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One Voice Against Many:
A Biographical Study of Elmer Berger, 1948-1968

Mark Glickman

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-
Jewish Institute of Religion

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Referee, Professor Michael A. Meyer

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Digest

This thesis examines the life and work of Rabbi Elmer Berger, the founding Executive Director of the American Council for Judaism. As an outspoken anti-Zionist throughout most of his career, Berger has consistently striven to articulate and realize his vision of what he perceives as a "truly emancipated" American Jewry, free of any national or ethnic ties whatsoever.

The introduction to the thesis sets the stage for my discussion of Berger's work by outlining, in very general terms, the relationship between Reform Judaism and Zionism prior to 1948, the year with which the focus of this study begins. The introduction also discusses Berger's emergence as an anti-Zionist--his childhood, his rabbinical training at HUC, his early years as a congregational rabbi, the formation of the American Council for Judaism, and the process by which he came to be associated with it.

Chapter I provides an examination and analysis of Berger's thought, his scholarly work, from 1948 to 1968. It outlines the premises of Berger's ideology and the implications of those premises vis-a-vis the ways he conceptualized Jewish religion, Jewish history, and eventually, Zionism and the situation in the Middle East.

In Chapter II I discuss Berger's activities during this time. As we shall see, he engaged in a wide variety of political, organizational and administrative endeavors during the

period being studied, and the discussion in this chapter highlights a few of the more significant ones.

Elmer Berger is widely regarded as a heretic by the American Jewish community. Chapter III, "Imagining Berger," examines the image of Elmer Berger in the psyche of American Jewry, and the ways in which he became a symbol--either intensely positive or intensely negative--for many Jews in this country.

In the conclusion, I provide an analysis of Berger's work and the extent of the impact which he has made. I have saved my own thoughts, responses, impressions, and conclusions regarding Berger's work for the epilogue.

In short, this thesis is a biography of a rabbi who, though not as well known as others, did play an important role in the American Jewish anti-Zionist movement--a fascinating chapter in American Jewish History. I genuinely hope that my work provides an accurate and fair portrayal of the life of this remarkable man.

Preface

I have always been fascinated by heretics. Interestingly, heretics rarely define themselves as such--rarely does a person adopt a stance which he or she feels at the outset runs contrary to the fundamental precepts of a given community. Instead, they usually feel that their views are logical extensions of those very same principles upon which their community is founded. Heretics are therefore usually deemed such by others, and thus the study of them reveals a negative image of the community from which he or she dissents. In other words, a study of a heretic from our own community is a study of what we are not; and by learning what we are not, we also learn a great deal about what we are.

I believe it was this fascination with heresy which led me to write a seminar paper as a undergraduate at Washington University entitled, "The American Council for Judaism: A Quixotic Child of the Reform Movement." Ever since then, my eyes have seemed almost irresistibly drawn to index-references on the American Council for Judaism and its founding Executive Director, Elmer Berger, in texts on American Zionism. In turn, my increasing interest in Berger and his activities led to my desire to write my rabbinical thesis on his life and work.

It is therefore my hope that this thesis, by providing information on Berger's thought and activities, also sheds some

light on American Jewry in general. In researching it, I have consulted three major categories of material: printed matter by and about Berger and the ACJ; interviews with both Berger himself and those who have had contact with him; and archival material, primarily of the Papers of the American Council for Judaism, which are in the Archives of the Wisconsin State Historical Society in Madison.

Elmer Berger has indeed been deemed a heretic by most American Jews who are familiar with him--especially those affiliated with the Reform movement. I myself began my research quite critical of his views and everything I felt he represented. Since it was clearly necessary to transcend the plethora of rhetoric which has been launched against Berger, objectivity was of utmost importance to me as I researched this thesis. My primary goal was to consult as many sources as I could and to produce as fair and as complete an account of Berger's work as possible.

As I approach the final stages of writing this thesis, I realize how deeply indebted I am to several individuals who have helped me reach this point. First of all, Dr. Berger himself was of immeasurable assistance by hosting me at his home in Florida and by providing me with vast amounts of information during my visit there and during the several telephone conversations which we had with one another.

The role of my thesis advisor, Dr. Michael A. Meyer, was much more than an official one. During all of my years of rab-

binical study in Cincinnati, Dr. Meyer has been my teacher in the finest sense of the word. Not only has he taught me how to produce what I hope will prove to be a good piece of scholarship, but he has made that learning a spiritual experience. He has shown me the strong connection between the Jewish yesterday and the Jewish today, and he has exemplified, in a very real way, the principle of "Torah im derech eretz." I hope that this thesis and the process by which it was produced lives up to these values which Dr. Meyer has taught me.

I am also deeply indebted to my good friend, Ms. Deborah Shapiro, without whose assistance and loving support I would not have made it through these past few trying months.

Finally, I owe much to my parents. The undying and sincere faith which they have had in me has always been an inspiration. Undying love is often difficult to come by in this world, and I only hope that I will be able to show those with whom I come into contact the same support which my parents have shown me.

One Voice Against Many:
A Biographical Study of Elmer Berger, 1948-1968

Introduction

"We fought a good fight, but we lost. Let us not be spoil-sports."[1] These were the words which Elmer Berger used to sum up his response to the creation of the state of Israel on May 15, 1948. The statement was a significant one. As Executive Director of the American Council for Judaism since its formation in 1942, Berger had indeed played a significant role in the fight against Jewish nationalism and the statehood which it strove to achieve. In its place, he struggled for a Judaism based on universal values and equal rights for Jews wherever they might live. For six years, Berger and his associates had tirelessly fought to achieve these goals, and most recently, they had focused on opposing the creation of a Jewish state--the state of Israel--in Palestine. Clearly, the events of May 15 signified a great defeat.

But although Berger acknowledged this defeat, he was by no means a defeatist. This too can be seen in the statement quoted above. While there were many voices calling for the dissolution of the American Council for Judaism, saying that the existence of

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[1] Executive Director's Report, 4/22/49. Exerpted in Council News, May, 1949.

the new state of Israel had rendered the Council's raison d'etre meaningless, Berger saw this as a time of new beginnings. The values for which the Council had always stood were now, he thought, only receiving a stronger challenge. The select group of individuals who were able to transcend the momentary madness brought about by the creation of the state would be the ones now responsible for promulgating those values. The Council thus needed to reorient itself and devote its energies to finding new ways of battling Jewish nationalism and its many implications in light of the existence of the state of Israel.

Rabbi Elmer Berger would devote the next twenty years of his career to these purposes.

Reform Judaism and Zionism Prior to 1948

Elmer Berger was by no means the first American Reform Jew, or for that matter, the first Reform rabbi, to be an anti-Zionist. Rather, from the very inception of Zionism, the American Reform movement was largely opposed to it, especially to the political Zionism of Herzl, Nordau and others. Although most Reform Jews had come to accept Zionism by the time Berger became active in the Council, he did have a well developed ideological foundation upon which to stand as he formulated his own anti-Zionist theories.

It is interesting to note that the anti-Zionism of the early American Reformers was based, in part, upon certain insecurities which they felt as newcomers to America. As people who greatly

desired to be accepted as "full-fledged Americans," they embraced American modes of thought and rejected anything which might call into question their loyalty to their new home. Later, we shall consider whether the later anti-Zionism of Elmer Berger was itself a product of insecurities which parallelled those of his predecessors.

The anti-Zionism of the early American Reformers was the product of a wide variety of social and ideological forces.[2] First among the ideological forces was the complete faith which these people had in the value of Emancipation. Emancipation, it was felt, was the key which would allow the Jews the enter Western society. Whereas the ghetto had isolated them, turned their community into an enigma to the Gentiles, and thus led to antisemitism, Emancipation would end all such oppression by allowing Jews to become a full fledged members of their communities. At the end of the nineteenth century, antisemitism was rampant in both America and in Europe, and it is easy to understand the significance which those Jews attributed to being accepted by the societies in which they lived.

That the early Reformers had faith in all that Emancipation would bring is evident in the Pittsburgh Platform, one of the first concise statements of Reform ideology. In order to gain entrance to the non-Jewish society, they knew that their behavior would have to be acceptable to the non-Jews who comprised it.

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[2] For the listing of these forces, I am largely indebted to the work of Rabbi David Polish, Renew Our Days: The Zionist Issue in Reform Judaism, Jerusalem, 1976, pp. 57-88.

Thus, halacha was subjected to the litmus test of acceptability to Western norms. This is evident in the third plank of the Pittsburgh Platform:

> We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and to-day we accept as binding only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization. [emphasis added][3]

Thus, we see that the early Reformers gave the prevailing Western modes of thought precedence over specifically Jewish ones whenever the two came into conflict. That they were willing to surrender Judaism to "Westernism" so readily for the sake of acceptance clearly reveals a certain amount of discomfort with traditional Jewish modes of thought. So insecure were they that whenever a Jewish practice threatened that which they hoped to gain as a result of Emancipation, it quickly fell by the wayside in favor of its Western counterpart. Clearly, they had internalized the cultural values of American society so extensively that this process seemed very natural to them.

Stemming largely from this faith in Emancipation and also from the universalistic tendencies of the early Reformers was their concept of the "mission of Israel." As citizens of the many nations in which they lived, the Reformers felt, the Jews

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[3] Reprinted in Michael A. Meyer, Response to Modernity, Oxford, 1988, pp.387-388.

have a mission to spread the principles of ethical monotheism to the world.[4]

It is interesting to note that there is an aspect of assimilationism to the notion of the mission of Israel. Although it asserts the distinctiveness of the role of the Jews and is, in a sense, a transmutation of the idea of chosenness, it was also partly an acceptance of the increasingly popular Protestant missionary movement of the mid- to late-nineteenth century.[5]

But more importantly, the idea of mission gave a positive meaning to what had previously been known as galut, exile. The fact that the Jews exist as a dispersed people no longer was seen as a result of oppression and defeat, but rather as a divinely ordained journey throughout the world for the purpose of spreading God's truth everywhere. This was stated clearly in the second article of the "Protocols" of the 1869 conference of rabbis in Philadelphia:

> We do not consider the fall of the second Jewish commonwealth as a punishment for the sinfulness of Israel, but as a sequence of the divine intent first revealed in a promise to Abraham and then increasingly manifest in the course of world history, to send the members of the Jewish nation to all parts of the earth so that they may fulfill their high priestly task to lead the nations in the true knowledge and worship of God.[6]

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[4] Of course, the concept of the Mission of Israel can be traced back to Mendelssohn. It was in the Reform movement, however, that the Mission idea was most fully developed.

[5] Polish, Renew Our Days, p.51.

[6] Quoted in W. Gunther Plaut, The Growth of Reform Judaism: American and European Sources until 1948, New York, 1965, p. 30.

With positive meaning thus attributed to dispersion, the Reformers clearly had no room for a movement such as Zionism which attempts to "re-isolate" the Jews in Palestine.

Furthermore, this too seems to be the result, in part, of some of the insecurities which the Reformers were feeling at the time. In their mission, the Reformers said that they "extend the hand of fellowship to all [Christians and Moslems] who cooperate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness among men."[7] By implying that the non-Jews of the world were following the Jews in the "march of truth", the Reformers misrepresented what was really happening.[8] In fact, the very notion of the "mission of Israel" is one which aggrandizes the Jews. Regardless of its validity, it turns an otherwise precarious existence as Jews in a non-Jewish world into part of a great process of cosmic significance. The creation of the notion of mission is therefore an understandable response to the insecurities of diaspora Jewish life.[9]

But in addition to the ideological forces which contributed to the anti-Zionism of the early Reformers, there were social factors as well. The most important of these had to do with the desire to Americanize.

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[7] Meyer, Response to Modernity, op. cit.

[8] Polish, Renew Our Days, op. cit., p. 62.

[9] That they did not assimilate or convert attests to the fact that their insecurity was mitigated by an intense desire to retain at least some sort of a positive Jewish identity.

The masses of Eastern European Jews who immigrated to the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came to comprise a majority of the Reform movement. They needed to somehow be acculturated so that they could survive and flourish in this country. So intense was this desire, that they were willing to Americanize even at the expense of their Jewish identity.

> To be an American, dress like an American, look like an American, and even, if only in fantasy, talk like an American, became a collective goal, at least for the younger immigrants....[David Blaustein remarked that] "in earlier years you could recognize a greenhorn a mile away....Now a greenhorn looks and acts like the yellows [half-Americanized immigrants]."...Hutchins Hapgood observed that some of the immigrants..."gradually quit going to synagogue, give up *heder* promptly when they are thirteen years old, avoid the Yiddish theatres, seek the up-town places of amusement, dress in the latest American fashion, and have a keen eye for the right thing in neckties."[10]

An atmosphere such as this one, an atmosphere centered on Americanization at any cost, left no room whatsoever for a Zionism which was perceived as advocating the focus of Jewish political and cultural allegiance on Palestine, a land very distant from America both geographically and culturally.

Moreover, the "greenhorns" engendered a great deal of insecurity on the part of the already-established, aristocratic, "Our Crowd" German Jews who comprised the power-base of the Reform movement. The immigrants, who came to this country with their old-world customs, were perceived by the German Jews as both "strange" (and therefore threatening) and yet irrefutably

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[10] Irving Howe, World of our Fathers, New York, 1976, p. 128.

part of their own people. Hence, with a certain amount of condescension, the established German-Jewish aristocracy poured huge sums of money into programs and institutions which would help Americanize the immigrants by "freeing" them of their old world ways in favor of "good" American customs.[11]

Again, with Americanization valued so highly, very little room was left for a movement such as Zionism, which was perceived as a threat to the Jews' cultural advancement.

The greatness which the immigrants attributed to America can be seen very clearly in the words of a Reform rabbi of the time.

> We the Israelites of the present age do not dream any longer about the restoration of Palestine and the Messiah crowned with a diadem of earthly power and glory. America is our Palestine; here is our Zion and Jerusalem: Washington and the signers of the glorious Declaration of Independence--of universal right, liberty and happiness--are our deliverers, and the time when their doctrines will be recognized and carried into effect is the time so hopefully foretold by our great prophets....[12]

Immigration and other types of change often bring about insecurity on the part of those undergoing these transformations. As we have seen, one manifestation of that insecurity on the part of the early reformers was the adoption of a largely anti-Zionist stance. Perhaps the clearest statement of this position was in the fifth plank of the Pittsburgh Platform.

> We recognize in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect the approach of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men. We consider our-

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[11] Ibid., p. 230.

[12] Rabbi Max Lilienthal, Quoted in Plaut, The Growth of Reform Judaism, p. 145.

> selves no longer a nation but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor a restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish State.[13]

Despite the anti-Zionist sentiment which prevailed in Reform, the Movement was never monolithically opposed to Jewish nationalism.[14] With the onslaught of World War I, and especially with the rise of Hitler, the existing Zionist voices from within Reform began to grow stronger. The optimism and faith which many early Reformers had vested in Emancipation and Western culture simply started to dissipate. As this happened, the movement began to slowly drift toward a position which was more sympathetic toward Zionism. The Zionist movement in America grew much stronger during this time and, by 1935, the issue had become so divisive within the movement that the Central Conference of American Rabbis found it necessary to adopt a resolution declaring its neutrality on the subject of Zionism.[15]

By this time, however, the conflict between the Zionists and the anti-Zionists within the Reform movement had become so intense that the whole issue could not be "swept under the carpet" by a neutrality resolution. Thus, when the CCAR met in Columbus two years later, and it adopted a new platform for the Reform movement, one plank read, in part, as follows:

> In all lands where our people live they assume and seek to share loyally the full duties and responsibilities of

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[13] Meyer, Response to Modernity, Op. Cit.

[14] Ibid., p. 294.

[15] Quoted in Polish, Renew Our Days, p. 168.

> citizenship and to create seats of Jewish knowledge and religion. In the rehabilitation of Palestine, the land hallowed by memories and hopes, we behold the promise of renewed life for many of our brethren. We affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its upbuilding as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life.[16]

Though its wording was cautious, the Columbus Platform did mark a significant shift regarding Reform's perspective on Zionism. Unlike the Pittsburgh Platform, it reflected an acknowledgement of Jewish peoplehood and of the validity of the work being done in Palestine. World War I and the beginnings of the Nazi regime paved the way for these changes very clearly.

Finally, as the magnitude of the Nazi atrocities became clear, and as it also became clear that something would need to be done with the thousands of Jewish refugees left by World War II, the Western World--and especially the Jewish community--became almost wholly sympathetic to Zionism and its aims.

But "almost" is the operative word in that sentence. The world had yet to see the American Council for Judaism and its Executive Director, Rabbi Elmer Berger.

The Early Years

Elmer Berger was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1908. Berger's mother was a second generation American who was raised in Texas,

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[16] Meyer, Response to Modernity, p. 389.

and his father was brought to the United States as a small child, having been born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.[17]

As he was growing up, Berger's family had what has been called a "marginal Jewish existence."[18] Berger grew up in the age of "Classical Reform Judaism," and his family life reflected that. Though involved in the Euclid Avenue Temple, his family saw this affiliation as merely a religious one, and they tried to become as fully a part of American culture as they possibly could. In fact, Berger's father had a white-collar job with a local railroad--one of the few Jews in that industry at the time. The general environment in the household was "gentilic" in nature. "The American way of life was predominant and the Jewish factor was minimal."[19] As Berger recalls,

> My father was...a kind of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur [Jew]. Neither of my parents had any great, intense associations with or affiliations with Jewish institutions even as we knew them during those days. But...we always belonged to Euclid Avenue Temple, and my brother and I went to Sunday School. We were both confirmed.... It was...a normal position for Jews. We were Jewish, occasionally we would have a Seder, and often we would go [to my Grandfather's] for a Seder, [etc.]. Otherwise, we didn't keep Kosher [or perform

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[17] Interviews with Elmer Berger, November 29-30, 1989, Longboat Key, Florida. [Henceforth, "Berger Interviews"] Berger recalls that his father would never admit to the possibility of having been born in Hungary, preferring to see the "classier" Austria as his birthplace.

[18] For this, and much of the upcoming information about Berger's childhood, I am indebted to Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus, interview August 18, 1989, and Rabbi Stanley Brav, telephone interview, August 23, 1989.

[19] Marcus interview, ibid.

very many other ritual practices]. It was strictly...a Reform Jewish home.[20]

Judaism was Berger's religion, and as a result of his involvement with the Euclid Avenue Temple, the young Elmer Berger came under the influence of the then rabbi of that temple, Louis Wolsey. Wolsey, a very charismatic leader who would become the president of the CCAR and, for a time, one of American Jewry's foremost anti-Zionists, made a deep and lasting impact on Berger.

Here it is important to note the general image of the rabbi in Reform Judaism's "classical" period. The rabbi was considered, first and foremost, a preacher and a teacher. His most important responsibility was to deliver sermons to the laity which addressed the issues of the day and which demonstrated his intellectual and oratorical abilities. Successful rabbis were often revered by their congregants and thus had great amounts of religious authority attributed to them.[21]

Largely as a result of Wolsey's influence and of the appealing nature of the career, Elmer Berger decided to enter the rabbinate. The event which sealed this decision for Berger was the success he had in preaching a "High Holy Day" children's sermon at his Temple in response to a request from Wolsey.[22] Thus, after graduating from the Cleveland public schools in 1925,

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[20] Berger interviews.

[21] Meyer, Response to Modernity, pp. 280-282. Also, Plaut, The Growth of Reform Judaism, pp. 327-336.

[22] Berger interviews.

Berger began his rabbinical studies at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.

Berger was a relatively successful student at the college. Though he did not flourish academically, he did become known for his flowery style of writing--some even characterized it as "pompous."[23] This pomposity was taken by some to reveal a certain element of insecurity in Berger's personality.

Once again, this was the age of "Classical" Reform Judaism. The curriculum of the Hebrew Union College during the late twenties and early thirties put a very strong emphasis on Biblical studies, particularly on the Prophets. Accordingly, the Jewish hero was the prophetic "lone wolf"--the man who was unafraid to stand up alone and chastise Israel for its wrongdoings. This image complemented that of the Classical Reform rabbi, and it was the one for which Berger and his classmates were taught to strive in their own careers.[24]

Having written his rabbinical thesis, entitled "An Examination of the Meanings of Selichah, Hemlah, and Hen in the Bible," Elmer Berger was ordained a Rabbi by the Hebrew Union College in 1932.

While it is difficult to cite a direct correlation between the environment and events of the formative years of a person's life and that person's actions during adulthood, it is often possible to trace--in very general terms--some ways in which

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[23] Marcus interview.

[24] Interview with Dr. Jakob Petuchowski, June 15, 1989.

one's life as an adult is shaped by past events. In the case of Elmer Berger, certain observations about his early years can shed some light on his later development as an ardent anti-Zionist.

It is ironic, for example, that a person brought up with a "marginal" Jewish identity should end up as a rabbi. By a strange twist of fate, Elmer Berger, an assimilated Jew and the son of a locomotive engineer, ended up as a Jewish leader. Berger, citing his anti-Zionist past, found his upbringing perfectly normal:

> I came from a Reform Jewish home, attended a Reform Jewish seminary. Zionism was an anomaly--and a little known one--in my formative years. I have felt thoroughly comfortable with the tradition of anti-Zionism all of my life.[25]

But while others came to the College with strong Jewish identities, Elmer Berger came with a very different past. From the outset, his Jewish identification was unlike that of his peers. Unlike most of the other students, for example, Berger did not teach or engage in other extracurricular Jewish activities while at the College, preferring to limit himself to his studies.[26] Also, most rabbinical students at HUC at the time did not come from Reform homes. In a certain sense, then, Elmer Berger began his career as an outsider.

It is also significant that others perceived his behavior as exhibiting some personal insecurities. Assuming the truth of these admittedly subjective observations, we can observe in

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[25] Elmer Berger, Memoirs of an anti-Zionist Jew, Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, 1978, p. 2.

[26] Interview, Rabbi Stanley Brav, August 23, 1989.

Berger a person who was searching, perhaps more than many others, for a means to flourish as an individual. We see a man who was striving to find a way to gain the self confidence which he so desperately needed.

We have seen that the anti-Zionism of early American Reform was largely rooted in the insecurity of the Reformers. Of interest is that Berger's personality as a young man could be characterized by a parallel type of insecurity. Like the early Reformers, he too may have felt that that which he had achieved in his own life was precarious at best, and could be destroyed very easily. In Chapter I, we will see how this insecurity manifests itself in Berger's ideology.

In sum, Elmer Berger's development was a conflicted one. Though raised with a "marginally Jewish" identity, he became a rabbi. Though insecure in his personality, he was urged by his teachers at the Hebrew Union College to achieve prophetic greatness. It is in these tensions that we can see the seeds of Berger's later activities.

Berger's Early Anti-Zionism

From early in his career, Elmer Berger was an outspoken anti-Zionist. From 1932 until 1936, he served as Rabbi of Temple Beth Jacob, in Pontiac, Michigan. While there, Zionism and Palestine did not pose "much of a problem" for Berger.[27] But in

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[27] Berger, Memoirs, p. 4.

1936, he moved to a somewhat larger and more prestigious congregation in nearby Flint, Michigan. It was there that his anti-Zionist activities began in earnest.

At the time, the Zionist movement in America was beginning to gain in power and status within the Jewish community as a whole. This gain in power was largely due to the fact that, by the late 1930s, the cloud of antisemitism had become a very dark one for Jews throughout the world. In Russia, Stalin was purging much of the Jewish leadership. In Germany, the Nuremberg Laws were in full force and the Nazis' mass slaughter of the Jews was about to begin. The Jewish community in Palestine suffered from a series of attacks by local Arabs in 1936, and in 1939, the British issued a "White Paper" which severely limited Jewish immigration.

Here in the United States, an ironic situation existed. On the one hand, the Jewish community was flourishing. Immigration controls had limited the size of the Jewish proletariat, which in turn helped effectuate the acculturation of the many East European Jews who had immigrated earlier. Many of the insecurities which the Jewish community had felt in previous decades gave way to feelings of "at-homeness" and socioeconomic success. But on the other hand, in the late 1930s, antisemitism was growing in this country as well. Names such as Father Charles E. Coughlin,

Raymond Gram Swing, and others gained renown as they proclaimed their hate for Jews in America and elsewhere.[28]

Thus, American Jews, finally feeling secure in their new home, also perceived antisemitism as a universal threat which imperiled the existence of Jews everywhere. This, in addition to many of the ideological currents mentioned above, led to an increasing acceptance of Zionism on the part of American Jewry.

Under the powerful and charismatic leadership Abba Hillel Silver, Stephen S. Wise (both of whom, it is important to note, were Reform Rabbis) and others, the Zionist Organization of America increased its membership from 8,400 in 1932, to 43,000 in 1939, to over 200,000 by the end of the war.[29] Significantly, the real surge in support for the ZOA began in the same year that Berger moved to Flint, 1936. In addition to the fact that Reform was then moving toward a formal acceptance of Zionism, B'nai Brith and other organizations were also responding to Nazism by becoming pro-Zionist in orientation.[30]

As a congregational rabbi in Flint, Berger's anti-Zionism began very "low-key" in nature. It primarily manifested itself in several sermons, speeches and pamphlets which he wrote during that time. These writings attempted to refute the claims of

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[28] For information on the events of the late 1930s, Robert M. Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History, New York, 1980, 653-655. Cf. Polish, Renew our Days, pp. 188-189.

[29] Walter Laqueur, A History of Zionism, New York, 1976, p. 549.

[30] Ibid.

Zionism on an intellectual level and to define Judaism as a religion only, free of all ethnic and cultural trappings.

Perhaps the best example of this is Berger's pamphlet entitled "Why I am a Non-Zionist."[31] After Berger moved to Flint, he was succeeded in Pontiac by a rabbi, Eric Friedlander, who strongly supported Zionism. So strong, in fact, was Friedlander's support that after a few years in Pontiac, he began to strongly criticize Berger and his anti-Zionist views. Having left Pontiac on friendly terms, Berger still had many supporters there, and they quickly tired of their new rabbi's attacks.[32] Thus, a debate between the two was scheduled. It took place at the Flint Jewish Community Center on March 17, 1942, and Berger's statement was published as the aforementioned pamphlet.

As befitting its context, "Why I am a Non-Zionist" is polemical in nature. In it, Berger describes Zionism as an attempt to "re-establish" Israel's unity despite the fact that the unity of which the Zionists speak never existed in the first place. Judaism flourished as a universal religion, he said, only after the destruction of the Temple and the ensuing dispersion. "The truth of Jewish history read with any interpretation," he says, "is that Judaism as a great, religious force was born [in the age of the Prophets] when the nation was dying and this same

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[31] Elmer Berger, "Why I am a Non-Zionist," Temple Beth El, Flint, MI, 1942. Berger would come to abhor the term "Non-Zionist" in favor of "anti-Zionist." By neutralizing their views, he felt that non-Zionists had abdicated their moral responsibility to fight Zionism however possible.

[32] Berger, Memoirs, pp. 4-5.

Judaism reached its true significance in history only after the nation was dead."[33]

Primary among his other arguments is that, as an attempt to segregate and isolate the "Jewish people" in Palestine, Zionism is fundamentally anti-religious. The religious role of the modern, liberal Jew, Berger says, is to integrate himself into his environment and to "lend what he and Judaism have to offer to the righting of the elemental, moral wrongs that beset civilized man and frequently break forth into irrational attacks upon the Jew."[34]

Clearly, these views are permeated by the same type of optimism which was professed by Berger's anti-Zionist Reform predecessors. In fact, he makes his optimism explicit in the pamphlet:

> ...Despite the fact that this liberal philosophy has not produced perfection, the liberal Jew holds faith with this belief, for he believes in the ultimate triumph of right and in the eventual victory of moral man. This is the basis of the religious hope as it is the basis of the very liberal civilization which we hope to save and expand.[35]

While there was some opposition to Berger's statement, the response was a generally positive one. Some of Berger's listeners were so enthusiastic, in fact, that they urged him to form a local "non-Zionist group" to "affirm the religious character of Israel and actively resist the nationalizing and secularizing

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[33] Berger, "Why I am a Non-Zionist," pp. 10-11.

[34] Ibid., p.16.

[35] Ibid.

tendencies of the Zionists." The Flint Non-Zionist Group did meet, and after establishing themselves as a group, the first thing they did was publish Berger's statement from the debate.

The group's work culminated in the publication of "The Flint Plan" in late 1942, which described the formation of the group and the strategies it used, and urged other non-Zionists to form similar groups in their own communities. In general, "The Flint Plan" was conceived as a guide for what Berger and his followers hoped would be the beginnings of a burgeoning anti-Zionist movement in America.[36]

The American Council for Judaism

In June, 1942, the Central Conference of American Rabbis voted to endorse the formation of a Jewish Army in Palestine. Though the conflict between the Zionists and the anti-Zionists within the Conference had been brewing for years, it would turn out that this was the controversy which would finally bring the ongoing debate to its climax.

Those members of the CCAR who supported the formation of such an army did so based on four claims: First, that the Jews in Palestine wanted and, based on the persecutions they had suffered in the past, they deserved the right of self-defense. Second, that the British Mandate recognized the Yishuv as a

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[36] For information on the Flint Non-Zionist group and its activities see Elmer Berger, "The Flint Plan," Temple Beth El, Flint, MI, 1942. Cf. Berger, Memoirs, pp. 5-6

political entity, and that this status entitled them to military support. Third, that since 1940, the British had been promising to grant the Jews the right to set up such an army, but they had been continuously procrastinating. Finally, other nations conquered by the Nazis had set up defense forces under British jurisdiction, and many Jews claimed that the Yishuv had the same right.[37] The question of the Jewish Army was seen as especially pressing since the Nazi takeover of Palestine was felt to be imminent.[38]

The anti-Zionists, who opposed the resolution, did so on the grounds that the CCAR was a religious organization and therefore should not become involved in this, a solely political issue.[39] In fact, their view was part of a larger-scale ideological stance which they had been trying to advance for the past several years. As a defense of their anti-Zionism, these rabbis argued that Judaism had become far too politicized of late, and that Judaism needed to be redefined as a universal religion, a religion which stood above politics.[40]

In the end, on February 27, 1942, the CCAR approved the resolution by a vote of 64 to 38. As adopted, it read, in part,

> The Central Conference of American Rabbis is in complete sympathy with the demand of the Jews of Palestine that they

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[37] Howard Greenstein, Turning Point: Zionism and Reform Judaism, Scholars Press, Chico, CA, 1981, p. 35.

[38] Plaut, Renew Our Days, p. 205.

[39] Greenstein, Turning Point, p. 36.

[40] Marcus interview, August 18, 1989.

> be given the opportunity to fight in defense of their homeland on the side of the democracies under allied command to the end that the victory of democracy may be hastened everywhere.[41]

The anti-Zionists were furious. Not only had they been outvoted, but the resolution implied statehood. It opened up the possibility of a "`Jewish' army, fighting under a `Jewish' flag," and to do so with the blessing of the Reform rabbinate. This touched the very heart of their ideology.[42]

Louis Wolsey, who had led the fight against the CCAR resolution, was then serving Congregation Rodeph Shalom in Philadelphia. On March 18 and 30, 1942, he met in Philadelphia with a few other anti Zionist rabbis (Berger was <u>not</u> there) to discuss what to do in the wake of the CCAR resolution. They decided to schedule a meeting of all anti-Zionist rabbis in Atlantic City on June 9, 1942. The invitation which they issued said:

> The purpose of the meeting is to bring together for consultation some of the men in our ministry who feel keenly the imperative need at this critical turn of world affairs, the [meeting will] re-emphasize the character of American Judaism, as we believe it.[43]

Berger had kept his mentor, Wolsey, apprised of his anti-Zionist activities in Flint throughout the years and, on April 7, Wolsey wrote to Berger to personally invite him to the Atlantic City meeting. Berger was originally reluctant to attend. Seeing

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[41] Quoted in Polish, <u>Renew Our Days</u>, p. 206.

[42] Berger, <u>Memoirs</u>, p. 7.

[43] For this quote and the foregoing paragraph see Thomas Kolsky, <u>Jews Against Zionism: The American Council for Judaism</u>, 1942-1948. Doctoral Dissertation, George Washington University, 1986, pp. 120-128.

his role as primarily philosophical and theological, he was afraid of getting mixed up in the "practicalities" of what was to be discussed at the meeting. But against his better judgement, he responded to Wolsey's urging and went to Atlantic City. The meeting would change the course of his life.[44]

By this time Berger had become dissatisfied and bored with his work in Flint. After ten years, the congregational rabbinate had become a mundane chore for him which ceased to offer him the challenges he needed. Atlantic city offered him a change of pace and new possibilities for making real his anti-Zionist dreams.

Thus, Berger's reluctance quickly dissipated and turned to enthusiasm. In fact, when James Heller, then President of the CCAR, found out about the planned meeting, he feared a schism and attempted to negotiate a compromise with the anti-Zionists. But Berger's enthusiasm and distrust of the Zionists helped prevent any such negotiation and the meeting took place, a week earlier than originally planned.[45]

On June 1-2, 1942, thirty six rabbis convened in Atlantic City. Among the many discussions and addresses was a speech by Elmer Berger, then thirty four years old. His remarks consisted primarily of a presentation and discussion of "The Flint Plan" and a call for lay involvement in the organization as soon as possible. The rabbis drafted a "Statement of Principles" and

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[44] Ibid., pp. 129-131; Berger, Memoirs, p. 8.

[45] Kolsky, ibid., pp. 135-144.

agreed to solicit the comments of their supporters on what it had to say.[46]

After the meeting, Berger was ecstatic. "It was a glorious few days," he wrote to Wolsey. He said that it had given his life "a new meaning which transcends the ugliness of Pontiac and Flint." Clearly, Berger was eager to take on the fight against Zionism and the Zionists with all of the energy he could muster.[47]

By late that year, the group was ready to formalize its operations and to officially become an organization. Having received several donations from prominent laymen, they hired a public relations expert, Sidney Wallach, to help promote the group. As executive director, Wolsey and his supporters could think of no better candidate than the young rabbi from Flint. So on November 23, 1942, the then unnamed group unanimously approved Elmer Berger's appointment as Executive Director, with a salary of "no less than $6000."

Once again, Berger was ecstatic. He told Wolsey that, although his salary was acceptable, he would have worked for less than that because he was so convinced of the importance of what they were doing.[48]

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[46] Ibid. pp. 142-153

[47] Ibid., p. 157

[48] Ibid., pp. 167-180. The group adopted its name, "The American Council for Judaism" at a meeting in December.

Though the group was accused by many of being a vehicle for assimilation, at the outset the American Council for Judaism was genuinely concerned with the preservation of Reform's heritage of universalistic, religious Judaism. The name that the group chose for itself was therefore very significant. Fearful of the politicization and "Zionization" of the Reform movement, they wanted their group to be an American Council for Judaism--not Zionism or anything else.[49] This, then, was to be an organization with a positive and constructive agenda, and not merely a "vehicle for assimilation."

From the outset, Elmer Berger was a maximalist in almost all of his views and activities connected with the Council. His associates had seen this previously when, after the meeting in Atlantic City, Berger had become infuriated when some of them had urged moderation in dealing with the Zionists within the ranks of the CCAR.[50] Now, one day after the official formation of the Council (which, for the first few weeks, was called the "Council for American Judaism"), the State Department issued a Report confirming the mass execution of Jews in Nazi Europe. Immediately, most American Jewish organizations, including the Zionists, scheduled a "day of mourning" for December 7, 1942. This was the date of the next scheduled meeting of the Council. Although some members of the Council suggested that the meeting be postponed, Berger felt that doing so would be an exhibition of weakness at a

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[49] Marcus interview, August 18, 1989.

[50] Kolsky, Jews Against Zionism, p. 160.

critical stage in the group's development. His view prevailed and the Council met on the scheduled date.[51]

Also exemplifying his maximalism is the fact that, unlike Wolsey and others, Berger urged immediate public announcement of the Council and its activities. He did this despite the dangers which it posed to his job in Flint, which he still held at the time.[52]

Furthermore, Berger continued to oppose any negotiation with the CCAR, especially when Rabbis Heller and Freehof tried to persuade the Council to liquidate. Responding to Heller, Jonah Wise, a member of the Council and Rabbi at Central Synagogue in New York, suggested that the Council become a temporary, consultative group until its objectives became more clearly delineated. Berger, on the other hand, wanted the Council to become a permanent organization as soon as possible.[53]

These ideals of universal, religious Judaism established by the founding rabbis were challenged early on by the laypeople who were solicited to become involved with the Council. Unlike the rabbis, their concerns were motivated primarily by social and political factors rather than purely ideological and religious ones. Thus, they were much more blatantly anti-Zionist than were the "pro-religion" rabbis.

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[51] Ibid., pp. 173-175.

[52] Ibid., pp. 175-176.

[53] Ibid., pp. 175-189.

This tension manifested itself in the writing of the final draft of the Statement of Principles. After much negotiation and compromise, the document that was accepted was primarily political in orientation. It did stress Judaism as a religious identification, but it also advocated the creation of a polity in Palestine in which citizenship would not be based on any previous religious or ethnic affiliation. Finally, it expressed hope for the eventual repatriation of Europe's Jews.[54]

Shortly after the Statement of Principles was adopted, the CCAR met again for its next annual conference. There Stephen S. Wise threatened to turn the CCAR into a conference of Zionist rabbis unless it severely censured the ACJ. In response, the CCAR openly declared itself to be Zionist in orientation and it called for the ACJ to terminate its existence.

Unlike most of the other rabbis, Berger was not dismayed in the wake of the universal criticism which the ACJ received at the 1943 CCAR Convention. He still wanted to publicize the position of the ACJ as aggressively as possible.[55]

In fact, during 1943 and 1944, most of the Council's rabbis began to feel alienated from the group and its activities. As foreshadowed by the tension surrounding the Statement of Principles, the increasingly powerful lay-leadership in the Council shifted its emphasis from the religious to the political. Wary

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[54] Ibid., p. 206

[55] Ibid. pp. 212-217.

of this shift, all but a handful of the founding rabbis of the Council resigned during the mid- to late-1940s.

Also contributing to this trend was the fact that the increasing knowledge of Nazi atrocities in Europe lent credence for many rabbis to the Zionist claim of the necessity of a state as a refuge from persecution.

Rabbi Stanley Brav, for example, recalled that he quickly realized that the Council was "snubbing progress. They were doing nothing for Judaism and nothing positive therefore came out of it."[56]

Even Louis Wolsey came to feel alienated. As Berger and Wallach increasingly turned to the laypeople for support, he began to feel neglected and angered. Thus, in 1944, feeling particularly disgusted, he wrote to Irving Reichert (another rabbi who was active in the Council) and complained about what he called Berger's "fascist" tendencies.[57] Later, he would complain that the leaders of the ACJ snubbed rabbinical input and suggestions and that it became a device for assimilation and irreligiosity.

> Its activity also became completely negative, and instead of majoring in religion, it put its full strength into a veto of Zionist ambition.[58]

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[56] Interview, Rabbi Stanley Brav, August 23, 1989.

[57] Kolsky, Jews Against Zionism, pp., 234-235.

[58] Louis Wolsey, "Why I Withdrew from the American Council for Judaism," Sermons and Addresses, Philadelphia, 1950, pp. 12-17.

Though he would officially remain a Vice President of the ACJ until 1948, Louis Wolsey had effectively withdrawn from most of its activities by the mid-1940s.

Very quickly, it became clear that the American Council for Judaism was Elmer Berger's "baby." He gave it its ideological foundations, he made most of the important organizational decisions and, in general, it was Elmer Berger who determined the direction that the Council took.[59] In fact, Irving Reichert was so disgusted with this situation that he had to be persuaded not to resign his Vice-Presidency.

During these early years, Berger's activities were primarily administrative, scholarly, and political in nature. As an administrator, he ran the national office in Philadelphia and travelled throughout the country, setting up local ACJ chapters wherever he could. He wrote several pamphlets and speeches which gave an ideological backing to the Council's position.[60] These culminated in his book, The Jewish Dilemma, which was a systematic explanation of the anti-Zionism which the Council advocated.

It was during these early years that Berger also began his political activities. Though involved in all of the Council's political work, he did focus on certain areas. For example, one

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[59] Interviews, Rabbi Stanley Brav, August 24, 1989; Mr. Clarence L. Coleman, Jr., June 11, 1989.

[60] Elmer Berger, "All in the Name of Unity," "Silence is Consent," "What Does the Balfour Declaration Mean?" and "Emancipation: The Rediscovered Ideal," published by the American Council for Judaism, Philadelphia, 1943-1945.

supporter of the Council was a low-level American diplomat by the name of George L. Levison. Levison quickly became a mentor of Berger's and gave him entree into the complex and sometimes closed world of the State Department. Levison also introduced Berger to Kermit Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt's grandson, who was involved in international diplomacy as well. Berger and "Kim" Roosevelt thus began a friendship which would last for years.[61]

As the Zionist movement continued to grow stronger and tried, in its own ways, to deal most effectively with the Jewish refugees of World War II, the ACJ grew more politically active as well. Berger and other Council leaders frequently went to Washington to testify before Congressional sub-Committees or to meet with representatives from the State Department.

Most of these activities were aimed at persuading the American government that there was no single group which could presume to speak for all of American Jewry. Since the notion of an "American Jewish community" was itself a myth, Jews could speak only as individual Americans--each person with his or her own view. Furthermore, they said, many individual "Americans of the Jewish Faith" who comprise the Council are opposed to Zionism. Therefore, any Zionist claims that the "American Jewish Community" monolithically supports the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine are simply unfounded.

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[61]Kolsky, Jews Against Zionism, pp. 360-362. Coleman Interview, June 11, 1989.

Elmer Berger's role in the early years of the Council is indeed a fascinating chapter in history. Within a short period of time, a young rabbi was brought from a relatively obscure existence in the midwest to the directorship of a national organization which ostensibly had both religious and political aims. During these years, one could observe a foreshadowing of what was to follow. Increasingly, in the years that followed, Elmer Berger would become one voice against many.

Chapter I

From Doctrine to Propaganda: The Thought of Elmer Berger

> Build houses and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat the fruit of them, take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that you may be increased there and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city to which I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to Adonai for it; for in its peace shall you have peace.
>
> --Jeremiah, 29:5-7

The distinction between ideology and propaganda is often a blurry one. Ideology is a Weltanschauung, a systematic way of looking at the world or at a part of the world which characterizes the view of an individual or a group. Propaganda, on the other hand, is prescriptive in nature and is designed to persuade its audience to adopt a certain view or perspective. Though it has taken on some negative connotations in contemporary political discourse, propaganda can clearly be a positive force when devoted to constructive ends.

The thought of Elmer Berger is both ideological and propagandist in nature. As we shall see below, Berger's writings give evidence of a systematic construction of Jewish history and of contemporary Jewry which culminates in an "ideology of emancipation." This philosophy is largely summed up by the opening citation from Jeremiah. But Berger's ideology eventually gave way to propaganda, to a specific critique of the actions of Israel and the Zionist movement as a whole. As a result of this

critique, Berger advocated a series of actions which he felt would right the flawed status quo.

This chapter will trace these two strains in Elmer Berger's thought. Chronologically, there is a great deal of overlap between Berger's ideology and his propaganda. But we shall see that, in general, one can perceive a gradual shift in Berger's thought from that which is theoretical in nature, striving to reach a systematic view of Judaism, to that which is polemical in nature, and which emphasizes the evils of contemporary Israel and Zionism.[1]

Berger's Ideology

Contrary to common Jewish perception, Elmer Berger's thought does have a complex and systematic ideological grounding. In our analysis of it, we shall examine the fundamentals of that ideology, the "usable past" which Berger creates for himself and his readers (i.e., his own view of Jewish history), and the Jewish character of Berger's ideology.

Fundamentals

1. **NO SUCH THING AS "THE JEWISH PEOPLE."** Primary in Berger's ideology is a debunking of the notion of Jewish peoplehood. Berger holds that, not only is the concept that Jews comprise a people, a nation, or any type of ethnic entity inaccurate, but

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[1] The chain of events which engendered this shift will be examined in detail in Chapter II below.

that such a conceptualization is detrimental to the wellbeing of Jews everywhere.

We shall see that Berger does recognize certain ties among Jews. But the notion that these ties are in any way ethnic in nature is utterly ludicrous for him. Indeed, many people in the past have tried to define the Jews as a "race," but modern scientific investigation has refuted this.

> Anthropologists and other scientists are generally agreed that Jews are not a separate race, but are ancestrally of the Mediterranean family stocks that spread out in pre-history times over much of Eastern Asia, North Africa, and Europe. All of these various tribes from the most ancient generations have moved about and intermarried throughout the long centuries of unrecorded and written history, and have produced the modern Europeans. In cultural background, in local history, in language, in religion, in political and economic organization, there have been, and are, many differences, but these differences are not "racial," as anthropologists would define the term, but rather cultural and environmental. Jews have lived among all of these resultant cultures and environments. They have been part of all of them.[2]

Accordingly, the Jews <u>were</u> a people under David and Solomon in the sense that they comprised a nation-state and were bound by certain familial ties, but this peoplehood has not existed for centuries.[3] Since then, that which has bound Jews together has

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[2] Elmer Berger, <u>The Jewish Dilemma</u>, New York, 1945, p. 3. Henceforth to be referred to as "<u>Dilemma</u>." Although this book was published slightly before the period being studied, it is <u>the</u> systematic statement of Berger's thought. Its themes reflect Berger's ideology throughout his career.

[3] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 28. It is important to note that Berger mentions the earlier existence of the Jewish people just in passing, and that he contradicts this in later works. This too will be examined below,

been Jewish religion and not ethnicity. Therefore, he refers to the collectivity of Jews as the Jewish "religious fellowship."[4]

As proof of this, Berger cites both the widespread diversity among contemporary Jews and the fact that most of them define themselves only religiously as Jews, and nationally as citizens of the countries in which they live. Historically, he cites the vicious conflicts between the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim of Bordeaux, France as evidence that Jews did not see themselves as part of a "Jewish nation."[5] On a more contemporary level, American Jewry (he would object to the term "American Jewish community"), is comprised of a wide diversity of individuals.

> Jews who freely profess Judaism differ widely in their interpretations of their religion. Some are as devout and some are as casual or indifferent as their fellow-Americans of all faiths. They are fragmentized in their Judaism, as Christians are fragmentized in Christianity. There are groups among Jews comparable to both high and low-church gradations in Christian denominations. And even within any synagogue of any denomination there are wide divergences of opinion about all matters from the sermons the Rabbi should preach to how much any member, rich or poor, ought to contribute to the maintenance of the institution. There is no unity, even in religion, among Jews. They are among the leading nonconformists of the world.
>
> The five million American Jews vote all political tickets and come from all strata of American economy....
>
> In short, except for a religion of common derivation and a tradition of helping other Jews in distress...there is no more similarity between the Jew of New York or Chicago and the Jews of a common farming project I once visited in Northern Michigan, than there is between the Southern tenant-farmer and the Cabots and the Lodges.[6]

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[4] Ibid., p. 9

[5] Ibid., p. 193.

[6] Ibid., pp. 11-13.

Because of this diversity, Berger goes on to say, "No organization...can speak for all Jews."[7] In other words, the Jewish collectivity cannot even rightly be called a community. It cannot speak in one voice at all because the individuals who comprise it are so diverse in nature.

But Berger uses another argument against the notion of Jewish peoplehood. Wherever they live, he says, Jews want to be fully part and parcel of their countries of residence, and don't want to segregate themselves by declaring their allegiance to a separate "Jewish people." American Jews, for example,

> ...want American Democracy to be applied to their lives and they have an abiding faith that the American way of life is the best that man has ever known, and that its extension offers the only promise for a still better way of life....
>
> Above all, American Jews want nothing so much as to be a part and parcel of American life. They want the processes of American freedom to continue and expand. Some are quicker than others in integrating their lives into the pattern of America. But they all want a strong, prosperous America and each, in his own way, gives himself to that purpose.[8]

Similarly, Jews in other countries throughout the world are striving to integrate into native life. He cites the Soviet Jewry of his day as an emancipated religious group which is enjoying official protection from the government against anti-semitism. Though there is very little religious activity or ideological diversity there, the Jews of the Soviet Union, Berger says, are freer than they have been for centuries, and the large

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[7] Elmer Berger, Judaism or Jewish Nationalism?: The Alternative to Zionism, New York, 1957, p.71. We shall see that this concept will play an important role in Berger's critique of organized Zionism.

[8] Dilemma, pp. 11-12.

portion of them that lives in what was the "Pale of Settlement" will continue to spread throughout the society. Indeed, their identity cards mark them as being of Jewish "nationality," but in Soviet terms that refers primarily to the difference in language between Jews and other Soviets (the Jews generally speak Yiddish), and it allows them to be represented as one of the 164 nationalities within the Soviet Union. "For all practical purposes, the term "Jewish nationality" reflects the same status for Soviet Jews as Americans of Jewish faith connotes for American Jews."[9]

Berger proceeds to discuss the Jews of other countries along similar lines, and then says that after the War (he was writing, one should remember, in 1944) some of those Jews who survived would want to return to their homes. Others would want to go to other places throughout Europe and the rest of the world. As human beings, Berger said, they should have the right to go wherever they want. It is "wicked, ridiculous, and irresponsible," he said, to lump them together as "the Jewish people" and say that they should go to one place or another. In other words, different Jews will have different needs after the war, and as emancipated individuals we should advocate their rights of settlement in any land they desire.[10]

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[9] Ibid., pp. 14-17. It is significant to note that Berger wrote this in the mid 1940s--before the Cold War.

[10] Ibid., pp. 19-26.

Thus, because Jews are so diverse in nature, and because they justifiably want to fully integrate themselves into their countries of residence, they cannot accurately be called a people.

But Berger takes this a step further. Not only are Jews not a people, but seeing ourselves as any sort of an ethnic collectivity is very detrimental to our wellbeing. One of the first steps of Nazism, he argues, is to assert that the Jews are a separate, "unintegratable element" in society. Indeed, all antisemitism is predicated on the fact that Jews are separate, apart from society in one way or another. Once we recognize Jewish peoplehood, Berger goes on to say, we therefore lose the fight against antisemitism. For recognizing peoplehood would, in effect, isolate Jews from the rest of society, and when that happens

> ...this "people" becomes either too good, or not good enough, too rich or too poor, too religious or too irreligious, too nationalistic or to internationalized ad absurdum and ad nauseam.[11]

Rather than segregation, Berger says, Jews should be striving for full and complete integration, and it is the celebration of Jewish peoplehood which interferes with this pursuit. Whereas Germany might be cited as a case in which integration proved impossible, Berger sees it differently.

> The harrowing tale of Germany...proves rather than disproves my thesis. Germany, up to this time, has not used the modern heritage of the Western World. Jews, social-democrats, Heine, Goethe, Thomas Mann--all these and more and by

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[11] Ibid., p. 29.

> no means Jews alone--were spewed out of a Germany that has not digested the substance of modern society in the last hundred years. Germany and its Jews and their tragedy taught us nothing we should not have known. It merely repeated the historic truth that where men are free, Jews live in security. Where they are not free, Jews, and others, know no freedom.[12]

Clearly, this facet of Berger's ideology is permeated by an extreme optimism regarding the benefits which Jews can reap by integrating into modern society. Though much of what we have discussed was written in 1944, we shall see that Berger's optimism remained largely intact as the magnitude of the Holocaust became clear. Already, we have seen that he used the Holocaust to shore up his argument, that it fit into his ideology as a whole. But for all this, any extreme optimist in the twentieth century is a "strange bird" and one wonders as to the source of his positive outlook.

Perhaps we can begin to approach an answer to this when we observe that, beneath this optimism in the Western World, is the quiet murmur in Berger's thought of insecurity regarding the Jews' place in that very same society. For the mere fact that he perceives those who view Judaism in national terms as such a threat bespeaks a certain lack of confidence in the strength of "integrated" Western Jewry. Again, we shall examine this in more detail below.

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[12] Ibid., p. 25.

2. **AN IDEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF ZIONISM.** Elmer Berger's critique of Zionism is a very long and complex one. Yet despite this complexity, it can be basically broken down into three categories: First, that Zionism politicizes and therefore corrupts Jewish religion; second, that Zionist claims of Jewish nationalism imply the involuntary association of Jews with the so-called "Jewish people," and thus contradict the principles of democracy which Western Jews have come to hold so dear; and third, and most important of all, that Zionism fights the forces of emancipation from which Jews could potentially gain so much.

We have already seen that Berger saw Judaism as a religion which should be free of any ethnic element whatsoever, and that the collectivity of Jews should only be seen as a "religious fellowship," and not as a nation or as a community. With this in mind, Berger was able to state that he saw Zionism for what it really was: a <u>political</u> movement designed to save the--in his view non-existent--"Jewish people." Though Jewish religion should remain unrelated to political problems and issues, Zionism brings it into that realm, and thus corrupts it.[13]

In a speech to the Council, Berger explained this argument further by quoting Hannah Arendt's <u>The Origins of Totalitarianism</u>. Berger reminded his listeners that in this book, Arendt argues that the peoplehood of the Jews is different from the tribalism of other peoples because Jewish peoplehood is built upon religious foundations. Zionism, Berger went on to say,

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[13] <u>Judaism or Jewish Nationalism?</u>, pp. 9-12.

replaces those religious roots with cultural and pragmatic concerns and thus diverts Jews from Judaism's original glory. Curiously, Berger did not refute Arendt's original recognition of Jewish peoplehood upon which she founded her argument.[14]

But the general point here is significant. Throughout his writings, Berger holds that Zionism corrupts Judaism because it secularizes it, and since it is a religion, "secular Judaism" is a contradiction in terms.

One might argue at this point that there has always been a longing for a return to Zion in the Jewish tradition, and therefore accepting Zionism would not be a secularization of Judaism but rather an affirmation of a strain within it. Berger answers this. He says that while it is indeed understandable that the symbol of Zion has had such a romantic hold over Jews for so many centuries, modern Zionism has converted that religious symbol into a contemporary deception.

Judaism, Berger argues, was the only thing which was able to brighten the lives of Jews in the ghettoes, and the longing for Zion was a part of the religious tradition. At various times when Palestine was under Roman control, Jews did have the opportunity to return there, but did not do so. Throughout the many years of their Dispersion, the Jews' nostalgia for "the old country" remained, but only in the sense of a religious and/or liturgical symbol.

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[14] Quoted in "A Speech--Some Reflections," Council News, May, 1952, pp. 16-23.

> Insofar as this religious nostalgia had any relationship at all to the problems besetting their lives, Jews believed that the return to Palestine was to be only a part of a Messianic emancipation of all men. It was, to them, a sacrilege for man to arrogate unto himself the power to bring this about. It was to be God's own work and in His "own time."[15]

Thus, Berger's reading of Judaism removes the traditional longing for Zion from the real and the possible and relegates it to the abstract realm of religious symbolism. Trying to turn that symbol into a political reality is therefore a contradiction of its true nature.

Berger felt that Judaism as a religion should transcend the mundane world of politics and deal only with higher spiritual issues. It is therefore quite understandable that he should quote Judah Leon Magnes who warned of Zionism leading to the denouement of Judaism.

> [Zionist] totalitarianism is on the way to converting us from the people of whom it is said "Who is like thy people Israel, a unique nation on earth?" to the people of whom it is said "House of Judah, like all the nations." This is an unparalleled plague of the spirit.[16]

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[15] Dilemma, p. 61. That "politics makes strange bedfellows" is evident in the consonance between this passage and the thought of the Neturei Karta.

[16] Judaism or Jewish Nationalism, p. 33. Berger held Magnes in very high esteem. At one point, he even pledged himself to the Judaism of "Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jesus, and Magnes," thus placing Magnes in very good company ("Executive Director's Report, May 10, 1953," quoted in Council News, July, 1953). But as is clear from this quote, Magnes did not reject Jewish nationalism. Rather he saw the possibility of incorporating Jewish nationalist claims within the binational state he advocated. The respect which Berger showed here and in other places where he praised the members and the statements of the Ichud group seems to be based on their rejection of Zionist exclusivism and despite their recognition of the validity of nationalism.

When we become "like all the nations," Berger went on to say, the politics of doing so would necessitate submitting our will to that of the majority. We thus leave our fate and the fate of the world in the hands of that majority. Implied here is the notion that religion deals in absolutes and is not, nor should it be, subject to the relativistic nature of majority politics.[17]

As an example of how Zionism corrupted Judaism, Berger cited the fact that when the Jewish National Fund was buying land in Palestine around the turn of the century, the purchased land was actually leased to individuals. These leases specified that the land was to be worked by Jewish workmen only and that, should the lessee die and leave no Jewish heirs, the Jewish National Fund could retain the title. Thus, the leases were discriminatory in nature and contrary to the universalistic principles of Judaism.[18]

Many Zionists claim that Zionism is a humanitarian movement aimed at preserving the rights of oppressed Jews everywhere, and that it thus tries to realize Jewish humanitarian values. But Berger is quick to point out--and he does so repeatedly--that Zionism has always been a political movement primarily concerned with the political appurtenances of statehood over and above the wellbeing of refugees and oppressed Jews. Implied in this

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Dilemma, p. 100. More about Berger's view of Judaism below.

argument is the further assertion that one does not need the structure of a state in order to exercise Jewish humanitarianism.

As an example of this, Berger cites an incident which occurred during Herzl's negotiations with Turkey.

> Among the many formulas suggested by the Turkish officials was one which would have permitted immigration of Jews, as potential Turkish citizens of the Jewish faith. Such immigrants were to be received at various places within the Turkish Empire. But the proposal did not meet any of the requirements of Zionism-nationalism and so Herzl rejected it, although its acceptance might have brought a large immigration of Jews to the Near East. He was not interested in individual protection--that was obtainable almost everywhere--but in national protection....[19]

Later in the history of Zionism, the Zionists persuaded the British to issue the Balfour Declaration. Though heralded as a great example of British humanitarianism, Berger argues that it too was first and foremost a political document.

> I have found the greatest difficulty in having the average Jew realize the true character of this document that has projected Jews as a political entity into one of the critical areas of the world. Most Jews, I believe, think of the Balfour Declaration as a generous, charitable gesture which can do no harm, and which may do good. They dismiss the nature of a political commitment made in the name of a "Jewish People." They overlook the fact that in many ways this document is the Magna Carta of Jewish nationalism, that it has helped create the impression that the aspirations of the average Jew is that of a separate, political entity.[20]

Even Zionist leaders, Berger argues, recognize that the true nature of Zionism is political and not humanitarian. He even quotes Chaim Weizmann as having responded to the Russian Revolu-

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[19] Ibid., p. 97.

[20] Ibid., p. 133.

tion and the argument that, now emancipated, Russian Jews would no longer see Zionism as their salvation, by saying

> We have never built our Zionist movement on the sufferings of our people in Russia or elsewhere. These sufferings were never the cause of Zionism. The fundamental cause of Zionism was, and is, the ineradicable national striving of Jewry to have a home of its own--a national center, a national home with a national Jewish life. We therefore look forward with confidence to the future of Zionism in Russia.[21]

Later, Berger argued, the Biltmore Platform of 1942 (which, it will be recalled, was one of the catalysts for the creation of the American Council for Judaism) also defined Zionism in purely political terms. At a time when millions of Jews needed refuge, it focused on the creation of a Jewish army to fight "under the high command of the United Nations," political rights for the Jewish agency, and the creation of "a Jewish commonwealth integrated into the structure of the new democratic world." In other words, Zionism at this stage was fighting for political structures instead of fighting for Jews.[22]

The second facet of Berger's ideological critique of Zionism is that Zionism co-opts <u>all</u> Jews, regardless of their desires, into the "Jewish people" and thus into the Jewish nationalistic enterprise. Thus, Zionism has rendered being Jewish no longer a matter of voluntary association and has attempted to use all Jews to further the aims of nationalism, whether or not they are

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[21] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 139.

[22] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 162.

sympathetic to it. At one point, Berger stated this quite blatantly.

> Zionism conjured up a "Jewish nation." ...Its Congresses were representative of only the various Zionist organizations created under the Basle program. Yet they presumed to speak for all Jews. No one knows, even to this day, how many Jews actually subscribe to the fundamentals of Zionism which were established in 1897 in Basle. No one knows how many who superficially subscribe know the implications of their act. No one can speak for all Jews....
>
> Herzl in 1897 had driven 197 Jews to proclaim the birth of the "Jewish nation." Against that statement there stood millions of Jews who would have disagreed had there been any real leadership of dissent and any aggressive, imaginative program for integration.[23]

In other words, Herzl drew the masses of worldwide Jewry unwittingly into his construct of a "Jewish nation." Berger argued that they would have objected had they known the full implications of what was happening.

Berger perceived this as a real threat to American Jews. For defining all Jews as part of a people contradicts the American principle of voluntary association. Zionism thereby imposes dual nationalism on Americans who see themselves as full-fledged citizens of the United States. Thus, Zionism, in a sense, violates the rights of American Jews because it defines a role for them which they might not want.[24]

It will be recalled that, early in his career, Berger published a pamphlet entitled, "Why I am a Non-Zionist." But shortly after its publication, Berger stopped calling himself a

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[23] Ibid., pp. 109-110.

[24] "The Constitution and the Balfour Declaration," Issues, Fall, 1961, pp. 65-85.

"non-Zionist" and started referring to himself as an "anti-Zionist." Non-Zionists, he felt, were those people who did not see themselves as part of a Jewish nation but who refused to actively fight the efforts of Jewish nationalism. Berger therefore felt that non-Zionism was an abdication of the moral responsibilities of free-thinking Jews.

Moreover, Berger felt that most Jews fall into the category of non-Zionism. Most Jews, whether or not they have articulated it to themselves, see themselves as Jews by religion only and citizens of the countries in which they live. But this great, silent majority, by virtue of its silence, has been used by the Zionists for the advancement of Zionism. For by co-opting all Jews into its "Jewish people" or "Jewish nation," the Zionists have taken these non-sympathizers and claimed them as their own. This is the logical extension of a nationalistic conception of Judaism.

Berger traces this strategy through most of the history of the movement. For example, after World War I,

> Very few Jews even knew Chaim Weizmann's name, yet this man was about to launch the individuals whom he lumped together as this "Jewish people" upon a political policy that would profoundly affect their lives and become a pivotal point in their history.[25]

More to the point, during the negotiations for the Balfour Declaration,

> Lloyd George [said], "The Zionist leaders gave us a definite promise that if the Allies committed themselves to giving facilities for the establishment of a national home for the

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[25] Dilemma, p. 118.

> Jews in Palestine, they would do their best to rally Jewish sentiment and support throughout the world to the allied cause. They kept their word."
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> To read again this arrogant pledge by Zionist leaders is to feel an irrepressible indignation, for myself, my family, my Jewish friends, all of whom are just ordinary Jews. For this promise to "rally Jewish sentiment and support" to the Allied cause constitutes one of the most obscene libels of all history. Only callousness and cynicism could imply that Jews in the Allied nations were not already giving their utmost to the prosecution of the war.[26]

This is an example of the insecure underpinnings of Berger's thought mentioned above. Regardless of the validity of Berger's claims of "libel," "callousness" and "cynicism," it is significant that Berger perceived this Zionist statement as being so important. The fact that he reacted to it so viciously reveals, I think, a certain feeling of vulnerability which Berger felt to the actions of the Zionists and, by extension, a vulnerability regarding his own position as a Western Jew.

Berger goes on to say that the non-Zionists at the time of the Balfour Declaration accepted it as a humanitarian document and that they failed to see its political nature. In doing so, he said they surrendered by default to pre-emancipation Judaism.[27]

Here in America, Berger said, the process continued, and when the House of Representatives debated resolutions which would support the creation of a Jewish state, Berger was in the audience.

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[26] Ibid., p. 118.

[27] Ibid., p. 135.

> As I listened to the testimony and saw the ghosts of Herzl, Weizmann, Hess, Pinsker, and others sitting in war-time Washington in 1944, I wished that every one of the five million Jews of America might have been sitting there with me. I wanted them to hear the things that were said in their behalf, by men in whom many reposed faith. I wanted the average Jew who thinks Zionism has some relationship to his Judaism hear Abba Hillel Silver say, Zionism is a "secular movement."...I would have liked him to hear Dr. Carl Friedrich affirm the fact that by default the ordinary Jew was made a part of all this because "the promises involved in the Balfour Declaration were made not to the Jews of Palestine, but to all Jews."[28]

The final facet of Berger's ideological critique of Zionism is his assertion that Zionism negates the forces of emancipation from which the Jews could potentially gain so much. Zionism, he holds, is a segregationist doctrine and exhibits no faith in what can be gained from the Western World.

Berger perceives this about Zionism from the very beginnings of the movement. He quotes Hess as saying that "We will always be strangers among the nations" and says that Hess was primarily concerned that we would never be granted rights as Jews, but rather we would only receive them as human beings. Hess was thus opposed to any advancement in Jewish freedom unless it was in accordance with the nationalist underpinnings of his thought.[29]

He cites Pinsker as saying that the solution to the "Jewish Problem" was not to be found by integrating into our surrounding societies, but rather by solidifying into a nation. The concept of "autoemancipation," Berger argues, posits a pre-emancipation

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[28] Ibid., p. 166.

[29] Ibid., pp. 64-66.

status for the Jews as an answer to their problems--namely, the status of a segregated people.[30]

Ahad Ha-am's notion of Palestine as the "Spiritual Center" is seen by Berger as "Palestinian Imperialism" and as merely a variation on the theme of Zionist opposition to emancipation. It too advocates the national allegiance of the Jews being directed to a place other than their countries of residence and bespeaks a lack of faith in integration and emancipation.[31]

Theodore Herzl, deeply influenced by the events surrounding the Dreyfus Affair, held that the causes of antisemitism were the loss of the power of assimilation and the production by Jews of "mediocre intellects." Since he also felt that the Jews constitute a people, he began to fight for the creation of a Jewish State. Berger notes that it is interesting that, although Herzl opposed emancipation, he used it to further his ends, for Herzl was able to "hobnob" with the non-Jewish elite and to capitalize upon his exposure to them. Thus, by fighting emancipation, Herzl was "biting the hand that fed him," as it were.[32]

In general, Berger says, Herzl felt that since Jews do constitute a people, the solution to the problem of antisemitism is to segregate all Jews into one land. Indeed, contemporary Zionists have extended what Herzl said by asserting that the Jews are not only a people, but a special people, with a special set

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[30] Ibid., pp.66-67.

[31] Ibid., pp. 68-70.

[32] Ibid., pp. 71-82.

of concerns different from that of\others. Thus, they assert our "abnormality" and render true integration and emancipation difficult.[33]

Indeed, for the Zionist, there is only one solution to this "abnormality," the creation of a Jewish state. Only in our own country, they say, can we be at home. This argument, Berger says, is based upon the premise that emancipation has failed and that antisemitism is an incurable problem. Berger, however is more optimistic than that and expresses the hope that Jews will be allowed to live freely and without oppression wherever they desire.[34] He states this very clearly.

> I do not condemn Herzl nor Zionism for these plans. If he was desperate and deluded, he was never evasive. Zionists, by and large, have announced their designs to the world. They are fighting with desperation against all the forces of history and freedom, hoping to keep Jews compressed within a pre-emancipation formula for Jewish life. They have announced their goal as the political restoration of a nation long, long dead.[35]

Later, Berger equates Zionism with "medieval barbarism" in that it is based on antiquated notions of nationhood and folk culture.[36]

In all of this, we see that Elmer Berger's three-pronged critique of Zionist ideology is quite complex indeed. Based on

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[33] Judaism or Jewish Nationalism?, pp. 13-20.

[34] Dilemma, pp. 49-57.

[35] Ibid., p. 90

[36] Ibid., pp. 229-230.

the ideas that Zionism corrupts Jewish religion, that it involuntarily co-opts Jews into its nationalist enterprise, and that it fights the forces of emancipation, it is at a deeper level founded upon both optimism and pessimism. Berger expresses almost complete faith that by integrating into Western society Jews can benefit greatly, and yet at the same time, he feels very threatened by Zionist claims. We saw this vulnerability he felt a little bit in this section. It will become even clearer when we later examine the propagandist aspect of Berger's thought.

3. **BERGER'S PHILOSOPHY OF EMANCIPATION.** Up to this point, we have examined Berger's rejection of the notion of Jewish peoplehood and his consequent rejection of the claims of Zionism. It is important to note, however, that the fundamentals of Berger's ideology are not completely negative in nature. For in place of Jewish peoplehood and nationalism, he advocates a very well-developed philosophy of emancipation. Though we referred to it before, we shall now examine this philosophy in more detail.

For Berger, the term "emancipation," when applied to the Jews, refers to two very different ideals: First, <u>integration</u>, i.e. that Jews can and should become full-fledged participants in the culture and national life of the countries in which they live; and second, that Jews can and should be free of <u>Jewish</u> corporate control over their lives which tends to fight the forces of integration.

The very notion of integration is itself predicated upon a more basic principle. As alluded to previously, Berger holds that there is no ontological or existential difference which distinguishes Jews from non-Jews. Since Jewish people differ from others only in their religious affiliation, they can rightfully claim all of the rights and privileges accorded their Gentile neighbors--no more and no less. Any difference between the rights granted to Jews and those granted to others would have to have been based, in other words, on a recognition of differences which Berger claimed didn't exist.

Berger roots this idea in Jewish history. Throughout the centuries, he argues, Jews have striven to be like their neighbors in almost every way possible. However they could, they attempted to "seek the peace of the cities" in which they lived, in accordance with the prophetic passage which was used as the epigraph for this chapter.

Because of this desire, Jews benefitted greatly from the freedoms gained in the American and French Revolutions. Indeed, the ongoing struggle for freedom on the part of the Jews is a part of the larger overall struggle of all people to be free. When people are free, Berger holds, then and only then can Jews and Judaism flourish.[37]

Here again, the optimistic nature of Berger's thought is evident. In fact, Berger' optimism is almost startling when one realizes that, writing in 1944, he was able to say

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[37] Ibid., p. 44.

> The proponents of emancipation have faith in the future of democracy and its opportunities for emancipation. They believe that beyond this global war, man will go forward in another advance toward fuller freedom. The believers in emancipation believe in the moral evolution of man and do not believe that it is inherent in men to hate Jews. In meeting the problems facing the uprooted Jews in to-day's world, they insist therefore, first, on the right of repatriation as equals. They reject any blanket attempt to lump all distressed Jews together as a separate people, and every solution that denies equality to Jews, however much it may give them privileges as a separate group.[38]

The source of this optimism is difficult to discern. Perhaps it is a result of the above-mentioned fact that Berger was a product of a Reform Judaism and of a Reform Jewish rabbinical training which emphasized prophetic ethics. The notion that human activity matters in the world, and at times even has salvific efficacy, is a very empowering one, and could have influenced Berger's view that Jews have the ability to change their world for the better. Also the messianism posited by the prophets attests to the onward and upward progression of history and could have been the basis for Berger's assertion that "man will go forward in another advance toward fuller freedom." Of course, the Prophets influenced many Zionists as well. Berger's rather unique conclusions which he drew from them may have therefore been a result of his combining them with the aforementioned rejection of peoplehood and critique of Zionism.

Also significant in the previous quote is that Jews demand rights not as Jews, but rather as human beings who deserve rights as humans. He reiterates this when he says

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[38] Ibid., p. 45.

> Emancipation was the fulfillment of the desires of ordinary human beings who happened to be Jews, to be free. This desire in all men antedated nations. Consciously or unconsciously, man has struggled to realize his fullest expression as an individual. To assist man in that struggle is the ultimate purpose of freedom. That is the meaning of our faith in the inalienable rights of individual men.[39]

As a hero for his philosophy of integration, Berger cites Moses Mendelssohn, who devoted his life to "a conscious, persistent effort at integration in its fullest sense." By asserting a philosophy which affirmed integration, by translating the Bible into German, and by integrating himself into German society, Mendelssohn became a symbol for Berger of the emancipated and integrated Jew par excellence, and set a standard by which Berger would judge future attempts at assimilation.[40]

Yet despite Berger's optimism in the great future of integration as ushered in by Mendelssohn, it could be argued that the events of history have proven Berger wrong. It could be argued that Jewish history is, to a great extent, a history of oppression, and that the world is such that it will simply not allow its Jews to integrate. The Jews' only alternative, this argument would go on to say, would be to insure our safety by segregating ourselves from the rest of the world.

Berger's response is that this argument "puts the cart before the horse." Segregation itself, he argues, has turned the Jews into an anomaly to the non-Jewish world, and has thus led to antisemitism. Conversely, he says that

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[39] Ibid., p. 169.

[40] Ibid., pp. 171-180.

> "The security and dignity of Jews today is in direct proportion to the degree to which [the] revolutionary changes [of emancipation] had practical influence in creating new, societal patterns."[41]

Berger offered further evidence of the connection between segregation and antisemitism by interpreting significant examples of modern antisemitism as being the result of Jews segregating themselves from their neighbors. Berger interpreted the Dreyfus Affair, for example, not by emphasizing the plot against Dreyfus, but rather by highlighting the fact that Dreyfus was eventually exonerated by the emancipated world.

> Where, in all the world, a century before, would more that half a nation have come to the defense of a Jew? Had Herzl possessed a knowledge of history he would have seen in the Dreyfus case a brilliant, heartening proof of the success of emancipation. A world that had treated Jews as Pariahs for 1500 years, had, within the space of a century, come to see half of a nation concerned to redress one Jew. <u>The Dreyfus case is history's "Exhibit A" to prove that Jews are stronger as integrated Frenchmen or Americans or Englishmen of the Jewish faith, than if they stand segregated and apart</u>.[42] [emphasis added]

It was only because he, and other Jews like him, were integrated into French society, in other words, that the French nation came to the rescue of Alfred Dreyfus.

Similarly, during the "Damascus Affair" of 1840, the Jews who were accused of a "blood libel" were eventually released due to the pressure put on the Turkish government by "nine great powers of the world [and]...even the Czar of Russia."

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[41] Letter to <u>Commonweal</u>, August 19, 1954, quoted in <u>Council News</u>, October, 1954, pp. 13-14.

[42] <u>Dilemma</u>, pp. 205-207.

> A hundred years before 1840, the barbaric, Central European World could hunt down and murder Jews en masse with impunity. Now, less than a century later, the Western World had begun to realize that the validity of its whole, liberal way of life was challenged when justice was denied to one obscure Jew.[43]

Again, what was important was not that the Jews were accused, but that they were saved by the Western World, and their salvation stemmed from the fact that they had been so successfully integrated into Western society.

Of course, once the details of the Holocaust emerged, it was more difficult for Berger to maintain his faith in the success of integration. But this too Berger explained in terms of integration and segregation. The Holocaust, he asserted, was the result "of false claims [on the part of Jews and non-Jews alike] that there are racial barriers or nationalistic impulses that separate Jews from other men."[44]

In other words, the integration of Jews in twentieth-century Europe was only cosmetic in nature. True emancipation had never really been tried there. Although the Jews in Germany did experience a certain amount of socioeconomic success, the forces which fought their integration had been going strong since the Jews left the ghettoes. Antisemitic acts abounded and were aimed

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[43] Ibid., pp. 223-224.

[44] Judaism or Jewish Nationalism?, pp. 45-46. Significantly, this would imply that the Jews were partly responsible for the Holocaust. This radical claim is not emphasized in Berger's other writings. In fact, in The Jewish Dilemma (pp. 217-231), written as the Holocaust was drawing to a close, Berger discusses the Holocaust but hedges as to whether the Jews bore any of the blame for its occurrence.

at re-segregating the Jews, and Jews themselves claimed special rights as a people and thus contributed to their own anomalous nature.

Therefore, emancipation didn't fail in Germany. It was never adequately tried.[45]

Here, Berger adopts a tacit "I-told-you-so" stance. Accordingly, the Holocaust was the tragic result of that which he had been warning against all along. When Jews are not integrated fully into the societies of the lands in which they live, and when they willfully segregate themselves by maintaining ethnic and/or national differences, their very existence in those lands becomes threatened, and the results can be disastrous to say the least.

Perhaps his view of integration is best summed up by the following passage:

> Today our military supremacy makes it possible for all men to choose whether they are to remain victims of the tragic forces or their past or architects of new patterns of life for a better world. Human beings of the Jewish faith cannot escape this choice. Jews cannot have their cake and eat it too. They cannot have full equality of rights and responsibilities--as individuals in a world founded upon individual rights--while, at the same time, they support either aggressively or by default a program that calls Jews an indissoluble minority and asks the world for special rights for such a group.[46]

But as previously noted, Berger does not consider emancipation and integration synonymous. Emancipation has another

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[45] Dilemma, pp. 217-231.

[46] Ibid., p. 256.

meaning as well--it refers to the freedom he hopes to see Jews enjoy from "corporate control" of various Jewish agencies over their lives.

During the time that Jews were ghettoized, Berger argues, their individual lives were controlled by the various organizations of the Jewish community. Therefore, when the ghetto walls fell and the Jews were allowed to enter secular society, the power of these organizations was seriously threatened. They no longer owed any civic allegiance to the power structures which had bound them in the past. Once emancipated, the Jew could choose the extent to which he (or she) would obey the dictates of these "communal" organizations.

Because of this threat to their control, many organizations struggled to maintain their power by maintaining, however possible, the vestiges of a "Jewish community." This has been translated into more modern and large-scale terms by organizations such as the American Jewish Congress and the World Zionist Organization which claim to speak for a "unified" American or worldwide Jewish community. Claiming the existence of this community segregates the Jews and thus works against the forces of emancipation.[47]

Berger cites the opposition of "official Jewry" to Mendelssohn's German translation of the Bible.

> Upon the very threshold of his freedom, the Jew was halted by organizations with "vested interests of considerable magnitude." Those vested interests lay in keeping Jews

[47] Ibid., pp. 46-47.

> different and segregated, in fostering a feeling of difference and segregation. "Official" Jewry spoke to the world that was preparing to welcome Jews and in effect said in their behalf, "We do not wish to come into this world you offer us unless we can do it unchanged, in the garb of our own medievalism, first as separate and segregated Jews and secondarily as free humans."[48]

What is most significant here is that Berger feels that it is precisely this corporate control, which has continued to exist, which is the cause of assimilation in contemporary Jewry! The following passage illustrates this quite clearly:

> Assimilation was a direct result of this conflict between inner freedom in the lives of ordinary Jews and the stubborn resistance to that freedom maintained by advocates of the "peoplehood" of Jews. Mendelssohn pointed the direction in which humans who were Jews might find a normal status in the Western world. It was a natural, human desire that led Jews to follow that direction. Across the broad road to freedom, "official" Jewry placed the obstruction of dogmatic "Jewishness." They hampered the process of integration and inner emancipation. To get around the obstacle some Jews went out into the free world by removing Judaism from their lives. It was an inevitable development.[49]

On the other hand, it was the believers in emancipation who provided a meaningful alternative and a way for Jews in a free society to maintain a Jewish existence appropriate for the age. Though Berger and those who agreed with him have been accused of contributing to assimilation, he holds that he is saving Judaism and fighting assimilation. It is significant, therefore, that the organization with which he is affiliated is known as the "American Council for Judaism."

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[48] Ibid., p. 173.

[49] Ibid., pp. 175-176.

That "emancipationist" Judaism fights assimilation is a similar assertion to that of many other Reform Jews. But to further argue that various Jewish organizations drive Jews away from Judaism and actually cause assimilation is another matter entirely. Regardless of its validity, we see here another example of the threat which Berger perceives in Zionism and in other "segregationist" forces within the Judaism of his day. It too reveals a certain insecurity and vulnerability which run counter to the rampant optimism which permeates much of the rest of his thought.

A critique of these three premises of Berger's thought yields very interesting results. To begin with, Berger's rejection of Jewish peoplehood gives rise to several questions. First of all, his rejection is partly based on the many instances he cites of diversity among Jews. But there are <u>many</u> nations in the world who have as citizens very different types of people. Berger cites the differences between various American Jews, and yet even he would still say that they can all--along with non-Jewish Americans--justifiably be seen as <u>American</u> nationals. To be sure, were cultural diversity sufficient grounds to deconstruct a nationality, only the most monolithic nations would remain.

Berger also argues that very few Jews want to be seen as part of a separate people, and that they want to integrate instead. Though partly true, this is only part of the story, for

throughout Jewish history, the desire to integrate has often been in tension with the security Jews have found in the proximity of other Jews. In other words, while recognizing the outward attraction of the non-Jewish society, Berger fails to mention the inward pull which the Jewish community has exercised over its members. This will be discussed in more detail when we examine Berger's view of Jewish history.

Berger's argument that Zionism corrupts the true, religious nature of Judaism has some veracity for the reasons he gives. But he oversimplifies the issue. By dismissing the desire to return to Zion which Jews have held for centuries with the simple statement that it was expression of a <u>messianic</u> hope, Berger shows no appreciation for the dynamic nature of a religious symbol. Although very few Jews actually moved to Palestine on their own free-will, Zion had become so deeply ingrained in the collective Jewish psyche that the hope to return there had become a real one, especially by the twentieth century. Zionism, in that sense, could rightly be seen as an ideology emerging from Judaism, and not as a corruption of it.

Berger's statement that Zionism negates the American principle of voluntary association reveals the extent of the insecurity which he feels as an American. Were Berger to have felt truly comfortable and at home here in the United States, then he would not have felt threatened by what he perceived as Zionist attempts to co-opt him into their Jewish nationalist enterprise. Instead, he would have had faith that America and all that it

represented for him would protect him against outside threats of this type.

Berger's argument that Zionism is a fundamental rejection of emancipation, seems to be valid to a great extent. At some fundamental level, Zionism does seem to have repudiated the primary goal of emancipation, namely, the acceptance of Jews into the surrounding culture. By the same token however, Zionism exhibits a full acceptance of the goal of integration in a collective sense. Having lost hope for the integration of individual Jews, in other words, Zionism focused its energies on the integration of the "Jewish people" into that same Western world. Berger, of course, negated the existence of the Jewish people, but he also seems to have blinded himself to the fact that Zionism does indeed embrace emancipation in a collective sense.

Berger's philosophy of integration seems a bit naive. Even if one were to accept the desirability of integration despite the threat of assimilation (which we shall discuss in more detail below), one wonders as to the power which the Jews have to integrate themselves fully into the Western World. Peoplehood has been part and parcel of the Jewish mind for so many centuries that it seems to have "entered our blood" as it were. That is to say, regardless of the validity of doing so, Jews have come to see themselves as a people and in a sense separate and apart from the rest of the world. Full integration, therefore, may have become an impossibility.

Yet despite its naivete, Berger's view of integration is somehow inspiring. It is heartening to think that Jews do have the ability to fully integrate themselves into their world and that Jews do have the power to attain "normalcy" in their countries of residence, thus ending antisemitism and allowing Jews to focus on the "eternal values" of Jewish religion. Perhaps the integration of which Berger speaks is an ideal for which we should strive, while still remaining cognizant of the difficulties in attaining it and the temporary measures needed to sustain worldwide Jewry until it is attained.

We have seen the three fundamental points of Berger's ideology. As we turn to an examination of his "usable past" and of the role of Judaism in his thought, it is important to note that it was the three points discussed above which served as the cornerstones of Berger's thought. His view of Jewish history and religion, in other words, stemmed from these three primary arguments and did not, as one might think, provide the background for them.

Berger's Usable Past

As is the case with many ideologies and ideologists, Berger found that it would be helpful to create for himself and his readers some sort of a usable past in which he could root his thought. In his reconstruction of Jewish history, he attempts, to the greatest extent possible, to validate his philosophy of

emancipation and his conception of Judaism as a religion free of ethnicity (of course, Berger does not see his history as a "creation" or a "reconstruction," but rather as a valid and true reading of the Jewish past). As we shall see, he does this quite extensively. His history is replete with villains and with heroes, with golden ages and with dark ones.[50]

Berger begins his history by attempting to debunk the "myth" that Jews originated from one racially or nationally unified group of people. This myth, used by many Zionists to justify claims of Jewish peoplehood, is totally foreign to Berger's thought. He claims that it is used to "suffocate rather than encourage growth."[51] As one might expect, Berger argues that the original force which led to a confederation among Jews was religious in nature.

The people who came to be known as Jews, Berger holds, actually originated from a series of nomadic, desert tribes who gradually infiltrated the land of Canaan. As good integrationists, they

> [g]radually...merged with the Canaanite people to such and extent that there were grafted on to the Israelite religion a great many Canaanite practices and a good deal of Canaanite culture. The eventual language of these Israelites--Hebrew--is probably of Canaanitish origin.[52]

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[50] Berger's most systematic statement of his view of Jewish history appears in his book, A Partisan History of Judaism, New York, 1951.

[51] Ibid., p. 8.

[52] Ibid., p. 19. It is interesting that Berger focused on the Canaanites here. Elsewhere, he expressed affinity for the

Being more specific, Berger points out that modern, scientific discovery has discerned three large migrations into the land of Canaan: first, a group from Ur, represented in the Bible by Abraham (note that Berger does not affirm the historical validity of the person, Abraham); second, a migration of Hyksos from Egypt known as "Habiru," or Hebrews; and third, another migration from Egypt under their leader, Moses.[53]

The first attempt to unify all of these diverse people was that of Deborah. Berger argues that Deborah did not use nationalistic or ethnic justifications for her attempted unification. Rather, she tried to predicate it on the fact that all of these peoples had worshipped, at one time or another, a desert god, and that which they shared was therefore religious in nature. In her call,

> [s]he said "Come and fight in the name of the Lord, Yahweh," which is the proper name of a desert god whose memory Deborah had reason to believe would arouse common action among these people who had a common desert background.[54]

It is curious that, while Berger points out that Deborah called these peoples together in the name of Yahweh, she did so that they might "fight" in Yahweh's name. In other words, even if we accept Berger's notion that the first confederation of Jews

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thought of several people associated with the "Canaanite Movement" in Israel, especially that of Uri Avnery. Also anti-Zionists, the Canaanites and Berger would come to have a great deal in common--namely, the advocacy of a de-Zionized Israel. We will examine this in more detail below.

[53] Ibid., pp. 22-25.

[54] Ibid., p. 29.

was based on a common religion, its purpose was military, and thus very national in character.

Having established the three-stage migration into Canaan, Berger now takes a chronological step backwards to discuss the creation of a major facet of what he sees as the true nature of Jewish religion--monotheism.

Berger's first, major point in connection with this is that the first time God was revealed it was not to a nation, but to an individual--Moses. Indeed, the Hebrews were a slave-people in Egypt and not considered a nation. Because of this, Moses could "marry out, "assimilate" and integrate himself into Egyptian life without any stigma being attached to it.

Here it is significant that, while Berger questions the historicity of the patriarchs--and the immigration to Egypt--based on the lack of supporting scientific evidence, he does not place Moses under the same scrutiny. This serves his ideology very well. For by removing the Patriarchs from the realm of historical reality, Berger also invalidates claims of familial, "peoplehood" bonds in Judaism. But by maintaining the historical reality of Moses, it is easier for him to posit the religious nature of Jewish cohesiveness.

In any event, Berger questions some of the details of the story of the Exodus from Egypt, but accepts it in very broad terms. He points out that what was significant about the Sinai experience was that it was at the foot of that desert mountain that the Israelites entered into a covenant with this desert God.

> The importance of this covenant relationship between a god and his people in the ancient world cannot be overstressed. It was a dramatic moment in the history of a primitive religion when, all things having been agreed to in the covenant or contract, this god of the desert tribe came to Moses...and proclaimed all of his attributes--merciful, gracious, and long-suffering; and also a god of retribution, "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children's children unto the third and unto the fourth generation.
>
> This, then is a fairly simple and primitive god. We stand at the threshold of Judaism here--many centuries removed from the religion that was to conceive a universal god and become the parent of two other great faiths.[55]

For Berger, the primitive nature of this god stemmed from the nature of that god's covenant. It was made with the Israelite "people" and, as he says later, it was partly predicated on human sacrifice. That, in addition to biblical kashrut and the Canaanite Pesach feast, most likely comprised Judaism at its earliest stage.[56]

At this point, Berger turns to a discussion of a group of people who were among his greatest heroes--the prophets. The prophets entered the stage of history at a time when Judaism was very corrupt. Pagan cult had influenced the Jewish Temple cult, which itself had become over-commercialized. Idolatry was rampant, and social justice was hardly valued at all.

Into this moral abyss leapt a group of individuals who were able to see this corruption for what it really was. Originally a group of "seers" or "diviners," the prophets claimed to speak the word of God as they castigated Israel. The "literary," or canonized, prophets are the ones upon whom Berger focuses most of his

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[55] Ibid., pp. 45-46.

[56] Ibid., p. 47-50.

attention and they were the individuals, he said, who were responsible for turning Judaism from a ritualistic cult into a religion standing for moral values.[57]

The prophets are true heroes and role models for Elmer Berger.

> To whatever extent the things these men conceived are truth, they are truth which they wrung from the complexities of life and the universe. There are undoubtedly many who would find it more comforting and exciting to believe that all of these truths were bestowed upon men, or preferably upon a single man, by some supernatural process....I prefer to see these men who changed the world as struggling upward, in the grim, anguished searching for truth that is man's most distinguished spiritual identification. To some, at least, seeing these men humanly reaching up for a moral god is a more thrilling historic drama than seeing them as sainted targets for a god reaching down.[58] [emphasis added]

In Berger's reference here to a "single man" we see a thinly veiled polemic against Christianity. More importantly, we see here part of what Berger admired about the prophets and the model which he hoped to live up to.

Not only that, but he elicited important values from the words of the prophets. He said that, from Amos, Jews had learned the value of justice, though it was unmediated by mercy--mercy was added by Hosea. Isaiah provided a majestic image of God, whereas Jeremiah complemented (offset?) that majesty with a more intimate God concept. These are the values which the prophet gave to Judaism, Berger says, and these are the values which

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[57] Ibid., pp. 55-61

[58] Ibid., p. 66. Clearly, the notion of prophecy as the result of people reaching upward, as opposed to that of God reaching downward, is a significant theological point quite apart from Berger's usable past.

Judaism in turn gave to the world. It is therefore understandable that the ethics and values of the prophets should receive such emphasis in the thought of Elmer Berger.[59]

As great as the age of the prophets was, Judaism gradually deteriorated with the increasing "ghettoization" of the Jews which began after the destruction of the First Temple.

When the Jews first were "exiled" to Babylon, they immediately began a process of integration there and became a part of Babylonian society. They built synagogues in which, Berger holds, psalms were read which reflected the universal values of the prophets. In general, these Jews were so integrated that when Cyrus offered them the option of returning to Palestine, many chose to remain where they were.

Those who did return came under the influence of Ezra and Nehemiah. By strictly forbidding intermarriage between Jews and members of the other tribes in the land, these two leaders led Jews in a reversion to separatism. In contradistinction to this, Berger prefers the universalism of the book of Ruth which he says may have been written at that time as an integrationist and universalist answer to Ezra and Nehemiah.[60]

During the Roman period, Judaism was a "tolerated" religion, and its universalistic principles attracted many converts.

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[59] Ibid., pp. 69-73

[60] Ibid., pp. 81-85. It is interesting to note that Berger himself is not opposed to intermarriage and, although he was only rarely asked to officiate at only life-cycle events, he performed a few of them during the period we are discussing.

Then, in Berger's view, darkness fell. With the increasing power of Christianity, Jews became pariahs and were forced to live in ghettoes. Not only were they put there by the non-Jewish governments, but there was also an increase in Jewish segregationism, and some Jews welcomed ghettoization as entrance into what they perceived as a safe-haven.[61]

Once in the ghettos, Jews became despotic and tyrannical in their treatment of one another. Various communal agencies engaged in power struggles to control the lives of Jews, Talmudic minutiae overtook universal religion, and the Jews were once again subject to the restrictive and segregationalist policies of the Ezra-Nehemiah stripe. These were the Dark Ages of Jewish history.[62]

The Jews thus became an underprivileged caste in Europe. But even then, the Jews were also part of an overarching "universal pattern," namely, the onward progression and strengthening of freedom throughout the world. This was so because the Jews often became a "test case" for the liberation of a given society. One could really tell if a country was truly free, in other words, if its Jews were free--if they were granted equal rights in their societies not as a special people, but as human beings.

> The principles upon which Jews were admitted to citizenship in France and to full participation in French society were set down by one of the great liberals of the day, who

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[61] Ibid., p. 94.

[62] Ibid., pp. 94-97. Berger cites Moses Maimonides as an example of a Jew who worked against this trend.

> happened to have been a former French nobleman. He said: "To the individual Jew, everything; to the Jews as a nation, nothing." These words need underscoring. They are the basis of the existence of Jews in any democratic society patterned either upon the French Revolution or upon American democracy.[63]

Thus, what was for many Jews an antisemitic statement, was for Berger a statement emblematic of much of his philosophy: Jews fully accepted as human beings, but receiving no rights at all as a separate nation. This, for him, was true emancipation.

The various law codes and corporate controls which ghetto Judaism developed enabled that community to function as a separate, political entity within the country where it was located. But with the ascent of democracy and the freedoms which it granted to Jews, secular control passed into the hands of the governments of these various countries, and out of the hands of the Jews. Thus, Judaism needed to be redefined in light of these newfound freedoms. It needed to be stripped of its segregationist tendencies (different languages, separate seating, separate schools, separate political blocs, etc.) and refocused on the spiritual and universalistic religion of the prophets. This, Berger holds, had been the glorious role of Reform Judaism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This "reformation" was first attempted in Germany, but it failed due to reactionist Jews and rabbis teaming up with a government which was not yet ready to truly emancipate its Jews.

> [The failure of German Reform] was possible in a country where, even to this day, the ideals of Western democracy

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[63] Ibid., p. 109.

> have had less support and loyalty and understanding than medieval romanticisms about race and caste. The tragic failure of democracy in Germany, generally, proves that it was no satisfactory laboratory for any democratic movement. The failure of liberal Judaism and emancipation for Jews in Germany proves nothing at all with regard to Jews and Judaism in states with established democratic traditions.[64]

In contrast to this failure, one of Berger's other heroes, Isaac Mayer Wise, was able to take the principles of German Reform and apply them here in the truly democratic United States. By rejecting separatism and the then young Zionist movement, and by articulating a universalistic concept of the "Mission of Israel," Wise was able to formulate a Judaism suitable to emancipated Jews.[65]

Since Wise's time, Berger goes on to say, the Zionist movement has grown and has been able to deceptively use Hitler's success to its own advantage. Accepting this, American Reform has allowed Wise's principles to become corrupted. The American Council for Judaism, on the other hand, by maintaining its principles of universalism and integration, can speak in healthy ways to the needs of "Americans of the Jewish Faith."[66]

It is clear that Berger sees his philosophy as being rooted in Jewish history and as an authentic product of it. Though he admits that his history is a partisan one, he does in general make a serious case for the existence of a universalistic trend

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[64] Ibid., pp. 123-124.

[65] Ibid., pp. 125-130.

[66] Ibid., pp. 130-140.

which runs through the centuries of Jewish existence and has influenced Jews during much of that time.

The Role of Judaism in Berger's Thought

Though the role that Judaism has played in Berger's ideology has been mentioned frequently above, it is necessary to engage, at least briefly, in a discussion of the overall picture of Judaism which emerges from his thought.

Elmer Berger was an advocate of what is commonly known as "Classical Reform Judaism." Though frequently accused of being assimilationist, Berger was affiliated with the American Council **FOR JUDAISM**, and he sincerely wanted to formulate an expression of Judaism which could speak to the needs of American Jews in a way which was free of any nationalistic element whatsoever. "In the mind of Elmer Berger there was always the combination of anti-Zionism on the one had and the striving of religious Judaism in the mold of Classical Reform [on the other]."[67]

In addition to the universalism which was discussed in detail above, Berger's identification as a Classical Reform Jew has implications regarding both the role of spirituality and of ritual within his conception of Judaism.

The emphasis which Berger placed upon the spiritual aspects of Judaism emerged very clearly in a speech he gave to the Sixth Annual Conference of the ACJ.

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[67] Interview with Dr. Jakob Petuchowski, June 15, 1989.

> The mark of Judaism is not Hebrew nor Israel nor Zionism. It is reverence for the spirit of man as a reflection of the glory of God, for the spirit of all men who are the children of one universal God.[68]

The role of religion, in other words, falls into a realm very different than that of the "physical" and the "mundane". Judaism deals with loftier, more universal themes. In fact, when we bring religion down out of the universal and spiritual, we corrupt it. The alliance of nationalism and Judaism, Berger said "must inevitably lower the sights of Judaism."[69]

For Berger, part of spirituality was clearly morality. He saw the role of Judaism as, serving as a "moral watchdog" over the events of the world. Primarily concerned with the events in the Middle East, Berger felt that Judaism could teach the moral implications of the events occurring there and of the American policies regarding them. It was clear to him, however, that once Judaism entered the political sphere it was out of its element.[70]

It is important to note that Berger's emphasis on the spiritual nature of Judaism did not mean that he advocated doing away with ritual. On the contrary, he advocated a new and innovative form of Jewish expression which could speak to the needs of contemporary Jews. Specifically, he held that Jewish customs need to be changeable so as to best adapt them to modern sen-

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[68] "Report to the Sixth Annual Conference," quoted in Council News, May, 1950, pp. 4-5.

[69] Article in Religion in Life, quoted in Council News, September, 1950.

[70] "Some Little Indulgences and the Truths Men Prefer not to Hear," Council News, June, 1957, pp. 10-12.

sibilities, that these customs should be optional, that we reject those customs which do not comport with the "truths of Judaism" or the free and open character of America, and that we create new "dramatizations and emotionalizations" of our Jewish faith. Some of the dramatizations and emotionalizations he suggested were the creation of a new type of Chanukkah menorah (he did not specify what it would look like), somehow broadening the agricultural festival of Sukkot so as to render it meaningful to members of an industrial society, and redefining Shabbat as a day of joy and rest, in part, perhaps, by celebrating it on Sunday. In his discussion of Sunday Shabbat celebration, Berger said,

> If the industrial genius of our country has made it possible for a large part of our citizenry to have two days of rest--instead of one a week--is there any good reason why, if they so choose, Jews should not worship on Sunday and play on Saturday....
>
> Is God less holy, the Shema less a watchword of our faith, the Torah less imposing on Sunday than on Saturday? Do not the very dogmatists who preach that we have a religion to serve our lives every day of the week, in the next breath try to convince us that one certain day of the week is more propitious for religion than the other six?[71]

There is an apparent contradiction in Berger's view of Judaism. Throughout many of his writings, Berger advocates Judaism primarily as a religion. And yet, despite this lip service which he pays to ritual, Berger's Judaism is very minimalistic in a ritual sense. Berger himself was not a very observant Jew,[72] and very few religious observances were held in

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[71] "Berger Calls for New Rites to Harmonize With U.S. Life," Council News, April, 1955, pp. 21-23.

[72] Ibid., p. 5. He hints that he was reluctant to lead a seder held on board his ship bound for the Middle East.

connection with the ACJ and its activities. Thus, it seems that Berger's Judaism is really a ritual-free expression of spirituality and ethics--that is, ethical behavior predicated upon Jewish values.

Other than citing pure, ideological conviction, it is difficult to say why Berger felt the way he did about Judaism. But there does seem to have been a certain rebellious streak in him which might have enjoyed criticizing the drift he perceived away from classical Reform. He said this blatantly in the preface to his history.

> I like the heterodox, the rebels, the challengers of authority who, time and again, put the clerics in their place and who, for me, made Judaism into something in which I can believe rather than something to which I was born.[73]

Respecting so many people who did challenge authority, as was the case with Berger, perhaps gave him the strength he needed to work against the general tides which were going against Classical Reform in America in his day.

Another cause may have been more subtle. Having adopted universalistic values so extensively, Berger may have been embarrassed on an emotional level, of that which did not comport with his Judaism. This came out very clearly after Berger visited some border villages in Jordan during 1955. Upset that Israel was the perceived cause of the poverty he saw, he wrote back to some friends in the States that he was "profoundly,

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[73] A Partisan History of Judaism, p. 4

humiliatingly--perhaps unforgettably--ashamed of being a Jew."[74] While this shame might not apply to Berger regarding all areas of Jewish life, it does point to the threat which he felt based on the behavior of other Jews as Jews, and it could explain, in part, the fact that the Judaism he advocated so closely resembled American Protestantism.

For all of this, perhaps Berger's Judaism is best summed up in the "Statement of Principles" of Lakeside Congregation for Reform Judaism. This congregation, located in Highland Park, Illinois, was founded in the Spring of 1955. Though officially unaffiliated with the ACJ, many of its founders were very involved in the organization. Clarence Coleman, President of the ACJ, was also President of the Congregation. Berger, for the most part, wrote the Congregation's "Statement of Principles."[75]

The Statement proclaims its allegiance to universal faith, especially that of the prophets, "The Old Testament," non-landed Judaism, God as in-dwelling in the human spirit, prayer, study, etc. It hails American democracy in almost messianic terms, and it proposes a Judaism compatible with our identity as Americans. This, in sum, is the Judaism of Elmer Berger.

Berger as Propagandist: A Critic of Zionism and Israel

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[74] Berger to Coleman and Rosenwald, May 23, 1955, quoted in Who Knows Better Must Say So!, Beirut, 1955.

[75] Coleman interview, June 11, 1989.

Berger's ideology could very easily remained in the theoretical realm and apart from the day-to-day realities of the developing State of Israel and the Zionist movement. But this was not the case. Rather, from the outset of his career Berger took it upon himself to show how his theories applied to the developing reality of Israel and worldwide Jewry.

Immediately after the creation of the state, the ACJ found it necessary to "shift gears" a bit. Having battled Zionism for five years, many Council members felt that with Israeli statehood the battle was lost and that the ACJ should disband. Their argument was that, since the state of Israel was now an established fact, the ACJ had nothing left to fight and was therefore an organization without a cause.

In response to this, the ACJ issued a "Statement of Policy" which recognized the new state of Israel and redefined the goals of the Council. In recognizing the state, the Council said that Israel is a <u>foreign</u> nation whose nationalism is valid only as it affects those within its own borders. By claiming to be <u>the</u> Jewish nation, the Council said, Israel impinged upon the rights of other governments over their own Jews and it therefore threatened the wellbeing of Jews everywhere. The ACJ thus pledged itself to drawing the distinction between Judaism on the one hand and Israel and Zionism on the other; it said that it would remind Americans that no Jewish organization could rightfully claim to represent all Jews in America, it would try to debunk the myth of a Jewish bloc vote here in America, and it would fight for

increased immigration rights of Displaced Persons in any land they chose. The Council would also gather funds for humanitarian causes and distribute them in such a way as to provide assistance for those who needed it without simultaneously supporting the cause or any organization of Jewish nationalism. They argued that, with the current UJA hegemony over Jewish philanthropy, it was impossible to split humanitarian and political donations.[76] Though this statement was not attributed to Berger himself, we shall see that much of his intellectual work for the next two decades was devoted to illustrating its points.

One of the first points that Berger found it necessary to make--and he made it repeatedly, was that he was not opposed to the existence of Israel. Although he was opposed to the creation of the state, now that it was established he wished it well.[77] Its existence was acceptable to the extent that it did not make Jewish nationalist claims.

> We regard Israel as a foreign state and the nationalism of Israel must be confined to its own citizens and its own territory.[78]

Israel, in other words, should be seen as an independent country of its own with its own national rights. Should it desire, it could serve as a refuge for many oppressed and dis-

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[76] Council News, May, 1948, pp. 1-2.

[77] Judaism or Jewish Nationalism?, p. 28.

[78] Berger in an interview with the London Jewish Chronicle, August 18, 1950, quoted in Council News, September, 1950.

placed people--Jewish and non-Jewish--throughout the world.[79] But when it expanded this role and made Jewish nationalistic claims, then it threatened the welfare of Jews in America and throughout the world.

In the next chapter, we will examine the nature of these threats which Berger perceived and the way in which he served as a self-appointed "watchdog" over the activities of Israel and the Zionist movement, criticizing them at every opportunity.

Berger perceived the Jewish nationalism proclaimed by Israel and by Zionism in general to be a serious threat to worldwide Jewry. Though Zionism claims to "foster Jewish national consciousness" for all Jews and to be concerned with their welfare, it attempts to exercise that concern only as it relates to the state of Israel. Because of this, Zionists in actuality have expressed very little concern for Jews in countries other than Israel, and have thus demonstrated the hypocritical nature of their movement.[80]

As examples of this, Berger claims that the Zionist movement obstructed that refugee assistance for Jews between 1943 and 1948 which would have helped settle them in countries other than Palestine. Also, he says that, contrary to popular opinion, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was prepared to settle up to 500,000 Jewish refugees here in the United States, but that effort was blocked by Stephen Wise and other prominent American Zionists.

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[79] A Partisan History of Judaism, pp. pp. ix-xvi.

[80] Ibid., p. 53.

Berger points out that Abba Hillel Silver openly stated that Zionism was not a movement for immigration but rather a movement for statehood.[81]

Regardless of the historical validity of its details, Berger's general point here is a significant one. Though it sometimes gave "lip-service" to other ultimate ends, Zionism during the first half of the twentieth century was primarily occupied with the fight for statehood. Thus, humanitarian concerns were subordinated to Zionism's struggle for an independent state.

Berger cited other example of the threat which Zionism posed to worldwide Jewry. He brought up the fact that, in England, after the creation of the state, the Jewish agency had proposed enforced savings for Jewish citizens to provide funds for Israel and that Jewish orphanages be closed and the children sent to live in the new Jewish state. In France, he said, Jewish Displaced Persons were being prevented from re-entering French society because they were perceived as having dual nationality.[82]

In 1952, Berger and his wife, Ruth, visited Foehrenwald, a DP camp in Germany. Writing about it afterwards, he bewailed the impoverished conditions in the camp, and he placed much of the blame on the Joint Distribution Committee which, he claimed, was focusing its efforts on settlement in Israel to the neglect of

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[81] Ibid., pp. 55-59.

[82] "Impressions of the Condition of European Jewry," Council News, November, 1950, pp. 6-7.

those Jews who chose to remain in Europe. He claimed that the JDC's primary goal was to disband the camp and send its residents to Israel, and not to help educate the people who were in the camp and help reintegrate them into European society.[83]

The next year, Berger revisited the camp and, though he was happy to report that the ACJ's philanthropic efforts had assisted greatly, he said that he had spoken to some Jews there who had just come from Israel and had experienced great difficulty in finding a country which would allow them to enter. He asserted that the existence of Israel and its claims of Jewish nationhood made it so that Jews now have no alternative, in many cases, but to go to Palestine. Thus, rather than having made a contribution, Israel has interfered with the advancement of Jewish rights.[84]

As an answer to the threat which Zionist Israel posed for the Jews of the world, Berger advocated a "de-Zionized" Israel, an Israel which cut off all national ties between itself and Jews of other lands. Interestingly, his thought came to be similar to that of the K'naanim, the Israeli anti-Zionists who posited an Israel where citizenship would be based on "nativism" in the

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[83] "This is Foehrenwald: A Report on the Last Jewish DP Camp in Germany," Council News, January, 1953, pp. 7-18.

[84] "Foehrenwald Revisited," Council News, January, 1954, pp. 3-18.

land.[85] While in the Middle East in 1955, Berger sympathetically quoted an Egyptian official who said,

> We were told--at times--that the Jewish Agency represented the Jews of Palestine. Then we would be told it represented world Jewry. We never had anything against the Jews *in* Palestine. But we could not tolerate a Palestine which belonged to all of the Jews of the world who would be given rights at the expense of the Arabs of Palestine.[86]

Berger came to advocate a democratic state in Israel whose citizenship would be open to everyone and which would be ruled by a secular government. Thus, it was not Israel per se to which he was opposed, but rather to "Zionist Israel." He came to refer to it that way in many of his writings.[87]

But Berger went beyond his discussion of the threat which Zionism poses to worldwide Jewry by discussing how it also affects us here in the United States. For one thing, he argued, Zionism makes it very difficult for those who are concerned about the threat of Jewish nationalism to participate in Jewish philanthropy. The UJA, for example, tries to portray itself as a humanitarian organization, but it uses its funds for nation-building and propaganda. Similarly, when a Jew buys Israel Bonds, he or she is not contributing to a charity, but rather to the government of a foreign country. In response to this, the

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[85] See James Diamond, Homeland or Holy Land: The "Canaanite" Critique of Israel, Bloomington, 1986.

[86] Who Knows Better Must Say So!, p. 19.

[87] For Berger's view on De-Zionized Israel, cf. "`De-Zionizing for a Normal Israel: Why and How," Council News, Autumn, 1966, pp. 53-89."

Council established its own philanthropic fund which will be discussed in the next chapter.[88]

Immediately after the creation of the state, the ZOA argued its own position by saying that, while American Jews need not express political allegiance to Israel, they should exert "nationalist" support upon the people and government of America for support of Israel. Berger argues that this is just a thinly veiled attempt to disguise the fact that Zionists still see "Americans of the Jewish Faith" as "Americans of Jewish Nationality," with a different destiny than our non-Jewish neighbors.[89]

With the threat thus defined, Berger became an active critic of Israel, the UJA, and their activities, interpreting everything possible in light of his ideology. He wrote so voluminously in this area that a detailed examination of it would be impossible in this context. But a few highlights are worth mentioning.

Berger had a great deal to say about the Law of Return. According to his reading of it, the Law blatantly conferred de facto Israeli citizenship on all Jews in the world, regardless of whether they wanted it. Israeli publicity on the Law predicates its "return" aspect on the notion that Israel is the native land of all Jews. This runs contrary to American principles of

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[88] Judaism or Jewish Nationalism?, pp. 147-164.

[89] Council News, August, 1948, pp. 1-8

voluntary citizenship and clarifies once and for all that Zionism does involve double nationality.[90]

In October of 1953, Israel was involved in a scandal when, in defiance of a threat by U.S. Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles to withhold U.N. funds, it diverted the water of the Jordan River so as to locate it more securely within Israeli Territory. Also during that month, Israel responded to a terrorist attack in Tirat Yehudah by attacking Kibya, a Jordanian border village. Sixty Jordanians were killed, many of them women and children.[91]

Dulles and Henry A. Byroade, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, criticized Israel and, in turn, met the rage of the American Jewish community. Some even accused them of anti-semitism. Berger was amazed that American Jews didn't join the officials of their government in expressing their moral outrage. For him, it was further proof of the "brainwash" of American Jews which had occurred and of the tacit Zionist assumption that American Jews were expected to propagandize their government on behalf of Israel regardless of what that country did.[92]

When, in what is commonly known as the "Brother Daniel Case," the Israeli Supreme Court refused to grant Israeli citi-

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[90] "Say When," Council News, June, 1952, pp. 2-9. Also, "How to Become an Israeli," Council News, March, 1953, pp. 7-12.

[91] Howard M. Sachar, A History of Israel From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time, New York, 1982, p. 444.

[92] "In Moral Indignation," Council News, December, 1953, pp. 3-20.

zenship under the Law of Return to a born Jew who had become a Dominican monk, Berger also had something to say. He pointed out that the primary question in the case was not whether Brother Daniel could still be considered a Jew in a religious sense after converting to Christianity, but rather whether he could still be considered a member of the "Jewish people" after such a conversion. Thus, the Brother Daniel case did not help determine that Israel is a country whose citizenship is determined partly by religion, rather, it further supported the ethnic character of its identity.

> The basic consideration is Brother Daniel's membership in or defection from "the Jewish people" and it is upon this consideration that determination of the eligibility of Brother Daniel for his "rights" under the Law of Return rests. In other words, automatic citizenship in the State of Israel is predicated <u>first</u> upon "the Jewish people" and not upon any specified legal relationship to the geographic territory of the political sovereignty called the State of Israel.[93]

Thus, Berger maintained the extra-territorial dimension of Zionism and the threat it posed to non-Israeli Jews.

As we shall see in the next chapter, Berger's work had become largely political, rather than intellectual, in nature by the mid-1960s. His writings therefore became fewer and farther between as the sixties progressed.

In sum, Berger's ideology is very conflicted in nature. On the one hand, he expresses utter and complete faith in the

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[93] ACJ Unprocessed Papers, Box 12, "Memos from Leonard R. Sussman, 1962," "Memorandum from Elmer Berger on <u>The Brother Daniel Case and the "Berger-Mallison Project</u>."

desirability and the possibility of integration into the Western World. But on the other hand, Berger is very fearful of the deleterious results which he foresees resulting from the promulgation of Zionism and its values. Out of this tension between hope and fear, between optimism and insecurity, emerged a philosophy which articulated the views, to a great extent, of the anti-Zionist movement in America from 1948 to 1968.

Chapter II

An Anti-Zionist in Action: Berger's Activities, 1948-1968

Though others in similar positions might have very easily led their lives as ivory tower intellectuals, this was very far from being the case with Elmer Berger. Rather, during his years with the Council, Berger worked diligently to propagate his views. By doing whatever he could to ensure that the ACJ was run as smoothly as possible, and by trying to persuade the American government and people to adopt views sympathetic with those of the Council, Berger strove to make real his dreams of a "truly emancipated" American Judaism.

The Attempt to Forge A Movement, 1948-1952

During the years immediately following the creation of the state of Israel, Berger played an integral role in attempting to unify the American Council for Judaism into a national movement. Prior to 1948, the ACJ had several small local chapters around the country, but most of the activities were centered around the national headquarters--first in Philadelphia, then in New York. But after the creation of the state, there was a feeling on the part of the Council leadership that the ACJ had a very specific role, namely, defining American Jewish existence vis a vis that of Israel.[1] Furthermore, as we shall see, there was a feeling

[1] Coleman Interview, June 11, 1989.

that the way to do this was to make the ACJ a truly national organization so as to mobilize the greatest number of Jews possible.

Berger's first task after the creation of the state was to justify the continued existence of the Council. Having battled Zionism for five years, many Council supporters felt that they had lost the fight and that it was time to accept the existence of Israel and to work "within the system" for an "emancipated" American Judaism. Indeed, in response to Louis Wolsey's resignation from the ACJ, the Council responded:

> ...[T]he Council remains dedicated [to opposing] Zionist nationalism with its inevitable segregation and consequent emphasis upon the rights and privileges of Jews as a separate secular entity, no matter where they may live.
>
> We are still firmly convinced that only through our practical and realistic application of Judaism can the many problems that face Jews outside of the state of Israel and many new ones created by the projection of that state, be met and solved.
>
> ...We are resolved to keep the compact with which Jews were admitted to equality in the democratic nations of the world; as individual members of a religious faith. We shall continue to reject concepts and programs for Jews that derive from national or racial theories.
>
> We pray that the state of Israel may also construct itself upon that basis, granting full equality of rights and obligations, in all aspects of its life, to all of its people. But for ourselves and our relationships in (sic.) the American scene, we entertain no question as to our determination of these matters.[2]

Elsewhere, Berger wrote,

> What we are fighting for now is our very life. We could afford to lose, as we did, the battle against "Jewish" nationalism in far off Palestine. Having lost it, our task

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[2] Papers of the American Council for Judaism (henceforth, ACJP), Archives of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, WI. 128/4.

here is, in many ways, more difficult. But we cannot afford to lose the battle here.[3]

More specifically, Berger wanted the ACJ to refocus its energies onto four main objectives: 1) to persuade the two major political parties to "omit any further extension of partisan support for Zionist nationalistic aims," 2) to engage a "top-flight lawyer in the field of international law to prepare...a brief on the problem of safeguarding the interests of American citizens of the Jewish faith in relation to the State of Israel," 3) to initiate long-range programs, i.e. scholarships, aimed at expanding the "energies and resources" of the Council, and 4) to present the ACJ position as effectively as possible to the UJA.[4] He argued that the Council needed to mobilize politically, financially, and in terms of sheer manpower in order to accomplish these goals.[5]

Early in his career, Berger attempted to bring his case to Washington. For example, his primary criticism of the UJA was that, although it posed as a humanitarian organization, much of the money donated to it was used to further Zionist, nationalistic aims. Donations to the UJA were therefore <u>political</u> in nature rather than humanitarian. To advance this point, in 1949 he wrote to Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg:

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[3] Berger to Dr. Bernard Rogowski, November 26, 1948. ACJP 30/1.

[4] Berger to I. Edward Tonkon, June 16, 1948. ACJP 6/1.

[5] <u>Ibid</u>., December 18, 1948.

> The United Palestine Appeal...is a fundraising organization of considerable size and power. It will probably obtain in the neighborhood of $80,000,000 of contributions from Americans, both Jews and Christians, in 1949. This money, as you know, is deductible by the contributor, for income tax purposes. Whether the purposes for which the money is used are such as to warrant such tax exemption is a question which should probably be submitted to the treasury department for investigation....
>
> [My purpose in writing] is to point out that campaigns are <u>now</u> under way for this agency, the status of which is certainly in doubt; that money being contributed, by innocent people, to an organization which is, in all likelihood, not an American institution but an institution of Israeli nationalism, no matter which Zionist group controls it.[6]

One of the Vice Presidents of the Council, George Levison, had done some diplomatic work in the past and was therefore able to teach Berger the ways of the State Department and give him entree into its network of diplomats.[7]

One of the first times this was put to the test was in the wake of a statement which David Ben-Gurion made on August 31, 1949, in which he urged all Jews to come live in Israel. The next day, Berger drafted a letter--to be signed by Lessing Rosenwald--to the then Secretary of State, Dean Acheson. In it, he accused Ben Gurion of attempting to "invade the national status of Americans of the Jewish faith," and to bring American Jewish youth to Israel, even if their parents refuse to cooperate. Berger urged Acheson to ascertain whether Ben Gurion had been quoted correctly and, if so, to impress upon the Prime Minister "the inviolability of the United States citizenship of Americans of the Jewish faith."

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[6] Berger to Arthur H. Vandenberg, February 21, 1949.

[7] Coleman Interview, June 11, 1989.

The letter was sent out on September 8, and on September 26, Rosenwald received a polite, but non-committal reply from an Assistant Secretary of State, George C. McGhee.[8]

In addition to his political activities, another way Berger attempted to forge a movement in these early years was by speaking and appearing in the media as often as he possibly could. During this time, while working out of the New York office, Berger would often have several speaking engagements each week at various banquets and forums which addressed topics having to do with the situation in the Middle East.[9]

In addition to this, Berger frequently appeared on radio talk-shows and in newspapers and magazines during this time. By doing so, he was able to establish a reputation for himself as an articulate, albeit extreme, anti-Zionist. Among the most significant of these appearances was a quote with a picture of Berger in the November 3, 1952 issue of Time magazine, in an article about the ACJ schools, which will be discussed later. Also, earlier that year, the New York Times had put Berger's Partisan History of Judaism on its list of the "125 Outstanding Books of the Year."[10]

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[8] Berger to Rosenwald, September 1, 1949; Rosenwald to Acheson, September 8, 1949; McGhee to Rosenwald, September 26, 1949. All in ACJP 65/6.

[9] My main sources for this were the many references to Berger's activities in the issues of Council News during the time being studied.

[10] Ibid.

Also during this time, Berger travelled extensively throughout the country so as to try to give whatever support he could to the struggling local chapters of the ACJ. Typically, he would go to a certain city, usually with another national leader of the Council such as Lessing Rosenwald or Rabbi Irving Reichert, and spend several days there meeting with local Council members, non-Council Jews, clergy, members of the press, community groups, etc. Often, he would take a several week tour of one part of the country and do this in several cities consecutively. In October, 1948, he toured the West Coast with Irving Reichert; he toured the South in January, 1949, he toured the West Coast again at the end of 1950, the South at the beginning of 1951, and the Midwest at the end of that same year. He also toured the West and the South during 1952.[11]

The many speaking engagements in which Berger participated during these tours, as well as the great amount of individual public speaking engagements in which he engaged throughout the country, allowed him to be heard by thousands of listeners and thus added greatly to his renown. While it is difficult to ascertain the extent of the support which Berger won for the Council during these many speaking engagements, we do know that he was a powerful and persuasive orator,[12] so the efficacy of the trips should not be minimized. Membership in the Council shortly

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[11] Ibid., cf., "Proposed Program for a Week of Activity," c. 1949[?], ACJP, 11/2.

[12] Coleman interview, June 11, 1989.

after the 1948 war was just over 14,000,[13] and he did what he could on these trips to increase it.

Very early, Berger became quite adept at "hobnobbing" with prestigious members of American society, both Jewish and non-Jewish. By doing so, he was also able to gain a great deal of support for the Council, both financial and political. Here it is important to note that, soon after the creation of the state, it began to be the case that more and more of Berger's supporters were Christians, rather than Jews. We see here the beginnings of Berger's disaffection with the Jewish community. For, as most American Jews became sympathetic to Zionism and its aims, he increasingly found it necessary to turn to non-Jews for support.

Sometime before the end of 1952, Berger became friendly with the journalist, Dorothy Thompson.[14] She became his friend and supporter, introducing him to several prominent officials in the State Department and other important members of society. As Berger tells the story, she came to be impressed by the salience of the points he made regarding the situation in the Middle East and she sought out his advice regarding the situation there.

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[13] Berger to Dr. Millar Burrows, August 18, 1948, ACJP 6/1.

[14] In his Memoirs (p. 63), Berger says that he first met Dorothy Thompson during the mid-fifties. But in a letter to Rosenwald, December 17, 1952, Berger mentions having gone over to her house the previous evening as if that was not a unique, first-time experience. Lessing J. Rosenwald Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society Archives (henceforth, LJRP), "Ready Reference, 1952."

Berger also became very close friends with Norman Thomas, a leader of the American Socialist party. Having originally worked with Thomas for labor reform during the 1930s, the relationship between these two men was renewed during the early 1950s. Berger was able to help Thomas understand why so many Jews of the past had become disaffected with Socialism, and Thomas was able to assist Berger by advising him on various political matters.[15]

Perhaps of the most political significance was the friendship which Berger established with Kermit Roosevelt, grandson of Theodore Roosevelt. Since Roosevelt was a diplomat by training, Berger was able to consult with him on a wide variety of political issues regarding how best to deal with the Washington bureaucracy. They became close friends (and golf partners) and sought out each other's advice frequently.[16]

By making these and other contacts with prominent non-Jews, in addition to the Jewish contacts which he had made prior to 1948, Berger was able to begin to gain the support he needed to run a large, national organization, and to accomplish what he wanted in the diplomatic sphere. We shall see below some of the ways in which this actually happened.

But Berger also consistently occupied himself with the administrative activities necessary to run the Council. Simply put, "Berger was the CEO of the Council. Nothing happened

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[15] Memoirs, pp. 30-35., Berger to Thomas, May 11, 1950, ACJP 6/5.

[16] Berger to Roosevelt, June 2, 1949.

without him knowing about it."[17] As the CEO, Berger occupied himself with the day-to-day running of the office, finances, recruitment, supervision of local chapters, ideological work (discussed above), etc. During the early years of the organization, after the establishment of the state of Israel, the Council was trying to define the way it would run things and, in general, its "standard operating procedure." For Berger, therefore, this work was especially important, for it determined the future character of the organization.

Among other responsibilities, Berger was in charge of supervising the staff who worked in the ACJ headquarters in New York. At this time, the office was a relatively small one. It consisted, among others, of Berger; a Director of Chapter Activities, Julius Grad; a couple of other full-time administrators; and several secretaries. From the outset, Berger's relations with these staff members were strained. This was partly a result of the fact that Berger's extensive speaking schedule forced him to spend a great deal of time out of the office, so the time he could spend cultivating positive relationships with his workers was somewhat limited.

For example, when Berger returned from the annual Council conference in Cincinnati in June, 1950, he became infuriated at what had gone on during his absence. He wrote to the "Executive Staff":

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[17] Coleman interview, June 10, 1989.

> I am completely dissatisfied with the amount and quality of the work being turned out of the office for the last two weeks.
>
> This may be due to a false impression since I have been away a good deal of the time and have been terribly preoccupied with my own work while in town.
>
> I think all of you however, should have formal notice of my dissatisfaction and advance knowledge of two proposals which will be instituted beginning with Friday of this week, June 16.
>
> 1. There will be a staff meeting every Friday until further announcement, at 10:00 a.m.
>
> 2. I expect each Executive to supply me with a written memorandum of the work he has been engaged with during the past week....[18]

The tone of this memo clearly bespeaks a certain tension between Berger and his executive staff and exemplifies the authoritarian nature of his relationship with them.

There was also a great deal of tension between Berger and the secretarial staff. One disaffected secretary complained to Berger about the way she was treated in her letter of resignation.

> I will no longer work in an office where the work is not appreciated and where workers are spied on constantly and every minute of the time spent in the office is questioned, where one is supposed to feel guilty when 5:30 comes and it is time to go home, and where employees are told daily that they are doing nothing and getting paid for nothing - and I suppose you know the rest.[19]

Berger is not mentioned by name in this letter, and it would be unfair to put the blame solely on him for this person's disaffection. In fact, earlier in the letter she mentioned that she had felt belittled and demeaned by the behavior of Henry

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[18] Berger to Executive Staff, June 12, 1950. ACJP 11/3.

[19] Barbara Levine to Berger, May 15, 1952. ACJP 11/5.

Moyer, a Vice-President of the Council. But since Berger was "running the show," and since we have other evidence of his authoritarian style of management, it would be safe to assume that her anger was partly a product of the tensions in her relationship with Berger.

A more specific example of dissatisfaction with Berger was provided by Julius Grad in his letter of resignation. Writing to Lessing Rosenwald, he alluded to the fact that he was resigning due to the increasing "difficulties" between him and Berger. Praising Rosenwald for his "unfailing courtesy and encouragement," he implied that these were not qualities which he found in Berger.[20]

It is possible that Berger's authoritarian style of management was partly a response to the fact that during the years following the creation of the state, the Council was beset by tremendous financial difficulties. In the above-mentioned memo to the Executive Staff, Berger mentioned that the Council's financial difficulties had reached a critical level, and that the only way to get them under control was to have a well-functioning and organized office staff.[21]

Because of this, Berger did whatever he could during these years to get the financial affairs of the ACJ in order. Frequently, he would write individual letters to major contributors to the Council, and mimeographed letters to the smaller ones,

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[20] Grad to Rosenwald, March 31, 1952. ACJP 11/5.

[21] Berger to Executive Staff, June 12, 1950. ACJP 11/3.

containing pleas for more funds. Also, he would assist various other staff members, both national and regional, in doing the same.[22]

Berger even suggested that reprints of the article about him in Time be distributed in conjunction with a fund drive. Since the magazine's policy prohibited the use of its reprints for fund-raising purposes, he proposed that the reprints be distributed one day before letters asking for more money.

The extent of the Council's financial problems, and the extent to which Berger took them to heart, became evident in a letter he wrote to I. Edward ("Eddie") Tonkon, an ACJ leader in Dallas.

> ...[T]hese last five months have simply been nip-and-tuck. We have taken in more money than we took in last year, but we are no farther ahead insofar as our bank account is concerned. Moreover, we are coming into the summer months when we have very little to expect in the way of money, but considerable expenditures facing us as we try to prepare for the fall season. Added to that [public relations consultant Sidney] Wallach called yesterday and apparently was quite insistent about having his $7,500 paid off immediately.
>
> I suppose that a businessman would say he was bankrupt, and under these circumstances, simply resign himself to closing up shop. I have no intention of doing anything of the kind and, as you know, I am sure, except for general exhortation at times to supply us with as much money as our members can possibly put at our disposal, I pretty well manage to keep these troubles to myself....Sometimes I come into the office and see the bills which must be paid and look at the bank account and I am just about as low and depressed as if I did not know how I was going to pay my own rent or buy my next meal.[23]

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[22] For example, Victor Raphals consultation with Berger regarding fundraising letter, June 6, 1952, ACJP 11/5. Cf. letter to non-contributing members, 1952, ibid.

[23] Berger to I. Edward Tonkon, May 19, 1950. ACJP 11/5.

Clearly, the finances of the ACJ were of great concern to Berger and he spent much of his time and energy dealing with them.[24]

During this period of time, Berger also realized that if the ACJ was to be a strong national movement, it would have to have healthy and thriving regional offices. For example, in addition to all of the support which he provided the local chapters and regional offices during his travels, Berger also suggested that a training course be set up for regional directors in training. Addressing the principal problems they would meet in their positions, it would teach them how to deal most effectively with Jewish communal institutions, Jewish fund-raising organizations, proposals for a "separatist" or "nationalized" Jewish community, publicity and public relations, the Anglo-Jewish and Yiddish press, Zionist organizations and ideologies, Diaspora nationalism, current issues of concern to the council, administrative procedures, and setting up a chapter program.[25]

By the end of 1952, the Council had begun to set up a religious school program with which Berger had only peripheral involvement. But when the regional directors failed to show much interest in the program, he expressed the fact that he was "considerably disturbed" about the situation, and that the

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[24] Berger himself was never paid very well by the Council. However, since both he and his wife had inherited some money, they were able to live quite comfortably. They always had a "nice American car," and they lived in a nine room apartment on Fifth Avenue in New York. (Berger interviews)

[25] Berger to M. Spector, March 1, 1950. ACJP 11/3.

program and/or its "method of exploitation" should be altered so as to make it more appealing to these regional directors.[26]

In general, Berger did what he could to support the regional offices and to supply them with the support they needed to function on their own. He sent out various people whom he recruited to set up regional offices, to establish personal contacts, and to raise the funds they needed to operate. Eventually, there were regional offices in Chicago, San Francisco, Dallas, Washington, and New York (the latter sharing office facilities with the national office), each of which had several local chapters which reported to it.[27]

Throughout his years with the Council, Berger also did a great deal of scholarly work. Of course, preparing the many addresses and lectures which he delivered to various groups was one way he did this, but more generally, he was regarded as the rabbi of the Council, the person who would give voice to Council ideology as it applied to various issues.

One example of this occurred in 1950. During that year, the president of the CCAR, Jacob Rader Marcus, expressed concern in his presidential address to the Conference over the introduction of religious practices into the American public schools. In response, Rosenwald wrote to Marcus asking him to be more specific regarding his views on the teaching of Hebrew in the public

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[26] Berger to Victor Raphals, December 31, 1952. ACJP 11/5.

[27] Berger to Tonkon, May 19, 1950. ACJP 6/5. Telephone interview with Elmer Berger, February 16, 1990.

schools.[28] Marcus responded that he did not see any difference between Hebrew and any other language and that, were there to be a sufficient number of people interested, it should be taught in the public schools. "We Jews," he wrote, "have a right to expect the same courtesies which all other American citizens receive."[29]

At this point, Rosenwald asked Berger how to best respond to Marcus' statement. Berger, in turn, drafted a suggested reply to Marcus. In it, he said that he agreed that Americans should have the right to study Hebrew in the public schools if they so desire, but that he felt the argumentation Marcus used was faulty. Indeed, Modern Hebrew does have a secular dimension to it, and that is why it should be taught to those interested. But it is <u>not</u> analogous to other languages, as Marcus said, because it has been accorded such a prominent place in the curricula of Jewish religious schools, that is to say, its significance to Jews is religious in nature. Thus, saying that Hebrew should be taught out of courtesy to the Jews is tantamount to saying that religion should be introduced into the schools.[30]

Berger's reply is significant. But even more significant is the fact that he was asked to write it. In fact, as "the Council

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[28] Rosenwald to Marcus, June 15, 1950. ACJP 6/5.

[29] Marcus to Rosenwald, June 22, 1950. ACJP 6/5.

[30] "Suggested Draft Reply to Dr. Jacob R. Marcus," undated, ACJP 6/5. While Berger's name does not actually appear on this document, it is safe to assume that Berger wrote it since, according to Coleman (interview, June 11, 1989), the lay leaders of the Council frequently went to Berger for consultation on such matters.

Rabbi" (even though there were other rabbis associated with the Council), his intellectual abilities were greatly respected by the laymen involved in the ACJ. They were greatly impressed by his Jewish knowledge and by his persuasive abilities as a speaker and administrator. It was largely out of this respect that they turned to him so frequently for consultation on intellectual matters.[31]

Berger himself realized that his professional forte was to be found in the scholarly and political realm of the ACJ's work, and not in administration. He enjoyed writing and speaking about the Council's views much more than dealing with the day-to-day operations of the office. Largely as a result of this, Berger's title was changed from "Executive Director" to "Executive Vice President" in the early 1950s so that he could have more time to focus his energies on the things of interest to him. It is important to note that this occurred at a time during which the Council was expanding--more regional offices were opening, and the administrative duties were becoming increasingly voluminous. A man by the name of Leonard Sussman was hired to take Berger's place as Executive Director.[32]

Before closing this section of the chapter, it is necessary to say something about the sheer volume of the work which Berger did with the Council. In addition to all of his traveling and speaking engagements, and in addition to the purely mental

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[31] Coleman Interview, June 11, 1989.

[32] Berger interviews.

energies which he devoted to running the ACJ offices, organizing its finances, and uniting its regions, Berger, simply put, wrote an incredible number of letters. It was not unusual for him to write six or seven letters (each four to five pages in length, single-spaced, elite type) in a single day. Apparently, he could dictate them so well that, assuming that there were no typographical errors, they could be sent out exactly as first dictated with no revisions.[33]

Berger recalls that he wrote so extensively during this time so that he could establish the Council as a substantial organization. His detailed letters were designed to fully express his viewpoint and that of the ACJ so that the Council would be regarded as a group which represented a coherent perspective.[34]

In general, we see that during these first years after the creation of the state of Israel, Berger played an active role in trying to forge the fledgling American Council for Judaism into a fully functioning movement. While it remained small, the ACJ ended up finding a certain "niche" during these years.[35] It

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[33] The amount of letters Berger wrote is apparent from even a cursory perusal of the ACJ papers in Madison, WI. Information on his accuracy in dictation was from the Coleman interview, June 11, 1989.

[34] Berger interviews.

[35] Berger has a vague recollection of the membership of the ACJ averaging about ten to twelve thousand during the years being studied. There was a small decrease in membership, he recalls, after the 1948 war, but it rose again "after the views of the Council coalesced." He said that the main growth in Council membership occurred in a slow but steady fashion between the wars of 1956 and 1967. (Telephone interview, February 16, 1990). Precise statistics are unavailable to me at this time.

succeeded in establishing itself as an organization--one which would advocate an "emancipated American Judaism" and which would fight any attempt by Israel and/or Zionism to challenge the status of American Jews or segregate them in Israel.

The Dulles Affair

On June 1, 1953, U.S. Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, announced in a nationally broadcast speech on the radio, the United States' "impartiality on Zionism." In the speech, he also declared that "Israel should become part of the Near East community and cease to look upon itself...as alien to this community."[36]

Berger and other leaders of the ACJ hailed this statement as a great victory. Finally, after ten years of fighting, there was a statement from Washington which at least approximated an official recognition of Council doctrine.

> This new policy makes it crystal clear that the administration is going to draw a definite line of demarcation or distinction between a normal Israel and an Israel that would be part of a world Zionist movement. Dulles' statement--and this is, I might say, more than my own interpretation but, as a matter of fact, is an interpretation from the highest possible sources--leaves no doubts that Zionism is a nationalism which at this present moment is not in consonance with the national interests of the United States.[37]

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[36] Quoted in Victor Raphals to Regional Directors, ACJP 12/1; Elmer Berger, "Dulles Speaks," Council News, August, 1953, pp. 5-24.

[37] Raphals to Regional Directors, August 12, 1953, ACJP 12/1.

Immediately, Rosenwald wrote to Dulles heartfelt appreciation for the content of the statement.[38]

Berger also acted quickly. With George Levison, he went to Washington and initiated what was to become a lifelong relationship with the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Henry Byroade. In a series of talks with Byroade over a period of two weeks, Berger and Levison got him to outline some of the implications of the Dulles statement. Among those implications outlined by Byroade were: That the Dulles statement could "be construed as a firm deliberate top policy and that it had been cleared with the White House before public release"; that the United States would play as active a role as possible in helping Israel integrate itself into the area and that it would try to redress the "unbalanced situation" which then existed in the Middle East; that the United States was not prepared to deal with an Israel which saw itself as "the nucleus of a world Zionist movement"; that the Council would do well to remain in close contact with him regarding the situation in the Middle East as time progressed, etc.[39]

In order to follow up and to further capitalize on the statement which Dulles made, Berger enlisted the help of Kermit Roosevelt to set up a meeting with Dulles at the State Department in Washington. Berger hoped that the meeting would be

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[38] Rosenwald to Dulles, June 3. 1953. ACJP unprocessed papers (Henceforth "ACJP-Unp") "Elmer Berger, Personal."

[39] Memorandum from Berger (recipient not specified), June 25, 1953. Ibid.

attended by himself, Rosenwald, Henry Moyer, Roosevelt, and a couple of other major Council supporters. At the time, Berger was also planning a trip to Europe in the late summer of 1953, and because of that and other scheduling difficulties, he did not see how they could meet until early November.[40]

Berger reluctantly took his trip to Europe and told Coleman that a call might be coming in from Washington while Berger was away, and that when it did, Coleman was to call the people who were to attend the meeting and make the final arrangements. The call never came, and the meeting never occurred.[41]

The next year, Byroade reiterated many of the ideas contained in the Dulles statement in a speech which he delivered in Dayton, Ohio. The press made almost no mention of his remarks, and the State Department ended up not paying them much heed either.

> Unfortunately, Byroade's declarations of policy principles were never implemented by the United States. And the failure led me, eventually, to a more specific plan for implementing more effectively the "domestic" agenda in the new anti-Zionist strategy occasioned by the events of 1948-49.[42]

This "more specific plan" was the "Berger-Mallison Project," which will be discussed below.

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[40] Berger to George Levison, July 14, 1953. ACJP 11/6

[41] Coleman Interview, June 11, 1989. Coleman associated this incident with another meeting which was supposed to be with the President and the Secretary of State in 1968. However, he did not recall that this meeting was to be with the President, and all of the details as he did recall them are in consonance with the proposed meeting of 1953, and not that of 1968.

[42] Berger, Memoirs, pp. 43-44.

Berger's Response to "The Status Law"

In various stages between 1952 and 1954, the WZO/Jewish agency and the Israeli government agreed on what came to be known as the "Status Law." It basically stated that the immigration and absorption of Jews into Israel was the responsibility of the Jewish agency. By defining its role as that of rescue and relief, this law maintained the tax-exempt status of the Jewish Agency's fund-raising efforts in the United States.[43]

Berger saw this as an affirmation of what he had been arguing for years. Namely, that the primary goal of the Zionist movement was that of bringing all Jews, even those of the United States, to Israel.

> ...I think "this is it". Even more than the creation of Israel, this move is the threat to American Jews. For as we have pointed out, even with Israel a state, there was the hope or possibility that American Jews would finally see through the ideological basis of the state, repudiate Zionism, re-form their organizations, arrange normal relationships with the people of Israel and so make the line of demarcation clear between Israel and themselves. This latest move however promises to be the coup de gras (sic.). If the Zionists and the non-Zionists...pull this off, the future consequences can be catastrophic. All the ramifications that flowed from the Enlarged Jewish Agency will be intensified and extended by this device to make American Jews, individually and corporately, satellites of Israel. There can be only one more step beyond this - emigration.[44]

He went on to suggest that a letter be written to the major supporters of the Council which explained the implications of the

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[43] Sachar, A History of Israel, p. 720.

[44] Berger to Rosenwald, December 29, 1953. Lessing J. Rosenwald Papers (Henceforth, LJRP), "Ready Reference 1954."

Status Law, and that some of them be gathered for a meeting in which they could explore these implications and try to devise a way to capitalize upon them so as to mobilize the support of previously uncommitted American Jews. Such a letter was written, but nothing ever came of it. Without the political wherewithal, Berger was powerless to capitalize upon what he saw as a golden opportunity in any political or organizational sense.[45]

Lakeside Congregation for Reform Judaism

Although the Council's primary emphasis was always political in orientation, it did start a program of religious education. Under the leadership of Rabbi Samuel Halevi Baron, the ACJ founded religious schools in Highland Park, Illinois (a suburb of Chicago) and in Westchester, NY. The Council developed curricula for these schools which reflected their doctrine--the curricula emphasized the Jewish Prophetic tradition and its Judaism as a religious--rather than ethnic--entity.

The group in Highland Park began by meeting in a local elementary school. But they quickly outgrew the facilities there and found it necessary to move to the larger facilities of a nearby junior high school. By mid-1954, the school had expanded to such an extent that several of the families associated with it decided to form a congregation of their own.

Although the congregation, which would come to be known as "Lakeside Congregation for Reform Judaism," was founded by

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[45] Berger, Memoirs, pp. 44-46.

members of the Council, it was decided from the outset that it would not be formally associated with the ACJ in any way. Lakeside was seen as a religious institution which was to be separate and distinct from the largely political ACJ.

This distinction was clearly just a formality. In fact, the founding president of Lakeside was Clarence "Buddie" Coleman, who had just been elected president of the ACJ as well. Furthermore, when Lakeside's Founders' Committee decided to compose a "Statement of Principles" for the congregation, they turned to "their" rabbi, Elmer Berger.[46]

The content of this statement was discussed in the previous chapter. What is important to note, however, is that despite the fact that the Statement technically had to be written by a committee of congregants, it was Berger's version which was eventually accepted. In fact, Coleman's support led to its acceptance over and above some criticisms by members of the committee.[47]

Berger's 1955 Trip to the Middle East

By mid-1955, Berger had been affiliated with the ACJ for 12 years and, as such, he had been an outspoken critic of affairs in the Middle East--this despite the fact that he had never visited

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[46] Coleman Interview, June 11, 1989. See appendix for the full text of the "Statement of Principles."

[47] Hope Abelson to Coleman, January 19, 1955; Coleman to Berger, January 25, 1955; Berger to Coleman, January 31, 1955. ACJP Unp, "Clarence Coleman, Jr. 1955."

that part of the world at all. Therefore, responding to a suggestion made by Kermit Roosevelt,[48] Berger made all of the necessary arrangements for visas and other travel papers. Many lay leaders of the Council were reluctant to send Berger there out of their concern for the financial burdens which such a trip would incur.[49] But Berger persisted, and on April 7, 1955, he set sail for Cairo.[50]

His "adventures" began while on board the ship which took him to the Middle East, the U.S.S Constitution. On his way to Cairo, Berger was asked to lead a Passover Seder for those Jews who were on the ship. For reasons which he did not specify, Berger was reluctant to accept the invitation, but he nevertheless agreed to lead the Seder. While leading it, he had a young boy read the Four Questions, and in lieu of a gift, he presented the boy with a dollar bill as a reward for his efforts. Shortly thereafter, he found a note underneath his cabin door from the boys parents saying that they had found out that he (Berger) was affiliated with the American Council for Judaism and that they were therefore returning the dollar bill which their son had

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[48] Referred to in Berger to Rosenwald, April 27, 1953. ACJP Unp "Elmer Berger: Personal"

[49] Ibid., cf. Coleman to Members of the National Executive Committee, June 28, 1955. LJRP, "Ready Reference, 1955."

[50] Unless otherwise specified, the rest of the details of Berger's trip can be found in Who Knows Better Must Say So!, New York, 1955. This book is collection of the letters which Berger wrote while on this trip to Rosenwald and Coleman.

received. Berger cited this incident as the most "pathetic" one of the whole journey.

Berger spent his first several days in the Middle East in Cairo. By the end of the trip he would also visit Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus, Tangiers, both Jerusalem, Jordan and Jerusalem, Israel, and Haifa. Although Jews could generally not get visas to visit Arab counties, Berger had some government contacts through his association with American Friends of the Middle East (to be discussed shortly), and he was able to cut through all of the necessary "red tape" with their assistance.[51] Furthermore, it is clear that he did not visit these cities as a tourist, but rather that he was seeing what was going on there as an interested observer of Middle Eastern affairs. In the Arab countries he visited, he would see government officials, refugee camps, leaders of the Jewish communities, etc. Occasionally he would also speak to various groups who were interested in his perspective.

It is also clear that, by this point he had become solidly critical of Israel and pro-Arab in his orientation. Although he said that he went to the area trying to be as objective as possible, he was consistently critical of Israel and usually full of praise for what the Arab countries had to offer. For example, writing from Beirut on May 8, 1955, Berger told of discussions which he had had with Jewish leaders in Baghdad. He told of how Israeli plans to move the entire population of Iraqi Jews to

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[51] Berger interviews.

Israel shortly after the creation of the state led to the Iraqi government clamping down on immigration rights and increased incidents of antisemitism.

Many of the meetings which Berger had with Arab officials while he was in the Middle East were set up for him by contacts of his through an organization known and "American Friends of the Middle East." AFME was ostensibly established to serve as a "think tank" and discussion forum which would deal with issues concerning the Middle East. In reality, however, it was a front organization for the CIA. At its monthly meetings, various CIA operatives would present Berger with documents concerning Zionist activities in the Middle East. As a consultant to AFME, Berger interpreted these documents and tried to assess their significance. AFME also had an office or a contact person in the American embassy of most Middle Eastern countries. Since the organization was acting covertly through diplomatic channels, its people were able to cut through much of the "red tape" which people acting under the scrutiny of the public eye would have to confront. The contact people in the embassies were the ones who arranged for Berger to meet with various dignitaries during his visits in these countries.[52]

Berger's negative attitude toward Israel was also evident from the moment he set foot in that country. He consistently complained of his treatment there, pointing out that his government-appointed driver was assigned to eavesdrop on his conver-

[52] Berger interviews.

sations and report anything unusual to his superiors, that he was unable to schedule meetings with any ranking members of the Israeli government (this was not the case when he visited the Arab counties), etc. Although he praised some of Israel's economic achievements, they ended up receiving a negative evaluation from him. Thus, a kibbutz which he visited became an institution which suppressed individuality and forced adolescent boys to take up arms in order to protect themselves. The beautiful houses and trees of Jerusalem were only beautiful because they had been built by the Arabs who inhabited them before 1948. The King David Hotel was a disappointment also, except for the courteous Arab bell-hops who worked there. Berger stated that

> ...there is no hotel to compare with the St. Georges in Beirut; no boulevards to compare with those of Damascus; no bazaars like those of Cairo; no government building to compare with the gem of architecture where the Syrian Parliament meets.[53]

In fact, immediately after Berger left Israel, he wired back to the United States, "You will never appreciate your exile until you have been in and out of the homeland...."[54]

The extent to which Berger's sympathies had become allied with the Arab position in the Middle East became especially evident in a letter which he wrote from Damascus to the first Confirmation class of Lakeside Temple. In this letter, using romantic language which strangely seemed to echo that of certain

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[53] For these responses by Berger to Israel, cf. ibid., pp.78-83.

[54] Berger to [Mr. or Mrs. Isaac] Witkin, May 31, 1955. LJRP "Ready Reference, 1955."

Zionists extolling the Land of Israel, Berger spoke of being in the place where the prophets walked. He even referred to Damascus as "the cradle of our faith."[55]

While Berger was at the airport on May 31, ready to leave Israel, he was approached by two Israeli reporters who hurriedly interviewed him as he was making the final arrangements for his departure. On June 24, he was informed by a friend of his that the day after his departure, Israeli Radio broadcast a story in Arabic to Jordan about Berger's visit to Israel. His friend said that the report went as follows:

> Dr. Berger declared that his organization will establish in Israel an institution investing large amounts of money. Dr. Berger indicated his admiration for what Israel has achieved in settling the new immigrants; in promoting industry; in reclaiming land and utilizing it for the poor. He said that he is leaving Israel full of new knowledge about the country and that his contacts have promoted his spiritual relations with, and his great interest in, Israel.
>
> Dr. Berger also expressed admiration for the statesmanship of Israel's leaders.[56]

Berger wrote back to his friend and explained that the report was a blatant lie and told of the context and of the real content of the interview. This was quoted in Who Knows Better Must Say So. But what is more telling is that section of the letter which was not reprinted. Berger wrote:

> You can see that the state is neither the fulfillment of my dreams nor do I regard its leadership as possessed of anything like the caliber of statesmanship required either for the endurance of the state or the peace of the Middle East. As for me--personally--I regard the state as a profa-

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[55] Quoted in Council News, July, 1955, p. 9.

[56] Berger to John Barwick, June 20, 1955. ACJP Unp, "Elmer Berger, 1956."

> nation of Judaism or as a hothouse for the preservation of excesses of Judaism which are completely out of tune with the hopes of a modern and enlightened world. I--personally--shall never return unless it be with witnesses to corroborate my experiences. I am more than ever convinced of the absolute necessity for Jews outside of Israel to divorce themselves completely from a situation the moral degradation of which is as apparent in the Arab refugee problem as in this smaller--but no less immoral--publicity stunt which you say was produced by the Israeli radio.[57]

Berger's hostility toward Israel was thus crystallized by this embittering experience, and his "objectivity" had given way to a vigorously negative view of Israel and what it had to offer.

Berger's Restatement of Council Objectives

Berger's trip to the Middle East and his further entrenchment into an anti-Israel position began a long process in which the Council re-examined its own objectives. Previously, the Council had seen itself as an organization whose primary goal was to preserve the wellbeing of American Judaism vis a vis the existence of Israel and the powerful Zionist movement which supported it. But once Berger had outlined the negative impact which he perceived that Israel had on worldwide Jewry, and on all inhabitants of the Middle East, the Council saw fit to re-examine exactly what it was trying to accomplish. Coleman stated this quite explicitly in the wake of Berger's letters from the Middle East.

> ...[I]t becomes increasingly clear--to me, at least--that the disclosures contained in Elmer's correspondence place upon the Council a very grave responsibility. We have, up to now, taken the position that our concern in the matter of

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[57] Ibid.

> Zionism relates only to its impact on American Jews. Elmer's correspondence seems to indicate that we must consider going behind this consideration and involving ourselves in a frank discussion of the sources and motivations of the Zionist pressures that we attempt to combat here.[58]

Upon Berger's return from the Middle East, he found it necessary to occupy himself with several political issues and with an his response to the Sinai Campaign of 1956. But by 1957, he was ready to make a statement to the leadership of the Council as to his own vision of the future of the organization and how its objectives should be defined for the future. This he did in a ten page memorandum to the National Advisory Board on December 2, 1957.[59]

In this lengthy statement, Berger said that he felt that the Council's proper objectives were most accurately summarized by a one sentence declaration which he had put on the ACJ letter-head the year before:

> The Council's active program enables American Jews to meet obligations in public affairs, religion and philanthropy in ways compatible with our beliefs rather than in the "Jewish" nationalist pattern of Zionism.

Despite the over-simplicity of the statement, and despite the fact that Berger was unsure whether the rank-and-file of the ACJ appreciated its full implications (and perhaps even because of these factors), Berger felt that the sentence needed to be

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[58] Coleman to Members of the National Executive Committee, June 28, 1955. LJRP "Ready Reference, 1955."

[59] Berger to National Advisory Board, December 2, 1957. LJRP, "Ready Reference, 1957."

recognized by the entire Council as one which accurately summarized its objectives.

Specifically, he felt that Israel was indeed a nationalist "machine" whose aims were first and foremost those of nation-building and, what's more, that that nationalism was a foreign nationalism which posed a threat to American Jews. Therefore, Berger saw the objectives of the Council as being threefold:
1. Through its educational program and other means, to explicate the true implications of Zionism and to "espouse, revive, and add to...the legitimate tradition of applying Judaism's universal truths to the particular environmental problems of American Jews.
2. To create institutions in line with this philosophy.
3. To create philanthropic structures separate and apart from those of the Zionists which would allow Jews to assist their "co-religionists" without simultaneously supporting Jewish nationalist ends.

Berger urged that these new objectives be implemented as soon as possible.

Coleman took a more radical view. Since the Council was experiencing severe financial difficulties, he first advocated the dissolution of the ACJ's educational program so that its efforts could be focused on public affairs. [60] Though he later retracted this proposal with an apology to those who worked in

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[60] Coleman to National Executive Committee, undated. ACJP Unp, "National Executive Committee Meeting, October 6, 1958."

the education department,[61] the fact that he was willing, at one point, to take such drastic measures illustrates the effect that the financial troubles of the Council were having on its policy. This became even more acute in 1958 when, upon the death of Aaron Strauss, one of the major donors to the Council, Berger went so far as to outline the possibility of liquidating the Council.[62]

Continuing Political Activities

Before continuing, it is important to note that, during the mid-1950s and early 1960s, Berger actively pursued the fulfillment of his goals regarding American foreign policy in the Middle East by strengthening his contacts in Washington however possible and by corresponding with high-ranking government officials there. He frequently would write to Dulles, Nixon, Eisenhower, etc., arguing that the United States should adopt a policy in line with his views and those of the ACJ.[63]

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[61] Coleman to National Executive Committee, October 24, 1958. Ibid.

[62] Berger to National Executive Committee, January 20, 1958. ACJP Unp, "National Executive Committee Meeting, February 10, Harmonie Club, New York City."

[63] For example, Berger to Eisenhower, August 6, 1956; Berger to Maxwell Rabb, October 9, 1956; Berger to Nixon, November 7, 1957. R.E. Cushman, Jr., Executive Assistant to the Vice President, to Berger, November, 14, 1957. Unprocessed Papers of Elmer Berger, [henceforth EBP Unp] Archives of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison WI, "Government: President Eisenhower, Vice President Nixon." Cf. Berger to Dulles, December 20, 1957. LJRP "Ready Reference, 1957."

The Sinai Campaign of 1956 was among the first real tests of the loyalty of American Jewry to the State of Israel. In the wake of the Israeli invasion of the Sinai and its capture of the Suez canal, the Eisenhower administration called for Israel to withdraw from the territories it had captured. Eisenhower did this as part of his more general attempt to woo Egypt to the American side of the Cold War. In response, American Jews deluged the White House and Congress with demands that the American Government adopt a more pro-Israel policy. Contributions to the UJA also rose dramatically in the wake of the Sinai campaign.[64]

As one might expect, Berger's response was quite different. When the confrontation broke out, the Bergers were vacationing in Key West, Florida. They were staying at a hotel, in relative anonymity, with several other Jews. With them, he sat outside on the veranda of the hotel and watched Eisenhower's televised speech in which he criticized Israel's behavior. Pleasantly, Berger found that most of the Jews staying at the hotel agreed with the President and were quite sympathetic to his response.[65]

Encouraged by this reaction, Berger returned to New York and coordinated the Council's response to the invasion. It too was critical of the invasion itself and of Israel's refusal to abide by the U.N's demands that it withdraw from it's newly-captured

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[64] Urofsky, We Are One!, op. cit., pp. 314-315.

[65] Telephone interview with Elmer Berger, February 16, 1990.

territory. In his analysis of the situation, Berger also looked (naively, as it turns out) to the response of American Jewry.

> There is hope [in the Administration] that as the Israeli role as a minor factor becomes clear, American Jews will reduce financial support and political petitions in [sic.] her behalf. The Administration hopes this process will handle by indirection a situation which it would be very unpleasant politically to handle by direct, Governmental action or statements. This Israel policy is talked of, officially, as the "little Israel policy."[66]

Thus, despite the widespread support which American Jewry showed for Israel at a time when her standing in American foreign policy was becoming insecure, Berger expectedly remained critical of the state, and implied hopes that the Sinai campaign would eventually lead to decreased American Jewish support for Israel in the political arena.

In general, the Council as led by Berger at this time was reactive, rather than pro-active in nature. That is to say, its behavior in the public sphere was primarily motivated by the desire to respond to certain statements or activities of the Israeli or American governments. Though there was a religious education program which consisted of the publication of various curricula which were in line with ACJ doctrine and their implementation in the ACJ schools, Berger had very little direct

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[66] Berger to members of the National Executive Committee, Confidential memorandum, February 11, 1957. LJRP, "Ready Reference, 1957." This memo was Berger's report to the NEC on a series of privileged conversations which he had had with Administration sources in Washington.

involvement with it and it was largely unsupported by the lay-leadership of the Council.[67]

Usually, these activities amounted to very little in the way of practical results. A government official would say or do something of interest to Berger, Berger would lead a vigorous campaign of either support or criticism of what had occurred, and the incident would quietly fade from view.

There was one small victory, however, which is worth noting. In October, 1959, the Department of the navy issued an information pamphlet for overseas military personnel entitled, "U.S. Naval Activities, Port Lyautey, Kenitra, Morocco." One section of it read,

> The principal population groups in Morocco are composed of Berbers and Arabs, Jews and Europeans, presenting an ethnic diversity as broad as the land they inhabit. About 95 percent of the total population is of the Moslem faith. Jews and Europeans are present in relatively small numbers.[68]

Once Berger had been made aware of this, he wrote to the Secretary of the Navy, responded to the passage from the pamphlet, and requested that it be changed. He said, in part,

> The Navy's publication distinguished between "Jews and Europeans" as a matter of "ethnic diversity." The impression is inescapable that Jews (who may have lived in North Africa for centuries or who may have come only recently from Europe) should be considered apart from other

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[67] Berger to Coleman, September 1, 1961; Coleman to Berger, September 5, 1961. EBP, "Memos to Dr. Berger." Though Berger does give lip-service to the education program in this correspondence, there is little evidence that he followed through with this support in any practical sense.

[68] Quoted in Berger to The Hon. William Birrell Franke, June 30, 1960. ACJP Unp, "Government Correspondence, 1960."

Moroccans or from other Europeans. Actually, individual Jews may well fall into either of these two groups.[69]

The Department of the Navy considered Berger's request and responded that, in future editions of the pamphlet, references to Jews as a "population group" would be deleted.[70]

Berger's Increasing Identification with the Arabs

We have already discussed the fact that, by the time Berger went to the Middle East in 1955, he was already largely sympathetic with the Arab cause. But as the 1950s and 1960s went on, this became increasingly so. One of Berger's close friends, for example, was a low-level Arab diplomat who worked for various Arab organizations in the United States, by the name of Fayez Sayegh. Since Sayegh knew the workings of the Arab political world, he was able to give Berger entree into that world and show him how to accomplish as much as possible within it.

Sayegh, it is important to note, had also done some work for the Palestine Liberation Organization.[71] In fact, Berger was associated, throughout the years, with many people who themselves were associated with the PLO. Among them were Walid Khalidi,

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[69]. Ibid.

[70] D.D. Overby to Berger, July 7, 1960, ibid.

[71] Fayez A. Sayegh, The United Nations and the Palestine Question, Research Center, Palestine Liberation Organization, Beirut, Lebanon, May, 1965. EBP, "The Palestine Liberation Organization." There is also one letter which Saadat Hassan, of the PLO's Permanent Delegation in New York, wrote to Berger containing references to several Hebrew textbooks on Jewish history which had been sent to his office. The letter referred to a previous conversation between Berger and Dr. Burhan Hammad.

Edward Said, Adnan Pachachi, and others. Berger has also had a couple of brief meetings with Yasir Arafat, although the two didn't discuss anything of importance while they were together.[72]

Also, Berger's increasing association with Arabs can be illustrated by the fact that, with increasing frequency, Berger addressed and wrote for Arab student groups during these years. Among the groups he addressed and for which he wrote were the Arab Clubs of Cornell University, Northern Illinois University, and M.I.T., the Organization of Arab Students (especially the Chapters at the Universities of Illinois and Wisconsin), the Arab American Club of the University of Minnesota, the General Union of Palestine Students, and others.

Berger's response to the Eichmann case is of interest in this context. Based on his ideology, one would think that Berger's response to the trial of Adolf Eichmann would have been to challenge the right of the state of Israel to bring Eichmann to trial in the first place, especially since Israel claimed to be trying him in the name of the Jewish people. Indeed, this was the response of Coleman and other lay-leaders of the Council.[73]

Berger's initial response, however, was very different. In an undated memorandum on the Eichmann Case, he wrote:

> It is my considered opinion that one of the principal reasons for the Israeli apprehension of Eichmann and his abduc-

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[72] Berger interviews.

[73] Coleman, undated letter to Secretary Herber, probably from early July, 1961. EBP, "The Eichmann Case." Later, Berger came to accept this view as well. Cf. Berger to Leonard Sussman, January 22, 1962. EBP, "Memos to Dr. Berger."

> tion to Israel for trial is the hope of exploiting the trial as a propaganda tool against the Arabs. In my judgement also, Gamel (sic.) Abdul Nasser's UAR will be the principal target.

Berger predicted that Israel would use the trial as an opportunity to establish strong ties between the Nazis and the Arabs during World War II. He went on to urge that a counter-propaganda attack be initiated in conjunction with Arab leaders, and that such an attack should refrain from challenging Israel's right to try Eichmann.[74]

"The Berger-Mallison Project"

As Berger became increasingly involved in arguments over the legal implications of Zionism for American Jews, especially in the wake of the Eichmann Case, he eventually saw that he would need the assistance of someone trained in U.S. law as it applied to those issues with which the Council was concerned. This need led to his association with Dr. W. Thomas Mallison, Jr.

Mallison, a professor of International Law at George Washington University, knew very little about the Middle East when Berger first met him in the early 1960s. But when Berger and Mallison originally met to discuss the agenda of the ACJ, Berger recalls that Mallison replied:

> [I]f what I had told him of the facts was accurate he thought we had a case; and if upon examining the facts himself he felt we did have a case he would be glad to help

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[74] "Memorandum on the Eichmann Case," undated. Ibid.

in preparing it since it appeared to be potentially of great interest.[75]

Berger related Mallison's interest to the lay-leadership of the Council, who initially gave their support to a study of the legal implications of Zionism. So began what was to be known as "The Berger-Mallison Project."

More specifically, the Berger-Mallison Project had four main facets:

1. A comprehensive research program regarding the historic, legal, and political activities of the World Zionist Organization and the state of Israel.
2. Documentation of the "damage" done to American Jews by the WZO and the state of Israel.
3. A recommendation to the U.S. government, by means of a legal brief, to end this damage.
4. Distribution and publication of that brief.[76]

The Council took Mallison on as its chief legal consultant in 1961, and began pouring huge amounts of time, money and energy into supporting the Project and its goals. The Project would eventually culminate in the publication of two legal studies on the implications of Zionism. The first came to be known as "The Jewish People Study," and was published in the June, 1964 edition of the George Washington University Law Review; and the second

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[75] Memoirs, p. 46. Biographical information of Mallison from ACJP Unp, "Mallison, William T."

[76] ACJ Brief, June, 1962, "Berger-Mallison Project Advances."

was a study of the Status Law, which was published in the Spring, 1969 issue of the Law Review of William and Mary College.[77]

Significantly, this culmination did not fulfill in any direct way any of the original goals (specifically, numbers three and four as listed above) of the Project. In fact, after the ACJ contributed such vast amounts of its resources to the project (approximately $10,000 in legal fees to Mallison, as Berger recalls), much of the leadership was disappointed in its results. "We never got any satisfaction," Coleman would recall, and indeed, the publication of a couple of articles in some law journals could not be expected to be of much interest to a lay-leadership concerned--in a very real and tangible sense--with the implications of Zionism and Israel on their own lives.[78]

The Talbot Letter

Amidst the frustration of the Berger-Mallison Project, there was one moment of hope. By mid-1963, Berger had been carrying on a correspondence for several months with Phillips Talbot, Assistant Secretary of State, in which he tried to persuade Talbot of the veracity of the Council's views.[79] Finally, and in apparent desperation, Berger used Mallison's assistance in drafting a 43 page letter which he sent to Talbot on October 14, 1963. In it,

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[77] Memoirs, pp. 46-47.

[78] Coleman interview, June 11, 1989.

[79] Referred to in Talbot to Berger, June 23, 1963, EBP, "Talbot Letter, March 14, 1964."

he frequently quoted the State Department's Digest of International Law, and he argued for an explicit recognition on the part of the U.S. government that there was no connection in U.S. law between the state of Israel and "Americans of the Jewish Faith."[80] The ACJ was thus not merely concerned that the government or public opinion would impugn American Jews' loyalty to the United States--they found it necessary to make sure that the American government would not recognize the Jews a legitimate group and therefore give that conception legitimacy.

Talbot responded politely to Berger's queries.

> It seems to me that the Department's position is very clear and gives no ground for alarm on the part of any of our fellow citizens. We are quite prepared to take up specific cases in which it seems that the interests of individual American citizens may have been injured or threatened by the action of a foreign state, whether it be Israel or another. As a practical matter, however, it has long been the judgment and practice of the Department that it refrain from taking stands on hypothetical cases or broadly challenging the citizenship laws or policies of other states which may not accord with our own.[81]

Berger's response was to once again consult with Mallison and draft another long letter to Talbot which further expounded the Council's views from a legal perspective. The 41 page letter was sent to Talbot of March 14, 1964.[82]

Talbot's reply was, in a certain sense, the victory of a lifetime for Berger. Writing on April 20, 1964, Talbot stated,

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[80] Berger to Talbot, October 14, 1963, ibid.

[81] Talbot to Berger, December 26, 1963, ibid.

[82] Berger to Talbot, March 14, 1964, ibid.

> The Department of State recognizes the State of Israel as a sovereign State and citizenship of the State of Israel. It recognizes no other sovereignty or citizenship in connection therewith. It does not recognize a legal-political relationship based upon the religious identification of American citizens. It does not in any way discriminate among American citizens upon the basis of their religion.
>
> Accordingly, it should be clear that the Department of State does not regard the "Jewish people" concept as a concept of international law.[83]

Berger heralded the Talbot letter as the victorious culmination of the 21 years of work which he and others had contributed to the Council. While not intending to read too much into its long range significance, he did speak in glowing terms of the importance of the Talbot letter in a communique to the ACJ membership.

> It is--in the first place--an unequivocal declaration of policy that the central, legal-political claims of the Zionist-Israeli sovereignty, often embodied in law, are inconsistent with the fundamental, Constitutional rights of United States Citizens....
>
> It is a clear shift of U.S. policy from acquiescence, or apparent acquiescence, of the United States Government in these "Jewish people" claims of the Zionist-Israeli sovereignty, to a policy of clear and explicit rejection of these claims for United States citizens...
>
> It is a significant contribution to, and clarification of, international law bearing on the relationship of Jews in countries other than Israel to the Israeli state. The fact that many American Jews and their voluntary organizations may have privately entertained reservations about these "Jewish people" claims had no impact on international law. Only the action of a sovereign state can affect international law.[84]

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[83] Talbot to Berger, April 20, 1964, ibid. The reader is left wondering whether Talbot wrote this letter to get Berger off his back after the long and voluminous correspondence in which the two had engaged.

[84] Berger to ACJ members, May 22, 1964, ibid.

Berger went on to say that the important job was now to interpret and implement the full implications of the Talbot letter as they related to American Constitutional law and the state of Israel.

Unfortunately for Berger and the Council, the State Department failed to follow through on the Talbot letter in any practical sense. Coleman had warned Berger that he (Berger) was probably reading too much into the letter, and ended up being correct. The letter "dropped" in the State Department, and nothing was ever done with it.[85]

Berger's Breakdown: The Beginning of the End

On April 23, 1964, three days after the Talbot letter was sent, Berger received a troubling memo from Coleman. In it, Coleman accused Berger of evaluating the Talbot letter in such grandiose terms so as to advance his own career, rather than to advance the interests of the Council. The memo also pointed out the fact that Berger would frequently go to Washington and negotiate with his contacts in the State Department there without informing the other leaders of the Council as to what he was doing.[86]

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[85] Referred to in Berger to Coleman, April 24, 1964. EBP, "Clarence L. Coleman, Jr., 1963-1964." Also, Coleman interview, June 11, 1989.

[86] I was not able to find this memo, but I have been able to reconstruct its contents with what I hope is a reasonable amount of accuracy from Berger to Coleman, April 27, 1964, EBP, "Clarence L. Coleman, Jr., 1963-1964;" Coleman Interview, June 11,

(continued...)

On the afternoon of April 24, undoubtedly physically exhausted and emotionally drained by the events of the previous few days, Berger received a telephone call from someone who informed him that King Hussein was in town and was very interested in meeting him at a cocktail party that night. Berger hurried home, picked up his wife, Ruth, and went to the party. There he met King Hussein and had a friendly conversation with him about peace and understanding in the Middle East, and about how the Council could play an active role in clarifying the relevant issues.

After the party, Dr.[87] and Mrs. Berger went to a nearby restaurant for dinner. There, he turned to his wife and tearfully said, "How can I go on and on and on trying to project a constituency which I do not have with me and dealing with attitudes such as those evidenced in Buddie [Coleman]'s letter to me today?"

Mrs. Berger continues telling the story:

> His face was grey and his hands were shaking so I said, "Let's get out of here." I had to pay the check for him and

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[86](...continued)
1989; Ruth Berger to Coleman, April 25, 1964, LJRP, "Berger, Dr. Elmer, American Council for Judaism, 1964;" and Berger interviews. Unless otherwise specified, information on the details of this incident is from the letter from Mrs. Berger.

[87] The evolution of "Rabbi" Berger to "Dr." Berger is itself interesting. Berger never received a doctorate from any academic institution. He recalls that as he became involved in the Council he realized that people in his circles referred to any educated person as "Dr." At first he resisted this, but later he acquiesced. (Telephone interview with Berger, February 16, 1990) That he accepted this title could imply that, in his own mind and those of others, his anti-Zionist spokesmanship and indeed his entire identity most likely shifted from being a specifically Jewish one to one which was more secular in nature.

> we left and in the taxi home Elmer just sat with his head upon my shoulder and cried.
>
> When we got home, he just sat and let me take off his shoes, sox [sic.] and cuff links like a limp rag or a helpless baby and after he had stumbled into the bath room several times and been violently ill, I finally called the doctor to give him a sedative.

Indeed, Berger's disaffection with the Council had been brewing for some time. As early as 1959, Berger had written of the "difficulties" he was having with the ACJ regarding the general policy of the organization and the nature of the work which he was doing for it.[88]

But by the time of the Talbot Letter, the problems had become significantly worse. In addition to the frustration which Berger was feeling, he was also angry that the Council was not supporting his desire to explore the implications of the Talbot Letter. Berger wrote to Coleman that he had fought to put up "the best possible front" for the Council in Washington and with various other organizations, but that after 21 years of fighting, he was "depleted of intellectual, spiritual, and moral enthusiasm to the extent that [he] regard[ed] opportunities to 'front' The Council with distaste." Furthermore, Berger acknowledged that there had been a great deal of infighting and criticism within the Council but, he said, those who criticized him had never confronted him. He therefore argued that the issues should be confronted head-on. Also, Berger claimed to have a degree of expertise in matters relating to Washington

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[88] Berger to D. Hays Solis-Cohen, February 25, 1959, EBP, "Solis-Cohen, Mr. D. Hays."

politics and, especially since he himself had invested so much energy in the Talbot letter, he expressed resentment at the implication that he was interpreting it incorrectly. Berger reiterated his call for a head-on confrontation of the issues and threatened to resign if it did not happen.[89]

Although Berger continued his political activities during the rest of 1964 and early 1965, he began to feel increasingly unhappy in his position with the Council. Finally, on May 17, 1965, he decided to make a definitive statement of where he stood with the ACJ in a letter to Coleman. In this letter, Berger restated some of the fundamentals of his ideology and stated that he was under the impression that most of the Council agreed with him on these and that their differences were not ideological, but tactical and strategic in nature. He did, however, say that he was among the few people involved with the Council who wanted to completely "destroy" Zionism and whose strategies and tactics were aimed at that end. Berger also said that the Council, in his view, needed to do whatever it could to capitalize upon all of its potential constituencies, namely, American non-Jews, American non-Zionists, and American anti-Zionists. He felt that the Council was not reaching its potential in this area. Berger further complained of the lack of vision among the membership of the ACJ and that the staff had become over-bureaucratized and disorganized. Finally, he told Coleman that he was getting

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[89] Berger to Coleman, April 27, 1964, EBP, "Clarence L. Coleman, Jr., 1963-1964."

older, and that the physical strains of his position were becoming burdensome.

In general, Berger complained of his increasing isolation from the leadership, staff, and rank-and-file membership of the Council. He said that the only encouragement he was receiving was from his contacts in Washington and in the business and academic communities. He closed by saying that he saw two alternatives for the immediate future.

> (1) I have stated my position often enough, though perhaps never as detailed as here. The next move is up to the Council, or
> (2) I will proceed as I do now, which is to say with one eye on the disintegration relationship and - in the absence of any sufficient interest from The Council in the matter - the reserving of the right to call it quits at almost any moment when the one-way effort to repair the situation or to obtain some understanding of it, is just too much for Ruth and me to carry any longer.[90]

With the reasons for his dissatisfaction thus stated, the final phase of Berger's relationship with the American Council for Judaism had begun. We shall see the extent to which it deteriorated as time progressed.

The Final Break

Berger's unhappiness with the Council and its policies continued throughout the mid-1960s. As his identification with Arab groups and individuals grew, as he spent more and more time in Washington, and as he became increasingly fatigued in a

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[90] Berger to Coleman, May 17, 1965. EBP, "Clarence L. Coleman, Jr., 1965.

physical sense, his relationship with the Council leadership continuously disintegrated.

The events surrounding the outcome of the Six Day War sealed Berger's fate regarding the Council. Berger urged that the U.S. encourage Israel to be as "generous as possible" regarding these issues, and he feared that, were Israel not to be generous, its conflicts with the Arabs would be worsened. More than any time in the past, Berger felt, the principles for which the Council stood needed to be promulgated however possible.[91]

Many of his supporters disagreed with this sentiment. Because the American Jewish community was so elated at the results of the 1967 war, Berger came under an enormous amount of pressure from many members of the Council to recognize Israel's victory and to join in the celebration. Clearly, the mere suggestion of doing this was diametrically opposed to the approach which Berger wanted to take.

Berger was deeply affected by the events of that time.It was a period of the most acute depression he had ever known.

> It was not that the Arabs had lost another battle. It was, first of all, because the United States had disgraced itself. It had broken all of its promises to guarantee the territorial integrity of all the states in the area. Right and left, the Arab states broke off relations with the United States. The depression was occasioned also by the arrogance and smug self-righteousness of the Zionist/Israel establishment, no less repugnant for all the redolence of Mr. Eban's incessant talking. And perhaps, above all, the depression was occasioned by the intoxication of American

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[91] Memoirs, pp. 108-113.

> Jews. I began to believe that every assumption on which I had worked for two decades was proven wrong.[92]

As a result of the frustration which Berger and many other members of the Council were feeling, he and Richard Korn, then President of the Council, went to meet with Arthur "Punch" Sulzberger, of the New York Times, to inquire as to the reasons for the newspaper's bias against the policies and opinions of the Council.

Sulzberger, a golf partner of Korn's, was receptive to their comments, and he responded by sending out a reporter, Richard Krebs, to do a feature story on the Council. Krebs interviewed Berger and Korn, and when the story came out, it had Berger explicitly identifying Israel as the aggressor in the Middle East, and it had him openly criticizing several leaders of major Jewish organizations.

Although he didn't originally intend to be so blatant, Berger refused to retract anything in the article. As a result, the Council's critics, who had accused the organization for years of being pro-Arab and anti-Israel, now had ammunition for the battle. Many major supporters of the Council were becoming increasingly respectful of Israel's achievements. As the article was being sent to press, Coleman wrote to Norton Mezvinsky, then Executive Director of the Council, and related the feelings of many people in the organization.

> ...I know that our members, by and large, want to be assured that their continued support for The Council does not mean

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[92] Ibid., p. 113.

> their undying hatred of the State of Israel or, of even greater importance, their endorsement of the position and tactics of the Arabs....People will not pay the ultimate price for anti-Zionism. They are "Jews" and share (and delight in) the accomplishments of their fellow Jews. Their sympathies, not unnaturally, are with Israel, certainly in the recent outbreak where nothing has been said to alter the attitude of most Americans...that Israel was justified in acting as she did.[93]

As a result, many major supporters of the Council threatened to withdraw their support and/or resign unless Berger either retracted or left the ACJ.[94]

Berger remained adamant and continued to criticize Israel and express his sympathy with the Arab cause.

Berger's "Special Project"

During this tumultuous period in Berger's life, there was one ray of hope which, though eventually unfulfilled, did rejuvenate Berger to a certain extent. On May 10, 1968, he sent a "strictly personal and confidential" letter to several of his supporters to report on some recent events in Washington.

> Eighteen months ago...I prepared an elaborate plan for attempting to help U.S. policy-makers cope with Zionist obstructionism....The plan called for a <u>private</u> White House conference to which 50-75 of the country's most prominent and powerful Jews would be invited for a direct appeal from the President and/or the Secretary of State. <u>Prominent</u> Council members would be deliberately eliminated....The central proposition of my plan was that there is a substantial number of genuinely influential Jews whose interest in Israel can be roughly described as wishing for any <u>reason-</u>

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[93] Coleman to Mezvinsky, July 13, 1967. EBP, "<u>C</u>" (Miscellaneous), 1965.

[94] Details of this incident are taken from <u>Memoirs</u>, pp. 113-117; Berger to Coleman, July 12, 1967, EBP, "Clarence L. Coleman, Jr.;" and Coleman interview, June 11, 1989.

> able compromise between Israel and the Arabs which, at the same time, safeguards U.S. interests. In a loose sense, I had in mind leading Jews who often say they agree with The Council but do not support it...

Berger went on to say that he had recently been reminded of this plan in Washington by "personal representatives of `the very highest authorities,'" and that he needed to compile a list of 75-100 prominent Jews who would be good candidates for such a conference. He requested five or six names from each person to whom he sent the letter, and he assured them that their anonymity would be maintained.[95]

The names came back. His supporters sent him over 70 names, and Berger come up with over 60 of his own. Together, these lists read like a veritable "Who's Who" of American Jewry. Arthur Rubloff, Phillip Klutznick, Jacob Javitz, and Bruce Gimbel (of Gimbel Brothers' Department Store) are but a few of the names who were suggested for this meeting of "closet" supporters of the Council.[96]

Unfortunately for Berger, he left the Council before anything could be done with the list of names which he was able

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[95] Berger to several major supporters, May 10, 1968. EBP, "Berger, Elmer, 1968, Special Project." That "prominent Council members" were to be "deliberately eliminated" was presumably to add credibility to the meeting. Berger said that, although he had been unavoidably associated with the project, neither he nor the Council would play any visible role in its final stages.

[96] Names taken from several letters from EBP, "Berger, Elmer, 1968, Special Project." It is important to note that some recipients of Berger's original letter interpreted his request to be for a list of prominent American Jews, regardless of their ideological bent. For the most part, however, his request was clear and people responded accordingly.

to compile. The "Special Project" therefore died before anything reaching fruition.

Berger's Departure

Berger had been discussing his resignation from the Council since the mid-1960s. Finally, in the minutes of the National Executive Committee meeting of June 30, 1968, the following paragraph appeared:

> During the executive session, Dr. Berger re-tendered his resignation and withdrew from the meeting. After further discussion, a motion was made to accept the resignation with deep regret and with appreciation of his 25 years of service and of his offer to be of help to The Council in the future. It was passed by a vote of 17 to 2 with one abstention.[97]

On July 11, Richard Korn sent a memo to the National Advisory Board informing them of what had transpired. It read, in part:

> The resignation was due both to Rabbi Berger's desire to reduce his organizational responsibilities and to a long growing and deep seated disagreement between Rabbi Berger and some members of the N.E.C. regarding the extent to which it was proper for The Council to openly recommend a policy for the United States in the Middle East, or even associate itself with the official United States policy, regardless of whether doing so resulted in The Council giving an impression of being anti-Israel and/or pro-Arab. While it was recognized that Rabbi Berger's unreported activities were vital to the anti-Zionist cause, the belief of the majority present was that the anti-Zionist cause which it serves would be better assisted by accepting Rabbis Berger's resignation.[98]

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[97] Minutes, National Executive Committee Meeting, June 30, 1968, Delmonico Hotel, New York, New York. LJRP, "1968 Annual Meeting and National Executive Committee."

[98] Korn to National Advisory Board, July 11, 1968. Ibid.

The report served as an impetus for a huge letter-writing campaign on the part of those members of the Council who supported Berger. Rosenwald, Coleman, and Korn each received several memoranda and letters expressing outrage at the acceptance of Berger's resignation and urging that the decision be reversed.

Among the most vociferous supporters of Berger at this time was Moshe Menuhin.[99] Menuhin led a group of Berger's supporters in a "proxy" battle to get Berger reinstated. Berger, physically exhausted by this time, warily agreed to cooperate.

Therefore, prior to the meeting of the National Advisory Board. at the Delmonico Hotel in New York on October 19, each member of the Council received two proxy statements in the mail. One was from the Coleman-Rosenwald camp, which supported the ouster of Berger. The other was from Berger himself, in which he made his own case.[100]

As the controversy was intensifying, and as the meeting of the National Advisory Board approached, Berger left the country. Having been invited to be a banquet speaker at a fund-raising event in Beirut co-sponsored by the Fifth of June Society, Friends of Jerusalem, and Americans for Justice in the Middle

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[99] Menuhin was the father of the famous violinist, Yehudi Menuhin.

[100] Moshe Menuhin, The Decadence of Judaism in our Time, Beirut, 1969, pp. 570-579; Memoirs, pp. 119-121; Berger to National Advisory Board, undated, LJRP, "1968 Dr. Elmer Berger."

East, Berger reluctantly accepted.[101] One can only speculate as to the true motivation for Berger's attendance at this event. Having been forced to deal with such sweeping criticism by his colleagues in the Council, it is understandable that he would take a trip to a place where he knew he would find widespread support.

In any event, the Delmonico meeting took place, and Berger and his supporters lost by a vote of 714 to 151.[102]

With the vote, Elmer Berger's 25-year career with the American Council for Judaism had come to an end. From the beginning of his association with the group until the time of his dismissal, Berger's work was largely characterized by controversy--at times internal and at times external. To some he was a prophet, to others a heretic. He perceived himself as a person striving to maintain the highest ideals of Judaism. Many of his critics saw him as a self-hating Jew. Yet, however others reacted to him, we can safely say that between 1948 and 1968, Elmer Berger constantly strove to let his voice be heard. The extent to which others listened to it will be examined in the next chapter and in the Conclusion.

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[101] Memoirs, pp. 117-119.

[102] Menuhin, op. cit., pp. 55-559.

Chapter III

Imagining Berger

Webster's Dictionary defines a symbol as "something that stands for or represents another thing; especially an object used to represent something abstract." With this definition in mind, it is easy to understand why symbolism is so necessary a part of the world of political and religious ideologies. With a meaningful symbol, one can recall a vast array of complex ideas and images, replete with all of the subtleties they might possess, merely at the mention of a certain object, event or person.

If this is true on an individual level, it is true to an even greater extent for groups of people and communities. One scholar summed it up this way:

> A symbol which encompasses the temper of a community encompasses that particular world. Anything in that world can become a symbol; it need only have something of the spiritual "charge," of the intuitive heritage which lends the world meaning, gives it character, and reveals its mystery. The community lays hold of some detail of its world, apprehends the totality in it, and derives from it and through it that totality and its content. The more such a detail contains within it of the specific character of that community's world, the more it is suited in the eyes of the community to become a symbol.[1]

To a certain extent, Elmer Berger became a symbol in American Jewish life during the period being studied. As we shall see, his association with the ACJ and his anti-Zionist activities

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[1] Gershom Scholem, "The Star of David: History of a Symbol," The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality, Michael A. Meyer, trans., New York, 1971, p. 257.

caused his name to acquire the above-mentioned "spiritual `charge'" which thus gave it the status of a symbol.

We shall also see that the totality which various American Jews perceived in Berger varied depending on their stance on Zionism. To all who were familiar with him, Berger came to symbolize anti-Zionism, but that meant different things to different people. For most American Zionists, especially those affiliated with the Reform movement, Berger came to represent all that they were not. Unlike Berger they were <u>not</u> "self-hating", "assimilationist", "Classical Reform", anti-Zionist Jews. To them, in other words, Berger's image was a negative one of all that they strove to be. For the anti-Zionists, on the other hand, Berger came to symbolize the highest ideals of Judaism as they applied to anti-Zionist ideology. For all, the image of Elmer Berger conjured up images of anti-Zionism and all of its attendant emotions.

Unmitigated Hatred: The Zionist Response[2]

As is to be expected, a man such as Elmer Berger, who challenged the very foundations of Zionism however and whenever he could, could hardly have been expected to have been greeted

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[2] It is interesting to note the responses of acquaintances of mine who are in rabbinical circles when I tell them that I am researching the life of Elmer Berger. They range from raised eyebrows accompanied by a surprised "Oh!?" to name-calling containing vocabulary not appropriate for these pages. Among the most telling responses were, "There are doctors who need to research cancer...you need to research Elmer Berger," and "Is this a lead-in to your next thesis on Hitler?"

On the other hand, I have received a few inquiries about my research from rabbis who are clearly sympathetic to what Berger had to say.

with very much favor by those in the Zionist camp. What is interesting, however, is the degree of vehemence with which they attacked him. In all of the criticisms of Berger and the ACJ, rarely can one find an appraisal which is a rational and dipassionate one. Rather, most of the critiques can be characterized by vicious name-calling, personal character attacks, and what seem to be "knee-jerk" responses to Berger and his thought.[3]

The denunciations began at the outset. Immediately after the creation of the ACJ, the CCAR adopted a resolution calling for the members of the organization to terminate it.[4] Of course, the leadership of the ACJ refused to accede to this demand.

Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld, a member of the CCAR, was appointed by the Zionist Emergency Council to head a "Committee on Unity for Palestine" (CUP), which had chapters in over 130 cities. The stated purpose of this committee was specifically to combat the ACJ. It did so through an extensive information (propaganda?) campaign in which it distributed "hundreds of thousands of pieces of literature" attacking the Council and its

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[3] For the rest of this chapter, I will be using Berger and the ACJ interchangeably when referring to the subject of these attacks. While not all of the criticisms of the ACJ were levelled at Berger in particular, the leadership of the organization was largely a one-man operation at the time, and thus most of the attacks were aimed at some aspect of Berger's work.

[4] CCAR Yearbook, Volume 53, p. 92. Quoted in David Polish, Renew our Days, p. 231.

activities. The committee flourished during the years 1943 and 1944.[5]

Zionist organs such as The Jewish Frontier, The New Palestine (which became The American Zionist), and Reconstructionist also contained many vicious attacks on the ACJ.[6] They began, in fact, at the outset. For example, one column gloatingly spoke of the effect which the U.N. partition plan had on the ACJ and its leaders.

> But what that decision did to the American Council for Judaism! It shouldn't happen to a dog. It found the very ground quaking under its feet. It sank into lethargy for days and weeks. Its leaders became speechless from the impact of it all as if they didn't know what hit them. Flabbergasted is the word.[7]

In general, the Zionist response to Berger, the ACJ, and its activities was to portray all of them as comprising a formidable threat which, though representing the views of only a small number of Jews, did have strong financial backing and wielded a great deal of influence in high circles. This was therefore a

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[5] Melvin I. Urofsky, We are One, p. 70. Also, Samuel Halperin, "Zionist Counterpropaganda: The Case of the American Council For Judaism," The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly, March, 1961, pp. 450-463. I was not able to find examples of CUP's literature.

[6] Cf. Eliezar Whartman, "The American Council for Judaism and the Hate Vendors," The Jewish Frontier, December, 1954, pp. 14-19; Ben Halpern, "The Anti-Zionist Phobia: Legal Style," Midstream, June, 1955, pp. 74-85; "The Die-Hard Opposition of the American Council For Judaism," The Reconstructionist, May 13, 1949, pp. 5-7; "The Narrow Nationalism of the American Council for Judaism," The Reconstructionist, May 4, 1951, pp. 3-5; "The Anti-Zionism of the American Council for Judaism," The Reconstructionist, April 4, 1958, p. 4.

[7] David Eidelsberg, "Lo, the Poor Council," New Palestine, February 18, 1948, p. 7.

rabbi and an organization to be dealt with, and not to be taken lightly. One Zionist leader responded to the activities of the ACJ by saying:

> Our government must be sustained by an alert public opinion if it is to resist various anti-Israel pressures which are now being exerted and which may be intensified in the future. American Zionists must keep watch and ward to maintain public interest and public sympathy for the struggling young republic, as well as extend every possible economic assistance.[8]

At one point, the notion that the activities of the Council should not be ignored was stated quite explicitly.

> There are many of the opinion that the activities of the group should be ignored. We cannot share this view. Their activities, if ignored, might...do serious harm to the relationship between America and the Jewish state. Their designs and activities must be exposed and nullified.[9]

It was also evident in the Zionist writings that the Council, especially its leaders, were perceived as posing a serious threat.

> ...[T]he hard core--the Rosenwalds and Bergers, [etc.], these are the intractable and the monomanic, the fanatical bitter-enders. They are sworn foes of Israel and of Zionism. We make a serious mistake if we underestimate their power and wealth or if we believe that ridicule will foil them. They are impervious to ridicule. Against such as these, American Zionists must remain constantly on guard, constantly vigilant. These people sought by every possible means, fair or foul, to prevent the establishment of the state of Israel and they will hesitate at nothing to bring about its downfall.

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[8] Emanuel Neumann to ZOA Executive Committee, quoted in New Palestine, April 29, 1949.

[9] New Palestine, editorial, May, 1950, p. 2. Cf. ibid., "Mobilize Your Community," p. 3.

> Let us not forget their vow--to be a thorn in our sides--and let us be equally determined in our devotion to our people.[10]

The threat which Berger and his organization posed, however, was not only to the security and well-being of the fledgling state of Israel. By being so outspoken in its anti-Zionist views, the ACJ threatened the image of a unified American Jewry which had joined as one in support of the Zionist cause.

> The fantastic charges of the Council, their violation of basic Jewish beliefs, the antics of its spokesmen, the bad taste and apparent hypocrisy of its hired promoters had long taxed the patience of the community and threatened the unity and welfare of American Jewry. Even the comedy of anti-Zionists prostrating themselves to the ground and offering obeisance to manifest a patriotism superior to that of millions of their brethren, even that comedy could no longer hold the stage....
>
> When it instigated certain prominent, non-Jewish Americans--more befuddled about Jews and Judaism than even its own members--to repeat the Rosenwald-Berger-Wallach prattle and gibberish about different qualities of civic duty and devotion, it reached the height of outrage and absurdity.[11]

Later, a new element was added to the propaganda war against the council. It was now argued that not only did the ACJ imperil Israel, and not only did in factionalize the American Jewish community, but its activities aided and abetted the efforts of antisemites in the United States and elsewhere. For example, one Zionist leader responded to Berger's critique of Zionism by stating that

> Rabbi Berger's attack on Zionism [in a recent ACJ Conference speech] as based on "a forgery of history" is a repudiation

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[10] Carl Alpert, "A Zionist at Large at the American Council for Judaism convention," New Palestine, May, 1951, p. 15.

[11] "Organized Jewry Repudiates the Un-Jewish Council," New Palestine, February, 1950.

> of everything that has been held sacred for the past 2000 years. Moreover, the same charge of "forgery of history' is contained in the vilest anti-semitic writings which have been distributed by bigots in this country and abroad and which have been used by Hitler in his campaign of extermination against the Jewish people....
>
> For a man who bears the title of rabbi to hurl the charge of totalitarianism against a movement which has redeemed a downtrodden and homeless people on its own soil is an act of shame and sheer recklessness.[12]

More specifically, it was pointed out that Gerald L.K. Smith, in his antisemitic The Cross and the Flag, had been quoted as saying that he was actually sympathetic to some Jews, including Berger. Berger and the others who received these sympathies would therefore be excluded from the list of those Jews whom he would have sent to concentration camps.

Berger responded to the accusation that the Council's activities contributed to the forces of antisemitism in the world by arguing that antisemitic citations of ACJ material shouldn't even be dignified (as Zionists often do) by being recognized as valid; that anti-Zionism and antisemitism should not be confused, since doing so interferes with the fight against antisemitism; and that what he perceived as the widespread approval of the Council by upstanding Americans should be weighed against the "lunatic fringe" of antisemites. The Council, he said, was dedicated to improving the lot of Jews in the United States, and was therefore opposed to antisemitism.[13]

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[12] "Browdy Denounces ACJ for Anti-Israel Bias," The American Zionist, April, 1952, p. 3.

[13] Elmer Berger, Judaism or Jewish Nationalism?, pp. 108-116.

The Council was also perceived as being assimilationist and therefore destructive to the overall health of the Jewish people. Responding to the remarks of Berger and others at the ACJ's 1953 San Francisco Conference, one Zionist editorialized:

> The line which began with the Protest Rabbiner, who denounced the First Zionist Congress, which led to Professor Sylvain Levy, who argued against the British Mandate at the Versailles Conference, and which led in turn to Jewish pro-Nazis who paraded in the streets of Berlin, shouting "Down with ourselves!" has now reached its terminus in San Francisco.
>
> In that city, a famous statue overlooks the Golden Gate. It could serve as a monument to the Council for Judaism; it is called, "The End of the Trail."[14]

Along the same lines, another Zionist commented that the leaders of the ACJ

> wish to have a type of Judaism which is as "Aryan" as possible, holding fast to the delusion that this renders them more secure of "acceptable." They wish to remove the "Jew" from "Judaism."[15]

As Zionism became more deeply entrenched in the American Jewish psyche, and as the existence became more of an established fact, the amount of criticism levelled against the Council and Berger decreased and revealed more security on the part of the Zionists. By the mid-1960s, therefore, the emphasis of that criticism which the Council still did receive had shifted to the extent that one Zionist leader was able to say:

> Particularly because the American Council for Judaism is utilizing its convention at the end of April [1965] to spew forth its poisonous propaganda through the press, it is

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[14] "On the Rampage," editorial, The American Zionist, June 5, 1953, p. 4.

[15] "ZOA Denounces Slanders by Anti-Zionist Council," The American Zionist, May 19, 1953, pp. 1-2.

> essential to inform the public that the Council constitutes an insignificant fraction of American Jewry, and that its activities and program have been repudiated time and again by all national Jewish organizations and all three branches of the American Rabbinate.[16]

That this Zionist still felt it necessary to criticize the ACJ reveals that a certain amount of insecurity was still being harbored by the movement. But that the criticism had shifted from one of inflating the significance of the Council to one of deflating it reveals that an important change had indeed occurred.

But Zionist journals were not the only forum for criticism of Berger and the ACJ. As time went on, an increasingly large amount of hate mail was received at the Council offices in New York. Much of it was aimed specifically at Berger. While most of it was quite vitriolic, the following letter typifies the tone of most of the letters received. Though lengthy, I quote it in its entirety to give the reader a sense of the vehemence with which Berger was attacked.

> To Rabbi Berger
> May you be buried alive:
>
> Troubler of Israel that you are, of whom it is said that "thine enemies and destroyers have come out of thee;" one who cringes before the Goy and prostitutes himself before those who are not his kith, but hides his face from his own broken and shattered people, saying that we are not a nation but only a religion, but all the while continues to live among the Goyim who hate you and destroy you, as in the Middle Ages!
>
> If they have not yet finished with you, just wait one more generation, and you will certainly be annihilated from

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[16] Dr. Max Nussbaum, "Judaists Hit a New Low," The American Zionist, May, 1965, p. 5.

under the heavens of God. Just wait, Berger! Think not that by being an American, and not a Jew - for only your religion is Jewish - you will escape. You will not escape the day of terror that will arise for all American Jews. The gallows of the K.K. Klan will be erected for you too. These will give no consideration to your being an American first. Those in whose veins there streams, or once streamed, a drop of Jewish polluted blood will not save themselves by subterfuge. You will surely be hanging on the gallows.

You are not the first to entertain such ideas; the German Jews preceded you, and you have seen how they were recompensed. For such as they and you there is no way of learning, except the hard way. But when your daughter, if any such thing you have, will be raped on the street and your house will be set on fire before your very eyes, then the spark of Jewishness left in you will reproach you for having gone back on your nation, since it did not help you. You will be knocking at the gates of Palestine, saying, it is my land, the land where my fathers and forefathers lie - the land history has given me - the Bible.

Are you afraid to lose your money by fighting one battle of Israel? It looks like it. I do not know how much the British pay you for doing this sort of work for them.

Shame on you for going by the name of Jew. You are not a Jew. You are a dog who cringes before his master and licks his spittle. You are one who says to his broken and emaciated people: "What is it that you want? Nothing is coming to you.

It is not for you to tell me, and those like me, what is mine and what is not mine. The land of Israel and its soil are part of me, and to them I have given everything. I have been laboring for it since a tender age; I have fought for it and I will continue to fight for it as hitherto. No dog like you will hinder me.

Keep on counting your sheckles [sic.]. Buy yourself another automobile, and buy your wife a mink coat and more diamonds. I am not asking you to participate in the redemption of Palestine; I ask you only not to hinder me and stop ingratiating yourself with the Gentiles. A day will come when you, too, will be in utter need of that country, you or your son.

And pray, how do you dispose of such texts as this: "And the land which I swore, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed forever and ever?" Can you answer it, you dog?

> From a native of "Eretz who was brought up on the motto of "Eretz Israel for the People of Israel on the precepts of the Torah of Israel."
>
> Jacob Teichman
> c/o YMCA, Room 434
> Williamsport, Pa.[17]

Although Berger rarely answered letters of this sort, he did reply to Teichman in a letter in which he cited his devotion to the democratic ideals of the United States and his consequent right to hold an opinion. He closed by asking Teichman why, despite his "fanatical mistrust of Christians" and his love for "Eretz," was he still living in the United States, and above all else, in a YMCA!?[18]

Berger received other letters as well. Later, after he had come out with statements criticizing Israel's behavior during the Six Day War, he received a letter which contained the following exhortation:

> You are helping to feed the flames of hatred to Israel's enemies, at a time when <u>you</u> (if you are truly a rabbi) and your band of self hating Jews, could be cementing love of brotherhood.
>
> <u>Shame</u> on <u>You</u>!
>
> "G-d" in "His" own good time, and in "His" own way, <u>will surely punish you</u>! And you, as a supposed rabbi deserve it![19]

Berger received countless other letters during his years with the ACJ which were similar in tone. Clearly, Elmer Berger

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[17] Teichman to Berger, July 30, 1947. ACJP 44/5

[18] Berger to Teichman, August 5, 1947, <u>ibid</u>.

[19] Mrs. Rosalind G. Roy to Berger, July 18, 1967. EBP "R (Miscellaneous)"

had touched some sort of a sore spot within the Weltanschauung of the individuals who wrote him.

But the attacks against Berger and the ACJ did not only come in the form of hate mail. Rather, the Zionists issued some printed material as well which criticized what they were doing.

Among these was a pamphlet issued by the American Zionist Council entitled "False Witness: The Record of the American Council For Judaism." In it, the ACJ is accused of providing antisemites, such as Gerald L.K. Smith, Conde McGinley, and Merwin K. Hart, with materials that they used in their attacks against Jews and Judaism. The pamphlet provides several quotes in which these antisemites do cite Council statements as proof of their own hateful views. The pamphlet also points out that the Council's views represent those of only a minute portion of American Jewry, and that even many prominent Christian clergymen are critical of the Council's activities. It says that Council statements misrepresent the activities of Israel, and it closes by suggesting that the members of the Council are motivated by "insecurity and self-hatred rather than healthy and beneficial stimuli. Elmer Berger is singled out several times throughout the pamphlet as the leader of the ACJ, and is thus held accountable for its activities.[20]

Another work critical of the Council was a book entitled Strangers to Glory: An Appraisal of the American Council for

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[20] American Zionist Council, False Witness: The Record of the American Council for Judaism, New York, February, 1955.

Judaism. Though the author of the book, Chaim Lieberman, mentions Berger only rarely, he does so in the most vicious of terms:

> Earlier we saw how the Council blasphemously desecrates the sacred ideal of Jewish nationhood by ridiculing it as outmoded, a relic of the dark ages. This blasphemy assumes even more sinister form in a statement by Rabbi Elmer Berger, a leading spirit of the Council, who declares, "The fiction of a 'world-wide Jewish nation' was a malicious slander dreamed up by the crooked-brain author of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion." (Elmer Berger, In Moral Indignation)
>
> Thus spake Rabbi Elmer Berger....
>
> Taking the most sacred of concepts and dragging it through the most polluted mire!
>
> While the towering, awesome mountain of four thousand years of Jewish history, unmoved, wrapped in mystic contemplation, gazes down silently, pitifully, scornfully upon the little Rabbi.
>
> And out of nowhere in particular, yet from everywhere, the clouds, the earth, the sky, comes a still, small voice: Blasphemer....
>
> Thus, Rabbi Berger can be said to have won the distinction of being the littlest man to fling the highest spit in the face of heaven.
>
> In view of such declarations, one is justified in asking: Has Rabbi Berger ever studied the Bible? Just a teeny, weeny, little bit? Did he ever set his eyes--at least one eye--on a page of the Talmud?
>
> The answer must be: He hasn't even read the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

Lieberman proceeds to give a critique of Berger's reading of the Protocols, and then continues:

> The Rabbi speaks of "American citizens who happen to be Jews." Isn't that putting the cart before the horse? Isn't it more correct, and to the point, to say: "Jews who happen to be American citizens?"
>
> Born of a Jewish father and a Jewish mother, Rabbi Berger could not, by any turn or trick of fate, be anything or anybody but a Jew. But if his parents, by the merest caprice of fancy or chance of a visa, had happened to land, let us say, in Mexico, he would be talking Spanish today and would be making the welkin ring with his railings against Israel in the name of Mexico instead of the United States....

> Even an apostate is still considered a Jew, though he is cold-shouldered out of the community.
>
> Now what should be done unto a rabbi, who is so patently out of touch with the true spiritual and moral values of the religion he claims to represent?[21]

Aside from the grammatical mistakes that can be found within this passage, one is immediately struck by how quickly Lieberman moves from an attack on what Berger wrote or said to a personal attack on Berger's character. It is not the anti-Zionism of Elmer Berger which is subject to Lieberman's critique, but rather Elmer Berger himself! Lieberman even goes so far as to accuse Berger of blasphemy and apostasy.

In reviewing the book, the Zionists praised Lieberman for providing them with "with an ideological exposure of the destroyers of our historic and sacred treasures."[22]

Others described Berger simply as a nuisance. At the time, many Protestant anti-Zionists in America were doing what they could to validate their views by grounding them in the Jewish tradition. Clearly, Berger's work provided an excellent avenue for doing this. Thus, when Protestants would cite Berger in an effort to substantiate their views, the Zionists felt that it was incumbent upon them to "set the record straight" and show that Berger's views did not represent those of the Jewish community. Thus, more than anything else, they perceived Elmer Berger to be

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[21] Chaim Lieberman, Strangers to Glory: An Appraisal of the American Council for Judaism, New York, 1955, pp. 49-54.

[22] "Disintegration , Assimilation, and Disappearance," review of Strangers to Glory, The American Zionist, November, 1955, p. 12.

a nuisance--a fly in the otherwise clean ointment of American Zionism.[23]

In light of all of this, one is still left wondering as to the reasons for the vehemence with which Berger was attacked by his critics. One possible reason is that, by the late 1940s, the American Jewish community was a frustrated one. Having been stymied in their attempts to save European Jewry, and having just become aware of the tragic extent of the Holocaust, and seeing the thousands of Jewish refugees languishing in DP camps, the Jews of America were desperately searching for some means of empowerment, some way of dealing with the frustration brought on by recent events.

Zionism, ostensibly a movement of national empowerment, provided an answer to this frustration, and American Jewry, it could be conjectured, therefore latched onto it as tightly as they could. Indeed, it could even be argued that Zionism had become one of the sancta of American Jewish religion by the time the state of Israel was established. This can be illustrated by Lieberman's critique above and by the fact that, by 1930, Hatikvah had been "sanctified" by the Reform movement by means of its inclusion in the Union Hymnal.

In any event, assuming that Zionism had indeed been sanctified in a large-scale sense in the minds and hearts of American Jews, it is quite understandable that Berger would be attacked so

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[23] Telephone interview with Rabbi Balfour Brickner, February 1, 1990.

viciously--he was challenging an ideology which was holy! In other words, to attack Zionism after the Holocaust was seen as an attack on its victims, and thus as a refusal to learn the lesson which it had to teach.

But there is another possible reason. Berger and the ACJ, it is important to remember, represented an amount of people numbering at most one or two percent of the total membership in the Zionist movement. But at some level, the Zionists realized that if they could prove that the ACJ was a real threat to what their movement was trying to achieve, then it could conceivably bolster the support which they received from American Jewry. Indeed, Samuel Halperin posits this point quite clearly.

> ...[T]he fact remains that the existence of the anti-Zionist group [the ACJ] provided the Zionists with a potent appeal and a new incentive for intensified activity. Exploiting the alleged danger of Council for Judaism activities to Jewish group survival, and cultivating the picture of wealthy anti-Zionists as "Jewishly escapist" and "self-hating" individuals, Zionist leadership found a useful device to win over previously apathetic sympathizers to their ranks.[24]

Halperin's analysis seems to hold true. To be sure, that the Zionists did indeed perceive the Council to be a threat is evident in an article David Polish wrote about the ACJ shortly after its creation.

> ...The most costly mistake we can make is to misjudge their strength. They are the spokesmen of great wealth to which Reform Judaism and Vanishing Judaism are synonymous. They

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[24] Halperin, op. cit., p. 463. Balfour Brickner, it is important to note, holds that this argument is "utter nonsense," and that the ACJ was such an insignificant organization that "American Zionism never made its [own] case against the Council. Telephone interview, February 1, 1990. The evidence presented in this chapter, however, seems to militate against Brickner's view.

> represent elements which, though numerically few, are influentially formidable. In those arenas of public life where American leaders want to hear that Jewry renounces Palestine, they command receptive ears. It is not difficult to represent themselves as spokesmen for Israel in those circles where such spokesmen are preferred....
>
> So far, victory is theirs. It will continue to be theirs until American Jews do what the democracies have done. Not at least until we have built a professional United Jewry will we be able to make a completely convincing case for Palestine....When at least we can muster all of our strength around this requirement, we shall not need to fear the dissident rabbis' "words of comfort."[25]

Thus, the ACJ, a small band of anti-Zionists, became a formidable force and a very real threat in the American Zionist mind. And with their desire at least tacitly being one of exploiting a perceived threat, the Zionists found no better leader to latch onto than a rabbi, namely Elmer Berger, who propagated anti-Zionist views.

Ascribed Leadership: The Anti-Zionist Response

Just as Berger became a symbol to the Zionists, and thus a prime candidate for vicious attack, so too did he become one for the anti-Zionists. To them, however, he was a figure-head of a much different sort.

Perhaps the primary reason for the leadership which anti-Zionists ascribed to Berger is the very novelty in the post 1948 world, of an anti-Zionist rabbi. Although Berger increasingly referred to himself as "Dr. Berger" during the period being studied, his rabbinical training and title were commonly known.

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[25] David Polish, "Of Little Faith," The New Palestine, December 18, 1942, pp. 11-12.

Because of this, his affiliation with the anti-Zionist movement, and his attempts to give voice to its ideology, authenticated it in the minds of his followers as a valid expression of Judaism.

Jewish anti-Zionists turned to Berger for leadership and guidance, especially in scholarly matters. Although by the end of his affiliation with the Council he had lost a great deal of support (primarily due to his perceived "pro-Arab" stance and activities), he did have a following. Their support and respect for him became evident during the final proxy battle concerning Berger's future with the Council. In the voluminous amount of correspondence which was exchanged regarding Berger at the time, scores of Berger supporters spoke up in his defense. The following example is typical:

> Why?...Why?...at the very peak of Elmer's influence in the United States and in many foreign nations, why have a few fearful and timid members of the Executive Committee created a situation where anti-Zionists no longer have their spokesman at the helm of the only organization that represented them?...
>
> Who do you have...without Elmer...who has the intelligence, the integrity, the experience and the creative thinking so necessary in the position this great mind has been asked to vacate?[26]

Other members of the Council spoke up in his defense as well. In short, these anti-Zionists saw Berger as the present-day "father" of their movement. He was the one who was able to ground it in "authentic" Judaism, he was the one who understood

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[26] Simon Rositzky to Richard Korn, July 16, 1968. LJRP, "1968 Richard Korn."

how to propagate its views in Washington, he was the one who was able to most cogently state its ideology.[27]

This support, it is important to note, did not only come from Jews. Rather, several Christians who were critical of Zionism also turned to Berger as the "father" of Jewish American anti-Zionism. As has been previously noted, Berger's support system in general became increasingly non-Jewish during the period of time being studied here, and this can be seen very clearly by the many non-Jews who spoke highly of him and his work.

For example, in September, 1949, Berger wrote an article for Council News entitled "How to Recognize `Jewish' Nationalism." In the next month's issue, a series of responses was published--all positive--and all of the eight reactions cited came from prominent non-Jewish scholars and journalists.[28]

In short, Elmer Berger was indeed the father American Jewish anti-Zionism during the period of time under discussion. As such, he came to symbolize the movement and everything it stood for in the minds of many Americans. Their reaction to Berger was therefore determined largely by their overall evaluation of Zionism and/or anti-Zionism.

Elmer Berger was a symbol, and this led many of his followers and many of his critics to spend a large amount of time

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[27] Cf. Moshe Menuhin, Jewish Critics of Zionism: A Testamentary Essay, pamphlet, The League of Arab States, New York, 1969, pp. 26-33.

[28] Council News, September, 1949, p. 6.

imagining Berger.

Conclusion: The Many Lessons of a Stormy Career

Since breaking with the Council, Berger has founded another organization, American Jewish Alternatives to Zionism, Inc. (AJAZ), which continues the fight against Zionism according to Berger's ideology. AJAZ, originally funded by some of Berger's supporters from the Council, is largely a one-man organization. Under its auspices, Berger maintains an office in New York (his permanent residence is in Longboat Key, Florida, a suburb of Sarasota), he periodically publishes his views and distributes them in AJAZ's main organ, the Report, and he goes on occasional speaking tours, usually addressing groups at various colleges and universities around the country.

On a purely practical level, Berger has exercised very little influence over the thought or activities of American Jews. Despite all of his efforts to combat Zionism, the Jews of America still remain largely sympathetic to it. Indeed, those sympathies have been challenged by recent events in the Middle East, but by far, most American Jewish critiques of Israel have been given in the context of the "loving brother," criticizing out of deep concern for the wellbeing of a member of the "mishpocheh." In other words, American Jews feel free to criticize Israel's activities, but only rarely, if ever, do we criticize the fundaments of the country's existence.

This being the case, we are left with a question: What lessons can be learned from Berger's years with the Council?

What lessons can be derived from the work which he did from 1948 to 1968?

I believe that the lessons to be learned are many.

With regards to Berger's ideology, there are two lessons to be learned. The first, while simple, is by no means simplistic: IT IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE THAT WE QUESTION IDEOLOGY.

That the popularity of Zionism underwent a dramatic increase among Reform Jews in America after the Holocaust is largely due to the utter powerlessness which they felt in the wake of that tragedy. The grief which they felt was immense, and it was tinged, perhaps, with a bit of guilt that they might have been able to do "just a little more" to save the murdered Jews of Europe.

Frustrated and depressed, these Jews were able to turn to Zionism for renewed hope. Now, they would no longer have to be powerless. They looked to Jewish nationalism as a way to prevent future holocausts. With the physical security which Israel would bring, and with the cultural rejuvenation it would engender, the Jews would once again be enfranchised in the world. American Jews finally had something to latch onto as a response to the frustration which they felt in the wake of the Holocaust.

And latch on they did. From the 1940s onward, American Jewry became passionately Zionist. Zionism became embedded in the psyche of most American Jews, and indeed it became one of the sancta of this community. To many, any critique of Zionism

became a statement of antisemitism and an insult to the memory of the victims of the Shoah.

Regardless of the validity of Berger's thought, the fact that he was there to serve as a self-appointed "watchdog" over Zionism as it effected American Jews is significant and valuable. To the extent that the American Jewish community blindly accepted Zionism because of the psychological gratification which it provided, Elmer Berger was there to remind us of that fact. In other words, Berger kept the Zionists honest. The student of his work is reminded that, more than truth shapes ideology, ideology often attempts to shape truth. Although Berger himself was often guilty of this in his own ideology, he does force the objective student to question Zionism in some very fundamental ways. In an age during which many American Jews struggle with their own identity vis-a-vis events occurring in Israel, this lesson is a very important one indeed.

The second lesson we learn from a study of Berger's ideology has to do with process. As previously noted, among Berger's heroes and role models were the Hebrew Prophets. Modelling his own behavior after them, Berger acted in what he believed to be a very "prophetic" way--he spoke his mind and stuck to his ideals despite the fact that they ran contrary to those of almost all of his contemporaries.

Although it has yet to be seen whether Berger's image will change as did the image of the prophets, it seems highly unlikely that any ideological shift on the part of American Jews toward

Berger's position will be attributed to Berger himself. So idealistic was he, so devoted was he to his principles, that he seems to have forgotten that he was speaking to an audience which was not ready or willing to hear what he had to say. One is left wondering whether he could have maintained his ideals while propagating them in a way which would speak in the language of American Jews.

While this may have been impossible to accomplish completely, I believe Berger could have succeeded in doing so to a much greater extent than he actually did. Berger's ideology ultimately advocates "Emancipation" and a universalistic form of Jewish expression and identity. These ideals have consistently spoken to American Reform Jews and were they, rather than opposition to Zionism, the <u>focus</u> of Berger's ideological energies, then it seems that the response to his work would have been greater, his voice would have been heard more clearly, and his fundamental ideals would have been maintained.

The lesson we learn, therefore, is that the Prophet, if his work is to be canonized, needs to choose his words very carefully, otherwise he will become a forgotten prophet.

An analysis of Berger's activities yields similar lessons. to a great extent, Berger's activities during his years with the Council can be characterized as a "Journey to Heresy." His original advocacy of anti-Zionism in the early 1940s removed him from the realm of acceptability in the eyes of most American Jews. He was of course, left with the relatively small following

of the American Council for Judaism and its sympathizers. In time, however, Berger's activities led to his rejection by most member of the ACJ as well. The fact that he behaved like a "lone wolf" by making trips to Washington without consulting with the leadership of the Council, and his increasing affiliation with Arab individuals, groups, and causes, caused an even greater increase in the "heretical" character of his activities.

Undoubtedly, Berger felt impelled to behave as he did. Yet it was precisely this behavior which led to his failure to achieve any significant, practical results. Not only did his efforts in Washington to change American foreign policy have very little, if any, impact, but the "heretical" character of his activities also contributed to his failure influence the views and activities of American Jews. Thus, the lesson we learn from Berger's activities is of the value of working "within the system." Playing "what-if" games is, of course, a dangerous endeavor, but the student of Berger's activities is nevertheless left wondering as to the effect Berger could have had had he limited his activities to those which would have kept him within the bounds of mainstream Judaism.

Elmer Berger is a man who has always striven to act according to the highest ideals of Judaism and of morality itself. During his years with the American Council for Judaism, he articulated and ideology of Jewish anti-Zionism, and authenticated it <u>in</u> Judaism in the eyes of his few followers. One price he has paid for the maintenance of the purity of his ideals has

been an almost total rejection of him and his work by the American Jewish community. Indeed, Elmer Berger has been one voice against many. For him, that has been both a blessing and a curse.

Epilogue: What I Have Learned from Elmer Berger

As I mentioned in the preface to this thesis, I began my research very sympathetic to Zionism and actually quite hostile to Berger and his views. However, during the course of my research, my views on this subject seem to have shifted almost daily. The course of my intellectual odyssey was determined both by my research into Berger's life and by many discussions I have had on the subject with teachers and fellow students.

Simply put, I have come to believe that Berger's notion of a democratic, de-Zionized Israel is one which carries a great deal of merit.

I have not come to this decision lightly, but the many hours of thought which I have devoted to this topic have led me to conclude that it would be of benefit vis-a-vis both internal affairs within Israel, and Israel-Diaspora relations. What follows is not a systematic analysis of the situation in Israel, but rather the results a series of impressions I have received through my studies, and some "gut-level" personal feelings as to what the best solution to some of the many problems which plague Israel would be.

An Israel which would cease seeing itself as a Jewish state, and which would instead be a Western-style island of democracy in the Middle East, would ideally (and I am admittedly speaking in ideals here) be a much calmer place than it is today. Citizenship in such a state would be determined along similar lines to

those advocated by the K'naanim--merely according to whether and for how long a given individual had lived within the boarders of the country.

With a new national definition of this sort, for example, there would be a separation of "church" and state within Israel. Religion would therefore become a private matter, and (again, I am speaking in ideals) all forms of officially sanctioned religious coercion would cease. Indeed, the state, like all other states, would have to develop a civil religion and a national set of symbols of its own, but this could be done in a way which would enfranchise all of its citizens, not just the Jewish ones. Reform Judaism, Islam, and Christianity would all have the same status under the law as Orthodox Judaism.

When the U.N. passed its "Zionism is Racism" resolution during the 1970s, the American Jewish community was justifiably outraged. Yet, while Zionism is clearly not racist, it definitely does possess some discriminatory qualities; for in any country which defines itself as a Jewish nation, the non-Jew at some level becomes a second class citizen and is disenfranchised as such. Although the Israeli Arab possesses many rights and privileges (some of which he or she would not have in other Arab countries), that Arab is clearly not a full-fledged member of Israeli national life. Israel is the Jewish state, and it therefore exists for the health and wellbeing of Jewish people.

In a de-Zionized Israel, however, this would not be the case. All citizens of the country, regardless of their religion

or original nationality would have equal status in its national life. Legalized discrimination against Arabs would cease to exist.

The benefits would be external as well. A de-Zionized Israel would lead to a radical redefinition of Israel-Diaspora relations. No longer would Israeli sh'lichim enter Diaspora communities and rouse the ire of Jews there by urging that they all leave their "homes" and make aliyah. To be sure, the Law of Return would have to be repealed, and the very notion of aliyah eliminated. By the same token, Diaspora Jews would no longer have the right to play "armchair" politician and thus anger the Jews who live in Israel and have to deal with the consequences of their actions in a very real way. Diaspora Jews would also have no need to feel embarrassed when Israel behaves in a shameful way.

This break would be mitigated by a certain affinity which Israeli and Diaspora Jews would feel for one another as members of "the mishpocheh," and a certain amount of mutual aid would be exchanged as a result, but not nearly with the same intensity and feelings of obligation and guilt with which the giving occurs today.

The state of Israel, as it exists today, drains the resources of Diaspora Jewry. That a majority of the UJA "pie" is sent to Israel and not used in this country, for example, implies that we place more of an emphasis on the wellbeing of the Jews of Israel than on the wellbeing of the Jews here. In an age during

which so many American Jewish institutions and individuals are suffering from a lack of resources, this problem has become especially acute.

I am not arguing for the complete discontinuation of American Jewish aid to Israel. I am merely advocating a re-focus of American Jewish resources on American Jews and Judaism.

It could be argued at this point that those UJA funds are only available to the Jewish community because of the power which Israel as a Zionist state has to galvanize Jewish support. "Israel excites Jews," the argument would run, "and it is only because of the connection which Jews feel to it that they give so generously to the UJA and other similar organizations."

Implicit in this statement is the notion that American Judaism cannot excite Jews to the extent that Israeli Judaism can. This I refuse to accept. Instead, I wholeheartedly believe that if the leaders of our community "play their cards right," American Jews can be shown that Judaism can be thrilling, exciting, and most importantly, can address their own needs in very deep and significant ways.

One asset which we do gain from Israel as it exists now is a feeling of empowerment. In the wake of events such as the Six Day War and the Entebbe Rescue, many Jews experienced a reawakening of Jewish pride. Others feel reassured by the mere physical security which they hope Israel will provide them in a time of need. Still others feel energized by the Jewish cultural renais-

sance which they have seen take place in Israel since its founding.

In a de-Zionized Israel, however, such feelings of empowerment could continue. Although Israel as a Jewish nation would cease to exist, Jewish culture could continue to flourish, as could Arab culture and others as well. As a Western-style democratic state, it would (ideally) serve as a refuge for Jews and others who would need a safe-haven at a time of need. I would furthermore hope that Jews would feel empowered in a universal sense from the knowledge they were able to play a role in the creation of an island of democracy in the Middle East.

Such a state as I am now advocating would clearly be an imposition of a Western democracy in a part of the world where such a political system is almost completely foreign. The Arab countries of today would never accept such a state. Yet if the type of country I am advocating is maintained as the ideal, and all efforts in that part of the world are aimed at creating a situation in which it could be established in a safe, healthy way, then I do think that the dream of a de-Zionized Israeli democracy could someday be achieved.

Such a state can only be created in the distant future. Perhaps the dream of its creation is messianic, and in this world we will have to settle for something closer to the status-quo. If that is the case, then I pray that only a few people will continue to suffer the consequences of the current, problem-ridden state of affairs in the Middle East. But as a Jew I feel

impelled to dream--to dream with the perhaps-naive hope that someday things will be better, that someday we will be able to look each other in the eye--Jew to Jew, Jew to Arab--and that together we will be able to sit under our vine and fig tree, and be afraid no more.

Appendix

"Statement of Principles"
Lakeside Congregation for Reform Judaism
Highland Park, Illinois[1]

Preamble

The distinguishing criterion of a living faith is its historic ability to meet, with new forms and emphases, man's spiritual requirements at any time. The mark of a universal faith is its ability to meet such contemporary spiritual needs in any place.

The Old Testament Prophets wrote the most significant pages in the development of Judaism. They first conceived and articulated a religion dependent upon inner, moral strength, rather than upon land, nation or ritual.

Many ancient religions, attached to "nationhood" and "land," disappeared when the nation was destroyed and the land conquered. But, through the majestic spiritual contributions of the Prophets, Judaism transcended the destruction of the Hebrew nation and we are Jews today because we accept this Prophetic faith.

More than three quarters of a century ago, men with great vision, embodying knowledge of Judaism and hope for the unfinished dream of American democracy, brought forth a new reformation of our ancient faith.

American democracy, with its hope for the brightest future man had ever known, inspired this reformation. In the new, free society of the United States man's equality before law and respect for the dignity of human personality were exalted as inalienable rights. In these guarantees the founding fathers of Reform Judaism saw new, practical potentialities for realizing the Messianic dream of the Kingdom of God on earth.

We believe these hopes have been justified in the steady evolution of American democracy, which is still in the process of removing inequities and injustices.

To this vision of America, the Reformers of Judaism added the realization that the enduring, permanent values of our faith are its inner strengths, eloquently amplified by the Prophets in universal terms and restated in contemporary language through all the generations of Jewish religious experience. These early Reformers also eliminated secondary accretions--bearing no permanent relevance either to America or to those inner strengths of a Prophetic and universal Judaism--which had become appended

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[1] Reprinted in Council News, June, 1955.

to our faith in the course of centuries when Jews lived in less enlightened lands and areas.

We have organized a congregation in the spirit of the principles basic to this great reformation, joining the living universalisms and spiritual insights of Judaism with the highest values and hopes of our lives as Americans. In doing so we believe we are carrying on the historic tradition of those Jews of all ages and lands who, to keep their faith a living and meaningful experience, reinterpreted and adapted it to serve the spiritual needs of their place and time.

Principles

As Jews, we consciously emphasize the great Prophetic truth of the Universality of One God and the brotherhood of all humanity; and the concomitant of such a God and such a brotherhood--universal standards of justice and righteousness as the basis of man's conduct to man.

In Prophetic Judaism, as well as in the noblest conceptions of the American dream, God is perceived as "indwelling" within man. The most cherished manifestation of Divinity is to be found in the aspiring human spirit, regardless of race, faith or nationality.

We, therefore, believe our religion must be exemplified in our daily lives by striving, in all human relations, for equality, brotherhood, justice and righteousness, and recognition of man's mutual responsibility to man in a world of constantly shrinking dimensions.

In the spirit of American reverence for the individual we believe our religious association has significance only as a conscious, voluntary choice of free individuals. We unqualifiedly dissociate ourselves from the concept, no matter by whom it is advanced, that Jews are a separate community or nation.

We shall encourage an understanding of God and Judaism through prayer, study of Holy Scripture and the historical evolutionary development of our faith.

We recognize that, in any religion, ceremonies may dramatize and emotionalize man's deepest inner feelings. But they are secondary to the belief in God and the worship of God through righteous and just conduct toward all men.

In Judaism, ceremonies and customs have changed from age to age; and, in any one period of time, they have differed from place to place. In keeping with this tradition, we will observe practices, customs and ceremonies which shall be meaningful for us because they symbolize in effective and beautiful form the

principles of our faith, compatible with our lives as Americans. We shall ever be challenged by the basic spirit of Reform Judaism to strive constantly to make our religious concepts more meaningful and creative.

Philosophical implications of human immortality may vary from individual to individual. But believing that human personality is the highest manifestation of God, we regard the hope of immortality in some form as a natural and understandable human aspiration.

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These principles, upon which our congregation has been founded, may not be acceptable to all Jews, nor do we suggest that others need be in agreement with us. However, these beliefs and attitudes--validated by Judaism's history--best meet our own needs and we have built our institution upon them.

--Unanimously adopted by the Founders' Committee, March 9, 1955.

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