diversity of opinion and philosophy was an asset, not a liability. American Zionism spanned the left-right political spectrum, encompassing the orthodox religious and the anti-religious, the committed capitalist and the ardent socialist. Therefore, when Zionists sought to reach out to the general Jewish and Christian populations, they found support from a wide variety of constituencies. The religious Mizrahi, for example, specialized in working with Orthodox Jewish organizations and communities, while the socialist Poale Zion focused its attention on the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Abba Hillel Silver maintained close contact with the Republican party, being especially close to Senator Robert Taft of his home state of Ohio; Stephen Wise, co-chairman of the AZEC, was an ardent Democrat, with strong ties to the party's political machine and leadership.<sup>4</sup>

After the American Jewish Conference, the AZEC established various committees, each geared to a particular function or aimed at a specific constituency. Louis Lipsky headed the Publications Committee, which oversaw the production of Zionist propaganda and educational material. Rabbi Milton Steinberg's Committee for Intellectual Mobilization worked with writers, academics, and artists. Hadassah's Rose Halprin ran a Zionist information campaign directed at the numerous official and unofficial groups concerned with drawing up blueprints for the postwar world. Rabbi Wolf Gold of Mizrahi headed the Committee on Contact with American-Jewish Religious Forces, primarily concerned with winning support within the Orthodox Jewish community.<sup>5</sup>

The Poale Zion representative on the AZEC spearheaded the formation of a committee that would maintain contact with the American labor movement. The Poale Zion had previously done this type of work independent of the larger Zionist body and it succeeded in convincing the AFL to pass a resolution "supporting the upbuilding of Palestine as a Jewish Commonwealth" at its October 1943 convention.<sup>6</sup>

Max Zaritsky, president of the United Hatters, Cap and Millinery Workers International Union, agreed to serve as chairman of the AZEC labor committee.<sup>7</sup> A Russian-born Jew, a long-time socialist, and a supporter of Franklin Roosevelt, Zaritsky established the American Labor party in 1936.<sup>8</sup> By April 1944, sixty Jewish labor leaders were affiliated with Zaritsky's American Jewish Trade Union

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Committee for Palestine, and Zaritsky hoped that there would be “a nucleus in every city in the United States in which there is an organized Jewish trade union movement.”<sup>9</sup>

The AZEC's national network of local emergency councils proved to be the most effective element of the Zionist public relations structure. The local committees, microcosms of the larger AZEC, were made up of representatives of all the major Zionist factions.<sup>10</sup> Although nominally led by Joel Gross, the AZEC's Community Contacts Committee, charged with organizing and maintaining local emergency committees, was actually directed by Rabbi Leon Feuer, a protégé of Abba Hillel Silver.<sup>11</sup> By the end of November 1943, Zionists had established 125 local emergency committees; the number rose to 225 by January 1944.<sup>12</sup>

Silver and his lieutenants on the American Zionist Emergency Council paid special attention to the organizing of Christian support groups. These Christian, for the the most part Protestant, “friends” of Zionism, were to play the critical role of demonstrating that the American and Christian values of justice, freedom, and compassion led directly to the support of Zionism and the recreation of a Jewish state in Palestine. The effort to organize such a group of Christians was older than the AZEC itself. Louis Brandeis's close friend, Judge Julian Mack, who had been a leader of American Zionism during the World War I era, organized the Chicago-based Pro-Palestine Federation of America in 1930.<sup>13</sup> Within a year of Mack's effort, Emanuel Neumann, then a young and promising Zionist functionary and associate of Brandeis, began enlisting prominent American politicians and public figures for a new organization, the American Palestine Committee (APC). With the cooperation of Brandeis, Neumann held a founding dinner for the APC on January 17, 1932. Vice President Charles Curtis, Assistant Secretary of State James G. Rogers, Senators Robert M. LaFollette, Jr. (R., Wisc.), William H. King (R., Utah), William E. Borah (R., Idaho), and Congressman Hamilton Fish, Jr. (R., N.Y.) supported Neumann's effort. The climax of the dinner came with the reading of a letter from President Herbert Hoover declaring his support for the Jewish development of Palestine.<sup>14</sup>

While its beginnings seemed to be auspicious, the American Palestine Committee was, in fact, stillborn. Largely Emanuel Neumann's creation, the organization ceased to function when he moved to Palestine later in 1932, to assume his role as American delegate to the World Zionist Executive. By mid-1941, however, Neumann had returned to the United States and Zionists faced a new crisis. Hitler controlled most of continental Europe, Rommel's Afrika Korps threatened the Suez Canal and the approaches to Palestine, and the British seemed to be adamantly committed to the White Paper policy of 1939, which threatened to ensure that Palestine would become an Arab state. Deserted by the British, Zionists looked for new allies and supporters. Louis Brandeis argued that Zionists would have to attract Christian supporters if they hoped to convince American Jewish “doubters”

Bringing on board



that Zionism was legitimate and not inimical to American interests.<sup>15</sup> Brandeis allowed Neumann to use his living room as a meeting place to recruit senators and representatives for a new Christian support group.<sup>16</sup>

Reorganized in April 1941, the new American Palestine Committee was more broadly based than its predecessor. Sixty-eight senators, two hundred representatives, several Cabinet officials, President William Green of the AFL and President Philip Murray of the CIO, and prominent Christian intellectuals, including Monsignor John A. Ryan and Dr. Henry A. Atkinson, affiliated themselves with the new organization.<sup>17</sup> Senator Robert Wagner (D., N.Y.) served as head of the reconstituted American Palestine Committee. Wagner, one of the premier liberals of the New Deal and World War II eras, had been close to the Zionist leadership for some time. Although truly sympathetic to the Jewish nationalist cause, his busy schedule and many commitments seem to have precluded his being any more than a figurehead leader of Christian Zionism. Rabbi Meyer Berlin of the Mizrahi Organization visited with Senator Wagner early in 1943 and reported: "My impression of Senator Wagner is that he is a fine gentleman but rather luke-warm in general political questions and knows very little about Jewish problems and Zionism, although he is the chairman of the Pro-Palestine Committee and, as I understand, delivers addresses for our cause quite willingly from time to time."<sup>18</sup>

Although the American Palestine Committee was nominally a Christian organization, Zionists exercised a considerable amount of control over it. Emanuel Neumann, in mid-1941, directed the Publicity Committee of the APC with the aid of such experienced Zionist workers as Arnold Israeli and Arthur Lourie.<sup>19</sup> The Public Relations committee of the American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs (precursor of the AZEC) oversaw the publication of a bulletin to be distributed to APC members, while Herman Shulman, a key AZEC staff worker, supervised the APC's 1944 membership drive.<sup>20</sup> Although the APC raised operating funds from its members, the Zionist organizations were also important sources of operating capital.<sup>21</sup>

Zionist activity in the United States increased in 1942 with the Biltmore Conference in May and with the planning for the American Jewish Conference that finally took place in August 1943. Not surprisingly, there was a corresponding increase in the organizing of Christian supporters. Neumann and other Zionist leaders, while happy with the work of the American Palestine Committee, felt that a separate organization made up exclusively of Christian clergy would allow the Sunday pulpit to become a powerful medium for transmitting the Zionist message.<sup>22</sup> The Christian Council on Palestine, formed in December 1942, gathered over nine hundred clergymen into its ranks within a year; by 1946 its roster approached three thousand.<sup>23</sup>

The American Palestine Committee, like the Christian Council, was predominantly Protestant in makeup. The failure of large numbers of Catholics to join either

Christian Catholics were against the cre

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the APC or the Christian Council partially reflected Catholic doctrine, which saw the Jewish exile from Palestine as part of the torment that came with rejecting Jesus. Jewish wandering, Catholic tradition taught, would only end with the total conversion of the Jews to Christianity. The Catholic Church was also concerned about the fate of its Holy Land if Jews were to regain political and jurisdictional control over Palestine.<sup>24</sup>

As with the American Palestine Committee, Zionist officials closely directed the work of the Christian Council. Well before the actual formation of the Council, American Zionists delegated the task of organizing Christian clergy support to Rabbi Philip S. Bernstein and Milton Steinberg. Bernstein, of Rochester, N. Y., was an excellent and logical choice for this important position given his success in bringing the Zionist message to American liberals through the *Nation* and the *New Republic*.<sup>25</sup>

The Christian Council listed an attractive array of Protestant clergymen and intellectuals on its letterhead. Henry A. Atkinson, secretary-general of the Church Peace Union and World Alliance for International Friendship Through the Churches, served as chairman of the council. Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr served on the council's executive committee.<sup>26</sup> Niebuhr, the intellectual leader of liberal Protestantism, significantly added to Zionism's prestige within the United States.<sup>27</sup> Professor S. Ralph Harlow of Smith College, a close friend of Stephen Wise, also was an active council participant. A veteran missionary, Harlow was a singularly unique Zionist ally, espousing the goal of a Jewish homeland while most other veterans of Middle East proselytizing campaigns identified with the Arab claims to Palestine.<sup>28</sup>

Christian pro-Zionists organized impressive educational campaigns. For example, the American Palestine Committee and the Christian Council on Palestine held meetings attended by more than four hundred Christian civic and religious leaders in Cincinnati on January 9, 1944. During that same week, the Christian groups sponsored 21 different meetings in St. Louis, including several for teachers, which attracted more than 4,400 educators.<sup>29</sup>

Christian support groups, working with and closely supervised by the AZEC, provided the Zionist public relations machine with an important weapon. In fact, American Zionists needed all the help that they could gather as they embarked on the difficult task of generating pro-Zionist support within an American public and government preoccupied with immediate wartime tasks and concerns. The threat that "dissident" Jewish organizations would challenge the Zionist claim to speak for the Jewish community significantly complicated this task.

This powerful public relation organizations was MOBILIZED to save Europe's Jews, but were mobilized to build i

### **THE ZIONIST LOBBY: COMBATING ENEMIES**

The American Jewish Committee's (AJC) secession from the American Jewish Conference especially worried American Zionists. While it was not a mass-member

organization, the AJC represented some of the wealthiest and most prestigious Jews of the United States. The Committee could also justly claim many impressive successes in protecting Jewish civil rights at home and abroad since its establishment in 1906.<sup>30</sup> With its impressive financial and political resources, the AJC might be able to block the Zionist quest for hegemony within the American Jewish community.

Abba Hillel Silver, at the helm of the AZEC, aggressively responded to the American Jewish Committee threat. He charged that the Committee's refusal to accept the decision of the democratically elected American Jewish Conference proved that non-Zionists would cooperate with Zionists only on their own terms. Silver urged that everything be done to break the influence of the American Jewish Committee.<sup>31</sup> Heeding an AZEC request, over half of the eighteen national organizations affiliated with the American Jewish Committee, including Hadasah, cut all ties with the group.<sup>32</sup>

Zionists, believing that world Jewry was involved in a battle for survival, accused the AJC of treason. By withdrawing from the American Jewish Conference, the AZEC argued, the Committee seriously undermined Jewish unity and significantly weakened the "Jewish war effort." A letter from the Council of Jewish Organizations of Bensonhurst and Mapleton (Brooklyn) is typical of the attacks on the American Jewish Committee. The Brooklyn Council chastised AJC President Joseph Proskauer for refusing to cooperate with the American Jewish Conference in protecting "our people against a future of continued horror, persecution, discrimination, and murder." The letter included a dire warning that "those who undermine the unity of our Jewish People give aid and comfort to the forces of evil by practicing their policy of 'divide and conquer.'" <sup>33</sup>

With all America mobilized for the war effort, the charge of giving aid and comfort to the enemy was certainly serious and powerful. Believing that only they could free the Jewish people from a 2,000-year-old tradition of persecution, Zionists realized that the AJC's opposition to the American Jewish Conference's platform threatened to do more than just challenge Zionist claims to community leadership; it might condemn future generations of Jews to the horrors of another Hitler. Given this view, the Zionist assault on the AJC is understandable and perhaps justified.

The leaders of the AJC found it difficult to resist Zionist pressure. In an attempt to maintain some leadership role in the American Jewish community, they decided that the Committee would have to undergo a drastic organizational transformation. The organization, which had always been content to restrict membership to a relatively few prominent Jews, launched a mass membership drive shortly after the American Jewish Conference. However, its struggle was futile. As American Jewry learned about the horrible extent of the Holocaust, the Zionist promise to put a "certain end" to Jewish homelessness, the principal cause of Jewish persecution, became nearly irresistible. By 1946, the AJC, finally prepared to bow to the will of American Jewry, began to cooperate with the Zionist crusade.<sup>34</sup>



Fake Valor:Zic

AJC Relented



Remember that BG enlisted 30k so-called Yeshuv into the British Army; not to fight Hitler

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Besides battling the AJC, the American Zionist Emergency Council devoted a considerable amount of energy to attempting to destroy the small group of Irgun representatives in the United States, led by Peter Bergson, who came to the United States shortly before the outbreak of war in Europe to raise money to support Irgun activities in Palestine. In December 1941, the Irgunists formed the Committee for a Jewish Army, believing that American public support might encourage Great Britain to organize Jewish Palestinians into a fighting force.<sup>35</sup>

After launching the Jewish Army effort, Bergson contacted Stephen Wise and offered to participate in a joint campaign.<sup>36</sup> Wise and most of the Zionist leadership considered the Irgun to be a renegade neo-fascist organization and condemned the group's refusal to accept the authority of the World Zionist Organization. As a result, Zionists refused to supply Bergson with any financial support.<sup>37</sup> However, American Zionists, recognizing Bergson's skills as a propagandist, were willing to cooperate on a limited basis; they proposed that the Committee for a Jewish Army would assume responsibility for publicity campaigns, while Zionist authorities would carry on all negotiations with the American and British governments.<sup>38</sup> David Ben-Gurion vetoed this plan, ruling out any cooperation with Bergson until he and his associates accepted the authority of the World Zionist Organization.<sup>39</sup>

Bergson's formation of the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe (ECSJPE) in July 1943 increased the tension between American Zionists and the Irgunists. The AZEC feared that the Bergson group, specialists in the use of full-page newspaper ads, would divert support and members from them. Zionists were particularly concerned about the Bergson-inspired Baldwin-Gillette resolution, which called for the establishment of a government agency to rescue the Jews of Europe but which made no mention of Palestine or Jewish statehood.<sup>40</sup> Appalled by what they considered to be the Bergson group's abandonment of Zionism, the American Jewish Conference on December 30, 1943, accused the ECSJPE of tricking American Jews into making financial contributions in the false belief that the committee was engaged in actual rescue work. The Conference statement also condemned the Baldwin-Gillette rescue resolution for being introduced in "complete disregard of the rescue program which is being actively pressed in Washington by representative Jewish agencies."<sup>41</sup>

Historians and other investigators have never found evidence to substantiate the Zionist claim that Bergson and his associates were involved in financial irregularities. Ads run by the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe always noted that contributions would be used to support the publicity campaign aiming to force the Roosevelt administration to adopt an aggressive rescue policy.<sup>42</sup> However, during the tense and dangerous years of World War II, American Zionists found it easy to believe that the "undisciplined" and "irresponsible" Bergson group was capable of almost any perfidy. A few weeks after the American Jewish



Conference assault, the American Zionist Emergency Council sent letters to American legislators and distributed press releases accusing Bergson of creating "paper" organizations that were not representative of the American Jewish community and of "acting in accordance with opportunistic impulses of the moment."<sup>43</sup>

As part of the AZEC's campaign against Bergson, Stephen Wise unsuccessfully attempted to convince Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes to resign his position as Honorary Chairman of the ECSJPE.<sup>44</sup> Zionist leaders had more luck in securing agreements from Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles and refugee-problem expert Myron Taylor not to participate in Bergson's rescue campaign.<sup>45</sup> Harry Shapiro, director of the AZEC, instructed all chairpeople of the local emergency committee in May 1944 to disseminate anti-Bergson statements in their communities. Shapiro reminded the local Zionist leaders that, after securing the resignation of Bergson supporters, they should "send us their names, along with any statement which they care to make, and we will release the story to the Yiddish and Anglo-Jewish press."<sup>46</sup> R. J. Thomas, president of the United Auto Workers, and William Green, president of the AFL, asked that their names be withdrawn from a list of Bergson supporters shortly after the AZEC operation began. Dean Alfange, leader of New York's Labor party and one of the oldest and strongest backers of the ECSJPE, resigned from the organization in 1944.<sup>47</sup>

The Bergson group continued to exist in some form until Israel's creation in 1948, however they were never able effectively to challenge the claim of established pro-Zionist and Zionist organizations in the United States that they, not Bergson, represented the interests and retained the loyalty of American Jewry. Instead, Bergson and his followers remained an annoying, but perhaps healthy, stimulant for American Zionist leaders who understood that the imaginative and energetic Irgunists might find a larger audience among American Jews if the Zionists appeared to be slackening in their efforts to solve the "Jewish problem."

#### THE PALESTINE RESOLUTIONS

While Zionist publicists and politicians devoted considerable energy to opposing rival Jewish organizations, the main function of the AZEC was to generate pro-Zionist sentiment in the U.S. public and government. Much of the American Zionist Emergency Council's work was unspectacular and certainly unromantic. Copying the tactics of other Jewish and Christian public relations campaigns, Zionists spent much of their energies collecting endorsements from public figures. By the summer of 1945, all but seven of the nation's governors had signed an AZEC-sponsored petition calling on the president to act to "open the

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doors of Palestine to Jewish mass immigration and colonization and to bring about the earliest transformation of that country into a free and democratic Jewish Commonwealth."<sup>48</sup> The AZEC received hundreds of solicited endorsements from senators and representatives for publication in Reuben Fink's *America and Palestine*, a book that attempted to demonstrate the long-standing commitment by the U.S. government for the reestablishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.<sup>49</sup>

Zionists did not find it especially difficult to convince legislators to issue statements in support of the creation of a Jewish commonwealth. Given the insignificant number of Arab-Americans, congressmen or state representatives took no political risk when they voiced sympathy for the Zionist position. These endorsements, however easily acquired, played an important role in the political campaign for Jewish statehood. The AZEC could use even vague statements of support by American politicians to demonstrate the compatibility of American national interest and Jewish nationhood. This was important in convincing Christian Americans that there was no danger involved in supporting Zionism and was essential in winning the approval of those Jews who feared that ethnic nationalism might raise embarrassing questions about the dual loyalty of American Jewry.

As important as political endorsements were to the Zionist education campaign, the AZEC in 1944 and 1945 discovered that it could not easily transform verbal expressions of support into concrete policies. During these years the organization devoted a considerable amount of its resources to a futile attempt to win congressional support for Jewish nationalism. The resolutions the Zionists asked the Senate and the House of Representatives to consider would not commit the government to a specific course of action, but would simply express the legislature's sense that the United States should support free Jewish immigration to Palestine and the establishment there of a Jewish Commonwealth.<sup>50</sup>

Although seemingly devoid of any meaningful content, the resolutions were central to the Zionist program. Jewish nationalist leaders hoped that congressional action would influence the State Department to adopt a more pro-Zionist position. The State Department would then become an important ally in negotiations between Great Britain and the Zionists on the postwar status of Palestine.<sup>51</sup> Emanuel Neumann and Abba Hillel Silver believed that it was extremely important to introduce the resolutions in 1944, an election year, when both Democrats and Republicans, vying for Jewish votes, would be most inclined to support Jewish statehood.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, it must be realized that the strategy Zionists began to pursue in 1942 led inevitably to the floor of the Congress. At the Biltmore Conference all major American Zionist groups made the creation of a Jewish commonwealth their goal, a position the representatives of the entire American Jewish community adopted at the American Jewish Conferences. The next logical step for Zionist leaders was to have the representatives of *all* Americans accept the

commonwealth position. If the Senate and the House of Representatives passed the Zionist resolutions, the AZEC could claim to speak for all Americans, not only American Jewry.

Fearful that Peter Bergson's ECSJPE was preparing its own resolution for congressional approval, Zionist leaders in early 1944 decided immediately to activate their own congressional strategy. The AZEC anticipated that the Bergson-inspired resolution would, like their own, call for free, unrestricted immigration to Palestine, but would make no mention of Jewish statehood. Instead of relying on the Jewish political claim to Palestine to justify their request for free immigration, the Bergson proposal would simply argue that Palestine's geographic location made it the most practical temporary haven for Jews escaping from Hungary and the Balkans.<sup>53</sup>

Pro-Zionist legislators sponsored the Palestine resolution in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Following AZEC orders, local emergency committees solicited statements of support from hundreds of prominent Americans. The AZEC forwarded these endorsements to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, which held hearings on the Palestine resolution in February 1944.<sup>54</sup>

The Zionists skillfully presented their case to the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Their statements contained few original ideas, but they articulately presented the case for Jewish statehood that Zionists had developed since the start of the war. Abba Hillel Silver condemned the British White Paper as a policy of appeasement and emphasized the vital role Palestine could play in solving the dangerous Jewish refugee problem the Allies would confront after victory.<sup>55</sup> Dr. Israel Goldstein, president of the ZOA, and David Wertheim, National Secretary of the Poale Zion, detailed Palestinian Jewry's contributions to the Allied war effort.<sup>56</sup> Hadassah President Judith Epstein's testimony focused on the many benefits the Zionists had brought to Palestine's Arabs. Stephen Wise, Wolf Gold of Mizrachi, and Emanuel Neumann reminded the representatives of the continuing murder of European Jewry. Neumann counselled the committee that by passing the Zionist resolution they could send a "word of cheer" and a message of "hope" to the Jews caught in Hitler's Europe.<sup>57</sup>

Prominent Christians, organized by the AZEC, assisted the Zionists at the congressional hearings. According to Senator Robert Wagner, speaking for the American Palestine Committee, the slaughter of European Jewry "demand[s] of us a statesmanlike, constructive policy which will provide a more secure and dignified future for the Jewish people in the democratic world of tomorrow."<sup>58</sup> Dr. Henry Atkinson, president of the Christian Council on Palestine, warned the House committee that a failure to solve the Jewish problem might allow another tyrant to use anti-Semitism to come to power and plunge the world into a third world war.<sup>59</sup>

For a time it seemed that the Zionists would succeed in winning Congress's support. On January 10, 1944, Isaiah Berlin, attached to the British Embassy in Washington, reported in his weekly political summary that Zionist agitation

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against the White Paper was “embarrassing” the Roosevelt administration. A month later he cautioned that while passage of the Palestine resolutions would not commit America to a specific course of action, “its significance should not be minimized as its passage imposes inevitable curbs on pro-Arab tendencies of Near Eastern Office of the State Department on Palestine issue.”<sup>60</sup> To the British government’s relief, the United States War Department informed Congress that passage of the pro-Zionist resolutions at that time could incite an Arab revolt in the Middle East that would undermine the Allied war effort. The House of Representatives and the Senate had little choice but to heed the War Department’s warning and tabled the Palestine resolutions until the military situation in the Middle East was more secure. On March 6, Isaiah Berlin reported that the “pendulum now seems to be swinging away from the Zionists.”<sup>61</sup> Franklin Roosevelt attempted to ease the Zionists’ pain by announcing, after a visit by Rabbis Wise and Silver, that the United States did not approve and had never approved of the restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine imposed by the White Paper of 1939.<sup>62</sup> Roosevelt’s Democratic party followed the lead of the Republican party and included a pro-Zionist plank in its platform.<sup>63</sup>

Throughout the remainder of 1944, the Zionists quietly prepared to have their resolutions reintroduced in Congress. In October, the War Department informed Senator Robert Taft that the military situation in the Middle East had substantially improved since March. With the War Department’s roadblock removed, Silver and the AZEC expected that the Palestine resolutions would win easy passage. However, after the presidential elections, the State Department, at the request of President Roosevelt, convinced Congress to postpone action on the bills because of the “tense” international situation. Roosevelt, in a letter to Senator Taft, expressed his concern with avoiding an Arab massacre of Palestinian Jewry, which he feared might follow the creation of a Jewish state.<sup>64</sup>

The State Department’s scuttling of the Zionists’ lobbying campaign infuriated Abba Hillel Silver. With the support of Emanuel Neumann, he demanded that the AZEC openly attack Roosevelt for betraying his and the Democratic Party’s electoral campaign pledges of support for Zionism. Stephen Wise and a majority of the AZEC members refused to accept Silver’s argument. Wise, who claimed to have a close friendship with the president, maintained that Roosevelt’s commitment to the Jewish cause was genuine. Many of the AZEC members understood that an attack on Roosevelt might backfire. He had not yet even begun his fourth term, and it seemed likely that the Zionists would have to deal with him for at least another four years.

After a hard-fought battle over what the Zionist response to Roosevelt should be, Silver gave up leadership of the American Zionist Emergency Council in December 1944. He would not return to the Zionist helm until July 1945. In the meantime, he and his supporters would wage an underground campaign



Zionists won the battle for the hearts and mind

### *American Zionist Lobby*

against Wise, preparing the way for Silver's resumption of power, while the AZEC carried on its public relations campaign.<sup>65</sup>

The Palestine resolution fiasco proved that even an efficient and energetic public relations and lobbying organization could not easily influence a popular wartime president who was able to justify unpopular actions by citing the imperative of victory over a cruel enemy. During World War II, however, the AZEC could alleviate its frustrations over the failure to influence presidential policy by contemplating its remarkable success in achieving a position of power and prestige within the American Jewish community. In 1933, the year Adolf Hitler came to power, Zionism was just one of several competing ideologies and movements within the American Jewish community. After the American Jewish Conference, Jewish nationalists could, with much justice, claim to be the rightful leaders of the community. By V-E day in 1945, American Zionists, with their Christian allies, had made substantial progress in bringing the case of Jewish statehood to the general American public, although they were far from a decisive victory for the "hearts and minds" of the American public. Many Americans with loved ones in the armed services were little aware of the plight of European Jewry and the Zionist solution of the Jewish problem.

### AMERICAN LIBERALS AND ZIONISM: A CASE STUDY

#### *Liberalism and Zionism*

Unlike many of their compatriots, American liberals seemed to be particularly sensitive to the "Jewish problem." Although they were by no means a monolithic group and could sharply disagree on many crucial factors, "liberals" during the World War II era generally shared basic values. Most espoused a creed of tolerance and opposed discrimination and persecution on the basis of race or religion. While some had flirted with isolationism in the twenties and thirties, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor unified them in the battle against the Axis. During the war, they devoted considerable thought to how they wished to reconstruct the world after the Allied victory. Some, like Eleanor Roosevelt, looked forward to the "internationalization" of the New Deal. Many renewed their commitment to a Wilsonian brand of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. Very few adopted a strictly anti-nationalist stance, although many who viewed nazism as an aberrant form of excessive nationalism believed that love of and commitment to nation had to be tempered with good sense. Roosevelt and Churchill's Atlantic Charter reflected a liberal sensibility in its commitment to provide all nations with "access on equal terms to the trade and raw materials . . . needed for their economic prosperity,"

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and its “desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field, with the object of securing for all improved labor standards, economic advancement, and social security.” Anthropologist Margaret Mead’s 1942 ethnography of the American people, *And Keep Your Powder Dry*, ends with a blueprint for the postwar world that elaborates upon the Atlantic Charter. Mead envisioned a world of sovereign nation-states, each recognizing that its prosperity and security depended on cooperation between all nations. Republican liberal Wendell Wilkie expressed much the same view in *One World*:

When I say that peace must be planned on a world basis, I mean quite literally that it must embrace the earth. Continents and oceans are plainly only parts of a whole, seen, as I have seen them from the air. England and America are parts. Russia and China, Egypt, Syria and Turkey, Iraq and Iran are also parts. And it is inescapable that there can be no peace for any part of the world unless the foundations of peace are made secure throughout all parts of the world.

An interest in the development of regional federations and economic unions was consistent with this world vision, which tended to equate war with unrestricted international competition and peace with economic cooperation.<sup>66</sup>

Partly because of their commitment to tolerance and their opposition to pseudo-scientific racism, liberals were generally more concerned about the plight of European Jewry than most of the American public. Columnist Dorothy Thompson championed the refugees’ cause and attacked Nazi anti-Semitism throughout the thirties and forties.<sup>67</sup> The *New Republic* and the *Nation*, two of the most respected liberal periodicals of the time, sympathized with the refugees’ plight and forcefully demanded that the American government take steps to prevent the extermination of European Jewry.<sup>68</sup>

Zionists expected liberals to become an important part of their American constituency and, as noted, went to considerable lengths to organize the liberal Christian clergy. In fact, many prominent liberals supported the Jewish national cause. Robert Wagner, the “father” of the National Labor Relations Act, championed the Zionist cause in Congress. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes also supported Jewish nationalism.<sup>69</sup>

Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, professor of the Philosophy of Religion at the Union Theological Seminary, strongly supported the Zionist cause. A world famous Protestant theologian and philosopher, Niebuhr served as editor-in-chief of *Christianity and Crisis*, a journal committed to furthering the Christian values of humanism and tolerance in the political world, sat on the editorial board of the *Nation*, and was a member of the pro-Zionist American Palestine Committee. Many American Zionists, perhaps surprised that a leading Christian thinker would join their crusade, admired Niebuhr. In September 1941, the minister received a tumultuous ovation

when he told the annual convention of the Zionist Organization of America that "justice" demanded that the Jews have a homeland.<sup>70</sup>

In February 1942, nine months before the American public learned about the continuing Holocaust in Nazi-occupied Europe, Niebuhr wrote a two-part essay for the *Nation*, "Jews After the War." Taking a position that David Ben-Gurion and Abba Hillel Silver would popularize at the Biltmore Conference two months later, he told the liberal readers of the *Nation* that the defeat of Hitler would not solve the problems of the Jewish people. Because the war would leave "millions" of Jews homeless and "disinherited," the world would have to provide the Jews with a post-war home. Declaring it "a scandal that the Jews have had so little effective aid from the rest of us," the theologian launched a devastating attack against unnamed liberals who, he claimed, incorrectly evaluated the Jewish problem.

Niebuhr condemned the tolerance of many American liberals, which was "based upon a false universalism which in practice develops into a new form of nationalism." There was a "partly unconscious" element of "cultural imperialism" in a tolerance that welcomed and expected "a complete destruction of all racial distinctions." Assimilation, he noted, was a "painless death," but it was "death nevertheless."

Jews, Niebuhr maintained, had a unique position in the American melting pot. While other ethnic groups could allow themselves to assimilate because their "collective will to survive" was "engaged" and "expressed" in their native homeland, Jews, a people without a country, would lose their collective identity if they chose to assimilate into liberal and tolerant America.

Zionism expressed the "national will" of Jewry to live. Liberals in particular and the Allied world in general must accept the Zionist program, which was "correct in principle, however much it may have to be qualified in application." Niebuhr explained that "every race finally has a right to a homeland where it will not be 'different,' where it will neither be patronized by 'good' people nor subjected to calumny by bad people."<sup>71</sup>

Many American liberals, like Niebuhr, sympathized with the suffering Jews of Europe, but not all followed him into the Zionist ranks. The editors of the *Nation*, who published Niebuhr's pro-Zionist articles, and their colleagues at the *New Republic* did not endorse the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. After the beginning of the Arab revolt in Palestine in 1936 both of these prestigious liberal journals opened their pages to liberal supporters and critics of the Zionist enterprise. Both journals appreciated the work of the Yishuv in resettling Jewish refugees, but they also were genuinely concerned and troubled by Arab opposition to Jewish settlement.<sup>72</sup>

Some American liberals questioned whether Palestine could become either a Jewish state or a mass haven for refugees. In November 1940, Henry Wallace, the newly elected vice president, told one prominent Zionist to consider using Brazil as a haven for Jewish refugees because Palestine was only a little land with



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limited natural resources.<sup>73</sup> Six months later, Wallace argued that Palestine could not be a solution for the refugee problem because the Holy Land had already reached its population "saturation" point. Solomon Goldman, president of the Zionist Organization of America, feared that most American officials shared Wallace's view.<sup>74</sup>

In the early years of World War II, as Zionist activities in the United States intensified, Jewish nationalists decided to confront the fears of Henry Wallace. An American Christian stood at the center of the new Zionist strategy. Dr. Walter Clay Lowdermilk, one of America's leading soil conservationists and assistant chief of the United States Agriculture Department's Soil Conservation Service, visited the Middle East in 1938 and 1939, on an official study of land use in the region.<sup>75</sup> As he traveled through the Middle East, he despaired to see the "repugnant evidences of deadly soil erosion superseding the results of skill and land use during previous centuries."<sup>76</sup> Lowdermilk's mood brightened when he discovered the three hundred Jewish settlements of Palestine, where he found refugees from European persecution defying all hardship and "applying the principle of cooperation and soil conservation to the old Land of Israel."<sup>77</sup> His experience in Palestine moved Lowdermilk to suggest that an eleventh commandment be added to the ancient ten. Speaking on Palestine's radio network in June 1939, the American soil conservationist proclaimed: "Thou shalt inherit the holy earth as a faithful steward conserving its resources and productivity from generation to generation. . . . If any shall fail in this stewardship of the land, thy fruitful fields shall become . . . wasting gullies and thy descendants shall decrease and live in poverty or perish from the face of the earth."<sup>78</sup>

Lowdermilk's enchantment with the Jewish pioneers and his conviction that continued scientific development would allow Palestine to absorb millions of Jewish refugees, attracted the attention of American Zionists. Emanuel Neumann contacted Lowdermilk and happily discovered that the soil conservationist was willing to write a book about Palestine's development prospects.<sup>79</sup> Zionist leaders agreed to provide Lowdermilk with technical and financial assistance and assumed responsibility for finding a suitable publisher for the planned volume.<sup>80</sup>

Lowdermilk's plan for a huge irrigation and hydroelectric project in the Jordan Valley fascinated Neumann.<sup>81</sup> The project would be modeled on the New Deal's Tennessee Valley Authority and would accordingly be named the Jordan Valley Authority (J.V.A.). Lowdermilk informed Neumann that the J.V.A. would allow five million Jewish refugees to settle in Palestine.<sup>82</sup> With this prospect in mind, Neumann took steps to begin planning for the eventual construction of the J.V.A. project.<sup>83</sup>

Even before the publication of his book, Lowdermilk was playing an important role in the Zionist campaign. He appeared as a witness before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in February 1944, testifying on Palestine's ability to absorb a great number of Jewish refugees without displacing the Arab population.<sup>84</sup> Zionists



used Lowdermilk's work to argue that the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine would be practical as well as just. Emanuel Neumann expected that liberals would be particularly impressed by Lowdermilk. The J.V.A. offered, Neumann remarked, "a new approach to the problem of Palestine and one that is peculiarly suited to the American mind." It would "attract wide support on the part of many who would naturally resent a direct political approach. Politically speaking, it may be regarded as a flanking movement of a most promising character—one of the most significant contributions ever made to Political Zionism."<sup>85</sup>

According to an agreement Neumann negotiated with Harpers Brothers, Lowdermilk's publisher, the American Zionist Emergency Council financed a promotional campaign for *Palestine: Land of Promise*.<sup>86</sup> The AZEC arranged for magazines and newspapers to print reviews.<sup>87</sup> George W. Norris, the "father" of the T.V.A., bestowed his blessings on the Jordan Valley Authority in the *Nation*.<sup>88</sup> Within a year, *Palestine: Land of Promise* went through seven printings, producing a total of sixteen thousand copies. Zionists distributed fifteen hundred gratis copies to congressmen, government officials, educational and religious leaders, journalists, diplomats, and state and local politicians.<sup>89</sup> By the end of 1945, the text appeared in Hebrew and Spanish translations, while the *Jewish Morning Journal* printed a serialized Yiddish version of the book.<sup>90</sup>

Lowdermilk's success delighted Zionist leaders. At Stephen Wise's suggestion, the American Palestine Committee organized a large testimonial dinner in the soil conservationist's honor.<sup>91</sup> The Mutual Broadcasting System broadcast portions of the testimonial including a call for a Jewish state. Prominent public officials attended the dinner including T.V.A. chairman David Lilienthal and Undersecretary of the Interior Abe Fortas. Neumann wrote that the continued "propagandization" of the Jordan Valley Authority scheme would "not only win new friends for our movement in areas in which we have very few friends, but will . . . offset the questions as to the absorptive capacity of Palestine with which we are continuously confronted."<sup>92</sup>

By November 1942, Zionists had undertaken substantial steps to win the support of liberal America. Reinhold Niebuhr had presented an elaborate pro-Zionist argument aimed specifically at a progressive audience. Walter Lowdermilk's work seemed to be especially promising. At the end of November, however, a tragic outside event interjected itself into the Zionist-liberal relationship when Americans learned about the Nazis' systematic extermination of European Jewry.

### *Liberals, Zionists, and the Rescue of the European Jews*

Unlike many Americans, liberals quickly acknowledged and bemoaned what Alfred Kazin termed "our silent complicity in the massacre of the Jews."<sup>93</sup> The

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*New Republic* reported in its December 7th edition that Hitler considered the “annihilation” of the Jews the most important Nazi goal.<sup>94</sup> Two weeks later, the journal published a long article on the Holocaust written by Varian Fry. A journalist and frequent contributor to the *New Republic* (he would later serve on the magazine’s editorial board), Fry had worked for thirteen months in Vichy France, legally and illegally aiding Jews to escape Hitler’s reach.<sup>95</sup> In his essay, Fry, remembering the false atrocity stories of World War I, acknowledged that it was difficult to believe the stories of systematic slaughter. But convinced that the terrible news was true, he urged Franklin Roosevelt to publicly threaten to punish individuals participating in the extermination and suggested that the United States offer asylum to those few Jews who could escape Europe.<sup>96</sup>

On December 19, 1942, the *Nation*’s editors recommended that the Vatican intercede on the Jews’ behalf and that Franklin Roosevelt condemn the Nazi murders.<sup>97</sup> By the end of February 1943, the magazine was charging the Allied governments with near complicity in European Jewry’s demise. The Jews, an editorial stated, needed more help and less pity, “for when definite measures are proposed to help the victims . . . the State Department and the British Foreign Office, though ever so politely, turn away.”<sup>98</sup> In March, Freda Kirchwey, the publisher and chief editor of the *Nation*, warned that an Allied victory might not save European Jewry. “It is not fantastic to believe that even when Hitler is overthrown, he will find profound compensation in leaving behind him a Europe ‘cleansed’ of the hated Jew.” If the Jew perished, the United States would be guilty of abetting the Nazi murders in their heinous crime. Kirchwey mourned: “If we had behaved like humane and generous people instead of complacent, cowardly ones, the two million Jews lying today in the earth of Poland . . . would be alive and safe. And other millions yet to die would have found sanctuary. We had it in our power to rescue this doomed people and we did not lift a hand to do it.”<sup>99</sup>

Zionists attempted to shape the liberal response to the Holocaust. During January and February 1943, the *Nation* published a series of four articles by Zionist publicist Rabbi Philip S. Bernstein. The first essay appeared less than two months after news of the Holocaust reached the American public.<sup>100</sup> Repeating a standard Zionist argument, Bernstein noted that while the Jews were the “worst victims of the war,” anti-Semitism endangered all Europeans. For centuries tyrants had used Jew hatred to maintain the loyalty of the masses and to justify conquest. He warned that a peace treaty that did not provide a solution for the Jewish problem could not effectively ensure peace and stability in Europe. Jews would again become the first victims of would-be dictators and conquerors.

Bernstein’s second essay focused on European Jewry’s “frightful dilemma.”<sup>101</sup> Allied victories would not necessarily lead to Jewish salvation. Every German defeat seemed to infuriate the Nazis who then “perpetrated new pogroms.” Recognizing that only England and the United States had the resources and power to prevent



the Jews' destruction, Bernstein proposed a seven-point Allied rescue plan, calling on Great Britain to open Palestine's doors to at least the number of refugees allowed under the White Paper. The Allies, he demanded, should also allow stateless and Palestinian Jews to form Jewish military units and should immediately announce that the Jews "will have a hearing in the councils of the United Nations."

The magnitude of Hitler's persecution horrified Bernstein, but he refused to label the attempted extermination of European Jewry an "aberration" born in the mind of a mad dictator. Rather, in a third article,<sup>102</sup> anticipating the major theme of Abba Hillel Silver's epic address to the American Jewish Conference, Bernstein argued that the mass murder was "the logical culmination of the whole history of the Jews in Europe." To escape the threat of postwar pogroms, Jews, particularly the East Europeans who had little contact with their Christian neighbors, would have to emigrate. He regretfully reported that there was little support for opening the doors of the United States to Jewish refugees. Many Americans expected that the country's postwar capacities and resources would be severely strained by the need to absorb millions of returning soldiers. While he hoped for an eventual liberalization of the American immigration quotas, Bernstein suggested that large-scale Jewish immigration to Palestine would be a bold and practical solution to the Jewish problem.

Bernstein concluded his series of essays with a powerful defense of Zionism that glorified Jewish accomplishments in Palestine.<sup>103</sup> Most Palestinian Jews were farmers and workers, not merchants and middlemen like their Diaspora ancestors and brethren. Americans could identify with these "new Jews" who had "much in common with the frontiersmen who cleared the wilderness and built the first settlements on the North American continent." An attachment to Palestine's soil gave Jews there "a quiet strength and courage denied to the harried restless Jews in Europe."

Bernstein, like most Zionists, believed that only a few American Jews would choose to settle in Palestine. Nevertheless, he announced that Palestine could still help ensure the security and safety of American Jewry. Every European Jew who went to the Holy Land reduced the pressure on the United States to settle refugees within its own borders. This pressure, Bernstein warned, threatened to incite anti-Semites within the United States.

Aiming his comments at his liberal audience, Bernstein maintained that the Zionist development of Palestine benefited the native Arab population, and he cited the work of Lowdermilk to prove that millions of Jews could settle in the Holy Land without displacing any Arabs. He asserted, however, that Zionism would still be justified even if some Arabs were displaced. Jews needed Palestine more than the Arabs did, for there was "no Arab problem in the sense that there is a Jewish problem." The Arabs did not have to fear brutal extermination, and they possessed more land than they could possibly settle.



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Eleven weeks after the final installment of his *Nation* series, Bernstein's appeal to American liberals appeared in abridged form in the *New Republic*.<sup>104</sup> He repeated many of the points he made in the earlier series and wrote that "it would be an injustice to the Arabs not to expose them to the inspiration and the example of Jewish social idealism and scientific progress in Palestine."

The continuing murder of European Jewry seemed to strengthen Bernstein's argument. As the Nazi extermination plan progressed, liberal concern for European Jewry began to dwarf consideration of Zionism's perceived drawbacks. The Arab population of Palestine was not forgotten, but secular liberal journals began to demand that Britain disregard Arab opposition of Jewish settlement and allow any Jew who could escape into Palestine.

The *New Republic* printed a nineteen-page special rescue supplement in August 1943.<sup>105</sup> The journal asked Americans to realize that "the fate of the Jewish people is one of the issues of the war."<sup>106</sup> If World War II was to be a crusade for peace and humanitarian idealism and not a struggle for national power, the United States had to attempt the rescue of European Jewry. The *New Republic's* editors suggested many steps to alleviate Jewish suffering in Europe and paid particular attention to Palestine's central role in any rescue strategy. One article asserted that due to the hard work of Zionist pioneers, the Holy Land could provide homes for at least two million refugees, if only the British would reverse their inhumane White Paper policy. The essay acknowledged, however, that the final decision on Palestine's political future would have to await the war's conclusion.<sup>107</sup>

Arab-Americans tried, with difficulty, to argue against unrestricted Jewish immigration to Palestine. In a letter to the *New Republic*, Jabir Shibli of the State College of Pennsylvania accused Jewish nationalists of being "more interested in the conquest of Palestine from the Arabs . . . than they are in saving the Jews from Nazi persecution." The Palestine Zionist was an "alien" who used British power to master Palestine, an Arab land. The persecution of Jewry was a "disgrace," he conceded, and everyone had to be willing to sacrifice to put an end to European Jewry's suffering. Palestine, however, had already done its humanitarian duty by absorbing nearly five hundred thousand Jewish refugees. Any further growth in Zionist strength in Palestine, he feared, would hinder legitimate Arab aspirations for "independence" and "unification."<sup>108</sup>

Arab nationalists in the United States were not formidable opponents to the American Zionist campaign for liberal support. However, even as the Zionist education campaign continued in full force, some influential American liberals began to adopt positions on the Jewish problem that potentially threatened the successful establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Most disturbingly for Zionists, several liberals seemed to be attracted to the "heretical" ideas of Peter Bergson.

Although the Palestinian Irgun was a right-wing organization, Bergson and his Irgun associates won a surprising level of support from American progressives.





Dean Alfange, a New York Labor party leader, served as co-chairman of the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe (ECSJPE) until his resignation in the summer of 1944. The presidents of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations gave at least nominal support to the Bergson rescue committee. The *New York Post*, at that time a strong supporter of liberal and left-wing causes, was the ECSJPE's closest media ally. Bergson maintained a very cordial relationship with Ted Thackrey, the *Post*'s managing editor, and the newspaper, in turn, strongly endorsed the program of the ECSJPE. When the Zionist establishment launched a concerted attack against the Bergsonites in 1944, the *Post* carried an extremely favorable feature story on Bergson.<sup>109</sup>

Other prominent liberal journals never embraced the ECSJPE with the same warmth as the *New York Post*. In fact, a March 1943 *New Republic* editorial sharply criticized the Irgun's brand of right-wing Zionism without specifically naming Bergson and his organization.<sup>110</sup> Despite this, the "Bergson Boys" (as their opponents called them) managed to have some input into the magazines that both reflected and helped to mold liberal thought.

The ECSJPE made extensive use of full-page newspaper and magazine advertisements. During World War II the organization ran many advertisements in liberal journals. These ads, some written by Hollywood script writer Ben Hecht, caught the public's attention with such stirring headlines as: "HITLER'S ENEMY NO. 1 *MUST BE RECOGNIZED AS OUR ALLY NO. 1*"; "HOW WELL ARE YOU SLEEPING?"; "TIME RACES DEATH—WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?"; "ONE VICTORY FOR HITLER?"<sup>111</sup>

Many American liberals, like the Bergson group, were primarily concerned with the immediate rescue of European Jewry. They recognized Zionist leaders as legitimate representatives of American Jewry, but naturally found themselves attracted to certain aspects of the ECSJPE's program.

On November 9, 1943, Congressmen Will Rogers, Jr., and Joseph B. Baldwin and Senator Guy M. Gillette, all supporters of Peter Bergson, introduced congressional resolutions calling for the creation of a United States Commission to Save the Jewish People of Europe. The Zionist-dominated American Jewish Conference charged that the resolutions were introduced in "complete disregard" of the rescue programs of "representative" Jewish organizations.<sup>112</sup> In spite of this formidable opposition, the *Nation's* editorial staff saw fit to support the rescue agency resolution. The journal attacked the American government's inaction and callousness toward the murders in Europe and asked Congress to establish an agency that would "help save the stateless Jews of occupied Europe who have no government to speak for them."<sup>113</sup>

On several other occasions, liberal positions coincided with those of the Bergson Boys and conflicted with the interests of the American Zionist establishment. The American Zionist Emergency Council had its own set of resolutions intro-

Zionists attacked this resolution

Zionists refused even to take Jews under the status of

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duced in Congress in early 1944. If passed, they would have expressed the legislature's support for the creation of a Jewish commonwealth. The *New York Post*, reflecting Bergson's view, opposed the Zionist resolutions because they politicized the rescue issue.<sup>114</sup> The editors of the *New Republic* endorsed the *Post* and recommended that the resolutions be modified to ask only for a "temporary refuge" in Palestine for those Jews whose "alternative" was death. Because the temporary refuge proposal would not affect the Holy Land's future political status, the liberal editors confessed, "We don't see how even the Arabs or the War Department can legitimately object to this action."<sup>115</sup>

Bergson and his colleagues spent the summer of 1944 campaigning for the establishment of emergency refugee shelters in Palestine. Under their plan, Jewish refugees admitted to the shelters would have no legal right to remain in Palestine once the war ended.<sup>116</sup> The emergency shelter scheme offered a way around Britain's restrictive immigration policy, but American Zionists vehemently opposed it. The idea of Jews being treated as refugees in their "national home" was too painful for Jewish nationalists.<sup>117</sup> The *Nation's* Freda Kirchwey, however, could contemplate the possibility without great anguish.<sup>118</sup>

### *Liberals and Binationalism*

Liberal deviation from the rescue strategy of pursuing Jewish statehood troubled Zionist leaders. The tendency of some liberals to adopt the binationalist cause when they became interested in a Palestinian solution to the Jewish problem further disturbed Jewish nationalists.

The idea of a binational Arab-Jewish state in Palestine did not originate in the forties. In 1925, Brith Shalom, a Palestinian Jewish organization, advocated the creation of a state where Jews and Arabs would share power equally. Each people would be guaranteed equal rights and cultural autonomy. Brith Shalom never attracted many members, but it included some of Palestine's leading intellectuals. The remarkable Judah Magnes led the organization. An American by birth, a Reform rabbi by vocation, and a nonconformist by inclination, Magnes pioneered community work among East European Jewish immigrants crowded into New York's Lower East Side. His pacifism compromised his position as a communal leader during the patriotically intolerant days of World War I. Shortly after the armistice, Magnes moved to Palestine, becoming chancellor of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.<sup>119</sup>

Most American Zionists opposed the binational state idea. Their hostility intensified after May 1942, when Zionist leaders at the Biltmore Hotel decided that their common goal would be the immediate postwar establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine. When Magnes resuscitated the defunct Brith Shalom

organization (now to be called Ihud) in the early forties, Jewish nationalist leaders prepared to do battle with him.<sup>120</sup>

Magnes presented his program to American liberals at the end of 1944, in a long letter published in the *Nation*.<sup>121</sup> His concept of a binational state linked to a larger regional federation appealed to liberals concerned with regionalism and internationalism. With an insight that proved to be all too prophetic, Magnes warned that any attempt to turn Palestine into either an Arab or Jewish state would lead to war. If bloodshed was to be avoided, large numbers of Jews would have to be allowed into Palestine, and Arab fears of being dominated by a Jewish majority would have to be allayed. A binational state was the logical solution to this perplexing riddle. In such a state, to be based loosely on the Swiss model, Arabs and Jews would share political power and each group would be assured of equal rights. Magnes proposed that an additional half-million Jews be allowed to enter Palestine. This influx would give the half-million Jews already in Palestine numerical parity with the country's million Arabs. He stipulated, however, that the Jewish rate of entrance should be determined by the economic absorptive capacity of Palestine. After this initial influx of Jews, immigration would continue at a pace designed to offset the higher Arab birthrate. Thus, neither Arabs nor Jews could hope to achieve a majority in the state. Arab fears of being dominated by Jews would be further assuaged by the creation of a larger union (or federation) of binational Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Magnes believed that this program would provide both Arabs and Jews with a sense of security and that the binational framework would allow both peoples to build bonds and mutual trust.

The Zionist leadership wasted little time in countering Magnes's presentation.<sup>122</sup> Attorney Bernard Joseph, a Jewish Agency adviser, called the binational scheme "unrealistic." In a letter to the *Nation*, he argued that giving Jews and Arabs equal political power in Palestine would only result in continual stalemate, while the other Arab nations would probably refuse to join the federation that Magnes proposed.<sup>123</sup> Magnes's concern with Jewish immigration to Palestine, Joseph wrote, ignored the major issue, which was to give every Jew who desired it, the right to enter the Holy Land by putting an end to the national homelessness of the Jewish people. Magnes's second major error was to base his program on fear of the Arabs. Arab disapproval or protest should not be allowed to interfere with a just solution to the Jewish problem because the conflict was not between the Jews and Arabs of Palestine, but between the Jewish and Arab peoples. The Arabs already had six independent countries, why couldn't the Jews have at least one? Most Arabs opposed binationalism, Joseph concluded, and Jews would also refuse to support Magnes, who, in spite of living in Palestine for more than two decades, still failed to understand its Jewish community.

Despite the Zionist attack on Magnes, binationalism succeeded in winning some American support. The binational idea's foundation on the ideals of tolerance and



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cooperation especially appealed to American liberals who hoped that it would militate against the dangers of excessive nationalism. The plan to link Palestine to a larger Middle Eastern federation attracted those liberals who, as late as 1945, continued to look forward to a postwar world reconstructed on the cornerstones of regionalism and internationalism.

Former Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles was among the few State Department veterans to sympathize with the suffering of European Jewry and the goals of the Zionist movement. In *The Time for Decision*, published in 1944, Welles supported the creation of a Jewish National Home in Palestine and expressed great confidence in the leadership abilities of Chaim Weizmann.<sup>124</sup> But Welles also wrote that he was convinced that a solution to the Arab-Jewish problem would be found "along the lines proposed by Judah Magnes." Welles suggested that an international organization (the United Nations) temporarily supervise the regional federation Magnes proposed to create.<sup>125</sup>

The editors of the *New Republic* also believed that the binational solution would provide a basis for Jewish-Arab compromise and peace. The magazine called a rumored Arab compromise offer in the winter of 1945, the "most interesting and important development in Palestinian racial relations in a long time." Under the plan, reportedly proposed by Arab foreign ministers, enough Jews would be allowed into Palestine to create numerical parity with Moslems in the country. The balance of power would be held by Palestine's small Christian Arab population. The *New Republic* conceded that Zionists who insisted on the creation of a Jewish state would object to the Arab proposal, however the magazine found hope in the plan's striking similarity to Judah Magnes's binational state proposal.<sup>126</sup>

I. F. Stone, a prominent liberal journalist and long-time Washington editor of the *Nation*, also supported binationalism. Stone, however, was not an early follower of Magnes. In fact, his adoption of the binational state idea came after he had seemingly adopted the Jewish state solution. Writing about the Jewish problem in March 1944, Stone carefully avoided any mention of statehood in Palestine and expressed support only for the creation of a nondefined "Jewish national home." He charged that British and American foreign policy makers opposed Zionism because they feared that Jewish settlement of Palestine would lead to a war that could jeopardize the continued flow of Middle Eastern oil. He believed, as did many Zionists, that the State Department and Foreign Office preferred to deal with neo-feudal Arab leaders who did not represent the best interests of their people rather than with the Jews of Palestine who were committed to democracy and anti-colonialism. English and American selfishness had deadly consequences, he explained, as both governments attempted to appease the Arabs by restricting immigration to Palestine while the Jews of Europe, a people without a refuge, continued to be shipped to Nazi slaughterhouses.<sup>127</sup>

Soon after World War II, Stone's opinions underwent a metamorphosis when

he visited Palestine and personally confronted the Arab-Jewish conflict. He risked displeasing American Jewry and wrote back to the States that "we have been carrying on a campaign in America on the basis of half-truths." Zionists were correct in claiming that there was room in Palestine for millions of Jewish refugees and that the Arab population had progressed because of Jewish settlement. But, Stone warned, no Jew he talked to could identify an Arab who wanted to live in a Jewish state. This was not surprising, he noted, because "it should not be hard to understand the natural dislike of any human being for being ruled by another people or his unwillingness to trust himself to such rule." At the beginning of his stay in Palestine, partitioning Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish states seemed to be the only practical solution to this dilemma. Carefully noting the arguments Zionists would use against partition, Stone argued:

I know there are other Arab states, while there is only one possibility for a Jewish state; I know that proposals to divide Palestine into two national states, put forward several times by Jewish sources, have fallen on stony ground. Nevertheless, despite present public utterances by the leadership of both sides, I think that a division on these lines . . . is ethically right and politically feasible and would be acceptable to a great majority of Jews and Arabs if it were imposed from above by Anglo-American or United Nations decision.<sup>128</sup>

When he left Palestine, Stone declared that he no longer favored the creation of a Jewish state. He had discovered a major defect in Jewish nationalist ideology, which he identified as a "failure to take into account the feelings and aspirations of the Palestinian Arab." While Zionists had not hurt the Arabs, they had made them feel excluded. He happily reported though that relations between Jews and Arabs were not as bad as he had first thought and that the Arab "does not fear the Jew, . . . he fears being dominated by him." If this fear could be allayed, Jewish and Arab cooperation would develop and mature. Stone concluded that the fairest solution to the Palestine problem was to establish a binational state that would exist within a larger Middle Eastern federation.<sup>129</sup>

I. F. Stone, Sumner Welles, and some other American liberals who were extremely concerned with the plight of European Jewry, found it difficult to fully accept the Biltmore formula of Jewish statehood. Even while agreeing to a Palestinian solution of the Jewish problem, they could not totally forget that another people claimed the Holy Land as their own. The war against fascism was for many liberals a fight against the excesses of nationalism. The future world that they were sacrificing for would be based on cooperation not competition, justice not strength, tolerance not hate, and pluralism not ethnocentrism. The concept of a binational state allowed some liberals to express their concern for European Jewry while maintaining their tolerant stance of internationalism.

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### The Zionist Counterattack

Weaning American liberals away from their neo-universalist convictions was not an easy task for American Zionists. Individuals like I. F. Stone were often stubborn, and Zionist influence on them was always limited. However, the liberal tendency to flirt with binationalism on the one hand and to accept Bergsonite positions on the other did not cripple efforts to build support for Jewish nationalism. The American Zionist Emergency Council continued to denounce the Magnes plan, and Zionists continued to link the rescue of European Jewry with the need for a Jewish state. The bond connecting salvation from Hitler's hell with Jewish Palestine was extremely effective when personalized, as it was in a September 1944 essay written by Gerold Frank.

Frank, a professional journalist and occasional contributor to the *Nation*, was sympathetic to Zionism and maintained close contact with American Zionist organizations. While visiting Palestine, Frank met with Jewish children who had escaped the Nazi deathtrap. Many were the sole surviving members of their families and their tales, as related by Frank, were horrifying. The children owed their lives, he explained, to the executive branch of the Zionist movement, the Jewish Agency for Palestine, which had negotiated the children's rescue. While most of the world reluctantly accepted refugees, the Jewish community of Palestine enthusiastically welcomed the European survivors. Palestine gave these demoralized and despondent victims of Hitler's persecution a new sense of purpose, mission, and self-worth.<sup>130</sup>

Shortly after the publication of Frank's article, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise also centered an appeal to American liberals around the Holocaust. In common with other Zionists, Wise linked the extermination of European Jewry with the need for a Jewish state, but his approach differed from that of Frank and previewed a theme that would be used much more widely by Jewish nationalists after the war's end. Attempting to come to terms with the awful dimensions of the Holocaust, the rabbi argued that Jewish statehood was not simply a means to the rescue of the Jewry, but was a form of just reparation for the heinous crimes committed against his people.

In an address to a conference organized by the *Nation*, Wise proclaimed that the United States as well as Germany had to accept responsibility for Hitler's genocide. Washington was guilty of "assenting" to Hitler's persecution of the Jews, he said, "as witnessed . . . by the non-organization in any real sense of rescue and of migration." He applauded the work of the War Refugee Board established by Franklin Roosevelt in January 1944, but he realistically noted that even that measure was "too little and . . . too late." Great Britain too must also accept its fair share of the blame for cruelly putting Palestine, which could have been a haven for the oppressed, off limits. Speaking for the remnants of the Jewish people, Wise asked the Allies, at the war's conclusion, to allow the Zionists to establish a com-



monwealth in Palestine. "My people," he implored, "deserve reparation from a Christian world if there be a Christian world."<sup>131</sup>

In the years after World War II, Wise's argument would prove to be an important factor in Zionism's success. During the war, American Zionists had made significant progress in their campaign to win liberal support for Jewish statehood. Liberals were more aware than most Americans of Hitler's persecution of European Jewry. When the Nazis moved from discrimination and expropriation of wealth to genocide, progressive-minded Americans suffered mental anguish. In a world filled with war and horror, Jews seemed to be suffering much more than most. Believing that the war against Hitler was a crusade in defense of progressive and humanitarian values, many liberals wanted the Allies to do something to save those awaiting slaughter. To do less would nullify the Allies' claim to be fighting for mankind.

Increased liberal concern for Jewry's sad plight coincided with the Zionists' assumption of American Jewish community leadership. **Zionist organizations claimed to be the legitimate representatives of American and European Jewry, and liberal opinion makers accorded them increased respect. Liberal concern for Palestine's Arab population continued, but it was generally superseded by a wish to provide Jewish refugees with at least one haven.**

Zionists, however, did not succeed in gaining full liberal support during World War II. I. F. Stone, for example, agreed that Palestine had a role to play in the Jewish future, but he opposed the establishment of a Jewish state. Other liberals questioned the Zionist claim that Jewish statehood was inextricably linked to the rescue and salvation of European Jewry. Two months after V-J Day, a *New Republic* editorial demanded that all the survivors of the Nazi death camps be allowed into Palestine.<sup>132</sup> The editorial also argued that Zionist demands for a Jewish state complicated the job of getting the refugees to Palestine. The article bluntly concluded:

**The editors of the *New Republic* are not and cannot be Zionists. They believe that the Zionists ill serve the cause of human decency when they raise the issue of Jewish nationalism and a Jewish state in Palestine. Nor are they impressed by Arab nationalism. . . . all of these matters are secondary to the immediate and practical job of bringing the Jews of Europe—those who want to go—to the only place where they are really welcome, Palestine.**

After receiving angry letters complaining about its editorial, the *New Republic* acknowledged that the British and Arabs "ill serve the cause of human decency" by using the Jewish survivors of Nazism as a "political football." But the journal maintained that, just because Arab nationalism and British imperialism were wrong, did not mean that the "Zionist demand for a Jewish state is right." Reasserting their position, the editors wrote: "From the liberal point of view, nationalism—the

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Zionists do not deny their nationalist objectives—and sovereign independence are hardly adequate solutions in the modern world, regardless of whether they are advocated by nascent nationalists like the Zionists or articulate Arab elements or by dying nationalists like our own isolationists or British imperialists.”<sup>133</sup>