

Jewish Communal Affairs

American Jewry and the Middle East

A YEAR OF DEBATING DISENGAGEMENT

The American-sponsored “road map” for resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (see AJYB 2003, pp. 212–16) stalled in late 2003 as neither side seemed willing to take the steps laid out by the plan. The Palestinian Authority (PA) would not or could not quell violent acts against Israelis, while Israel did little or nothing to dismantle illegal outposts in the territories or to limit population growth in existing settlements to “natural” increase. Israel continued to build its security fence on the West Bank and to conduct targeted attacks on known terrorist leaders.

As 2004 began, left-of-center American Jewish leaders and organizations placed much of the blame for the stalemate on what they considered the Bush administration’s failure to use diplomatic muscle to advance the peace process. As evidence that the matter had been relegated to the back burner, they cited the president’s failure even to mention the “road map” either in his State of the Union Address in January or in the administration’s new “Greater Middle East Initiative” unveiled in February. These critics, hostile in any case to the administration on matters of domestic policy, hoped that the Democrats would use this foreign-policy issue against President Bush in the 2004 election campaign. Many knowledgeable observers, however, doubted that either major party would risk alienating Jewish voters by proposing a diplomatic initiative that would be perceived as pressuring Israel.

Americans for Peace Now, however, claimed that a telephone poll it sponsored in January 2004 indicated that the mainstream Jewish organizations, which favored giving Israel a free hand, did not represent grassroots Jewish opinion. Conducted by Zogby International, the poll surveyed the views of a random sample of 500 Jews and found that 71.6 percent would be more likely to vote for a presidential candidate committed to active diplomatic engagement, and that 67.8 percent wanted the U.S. to be more evenhanded in brokering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon’s call for unilateral disengagement from Gaza and part of the northern West Bank (see below, pp. 214–15)

played havoc with the previous ideological divisions in the Jewish community. The mainstream leadership, which ordinarily deferred to the judgment of the Israeli government, was not quite ready to do so this time. Members of a delegation visiting Israel from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the umbrella body of organized American Jewry, were briefed about the plan early in March. On their return, some told the *Forward* (Mar. 19) that it was “confusing” and “half-baked.” Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice president of the conference, said, “There is a lack of clarity about what it means and how it will be implemented and what will happen with security. Nobody knows yet what it really means.”

The right-leaning and Orthodox groups, which had long considered Sharon their champion, were split. The Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) and Americans for a Safe Israel immediately denounced the withdrawal initiative as tantamount to rewarding terrorism. So did one Orthodox synagogue body, the National Council of Young Israel, which urged its congregations to telephone Likud MKs and urge them to vote against their prime minister’s program. But the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations (OU), the largest Orthodox synagogue group, and the Religious Zionists of America (RZA) refrained from taking a position, although some of their leaders openly stated their misgivings.

Similar confusion abounded on the left-leaning flank of American Jewry. Its adherents were just as skeptical about disengagement as the right-wingers, but for opposite reasons, claiming that its unilateral nature did not take into account the needs of the Palestinians, and that it could very well turn out to be a way of staving off any further concessions on the West Bank—a suspicion reinforced by statements coming from people close to Sharon. But some on the left saw the new Israeli approach as a giant step toward peace. The most prominent exponent of this position was Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), who declared, “When it comes to Israel and the Middle East, I am a dove and a peace activist. And my hero right now is Prime Minister Ariel Sharon” (*Forward*, Apr. 16).

Despite some concern that Israel’s assassination of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in Gaza City (see below, p. 234) might draw the ire of the U.S. and complicate coordination between the two countries over the Gaza withdrawal plan, Sharon had a very successful meeting with Bush in Washington on April 14. The American president announced his support for unilateral disengagement on the understanding that the “road map” would be followed afterwards; his acceptance of “changing reali-

ties on the ground” in “any final settlement” was understood as legitimizing Israel’s hold on certain West Bank settlement blocs; and he rejected a Palestinian “right of return” to Israel proper (see below, p. 215).

Whatever their private doubts about unilateral disengagement, the mainstream American Jewish leaders applauded the administration’s strongly pro-Sharon stand, while the left-leaning groups drew what solace they could from Bush’s insistence on maintaining the “road map” framework, a position likely to prevent Israel from limiting its territorial withdrawals to those already announced. But the right-leaning elements of the community—and, more important for electoral purposes, their evangelical Christian allies—blasted Bush for approving the uprooting of Jewish settlements, and noted that his vague reference to “realities on the ground” was no guarantee that the U.S. would approve of Israel keeping any specific West Bank territory.

The Bush-Sharon meeting in Washington had been carefully orchestrated to buttress Sharon’s standing among security-conscious Likudniks ahead of the May 2 party referendum on his unilateral disengagement plan. But Likud members, insufficiently impressed by Bush’s assurances, decisively rejected disengagement (see below, pp. 217–18).

American Jewish organizations, which had geared up, on the eve of the referendum, to mobilize their political and public-relations resources on behalf of Sharon’s policy, were dumbfounded at the rebuff rendered by his party. They were also fearful that the U.S. administration, having gone so far to accommodate Sharon’s domestic political needs, would now back away from the Israeli prime minister, who had proved, in the end, unable to deliver. Groups never previously at a loss for public statements on Israel responded to reporters’ questions with replies of “no comment at this time,” or “we will wait and see.” AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee), the premier pro-Israel lobby, put on hold an initiative it had conceived to draft and get congressional sponsors for legislation promulgating Bush’s assurances to Sharon, and Sharon canceled plans he had made to come to the U.S. and address AIPAC’s annual policy conference in Washington, scheduled to take place two weeks after the referendum. “Of course we’re backing Sharon,” one unidentified official of a Jewish organization told the *Forward* (May 7), “but this is an unbelievable fiasco.” The only American Jews happy about the turn of events were the pro-settler elements, which had never disguised their opposition to disengagement.

Although Sharon was a no-show, President Bush addressed the AIPAC conference on May 18, and his words were carefully scrutinized by the

Jewish community. The president drew enthusiastic cheers and more than 20 standing ovations from the audience of 5,000 for his forceful defense of his policies in Iraq and for declaring that the U.S. and Israel were allies in the global war on terrorism. But while calling Sharon's disengagement plan "a bold and courageous step," Bush made no mention of the assurances on borders and refugees that he had given the Israeli prime minister in April. Israeli vice premier Ehud Olmert, undoubtedly delivering a message from Sharon, told the gathering that despite the result of the Likud referendum, the prime minister was determined to implement disengagement.

AIPAC's executive committee, however, did not officially endorse Sharon's plan nor did it request AIPAC members to lobby Congress for it, on the grounds that the initiative had not yet become Israeli government policy. The committee did, however, endorse Bush's April assurances to Sharon and supported congressional passage of a resolution to that affect. It pointedly voted down a proposed amendment that would have noted that those assurances had been given on the assumption of an Israeli pullout from some of the territories.

In the following weeks, mainstream American Jewish leaders sought to impress upon the Israeli government just how important it was—not only for securing congressional passage of the resolution, but also for the health of the U.S.-Israel relationship generally—to push disengagement forward. Most outspoken was editor and publisher Mortimer Zuckerman, immediate past president of the Conference of Presidents, who bluntly told the Israeli daily *Yediot Aharonot* that failure to carry out disengagement could induce the international community to put forward an "imposed solution that Israel won't be able to live with." Much of the organized American Jewish community heaved a collective sigh of relief when the Israeli cabinet voted to approve disengagement on June 6, even though Knesset passage, let alone actual implementation of the plan, was hardly assured.

AIPAC now lobbied feverishly to get Congress to approve its pro-Israel resolution. By the end of June both houses had done so, but the wording of the two statements that emerged differed significantly. The Senate version endorsed not only Bush's assurances to Israel but also the Israeli disengagement plan and the "road map," drawing praise from Americans for Peace Now for pointing out Israel's responsibilities. But the House of Representatives, largely upon the insistence of Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R., Tex.), required nothing from Israel, and simply endorsed Bush's guarantees that the "facts on the ground" would be taken into ac-

count in the final territorial settlement and that Israel need not accept the entry of Palestinian refugees. AIPAC, ignoring the Senate's more balanced language, announced its gratification that Congress recognized "the need for Israel to have defensible borders that reflect demographic realities." An unidentified insider told the *New York Jewish Week* (July 2), "It's all about how this is spun, now that Congress has acted. There's a lot of room for interpretation in these resolutions—and you can bet everybody with a position on peace is spinning like mad."

Seemingly uninterested in spinning was the Union for Reform Judaism, whose governing board approved a resolution endorsing Sharon's disengagement plan and U.S. support for it, but criticizing the administration and Congress for not insisting that Israel return to the bargaining table and ameliorate the "humanitarian conditions" of the Palestinians. These sentiments, conveyed in a letter to Secretary of State Colin Powell, were hailed by dovish American groups, which noted that Reform, claiming 900 congregations and 1.5 million members, was the largest Jewish denomination. But Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), wondered, in the absence of any sign of Palestinian moderation, "Who is America supposed to push Sharon to negotiate with?"

In July, American Jewish attention turned to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, which voted 14-1 (the U.S. judge being the lone dissenter) that Israel's security fence on the West Bank violated international law (see below, pp. 228–29). Since the beginning of the year, Jewish organizations that had international ties had been meeting with foreign diplomats to convince them to use their influence against the court's taking up the issue. Some 30 countries—including the U.S., Russia, and 14 European countries, as well as the European Union—submitted briefs urging the ICJ not to hear the case, and the American Jewish groups claimed some credit for this.

Once the ICJ put the case on its docket, however, the court's condemnation of the fence was assured, and it came on July 9. The American administration rejected the decision, and both houses of Congress passed resolutions denouncing it (see above, p. 140). Jewish concern now focused on UN headquarters in New York, where the Arab states proposed a resolution in the General Assembly endorsing the ICJ decision. It was sure to pass, but Jewish groups hoped to keep the majority for it down so as to head off possible action by the Security Council, the body with the authority to enforce ICJ rulings.

Differences emerged within the Jewish community over tactics. The

Conference of Presidents, reflecting a broad Jewish consensus as well as the preferences of the Israeli government, wanted to keep its diplomatic efforts at the UN low-key so as not to attract even more attention to the issue. Emphatically disagreeing was Foxman of the ADL, who considered the campaign against Israel's fence even more dangerous than the 1975 UN resolution equating Zionism with racism, and called for a public campaign to "delegitimize" the UN and the ICJ. The General Assembly vote, held July 20, disappointed pro-Israel activists. By a margin of 150-6, with 10 abstentions, that body endorsed the court ruling. All 25 European nations voted with the majority, even those that had originally counseled the court not to take up the matter. The Security Council, however, did not act.

In the fall, opposition to Sharon's disengagement policy on the part of the Jewish religious and political right became increasingly controversial. For one thing, inflammatory rhetoric emanating from Israeli national religious circles in opposition to uprooting settlers from their homes was coming to resemble that which preceded the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. In addition, American Jewish groups sympathetic to the settlers prevented the Conference of Presidents from officially endorsing disengagement.

The leadership of American Orthodoxy had strong ties to an Israeli rabbinate that was overwhelmingly hostile to disengagement, some of whose most prominent figures declared territorial withdrawal a violation of Jewish law and urged their followers forcibly to resist government orders to evacuate settlements. American Orthodox groups, harboring some sympathy for this position but reluctant to countenance civil disobedience, sought refuge in ambiguity.

Thus the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), the organization of Modern Orthodox rabbis, issued a statement on September 23 calling on all Jews "to engage in and foster respectful and reasonable debate and discussion of the undoubtedly important issues involved." One prominent member of the council, Rabbi Haskel Lookstein of New York, expressed his disappointment that the statement did not condemn hate speech, including death threats, directed against Prime Minister Sharon by religious extremists in Israel. The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations (OU), meeting in Israel in November, frankly acknowledged that "the debate in Israel . . . has evoked strongly held feelings within the Orthodox Union family," compounded by "profound identification" with the Jews living in the territories. Unable to reach a consensus on disengagement, the OU

left the decision to “the citizens of Israel and the State of Israel’s democratically elected institutions.”

With no American Orthodox organization prepared to take on the hard-line Israeli rabbis, Rabbi Norman Lamm, chancellor of Yeshiva University, issued a joint statement with two prominent moderate Israeli rabbis condemning calls for resistance to disengagement orders. Lamm told the *Forward* (Dec. 3), “There’s no room for encouraging or engaging in political or physical violence. It’s not for rabbis to determine national military policy.”

The ADL, frustrated that the Conference of Presidents would not officially endorse disengagement, approached other organizations to join with it in a pro-disengagement statement outside the conference framework. To head this off, the conference designated its October 14 meeting for discussion of the issue, once again raising an old sore point within the umbrella body. For years, left-leaning member organizations had felt that the conference, under the sway of its right-wing elements, had been reluctant to endorse Israeli peace initiatives espoused, the critics believed, by a majority of Israeli and American Jews. Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice president of the conference, denied that there was any attempt to block an endorsement; rather, he said, the Jewish organizations had so far failed to develop a broad consensus on what such a document should say and whether its release should be postponed until the Israeli Knesset approved the policy.

The October 14 closed-door meeting yielded no consensus. A draft document circulated afterward noted that “a substantial majority” (some two-thirds, according to people who were there) of the organizations supported disengagement, but the conference as a body did not issue an endorsement. Conference chairman James Tisch explained, “We let the reader come to his own conclusion. By saying ‘substantial majority,’ which is what actuality there was, those who want to can say that there was. And, likewise, those who do not want to see it as a consensus don’t have to see it as a consensus.” In fact, neither side was happy, opponents of disengagement arguing that Tisch should not have given the impression of a consensus in favor of the policy when there was none, and proponents of the plan angry that a minority had been allowed to block the conference from issuing an official, full-throated endorsement.

Disappointed at the Conference of Presidents’ equivocation, the left-leaning Israel Policy Forum, in November, collected the signatures of some 70 Jewish leaders on a letter to Condoleezza Rice, the president’s

national security adviser and secretary of state designate. It requested the Bush administration to encourage the development of a new, moderate post-Arafat Palestinian leadership, and to become actively involved in brokering an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement, since such a show of evenhandedness would enhance America's image in the Arab world and aid the war on terrorism. It called for Israel to make its disengagement plan bilateral instead of unilateral, to freeze its West Bank settlements, and to ease restrictions on Palestinian movement in the West Bank. Among the signers were the heads of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and the Union for Reform Judaism.

Rice met with representatives of Jewish organizations—both those of the mainstream and left-leaning bodies such as the Israel Policy Forum—on November 29, at the White House. This was the first such meeting since President Bush's reelection. Seeking to satisfy the expectations of all, Rice praised Sharon's disengagement initiative and talked of active U.S. involvement in the peace process, including an insistence that Israel live up to "its responsibilities" under the "road map." But she also assured her guests that nothing would be done to undermine Israel's security. The major thrust of her remarks, according to those who were present, was the need to democratize Palestinian society.

ISRAEL ON CAMPUS

The debate that broke out in 2003 over how best to present Israel's cause on American campuses continued on into 2004. With pro-Palestinian students organizing, and faculty anti-Israel bias charged at a number of universities (see above, pp. 167–70), was the appropriate Jewish response reflexively to defend Israeli policy, as Natan Sharansky had urged on a tour of college campuses in 2003? Some thought otherwise. A number of Hillel directors and others familiar with the campus situation believed that young Jews could not be mobilized in large numbers in support of "occupation" and "settlements," and that student doubts about the policies of the current Israeli government should not be viewed as hostility or indifference toward the Jewish state. Avraham Infeld, named president of Hillel in February, was an advocate of the more open approach.

On several campuses, however, some Jewish student organizations would not countenance dissenters. In a wide-ranging report about the situation, the *Forward* (Apr. 16) noted that "pro-Israel organizations at American universities are increasingly becoming inhospitable places for

dialogue . . . as fears of anti-Semitism have risen along with the stakes in the Middle East.” At the Spitzer Hillel Forum in February, numerous students complained about being tarred as anti-Israel for expressing any reservations about Israeli actions, some adding that such narrow-mindedness alienated many from participating in Jewish activities on campus.

A widely reported episode at the University of Richmond epitomized the problem. On February 12, Jilian Redford, the 20-year-old president of the campus Hillel, e-mailed the Israeli embassy to complain that e-mails she was receiving from the embassy contained “radical Zionist propaganda,” and that Hillel’s purpose was “fostering religious life on college campuses and not organizing marches, protests, or listening to speakers who encourage us to hate our Palestinian neighbors in Israel” (*Forward*, May 7). The next day, an official of the Richmond Jewish Community Center, which oversaw the Hillel chapter, asked Redford to resign as president, and when she refused, removed her. Wayne Firestone, director of national Hillel’s Campus Coalition, explained that while her views were certainly welcome at Hillel, her position as president required a more respectful tone toward the embassy. Redford subsequently became something of a heroic figure for Jewish groups critical of Israeli policy.

Despite such tensions, there was an overall sense that pro-Israel advocacy on campus had improved substantially. There were now some 25 different organizations ready to help students with speakers, programming, and advice. The five-day Charles Schusterman International Student Leaders Assembly, sponsored by Hillel in August, drew 400 young people who shared their experiences in countering pro-Palestinian student activists. One clear message that emerged was that a positive strategy of disseminating narratives about personal connections to Israel was far more effective than a negative stance of simply defending Israel against the charges of its enemies.

Another important communal initiative for cultivating enthusiasm for Israel among young Jews was Birthright Israel. Since its founding in 2000 by a small group of philanthropists in cooperation with the Israeli government and Jewish federations, it had, by 2004, brought some 68,000 Jews between the ages of 18 and 26 to Israel for ten days, free of charge. Follow-up surveys of participants indicated that the Israel experience enhanced their sense of Jewish identity. But the original funding had only been for five years; Israel, its economy shaky, would not commit to renewing its share of the costs, and many of the federations were finding it difficult to set aside money for this purpose. In February, the Avi Chai

Foundation, which ordinarily funded only Jewish educational projects, donated \$7 million, enough to pay for the summer Birthright program.

But Birthright was no more immune to controversy than Hillel. In 2004, as in 2003, a small number of American students who came to Israel through Birthright did so not with the intention of experiencing Israel, but to join up with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) in active opposition to Israeli army actions against Palestinians and the construction of Israel's security fence on the West Bank.

AMERICAN JEWS, IRAQ, AND DARFUR

On May 11, Nicholas Berg, a 26-year-old American Jew working as a contractor in Iraq, was kidnapped and killed. His killers videotaped the execution and made it available on the Internet. It was unknown whether the fact that he was a Jew had anything to do with his fate.

The murder of Berg came at a time when the connection of American Jews to the Iraq war was a matter of controversy. One subject of discussion was the silence of most Jewish organizations—which had generally supported the war in Iraq—about the mounting evidence of the abuse of Iraqi prisoners. As of early May, only the ADL, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism had publicly criticized the treatment of prisoners. The other Jewish groups had no comment, some explaining, off the record, that they did not want to appear partisan, especially in a presidential election year.

By late May, talk of an alleged Jewish role in masterminding and pursuing the Iraq war, which had surfaced when hostilities began in 2003 and then quieted down, resurfaced. Some but not all of the impetus came from political opponents of the administration seeking, in an election year, to discredit the war. On May 20, Sen. Ernest “Fritz” Hollings (D., S.C.), who had announced his retirement, said on the floor of the Senate that the war was being fought for Israel's benefit. Three days later, retired general Anthony Zinni, who had served as President Bush's emissary to the Middle East, expressed the same sentiment on the CBS television show “Sixty Minutes,” adding that this was “the worst-kept secret in Washington.” Rep. Nita Lowey (D., N.Y.), herself Jewish, placed a different spin on the theme, telling the *Forward* (May 28) that Bush's Middle East policies were causing a rise of anti-Semitism around the world, prompting Abraham Foxman of the ADL to accuse her of “something worse than blaming the victim, blaming someone who stands up for the victim.”

Ironically, a report emanating from Israel, issued by the Jewish

Agency's Jewish People Policy Planning Institute (JPPPI), echoed Lowey. It urged Israel, when formulating policy, to take into consideration the effect of its actions on the Diaspora, especially since "The U.S.'s pro-Israel leanings antagonize other countries, including some in the West, thus generating hostility against Jewish communities."

At the same time, Jewish organizations had to fend off the charge that U.S. support for Israeli policies was endangering American interests in Iraq and throughout the Muslim world. Nicholas Kristof, in the *New York Times* (May 26), claimed that only pressure on Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians could ease Arab suspicions of U.S. intentions. And that very week, the eagerly anticipated report of the 9/11 Commission noted that resentment at American support for Israel was a central factor in motivating Muslim terrorists.

A crisis in another part of the world provided the Jewish community with a far less controversial kind of involvement. Over the course of the year, a number of national Jewish organizations and local federations held meetings and public events, some in conjunction with other religious and ethnic bodies, on the ethnic cleansing and widespread hunger in Darfur, in western Sudan, and raised large sums to help the victims. It was the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, however, that brought the issue to prominence in the Jewish community by organizing a mission to the region in May, issuing reports on what it saw there, and, on one day in June, suspending all museum activities for half an hour, replacing them with a special program on Darfur. The museum's efforts might well have influenced the decision of the Bush administration, in September, finally to refer to the situation as genocide.

Religious Trends

Denominational developments during the year occurred under the shadow of the 2000–01 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS). Its results were released in 2003 amid considerable controversy (see AJYB 2004, pp. 114–116), and its implications only began to be grasped in 2004. The NJPS indicated that, over the previous decade, Reform had replaced Conservative Judaism as the largest denomination, with 39 percent of synagogue-member households identifying as Reform and 33 percent as Conservative. Meanwhile, the Orthodox share of such households had risen from 16 to 21 percent, a figure that was likely to grow substantially over time since the Orthodox constituted a plurality of denominationally affiliated Jews under age 18. But the fastest growing group of American

Jews was the element that called itself nondenominational or secular; 13 percent of American Jewry in 1990, they now constituted 25 percent.

The gains made by Reform and Orthodoxy at the apparent expense of the middle-of-the-road Conservative movement evoked a prediction from the Reform rabbinical organization's top professional of Conservatism's demise. Rabbi Paul Menitoff, executive vice president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), declared in February that young Conservative Jews were leaving the movement, dissatisfied with its reluctance to accept the inevitability of intermarriage—and thus the Jewish identity of children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers—as well as its failure to recognize the validity of homosexual relationships. Menitoff declared that Conservative Judaism was doomed, over time, either to merge with Reform, or die. Conservative leaders reacted with outrage, and some of Menitoff's Reform colleagues expressed regret at his violation of the tacit rules of interdenominational politesse.

CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

Menitoff's dire prediction was premature, to say the least, but his diagnosis of the malaise of the Conservative movement was essentially accurate. Not only were Conservative numbers down, but the two-edged issue of homosexuality—whether to ordain gay rabbis and whether to allow the performance of same-sex commitment ceremonies—was proving deeply divisive. Among the rabbinical students at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), the Conservative rabbinical school, and among the younger rabbis, sentiment was strongly in favor of liberalization. And in July 2003, the president of the movement's congregational body, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, had called for a review of Conservative policy. But more traditional forces, headed by the JTS chancellor, Dr. Ismar Schorsch, categorically opposed any change (see AJYB 2004, pp. 102–03). In February 2004, Schorsch declared fatly that there was no “Halakhic justification” for changing the ban on homosexuality, and besides, such a shift would split the movement and lead inevitably to a relaxation of the taboo on intermarriage. In March, he told a reporter, “This is an issue which has come from outside the movement and the seminary. It's a head-on collision between traditional Jewish values and American society” (*New York Jewish Week*, Mar. 21).

And there were other problems facing Conservative Judaism. The movement had begun ordaining women in 1985. In early August 2004, the Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative Judaism issued a 15-page re-

port, "Gender Variation in the Careers of Conservative Rabbis: A Survey of Rabbis Ordained Since 1985," showing that male Conservative rabbis earned, on average, far more than their female colleagues. While part of the differential was due to the fact that the males tended to move on to senior positions and larger communities more quickly than the women, the study found a gender gap even among rabbis holding comparable pulpits. In response to the findings, the organization proposed the establishment of mentoring programs for female rabbis, greater public visibility for these rabbis, and monitoring of the procedures of rabbinic search committees.

As if the movement had not heard enough bad news during the year, there were indications of financial difficulties. In June, the United Synagogue, as a cost-cutting measure, let go its director of social action and did not appoint a replacement, all the while denying that this would diminish Conservative involvement in public affairs. And in December, JTS was reported to be \$50 million in debt, its longtime comptroller having resigned on November 9. On December 17, Chancellor Schorsch, in an e-mail to faculty, students, and donors, stressed the institution's financial health, pointing out that what it owed was "less than half of our endowment."

REFORM JUDAISM

Reform Judaism, meanwhile, took pride in its newly acknowledged position as the largest denomination, in the full realization that many were drawn to affiliate because of Reform openness to intermarried families, gays, and other previously excluded groups. This outreach thrust coexisted with a greater interest, primarily among younger Reform Jews, in the practice of Jewish ritual.

Not only had there been a resurgence of such traditional practices as prayer in the Hebrew language and the wearing of head covering, prayer shawl, and tefillin during services, but also, the *Forward* reported (Mar. 5), there was now only one Reform temple in the country that held Sunday services, a phenomenon that had been widespread until the mid-twentieth century. And despite the movement's historical allegiance to the American public-school system and disdain for forms of education that set Jewish children apart from other Americans, there were, by 2004, more than 20 Reform day schools in operation, educating thousands of students.

The kosher laws became a focus of discussion in 2004. The Spring

issue of *Reform Judaism*, the quarterly published by the CCAR, featured several articles on kashrut and announced the inauguration of a CCAR task force on the subject. Its chair, Rabbi Bennett Miller, explained, "It's no longer a movement perceived of as 'We don't do this or we don't do that.' All Jewish experience is available to us, and we have the opportunity to pick and choose which aspects would give meaning to our lives." Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the URJ, who maintained a kosher home, noted: "Many rituals we once saw as having no redeeming value in many instances in fact contribute to enriching Jewish lives." Some rabbis urged that synagogues and other communal institutions be kept kosher even if most members did not have kosher homes, so that no one would feel excluded from public events. One Reform summer camp, in Ontario, Canada, was already kosher. To be sure, skeptical views were also represented in the journal, some pointing out that whatever the interest of rabbis in the matter, rank-and-file Reform Jews were indifferent, and others arguing that non-ritual issues having to do with social action and public policy should get priority.

ORTHODOX JUDAISM

The self-confidence that had long been growing in Orthodox ranks, bolstered by the results of the NJPS, received another boost from the 2004 election, in which the Republican presidential campaign targeted the Orthodox vote, and with considerable success. While some two-thirds of the overall Jewish vote went to Democratic challenger John Kerry, around the same percentage backed George W. Bush, the Republican incumbent, among Orthodox voters.

While this divergence raised some concern in the Jewish community about a potentially damaging cleavage between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox sectors, Orthodox leaders viewed the numbers as a long overdue declaration of Orthodox independence from the liberal tendencies of the broader community: not only their strong support for Israel, the argument went, but also their traditional values were more in consonance with the Republican administration than with the Democrats.

An unprecedented assertion of Orthodox triumphalism came just a few weeks after Election Day, at the Thanksgiving-Day-weekend convention of the *haredi* (sectarian) Orthodox organization Agudath Israel. There, the executive vice president, Rabbi Shmuel Bloom, noted the declining numbers of non-Orthodox Jews and urged the Orthodox to prepare for the day when they would constitute the American Jewish majority. Agu-

dath Israel, he suggested, would have to move beyond its current focus on religious matters and take the lead in such areas as anti-Semitism, support for Israel, and public policy. “The things we rely on secular Jews for—who’s going to do that if the secular community whittles down?”

Another escalating Orthodox phenomenon was interest in novel religious stringencies. In May, a good number of Jewish women discarded or even burned their human-hair wigs, some of which had cost thousands of dollars. Orthodox law mandated hair covering for married women, and many who fulfilled this requirement with wigs rather than hats or scarves used hair originating in India. But rumor now had it that Indian women had this hair cut as a religious ritual at Hindu temples, which, if true, would render it idolatrous in Orthodox eyes, and therefore unfit for use. Then, in June, questions were raised about the kosher status of the New York City water supply. Copepods, tiny crustaceans that could not be seen with the naked eye, were found in the water, and these were not kosher. Some Orthodox Jews resorted to the use of bottled water, or installed filters on their water taps.

These cases illustrated some interesting aspects of contemporary Orthodoxy. First, the ubiquity of the Internet ensured that the issues would be instantly known and debated all over the Jewish world. This, in turn, brought on international consultations, as Israeli and American rabbis visited India to research the practices of Hindu temples, and bottles of New York water crossed the Atlantic for examination by Jerusalem rabbis. Also, the general media found these matters fascinating, the *New York Times* placing the wig story on page one (May 14), and the water story on page one of its metro section (Nov. 7). And finally, as might be expected in an age of short attention spans, both issues quickly vanished from public discussion, with few in the Orthodox community having any idea if or how they were finally resolved.

The blurring of lines between *haredi* and Modern Orthodoxy also continued apace, as the latter found itself pulled further to the religious right. Perhaps the best illustration was the virtual extinction of mixed-gender seating at Orthodox synagogues, a practice that had been widespread a generation earlier. In June, Agudas Achim, a synagogue in Columbus, Ohio, voted to switch its affiliation from Orthodox to Conservative rather than provide separate seating, leaving only one mixed-seating congregation (in Denver) within the OU.

Even as American Orthodoxy turned more inward, countervailing forces seemed to push it toward greater openness. Exhibit number one was the widespread feeling that the so-called *shidduch* system, whereby young

men and women met only by prior arrangement through a matchmaker, and only after thoroughly “checking out” each other’s credentials, was at least partly to blame for the growing population of unmarried Orthodox singles. Several Orthodox organizations—including one called “End the Madness,” especially founded for the purpose—held conferences and issued publications to address the problem. The Rabbinical Council of America went so far as to issue an official endorsement of one of the numerous Orthodox Internet dating sites, SawYouAtSinai.com, calling it a “Halakhically permissible way for people to find their match.”

The Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA) held its fifth international conference in February, its theme, “Male and Female, God Created Them: Women and Men in Partnership,” indicating a desire to draw more men to the sessions. About 1,000 people attended, about 21 percent of them male. Topics discussed included sexual abuse, ways of dealing with the plight of women refused Jewish divorces by their husbands, and the inclusion of women in Jewish ritual. There was also a report of a study documenting the attitudes of Orthodox Jewish women toward sexuality. Causing the biggest stir was the willingness of at least some of the Orthodox rabbis present to entertain the possibility of women rabbis.

The five-year-old Yeshiva Chovevei Torah, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, embodied the aspiration of that element of the Orthodox community that deplored the perceived trend toward Orthodox sectarianism and believed that Yeshiva University, previously the sole Modern Orthodox rabbinical school, had allowed itself to be swept up by it. In 2004, Chovevei Torah graduated its first class of nine rabbis; all found rabbinic positions either with congregations, Jewish schools, or campus Hillels. At the seminary’s first annual dinner, in late March, Rabbi Avi Weiss, the founder and dean, declared: “We can transform the fabric of the Jewish community” so that Orthodoxy is “nonjudgmental, persuasive but never coercive,” and thus able to address Jews far beyond Orthodox precincts.

CHABAD-LUBAVITCH

The evening of June 21 marked the onset of the tenth *yahrzeit* (anniversary of date of death) of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Although he had died childless at the age of 92 without picking a successor, and the movement had divided over whether or not he would rise from the grave as the Messiah, Chabad was flourishing. It was clear, in retrospect, that the rebbe had set in place an effective,

decentralized system of outreach in which Chabad emissaries, imbued with missionary fervor, saw themselves as fulfilling his direct instructions to bring Jews around the world closer to Judaism. Some 4,000 of these emissaries were active, double the number in 1994; a new Chabad house opened somewhere on the average of one every ten days.

One key to Chabad success was the emissaries' distancing themselves from messianic rhetoric, thus avoiding the taint of extremism and possible heresy. Another was its openness to nonobservant Jews who had no intention of adopting an Orthodox lifestyle, an approach that brought political and financial backing from members of Reform and Conservative congregations (the bulk of Chabad funds came from non-Orthodox donors), and opportunities to participate in and influence the programs of local Jewish federations. Chabad's growth earned it both respect and envy from non-Orthodox groups.

Local Chabad rabbis organized numerous events commemorating the *yahrzeit*, and many followers came to pray at the rebbe's grave in Queens, New York, to mark the occasion. The movement's annual convention for its emissaries, in November, had to be held at the 69th Regiment Armory in Manhattan, since no hotel ballroom could accommodate the more than 2,500 Chabad activists who came from as far away as China, Nepal, and Paraguay. That same night, the messianist faction of Chabad held a competing event at movement headquarters in Brooklyn.

Organizational Developments

UNITED JEWISH COMMUNITIES

Created in 1999 out of a merger between the Council of Jewish Federations, the United Jewish Appeal, and the United Israel Appeal, United Jewish Communities (UJC) coordinated the network of some 200 local Jewish federations in the U.S. and Canada. A study completed in late 2004 but not yet released documented widespread disappointment with the organization on the part of communal officials intimately involved in its operation. *From Chaos to Chaos? How Jewish Leaders Reinvented Their National Communal System*, by Gerald Bubis and Steven Windmueller, concluded that lack of proper planning for the merger and the absence of an overall "vision" for the new entity had led to "chaos."

Fully cognizant of the problem, Howard Rieger, previously the head of United Jewish Federations of Greater Pittsburgh, took over as UJC president on September 1. Rieger made it clear from the outset that UJC

would have to narrow its focus and not duplicate work that could be done by other agencies. Specifically, he told reporters that managing the decennial National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) might not be a UJC priority. The annual General Assembly of the UJC, held this year in Cleveland in November, reflected Rieger's perspective, emphasizing the "nuts and bolts" of fund-raising, strategic planning, provision of services, and advocacy, rather debates over "big ideas."

AIPAC

On August 27, the American Jewish community was shocked to learn, from a CBS report, that two AIPAC officials, Steven Rosen, its foreign policy director, and Keith Weissman, a specialist on Iran, were being questioned by the FBI. This was the result of a two-year investigation about the two men passing on information to the Israeli embassy that they received from Pentagon analyst Larry Franklin about Iran. Since such exchanges of information had been considered routine, Jewish leaders found themselves in the dark about the purpose of the investigation, one explaining to the *New York Jewish Week* (Sept. 3), "we are operating with almost no real information." AIPAC, for its part, emphatically denied any wrongdoing, said it would cooperate fully with federal authorities, and elicited statements of support from prominent political figures and all of the Jewish organizations.

As the FBI investigation intensified over the next few weeks, concern mounted in the Jewish community that a weakened AIPAC could seriously undermine Israel's standing in Washington, and that the scandal could once again resurrect the allegation that the primary loyalty of American Jews was to Israel, not the U.S. Two theories developed about what lay behind the challenge to AIPAC. One was anti-Semitism (see above, p. 171), a suspicion encouraged by the fact that David Szady, the FBI man in charge of the investigation, had been charged in the past with mistreating Jewish FBI employees, most notably in the Adam Ciralsky case in 1999 (see AJYB 2000, p. 168.) Another hypothesis, not necessarily incompatible with the first, was that the anti-AIPAC initiative was an attempt by elements in the government hostile to neoconservative policy makers to discredit AIPAC and Israel, and thereby change the administration's pro-Israel foreign policy in the Middle East.

On December 1, the FBI conducted a raid of AIPAC headquarters, and four of the organization's top officials, including Executive Director Howard Kohr, were issued subpoenas by a federal grand jury. In a De-

ember 10 conference call with Jewish organizations, Kohr urged patience and pledged that his organization would be vindicated. Two weeks later, reports surfaced that Franklin, the Defense Department analyst who had provided the information to the AIPAC figures, had done so as part of a “sting” operation orchestrated by the FBI.

WORLD JEWISH CONGRESS

At the end of August, a serious public dispute broke out at the World Jewish Congress (WJC), the high-profile group known for its aggressive work in the area of Holocaust restitution. The spark was a memo written by Isi Leibler, a senior vice president of the organization, an Australian Jew who now made his home in Israel. Leibler charged financial irregularities on the part of WJC chairman Israel Singer, pointing specifically to a \$1.2-million account in a Swiss bank under Singer’s control. Leibler called for the WJC to institute changes in its procedures to ensure transparency and accountability. Singer denied the allegation, claimed that the Swiss account had been set up to fund his pension, and suggested that Leibler was seeking to take over the organization.

The WJC leadership—most particularly its president, Edgar Bronfman—backed Singer. Leibler made his case at a meeting of the WJC steering committee on September 20, after which Bronfman relieved him of his position in the organization. After the meeting, Bronfman announced that, in light of the controversy, he would run for another term as WJC president.

But Leibler refused to give up his post. In November, Alfred Donath, president of the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities, added his voice to the call for financial transparency, demanding an independent audit. When Donath refused to drop his request, he was “suspended” from the governing body of the European Jewish Congress, an affiliate of the WJC. But by year’s end, pressure generated by negative publicity seemed likely to force the organization into opening its financial records for examination.

AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS

Rarely had any American Jewish organization so swiftly changed direction as the American Jewish Congress under the leadership of Jack Rosen, formerly its president and now its chairman. Known historically for its liberal domestic social agenda, AJCongress now championed ag-

gressive opposition to international anti-Semitism and a hard-line pro-Israel stance, while Rosen's personal ties to President Bush smoothed relations with political conservatives.

But AJCongress got caught in an embarrassing situation during 2004. In August, it made headlines by announcing the appointment of Alon Pinkas, about to step down as Israeli consul general in New York, to the newly created position of CEO. This was the first time that a former Israeli diplomat was chosen for a high-level job at an American communal organization. Pinkas said that his experience in dealing with Israeli-American relations and his connections with American Jewish leaders would stand him in good stead in the new post. But the move was not looked upon kindly in Israel, which had a law on the books barring any diplomat from accepting employment in the country where he served until two years had passed after the end of his tenure there, and AJCongress put the appointment "on hold." In December, a panel of administrative judges in Israel ruled that Pinkas could not take the position.

Trends and Ideas

INTERMARRIAGE

The publication of *Double or Nothing: Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage*, by Brandeis University professor Sylvia Barack Fishman, brought a degree of scholarly rigor to the hotly contested issue of intermarriage. Rather than addressing the issue quantitatively, Fishman reported on over 250 interviews she conducted with families as part of a project commissioned by the American Jewish Committee. Among her conclusions was that the Jewish partner and his/her family are often reluctant to urge the non-Jewish partner to adopt Jewish practices; that homes providing children elements of two religions are far less likely to produce Jewishly identified children than homes that are unambiguously Jewish; and that Jewish education, a Jewishly active family, and a Jewish peer group were the key factors in determining the Jewish identity of children, whether intermarried or not.

The book was not welcomed by elements of the Jewish community that saw intermarriage as an inevitable trend in an open society; they resented what they saw as Fishman's negative portrayal of mixed-religion families. One Jewish leader who saw no point in maintaining the traditional Jewish aversion to intermarriage was Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress. Bronfman told the *Jewish Chronicle* (London)

that such opposition was “racist” and “begins to sound a little like Nazism.” For Bronfman, the choice was between “an attempt to double the amount of Jews that there are, or we can irritate everybody who’s intermarried, and lose them all.”

In October, the Jewish Outreach Institute, which advocated inclusion of such mixed-religion families in Jewish life, issued a study, “Rabbis and the Intermarried Family in the Jewish Community.” It was the report of a survey of how 183 Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist rabbis dealt with officiation at interfaith marriages, the status of the children of mixed marriages, and the participation of non-Jewish parents in their children’s Jewish life-cycle events. The most striking finding was that even Conservative rabbis, barred by their interpretation of Judaism from performing intermarriages, were often quite willing to allow non-Jewish family members to participate in some way at the bar/bat mitzvah of their Jewish relatives.

With much of the community eager to blur the lines between Jew and non-Jew (after all, Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry was something of both), the casting of a non-Jew, Alfred Molina, as Tevye in a new Broadway production of *Fiddler on the Roof* should not have raised many eyebrows. In fact, most Jewish critics treated the production harshly, charging that Molina’s performance universalized what had been a Jewish play; “Sunset on a Jewish ‘Fiddler’” was the headline in the *New York Jewish Week* (Feb. 27).

GAYS AND LESBIANS

Nowhere were the changing American attitudes toward homosexuality more evident than in the Jewish community. The *2004 Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion*, commissioned by the American Jewish Committee, found that only 13 percent of American Jews opposed legal recognition of gay unions and just 24 percent favored President Bush’s proposed constitutional amendment defining marriage as between a man and a woman. These were far lower figures than in the broader American population.

The organizations of Reform Judaism backed gay marriage as a civil right. The Conservative movement, in the midst of a jarring internal conflict over the matter (see above, p. 198), took no public position, although many of its rabbis argued against any discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation.

Only the Orthodox stood adamantly against the legitimization of ho-

mosexuality, but even in that sector there were signs of change. The release of a film in 2003, *Trembling Before God*, a moving portrayal of Orthodox homosexuals, evoked considerable empathy in Orthodox circles. And in 2004, Rabbi Steven Greenberg, the first openly gay Orthodox rabbi, caused something of a sensation with his book, *Wrestling With God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition*, in which Greenberg related how he came to terms with his homosexuality and sought to combine it with the Orthodox way of life. He told an interviewer (*New York Jewish Week*, Feb. 27) that he wanted “a 16-year-old in an Orthodox day school who discovers that he or she is gay to know there’s a decent life inside the community that he or she can plan for.”

Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum of Congregation Beth Simchat Torah in Manhattan, the nation’s largest gay synagogue, urged her fellow rabbis to officiate at gay marriages, even though they were illegal in New York, as an act of civil disobedience. More than 200 members of the New York clergy, most of them rabbis, signed a pledge to do just that, which was posted on the Web site of Kleinbaum’s synagogue. Although she performed the wedding of two women on Long Island in late March, the district attorney declined to press charges.

SCHOLARSHIP, MYSTICISM, AND MADONNA

Of the many scholarly books on Jewish themes to appear during 2004, four publications were immediately recognized as masterpieces. Two were histories of the Jews in America, published to coincide with the celebration of the 350th anniversary of Jewish settlement in what would become the United States (a comprehensive review of the commemoration of this milestone will appear in AJYB 2006). Brandeis University historian Jonathan Sarna’s *American Judaism: A History* was a comprehensive and provocative treatment of the religious development of American Jewry, while *The Jews of the United States*, by Hasia Diner of New York University, concentrated on social, economic, and cultural trends.

The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary, by the literary scholar Robert Alter, who taught at Berkeley, set a new standard for Bible translation. Alter’s expertise in Hebrew and the Jewish interpretive tradition, combined with his command of English style, made this translation both faithful to the sound and rhythm of the original, and an elegant literary work in its own right.

The first two volumes of Daniel Matt’s translation, with notes, of the *Zohar*, the basic text of the Kabbalah, appeared in 2004, with many more

volumes in preparation. This monumental accomplishment, titled *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, had been years in preparation. It opened up to the modern reader an exceedingly dense and enigmatic book that was, in essence, a mystical commentary on the Torah.

Matt's scholarly approach to Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, was not widely shared. Kabbalah, to be sure, was extremely popular in the U.S., both in the Jewish community and outside it, but in a very watered-down version that appealed to the current vogue of spirituality and individual self-fulfillment. An organization called the Kabbalah Center, based in Los Angeles with branches in ten other American cities and several foreign countries, promoted Kabbalah as an "ancient spiritual wisdom" not confined just to Jews, and the books published by the group's leader, Yehuda Berg, undoubtedly sold many more copies than Matt's work. But the center's real star was one of its many celebrity recruits, the pop diva Madonna, who, though not Jewish, adopted the name Esther, and paid a highly publicized visit to Israel for the High Holy Days (which gleeful Israeli officials believed would help boost tourism).

LAWRENCE GROSSMAN