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**DIASPORA INFLUENCE ON ISRAEL: THE BEN-GURION-  
BLAUSTEIN "EXCHANGE" AND ITS AFTERMATH**

by  
**Charles S. Liebman**

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## **Diaspora Influence on Israel: The Ben-Gurion–Blaustein “Exchange” and Its Aftermath**

by Charles S. Liebman

The “exchange of views” between David Ben-Gurion and Jacob Blaustein (then president of the American Jewish Committee), which caused so much excitement in 1950, remains as just a footnote in the history of Israel–Diaspora relations. Nevertheless, the “exchange” is important for a number of reasons. It tells us a great deal about the attitudes of an important segment of American Jewish leadership and the thinking of Israeli officials in 1950. Of greater contemporary interest, however, is the lesson it teaches us about the nature of Diaspora influence on Israeli policy. The “exchange of views,” and its aftermath, is in some respects an example of a unique kind of influence. It is the only example of an even partially successful exercise of pressure in which Diaspora leaders operated directly upon the Israeli government, rather than in alliance with a section of the Israeli political or bureaucratic elite. In other words, this is the only case in which Israeli leaders adopted a policy under Diaspora pressure without any significant segment of the Israeli elite being sympathetic to that policy. In other respects, the case presented here is paradigmatic of political relations between Israel and the Diaspora.

First of all, like most Israeli policies which have aroused Diaspora involvement, the Ben-Gurion—Blaustein “exchange” centered around symbols and statements of intent rather than actual policy. Secondly, like most examples of successful pressure, it came in the early years of statehood, rather than in more recent years. Thirdly, it was of little long-range consequence, in part because Diaspora Jewry has neither the resources, the interest, nor the sense of involvement to sustain continuing pressure on any specific aspect of Israeli policy. In this particular case, however, one must add that the growing commitment of American Jews to Israel, their increased feeling of security in America, and their sense that Israel’s existence does not create antisemitism or lead to charges of dual loyalty makes those concerns which precipitated the “exchange” seem quite irrelevant. It would, however, be premature to suggest that these concerns will lie forever dormant.

Prior to the establishment of the state of Israel and for more than a decade thereafter, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) was the Jewish organization to whose views Israeli leaders were most sensitive. Israeli and Zionist leaders perceived the AJC as the Jewish organization with the best access to U.S. policy-makers and as most rep-

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representative of wealthy American Jews. Thus, the AJC was an important link in securing political and economic support from the American government and financial assistance from the American Jewish community.<sup>1</sup>

AJC leaders had participated in the expanded Jewish Agency when Zionist leaders had sought the cooperation of leading non-Zionists in the 1920s. Indeed, the agreement between Zionists and non-Zionists whereby the latter joined the expanded Jewish Agency was largely the result of an agreement reached between Chaim Weizmann and Louis Marshall, leader of the AJC.<sup>2</sup> AJC leaders filled most of the important non-Zionist posts, although the AJC as such never entered the agency's structure. Both sides abandoned the idea of non-Zionist representation by the early 1940s, but a few years later the AJC appealed to Weizmann to reconstitute the Jewish Agency, again with non-Zionist representation.<sup>3</sup> The AJC motive was to gain representation for their opposition to Jewish statehood.<sup>4</sup>

The AJC membership included some who opposed any cooperation with the Zionists. The leadership's position was to support the Jewish settlement in Palestine for humanitarian purposes but to vehemently oppose the legitimacy of Jewish nationalism. Opposition was both ideological and practical. The AJC feared that a Jewish state would lead to charges of dual loyalty against Jews and would heighten antisemitism. In 1946, the AJC, despite such reservations, supported the partition proposal.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, it confronted the reality of a Jewish state with mixed emotions. As the chairman of its executive committee stated in 1950, "sympathetic though we were and are with the upbuilding of Israel, we have nonetheless realized that the new state could create serious problems for us."<sup>6</sup>

In 1948 Israel invited leaders of the AJC to comment on a proposed draft of the Israeli constitution. The AJC's general attitude—its sensitivity to the problems Israel might create for Diaspora Jews—is reflected in its suggestion that references in the constitution to "the Jewish State," rather than to "the State of Israel," be deleted. An AJC leader also urged "that the oath of office pledge the incumbent to [serve] the welfare of the people of Israel instead of, as proposed, to the welfare of 'the Jewish people.'"<sup>7</sup> The AJC noted with satisfaction that a number of their views were incorporated into the proposed constitution.<sup>8</sup>

As early as 1948 the executive committee urged upon Israel the importance "of

<sup>1</sup> On the recognition of the AJC's importance, see Abba Eban's remarks in Foreign Office, *Kinnus Tzirei Yisrael*, July 17-23, 1950, mimeographed (Jerusalem 1950), p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 10, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Naomi W. Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee 1906-1960* (Philadelphia 1972), p. 294.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 298 ff.; and Nahum Goldmann, *The Autobiography of Nahum Goldmann: Sixty Years of Jewish Life* (New York 1969), pp. 234-35.

<sup>6</sup> Irving Engel, "Report of the Executive Committee: Highlights of 1949," *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 52 (1951), ed. Morris Fine (Philadelphia 1951), p. 527.

<sup>7</sup> American Jewish Committee, Minutes of the Executive Committee Meetings, October 16-17, 1948.

<sup>8</sup> "The Report of the Executive Committee of the American Jewish Committee," *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 51 (1950), p. 554.

avoiding any pronouncements from which it might be inferred that the State of Israel regards itself as the spokesman for the Jews of the world or for any Jewish community outside of its own borders."<sup>9</sup> In May 1948, three AJC leaders were invited by Israel's prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, to visit Israel. On that visit the AJC received assurances that Israel would not represent itself as the spokesman of world Jewry or seek to promote large-scale immigration from the U.S.<sup>10</sup>

AJC concern focused increasingly on the question of Israel's demand for *aliya* from the U.S. The fear was that the very demand for *aliya* would raise questions about American Jewish loyalty. According to the AJC's former president Judge Joseph Proskauer, who led the organization from 1943 to 1948, the AJC should "forcefully discourage Israeli propaganda for immigration from America."<sup>11</sup> Whatever assurances it may have received from Ben-Gurion in 1949 were shaken by a report that in an address to an American Jewish delegation Ben-Gurion had stressed the importance of large-scale immigration of American youth, and had threatened to appeal directly to the youth, over any parental objections.<sup>12</sup> The AJC president, Jacob Blaustein, wrote to Ben-Gurion on September 19, calling the statement "most unfortunate and most unexpected; and as contravening assurances given by Ben-Gurion to AJC officers last spring."<sup>13</sup> According to the AJC administrative committee's minutes, the letter intimated that if Israel contemplated a campaign for immigration to Israel from the U.S., the AJC would have to reconsider its support for Israel. The minutes of the October 4 meeting further reported that Blaustein told Israel's ambassador to the U.S., Eliyahu Elath, and its U.N. representative, Abba Eban, that the AJC must stand against interference by Israel in the internal affairs of American Jewry and the "propagation of Jewish nationalism in the U.S."

The day following the administrative committee's meetings, Judge Proskauer wrote to Ben-Gurion:

... I am reasoning with you and your answer to me, to my mind is going to determine whether my attitude of reasonableness is to be thrown into the ashcan and the philosophy of the American Council for Judaism is to prevail, for obviously people like myself cannot be expected to ask American contributions to funds intended in part to achieve such an un-American aim as the emigration of all American Jews to Israel. Nor can we be expected to sit silent under the attacks that will follow shortly unless this situation is corrected. . . . I implore you to issue a statement modifying your position and categorically disclaiming any intention on the part of the State of Israel to interfere with the life of American Jewry.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Engel, *loc. cit.*, p. 528; and American Jewish Committee, Minutes of the Executive Committee Meetings, May 7-8, 1949.

<sup>11</sup> American Jewish Committee, Minutes of the Executive Committee Meetings, May 7-8, 1949.

<sup>12</sup> American Jewish Committee, Minutes of the Administrative Committee Meetings, October 4, 1949.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Letters from Joseph M. Proskauer to David Ben-Gurion, October 5, 1949. (The letter, in the files of the American Jewish Committee, was not written on an AJC letterhead.)

A response came quickly. On October 22 Blaustein told the AJC executive committee that Ambassador Elath, after speaking to Foreign Minister Sharett, reported that Ben-Gurion's speech to the American Jewish delegation had been misquoted. In addition, Ben-Gurion's secretary cabled that the report of Ben-Gurion's speech had been "unauthorized" and that a letter from the prime minister was on the way. A cable of Ben-Gurion's speech to a United Jewish Appeal delegation in Israel affirmed that he desired only "selected immigration" from America. In addition, Elath wrote to Blaustein that Ben-Gurion had clearly been misquoted and that Israel had "no desire to intervene in the internal affairs of the American Jewish community."<sup>15</sup>

The AJC's traditional rival, the American Jewish Congress, charged the AJC with "blackmail against the State of Israel." According to a Congress official:

What the Committee is doing in polite terms is to say to the government of Israel that if it does anything that causes us public relations problems in America and if it doesn't apologize and clean up the difficulty as the Committee believes it should be done, the Committee will withdraw support and will resume its old status as an organization sometimes non-Zionist and sometimes anti-Zionist.<sup>16</sup>

AJC leaders continued, however, to press their point of view upon Israel. In April 1950, Blaustein reported that he had impressed on Elath the harmfulness to Israel itself "of any attempts by his government to agitate among American Jews in the interests of a world Jewish nationalist philosophy."<sup>17</sup> At stake in all this, Blaustein declared in his "private conferences with Israeli statesmen," was "not only the continuance of American philanthropic and economic assistance, but also the general good will of American Jewry. And above all, the unassailable fact remains that for Israel's own security there must be a strong and independent American Jewry."<sup>18</sup>

Apparently Blaustein wanted a public statement by Ben-Gurion himself. One can only guess why Blaustein was anxious for such a statement after so many responsible Israeli and Zionist officials had reassured him that Israel did not wish to intervene in American Jewish life and did not insist on mass immigration of U.S. Jews. We may conjecture, first of all, that Ben-Gurion himself was the only really authoritative source for a statement on immigration policy—particularly since it was he who had frequently declared that Israel's *raison d'être* was "ingathering the exiles." Secondly, until then Blaustein had received only private assurances, whereas he really wanted a public statement which would not only be a more authoritative expression of intent but would in and of itself constitute a formal statement of policy. Thirdly, a statement from Ben-Gurion to Blaustein would constitute a major public relations triumph for the AJC in general and Blaustein in particular. Finally, assurances by Sharett, Elath,

<sup>15</sup> American Jewish Committee, Minutes of the Executive Committee Meetings, October 22–23, 1949.

<sup>16</sup> Mike Shulman, "American Jewish Committee Blackmails Israel, AJC Leader Charges," *Jewish Weekly Times*, April 6, 1950.

<sup>17</sup> American Jewish Committee, Minutes of the Executive Committee Meetings, April 29–30, 1950.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Jacob Blaustein to AJC Members, May 26, 1950; AJC files.

and Eban notwithstanding, Israeli emissaries in the United States continued to demand mass *aliya* and continued to point an accusing finger at those American Jews who were not prepared to resettle in Israel. Indeed, there is evidence that Israel’s assurances to the AJC on immigration questions were not taken seriously by Israeli officials themselves. In July 1950, the Foreign Office held a conference of Israeli representatives abroad. Among the topics for discussion was *aliya*. Eban noted the AJC’s insistence that Israel should not demand *aliya* as though it were an ideological obligation of all Jews but should instead stress Israel’s need for assistance and *aliya* from democratic countries—in other words, that identification with Israel should be made an extension of one’s democratic values and that the particularist Zionist argument should go unmentioned. Eban then commented: “We have absolutely no right to accept this demand and to forgo the ideological principle.”<sup>19</sup> But Ben-Gurion was more willing than Eban to make concessions.

In August 1950, Blaustein visited Israel at the invitation of the prime minister. According to the AJC’s official biographer, “after many hours of negotiating with top officials, alternately cajoling and threatening, he secured his basic objectives.”<sup>20</sup> On August 23, at an official luncheon tendered by the prime minister to Blaustein, an “exchange of views” between the two was announced. Ben-Gurion declared:

The Jews of the United States, as a community and as individuals, have only one political attachment and that is to the United States of America. They owe no political allegiance to Israel. . . . the State of Israel represents and speaks only on behalf of its own citizens and in no way presumes to represent or speak in the name of Jews who are citizens of any other country. We, the people of Israel, have no desire and no intention to interfere in any way with the internal affairs of Jewish communities abroad.

And finally:

. . . let me say a word about immigration. We should like to see American Jews come and take part in our effort. We need their technical knowledge, their unrivalled experience, their spirit of enterprise, their bold vision, their “know-how.” We need engineers, chemists, builders, work managers and technicians. The tasks which face us in this country are eminently such as would appeal to the American genius for technical development and social progress. But the decision as to whether they wish to come—permanently or temporarily—rests with the free discretion of each American Jew himself. It is entirely a matter of his own volition. We need *halutzim*, pioneers, too. *Halutzim* have come to us—and we believe more will come, not only from those countries where the Jews are oppressed and in “exile” but also from countries where the Jews live a life of freedom and are equal in status to all other citizens in their country. But the essence of *halutzit* is free choice. They will come from among those who believe that their aspirations as human beings and as Jews can best be fulfilled by life and work in Israel.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Foreign Office, *Kinnus Tzirei Yisrael*, July 17–23, 1950, mimeographed (Jerusalem 1950), pp. 78–79.

<sup>20</sup> Cohen, *op. cit.*, pp. 311–12.

<sup>21</sup> The full “exchange of views” is printed in the *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 53 (1952), pp. 564–68.

In his response, Blaustein showered praise on Israel's achievements and progress and then reiterated the classic American non-Zionist position that Israel's existence was for the benefit of "other Jews."

While Israel has naturally placed some burdens on Jews elsewhere, particularly in America, it has, it turn, meant much to Jews throughout the world. For hundreds of thousands in Europe, Africa and the Middle East it has provided a home in which they can attain their full stature of human dignity for the first time. In all Jews it has inspired pride and admiration, even though in some instances, it has created pressing headaches.

However, he conceded that "coming after the tragedy of European Jewry in the 1930's and in World War II [Israel] has done much to raise Jewish morale. Jews in America and everywhere can be more proud that ever of their Jewishness." Blaustein then pointed out that to American Jews, America is their home and their destiny. He went on as follows:

We have been greatly distressed that at the very hour when so much has been achieved, harmful and futile discussion and misunderstandings have arisen as to the relations between the people of the State of Israel and the Jews in other countries, particularly in the United States. Harm has been done to the morale and to some extent to the sense of security of the American Jewish community through unwise and unwarranted statements and appeals which ignore the feelings and aspirations of American Jewry.

Even greater harm has been done to the State of Israel itself by weakening the readiness of American Jews to do their full share in the rebuilding of Israel which faces such enormous political, social and economic problems.

Your statement today, Mr. Prime Minister, will, I trust, be followed by unmistakable evidence that the responsible leaders of Israel, and the organizations connected with it, fully understand that future relations between the American Jewish community and the State of Israel must be based on mutual respect for one another's feelings and needs, and on the preservation of the integrity of the two communities and their institutions.<sup>22</sup>

In retrospect, this "exchange of views" is incredible. In the first place, the entire setting of the exchange, the very designation "exchange of views," suggests a meeting or negotiation between two equal parties. Secondly, whereas Ben-Gurion's statement was modest and inoffensive, deliberately couched in terms to which the other party would not object, Blaustein's statement was a denial of basic Zionist premises and openly criticized Zionist and Israeli spokesmen. If the setting for the exchange suggested a meeting of equals, the tone of the exchange suggested that Blaustein represented the dominant party.

Ben-Gurion's greatest concession was not his disavowal of political allegiance but his final comments on *aliya*. (Significantly, he used the neutral term "immigration," rather than the value-laden term *aliya*, with its far more ideological connotations). Nothing in his statement explicitly contradicted his past pronouncements. (He had never said that a decision to immigrate does not rest "with the free discretion

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

of each American Jew," nor had he ever suggested that Israel would *force* American Jews to come.) Nevertheless, his silence on Israel's mission to "ingather the exiles," on the obligation of the Jew *qua* Jew to live in Israel; his statement that American *aliya* was desirable to provide Israel with needed technical skills rather than its need for more Jews—all this was implicitly contrary to everything he had ever said on the subject in the past. The tacit admission that American Jews do not live in "exile" must have been difficult enough for the prime minister, but to describe immigration to Israel as an act of *noblesse oblige* by citizens of an advanced country toward those of a more backward state must have been degrading to a man who had so many times spoken of *aliya* as Jewish self-fulfillment and who had referred to the day of his own arrival in the country as a day of rebirth.

This "exchange of views" can be understood only as a response to the pressure brought to bear by a segment of Diaspora Jewry. The concessions extracted from the prime minister were not easily obtained. A sense of this can be gathered in a letter (dated August 23, 1950, the day on which the "exchange of views" took place) from an AJC staff member who accompanied Blaustein, to John Slawson, then executive director of the AJC.

. . . it was all the time touch and go; we had ups and downs and until last night we still did not know whether or not we will get a satisfactory letter.

We met with Ben-Gurion twice. . . .

The statement . . . is not all we have suggested. It is a compromise between our original suggestions and their proposals and they consider that they went as far as they possibly could to meet our point of view. You may note that Mr. Ben-Gurion is definitely stating that Jews of America are not exiles and by implication, that all their campaigns of "ingathering the exiles" do not apply to American Jews. This was a point very hard for him to accept but he finally did agree.

We consider it important that the statement of Ben-Gurion be publicized even before the big U.J.A. Conference starts here on September 6th. It should in no way appear that this statement is a quid pro quo for the plans that this conference is going to devise.<sup>23</sup>

This is an apparent instance of successful pressures on Israel from Diaspora Jewry, but the consequences or continuing impact of this "exchange of views" on Israeli policy is more problematical. Israeli spokesmen continued to call for *aliya* from the U.S.—a call which failed to meet with any positive response. Ben-Gurion, on the other hand, while continuing to insist on the necessity of *aliya* from the West, chose his language rather carefully in the period immediately following the "exchange." Whether in response to his commitment to Blaustein or in response to the reality of *aliya*, the prime minister spoke in terms of Israel's need for an *aliya* of technical experts. For example, in his speech to the World Zionist Congress in 1951 he said:

The shortage of doctors, nurses, teachers, kindergarten teachers, engineers, chemists, trained managers, men of science and research is becoming more acute—and threatens

<sup>23</sup> Letter from Simon Segal to Dr. John Slawson, August 23, 1950; AJC files.

with all its severity the cultural level of the State and its capacity to provide public services: education, health, security (for the army cannot establish itself and cannot develop without a continuing and satisfactory increase of expert professional pioneers, educated and of broad spirit).

These two things, wealth and professional expert pioneers, can only be provided by Jews of the free world.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, Ben-Gurion stressed Israeli needs rather than Jewish obligations. The following year, in his message to the Zionist General Council, he noted that one could be a Zionist even if one did not "fulfill the most exalted Zionist obligation—*aliya*."<sup>25</sup> He noted that Israeli Zionists who tended to adopt a maximal position on *aliya*, were obliged to understand their opponents from the West; they were obliged to "try and understand the historical, cultural, economic and political background to the differences of opinion."<sup>26</sup> Ben-Gurion's associate Zalman Aranne put the matter more bluntly. He noted that this was not the time to open an ideological war for a radical Zionist position, because Israel dared not antagonize potential friends on its path to economic independence.<sup>27</sup> If in the following year or two Ben-Gurion did adhere to the "exchange of views" in his public statements, these statements were nonetheless, of purely symbolic import.

In later years the AJC felt that it had cause for complaint on this level as well. In February 1960 John Slawson, senior staff member of the AJC, wrote to AJC president Herbert Ehrman complaining that Israel was acting as a spokesman for Jewish citizens of other countries, in violation of the 1950 "arrangement." He recommended that Ehrman "bring this matter to the attention of appropriate Israeli representatives in the U.S. requesting that Israel henceforth desist from such actions."<sup>28</sup> In December 1960 Blaustein wrote to Ben-Gurion:

During past months . . . there have been a number of definitive violations of your August 1950 Statement. These departures are causing serious embarrassments and consequences. They are again opening up the furor that was existing at the time in 1950 when we got together and resolved the Statement we then issued.

American, Canadian and English Jewries are up in arms about these violations—and I think I should tell you that some are charging me with having been naive in even having accepted the August 1950 Statement as bona fide. . . .

. . . Some of the violations to which I refer are as follows:

- 1) Israel's notes addressed to the United States, British and other governments regarding the swastika daubings in those countries last winter . . . Israel should have confined itself to discussing [the issue] with the Jewish communities in those countries. . . .
- 2) General Moshe Dayan's incomprehensible March 9, 1960 statement in Canada that "his government should not only represent the people of Israel, but the interests of all Jews."

<sup>24</sup> Twenty-Third World Zionist Congress (1951), Stenographic Report (Hebrew), (Jerusalem 1951), p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> Jewish Agency, *Sessions of the Zionist General Council*, May 7–15, 1952 (Jerusalem n.d.), p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from John Slawson to Herbert Ehrman, February 29, 1960; AJC files.

3) And Foreign Minister Golda Meir's reply to the delegation of the Anglo-Jewish Association which resulted in the startling headlines in the Jewish National Post (April 15, 1960): "Israel will continue to speak for Jewry." . . . I assure you that if you wish your country to retain its friendships—at a time when you sorely need them—it is essential that you promptly correct the wrong impression to which I have referred. . . .

Out of my closeness to you, I feel I can venture to say that you cannot expect diplomatic and financial cooperation from even friends, including me, when understandings with them, and principles dear to them, are violated or ignored.<sup>29</sup>

A memorandum to the AJC executive board in mid-December noted that after conversations with "Golda Meir and other Israel officials [we] found them firm in the conviction that Israel is the sole authority to speak and act for Jews everywhere."<sup>30</sup> The AJC also noted that Ben-Gurion, in his address before the Twenty-Fifth Zionist Congress, asserted that "Jews living outside Israel were violating the precepts of Judaism and that in the free and prosperous lands Judaism faced the kiss of death, a slow and imperceptible decline into the abyss of assimilation."<sup>31</sup> The AJC's president, Herbert Ehrman, notified Ben-Gurion of his "grave concern" concerning that statement, as well as his dissatisfaction with Israel's Law of Return, which automatically granted citizenship to all Jews who came with immigrant visas.<sup>32</sup>

As before, the Israeli government remained sensitive to AJC criticism. In response to Blaustein's censorious and threatening letter, Avraham Harmon, Israel's ambassador to the U.S., conveyed a message from Ben-Gurion to Blaustein affirming the 1950 agreement and stating that the government of Israel "speaks and acts only on behalf of its citizens."<sup>33</sup> But Blaustein and the AJC wanted another public statement. After further exchanges of letters, the two met, and on April 23, 1961, issued a joint statement, much briefer than the original "exchange of views." It was "agreed that everything should be done on both sides in order to obviate . . . misunderstandings in the future, so that it would be entirely clear to everybody concerned that the 1950 Agreement had lost none of its force and validity so far as either side is concerned. In particular Mr. Ben-Gurion undertook to do everything within his power to see to it that the agreement is in future kept in spirit and in letter."<sup>34</sup>

We might note, however, that the joint statement was not nearly as degrading for Israel as the "exchange" of a decade earlier. It acknowledged that "it is perfectly natural for differences of view to exist on the essence and the meaning of Judaism and Jewishness, both inside American Jewry and between various Jewish communities,"<sup>35</sup> and noted that regardless of differences the parties must act in accordance

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Jacob Blaustein to David Ben-Gurion (marked "Personal and Confidential") December 5, 1960; AJC files.

<sup>30</sup> American Jewish Committee, Memorandum to the Executive Board, December 19, 1960.

<sup>31</sup> Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Message Conveyed by Avraham Harmon, on behalf of David Ben-Gurion, to Jacob Blaustein, January 17, 1961; AJC files.

<sup>34</sup> American Jewish Committee, *In Vigilant Brotherhood* (New York n.d.). The full text is found on pages 69–70.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

with the 1950 agreement. It also permitted the prime minister greater ideological flexibility by noting that "some misunderstandings might have arisen owing to the fact that Mr. Ben-Gurion now and then takes the liberty of expressing views on a variety of topics that are his own rather than those of the Government of Israel."<sup>36</sup>

The 1950 "exchange of views" was reaffirmed by Levi Eshkol when he became prime minister in 1963,<sup>37</sup> and by the succeeding prime minister, Golda Meir, in a letter which she wrote to Jacob Blaustein in 1970: "... As you know I was privy to the talks which you conducted on the occasion of your visit to Israel in 1950, and to the understanding which flowed from those talks. This has been a continuing understanding. On my part, there has been no deviation from it, and it is my intention that there will not be."<sup>38</sup>

It seems fair to say that the past decade has reduced the "exchange of views" to a document of purely symbolic importance, and one of importance to only the AJC at that. Perhaps nothing better demonstrates the meaninglessness of the document than the fact that Golda Meir could affirm its contents and could note that, on her part, "there has been no deviation from it," when in fact many of the complaints voiced by the AJC in the earlier decade concerned statements she herself had made. There is evidence that even the AJC no longer holds the views expressed in the 1950 agreement. It sent no protests, much less threatening letters of the Blaustein variety, when Israel called for mass *aliya* from the West after 1967, nor did it object to the very intensive activity on the part of the World Zionist Organization in promoting *aliya* from the United States. The AJC also kept silent in 1972 when the president of the U.N. General Assembly declined to rule on an Arab delegate's objection to Israel's claim to speak for the Jewish people thereby granting de facto recognition to this claim.<sup>39</sup> But what could the AJC have done?—defended the Arab point of view? denied that Israel has a special right to protest discriminatory treatment of Jews in Arab countries or in the Soviet Union? Events, and life, have—at least for the time being—rendered the 1950 "exchange" without substance.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Bertram Gold, "Who Speaks for the Jews?" Text of an address delivered to the annual AJC meeting in New York City in 1972.

<sup>39</sup> The incident is reported in World Jewish Congress, *Press Survey* No. 3444 (October 27, 1972) in an item from the *Jerusalem Post* (October 26, 1972).