

Free Palestine Committee

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C O P Y

*Sent to Files
JH Mann / 5/15/44
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JRS:JMM/LN

149-893

MEMORANDUM FOR THE FILES

Re: Conference with Free Palestine Committee

Attending were:

Mr. Peter Bergson - Chairman of the Free
Palestine Committee
Mr. Eri Jabotinsky - Member of the Free
Palestine Committee

Mr. James R. Sharp)
Mr. George Roudabush) Department
Mr. Ronald Macdonald) of
Mr. Louis Nemzer) Justice

Date: March 1, 1944
Time: 10:30 to 12:30
Place: Hutchins Building, Room 401

(At a previous conference held with Mr. Jabotinsky on February 16, 1944, it was agreed that the Free Palestine Committee would seriously consider the problem of registration. Mr. Jabotinsky stated, at that time, that he was personally in favor of having his organization register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. At the conclusion of that meeting, he stated that this Section would be contacted within two or three days and at that time the Free Palestine Committee would either arrange to fill out its registration forms or would present another alternative. After two weeks had elapsed, Mr. Nemzer telephoned Mr. Jabotinsky and asked about the status of the registration matter. Mr. Jabotinsky reported that the Free Palestine Committee was considering the compilation of a memorandum on the subject which might take some time. After some discussion on this point Mr. Jabotinsky agreed to confer immediately with members of this Department, and arranged for the conference which is reported below.)

Mr. Bergson

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Mr. Bergson explained that he was the Chairman of the Free Palestine Committee and stated that he was not convinced that his organization was obliged to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. He asked for precedents on this matter, pointing out that at least 1600 groups in the United States were working in one way or another on Palestinian affairs. He felt that since his organization was a very small one and since there were many very large and very wealthy organizations working in the same field, it was best that his organization wait in order to see what the larger and wealthier organizations would do. Mr. Sharp pointed out that the obligations of the Free Palestine Committee under the Foreign Agents Registration Act was a matter which concerned the members of that Committee, and that this did not involve any other organizations. Moreover, he pointed out, these obligations of the Free Palestine Committee were not affected by the decisions of other organizations concerning their own obligations under the same Act.

Mr. Bergson and Mr. Jabotinsky were asked to distinguish between the ideology and work of their organization as distinct from that of other Zionist groups. Mr. Bergson stated that his group believed that the Stateless Jews of Europe and Asia and the Jews of Palestine compose a "Hebrew nation". He stated that the Jews in the United States can be descendants of the people of this Hebrew nation but not members of it. He also stated that the descendants of this Hebrew nation can have any religion they wish, but they still remain descendants of it. Thus, for example, he stated that Mr. Morgenthau is an American of Hebrew descent, practicing the Jewish religion at the present time. He pointed out that since this Hebrew nation was not recognized, the people who formed the nation had many difficult problems to solve. Thus at the beginning of the present war, the Hebrew people who lived in neutral countries of Europe wanted to fight against the Nazis, even if the country in which they were temporarily living refused to declare war against Nazi Germany. The Palestine delegation had worked in an effort to solve some of these difficult problems.

Messrs. Bergson and Jabotinsky were asked to explain the origin of their Committee. Mr. Jabotinsky stated that he had come to the United States in July 1940 from London where he had been working on behalf of the Hebrew nation. He stated that there had not been a definite, well-organized group, but

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there had been working for some time in Europe a number of Hebrew young men who were trying to do something about the position of the Jews in Europe. It became clear to these men that if the "terrible mess" in Europe were to be cleared up, the assistance of America must be secured. Mr. Bergson pointed out that long before Pearl Harbor his comrades had realized that this was a moral war in which the United States would eventually have to take part. In June of 1940, for example, Vladimir Jabotinsky, then head of the world Revisionist organization, had said before a large gathering in New York City that the United States would soon take its place on the side of the Allies in the world war and would help to gain a clear-cut victory. Because of this belief, the members of the Free Palestine Committee came to the United States in order to try to secure the aid of American public opinion for the "Hebrew nation".

Mr. Roudabush inquired concerning the origin of the group which comprises the Free Palestine Committee. Mr. Bergson stated that the members are composed of young Jewish men who had spent some years in Palestine. He said that they are representative of a new generation now growing up in Palestine, which is strongly determined to solve the problems of the Hebrew nation. The members of the Free Palestine Committee had gradually drifted together. For example, Bergson and Ben-Ami had met at a congress of Jewish students in Palestine during 1932. Bergson worked for a time as statistician for the Hadassah medical organization in Palestine from 1934 to 1936. He went to Warsaw, Poland, to attend a Zionist congress there and to enjoy a short vacation in 1937, and had stayed in Poland for several months. It was at that time, Mr. Bergson said, that he became keenly aware of the problems of his people and, he said, afterward he began to work with a number of other people in an effort to smuggle Jews from Europe into Palestine. Ben-Ami came to the United States in 1937 in an effort to get some foreign exchange and finances for this immigration work. Ben-Eliezer worked for a time in the Balkans. Jabotinsky spent some time in Rumania, from whence he helped some 2400 Jews get to Palestine. In all, there were about two dozen individuals performing this emigration work, including those now composing the Free Palestine Committee. All of the latter seven arrived in the United States in the period between 1939 and 1941. Each of them came to the organization known as the American Friends of Palestine which had been formed in 1939 to help the Jewish immigration movement.

Mr. Bergson

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Mr. Bergson insisted that the Free Palestine Committee had no organizational connections of any kind with groups abroad but did agree that there was a certain amount of cooperation with certain individuals and groups on specific types of work. This was particularly true in the case of Mr. Klarman, who is working in Turkey on behalf of the Jews in Europe. Bergson said that they have received a good many communications from Dr. Altman and from Klarman usually asking for money, but the Free Palestine Committee had only sent some five hundred dollars, and had helped to arrange for some funds to be sent to Klarman from Hirschman in Argentina.

A general discussion followed concerning the legal obligations of the Free Palestine Committee under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. It was agreed that, on the basis of the spirit of the Act, the Free Palestine Committee had some responsibility to inform the American public concerning its connections and activities. It was not clear, however, whether the Free Palestine Committee, as it is constituted at present, was absolutely subject to registration according to the letter of the Act. It was generally agreed that the Free Palestine Committee was probably liable to registration. In line with this consensus of opinion, Mr. Bergson stated that his group would register as soon as the Free Palestine Committee was completely organized and its aims and objectives clearly stated. He believed that this would take place within the next two months or less and, therefore, promised that his Committee would contact the Foreign Agents Registration Section before the end of April to begin process of registration.

In concluding the meeting, Mr. Bergson pointed out that there was a possibility that several members of the Committee, especially himself, would find it necessary to leave the United States at least for a short time. In that case, he declared there might be a delay in the actual process of registration.

Louis Neizer

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Mr. Pehle

March 2, 1944

L. S. Lesser

James Sharp, of Justice's Foreign Agents Registration Unit, told me on the telephone this morning that Bergson and Jabotinsky agreed yesterday to register the Free Palestine Committee within the next sixty days. On the basis of this agreement, Sharp said that Justice had no objection to Jabotinsky going overseas. He stated that he had so informed State yesterday afternoon in response to its inquiry and he knew of no reason why we shouldn't assist Jabotinsky in getting overseas.

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