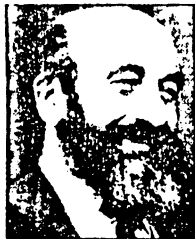


ON THE OTHER HAND  
CHAIM BERMANT



## Zionist has-beens taken up with trivial pursuits

NOW THAT the 31st Zionist Congress is well and truly over, can anyone show cause why there should be a 32nd Congress or, indeed, why there should have been any at all once the Jewish State was established?

It was perhaps too much to hope that, with the Declaration of Independence, the Zionist movement, having done what it set out to do, would pay off its staff, sell off its offices, hand over the proceeds to the government exchequer and go into immediate liquidation.

Such things take time, and I could see the process taking months, even years; but who would have believed that they would still be electing delegates, calling congresses, making speeches and passing resolutions *forty* years on?

What happened was this. As the leaders of the Zionist movement — the first division, so to speak — stepped forward to become the Government of Israel in 1948, a second division immediately stepped forward to take its place, and thereafter it became a job centre for party hacks who either could not get jobs in the Government itself or who had, for one reason or another, fallen out of office.

Or, put otherwise, the Zionist executive was a little like a Shadow Cabinet, holding shadow offices and exercising shadow responsibilities, but spending real money.

Which brings us to the crux of the matter. The speeches made and the resolutions passed at the Congresses,

in so far as anyone paid any heed to them at all, have no relevance or authority, and if delegates fought for a place at the microphone, it was not because anyone was anxious to redefine the Herzlian view of Zionism, but because there was cash at stake.

A place on the executive of the World Zionist Organisation means a place on the executive of the Jewish Agency (they are almost one and the same), and the Jewish Agency controls thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of pounds.

But it is not a mere matter of apportioning funds. There are still men and women around who have grown old in their service to Zionism, and who cannot easily relinquish the habits of a lifetime.

The fact that their movement has, through its very success, lost its *raison d'être* has not stopped them from hanging on to offices which have no function in organisations which have no purpose, or even from recruiting others as their successors.

The Zionist Congresses are thus little more than reunions, where they can talk over old campaigns and mourn the passing of old friends.

They are perfectly harmless and provide useful outlets for the energies of well-meaning people who have nothing better to do with themselves. It's a type of trivial pursuit and not a word could be said against it if those involved paid for their amusement out of their own pockets. But they don't.

A glance at the "Jewish Year

Book" shows that there are no fewer than seven distinct Zionist parties operating in Britain alone, all with their own offices, their own presidents and hon life presidents, chairmen and vice-chairmen, secretaries and treasurers. But they are loitering without visible means of support, for none would last a day if they were dependent on subscriptions from their own members.

They continue to flourish, however, because they are paid for — like the Zionist Congress itself — out of funds diverted from the Kol Nidre appeal and other such occasions. (I exclude the women's Zionist groups from my strictures, because they earn their keep by applying themselves to practical tasks like child welfare.)

A recent study by Professor Eliezer Jaffe, of the Hebrew University, shows that the £500 million donated by diaspora Jewry to Israel forms only 2 per cent of the total foreign aid received by Israel. About £25 million is raised in Britain, which is petty cash as far as Israel is concerned, but even if half that sum were diverted to local causes, the community here would be transformed.

I am not suggesting that our financial commitment to Israel should stop, but we should concern ourselves with the specific needs of specific institutions like the Hebrew University, the Pelech School, the Hadassah Hospital and the Wizo baby homes, which have proved their worth, and not with organisations which have become worthless.