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R E P O R T O F

23rd WORLD ZIONIST CONGRESS

HARASSES ZIONISTS AND DISTRESSES FRIENDS

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September 24, 1951

M E M O R A N D U M

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From: Eliezer Greenberg
Date: September 24, 1951

23rd WORLD ZIONIST CONGRESS

HARASSES ZIONISTS AND DISTRESSES FRIENDS

I. Introduction

The 23rd World Zionist Congress, held in Jerusalem from August 14 to August 28, 1951, was the first Congress to be convened since the founding of the State of Israel and was called primarily for the purpose of replacing the Basle Program of 1897 with a Jerusalem Program that would chart the ultimate realization of Zionism. The Congress resolved, however, to deal with the "tasks" rather than the "aims" of Zionism, the aims of Zionism remaining "the redemption of the people of Israel through the ingathering of the exiles in the historic home."

By a vote of 286 to 0, the rest of the 438 delegates abstaining, the Congress adopted a resolution, defining the tasks of the Zionist movement as:

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1. The strengthening of the State of Israel.
2. The in-gathering of the exiles in Eretz Yisroel (Kibbutz Galuyot).
3. The fostering of the unity of the Jewish people.

This resolution is, in fact, a compromise on the maximal resolution, calling for the "redemption" of all of the Jewish people in the historic home. Adopted on the insistence of the American delegates, this abstract reference to "in-gathering of exiles," does not have to be taken to apply to American Jews, who do not consider themselves "in exile." However, in this connection, it may be noted that Dr. Nahum Goldmann declared that he personally was for "the redemption" of the Jewish people as the true aim of Zionism, but asserted that the Congress "had shown statesmanship by avoiding a definition of aims, which was longer and more difficult, concentrating instead on tasks." (JTA, August 30)

A second resolution adopted by the Congress outlined the terms of the special status to be granted in Israel (by confirmation of the Knesset) to the World Zionist Organization. This status, however, is a far cry from the demands originally put forth by the Zionists, who had asked the Israel Government for the right "to channel all its requirements from diaspora Jewry to the Zionist Organization." In this connection, it has been reported that in return for such status, the Israelis demanded the Zionists' unconditional support of the Israel Government, whatever its composition.

From all reports, the long-awaited event, preceded by much fanfare, marked no significant changes in the Zionist program. The few controversies that did arise involved issues which to all intents and purposes had been settled in the best interests of Israel and Jews outside of Israel prior to the opening of the Congress. On some of these issues, the Congress succeeded only in creating new confusion and distress among both Zionist and non-Zionist friends of Israel.

(We may cite here the exchange of statements between Prime Minister David Ben Gurion and Jacob Blaustein, president of the American Jewish Committee, during the latter's visit to Israel in the summer of 1950. On that occasion, Ben Gurion, in a declaration defining the relationship of Israel to the American Jewish community, asserted:

"We, the people of Israel, have no desire and no intention to interfere in any way with the internal affairs of Jewish communities abroad... Any weakening of American Jewry ... any lowering of its sense of security is a definite loss to Jews everywhere and to Israel in particular...

"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.' ... 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.")

On technical questions involving, for example, measures to introduce economy in the Zionist funds, Keren Kayemeth and Keren Hayesod, and a re-examination of the functions of the World Jewish Congress, no fundamental changes were effected.

But, before proceeding to a discussion of the major issues, we shall touch upon some of the lesser sidelights of the Congress sessions.

II. Old Rifts and Broken Ties

The 23rd World Zionist Congress did not elect a president for the World Zionist Organization, a post of power and prestige to which Dr. Abba Hillel Silver aspired. Dr. Silver failed also to attain the second high post in the movement, that of chairman of the Zionist Actions Committee, which plays a predominant role in the periods between meetings of the Congress. Josef Sprinzhak, Mapai leader and Speaker of the Knesset, was elected to this office, thus strengthening his party's commanding position in the Zionist movement.

Even the strategic (and from the objective viewpoint, undesirable) gain the Silver group won, through great effort and maneuvering, at the ZOA convention in Atlantic City this past June (a resolution pledging "fraternal relations" with the General Zionists of Israel) was abrogated through an agreement with the Progressives, who insisted that neither the Israeli party nor the American party "should seek or expect identification" with General Zionist organizations in other countries.

By relinquishing this gain, the Silver group averted a split in the World Confederation of General Zionists. However, in an interview

upon his return from Jerusalem (several days before the Congress' closing), Dr. Silver admitted that the "peace" agreement was a "patched up job," and declared that the two parties in the Confederation, the General Zionists and the Progressives, "continue to fight each other more bitterly than other parties which do not have a common background." (Jewish Morning Journal, September 5) As a matter of fact, the rift between the Progressives and the Silver supporters has already been renewed.¹

With Dr. Silver facing what seems like unequivocal defeat, Dr. Nahum Goldmann and Dr. Israel Goldstein emerge as the two strongest figures in the Zionist Organization of America. Dr. Goldmann, who is also president of the World Jewish Congress, remains as chairman of the American Section of the Jewish Agency. The seventeen-man Executive of the Agency now includes ten Israelis and seven Americans. The American members are, in addition to Dr. Nahum Goldmann, Benjamin G. Browdy, president of the Zionist Organization of America; Dr. Israel Goldstein, president of the World Confederation of General Zionists; Hayim Greenberg, editor of Yiddisher Kemfer and Jewish Frontier and head of the Education Department

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¹The Jewish Morning Journal of September 19 reports that the Manhattan Region of the ZOA, at its annual conference, "resolved to carry out the decision of its convention in Atlantic City to solidarize itself with the General Zionists of Israel."

of the American Section of the Jewish Agency; Baruch Zuckerman, president of the American Poale Zion; Mrs. Rose Halprin, president of Hadassah, and Zvi Luria, of the Mapam. Berl Locker heads the Jerusalem Section of the Agency.

Dr. Israel Goldstein, who headed a splinter General Zionist group at the Congress, known as the "Independents," has been re-elected president of the World Confederation of General Zionists. His cooperation with the Progressives on most issues -- thereby, in effect, supporting the Mapai -- helped to weaken the Silver group. Furthermore, his decision not to seat sixty Israeli General Zionists, Silver supporters who had boycotted the elections to the Congress, was a definite advantage for the Progressives, and was undoubtedly a factor in raising his prestige among the Progressives, and outside the Confederation, with the Mapai.

III. Status in Israel of World Zionist Organization

The following resolution was adopted outlining the terms of the special status to be granted in Israel to the World Zionist Organization. This status, as noted above, must be approved by the Israeli Knesset.

The text of the declaration reads in part:

..."The Congress considers it essential that the State of Israel, through appropriate legislative act, grant status to the World Zionist Organization

as the representative of the Jewish people in all matters that relate to the organized participation of Jews the world over in the development and building of the land and the rapid absorption of newcomers.

"In relation to all activities conducted in the interest of the State of Israel within Jewish communities outside of Israel, it is essential that the Government of the State of Israel shall act in coordination and consultation with the World Zionist Organization.

"In all matters regarding legislation by the State of Israel touching upon the activities of the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency, their property or their undertakings, there shall be prior consultation between the Israel Government and the executive of the WZO and the Jewish Agency.

"On the basis of the status granted to the World Zionist Organization, the executive of the WZO and the Jewish Agency shall be authorized to work within limits defined from time to time by special agreement with the Israel Government.

"Among the fields of activity during the forthcoming period shall be the following:

1. Organization of immigration and the transfer of immigrants and their property to Israel.
2. Participation in the absorption of immigrants.
3. Youth Aliyah. Development of agricultural settlements.
4. Acquisition and development of land by the Jewish National Fund.
5. Participation in development projects.

"A coordination board between the Israel Government and the executive of the World Zionist Organization shall coordinate the operation of the above-described activities."

IV. Unfinished Business

A recommendation of the Budget Commission of the 23rd World Zionist Congress instructed the Zionist Actions Committee to work out a budget for the Executive of the Jewish Agency, Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemeth) and Keren Hayesod of about \$74,000,000 from the funds allocated to the United Palestine Appeal by the UJA.

It is noteworthy, however, that despite reports of ever-growing economic distress in Israel, the Congress took no action on a proposal to consolidate the administrative apparatuses of Zionist funds in the United States, including the Keren Hayesod and Jewish National Fund, although the question was debated.

In this connection, a Labor Zionist, J. Stolarsky writes on his return from the Congress:

"Heated discussion was heard on the question of merging the Zionist funds -- Keren Hayesod, which until now has financed immigration and colonization, and the Jewish National Fund, which purchased land. Since the founding of the State of Israel, however, the purchase of land is not actual, with the result that the Jewish National Fund has been duplicating the work of the Keren Hayesod.

"It does not seem logical, therefore, that two separate administrative apparatuses should be maintained. However, organizations do not yield easily to dissolution, and as regards the Zionist funds, nothing has been radically changed."
(Freie Arbeiter Shtimme, September 14)

It was also rumored, preceding the opening of the World Zionist Congress, that the functions of the World Jewish Congress would be re-examined. As a matter of fact, since the leadership and the activities of the WJC are almost exclusively Zionist, such a re-examination of its functions has long been urged by individuals and groups holding extremely different points of view.

For example, Peter H. Bergson, former member of the Israeli Knesset, writes:

"There is no reason any longer for the continued existence of international Jewish organizations such as, for example, the World Jewish Congress; unless this body intends to become a purely religious one, its continued existence can do nothing but harm."
(Liberty, September 1951)

And the magazine ISRAEL (published in Tel Aviv by the World Labor Zionist Federation) in the July-August, 1951, issue carries an article titled "Let's Close the Chapter with Dignity," which comments:

"The question is very actual now: Why do we need the World Jewish Congress? Another institution with an apparatus, with expenditures, to create another ideology? It is high time that we closed the chapter of the World Jewish Congress with dignity. We have a rare ability to extend the existence of organizations and institutions long after life has condemned them."

It is worth noting, too, that for some time already the WJC's continued functioning has been defended. To cite one example,

Dr. I. Schwartzburt, member of the Executive of the WJC, writes:

..."Why is the proposed merger of the WJC and the WZO harmful? The WZO has one major purpose: to mobilize and organize world Jewry for the strengthening and development of the State of Israel. We, however, have a major task to defend the economic and political rights of Jews wherever they reside and wherever they are threatened. The purpose of the Zionist Organization is Kibbutz Galuyot. The major aim of a galut organization should be to organize Kehillath in Jewish communities outside of Israel." (emphasis, E. G.)
(Toronto Yiddisher Journal, August 24)

In this connection, it should be noted that a report from Geneva on the meeting of the WJC Executive immediately following the closing of the World Zionist Congress, states: "While the Zionist movement is administratively unconnected with the World Jewish Congress, many of the Congress leaders are Zionists."

To the extent that they are "administratively unconnected," it is worthwhile pointing out that the two Zionist leaders who emerged strongest from the World Zionist Congress flew directly to Geneva to address the WJC Executive: Dr. Nahum Goldmann, who presided at the World Zionist Congress, similarly chaired the Executive meeting of the WJC, and Dr. Israel Goldstein, president of the World Confederation of General Zionists, is chairman of the American Section of the World Jewish Congress.

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V. The Limitations of Dogma

It was to be expected that the 23rd World Zionist Congress would create new functions for the World Zionist Movement, based on the reality of the State of Israel; that it would consider the possibilities for enlarging the sphere of Zionist activity for the further strengthening and upbuilding of the country; and that it would attempt to deepen the harmonious relations between Israel and Jews outside of Israel, laying the basis for a fruitful cultural exchange, of which so much was made before the State came into being and immediately following its founding.

Judging from the reports of on-the-scene observers, however, the Congress displayed a lack of statesmanship and vision, contenting itself with restating outworn Zionist dogmas and indulging in irresponsible and unjustified attacks on American Jewry.

There was scarcely any acknowledgment of the fact that American Jews have supported the cause of Zionism and that since the founding of the State of Israel, they have extended wholehearted and unstinting aid; that they have given millions toward the upbuilding of the country, have counselled the young republic on economic and political questions, and have lent their prestige and influence on its behalf.

Ben Gurion himself admitted at a conference of the World Labor Zionist Federation, which he addressed prior to the opening of the Congress,

that with the exception of one or two small insignificant groups (Ben Gurion mentioned the American Council for Judaism and the Communists), "All Jews have stood by the State of Israel and wish it well." (Yiddisher Kemfer, August 31)

From the pronouncements of the Israeli Zionists, however, one might have concluded that American Jews have contributed little, if anything, to the upbuilding of the State of Israel. Nor did they seem to realize that their attacks might have embarrassing repercussions on Israel's appeal to American Jewry as well as the American public at large.

Here is how an American observer at the Congress sums up the Israeli attitude:

..."Heading it is the unbridled assault made by some outstanding figures in Israeli life upon American Zionism. It riled and chagrined the American Zionists, and could not but have a deleterious effect on American public opinion and the American Jewish effort on behalf of Israel...

"All pervading and thick enough to be cut with a knife is the resentment against American Jews. You hear it expressed everywhere -- in the cafes, in the movie houses, in buses and hotel lobbies.

"The resentment and bitterness echoed through all the debates of the World Zionist Congress. Speaker after speaker rose to denounce American Jewry in general and American Zionists in particular."

This, from no less a spokesman of American Zionism than Dr. S. Margoshes.

Among those who "rose to denounce American Jewry," was Eliahu Dobkin, head of the organization department of the Jerusalem Section of the Jewish Agency. Deploing the absence of a strong challutz movement in America, Dobkin declared:

"Zionist parents tremble at the thought that their children might become infected with the idea of emigration to Israel. In nearly every training farm in America, there have been instances of children removed by force, sometimes with the help of police..."

"Unless training of pioneers is placed at the center of the movement's activities in the United States, American Zionism may close down entirely." (New York Times, August 16)

Also participating in the debate on aliyah was Itzhak Bar-Yehuda, Mapam leader and member of the presidium of the Zionist Actions Committee, who warned American Jews that they are "living under an illusion." He went on to say:

"In ten or fifteen years from now you, too, may be faced with the need for sanctuary. It may be too late by then for you will be unable to draw out your resources. And eventually you will be forced to resort to labor anyhow, because this country will not be able to maintain itself without workers." (JTA, August 17)

The extent of this indiscretion is most evident in the emotion and distress it has stirred among veteran American Zionists as well as non-Zionist supporters of Israel. At the Congress itself, American delegates representing every shade and grouping in the movement protested, in

one form or another, the flamboyant appeals for mass aliyah and the open threats that in ten or fifteen years "it would be too late."

Among the American Zionists who strongly voiced their protests were Mrs. Rose Halprin, of Hadassah; Dr. Emanuel Neumann and Benjamin G. Browdy, of the Zionist Organization of America; Hayim Greenberg, leading Poale Zion and editor of Yiddisher Kemfer, and Dr. S. Mergoshes, member of the Zionist Actions Committee.

Greenberg advised the Congress to take a realistic view of the possibilities of mass emigration from the United States. He insisted that just as there was a difference between medieval Spain, which expelled the Jews, and Holland, which gave them refuge, so there is a difference today between Iraq and the United States. American Jews, he said, would not be persuaded to come to Israel by "declarations and manifestos issued by the Congress."

On the other hand, Dr. Nahum Goldmann, who earlier defended the position of American Jewry, declared later that "Galut does not cease being galut because Jews are happy and well treated. Galut is not measured by good or bad treatment. Galut is a mystical concept, and if you deny that America is galut, you might as well deny the need for Israel."

The American Zionists who did oppose reference to the United States as galut were, nevertheless, not as strong as they might have been, because of their own ambivalent feelings: On the one hand, they are aware

of the freedom and security which American Jews enjoy and honestly recognize that they themselves are not ready to settle in Israel, as they have often been called upon to do. On the other hand, as Zionists they cannot completely repudiate Kibbutz Galuyot since that is the basic principle of Zionism, which has consistently despaired of Jewish life outside a Jewish homeland.

VI. Things as They Are

That the Israeli attitude toward American Jewry is, at best, a cool or hostile one is obvious. We should next consider wherein lie the roots of the "malaise."

Political Zionism has always held that outside of a Jewish homeland, there can be no permanent security for the Jews. The thinking of all the great leaders of political Zionism from Herzl to Ben Gurion was nurtured on concepts of disaster drawn from the tragic history of the Jews in a non-Jewish world, and, in some cases, was reinforced by their own shattering experience with anti-Semitism. It is not surprising, therefore, that even those delegates to the Congress who oppose the cry for mass exodus and strongly object to the "scare technique" as applied to American Jewry did not deny the basic meaning of aliyah for the Zionist movement.

The original Zionist program, as formulated by Dr. Theodor Herzl at the first Zionist Congress in Basle in 1897, states simply, "The object of Zionism is to establish for the Jewish people a publicly and legally assured home in Palestine."

The founding of the State of Israel has, in many respects, superseded this cardinal principle of Zionism, in that a larger concept -- a publicly and legally assured state -- has been concretized. To judge, however, from the Israeli demands at the Congress sessions, the Jewish problem, insofar as Zionism conceives it, has not been finally resolved.

The State of Israel appeals to American Jews on two levels: Out of the traditional Zionist despair for the future of Jews "in exile," and out of its own desperate need for manpower and "know-how."

Consider, first of all, the anomaly which the State of Israel presents. Unlike other national or ethnic groups, the vast majority of the Jewish people lives outside the geographical borders of the "Jewish State." As a matter of fact, at its founding, the State of Israel had a Jewish population of 650,000, as compared with the five million Jews in the United States alone. In the three years since its founding, Israel has, in spite of economic difficulties, almost doubled its population, the greatest majority of the immigrants now coming from Yemen, Iraq, and other culturally and industrially backward countries.

But Israel herself is a poor country, economically and industrially, and is sustained by the financial aid of American Jewry, which she will need, even under the best of circumstances, for many years to come. In order to develop even her own meager resources, however, Israel desperately needs skilled workers and professionals, requirements which can be most adequately met by Jews in the Western democracies, notably American Jews, who, as a matter of record, while extending financial assistance lavishly, have sent an insignificant number of pioneers to Israel.

There is another factor, which, though not usually discussed openly, is well known. It is feared by many Zionist leaders that the tremendous influx of Oriental Jews, who might eventually be in a majority in Israel, will cause Israel to become a "Levantine state," with a consequent lowering of the high standards of society and culture which the early pioneers and later European immigrants brought to Israel.

That this constitutes an actual problem in Israel may be seen from an article by Berl Locker, chairman of the Jerusalem Section of the Jewish Agency, published in ZION, monthly organ of the WZO. Writing in the August, 1951, issue, Locker asserts:

"Unfortunately, there are elements even in Israel who, if not openly avowing their disapproval of immigration from the Oriental countries, have serious doubts and misgivings as it is bound to change the character and structure of the Yishuv, and may soon give the non-Ashkenazic elements numeric equality with or even preponderance over the Ashkenazic."

These problems are a part of the grim reality of Israel's existence, and they should not be either denied or minimized. However, while we recognize their exigency, we may still question whether the Israelis at the Congress approached them with a sense of reality, tact and farsightedness.

VII. The Other Side of the Coin

One of the greatest shortcomings of the 23rd World Zionist Congress, the first to be held on the territory of a Jewish State, was its failure to recognize the necessity for a radical revision of the Zionist program in light of the new reality. The Zionist ideologists labored, as it were, in a vacuum, or, at best, on the assumption that the problems they dealt with and the solutions they offered were eternal and inevitable.

This was most strongly evident in the attitude of the Israeli delegates toward "galut," in particular the situation of American Jewry, which is, in most respects, the case of exceptionalism in Jewish history. Bemused as they are by preconceived and mechanical notions of galut, the Israelis cannot comprehend the unique position of the Jew in America. They cannot see that at no time in history and in no other country have the Jews enjoyed such full freedom, equal rights and educational and economic opportunities as American Jews enjoy, and that the soundest assurance of Jewish security in the United States lies not so much in the fact that the

Jews have been granted "certain inalienable rights," but that these rights are inherent in the basic structure of American democracy. For, while it is true that oppression, poverty and fear drove the peoples of many nations to the shores of the new world, it is equally true that it was the freedom, opportunity and political liberalism of America that beckoned to them.

The Israeli point of view, however, conditioned as it is by Zionist dogma, makes no distinction between "galut" in Eastern Europe and "galut" in the United States. Such oversimplification of the "Jewish question," leads naturally to such an oversimplified demand, as made by Eliezer Peri, Mapam spokesman, that it is now the turn of American Jewry to take the place of "East European Jewry," which, up till the time of the second World War, was the major source of emigration to Israel.

On their part, the American Zionists, many of them native-born and others having spent most of their lives in this country, are aware, of course, of the all-too-apparent differences between the conditions under which East European Jews lived and the status of the American Jewish community, and, therefore, all of them, regardless of disagreements among themselves, rejected the concept of America as galut, pleading as Rose Halprin of Hadassah did that the Israelis be "realistic."

For this, the American Zionists were labelled "assimilationists" in the Hebrew daily YEDIOT ACHRONOT. Commenting on this charge, a leading American Zionist states ironically:

"What does the learned commentator care about public reaction in America, and about non-Jews generally. He has grown up in a 100 per cent Jewish environment. He understands little about Jewish-Gentile relations and cares less. He does not understand how careful one must be not to rouse an unfavorable public reaction which may put the whole group in an embarrassing position."

But granting that the Israelis are indifferent to the sensibilities of the American Jewish community, objectionable as we may regard this attitude, we could, perhaps, understand the logic of their demands if there were even the remotest possibility that they would be fulfilled. From all indications, however, the possibility hardly exists.

Therefore, the only explanation can be that they are totally ignorant of, or choose to ignore, the factors which motivate large masses to emigrate from one country to another. Otherwise, why should a serious body of people spend days bickering over a resolution, which, in light of their goal, could have no practical effect, and what is more, damage their cause?

As a matter of fact, reaction to the Israeli demands is already being expressed among Jews in the Anglo-Saxon countries. A Canadian Zionist comments:

"There was a time when the Zionists envied the patriotism of the Irish Americans. But when the fate of the State of Israel was being decided in the U. N., the Jews surpassed them in patriotism. All of our people were united as never before in Jewish history.

"Today, we must again envy the Irish Americans. Neither de Valera nor Costello have every confronted them with the kind of demands that some of the Israelis at the World Zionist Congress put up to American Jews." (Canader Yiddishe Neues, September 7)

But if the American Zionists took exception to the Israeli demands, it must certainly be so for the great mass of American Jews, who having come to the United States to escape "oppression, poverty and fear," have struck deep roots in this country and do not think of it as a way station.

The American Zionists, of course, may have been the victims of undeserved attacks, but, in a sense, they are reaping what they have helped to sow. Like the Zionists of all countries, they regarded Jewish life in diaspora as a means of furthering the Zionist cause, consequently neglecting to strengthen and develop Jewish life in diaspora for its own sake.

Their present position is the fruit of political Zionism. For two thousand years, pious Jews prayed for the coming of Messiah and Shibat Zion (return to Zion), but perpetuated Jewish life in the countries of dispersion, building its synagogues and Yeshivoth, its codes of laws and ethics, and a distinctive way of life. The non-Zionist secularists, too, created a rich and meaningful culture and a great Yiddish literature, participating all the while in the culture of the countries in which they lived.

The Zionists, it cannot be denied, have produced some outstanding Hebrew scholars and literary figures, but their ultimate goal was a Hebrew renaissance in Zion. Thus, by default, they minimized the great modern Jewish civilization of diaspora, and, in effect, the mainsprings of their own movement, for it was also diaspora that produced the leaders and theoreticians of Zionism, supplied the first idealistic pioneers and the builders of the land of Israel.

VIII. "Hebraization of Diaspora"

It is well known that with the founding of the State of Israel Hebrew became its official language. Though unspoken by the great mass of the Jewish people for over 2,000 years, it was always held in reverence and esteem as the "Lashan Kodesh" (sacred language). It is understandable, therefore, that the Israelis should wish, as was resolved at the Congress, to propagate the Hebrew language and culture in the countries of dispersion. In fact, to the Zionist, the return to Zion and the revival of the Hebrew language have always been synonymous.

However, on this question, too, as on those dealt with previously in this report, the Israelis evidenced an approach analagous to their treatment of aliyah, as though these questions could be "legislated" outside their own boundaries by resolution or manifesto.

It is noteworthy that every major Zionist conference in the past has called for the propagation of the Hebrew language and culture, without having had any noticeable effect. One recalls that most recently, the "Hebrew renaissance in America," so enthusiastically heralded by the ZOA following the founding of the State of Israel (during the administration of the late Daniel Frisch) was one more disappointment.¹

This, of course, should not deter the Zionists, or, for that matter, the non-Zionist who is interested in Hebrew and Hebrew culture, from further efforts; nor could one, in all fairness, object to such an attempt. What is objectionable, however, is the Israeli deprecation of diaspora life and culture in languages other than Hebrew, particularly in its extreme application to the Yiddish language, which the Israelis undoubtedly view as the highest expression of galut. This, in spite of the fact, that experience has shown that where Yiddish is strong, Hebrew similarly flourishes.

But, in their desire to "Hebraize the diaspora," the Israelis have concluded that the Jew who does not possess a knowledge of the Hebrew language is hardly a Jew at all. To cite only one example of this approach, we may quote from an address delivered by Prime Minister Ben Gurion, in which he asserted:

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¹According to a recent report the Evander Childs High School in N. Y. has had to cut out two of its four classes in Hebrew for lack of interested students, and that an attempt to establish such classes in Cleveland high schools failed when only 23 applicants out of a required 40 responded.

"The fact that the Jewish people are one people does not conflict with the loyalty of the British Jew to Great Britain or the loyalty of the American Jew to the United States. But he must also express himself as a Jew, and for a Jew there is only one form of expression -- Hebrew."

Such an attitude does injustice to millions of Jews, who do not feel that their Jewishness is contingent only upon a knowledge of Hebrew. We know for a fact that Dr. Theodor Herzl, the father of political Zionism, had no knowledge of Hebrew, and his case could be multiplied by thousands of Zionists today of all groups.

One may also question whether the Israelis are ready to disavow the great creations of diaspora in the past -- in Aramaic, in Yiddish, in Ladino, and in all the languages in which Jews have made their contribution to world culture. At least one group in Israel, true a small one composed chiefly of native born Israelis, has already done so. The "Canaanites," a group of young intellectuals and writers, advocate the cessation of immigration to Israel and complete severance of any relations with galut.

One cannot stress strongly enough the importance of language in shaping the culture of a people, but the fact, nevertheless, remains that culture cannot be imposed or grafted on. If the Israelis are serious about establishing spiritual and intellectual ties with American Jews, there must be a genuine give-and-take between them. For if, on the one hand, this imposes upon American Jewish parents a responsibility to instill in their children an interest in Hebrew culture, the Israelis, in particular the

Sabras, must also be ready to demonstrate a greater interest in and respect for the life and culture of Jews outside of Israel than they have shown until now.

Thus far, the Israelis, particularly the youth, have evidenced no such interest, having inherited the traditional Zionist scorn of galut. Even where there is actual opportunity for the Israeli youth to meet American Jews, they seem almost deliberately to avoid all contact with them. One reads with distress and a sense of shock an article by E. Auerbach in the Jewish Morning Journal of September 7,¹ noting that Israeli students in American universities "keep aloof from Jewish students. They do not want to know Jewish students, and would rather associate with non-Jews..."

Mr. Auerbach goes on to say:

"A great deal is being said about influencing Jews in diaspora, but Israeli youth runs away from Jews. Israel sends enough shlichim (emissaries) here on official business, but the elements who could create the strongest ties, the youth, create only antagonism. American Jewish students, who are drawn instinctively to the Israelis on the campuses, are insulted when they are met with scorn by the Israelis."

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¹In this connection, it is interesting to note that the writer E. Auerbach, a well known poet and journalist, has been affiliated with the Labor Zionist movement for over thirty years. He has been a frequent visitor to Israel, and, as a matter of fact, served as a volunteer in the Jewish Legion in Palestine during the first World War. The newspaper in which this comment appeared is the Jewish Morning Journal, of which Benjamin G. Browdy, ZOA president, is now the major shareholder.

Under no circumstances has the propagation of a language and a culture outside its own borders been an easy task. Certainly, the situation described above will not help to advance the cause of Hebrew and Hebrew culture in this country. The Israelis must recognize the great achievements of Jewry in diaspora and its two thousand year old heritage. They cannot start from scratch, for culture is a people's accumulated experience, wisdom and expression, taken from time "for all time."

IX. Summary

It is apparent, of course, that insofar as the American Zionists are concerned, they have been alienated still further from their "father image," and, for that matter, from each other. Although they return from Jerusalem determined "to take over the communities,"¹ it cannot be said that they are yet united in their purpose. As noted earlier in this report, sharp disagreements are still in evidence among them, notably within the Zionist Organization of America, and it has already been urged by Rudolph Sonneborn that "partisan Zionism" be eliminated in the United States, in which the movement is divided into parties paralleling Israel's political structure. Organized Zionism, Sonneborn maintains, "is the need of a new area of activity ... Zionism, as a whole, must be preserved to serve as a

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¹B. Smolar, the Forward, September 1, 1951.

spiritual and moral stimulation for American Jewry's response to Israel's needs." (New York Times, September 10)

There are indications, in fact, that Mr. Sonneborn's group is coming closer to the point of view of the Labor Zionists in America, who have long advocated and lately become more insistent upon the organization of a Kehillah in the United States, in which the Zionists hope to play a major role.

It is in this connection that one must view the future tendencies of the American Zionist movement. They will undoubtedly also attempt to play a more active role in fund-raising in the United States, for at the Congress in Jerusalem they were severely taken to task by the Israelis, who pointed out to them that 95 per cent of the funds sent to Israel during the past ten years came from the federations and welfare funds, in which the Zionists had not been too active.

The Zionists recognize that this will not be an easy task. Thus, moderate Zionists have again raised the question of increasing the Jewish Agency Executive to include non-Zionists, who make up the majority of the big contributors. In such an eventuality, the non-Zionists, before agreeing to participate, will undoubtedly make it understood that aid to Israel, and exigent it is, must not be allowed to weaken Jewish life in diaspora. Only myopic Zionists could view such conditions as infringing on Israel's needs, for it is clear that the wellbeing and security of Israel are

dependent on the wellbeing and security of Jewish communities outside, just as, in turn, the wellbeing and security of the communities and Israel itself are dependent upon the strength of democracy in the world.

From all indications, the American Zionists, whether they like it or not, may eventually become simply "friends of Israel." For while the status asked for by the World Zionist Organization appears, on the surface, to be a victory, it is a fact that to all practical purposes, it has not enlarged the Zionist sphere of influence. As one leading Zionist complains:

"The failure of the Israel Government to accord special recognition to the World Zionist Organization in the diaspora makes a mockery of the whole project of a status. A Zionist Organization in diaspora, treated by the Government of Israel on par with, say the B'nai B'rith or the American Jewish Committee, can hardly aspire to a great role." (Dr. S. Margoshes, The Day, September 7)

In studying the American Jewish scene, one observes trends among the Zionist groups pointing to a renewal of their efforts to organize Kehillath in the United States. The World Jewish Congress, too, in order to justify its continued functioning, has already expressed itself on this point. As the director of organization of the WJC put it, "The major aim of a galut organization should be to organize Kehillath in Jewish communities outside of Israel."

In summing up, it should be emphasized that neither an unconditional pro-Israel attitude nor an unconditional anti-Zionist approach would be in the best interests of Jewry. Neither position is consonant with the general policy of the American Jewish Committee.

It must be recognized that while the hard reality of the State of Israel in the three years since its founding has somewhat dimmed the enchantment, any unconditional anti-Zionist expression would find all Zionists, regardless of differences among themselves, united to combat it. Such a situation would also undoubtedly rouse the sympathies of a great many non-Zionists.

America-centered Jewish organizations, therefore, must intensify their efforts in certain areas of activity, with special emphasis on serving and guiding American Jewish youth, who are today manifesting a still undefined but noticeable effort at self-identification and self-acceptance in harmony with the best traditions of Jewishness and American democracy.

The forces which prepare the proper climate in which Jewish creativity, in whatever form, can best express itself, would not only enrich the American Jewish community, but at the same time command greater respect among Jewish communities all over the world, including Israel.

Suffice it to say that a "Bagels and Yox," and "Borscht Capades," culture will not lend prestige to the American Jewish community, nor will it counteract the regrettable ignorance and lack of understanding among the Israelis of the American Jewish scene.