The Third Crisis

The third crisis occurred in the years from 1943 to 1948.

Weizmann had come to America again to have millions of American Jews, who opposed "Jewish" nationalism, do for "Jewish" nationalism what "Jewish" nationalists were unable to do themselves. By 1941, Weizmann and Zionism recognized that the center of the free world had already shifted from London to Washington. It was, therefore, necessary for Zionism to persuade Franklin Roosevelt to support their post-war aspirations in Palestine.

When he arrived in the United States, Weizmann—with unmistakable candor—confessed the purpose of his visit to the chief administrative officer of the American Jewish Committee. On the best authority the President is reported to have said:

". . . He had received the most solemn assurances from the highest quarters in London that . . . 'after the war we will get what we want in Palestine,' that he had seen some very important people in Washington, who are very sympathetic, who advised him to see . . . (F. D. R.) that he proposed to seek a meeting with the President but regarded it as highly useful before seeing him to be in a position to speak for *a united Jewry of America.*"

For the next two years, much of the energy and resources of the leading organization of "non-Zionists" were devoted to helping Zionism confront the President of the United States with "a united Jewry of America."

Two footnotes of the history of these years are of somewhat intimate interest to us. One of our founders, Dr. Morris Lazaron, led the fight to prevent this "non-Zionist" deliverance of American Jews to the political purposes of Zionism. We honor him for his vision. Perhaps I may say for him, the Council honors his vision by the role it picked up—and continues to play—when more expedient men turned from his counsel.

The second footnote, in view of Weizmann's desire to confront the President of the United States with "a united Jewry of America," was the impact of the Council's first, official appearance on the Washington scene in February of 1944. I think I shall never forget Lessing Rosenwald's calm, deliberate certainty of principle as he testified to our position before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on a resolution seeking the endorsement of Zionism's "Jewish Commonwealth" by the United States Congress. Morris Lazaron, Louis Wolsey and William Fineshriber also represented us. There had been a long, unrelieved chain of Zionist witnesses. Not until Lessing Rosenwald presented our position was there a single, solitary scrap of evidence indicating all Jews did not applaud the endless repetition of phrases like "homeless people" and "the historic aspirations of Jews to have a home of their own." The "non-Zionists" stood in wings. They claimed greater prestige and stature than we. They professed rejection of "Jewish" nationalism. But they raised not even a whisper when the forces of "Jewish" nationalism confronted the highest legislative tribunals of the United States with what looked like a solid phalanx of American Jews clamoring to be recognized as a separate nationality. The "non-Zionists" were too busy cooperating with Weizmann to worry about defending American Jews against this "Jewish" nationalist offensive.

This dereliction was not because there were no anti-Zionist voices pointing to the dangers. As in 1917, and again from 1925-1929, prophetic voices were raised. And the issues raised were the same as those which had been raised on two previous occasions.

James N. Rosenberg, a member of the Executive Committee of the American Jewish Committee, commented on the proposal that the Committee support the creation of Palestine as a "commonwealth" only *after* Jews "constitute a majority." To the administrative head of the American Jewish Committee, Rosenberg observed,

"*You set up a kind of democracy which I do not recognize as democracy;* one which begins to work in Palestine only when Jews become a majority there, and only when operating under their sole direction. . . . Your demand that the exclusive power to set up the 'autonomous commonwealth' be in Jewish hands refutes democracy because it cancels out the rights of others." (my italics)

Predicated upon such logic, Rosenberg also said,

"*These resolutions bring the Jews of the United States to the cross roads. Nothing less.*"

This was the opposite of ethno-centrism, of "Jewish" nationalism. This was universalism, even though the author was a successful corporation lawyer—not a Rabbi. This was applying to others, what Jews wanted applied to themselves. And the "non-Zionists" rejected the advice.

The distinguished attorney was not alone. Dr. Louis Finkelstein, on another occasion and to an American Jewish Committee audience, discussed the inadvisability of "non-Zionist" leadership supporting Zionist objectives. The occasion was the American Jewish Conference of 1943. The issue, again, was the so-called "Jewish Commonwealth Resolution." During a "non-Zionist" caucus, the Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary said to his "non-Zionist" colleagues.

"I don't know what the words 'Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine' means. (sic) "Now, it seems to me that *by saying we want the Jewish commonwealth in Palestine, no matter what may be understood by us in those words*—and frankly I have not been able to grasp what is meant by that—*we are helping to defeat that which is the salvation of the Jews,* as of all other people, namely the creation of states on political and economic and geographical basis and without regard to ethnic, religious and other divisions. . . . "*I will wager that out of the five hundred men who were supposed to vote for this resolution, not fifty of them know what we meant. I will wager they thought we were talking about a refuge for Jews in Palestine.*" (my italics)

And finally, in this array of distinguished witnesses to the soundness of anti-Zionism and our principles, I call upon Judge Joseph M. Proskauer. In a letter dated April 29, 1942, just about a year to the day *before* the organization of the Council, the future President of the American Jewish Committee said to the chief executive officer of the leading "non-Zionist" organization.

". . . My feeling is that the time has come when *The American Jewish Committee has got to fish or cut bait on Zionism.*

"There has got to be in this country a Jewish organization who would definitely represent *to the public* that the Jew is not a political unit, either nationally or internationally, in Palestine or out of Palestine. . . .

"*I am satisfied that from every point of view of safety for Jews in America there has got to be an open, vocal Jewish dissent from nationalism and political Zionism; and if the American Jewish Committee doesn't make itself the mouthpiece of this public position, some other organization will have to.*"

In August of 1943 the American Council for Judaism fulfilled Proskauer's imperative of an organization to differentiate between Zionists and Americans of Jewish faith. For the American Jewish Committee failed either to fish or cut bait, although less charitable observers would assign to it the role of Izaak Walton. The issues which the Council drew were the very issues which has been raised by every one of our anti-Zionist antecedents from Montagu, Sylvain Levi, Philipson, Rosenberg, Finkelstein to Proskauer.

The issues were "Jewish" nationalism, embracing all Jews, not the freedom of Jews to enter Palestine—or live in it—on a basis of equality with anyone else. The issues were a racist or theocratic state, privileging *all* Jews, or a truly democratic state. The issues were whether Jews are individual citizens of the many countries of their citizenship, or collectively members of a world-wide "Jewish" nation, only a part of which lives in the "national home." The issues were whether *all* Jews expect equal, *individual* rights everywhere and, at the same time, possess collective *national* privileges in Palestine. The issues were whether American Jews were devotees of a faith with universal validity or homeless nationals who could be full and dignified Jews only in a "Jewish" state.

These are honorable issues. The men who raised them were all honorable men. They were generous men. They were humanitarians. They were scholars. They were unashamedly Jews. But the established mechanism of the so-called "non-Zionist" organizations ignored them; and the Zionist mechanism called them escapists, plutocrats, enemies of Jews—as they called these names at the Council after 1943, when the same principles and ideas were articulated by the Council.

For Zionism had its way also at the showdown in this third crisis. A Zionist state was established. Its very birth was formally proclaimed in precise language, as an accomplishment involving all Jews. And it was not long before the leading "non-Zionists" were competing with the Zionists in claiming credit for this political *fait accompli.*

Why did the real anti-Zionists fail? Why, or how, did Zionism bulldoze them into the crowd?

On the fifteenth anniversary of this Council, answers to these questions are important —not as self-serving devices but—because if we understand the failure of all these anti-Zionist efforts in the past, we may better understand the ingredients of our own accomplishments in the future.

My own examination of a great deal of