

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
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AJC USE OF THE BLAUSTEIN - BEN-GURION EXCHANGE
OF VIEWS OF AUGUST 1950

The exchange of views between Mr. Jacob Blaustein, then President of the American Jewish Committee, and Mr. David Ben-Gurion, Prime Minister of Israel, on the relationship between American Jews and Israel, issued on August 23, 1950, was acclaimed by the American Jewish Committee and used extensively in its statements and program activities. The following is a compilation of the more readily available references to this declaration in AJC publications and reports.*

1. On August 28, 1950, Irving M. Engel, then chairman of AJC's Executive Committee, sent out a letter to all AJC members with a reprint of a New York Times dispatch from Jerusalem summarizing the exchange of views between Mr. Blaustein and Premier Ben-Gurion.

2. The Committee Reporter, August-September 1950, carried a lengthy first-page story, "American Jews Owe No Political Loyalty to Israel, Ben-Gurion Tells Blaustein at Jerusalem Parley."

*Sources: Annual reports; minutes of meetings of Executive Committee & Board, Administrative Committee and Board, Steering Committee; Committee Reporter, 1950 to date; also press releases, membership letters, miscellaneous documents.



3. AJC press release, September 9, 1950: "Israeli Premier's First Official Declaration Clarifying Relationships between Israel and Jews in United States and Other Free Democracies Hailed by Blaustein as 'Document of Historic Significance.'" The texts of both statements of August 23 and the text of Mr. Blaustein's statement of September 9, 1950, on his return from Israel, were appended to the news story.

4. The Committee Reporter of October 1950 reported in detail in a first-page story on Mr. Blaustein's mission, and published the full text of the exchange of views.

5. On October 3, 1950, at a meeting of the Steering Committee of AJC, Mr. Blaustein made his first formal report of his mission. Minutes of this meeting conclude with the following paragraph:

Judge Proskauer then sought the privilege of moving the enthusiastic approval of the Steering Committee and its congratulations to Mr. Blaustein on his magnificent achievement. . . . This motion was unanimously and enthusiastically carried.

6. On October 15, 1950, Mr. Blaustein reported on his mission to the Executive Committee. Following his report, the following resolution was introduced:

The Executive Committee of the American Jewish Committee hails with enthusiasm the achievement of Mr. Jacob Blaustein, President of the American Jewish Committee, in obtaining clarification from Prime Minister Ben-Gurion of the relationship between Israel and American Jewry. The historic mission which Mr. Blaustein undertook at great personal

sacrifice will be found to be of benefit not only to our organization, but to the Jewish community as a whole. Our deep gratitude goes to Mr. Blaustein for the untiring efforts and the leadership he has given to our organization on this and other vital issues.

The minutes of the meeting report that this resolution was adopted "by an enthusiastic rising vote."

7. On November 9, 1950, a letter sent to all AJC members by the President, reporting on the October meeting of the Executive Committee, contained an account of Mr. Blaustein's report and the final text of a second resolution adopted on the subject by that body:

The Executive Committee of the American Jewish Committee commends the statement made by the Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, on the occasion of the State luncheon in honor of Jacob Blaustein, President of the American Jewish Committee, in Jerusalem on August 23, 1950.

With this significant statement Mr. Ben-Gurion has now made clear in unequivocal terms the official and considered position of the Israeli government on three points of major concern to American Jews, as follows:

- (1) Recognition by Israel that Jews of the United States, as a community and as individuals, have only one political attachment; namely, to the United States of America - a fact which we Americans have always regarded as axiomatic.
- (2) Respect by the Government and people of Israel for the integrity of Jewish life in the democratic countries, and the right of the Jewish communities to develop their indigenous social, economic, and cultural institutions in accordance with their own needs and aspirations.
- (3) Acceptance by Israel of the fact that the Jews in the United States do not live "in exile," and that America is home for them.

This statement dispels any confusion concerning the relations of Israel with the Jewish

communities of this and other lands. The consequences cannot fail to be beneficial both to American Jewry and to Israel. . . .

8. The Committee Reporter of November-December 1950 carried a lengthy first-page report of the proceedings of the Executive Committee meeting, under the headline "Success of Talks by Ben-Gurion, Blaustein Hailed by All as Beneficial to Israel and American Jewry." This issue also contained an editorial comment (in a column entitled "opinion") on the historic importance of this declaration.

9. The American Jewish Year Book, vol. 53 (1952), published the full texts of the interchange between Mr. Blaustein and Premier Ben-Gurion.

10. In his address at AJC's annual meeting in January 1951, Mr. Engel discussed the importance of the Blaustein-Ben-Gurion exchange and said, in part:

This statement, resulting from a series of conferences both here and in Israel, was an official pronouncement of the Israeli government, subscribed to by its president, and has taken its place as a manifesto of the utmost historic significance. It was recognized and hailed as such by Jews all over the world -- in England, Western Europe, Africa and Latin America, as well as in the United States. The role of our Committee and its president in achieving this important clarification has been extensively recognized.

11. Mr. Blaustein, in his address at the annual meeting of the AJC in January 1951, spoke about the significance of the exchange of views, concluding:

It is my belief -- I, of course, cannot guarantee it -- that we may classify as finished business, the previous confusion that existed as to the relationship of Israel to Jews in other countries.

12. Dr. John Slawson, in his address at the annual meeting in January 1951, referred to the Blaustein-Ben-Gurion statements:

Judge Proskauer contributed this pregnant thought to the thinking of the American Jewish Committee: that regardless of differences in philosophy or in points of view, there were always areas of agreement that could be utilized as a basis for action. It was with this in mind that we approached the problem of Israel. It was through a practical application of this attitude that Mr. Blaustein was able to obtain the historic statement from Prime Minister Ben-Gurion with which you are all familiar.

13. The Committee Reporter of February-March 1951, in reporting the proceedings of the annual meeting of January 1951, summarized Mr. Blaustein's address and referred to the Ben-Gurion declaration.

14. At the Administrative Committee meeting of February 6, 1951, Mr. Blaustein mentioned a recent statement attributed to Mr. Ben-Gurion with respect to the relationship between Israel and world Jewry; Mr. Blaustein reported that he was in contact with Ambassador Eban about this and was looking toward a clarification of the recent statement in the light of the 1950 exchange.

15. At the Administrative Committee meeting of March 6, 1951, Mr. Blaustein read a lengthy letter from Mr. Eban, advising that he was instructed by his government to state categorically that the Prime Minister still maintained the position enunciated on August 23, 1950, and that any report to the contrary was entirely misleading and untrue.

The minutes of this meeting state that the belief was expressed "that the clarifying statement of August 23 has been given such wide distribution, both within and outside Israel, that intentional departure from it seems very unlikely."

16. In his address before the Executive Committee meeting of May 1951, Mr. Blaustein referred further to the exchange between him and Ambassador Eban, concluding with the following information, as recorded in the minutes of that meeting:

In another letter, dated March 16, 1951, Ambassador Eban advised, "The whole of Mr. Ben-Gurion's address on August 23, 1950". . . the Clarification Statement. . . "remains to this day and for the future an authoritative statement of my Government's views on this question. Nothing has been changed or modified in any way."

17. The minutes of the meeting of the Administrative Committee of June 5, 1951, record a report by Mr. Blaustein as follows:

In the conversations with Mr. Ben-Gurion, Mr. Blaustein said, the Prime Minister confirmed the Statement he had given Mr. Blaustein in Jerusalem August of last year to clarify the relationship between Israel and the Jews in other democracies, particularly in America. . . .

Members of the Administrative Committee received Mr. Blaustein's report with appreciation and unanimously approved a motion offered by Mr. Geller, congratulating the President upon his impressive and effective activities in the international scene.

18. The Committee Reporter of September-October 1951 published a news story "Blaustein Gives Views to Zionist

Leaders," that had reference to the August 1950 exchange, adding that a full report would be given at the forthcoming meeting of the Executive Committee.

19. At the Executive Committee meeting in October 1951, Mr. Blaustein presented a comprehensive report on recent developments concerning the relations of Israel and American Jews, largely dealing with the proposal by the Zionist Organization that it be given special status in Israel. Mr. Blaustein reported that Prime Minister Ben-Gurion had delivered an address at the opening session of the World Zionist Congress on August 14, 1951, in which he reiterated a portion of the clarification statement given by him to Mr. Blaustein in August 1950. Mr. Blaustein then elaborated upon negotiations and discussions between him and the Prime Minister on related problems.

20. At the Administrative Committee meeting on November 19, 1951, Mr. Blaustein reported on continued negotiations with Prime Minister Ben-Gurion resulting from conflicting interpretations of statements made by Mr. Ben-Gurion about the relations between Israel and American Jews. The minutes of this meeting report:

Mr. Blaustein stated he had personally received three cabled replies and a letter from the Prime Minister in which the Prime Minister had reiterated that nothing in what he had said departed from his August 1950 statement.

The need for further clarification was suggested to the Prime Minister, and on September 30, 1951, one was received from him which quoted in large measure the clarification statement given in August 1950. This latest one, however, Mr. Blaustein stated, incorporated a highly undesirable reference. . . .

21. In his address at the annual meeting of January 25, 1952, Dr. Slawson said the following:

In Mr. Blaustein's important correspondence with Prime Minister Ben Gurion, I find this one sentence:

"It is, of course, a foregone conclusion that the aid given Israel by an American Jew (Zionist or non-Zionist) must be done within the framework of American interests and must in no way conflict with his obligations, duties, and responsibilities as a citizen of his own country, the United States of America."

I need not dwell on the tremendous help that the American Jewish Committee has given Israel under the leadership of Mr. Blaustein and his predecessor Judge Proskauer, but the principle spelled out in that sentence has always guided and will continue to guide all our activity in this area.

22. Dr. John Slawson, in his report, "Problems Facing American Jewry," delivered at the annual meeting on January 30, 1953, said:

Present Zionist efforts to snatch other kinds of responsibilities are not succeeding because they are not consonant with the pattern of American voluntarism. Favored by the American environment and tradition of liberalism, our President, Jacob Blaustein, was able to do a magnificent job through face-to-face contact with Israel's Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, in resolving any possible conflict of dual loyalties.

23. On August 5, 1953, the American Jewish Committee issued a press release criticizing Dr. Nahum Goldmann for a reported statement about American Jews and Israel made at a meeting of the World Jewish Congress. The release appeared in the form of a statement made by Mr. Blaustein. After reaffirming the AJC's 1949 Statement of Views ("Citizens of the United States are Americans and citizens of Israel are Israelis"), Mr. Blaustein then said:

Three years ago, in fact, the Prime Minister of Israel himself, David Ben-Gurion, in his August 1950 statement on the occasion of my visit at his invitation to that country, specifically repudiated the strange doctrine now propounded by Dr. Goldmann.

Mr. Blaustein then went on to quote from Mr. Ben-Gurion's statement.

24. At the Executive Committee meeting of October 1953, Mr. Blaustein reported on the relationship between Israel and Jews in other countries. He summarized developments since the issuance of the August 1950 statement and informed the meeting that his statement of August 5, 1953, (see #23) had produced from Dr. Goldmann a cabled denial that he had made the statement attributed to him. Furthermore, Mr. Blaustein reported that Mr. Ben-Gurion's office had written to him "disassociating that government from Dr. Goldmann's statement if made as reported and affirming his own adherence to the views expressed in his official statement of August, 1950."

25. In a report to the Administrative Committee at its meeting of November 5, 1953, Mr. Blaustein reviewed the developments reported in #23 and #24.

26. At the annual meeting of January 1954, Irving M. Engel, speaking on "Highlights of 1953," summarized Mr. Blaustein's criticism of Dr. Goldmann's statement and the replies it produced.

27. Mr. Blaustein, in his presidential address at the annual meeting of January 1954, "The Fight for Freedom: Problems and Prospects," said, in part:

On the occasion of my visit to Israel in August, 1950, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, after a series of conferences, issued a declaration, concurred in by President Weizmann, on the relationships of Israel to Jews in other lands. . . .

Subsequently, as so often happens, the two extremist groups described Prime Minister Ben-Gurion's declaration as a mere "tactical manoeuvre" and accused the American Jewish Committee of being incredibly naive.

Well, Ben-Gurion is no longer Prime Minister of Israel, and after tomorrow I will no longer be President of the American Jewish Committee. This seems the appropriate time, then, to ask: Is it not a fact that the 1950 Israel declaration played an important role in allaying strife over the issue of "dual loyalty" for all except the die-hards in the American Jewish community? Is it not a fact that the declaration helped make Israel more realistic than it had previously been about the true attitudes and aspirations of American Jews?

No guarantees, of course, can be offered for the future. Extremist groups on both sides may again make "dual loyalty" a major issue in American Jewish life.

28. At the January 1954 annual meeting, a silver plaque was presented to Mr. Blaustein by Senator Herbert H.

Lehman, recording the AJC's admiration and appreciation of Mr. Blaustein's leadership. The inscription on the plaque contained the following, among other, tributes:

Your statesmanship secured great material aid for Israel and clarified the relations of American Jews to that nation.

29. The Committee Reporter of February-March 1954 reported, on the first page, the contents of Mr. Blaustein's address at the January 1954 annual meeting, mentioning, among other things, the 1950 exchange of views.

30. In his presidential address, "Testament of Freedom," delivered at the annual meeting of January 1955, Mr. Engel said:

Is it necessary to repeat what we all know -- that this concern with Israel has nothing in common with any doctrine or ideology of Jewish nationalism? Anyone who has the slightest acquaintance with American institutions and with the attitudes of American Jews knows that this involves no question of loyalty or allegiance. The loyalty and allegiance of American Jews are unreservedly to the United States.

Further clarity of the distinction between Israeli citizens and American Jewish citizens was secured in 1950 by Jacob Blaustein, then president of the Committee, through personal conferences with Ben-Gurion, then Israeli Prime Minister.

31. In an address delivered at the annual meeting of January 1956, "The Pursuit of Human Equality," Mr. Blaustein said:

Let me single out only two more milestones of our eventful past. There was our support

of Israel. Our efforts throughout have reflected a pragmatic, non-political (neither Zionist nor anti-Zionist) concern with its upbuilding as a vital spiritual and cultural center and with the development of its capacity to provide a haven and a free and dignified life for those who desire or need to make it their home; also we have been concerned with Israel's role as a reliable ally of the United States in the Middle East. In focusing on practical and humanitarian aspects, rather than political, the important services we have rendered and the criticism we have at times directed toward Israel and toward our own Government have been pursued with the full realization of the basic premise (contained in the historic statement we worked out in Israel in August 1950 with Prime Minister Ben-Gurion) that "citizens of United States are Americans, and citizens of Israel are Israelis."

32. In an address before the annual meeting of January 1956, "Tensions in the Middle East and Their Impact upon American Jews," Dr. Isadore L. Blau stated:

During the past five years, the AJC aided Israel in very many ways. We have helped to clarify both for Israelis and for Jews elsewhere, what we believe to be the relationship between Israel and our own Jewish community. A major contribution for which we can take credit was the statement issued by the Prime Minister of Israel in 1950, after his conference with Jacob Blaustein in which the former enunciated the complete and unqualified separation of American Jews politically from the State of Israel. As one of those who was in Israel at the time, I am convinced that had it not been for the insistence of Jacob Blaustein, that statement by the Prime Minister never would have been issued.

33. In his address on the American Council for Judaism before the Executive Board meeting of October 1956, Dr. Blawson referred to the Blaustein-Ben-Gurion exchange

as a basis for understanding the relations between American Jews and Israel.

34. The Community Affairs Department of AJC made extensive use of the Blaustein - Ben-Gurion declaration in chapter discussions and meetings.

35. The Joint Defense Appeal made wide use of the Blaustein - Ben-Gurion exchange in its fund-raising activities, using the declaration with greatest effectiveness in appeals to individual donors.

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An excerpt from Mr. Blaustein's statement to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion on August 23, 1950, appears in A Treasury of Jewish Quotations (Crown Publishers, N.Y., 1956), edited by Rabbi Joseph L. Baron, a leading member of AJC's Milwaukee chapter. The quotation is included under the heading "America: The Jew and Judaism in America."