

MEMORANDUM OF THE ADL

ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE
of B'nai B'rith
212 Fifth Avenue—Suite 601
New York 10, N. Y.

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: You will want to read the attached report of a significant conference with Congressman [Harold H.] Velde, Chairman of the Un-American Activities Committee.

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TO: ADL National Commission, Eastern Region
Board, Chicago Board, National Civil Rights
Committee
FROM: Benjamin R. Epstein
DATE: July 9, 1953

TO: ARNOLD FORSTER
FROM: HERMAN EDELSBERG
DATE: July 3, 1953

ON June 30th, the Washington and New York papers carried the story of the appearance before the House Un-American Activities Committee of Dr. Louis Harap, editor

of JEWISH LIFE. The headlines and the body of the stories sent out by AP and UP, were, as you know, most unfortunate. They played up Harap's charges: 1. That the Com-

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mittee was creating conditions "under which 6,000,000 Jews were murdered"; 2. that the Jews in the Soviet Union are better off than they are in this country.

That afternoon, I phoned Chairman Velde of the Un-American Activities Committee and told him that the Committee: 1. Had taken the obscure editor of an obscure paper with a peanut circulation, an editor who had been consistently ignored by the Jewish community, and had provided him with a million dollars worth of free publicity in all American papers for his Commie propaganda line; 2. the Committee had failed to show that Harap spoke for no Jewish organization or Jewish group, or that in fact Harap and his kind had been flatly repudiated by the responsible Jewish organizations.

Velde told me that he was unhappy over the news stories, that he hadn't sat through the whole hearings and didn't realize that the hearings had gotten out of hand, and that he had just received a statement from the American Jewish Committee in New York repudiating Harap which he would put into the record.

I told Velde that was all to the good, but it couldn't begin to undo the damage done by the Harap stories. I asked him to give me an hour with himself and his chief counsel so that I could suggest a course of procedure that the Committee could follow with witnesses like Harap to insure that such witnesses didn't climb all over the Committee and get away with murder. Velde set Thursday, July 2, at 4 o'clock as the date for such a meeting. I told him I would bring several of my colleagues from other Jewish organizations with me.

On Thursday, I brought Marcus Cohn of the AJC [American Jewish Committee] and Ben Weitzer of the Jewish War Veterans to Velde's office. Velde was detained on the floor of the House by the voting on the defense bill, so we began our conference with Robert L. Kunzig, chief counsel of the Committee, and Frank S. Tavenner, who had been chief counsel under the Democrats and now was associate counsel. (Kunzig is a Philadelphian who served as prosecutor in some of the war crimes trials and shows both an interest in and understanding of Jewish problems.) Velde joined us about half-way through the hour-long conference.

After the amenities, I showed the Committee counsel our office press clippings on the Harap hearing. I said bluntly that in my opinion the net result of the hearing had been to: 1. Disseminate Communist propaganda; 2. create the false impression that *JEWISH LIFE* and Harap were substantial spokesmen for a section of Jewry that praised Russia and denounced American institutions; 3. perpetuate suspicion among some Jews, created during the days when Rankin was riding high on the Committee, that the Committee was unfriendly to Jews.

Kunzig asked me to elaborate on the last point, and I did. My colleagues told me that they were aghast at my bluntness, but they were gracious enough to say that my resume of the Committee's history cleared the air beautifully and permitted us to get down to cases.

We made the following proposals to the Committee:

1. They must assume that witnesses like Harap will try to use the Committee as a sounding board for their propaganda. Accordingly, they should screen such witnesses first in executive session to explore what the witnesses might be up to. While we did not take the position of suggesting to the Committee who should or should not be called in an open hearing, we did suggest that they should make their own decision as to whether or not the good served by a public hearing for an insignificant Commie would outweigh the harm done by this carefully coached witness when he shouts "persecution."

2. The files of the ADL and AJC should be consulted for information about such witnesses. Where responsible Jewish organizations had repudiated the witness or the line he peddles, that fact should be put in the record *before* the witness sounds off. In such a case, it would be most unlikely that the newspapers would play up the witness' charges against the Committee. Kunzig wasn't so sure about this. He felt that many reporters were out to smear the Committee or at least to sensationalize the hearings by playing up the wild charges of witnesses. We told him to try our way nevertheless, and if the newspapers persisted in writing bad stories, this same delegation would call on them for an accounting.

3. The Committee staff handling such witnesses should be familiar with our analyses of the Communists' studied tactics of exploiting charges of persecution and discrimination. The witnesses should be confronted with material from ADL's report, *The Troublemakers*, and our two pamphlets on Communism, "the damned best pieces there are on the subject." Copies were left with them.

4. Why don't Committee members say flatly, when a witness falsely charges anti-Semitism, that they regard anti-Semitism as being un-American and odious? Why don't they steal the witness' lightning? If Committee members took a clean-cut public stand on anti-Semitism, they would be in a position to say that, "just as patriotism may be the last refuge of scoundrels, so the cry of anti-Semitism may be the last refuge of insincere Communists." Kunzig insisted that some of the members had done just that—as I would see when I read the whole transcript of the hearing—but that the newspapers did not report it.

Velde didn't take much part in the discussion—both counsel carried the ball. (But, Velde did make a contribution—counsel noted he called me by my first name.)

1. Velde and counsel agreed then and there that in the future, Committee investigators would be sent to ADL and AJC for material on prospective witnesses. (That would be a good opportunity to make specific suggestions on procedure.)

2. We were invited to send additional copies of our material so that the staff could bone-up on our answer to the Commies' persecution cry.

We left on the most friendly basis. My colleagues and I were heartened by the understandings achieved. I was extremely glad for their participation—Marcus Cohn was a tower of strength—I think it contributed greatly to the success of the conference.