

Introduction

The Palestine Statehood Committee Records, 1939-1949, consist of correspondence, memoranda, reports, publications, advertisements, and clippings related to five committees active in the United States from 1939 to 1949: the American Friends of a Jewish Palestine, the Committee for an Army of Stateless and Palestinian Jews, the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, the American League for a Free Palestine, and the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation. Among these papers are materials on the activities of similar groups in Great Britain and France: the British League for a Free Palestine, and the Ligue française pour une Palestine libre.

A small group of Palestinian Jews under the leadership of Peter H. Bergson (Hillel Kook) were central figures in the formation of these committees. Their goals, as the names of the committees they formed indicate, were the creation of a Jewish army not under British command to fight against the Axis Powers, the rescue and repatriation in Palestine of European Jews, and the reestablishment of the Hebrew nation in an independent Palestine. Peter H. Bergson, Eri Jabotinsky, Samuel Merlin, Alexander Hadani-Rafaeli, Arieh Ben Eliezer, Y. Ben Ami, and their supporters in the United States embarked upon a campaign to publicize the plight of the Jews in Europe and to raise financial support for their programs. Their activities led to rivalry with the American Zionist leadership and the Jewish Agency in Palestine, who challenged the legitimacy of the Bergson committees. Both sides questioned the effectiveness of the other's methods and policies with regard to the rescue of European Jews, immigration quotas in Palestine, and resistance to British rule. The conflict was intensified by the Bergson committees' sympathies for the Revisionist Zionist movement and support of the Irgun Zvai Leumi, the underground army in Palestine led by Menachem Begin.

The papers have been organized into seven series: **I. Correspondence; II. Public Statements, Press Releases, Reports, and Clippings; III. Subject Files; IV. Files of *The Answer*, Advertisements, and Clippings; V. Public Records from the United Kingdom Foreign Office; VI. Records from the United States Department of State; and VII. Additional Clippings.**

The first four series contain papers in Hebrew as well as in English. From the contents of **Series I** and **Series II** can be derived a chronology of the activities of the committees and a background of events which influenced their actions. **Series III** provides additional information on individuals, organizations, and topics of importance from **Series I** and **II**. **Series IV** is a record of the publicity campaign directed by the committees in the United States.

Series I contains correspondence of the American Friends of a Jewish Palestine, the Committee for a Jewish Army, the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, the American League for a Free Palestine, and the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation. Since the committees were operating concurrently and many of the individuals whose correspondence appears in **Series I** served on more than one committee, letters have not been arranged by individual or organization, but are filed in chronological order.

The American Friends of a Jewish Palestine, the earliest of the committees, was founded in 1939 to support the underground activities of the Irgun Zvai Leumi in the repatriation in Palestine of Jewish refugees from German-held territory. The correspondence of the committee that appears in these papers pertains to the publication of a new edition of *The Rape of Palestine* by William B. Ziff; fund-raising activities; and conflicts with officials of the Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs (including Stephen S. Wise) and the United Palestine Appeal. Some of the individuals whose letters appear in this committee's correspondence are Y. Ben Ami, Harry Louis Selden, Mrs. John Gunther, William B. Ziff, and Louis Germain.

Correspondence of the Committee for an Army of Stateless and Palestinian Jews from 1941 to 1943 contains discussions between the committee and Arthur Lourie and Stephen S. Wise of the Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs. Members of the Committee for a Jewish Army corresponded with Congressmen, government officials, and private citizens in an effort to stimulate public support for the committee's proposals. One exchange of letters between the committee and several members of Congress—including Harry S. Truman, Robert A. Taft, and Edwin C. Johnson—involved the unauthorized use of their names on an advertisement published in the *New York Times* on May 4, 1943. Also included is correspondence concerning publicity efforts such as the "Proclamation on the Moral Rights of the Stateless and Palestinian Jews (1942 Nov 17)," and Ben Hecht's pageant, "We Will Never Die." Individuals writing on behalf of the Committee for a Jewish Army include Pierre Van Paassen, Gabriel A. Wechsler, Peter H. Bergson, Samuel Merlin, Maurice Rifkin, and Alexander Wilf, a Philadelphia businessman.

The Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe grew out of a conference sponsored by the Committee for a Jewish Army. Held in New York City in July, 1943 it was a reaction to the Bermuda conference on refugees attended by representatives of the United States and Great Britain in May 1943. Believing that the Bermuda meeting had failed to address itself specifically to the treatment of Jews in Axis countries, the organizers of the New York conference established the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe. (For the proposals of the committee, see "Memorandum on the findings of the E.C.S.J.P.E." Roll 4. The original members of the executive board were Peter H. Bergson, Louis Bromfield, Ben Hecht, Max Lerner, Will Rogers, Jr., and Sigrid Undset. Others on the committee were Congressman Andrew L. Somers, Konrad Bercovici, Frances Gunther, Dean Alfange, Stella Adler, Rose Keane, and Arthur Szyk.

Correspondence of the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe dates from July 1943 to June 1945, when the committee was disbanded. A copy of a letter (1943 Oct 12) from Eri Jabotinsky to Dr. Leib Altman describes the march on Washington of the Orthodox rabbis of the United States organized by the Emergency Committee in October 1943. There is correspondence between members of the committee and the War Refugee Board, as well as copies of the correspondence of Johan J. Smertenko, executive vice-chairman of the Emergency Committee, with the International Red Cross, the Vatican, foreign ambassadors in the United States, and State Department officials.

In a letter to Peter H. Bergson dated August 13, 1943, Y. Ben Ami proposed the creation of a "Free Palestine League" to influence United States policy on the Middle East and to wage a publicity campaign to create public support for an independent Palestine. The result was the formation of the American League for a Free Palestine, many of whose members had been active on one or more of the preceding committees. Among the members of the executive board from 1943 to 1948 were Y. Ben Ami, Louis Bromfield, Ben Hecht, Will Rogers, Jr., Harry Louis Selden, Andrew L. Somers, Alexander Wilf, Stella Adler, Konrad Bercovici, Fowler Harper, Arthur Szyk, Mrs. Louis Untermeyer, and Isaac Zaar. Guy M. Gillette, senator from Iowa, became president of the league in August 1945.

The Hebrew Committee of National Liberation was formed in May 1944 by Peter H. Bergson, Arieh Ben Eliezer, Theodore Bennahum, Pinhas Delongaz, Jeremiah Helpert, Eri Jabotinsky, and Samuel Merlin. Designating itself as "a temporary trustee of Hebrew National interests," the group opened an "embassy" on Massachusetts Avenue in Washington, D.C., as a "committee of liberation in exile." Questioning the right of those Zionists who were citizens of the Western democracies to make decisions regarding the government of Palestine, the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation defined the "Hebrew nation" as the people in Palestine and Eastern Europe who renounced allegiance to any other nation, and who by common descent and common destiny constituted a national entity. Its aims were self-determination and international recognition, including membership in the United Nations, of the Hebrew nation, the repatriation of those European refugees who chose Palestine as their home, and the establishment of a democratic state in which Arabs would be guaranteed full citizenship.

The Hebrew Committee of National Liberation, by its own definition, could not include among its membership persons who claimed citizenship of the United States or any other nation. Those Americans who supported the program of the H.C.N.L. joined the American League for a Free Palestine, which raised funds and support on the committee's behalf.

The correspondence of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation and the American League for a Free Palestine dates from 1943 to 1949 and comprises approximately two-thirds of the correspondence in **Series I**. Harry Louis Selden, Guy M. Gillette, Alexander Wilf, Maurice Rosenblatt, Maurice Rifkin, Louis Bromfield, Johan J. Smertenko, Rose Keane, and Jacob Barouch are among those whose correspondence appears in **Series I** on behalf of the American League for a Free Palestine. Peter H. Bergson, Samuel Merlin, and Michael Berchin represent the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation. In addition, **Series I** contains copies of correspondence of Paul O'Dwyer from 1947 to 1949, and correspondence of J. David Stern, editor of the *Philadelphia Record*. Both men were sympathetic to the activities of the American League for a Free Palestine.

From 1943 to 1949 there is considerable correspondence related to the opposition of the American Zionist Emergency Council and other Zionist organizations to the activities of the American League for a Free Palestine and the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation. The perspective of the H.C.N.L. is given in a letter dated April 2, 1945, from Peter H. Bergson to Chaim Weizmann, president of the Jewish Agency for Palestine. The position of the A.L.F.P. in the controversy was defended on numerous occasions in the letters of Harry Louis Selden.

There are also frequent letters and telegrams from committee members to newspaper and magazine editors, reporters, congressmen, the president of the United States, the prime minister of Great Britain, officials of the U.S. State Department and the British government with regard to Palestine. House and Senate resolutions on Palestine are the subject of correspondence between committee members and members of Congress in May 1945, February 1946, and January-February 1948.

From 1944 to 1946 there is correspondence between Peter H. Bergson and officials of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration concerning the extension of the agency's services to include Jews who were former nationals of Axis countries. There are copies of several letters and a memo (1945 Jan-Feb) regarding the role of Herbert C. Pell on the War Crimes Commission, and correspondence (1945 Sept) with Earl G. Harrison, U.S. representative to the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees.

Within the correspondence for December 1945 are several letters and memoranda describing preparations and activities of the delegation sent by the American League for a Free Palestine to England. Other events that occasioned correspondence were the league's mission to Palestine in the summer of 1946, the United Nations' decision on the partition of Palestine in December 1947, and the visit of Menachem Begin, former commander-in-chief of the Irgun, to the United States in November-December 1948.

Throughout the correspondence of the American League for a Free Palestine and the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation, there are letters of protest on the detention of political prisoners in Palestine and the sentencing by the British of members of the Irgun and the Stern group. Several of the members of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation were at one time or another detainees of the British or the Israeli governments: Eri Jabotinsky, Arieh Ben Eliezer, and Peter Bergson. Committee correspondence during the years 1946 to 1948 describes the financing and equipping of vessels for the illegal immigration to Palestine of Jewish refugees, as well as fund-raising efforts for the Irgun. In 1948 and 1949 letters from Alex Hadani-Rafaeli, Arieh Ben Eliezer, and Peter Bergson describe the political situation in Israel and the activities of the Herut Party.

Series II. Public Statements, Press Releases, Reports, and Clippings, (1938-1949) is a chronological file documenting the activities of the American Friends of a Jewish Palestine, the Committee for a Jewish Army, the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, the American League for a Free Palestine, and the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation. Individuals whose papers appear in this series have already been mentioned in the description of **Series I**. As in **Series I**, papers of or about the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation and the American League for a Free Palestine comprise approximately two-thirds of the items in the series.

Series II contains newsletters and bulletins of the various committees, memoranda, reports, and position papers prepared by committee members and others, pamphlets, booklets, and posters published as part of the publicity campaigns in the United States, press releases, speeches, magazine articles, and clippings. One folder of financial records appears at the end of **Series II**. There are minutes of committee meetings and conference materials from the following: the

first and second annual Emergency Conferences to Save the Jewish People of Europe (1943 Jul, 1944 Aug), the Special Emergency Conference on Palestine of the American League for a Free Palestine (1946 Feb), and the Emergency Conference to Propose a U.S. Policy for Palestine and the Middle East (1948 May). **Series II** contains excerpts from the *Congressional Record*, as well as copies of House and Senate resolutions on the refugee situation in Europe and the independence of Palestine during the years 1944 to 1948.

There are texts of proposals submitted by the committees to agencies concerned with Palestine policy and the status of Jewish refugees in Europe. These include a memorandum to the War Refugee Board from the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe (1944 Feb 17) and a statement of aims and policies of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation submitted to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry (1946 Jan).

Among the many public statements issued by the committees from 1938 to 1949 is the response of the A.L.F.P. to the statement of Winston Churchill following the assassination of Lord Moyne by Jewish terrorists in Cairo in November 1944. **Series II** also contains copies of the statements issued by the H.C.N.L. at its inception in May 1944 and the response of the American Zionist Emergency Council. There are texts of underground broadcasts, newsletters, and public statements of the Irgun Zvai Leumi. In addition, there are copies of a transcript of the legal proceedings in the Untermeyer-Warsaw Case (1948 Apr), in which Joseph Untermeyer, represented by Paul O'Dwyer, and Isaiah Warsaw, represented by M. S. Fisher, were accused by the New York police of attempting to smuggle arms into Palestine in bundles of clothing.

In April 1947 an office of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation was set up in New York to direct its attention to the work of the United Nations. **Series II** contains bulletins and memoranda describing the efforts of the H.C.N.L. and the positions of the committee with respect to United Nations resolutions. A reorganization of the H.C.N.L. in March 1948 resulted in the relocation of its headquarters from the United States to Paris and the appointment of a new chairman, Samuel Merlin, in place of Peter Bergson.

Series III. Subject Files consists of individual files of correspondence, memoranda, interviews, reports, public statements, articles and clippings concerning specific individuals and on special topics related to repatriation and resistance efforts. While the correspondence in **Series I** contains few letters after 1949, much of the correspondence appearing in **Series III** dates from 1950 to 1972.

Among those for whom there are files in **Series III** are Arieh Ben Eliezer, Peter H. Bergson, Ben Hecht, and Eri Jabotinsky, all of whom played leading roles in the work of the committees. Much of the material on Arieh Ben Eliezer concerns his imprisonment by the British while in Palestine representing the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe. Detained from April to October 1944, without a trial, Ben Eliezer was deported to a prison camp in Eritrea. He remained in prison camps until 1948. There are copies of his letters from prison, as well as correspondence and other papers concerning attempts to secure his release. With few exceptions, the correspondence in the Bergson and Jabotinsky files dates from 1950 to 1972, and pertains to social and political conditions in Israel after its independence. (Correspondence on the detention of Eri Jabotinsky by the British authorities in May 1944 and the subsequent refusal of

the United States State Department to issue him a visa to re-enter the United States may be found in **Series I.**) The file on Ben Hecht contains correspondence about his book, *Perfidy*, published in 1961; texts of plays and pageants; and reviews. There are clippings, correspondence, and memoranda related to the Zionist leader, Vladimir Jabotinsky, and a typed copy of an undated article entitled "Introduction to the Theory of Society and Economics."

Series III also includes topical files: "Hebrews and Jews" contains articles, lectures, and clippings—written before and after Israeli independence—on the relationship between the Jews of the world and the citizens of Palestine/Israel. The "Irgun Zvai Leumi" file contains correspondence, memoranda, public statements, pamphlets, and clippings related to the Irgun and its supporters in the United States. "Repatriation" includes correspondence, reports, memoranda, clippings, and some financial records on the activities of the American League for a Free Palestine in 'Aliyah Bet'—extra-quota immigration to Palestine. In particular, there are files on two ships, the *Ben Hecht*, captured by the British in March 1947, and the *Altalena*, destroyed on orders from the Israeli government in June 1948. The correspondence, public statements, and clippings on "Zionist organizations" pertain to the conflict between the Zionists and the Bergson committees, as well as the opposition of the Herut party to the policies of the Ben Gurion government.

Within **Series III** are copies of oral history interviews conducted by the Institute of Contemporary History of Hebrew University. A part of the Institute's research on the Revisionist movement, the Irgun Zvai Leumi, and the Lohame Herut Yisrael, the interviews were recorded from 1966 to 1970. Those interviewed were Peter H. Bergson, Sam Dubiner, Alexander Hadani-Rafaeli, Eri Jabotinsky, Jacob Meridor, and Jacob Vinchel. With the exception of the Dubiner interview, all are in Hebrew.

Series IV. *The Answer*, Advertisements, and Clippings consist of issues of *The Answer* (published in French and English), files of clippings, lists of advertisements and mailings sponsored by the various committees, and copies of the advertisements themselves, many of which were illustrated by Arthur Szyk. There are twenty-two scrapbooks, six folios, and one archive box of material dating from 1941 to 1949.

Series V and **Series VI** consist of records from the United Kingdom Foreign Office and the U.S. Department of State. And **Series VII** contains additional clippings from *The Answer* and committee scrapbooks.