

Documents

WHICH WAY FOR WORLD JEWISH CONGRESS?

By Dr. Moshe Sneh

A year has passed since the Plenary Session of the World Jewish Congress in Montreux, when, for the first time after the Jewish catastrophe in Europe, Jewish representatives from all parts of the world, from five continents and nearly 70 lands met together in conference. All those attending the conference felt that the establishment of the State of Israel rejuvenated our ancient people and gave it a faith to believe in, a future to fight for.

The existence of a united national organization has not blurred the class differences within the nation; on the contrary, it has sharpened them. Naturally, they also expressed themselves at Montreux. The conference was united in its enthusiasm for the State of Israel, and in its solidarity with the Defense Army of Israel, then engaged in its bitter fight with the invading forces; it was divided when it came to seeing the imperialist inspiration behind Arab aggression and the direction of our political struggle. The conference was united in its recognition that the fate of Jews was everywhere bound up with the progressive and peace-loving forces; it was divided when it came to distinguishing progress from reaction.

Certainly the general resolutions, accepted unanimously, were progressive in a general way, but they lacked exactness and definition. The detailed practical proposals of the left were not accepted. The composition of last year's executive was also open to criticism. The majority of the American delegation was adamant that there should not be even one representative of the left—neither from Mapam nor from the non-Zionist left—on the section of the executive resident in New York. Although the possibility of co-option was left open and a promise given that this would be made use of, delegations from Eastern Europe and communists from other countries refused to accept the places allotted to them on the European and Israeli sections of the executive so long as representatives of the left were not included on the American section as well. Thus, Montreux ended with an incomplete executive.

The activities of the World Jewish Congress must of necessity fall into three categories:

(a) Political representations in Jewish matters in the United Nations and with governments concerned;

(b) Activation of the Jewish masses in the struggle for their rights and against any manifestation of anti-Semitism or fascism;

(c) Co-operation with non-Jewish progressive forces and international democratic institutions—to prevent the outbreak of another war, against war propaganda, to secure peace, national freedom, human rights, etc.

The Congress executive has limited its functions to the first category; to diplomatic representations to various governments, and to the presentation of memoranda. In this field, the Congress executive has shown continuous activity. Without denying the value of these activities—some of them, notably those during the U.N. discussions on Human Rights or in connection with the position of Jews in the Moslem countries, are most praise-worthy—they do not justify the existence of Congress if they are not accompanied by a mass movement within the Jewish communities based on close co-operation with those fighting for progress and peace and against anti-Semitism and national discrimination.

One or two examples are worth noting. The U.S. government organised an exhibition of reviving German industry and gave great publicity to known Nazi industrialists. What did the New York branch of the W.J.C. executive do? It had conversations with a number of officials and asked certain changes in the exhibition, but it refrained from conducting a public campaign against this pro-Nazi propaganda in New York. Such a campaign, had it been initiated by Congress, would undoubtedly have gained the support of many progressives in America. The executive of the Congress, however, preferred to deal with the matter behind locked doors.

Another example. There was no evidence of Congress participation in the protest campaign against the release of Ilse Koch, the notorious concentration camp murderess. A mass campaign could have been organized in America among Jews and non-Jews against this gross miscarriage of justice in freeing this human beast. A strong personal statement of the late Stephen Wise was published, but the public was not called to action by the Congress executive. No information has reached us of any public protest against the acquittal of the eleven Nazis responsible for the organization of the

pogrom in Germany in November 1938, yet Munich—the “seat of justice” is in the U.S. zone of Germany. The executive composed a fairly adequate memorandum on the subject of American lenience towards the Nazis in Germany, but who will read this memorandum? What can be its effect if no mass movement is organized against this revival of the Nazi danger in Europe.

There is no need to enlarge on the negative decision of the Congress executive on participation in the Congress for World Peace in Paris. The executive received requests to participate in the Congress from three sides—from the Bulgarian Consistory of Jewish Communities, from the Polish Central Committee, and from Mapam representatives in the various institutions of Congress. The majority of the executive rejected this demand, thereby acting contrary to the Montreux resolution binding the Congress to participate in any international effort to strengthen peace. The executive gave way to reactionary pressure and joined in the boycott of the Paris Congress. This fatal decision, which shocked all progressive Jewish circles in Israel and elsewhere, has already resulted in serious organizational consequences and led to the severance of relations between the Polish Central Committee and the Congress Executive.

Recently there has been another act which shocks the conscience of every progressive Jew. The American Jewish Congress, a branch of the W.J.C., has decided to expel from its ranks two progressive workers' organizations, the American Jewish Labor Council and the Jewish People's Fraternal Order. The official reason given is that these two organizations, in addition to their affiliation to the W.J.C., also participated in the “United Committee against Anti-Semitism” and thereby allegedly violated the constitution of the Congress. It is clear, however, that this step is only an indicative of the anti-communist hysteria which is sweeping America. This craze has apparently caught hold of the Jewish public as well. The action of the American J.C. casts a shadow over the entire Congress; the executive cannot remain silent over this act.

The crisis demands deep heart-searchings. Which way is the Congress turning? Towards an all-embracing framework of world Jewry, including Jews of the popular democracies and progressive Jews elsewhere, or towards concentration only on the right wing?

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