

Basel as a host of international congresses

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The tradition of Basel as a place of international meetings, which Part A traced to the Council of 1431, continued in the industrial age. Two congresses held in Basel at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century had a lasting historical significance.

In August 1897, the first Zionist Congress met in the concert hall of the Basel casino, convened by Theodor Herzl, the Viennese journalist who had published *The Jewish State* a year earlier. The congress adopted the Basel Programme, which declared the aim of creating a home for the Jewish people in Palestine secured by public law, and founded the Zionist Organisation.¹ Herzl wrote in his diary that in Basel he had founded the Jewish state. Several later Zionist congresses were also held in Basel, and the city has remained associated with the history of Zionism.

In November 1912, the Socialist International held an extraordinary congress in Basel to oppose the danger of a European war, which the Balkan wars had made acute. The delegates marched through the city and held a meeting in the Minster, which the Reformed church authorities had made available, where speakers from many countries called on the working classes to prevent war. The Basel Manifesto adopted by the congress declared that the workers of all countries would oppose war by all means.² Less than two years later, the First World War broke out. Most socialist parties then supported their national governments.

These congresses show a feature of Basel that would make it attractive to the central banks in 1930: its capacity to host international gatherings of different political orientations in a neutral setting, with good communications and a cosmopolitan population. Having offered its halls and its Minster to Zionists and socialists alike, the city would offer its hotels and offices to the central bankers.

1 Notes

1. On the First Zionist Congress in Basel (29–31 August 1897), convened by Theodor Herzl, and the Basel Programme, see HLS, article "Zionistenkongresse". To be verified. ↩
2. On the extraordinary congress of the Second International in Basel (24–25 November 1912), the meeting in the Minster and the Basel Manifesto against war, see HLS, article "Internationale". To be verified. ↩

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