ISRAEL AND THE STATE OF ZIONISM

Zionism in Crisis

FOR years now Zionist circles have been discussing what they openly define as the “crisis in Zionism.” Intensive personal coverage of eight sessions of the Convention of the Zionist Organization of America in New York Aug. 25-28 revealed that the crisis persists.

The crisis was precipitated, paradoxically enough, by the establishment of the State of Israel and has for the past few years been sharpened by the attacks of Israeli Premier David Ben-Gurion on the Zionist movement.

The existence of Israel served to test and exposed the hollowness of the main principles of political Zionism. Before 1918, a Zionist could talk loosely about Jews the world over constituting a single “nation.” But with the State of Israel and a nation forming there, an American Zionist could no longer, as an American national, claim to be part of the Israeli nation without running afoul of the legal meaning of dual nationality, which rejects simultaneous membership in two nations.

Despite Zionist theory, which advocated and predicted “the ingathering of the exiles,” American Jews and even American Zionists, except for a few thousand, have not migrated and in the foreseeable future not even the most dogmatic Zionist expects them to settle in Israel. Nor, it is obvious, has Israel solved or can it solve “the Jewish question” all over the world.

Zionist political theory, however, had never attracted the majority of Jews in the countries of large Jewish population. Yet the practical demonstration of this hollowness did not deter the masses of Jews from extending their sympathy and support to the people and State of Israel. But the crisis in Zionist theory developed into a crisis in program: what was it that Zionists did that distinguished them from other friends of Israeli independence and security? Failure to provide a satisfactory answer led to an organizational crisis: drastic drop in ZOA membership and organizational funds.

(The ZOA is today only a part, and currently a small part, of the organized Zionist movement here, which includes Hadassah, with 318,000 members, the Labor Zionists and their auxiliary Pioneer Women, the socialist-Zionists, Religious Zionists, and other groups.)

Now this internal Zionist crisis does not rise from, say, such a vital issue as the alignment, so dangerous for Israel, of the Ben-Gurion foreign policy with that of the Western powers, especially the USA, in the East-West Cold War. On that, unfortu-
nately, there is unanimity among General Zionists and Labor Zionists to this day, and Ben-Gurion and the ZOA leadership see eye to eye. The source of the Zionist crisis lies in an entirely different conflict.

While dogmatic Zionists could try to ignore the challenging question when non-Zionists asked, “why a Zionist movement now that there is a State of Israel?”, Zionists could not ignore Ben-Gurion. As ZOA leader Dr. Emanuel Neumann told a European General Zionist Conference in Belgium June 26-27, “When Ben-Gurion came to America for the Israel Bonds campaign [1951] he avoided mentioning the word Zionism and wouldn’t meet with Zionist leaders. When I reproached him he replied that he wants ‘to talk to all the Jews and you, Zionists, put yourselves up as a wall between Israel and the Jewish people.’”

Particularly did Ben-Gurion scold American Zionists for not settling in Israel. East European Zionist dogma regarded personal emigration to the Land of Israel as a part of the definition of the Zionist. Ben-Gurion, therefore, began to question the right of American Zionists to consider themselves Zionists. At the Jerusalem Ideological Conference in Aug., 1957 he pointed out: “The Jews of America, including the Zionists among them, see themselves as a part of the American people, while at the same time they consider themselves a Jewish community. . . . Members of the bodies that belong to the Zionist organization are no different from those Jews who do not belong to that organization. Zionism in America is not based on the consciousness of exile and foreignness, and on the will and the need to turn to Zion.”

And since, in Zionist dogma, such consciousness and such will to emigration are part of the definition of the Zionist, the American Zionists were not Zionist. Last fall, Ben-Gurion insisted: “The rise of the Jewish state started a new chapter in Jewish history. In this new chapter the Zionism of each person is determined by whether he resides in the State. . . . Even the Naturei Karta, which does not recognize the Jewish State but who live in Israel, are Zionists, whereas Jews who call themselves Zionists but who live in America cannot be included within the community of Zionists.”

This May, at the Conference of his party, Mapai, Ben-Gurion returned to the taunts: “The Zionist organization was a scaffolding for building the edifice. As long as the building was in process the scaffolding was necessary. But since the building is completed, the scaffolding must be removed because it obstructs the entrance. The Zionist Organization is a scaffolding which refuses to be removed.” Then he pointed to the work in behalf of Israel by the non-Zionist B’nai B’rith, Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds and other groups as argument that the Zionist organizations are now superfluous. Although Ben-Gurion’s position was not endorsed by Mapai, and is in fact rejected by a Moshe Sharett, it has the backing of Foreign Minister Golda Meir; these views influence Israeli public opinion and wreak havoc in USA and other Zionist circles.

In the World Zionist Organization, its president Nahum Goldmann about a year ago succeeded in getting agreement of the Executive Committee to change the WZO Constitution to permit affiliation of non-Zionist organizations that accepted the 1951 Jerusalem Program defining the task of Zionism as consolidation of Israel, ingathering of the exiles and the unity of the Jewish people. By securing the affiliation of such bodies as B’nai B’rith, Goldmann
hoped to demonstrate to Ben-Gurion that Zionism really includes the Jewish people. Dr. Neumann, at the Belgian conference referred to above, asserted of the World Jewish Congress that its "independent existence is entirely unnecessary, and we shall soon propose that the WJC be incorporated into the World Zionist Organization!" The test of the Goldmann tactic will come at the 25th World Zionist Congress opening in Jerusalem Dec. 27. Judging by the 63rd Annual Convention of the ZOA at the Statler-Hilton, the WZO convention is not likely to come up with an answer to the Zionist crisis.

The ZOA Convention

FOR at the ZOA convention there was interminable resentment expressed against Ben-Gurion's views but no program to solve the crisis. The ballrooms of the Statler-Hilton resounded with rhetoric to prove to Ben-Gurion—and to themselves—that Zionism is indispensable. Rebuttals of Ben-Gurion by speakers like the indignant Convention Chairman and ZOA vice-president Harold W. Carmely, the histrionic and clamorous vice-president Rabbi Joseph S. Shubow, the well-tempered administrative vice-president Jacques Torczyner, the grave elder statesman Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver and the plaintive new president Max Bressler as well as from the floor, while affirming a faith, offered no program.

At one session a young girl, Evelyn Torczyner, niece of Jacques, got the floor to say that it's all right to criticize Ben-Gurion, but let us do something here, let's make a program, since the Young Zionists have no program because the ZOA has no program. She was applauded because she was young and fresh, complimented patronizingly as evidence of a future for the ZOA—and her frustrated challenge was ignored.

Reporting on Young Zionist activities two days later, Bernard Rifkin complained that while no youth were coming into the ZOA no attention was being paid to the problem and advanced a set of proposals, including the idea that the Zionist program should take positions on American problems like Negro segregation, anti-Semitism, juvenile delinquency, attitudes to African and Asian independence and similar matters. The report was referred without discussion to the National Executive Committee.

ZOA National Secretary Dr. Sidney Marks reported a membership of 86,836 enrolled with 15,705 still to be enrolled (the ZOA press release issued the misleading figure of 103,000). A Virginia delegate, however, stressed that the key figure was the 50,086 unit dues-paying members, uninflated by adding their wives and children. Since a few years ago we had a unit membership of almost 100,000, he said, this was a "catastrophic drop." A Milwaukee delegate added that in 1948 the unit membership was 270,000. The gloom was not dispelled when a Philadelphia delegate triumphantly announced that at "a luncheon of wealthy men" one man had just given $100,000 to the ZOA (all assumed he was the incoming president Max Bressler).

Much satisfaction was derived by the delegates (652 regular, 163 alternate, 54 fraternal) from the fact that both presidential candidates found it useful to address the convention. Kennedy in person at an opening session to which 3,200 thronged, and Nixon in a recorded speech at the dinner honoring Rabbi Silver. Both reaffirmed that Israel is here to stay, an elementary proposition that still requires assertion, since the Iraqi Foreign
Ministry July 27 had declared it "strongly opposes Israel's existence" and in Cairo the official Al Gomhouria Aug. 6 for the thousandth time insisted that "Israel will not continue to exist."

Both candidates vaguely deplored closing the Suez Canal to Israel, the Arab boycott, the Arab refugee problem, the arms race (and both failed to mention that the USA had been the first to pour arms into the Middle East) and both "pledged" action if elected. But no delegate pointed out that neither party can help solve the Middle East tensions because neither party recognizes that they can be reduced only by cooperation between the USA and USSR and not by unilateral maneuvers designed merely to strengthen USA positions in the Cold War. (If most Zionists, like other Jews, vote for Kennedy, it will be for reasons indicated by Mr. Gerson on page 7.)

If there was some dissatisfaction among the delegates with the "promises" of Kennedy and Nixon it was not because these Zionists differed with the candidates on their bi-partisan Cold War approach to Middle East policies. Rather did the Zionists fear that neither Kennedy nor Nixon could be relied on to recognize the service Ben-Gurion is ready to render such a U.S. policy. Zionists who to this day believe that Ben-Gurion's joining Britain and France in their 1956 Suez adventure was a "glorious triumph" for Israel resent the fact Republicans and Democrats together supported the United Nations' action, based on USA-USSR cooperation, that forced Britain, France and Israel to withdraw after their aggression in Sinai and the Suez area. So much is this Zionist orientation on the West in the Cold War taken for granted that it was not even discussed at this Convention. The resolution on U.S. policy in the Middle East, which embodied the Kennedy-Nixon approach, was adopted without comment by about 50 delegates present on the floor when the Resolutions Committee reported.

What the ZOA should do about the Arab boycott was extensively discussed at a plenary session. (Incidentally, at the same session the printed program provided for consideration of the Eichmann Case and the ZOA press release actually reported such a discussion was held, but it was not. The chairman, ZOA vice-president Rabbi Joseph P. Sternstein, blandly ruled that Eichmann would not be discussed for two reasons: what was there to discuss? and since the case was in the courts it was improper for the ZOA to discuss it lest it prejudice the court!) Israeli Consul Shimshon Arad warned that "if we publicly overstate the effect of the boycott," we may be helping the Arab cause by scaring some firms beginning to deal with Israel. He cautioned against allowing considerations of building organizational morale by giving the membership something to do to override the main issue of what was good for Israel.

The Israeli consul's views did not please many delegates who argued for a public counter-boycott. Finally a resolution was passed instructing the National Executive Committee to give high priority to create a Committee to protect Americans from the Arab boycott and to work with other organizations for this end.

Another issue that got much attention beginning with Mr. Redelheim's opening address and culminating in a well-attended panel discussion was "The Need for a Representative Body for American Jewry." Rabbi Ira Eisenstein of the Reconstructionist move-
ment was for such a body, although he noted it could not speak for all Jews, since there would always be dissenters. He believed, however, there is enough agreement in Jewish life to enable common action on many problems. He favored a bicameral body, a council of national organizations and an overarching council of community councils and federations. He hoped the initiative would come from the Synagogue Council.

B'nai B'rith president Label Katz, personally a Zionist, argued there was "less to fear from dissent than from conformity" and proposed that it would be sufficient to expand the President's Conference (of 18 national Jewish organizations), by adding more presidents and expanding its field of interests.

ZOA National Executive Council Chairman, Rabbi Max Nussbaum, advocated a National Jewish Assembly elected by to-be-created State Jewish Assemblies composed of city Community Councils; national organizations could have weighted representation in the National Assembly. The convention resolved to pay special attention in all ZOA regions to promoting a central Jewish organization.

Another resolution urged Zionists to “regenerate and reconstruct the Jewish community” on the basis of the “centrality of Israel in Jewish life.” Now it is this concept of the “centrality of Israel” that separates Zionists from non-Zionists, whether, like Ben-Gurion, they believe that Zionism is a wall between Israel and the Jews or, like Dr. Neumann, they believe Zionism is a bridge. In that sense there is no fundamental difference between Ben-Gurion and those he is attacking.

At the 1957 Jerusalem Ideological Conference, Ben-Gurion defined “three elements that can serve as a moral and cultural bond between Diaspora Jewry and Israel. Attachment to Hebrew culture, and first and foremost to the Book of Books in the original; to Israel; and to the Messianic vision of redemption, redemption both Jewish and human; that is the three-fold cord that can bind together all sections of Jewry, of all parties and all communities. . .”

**What the ZOA should do about the Zionist Organization** gladly accept this view; all they want is to be recognized as an organization useful in shaping such bonds.

American Jews who are not Zionists (and the overwhelming majority who are pro-Israel are not Zionists), however, cannot develop American Jewish life and culture with Israel as its center, Hebrew as its language and the Bible as its text, no matter how they may esteem the Bible, Hebrew and Israel. Whatever part any or all three may play in a healthy American Jewish life and culture, none of them can be central. Failure to understand this key fact in American Jewish life is what has caused the crisis in American Zionism and failure to grasp this fact about Jewish life in other countries has caused the crisis of world Zionism.

The center of American Jewish life has to be in our country and not elsewhere. Only such an orientation can develop a proper relationship between American Jews and Israel, to whose existence, independence, welfare and peace they are devoted, without reference to the confusing issue of “centrality of Israel” or the dangerous foreign policy of the Ben-Gurion government.