THE IMAGE AND THE SUBSTANCE OF THE AMERICAN COUNCIL FOR JUDAISM

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

by Clarence L. Coleman, Jr.

I cannot refrain from observing, at the very start of my remarks this evening, that probably the most gratifying and enjoyable task that I perform as the president of the Council is the opportunity and privilege each year of discussing with close friends matters of deep mutual concern. Perhaps some of you may feel that I use the words "close friends" improperly, but the fact is that despite the lack of frequent social contacts and the regrettable existence of geographical barriers, very special relationships emerge from a sharing of basic ideas and convictions which lead me to think of you as, indeed, good friends. On this, our Fifteenth Anniversary, and in the very congenial atmosphere which has been provided by our gracious host, the I. Friedlander Chapter of Houston, let us examine the undertaking which has developed from our close ideological association, in a context which will permit me to touch upon the most important aspects of our joint endeavors.

To some of you assembled here this evening the subject of my remarks—The Image and the Substance of the American Council for Judaism—may be somewhat mystifying; for, in the case of most organizations, the image and the substance are one and the same. Organizations dedicated to the advancement of medical research, for example, are not ordinarily regarded by the public as organizations created to spread pestilence and disease. Religious groups—of whatever faith—are not popularly considered to be, in reality, schemes for denying the spiritual values of religion and advancing the concepts of atheism. But the American Council for Judaism represents the rare and literally fantastic phenomenon in which the *image* of the organization carefully created by hostile propaganda, is very different from the *substance* of the Council's guiding principles. I can think of no more striking example of the power of propaganda than the success thus achieved by our opponents who see the Council as the greatest obstacle remaining in the way of the progressive "Jewish" nationalization of American Jews.

Fifteen years ago, only weeks after the Council was organized, an unusually candid editorial in an authoritative Zionist publication prophesied the real issues in the struggle which the Council had joined.* Mark the words well! They are a more truthful exposé of the issues than will be found in the smears we have since encountered. For despite the "image" of the Council created by the propagandists this fifteen-year-old herald of our birth delineates the real substance.

On October 8, 1943, the *Congress Weekly* featured an editorial entitled "American Zionism: The Second Phase." The following are *verbatim* quotes:

"At the recent American Jewish Conference the idea of a Jewish Commonwealth met with almost no opposition. On the surface it might seem that the nationalist concept of Jewish life also emerged from the Conference with flying banners. Such a belief, however, would be self-deceiving. For the sake of a realistic evaluation of the attitudes of American Jewry it is necessary to separate the two ideas which in Zionism are considered as one: Jewish statehood in Palestine and Jewish peoplehood in the Diaspora. The delegates who acclaimed the Jewish Commonwealth probably would have registered a different proportion of ayes and nays had they been asked to vote on a separate resolution declaring that the five million Jews in America regard themselves as part of a world-wide Jewish nation. While the right to a National Home in Palestine has decisively taken hold of the mind of American Jewry, the idea of a conscious national Jewish existence has not yet found ready acceptance, and there are still vast areas which offer the American Council for Judaism fertile ground for the spread of its doctrines." Then note the role assigned to the Council—and let those who have said they agree in *principle* with our substance, but who have withheld support because they *accept* the image; let them ask themselves if they have been guided by truth or been victimized by propaganda.

For the *Zionist* editorial *accurately* says,

*See, *Information Bulletin*, ACJ, Nov. 30, 1943.

"It is quite possible, that the American Council for Judaism would not be fighting so desperately against Zionism if the idea of a Jewish Commonwealth did not entail the concept of Jewish nationhood. The big guns of the American 'Judaists' are pointed not so much at Palestine as a haven and spiritual center as at the nationalist concept that makes American Jews an integral part of that world-wide people which sees in the Jewish Commonwealth its highest political aspiration." Why has this basic issue been lost to so many in these fifteen years? Not because *we* have failed to spotlight it with restraint and precision. But because millions of dollars a year can buy more propaganda than a few hundreds of thousands — used for the Council's conservative approach to a nation-wide educational program. And, because it is easier to trade on the emotions than to appeal to reason and intellect. With these obvious advantages the "Jewish" nationalists have produced a deliberate evasion of the issues and a deliberate misundertanding and distortion of the basic position of the Council—as well as the positive programs through which it seeks to implement its views. Despite a campaign of vilification and misrepresentation, the result of nearly fifteen years of arduous building is today an organization representing the attitudes and beliefs of those Americans of Jewish faith who are resolutely unwilling to surrender their principles—indeed, their very lives—to the unacceptable doctrines of "Jewish" nationalism. An intensive and skillfully managed propaganda campaign against this organization makes it necessary for fair-minded observers to distinguish constantly between a contrived image and the sound substance of the Council.

For the Council has been, from its beginning, the element of determined resistance which had to be removed—at any cost and by whatever means, in order to permit the process of "Jewish" nationalization to go on without challenge or hindrance. The Council's "still, small voice" had to be forever silenced, and its philosophy of hope and courage in the spirit of our American democracy, replaced by Zionism's alien philosophy of hopelessness and despair, of ultimate defeat for Jews and Judaism. And out of Zionism's pessimism flows its ultimate solution for a so-called and allegedly permanent Jewish problem—the "ingathering of the exiles" into a "Jewish state." Small wonder that many major Zionist organizations and several so-called non-Zionist groups, which regularly ally themselves with the Zionists, have committed themselves to the destruction of the American Council for Judaism.

Why does Zionism wish the Council destroyed? And why has it sought to establish an unreal image of the Council in the public mind? We come here to one of the sedulously created confusions about the issues in the controversy. We all know what classical Zionism is and means. It is spelled out in Zionist resolutions and Israel's legislation. It is reiterated constantly in Zionist propaganda: All Jews are participants in Israel's "Jewish" nationalism and the "Jewish" state exists for all Jews.

"But," say the "neutralists,"—the "non-Zionist-but" majority, the "above-the-fray" statesmen—"*American* Zionism is different." Is it? There are only two kinds of modern political Zionism which, in reality, are one. There is Mr. Ben-Gurion's Zionism which says the only good Zionist is the Israeli Zionist. And then there is "diaspora Zionism" —of which American Zionism is a part.

The basic philosophy of this American or "Diaspora" Zionism, which many regard as an answer to Mr. Ben-Gurion, is *precisely* the danger with which we of the Council are concerned. For Mr. Ben-Gurion, with consistent logic, is unable to accept as a true Zionist one who refuses to settle in Israel and thus does not fulfill the basic imperative of the Ingathering of the Exiles. The purveyors of "diaspora" American Zionism say that one can—even should—live wholly or partially as an Israeli, *in America*. The continuing effort of a massive organization to impose this highly dangerous philosophy upon all American Jews is but another reason that the Council must continue to exist and to grow as the sole representative of those unable, on principle, to accommodate themselves to this philosophy and we must accordingly resist the Zionist effort to destroy and silence us. Listen to Dr. Mordecai Kaplan — a leading American Zionist — following his participation last summer in Jerusalem in the top-level Ideological Conference called by the governing body of World Zionism, the Jewish Agency. Dr. Kaplan wrote:

"Ben-Gurion defined the issue very clearly by maintaining that the continuation of the Zionist movement in the free countries would only be justified if its principal function consisted in getting Jews from those countries to migrate to Israel. Whatever activities Zionists engaged in that were likely to help