



There are days when one can feel that they have been part of great things and other days where one is overwhelmed by the futility of our actions to stop those bent on destroying our way of life. Yes, it sounds dramatic, but over the course of the last three weeks we have seen both ends of these emotions.

The largest MERCAZ-Canada delegation ever attended the WZO's Extraordinary Zionist Congress to mark the 75th anniversary of the independence of the State of Israel in Jerusalem from April 19th to 21st. Our group included Rabbis Jennifer Gorman, Sean Gorman, Phil Scheim and Steve Wernick, along with CFMJ President Charles Wrock, Kyla Hershoran and myself.

We were joined by close to 50 other Masorti Movement delegates from around the world, and for the first time ever, the majority, while slim, of the delegates were not from the USA. We are truly a world wide movement!

Our delegates came to Israel from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, France, Hungary, Mexico, Russia, Spain, Sweden, UK, Uruguay and Canada and the US.

We worked with the other “progressive” movements at the WZO to ensure that the the WZO and by extension the Israeli government followed the precepts of the Jerusalem Program, which promotes a democratic inclusive and exemplary State of Israel that is equal, welcoming and open to all Jews regardless of their religious practices.

At the Congress we were incredibly successful, having promoted 15 separate resolutions that honoured our principals.

We have never hidden our agenda. We believe in the basic premise of the 13th paragraph of Israel's Declaration of Independence,

“THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.”

We have always worked towards the day when this statement will indeed ring true. Not everyone shares our belief in “complete equality.”

The Congress was disrupted several times by those led by the radical religious right as headed by “Eretz HaKodesh” who are closely aligned with the Netanyahu government. Both are now committed to denying civil rights to those who are not of their side of the religious or political divide.

They have consistently denied religious rights to anyone other than the Orthodox.



They worked to delay and disrupt the proceedings of the Congress to the point where voting on the accepted resolutions will not take place until nearly a month after the end of the “official” Congress. This is unprecedented.

It is also unprecedented that Eretz HaKodesh, which currently is not represented “officially” in Canada was allied with both Mizrahi Canada and the Canadian Russian Jewish Forum, neither of which have ever disclosed their close and almost supplicant relationship with the “radical right.”

Israel is currently in the midst of a political upheaval spurred by a prime minister who is using every possible means to extend his term. He has again and again given more and more to the radical right, giving a minister who has been convicted of “assisting terrorism” his own private army. The Prime Minister and the cabinet just passed a budget that gives an additional NIS 13.7 billion (\$5.5 billion CDN) to the Haredi, nearly a 4% increase in the State budget, much of it at the insistence of a Shas party member who was twice convicted of tax evasion.

We cannot lose our faith in Zionism or that there will be corrections in the upcoming months as Netanyahu’s own bribery trials begin.

The current coalition is fragile; the Prime Minister is constantly “buying” support as he ignores the needs of the majority.

This is why we proudly joined the weekly protests in Israel. With literally hundreds of thousands of people peacefully protesting this hijacking of democracy all over the country, these demonstrations have forced Netanyahu to retrench and reward his supporters to keep them in the coalition.

These are not the darkest of times for Israeli democracy.

Our support of MERCAZ and Masorti are helping to move the needle back to the centre. Israelis were extremely grateful and appreciated our support.

We must not let them down.

**Stan Greenspan, President of MERCAZ Canada**