

The Triple Crisis of Zionism

And the Jerusalem Congress

LABOR ACTION

By HAL DRAPER

One of the few things about which the Zionist movement in all its sections is pretty unanimously agreed is that the whole movement is today racked from top to bottom by a violent organizational and ideological crisis.

Note: it stems from the fact that Israel exists, not from any special difficulties of that state. There is also, to be sure, a much-discussed crisis in Israel itself; but this does not contribute to the crisis of the Zionist movement.

This is all very well recognized:

"Now the state is established . . . and the Zionist organizations are left minus members and without a mass-movement ideology. There has been a great searching for redefinition but so far no new definition has emerged."

"Perhaps the chief impression [at the convention of the Zionist Organization of America] was one of crisis and also how to explain this crisis. The ZOA now claims a membership of about 164,000. This is a significant drop from the quarter million members which were cited only about a year ago."

... an intellectual crisis which cuts across parties, but divides Zionists in Israel from Zionists elsewhere. Spokesmen for the divergent viewpoints are trying hard to meet the crisis with the dignity and forbearance becoming to a dilemma so deep and so wounding.

"The rise of the Jewish state brought them [Zionists] a tremendous feeling of elation and triumph, while it also administered a severe jolt to their movement. . . . It is doubtful whether all our friends in Israel realize to the present day the extent and nature of this crisis. . . . Suddenly and at one stroke, the Zionist Organization was shown of its political prerogatives and much of its authority."

THE THREE ROOTS

The roots of the Zionist crisis which stems from the setting up of the state of Israel are three. They are quite distinct and with independent effects, though not equally important or fundamental, not equally recognized consciously by the Zionists themselves, and certainly confusively interlocked in the discussions and struggles within that movement.

(1) The one which the Zionists refer to as "the ideological question" is simply: "What is Zionism now, anyway?" and "What is a Zionist today?"

(2) With Israel there was born Israel nationalism as distinct from Jewish nationalism. It has made itself felt in a short space of time, not least within the Zionist movement. Within Israel, of course, there is no conflict between the two simply because the two are identified.

(3) The Zionist movement has always been divided into political parties—"General" Zionist (bourgeois conservative), Labor Zionist (socialistic, further subdivided into reformist and would-be Marxist), Revisionist (chauvinist and fascist), Religious, Stalinoid, etc.

The World Zionist Congress which was concluded at the end of August in Jerusalem mirrored and focused all the strains and confusions

set up within Zionism by these three sources of crisis.

It could not and did not resolve the crisis; it had not really been expected to do so by anyone. But through the struggles at the Congress, as in the discussion which preceded it, the triple crisis of Zionism is quite clear.

The Political Antagonism

"Zionism has already achieved a remarkable result—something hitherto deemed impossible. I refer to the close union of the most modern with the most conservative elements of Jewry."

That was more or less true (and incidentally an index to the character of Zionism) up to the creation of the state. The union is now strained more and more.

We take it up first not because it is most important but because it is easiest to see. Mainly, at the present stage, it is a complication which serves to embitter and sharpen the crisis.

The power struggle in the movement is largely between the Israeli and American Zionist leaders, but it is not, of course, accidental that the most influential leaders and spokesmen of the Americans (Abba Hillel Silver, Emanuel Neumann, Benjamin Browdy, etc.) and the main organization, the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), are General-Zionist in politics.

THE PRIZE IS STATE POWER

For both sides this is not simply a matter of political theory, to be shelved by them in their capacity as Zionists. As we said, state power is at stake. For the Americans, of course, it cannot directly be their state power, but it is state power in "their" Zion. Not less than their non-Jewish class-counterparts in this country, they are mortally antagonistic to socialism, which they see in Mapai's controlled economy, labor base and program.

The ZOA, for the first time in its history, at its convention earlier this year, voted overwhelmingly to identify itself formally with the Israeli General-Zionist party. It meant throwing down a gage. At the ZOA convention, as well as in Jerusalem, Silver went out of his way to take a crack at socialism. Part of the struggle at the world congress turned on "how much of a say in the development of Israel the Zionist movement outside the country should be entitled to in return for its economic aid."

THEY AREN'T NAIVE

"Translated into practical terms," continues the dispatch, "this, of course, means a measure of authority over immigration, the rate and sources of economic development, and inevitably Ben-Gurion's people believe this would have a political effect as well."

Naturally! And when the Israeli General-Zionists' allies from America yell that they want more determining power in fields which vitally affect Israeli economic policy, they can hardly be considered to be entirely naive.

The bitterest words in connection with the otherwise carefully restrained world congress flowed from this antagonism. Rabbi Silver started the very day before the congress opened with an open accusation at a press conference that the Israeli government had undermined American Jewry because it wanted non-interfer-

ence from U. S. Zionists in political matters and "nothing pleased Washington more"—hence the drift of State Department policy away from Israel. He did not make explicit the inference that Ben-Gurion should tolerate interference from his American Zionist antagonists in the country's political affairs, or else.

On the other hand, Ben-Gurion's denunciations of the ZOA leaders had been even more slashing. At the congress Browdy had to stand up to rebut the former's statement labeling the ZOA "enemies of labor" and an outfit of labor-baiters. (He might have been more convincing if it had not been true, for one thing, that at the ZOA convention one of the chief speakers had waxed enthusiastic in praising the Israeli General-Zionists for supporting the right not to join a trade union.)

BEN-GURION POURS IT ON

In a speech prior to the world congress on August 8, Ben-Gurion had cuttingly denounced the ZOA by name: "The leaders of this movement live in deceit. . . . The nation must know that the Zionist Organization of America has ceased to be a Zionist organization, and pretty clearly referred to them scornfully as a bunch of 'merchants, lawyers and rabbis.'"

Perhaps the most heated moment on the open floor of the congress came when, after Rabbi Silver had been given time to speak his piece, Mrs. Golda Meyerson rose to answer him for Ben-Gurion, before a hall packed to see the sparks fly. Among other things she "demanded to know what Zionist leaders in America had done to refute the libels that the Israeli government was preventing private capital and foreign investors from participating in Israel's upbuilding. She asked whether some of these same leaders had not helped fan the fires of allegation."

It is, of course, not necessary to charge the gentlemen from the ZOA with the deliberate intent to substitute their own influence as foreign Zionists for the failure of the Israeli General-Zionists to do better in the last elections. The capacity of men to believe "sincerely" that they are acting not as "partisans" but only in the best interests of humanity is virtually infinite. But it is this which gave part of its heat to the congress issue of "special status" for the Zionist movement.

THE "SPECIAL STATUS" ISSUE

The Americans came to Jerusalem with the No. 1 demand that the world Zionist organization, rather than the Israeli government and its agencies, be given a monopoly on the activities of Jewry all over the world on behalf of Israel. As Silver said, demanding a "charter" for the Zionist organizations:

"What we mean by 'charter' is not just affording the [Zionist] Jewish Agency diplomatic status in Tel Aviv. . . . We want the Zionist movement to be recognized as the channel for all important activities of Jews on behalf of the state of Israel."

They talked in terms of a "semi-governmental" status for the Zionist executive. The Israelis had more than good ground to suspect that what the Americans were demanding would mean in practice their assumption of a good measure of control and influence in Israel's foreign economic activities and consequently a long finger in all of Israel's affairs.

Under the circumstances this was more than a modest demand. Ben-Gurion rejected it, counterposing (perhaps only tactically) the demand that the Americans first recognize their obligation to aid Israel unconditionally regardless of their hostility to the political composition of its government.

Silver especially was quite clear on what he was demanding: "We do want, however, a say on how the money [raised for Israel] is spent. No taxation without representation, we say." There were the Americans, with the slogan of 1775 demagogically on their lips, demanding control over a vital part of another country's internal policies. The Israelis replied in effect that if Rabbi Silver wanted a voice in Israel's affairs,

he would have to settle down as an Israeli citizen.

Browdy, at the congress, resorted to more weasely formulas: "We have no desire to interfere in the internal affairs of Israel," he said piously, "but we have every desire to make sure its foundations are firm and will resist the ravages of time." And later: "We are prepared to work unconditionally, but not at the expense of our self-respect."

WAVING THE DOLLAR

The Americans had two weapons with which to enforce their demand against the position of the Israelis: their influence in the world Zionist organization—and the almighty dollar. And it can be argued that these two are one. Everyone knew, as the report to the congress later stated, that American Jews had given 75 per cent of all moneys received by Keren Hayesod, the Development Fund, in the last 5 years.

The Americans were not too bashful about waving the dollar in a threatening pose. Silver hinted broadly: "Jews are not automatons which release coins upon the pressing of a button. . . . And in his speech to the congress he "warned, however, that should Jews overseas begin to feel that Israel flouts them completely, 'they might cease to help you and there will be nothing you can do about it.'" (JTA, Aug. 20.)

At the World General Zionist caucus in Jerusalem just before the congress, the Americans threatened to make sure that the Jews would not act as "automats":

"The greatest impression was made by the speech of the chairman of the ZOA Executive Committee, Mortimer May, who said that the time had come to explain to American Jewry the internal problems of Israel. 'For a long time,' said Mr. May, 'I was of the opinion that not everything about Israel should be told in the U. S., since I felt that it might harm the Zionist movement. But we must now change our way of thinking.'" (ZINS, the ZOA news service.)

Naturally, extreme threats by both sides must be taken with a grain of salt, since the American Zionists need their relation with Israel (otherwise how exist as Zionists at all?) as much as the Israelis need the former's dollars. But the threats were there, including May's to bring the Israeli election campaign home to New York. Everyone knew a compromise would be reached, as it was; it was a question of who got how much, and how the vague terms of the compromise would work out in the period ahead.

But it is too easy to see the conflict at the Jerusalem congress in terms of this political antagonism alone or primarily. That would be quite inaccurate. This element of crisis is here to stay, but it is not accidental that we have largely had to speak (as the congress did) in terms of the "Americans" and the "Israelis."

The Nationalist Antagonism

"The Zionist axis is no longer, and has not been for 30 years, Tel Aviv-Odessa, but Jerusalem-New York."—Jerusalem Post, Aug. 14.

The axis has developed antagonistic national poles. For one thing, the American Zionist leaders came to Jerusalem with roughly the same spirit and with the same psychology as the American delegation at the San Francisco conference on the Japanese treaty: as the world's aristocrats, with wealth and power behind them, and little inclined to play second fiddle to the leaders of a piddling little country. That little country is dear to them, of course, because it is Zion, but it is dear to them as their Zion, not as a sovereign state with leaders of its own.

On the other hand, the development of Israeli nationalism (as distinct from Jewish nationalism, remember) and its effect on the character of Zionism in Israel would deserve a special chapter in a book on contemporary Zionism. "It is from here [Israel] that the principles of Zionism shall go forth," proclaimed Ben-Gurion a week before the congress.

In discussing the "special status" issue in terms of the political antagonisms, we had to be one-sided temporarily. Actually, the national sovereignty of Israel is also involved, and while the Americans could think of this concept only hazily, it meant a great deal more to the Israelis, and not Ben-Gurion's Israelis alone.

It was not just a matter of the Americans' "special status" demand versus national sovereignty as an abstraction. It is not hard to feel the reaction of an Israeli to the rich foreign tycoons, too many of whom apparently made manifest their scorn for "our alleged contempt for what a few among our guests consider to be elementary comforts of civilized life (e.g., hotel rooms with private bath)," as a Jerusalem Post article delicately put it.

The same paper editorialized during the congress about such people who come not as pioneer emigrants but as "alien experts with their talents for hire" and it urged that their contribution "be on this country's hard terms, without setting up two standards, one for those coming from the free, another from the enslaved world.

Let not those that come cling to the return ticket as to a lifeboat in a storm; and let them embrace our civilization without a mental reservation about the size of the British Commonwealth of Nations or the United States of America."

As for the other delegations, it is likewise not hard to feel their reaction before the dollar-power of the Americans and the governmental power of the Israelis. Prior to the Congress, the London Zionist Review had editorialized:

"It is necessary for them [the British delegates] to oppose the idea that the two important centers of world Jewry are America and Israel. . . ." And the president of the British Zionist Federation, speaking at the congress, "expressed fears that Zionists in Europe would be caught in a struggle between the 'power blocs' of Israeli and U. S. Zionism." (JTA, Aug. 17.)

VOICE OF AMERICA

Before the dollar-waving of the Americans, the Israelis reacted not as Zionists but in the first place as Israelis. We are not criticizing them for this. On the contrary, it would have taken miserable men—not men who felt they were building a country—to listen without bitterness to one of the American Zionist leaders who actually got up and said:

"You don't know America. It is too big for you to understand. You have fantastic ideas about the United States. . . . We demand respect from the Zionist movement. Without the Zionist Organization of America, Israel will suffer." (Joseph Tenenbaum.)

The interests of Israel as a nation versus the interests of the Zionist movement could not have been more clearly counterposed than in the spectacle during Ben-Gurion's tour of this country earlier this year. The head of the Zionist state, the symbol of Zionism's great "victory," was here—and no reference to Zionism ever passed his lips at any of his meetings. More than that: he cut the whole American Zionist movement dead-cold.

He spoke at numerous meetings, but even the ZOA failed to secure his presence at their big "Salute to Israel" rally, where more than 19,000 waited for him. The president of the ZOA was not among the notables invited to sit on the platform during Ben-Gurion's Madison Square Garden bond rally. Zionism was never even mentioned in all the speeches and tableaux about the struggle for Israel's statehood. (He addressed not a single Zionist group until just before catching the boat—and then it was a semi-private meeting which we will discuss under Section III.)

WOOLING THE NON-ZIONISTS

This is not to be explained by the political antagonism with the pro-General-Zionists of the ZOA; it is too extreme. Besides, he paid no more attention to his own Labor Zionists. And there is another very clear explanation for it, which the American Zionists understand only too well.

It is clear that Ben-Gurion looks on the Zionist movement as an obstacle to mobilizing the fullest aid to Israel from abroad, more than as an aid.

For now virtually the whole Jewish community, non-Zionist and anti-Zionist as well as traditional Zionists, are for aid to Israel. While Zionism was a dream, only the Zionists could be depended on. Now it is a state, a reality, and the old lines do not demarcate out the "friends of Israel."

The old Zionist movement is the old skin which has to be cast off in the moulting. As a state, Israel looks to and appeals to the Jewish community as such, and its appeal can only suffer if it gets involved with the traditional antagonisms between Zionists and anti-Zionists within the Jewish community. The Zionists, the Israelis feel, cannot hold back from giving. It is the others who are not to be offended, who are to be wooed. (Hence the Zionists' partly hollow threats, in reaction, to hold back the dollars.)

A "prominent Israeli official" is quoted by the Times correspondent in Jerusalem:

"Zionism has had a long and useful life and should now be given a decent burial," he said recently. "We Israelis, who pay taxes, maintain an army, fertilize the desert and bring in hundreds of thousands of new immigrants, cannot be expected to brook interference from Diaspora [non-Israeli] Jews. . . ."

The state of Israel congress, Nahum Goldmann, president of the congress, countered the demand for "special status" with the argument, among other things, that to give special status to the Zionists "would antagonize the good friends of Israel who are non-Zionists."

There is no doubt that the "special status" demand was opposed not only (though most sharply) by the Mapai Israelis for the reasons already explained, but by far wider Israeli circles whose motivations were not political-partisan but nationalist. Why should aid to Israel (as far as the Israelis are concerned) be farcically channeled through a privileged section of the Jewish community—just because of this section's past services? Let it be given a decent burial, with a cheer.

But the Zionist leaders do not plan to be buried because their existence is inconvenient to the Israelis. Unfortunately for them, however, as we shall see, their chief gravedigger is not Israeli nationalism but their own ideological bankruptcy.

There is another and quite different aspect of the national question in Zionism which bedevils the diaspora Zionists, especially the Americans, as a result of the existence of the Jewish state.

It is the delicate question of "double loyalty." In words it can be and has been resolved easily enough: We are American Jews loyal to our own country but

loving Israel; we are like good Irish-American citizens who love the old sod too; a man can have many loyalties, to family, party, religious group, country, etc. and they are not contradictory. . . . and so on. This is a perfectly consistent attitude for a non-Zionist "friend of Israel."

It was easier for the European Zionist (Labor-Zionist) leader, Jacob Yefroikin, editor of the Paris Kiyum. In the article which we shall quote he is talking what undoubtedly seems another language to most American Zionists. But the Americans, at Jerusalem, found most of the others thinking on the same basis, even though the question of double loyalty is the last question they would dream of bringing up. If Yefroikin is extreme, it is because he is following the heart of Zionism to its logical ends.

A ZIONIST LEADER'S VIEW

"President Truman at the beginning of 1948, in his message to the convention of the American Council for Judaism, said: 'Jews must in their own interests and as loyal citizens, think and act exclusively as Americans.' And if this hint was not sufficiently obvious, it found a clearer definition in a speech at the same gathering by Carol Binder: 'If,' he said, 'the struggle for a Jewish state. . . would eventually have to cost the democratic countries the oil of the Middle East, the Jews of the United States would have to pay dearly for it!'"

"Even now in peacetime, before the storm has broken out, there are Jews, even so-called Zionists, who have the sorry courage to justify morally the preference of American patriotism above the Jewish if there should ever come to a clash between the two. States the editor of the Reconstructionist in an open letter to Lessing Rosenwald that, in a not-improbable case, if the state of Israel should be involved in a war with the United States, American Jews will act exactly in the same manner as if another country were at war with America and in accordance with their 'exclusive loyalty' would fight Israel as Jews of one country always fought Jews of another country, just as American Catholics would fight any Catholic country." (Reconstructionist, March 5.)

"There is a theory concocted by some Zionists, including Chaim Greenberg [American Labor Zionist theoretician], which says that we Jews are no exception to the general rule. Non-Jews too have many loyalties and this does not prevent them from being loyal citizens of their countries.

"This is true. . . . To each social cell man gives only a part of his loyalty. Only a totalitarian state demands the entire individual for itself. States which recognize a certain degree of individual freedom see nothing wrong in the pluralistic loyalties of its citizens.

"All this is true, but our specific Jewish [that is, Zionist—H. D.] problem is not exhausted nor answered by this. For it is one thing to have many loyalties to different objects, and something else to have one's own loyalty divided and split between two objects of the same category. A man can be true to his father and mother, to his class and state at the same time. But a person cannot have two fathers and two mothers and remain equally loyal to both of them, just as a man cannot be long to two nations at the same time and have two fatherlands." (Italics in original. Quoted from the Jewish Newsletter, July 23.)

THE NATURE OF ISRAEL

This question of "double loyalty" arises for the consistent Zionist (if there are any such left in the United States), and not for the Jew, not because the former "loves Israel" with the sentimental or philanthropic attachment of an Irishman for old Erin but because of the consistent-ideology of Zionism on the "Jewish nation." This gets us to Section III.

But before any American Zionist (as they virtually all do) rejects Yefroikin's views with sincere astonishment and an unwillingness even to consider such "absurdities" seriously, it would be well to look at Ben-Gurion's definition of Israel as a state. As a statesman, Ben-Gurion recognizes foreign Zionists' loyalty to their own country, but that is as a statesman.

"The state of Israel differs from all other states in that it is not only the state of its own citizens alone, but of the entire Jewish people, of every Jew wherever he lives." (Ben-Gurion at the Jerusalem congress.)

"The state is part of the nation [he is referring to the entire 'Jewish nation' in the world—H. D.] The state does not yet constitute the fulfillment of Zionism but it is the main and fundamental means for the ingathering of the Exiles, and this is the content of Zionism. . . . Israel is a state not only in respect to its residents—it is a state for the Jewish nation. The constitution of the state of Israel is one small law—the 'Law of the Return.' That is the special historic quality designating the raison d'être of the state of Israel." (Ben-Gurion in speech, Aug. 8.)

To be sure, Ben-Gurion does not want any "double loyalty" either. As we shall see, his demand is that every Zionist become an Israeli. But the American Zionists do not want to go to Israel; they want to remain Zionists in the diaspora even while "their own" state exists in the world. But their dilemma in this respect is only a part of their larger dilemma which is the content of the ideological crisis of Zionism, which underlies and embraces all that we have already discussed.

(Concluded next week)