

What Jewish Conference Achieved

By Abraham Chapman

The American Jewish Conference is now a reality. The 502 delegates who met for five days at the Waldorf-Astoria returned to their respective communities after they had erected a structure in which 65 national Jewish membership organizations of differing tendencies and political outlooks are formally united for the first time. This was the greatest achievement of the American Jewish Conference. It achieved a certain measure of unity among the diverse Jewish organizations in the United States. It took a broad step in the direction of Jewish people's unity and this will be hailed by all Jews in the United States.

The baby has been born. Now it has to grow up. The Jewish unity, begun at the Conference which just recessed is by far not complete.

The most consistent fighters for Jewish unity, the most decisive fighters for the interests of the Jewish people—the Jewish workers—were hardly if at all represented. On the one hand the die-hard Social Democratic clique which dominates the Jewish Labor Committee prevented its affiliate from participating in the local conferences which elected the delegates to the Conference. On the other hand the anti-unity forces within the apparatus of the American Jewish Conference headed by Louis Lipsky, discriminated against and barred the Jewish Peoples Committee with its affiliated trade unions, and the Jewish-American Section of the International Workers Order, with its

41,000 members, from participating in the Conference nationally.

Eighty-five thousand American Jews signed petitions calling upon the American Jewish Conference to admit these organizations and other organizations of the Jewish workers in the United States. A delegation from the Jewish-American Section of the IWO, in which Judge Anna Kross and the Unity delegate from Chicago, H. B. Ritman, participated, and a delegation from the Jewish Peoples Committee composed primarily of Jewish trade unionists appeared before the General Committee and urged the inclusion of the Jewish workers organized in these organizations and in the trade unions. Caplan, an Orthodox rabbi from Queens called for the inclusion of the Jewish Peoples Committee and the trade unions at the very first session of the Conference. Two hundred trade unionists addressed an Open Letter to the Conference demanding their inclusion. But the question was never allowed to be discussed by the Conference as a whole and the General Committee, in a secret proceeding, ruled against the inclusion of this healthy, vigorous and decisive section of American Jewry.

At the General Committee itself a number of prominent Jews spoke out and voted for the inclusions of this section of the American Jews. Outside the General Committee, among the delegates to the Conference, unity sentiments prevailed to a large degree. It was not the absence of unity forces which brought

about this exclusion but the failure of the unity forces to assert themselves properly and fully.

DISUNITY CLIQUE

The Conference was organized under a system whereby all delegates registered their affiliation with one bloc or another. But one bloc functioned throughout the Conference in an effort to prevent the unity forces from coming to expression. Nobody formally designated his affiliation to this bloc. "Forward" clique, the delegates of the Jewish Labor Committee, their associates in the Poale Zion personified in Louis Segal and Chayim Greenberg, and Louis Lipsky, chairman of the General Committee, of the Conference, and as such the most decisive force of this entire bloc at the Conference.

The exclusion of the Jewish Peoples Committee and the IWO is not a narrow organizational question, which can be passed off with a shrug of the shoulders. By their exclusion the Jewish trade unionists, an entire tendency in Jewish life, comprising the most passionate self-sacrificing and conscious fighters for Jewish unity was barred. This inevitably weakened the Conference and is a fatal weakness which threatens the further work of the Conference unless it is remedied at once.

The sessions at the Waldorf-Astoria constituted only the beginnings. Now the fight for Jewish unity continues, even stronger and broader than before. The Conference did not adjourn, it recessed.

It elected an Interim Committee to carry on and it was decided that the Conference as a whole will reconvene within twelve months. What was not achieved in the first five days of the Conference will have to be achieved in the further work of the Conference, in the further development of the fight for all-inclusive Jewish unity and for the implementation of a true program of Jewish people's unity. The Jewish people will support every step of the Conference that it will take in the defense of the Jewish people and its rights and will simultaneously fight to broaden the composition of the program of the Conference.

The Lipsky-"Forward"-Segal policy of discrimination resulted not only in the exclusion of Jewish labor but also in inadequate representation for the religious Jews and particularly for Jewish youth. The vigorous, vital, fighting spirit of American Jewish youth—manifest so heroically on the battlefields—was unfortunately hardly felt at the Conference.

DR. WISE'S APPEAL

The keynote address of Dr. Stephen S. Wise came closest to voicing the aspirations and the sentiments of the deeply-rooted movement for Jewish peoples unity. Dr. Wise correctly emphasized the following as the first point of his address:

"Our first and sternest task, in common with all other citizens of

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our beloved country and with the citizens of the United Nations, is to win the anti-fascist war. Unless that war be won, all else is lost."

Then Dr. Wise stressed the need for unity and the subordination of all partisan and group interests.

Dr. Wise then took the next logical step:

"That American Jewry be united through this Conference is not enough. It must be united with Jews the world over, reforging the old bonds with the re-inforced and unrooted Jewish population of the Soviet Union and eager to act with, not merely for, the reviving Jews of the Axis lands."

Dr. Wise then stressed the demand for the outlawing of anti-Semitism the world over.

From this point Dr. Wise stressed the urgency of immediate measures to rescue the Jews of Europe. And Dr. Wise, the Zionist leader, sought in his keynote address to find a basis of agreement between Zionists and non-Zionists on the question of Palestine. (For this the narrow, partisan and dogmatic Zionists attacked Dr. Wise.) To point out that very many delegates at the Conference fully supported the policy presented by Dr. Wise is to belabor the obvious. The Conference concluded with a special resolution hailing the leadership of Dr. Wise and with a standing ovation for him. But unfortunately Dr. Wise's address remained very much in the nature of a keynote, and did not constitute the leitmotif of the Conference proceedings.

Here again it must be pointed out that the unity forces didn't press sufficiently and didn't fight for the people's unity program.

On one very vital question the militant mood of the delegates did break through the barriers set up by the General Committee to narrowly limit the Conference to the two points of the Conference call: post-war questions and the problems of Palestine. There was evidence from all sides and in all of the blocs in the Conference that the delegates refused to allow any narrow and technical interpretation of the Conference agenda to silence their voice against anti-Semitism. The conference adopted a resolution demanding the international outlawing of anti-Semitism.

The Jewish Peoples Committee, which was not admitted into the Conference, must still be credited to no small degree for the passage of this resolution. Long before the Conference convened the Jewish Peoples Committee initiated a campaign urging the Conference to take action against anti-Semitism. Before the Conference each and every delegate received a circular letter from the Jewish Peoples Committee calling for such action and providing the delegates with copies of the Lynch and Dickstein bills to bar anti-Semitic and racist matter from the U. S. mails. Many delegates were seen with copies of these bills in their hands.

Throughout the conference the Jewish Peoples Committee maintained a headquarters at the Waldorf-Astoria, met with delegates on this question, and urged ac-

tion. But here too it must be pointed out that this good step of the Conference was also limited. The general demand for the international outlawing of anti-Semitism was not accompanied by a recognition of the menace of anti-Semitism, and by a demand for concrete measures, for support of the Lynch and Dickstein bills and by a demand for the U. S. Congress to outlaw anti-Semitism in the United States specifically. This will have to be remedied in the further development of the work of the Conference.

The major weakness of the Conference was the fact that it did not place the quickest possible winning of the war as the focal point of all its deliberations and all its resolutions. This serious weakness, as well as the hesitancy of the unity forces in the Conference to fight for a policy of all-embracing win-the-war Jewish unity, is in large part the result of the exclusion of Jewish labor and the consistent fighters for Jewish unity.

The Conference adopted a program for the rescue of the Jews, which can and should be supported by all Jews. It demanded a warning from the United Nations promising retaliation for brutalities against the Jews as well as an entire series of rescue measures and refugee migration which are by now quite familiar. But the resolutions for rescue failed to call for the quickest possible winning of the war, for the opening of the second front now, for strengthening the Anglo-Soviet-American coalition.

(Concluded Tomorrow)