

WORLD ZIONIST CONG JUNE 9

(Editor's Note: With Jewish leaders from all over the world planning to attend the 27th World Zionist Congress, which opens in Jerusalem, June 9th, the following historical resume of previous Congresses is particularly interesting.)

By Henry W. Levy

Delegates from all over the world will gather in Jerusalem on June 9th for the 27th World Zionist Congress. Twenty years after the birth of the State of Israel, it will be a very different Congress from the assemblage at Basle in 1897 at which Theodor Herzl founded the modern Zionist Movement.

What was then a dream is today an actuality -- a living pulsating Jewish State. At the first Congress, there were 202 delegates; at this coming twenty-seventh Congress, there will be 500 voting delegates from 52 countries representing the various Zionist groupings and about 300 non-voting delegations of youth and students, heads of Jewish organizations and communities, representatives of aliyah movements in America and Europe and special delegations from fund raising groups.

From the first Congress, there emerged the Basle Program that was to be the basic philosophy of the Movement for many years. The 27th Congress is expected to reformulate the Jerusalem Program originally adopted at the 23rd Congress, the first held in Jerusalem following the birth of Israel. The revised Jerusalem Program will reflect the new historic situation and the contemporary challenges before Israel - particularly the need for increased aliyah.

Veteran Zionists, both Israelis and those living in the Diaspora, will bring to the Congress in Jerusalem this June a panorama of memories. Eleven cities have been the site of these World Zionist Congresses. Since the 23rd Congress, the meetings have all been held in Jerusalem -- this being the fifth for the Holy City -- the first in a unified Jerusalem.

But before that there were ten other sites, with Basle as the overwhelming favorite. The Congress met in Basle no less than ten times. The last Congress in Basle was the pivotal pre-State Congress of 1946, the first Congress held after the conclusion of World War II. The first Congress held outside of Basle was the fourth Congress held in London in 1900, a site chosen in recognition of the key role that it was hoped Great Britain would play in the founding of the Jewish Homeland. Since then, Congresses have been held at The Hague, Hamburg, Vienna, Carlsbad, Zurich, Prague, Lucerne and Geneva.

Herzl, himself, attended and presided at the first six Congresses. The meeting in Basle, in 1905, just a year after his death, was chaired by Dr. Max Nordau, who was to function in this capacity three times. Others who have held the chairmanship at Congresses have been David Wolfsohn, Nahum Sokolow, Leo Motzkin, Menahem Ussishkin, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, Joseph Sprinzak, Dr. Nahum Goldmann, and Moshe Sharett.

Each Congress had its issues, its controversies, its triumphs. The Second Congress was largely concerned with the proposal for the establishment of a Colonization Fund. The Fourth Congress planned for the alleviation of the plight of Rumanian Jewry and the beginning of organized migration. The Fifth Congress established the Jewish National Fund. The Sixth Congress was nearly torn apart by the debate over the British offer of Uganda for Jewish colonization. The Seventh Congress definitely

rejected the Uganda offer. The eighth Congress established a Palestine office to encourage settlement and industry under the direction of Dr. Ruppin. The Ninth Congress, in Hamburg, saw the first appearance of a group of Chutzim. The Tenth Congress was largely devoted to the promotion of Hebrew Culture and witnessed the election of Professor Otto Warburg to the WZO Presidency and the ascension to control of the so-called "practical group."

The Eleventh Congress voted the establishment of the Hebrew University. The Twelfth Congress, following the Balfour Declaration, elected Dr. Weizmann as President of the World Zionist Organization. While the Thirteenth Congress was in session, the League of Nations ratified the British Mandate over Palestine, a major milestone in the international recognition of the concept of a Jewish National Homeland. The Fourteenth Congress in 1925 was most concerned about aliyah, about methods of colonization.

The Fifteenth Congress, in 1927, represented 631,151 shekel holders, an indication of the growth of the World Zionist Movement. The Seventeenth Congress, which elected Nahum Sokolow as president of the Movement in place of Dr. Weizmann, met following the impact of the Arab riots of 1929, and the Passfield White Paper. The Eighteenth Congress met under the shadow of an emerging Hitlerism in 1933. The Nineteenth Congress, once again electing Dr. Weizmann as president, met without Revisionist participation, the group having organized the new Zionist Organization earlier that year.

Partition, as suggested by the Peel Commission, was discussed in Zurich at the 20th Congress in 1937. The Twenty-First Congress, in 1939, the last before the outbreak of World War II, with 1,416,280 shekel holders, was concerned largely with combating the restrictive immigration regulations of the British as limited by the MacDonald White Paper. The Twenty-Second Congress, in 1946, the first to be held after World War II, witnessed the withdrawal of Weizmann, the emergence of Ben Gurion as head of the Jewish Agency Executive, and the shift of Zionist leadership to America. This was the Congress that paved the way for the Proclamation of the State of Israel a year and a half later.

Since the founding of the State of Israel, all Zionist Congresses, beginning with the 23rd, have been held in Jerusalem. With the government now having full responsibility for the State's political relations with other countries of the world, the nature of the post-state Congresses has differed from that of the pre-state Congresses. Although Israel's relations with the world and with its Arab neighbors are still - as always - a concern of the Congresses, the deliberations of the post-state have been directed largely to those areas in which the Zionist Movement had responsibility and authority such as the practical aspects of growth, the promotion of aliyah and the development of better techniques of absorption and education for aliyah. The 23rd Congress set the tone for these post-state Congresses with the adoption of the Jerusalem Program, which defined the role of the Zionist Movement.

The 24th Congress, meeting in April and May of 1956 under the threat of the Sinai War later that year, warned that danger to Israel "constitutes a grave threat to the peace of the world." It called upon the nations of the world to make available "adequate weapons" to Israel in its struggle for survival. In the general plea for aliyah, stress was placed on the encouragement of middle class immigration. Eight years after the establishment of Israel, the Congress pointed with pride to the fact that 800,000 survivors of the Holocaust, as well as refugees from countries in the Middle East, had found a haven and were integrated into the new state.

The promotion of aliyah from free countries through a program of emissaries to Diaspora countries was adopted by the 25th Congress. It also urged the creation of economic instruments facilitating absorption of newcomers and recommending an intensification of settlement activities in the Negev.

The 26th Congress, in urging "the intensification and dissemination of Zionist consciousness," recommended an educational program towards aliyah and the "stimulation of emigration by personal example."

At the coming Congress the over-riding theme will be aliyah, with particular emphasis on western aliyah. The plan for the reorganization of the World Zionist Movement, and the streamlining of the Jewish Agency, will be widely debated. Also, of great concern will be the consideration of techniques for improving and expanding cultural activities and work with youth. A new Jerusalem Program will be adopted and new guide lines for the Zionist Movement evolved at this 27th Congress.

No one can predict with certainty all the actions and developments that will emerge from the sessions of the Congress in Jerusalem this June. But it is not an overstatement to say that the issues before it are significant, and the decisions made will have great influence on the future of Israel, the Zionist Movement and Jewry everywhere.



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