

PEACE FRONT IN ISRAEL

For two days, March 10-11, Israeli citizens jammed Beth Ha'am hall in Tel Aviv to attend the first National Congress of the Peace Movement. Among the over 700 delegates from 300 towns and villages were workers from the factories, farmers from the *kibbutzim*, Arab fellaheen in native costume, intellectuals, students and soldiers. Meyer Vilner, Communist Knesset member, gave expression to their passion for peace. "For the Jewish people," he said, "a new war would mean the extermination of more millions of Jews—total destruction. For the state of Israel the new war danger threatens the liquidation of the country and total destruction of its inhabitants. Therefore the patriotic interests of the state of Israel . . . demand participation in the struggle against the danger of war and the maintenance of peace."

The meeting had been summoned by the Israel Peace Committee, a broad group crossing party lines. On the congress presidium sat the three Israeli members of the World Peace Congress Continuations Committee, Meyer Yaari, Mapam leader, Tewfiq Toubi, Arab Communist leader, and Yisroel

Bar Yehuda, Mapam leader. A number of Mapam and Communist members of the Knesset also served on the presidium, as did poets A. Pen and A. Shlansky, Jewish Agency executive member Y. Zerubavel and former cabinet minister Itzhak Greenbaum.

Greenbaum expressed quite simply why he had joined the congress. "If we do not wish Israel to become a momentary episode in the history of mankind," he said, "we must do everything in our power to insure the victory of the forces of peace."

Demands for peace were coupled with urging for equal treatment of Arabs with other citizens of Israel. The opening speech of Meyer Yaari set forth this demand, as well as a call to outlaw the atom bomb and the fight for self-determination of peoples. Tewfiq Toubi severely criticised the policy of the Israeli government towards the Arab states. Neither the Arab nor the Jewish peoples, he said, would be hitched to the war chariot. "This Peace Congress," he exclaimed, "representing the best sons of the Jewish and Arab peoples, shall give a clear and decisive answer. 'The

people of Israel will never consent to the conversion of their country into a war base!'"

Toubi affirmed that it was possible to reach agreements with the Arab states without imperialist intervention. He urged especially that the attempt to hand over Arab Palestine to Transjordan be resisted. Instead, a fight should be carried on to create an independent Arab state, which would be an ally of Israel in resisting imperialist encroachment.

Policy towards the Soviet Union was discussed by Dr. Moshe Sneh, Mapam leader and general secretary of the Israeli League for Friendship with the Soviet Union. "Friendship for the Soviet Union," he said, "can not be expressed better than in the struggle for peace. And there is no better guarantee for the peace and friendship of peoples than friendship with the Soviet Union. . . . We favor peace between Israel and the Arab countries with all our hearts. But we will not allow anyone to palm off on us a Middle Eastern bloc created by the Anglo-Saxons as a Jewish-Arab peace."

Some problems of the peace movement were frankly discussed by Meyer Vilner, Communist Party secretary. He warned against conversion of the movement into a corps of "article writers" instead of militant fighters "every day against every manifestation of war mongering." "There are those," he continued, "who opportunistically try to restrain the masses from demonstrations, strikes and other forms of concrete action. . . . Must we wait for new Maidaneks before we struggle militantly for peace?" Vilner called for a struggle in the Knesset for support for the outlawing of the atom bomb and for Big Five peace talks.

Finally, Vilner appealed for unity. "The Communist Party of Israel appeals to Mapam, to women's and youth organizations, to progressive intellectuals . . . to make a peace movement that will be a powerful and united peace force is Israel which will strike fear in the ruling class so that they will not dare to drag Israel into the abyss of the Anglo-American war madness."



Emblem of Israeli Peace Congress