

Jewish Communal Affairs

THE ISSUE THAT MOST worried American Jewish leaders in 1986 was conflict between the Jewish religious movements. Other developments that attracted attention in the community were revelations of financial crime in Jewish leadership circles, the spread of AIDS among Jews, and disagreements among scholars over the quality of American Jewish life and the long-term potential for survival of American Jewry. American Jews also confronted certain external issues relating to the American political system, the administration in power, and foreign governments. These included strengthening Jewish influence on the domestic political scene, facilitating the emigration of Soviet Jews, and mounting an appropriate and effective response to the election of a former Nazi officer as president of Austria.

Jewish Religious Life

The theme of the annual General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds (CJF) is usually a reliable guide to the Jewish community's deepest anxieties. In 1986 the theme was "*Klal Yisrael*"—Jewish unity. CJF president Shoshana Cardin opened the proceedings with a reminder that "the agenda that unites us is more compelling than that which divides us." Harold Schulweis, a California Conservative rabbi, delivered an emotional talk decrying what he saw as increasing separation between American Jewish religious movements. "The division," he said, "is no longer between 'them' and 'us,' but within us."

The friction between the Jewish denominations in 1986 was an intensification of strife that went back to the early nineteenth century. At the time, the new Reform Judaism declared itself no longer bound by *halakhah*—Jewish law—while its traditionalist opponents, soon to be known as Orthodox, maintained that law's ongoing validity. Yet it was not till recently—beginning in the 1950s and accelerating ever since—that religious polarization became a serious concern of American Jewry.

There were three related reasons for this. One was the revival of American Orthodox Judaism. Previously assumed to be an immigrant faith destined to disappear in the course of time, Orthodoxy managed to reverse the process, slowing

attrition among its youth, attracting *ba'alei teshuvah*—recruits from outside the movement, and developing an assertiveness it never had before.

Another new factor in the equation was the State of Israel, where Orthodoxy was legally recognized as the sole legitimate brand of Judaism. Time after time, disputes over the role of religion in the Jewish state spilled over to poison relations between the movements in the United States. The animosities would then be transferred back across the Atlantic, adding more fuel to the fires in Israel.

Third, resentment over these first two trends led American Reform Judaism to drop earlier inhibitions against overt actions that might shock and alienate the Orthodox. Thus, in 1983, Reform, giving up hope that its conversions would ever be recognized in Orthodox circles, had declared that the child of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother did not need a formal conversion to be considered a Jew, so long as he or she publicly identified as a Jew. While this step formalized a practice that was already common among Reform rabbis, the issue of “patrilineal descent” became a powerful symbol of Jewish fragmentation.

ISRAEL'S LAW OF RETURN

In 1986 the key Israel-related issue dividing the Jewish religious movements had to do with the Law of Return, which guaranteed citizenship rights upon request to any Jew arriving in Israel. The law defined as Jewish anyone born of a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism. Early in the year the Israeli Knesset considered an amendment that had been attempted several times before, one that would specify that only conversions performed according to *halakhah* rendered an individual Jewish for the purpose of the Law of Return. This change, supported by Orthodox parties in the Knesset, would have effectively delegitimized conversions done by non-Orthodox rabbis. The driving force behind the amendment was the worldwide Lubavitch Hassidic movement, headquartered in New York. Modern Orthodox groups, both in Israel and the United States, doubted that it could pass, and demonstrated little enthusiasm for pressing the issue. American Reform and Conservative leaders mobilized against the measure, charging that the great majority of American Jews were not Orthodox and would only be alienated from Israel by any step that strengthened the Orthodox monopoly. The Knesset defeated the amendment in February, to some extent because of fear of American Jewish reaction.

The issue came up in different form in April, when the two Israeli chief rabbis visited the United States and castigated Reform and Conservative Judaism for “creating a new Torah that can divide the Jewish people.” The rabbis called on these movements to stop performing conversions. Reform and Conservative leaders retorted that religious pluralism was good for the Jewish people, and that it was the Israeli Orthodox establishment that sowed divisiveness.

In late June, the Shoshana Miller case reignited the controversy over non-Orthodox converts in Israel. Miller, who had undergone a Reform conversion in the United States, moved to Israel in 1985 and requested Israeli citizenship under the

Law of Return. Minister of Interior Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz, a leader of one of the Orthodox parties, granted her wish, but had the word "convert" printed on her identity card. American Reform and Conservative organizations denounced this move as a back-door attempt to nullify the Knesset's recent decision not to amend the Law of Return. Franklin Kreutzer, president of the United Synagogue of America (Conservative), warned of "dire negative consequences" for Conservative *aliyah* to Israel. Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (Reform), went so far as to compare the "convert" stamp on Miller's identity card to the yellow star that the Nazis had forced Jews to wear.

So volatile did the question of Israeli policy toward non-Orthodox converts become that even American Jewish organizations and leaders not affiliated with denominational movements got involved. For the first time in its history, the Council of Jewish Federations went on record "to inform Israeli leadership of the divisive impact any change in the Law of Return would have on North American Jewry." Kenneth Bialkin, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations—which had previously steered clear of religious disputes—expressed dismay at the treatment accorded Shoshana Miller. He said that "the mischievous and unacceptable order requiring the legending of Jews according to the quality of their Jewish origin" would undermine Jewish unity.

Israel's Supreme Court soon ruled against Interior Minister Peretz, in part, ironically, because traditional Jewish law forbids shaming a convert. The non-Orthodox movements in America applauded the decision, while warning against possible Orthodox machinations to block its execution. However, Rabbi Moshe Sherer, president of Agudath Israel (Orthodox) in the United States, said that the issue was not closed: "When it comes to identity, there is no compromise. It is not a business deal which can be settled by everyone giving up some points. It goes to the very heart of Jewish survival." Sherer warned that if non-Orthodox forms of Judaism were to transplant themselves to Israel, the Jewish people might split in two, since the Orthodox would never accept non-Orthodox converts as Jews.

The dangers of religious polarization revealed by the Miller case, coinciding with the outbreak of physical violence between Orthodox and secularists in Israel, evoked a peacemaking initiative from the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), which represented the modern Orthodox rabbinate. In August the council called for a moratorium on any new religious legislation in Israel, presumably including amendments to the Law of Return. It also asked for calm and respectful dialogue between the Orthodox and others. American spokesmen for the other movements, while praising the intentions behind this Orthodox overture, pointed out that the status quo that would be preserved by such a moratorium was inherently unfair to them, since it did not recognize the religious legitimacy of their rabbis.

OTHER ISSUES

There were other interdenominational disputes during the year that were not related to Israel. They involved two American Jewish umbrella organizations that,

up to this point, had served as neutral arenas where the movements could address issues of concern to American Jewry as a whole.

The membership of the Synagogue Council of America encompassed synagogue and rabbinic bodies of Orthodoxy, Conservatism, and Reform. The small Reconstructionist movement requested admission into the Synagogue Council, but in April the Orthodox members vetoed the application. This demonstrated, said Reconstructionist leader Rabbi David Teutsch, the “woefully insufficient commitment to pluralism on the part of the Orthodox in the American Jewish community.”

The very existence of the JWB Commission on Jewish Chaplaincy was threatened by denominational strife. This body, which had representation from all the movements, collectively certified chaplains for the American armed forces. In June Rabbi Louis Bernstein, the Orthodox representative, announced his movement’s withdrawal in protest over a unilateral decision by his Reform counterpart, Rabbi Joseph Glaser, to certify a female rabbi. This step, charged Bernstein, “broke the rules.” Glaser, however, was in no mood to apologize. All too aware that the Orthodox would never agree to certify a woman, he explained, he had gone ahead on his own, as a matter of conscience. The crisis was resolved in August when a new system for choosing Jewish chaplains was devised: each movement’s rabbinic organization would endorse its own candidates, with no need for the approbation of the other groups.

Did this accumulation of interdenominational disputes endanger the community? Those approaching the question from a scholarly standpoint, viewing current rancor within the broad context of the Jewish historical experience, tended to doubt it. Samuel Heilman, a sociologist at Queens College in New York City, prepared an analysis for the American Jewish Congress entitled “American-Jewish Disunity: An Overview.” Heilman did not believe that current strife among Jews was any worse than in the past, and he stressed how united American Jews actually were on such issues as support for Israel, rescuing Soviet Jewry, and fighting anti-Semitism. Gerson Cohen, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary and a noted historian of medieval Jewry, went even further, declaring: “There has never been as much unity in Jewish history.”

Others, addressing the situation from a communal-policy vantage point, were more pessimistic. Notable among them was Rabbi Irving “Yitz” Greenberg, founder and president of the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership (CLAL). In lectures and articles, Greenberg advanced the thesis that unless denominational differences were bridged—especially on such matters as conversion, patrilineal descent, and divorce procedures—the Jewish people could well divide into two or more sects whose members would not marry anyone outside their own group.

In March, CLAL sponsored a conference in Princeton, New Jersey, on the question “Will There Be One Jewish People by the Year 2000?” It attracted an impressive turnout of rabbis and lay leaders from all the movements. The program featured addresses by leaders of Orthodoxy, Conservatism, Reform, and Reconstructionism—though at Orthodox insistence, the speakers did not appear together

on the same platform. Rabbi Alexander Schindler, representing Reform, took the opportunity to apologize publicly for having compared some Orthodox leaders to Nazis, and Rabbi Norman Lamm, president of Yeshiva University (Orthodox), suggested the establishment of a joint *bet din* (religious court) to handle controversial issues of Jewish identity, whose members would be chosen on the basis of scholarship and religious observance, not denominational affiliation. Lamm's idea evoked little support from others in the Orthodox community.

TENSIONS WITHIN EACH MOVEMENT

Conflict between the major movements in 1986 was accompanied by—and surely exacerbated by—factionalism inside the movements. Within Reform and Conservative Judaism, traditionalist and modernist rabbis vied over questions of law and ritual. In the case of Orthodoxy, the focus of internal contention was how much, if any, cooperation and association were appropriate with the official bodies and leaders of non-Orthodox movements.

Three years after its patrilineal-descent decision, some within the Reform movement expressed doubts about its wisdom. Unexpectedly vehement criticism from Conservative rabbis and Reform leaders in Israel led to a few calls for reconsideration. The laity, however, backed by most of the rabbis, opposed reopening the matter.

A new issue, that of personal religious observance, emerged as a potentially divisive force. Reform had long before discarded the Orthodox notion of fixed, codified ritual obligations, stressing instead personal ethics and prophetic social justice. But trends in the broader society in the 1980s made many Reform Jews more receptive to traditional observance patterns. This was especially evident among younger rabbis and rabbinical students. At the 1986 convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), Peter Knobel, one of those young rabbis, went so far as to suggest that the movement as a whole develop standards of ritual practice which, while not Orthodox, would diminish, to some extent, the personal religious autonomy that Reform had historically championed. CCAR's executive vice-president expressed sympathy for this view. Citing the dictum that Reform granted *halakhah* "a voice but not a veto," Rabbi Joseph Glaser asked, "Who are the other voters? Pressure? Fads? Radical chic? Weakness and despair? Reaction?" Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk, president of Hebrew Union College, which ordained Reform rabbis, decried the call for standards: "We're making an idol out of *halakhah*," he said. Still, it was clear that interest in ritual practice was on the rise in the movement, and that classical Reform was on the defensive.

Conservative Judaism in 1986 was still seeking to heal the wounds inflicted by its decision two years earlier to ordain women rabbis. Symbolic of the ongoing division among Conservatives over gender roles in religion was the existence at the Jewish Theological Seminary, the training ground for the Conservative rabbinate, of two separate prayer services, one "traditional," where women sat separately and

did not lead prayers, and the other "egalitarian," where men and women participated equally.

The struggle over women's ordination had led to the establishment of the Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism (UTCJ), which stayed in existence even after that issue was resolved, pressing for higher standards of religious observance and greater emphasis on *halakhah* within Conservative Judaism. At the 1986 convention of the Rabbinical Assembly (RA), the UTCJ proposed a resolution opposing patrilineal descent and providing for sanctions against any RA member who accepted as a Jew someone neither born of a Jewish mother nor converted according to Jewish law. The measure passed 235 to 92. However, when the UTCJ tried to get the Conservative rabbis to reject the movement's new prayer book for ostensibly deviating from tradition, and sought to guarantee itself a platform at the 1987 convention, it was defeated overwhelmingly.

The retirement on July 1 of Gerson Cohen as chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary was expected to ease the tensions between the traditionalist and modernist wings, since Cohen had been an outspoken proponent of women's ordination. His successor, Ismar Schorsch, while insisting that the clock would not be turned back on the women's ordination issue, made immediate efforts to conciliate the traditionalists and restore harmony to the movement.

The debate within Orthodoxy over relations with the non-Orthodox had implications for the very existence of "modern" Orthodoxy, which had long championed such cooperative endeavors. So-called right-wing or yeshivah Orthodoxy, in contrast, took a separatist stand, charging that membership on boards of rabbis or other umbrella organizations together with non-Orthodox rabbis constituted recognition of the other movements, and was therefore banned.

The inherent dynamism of rightist Orthodoxy, combined with the illness and withdrawal from public life of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, who had been looked to as a mentor by those who favored working with the non-Orthodox, weakened the position of modern Orthodoxy in the community. Increasingly, rabbis who had called themselves "modern" decided to avoid the stigma associated with the word by denoting themselves "centrists." The Rabbinical Council of America, previously the acknowledged bastion of modern Orthodoxy, was now divided over whether to cooperate with the non-Orthodox movements on religious matters. At the organization's 1986 convention, suggestions to work out joint procedures on conversion with Reform and Conservative rabbis ran into heavy criticism, not because of *halakhic* misgivings, but because many members took the triumphalist position that the other movements would soon fade away and only Orthodoxy would survive.

Demoralization in the ranks of modern Orthodoxy led "Yitz" Greenberg, the president of CLAL and himself an Orthodox rabbi, to attempt a revitalization of this trend within Orthodoxy. Seven people accepted Greenberg's invitation to a preliminary meeting, which dealt with strategies to regain power for the modernists. Despite optimistic predictions by some of those who attended, nothing further came of the initiative.

The Jewish Political Agenda

Most American Jews combined a passionate commitment to the security of fellow Jews around the world—and particularly, after 1948, the security of Israel—with a politically liberal stance on other public-policy issues. Since the time of the New Deal, their political attitudes had been roughly congruent with those of the Democratic party, which consequently won the lion's share of the Jewish vote.

In recent years this picture showed signs of shifting. The election of Ronald Reagan as president in 1980 brought into power a conservative Republican administration which by 1986 had compiled a strongly pro-Israel record, at the same time that elements within the Democratic party seemed to be losing enthusiasm for Israel's cause. But could American Jews in good conscience reward Republicans at the ballot box, given the administration's conservative social and political agenda in domestic and foreign affairs? The 1986 congressional elections provided a focal point for heated Jewish debate over this question.

For one segment of American Jewry, the problem did not exist. Many Orthodox Jews were quite comfortable with the Reagan administration's overall approach to the issues. The Agudath Israel organization, representing this Orthodox element, agreed with the president on opposition to abortion and gay rights and support for tax credits to parents whose children attended nonpublic schools. As one activist put it, the stance of Agudath Israel showed that "the entire Jewish community is not out there attacking the Reagan administration for its abortion policies and then looking for its support on the issue of Israel."

Other American Jews viewed pro-Israel sentiment in Republican ranks as an opportunity to maximize Jewish political clout. Jewish political action committees (PACs) proliferated, almost all of them contributing money to candidates for public office on the basis of their records on Israel and Soviet Jewry, irrespective of their positions on other issues. This strategy was designed to encourage candidates of both parties to vie for Jewish support. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a national lobbying organization based in Washington, did not itself participate in distributing funds but did rate candidates on "Jewish" issues, without taking into consideration their liberal or conservative loyalties on other matters.

CONFLICT OVER PACS

Much controversy surrounded these "single-issue" PACs. In the May 26 *New Republic*, Robert Kuttner charged that by concentrating on Israel and tending to favor incumbents over challengers, Jewish PACs were actually providing more help to conservative Republicans, who opposed Jews on church-state and social-justice issues, than to liberal Democrats, whose overall agenda was much more in tune with predominant Jewish sentiments. While Kuttner's facts and figures were debated back and forth, his allegation brought to the surface a serious conflict of values and political strategy within the American Jewish community.

The issue was joined even before the Kuttner article appeared, at the American Jewish Congress biennial in March. Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, a former president of the organization, and Massachusetts congressman Barney Frank argued passionately for a broad, liberal Jewish agenda. For Hertzberg, traditional Jewish values demanded concern for the poor and underprivileged and opposition to a socially conservative administration. He claimed that "we have a stake in a generous and open America which we helped to fashion and which now is under attack." Congressman Frank argued that there was an American consensus that backed Israel for geopolitical reasons, and that there was therefore "no reason to support right-wingers who oppose abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment for women, and who want prayer in the public schools because this is, they say, a Christian nation—just because they support Israel."

Richard Altman, director of NATPAC, a large pro-Israel PAC, and political analyst Ben Wattenberg argued the other side. Altman asserted that Jewish PACs deserved the credit for bipartisan congressional support of increased American aid to Israel, despite the budget cuts mandated by the Gramm-Rudman Act. Republicans, he said, must be made to feel that pro-Israel activity is appreciated: "We don't have the luxury of supporting only liberal congressmen like Barney Frank." Wattenberg argued the necessity of realistic political trade-offs: "If 90 percent of a congressman's supporters are for school prayer, and he is for Israel, then you shouldn't withhold money because of his position on school prayer."

The debate over single-issue PACs was further complicated by White House efforts to attract Jewish support for funding the *contra* rebels in Nicaragua. Members of the administration told Jews that not only was the Sandinista regime a threat to American security but the *contras* were anti-Semitic and pro-PLO. In a conversation with a delegation from the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, President Reagan himself added the argument that a hostile Nicaragua could very well endanger American supply routes to Israel. The immediate effects of this administration initiative were outrage at the assumption that Jews could only be mobilized on the issue by appeals to parochial Jewish interests and bitter controversy between Jewish leaders over whether the closing of a synagogue in Managua, Nicaragua, constituted anti-Semitism. Expressing the feeling of many Jews, columnist Marvin Schick charged that "if Nicaragua is a Jewish issue, fish ride bicycles. . . . The American public and Congress can arrive at a judgment without the gratuitous benefit of a crude attempt to provoke Jewish reaction." (*Long Island Jewish World*, May 23–29, 1986)

The public discussion about Jewish political options encouraged speculation about the Jewish vote in the fall elections for the Senate and House of Representatives. Would the community's traditional liberal sympathies generate another overwhelming show of support for the Democrats, or would the new single-issue emphasis lead to significant support for conservative Republicans who were pro-Israel? The results were inconclusive. Generally, the Jewish vote went to Democrats, but a few pro-Israel Republican incumbents garnered considerable Jewish backing,

even though they ran against liberal Democrats. It was clear that the debate among Jews over appropriate Jewish political behavior would intensify as the Reagan administration entered its final two years.

Soviet Jewry

During the year American Jewry agonized over how best to facilitate the emigration of Soviet Jews. Despite the release of some notable refuseniks, the dismal overall emigration statistics disappointed activists and sharpened debate within the Soviet-Jewry movement over strategy.

The November 1985 summit meeting in Geneva had produced optimism, bordering on euphoria, that Soviet leaders were prepared to liberalize emigration policy. Hopeful that a deal could be struck, World Jewish Congress president Edgar Bronfman, whose business contacts gave him entrée into high Soviet circles, went to Moscow in December 1985 for private negotiations. No massive upsurge in emigration was forthcoming, however, although a number of well-known refuseniks were granted permission to leave the Soviet Union.

The meager results of Bronfman's initiative evoked anger from Morris Abram, president of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ), who, in January, called on the American government to link any future arms-control agreement with the Soviets to human rights. Abram said that if there were no progress on the Soviet Jewry issue by the time Mikhail Gorbachev arrived in the United States for another summit, public anti-Soviet demonstrations would be appropriate.

Abram's hard line drew immediate criticism. Edgar Bronfman rejected linkage on the ground that world peace would benefit all people, including Soviet Jews. Martin Peretz and Leon Wieseltier, editor in chief and literary editor, respectively, of the influential *New Republic*, denounced Abram's suggestion in a letter to the *New York Times* (January 22, 1986), arguing that "if arms control indeed represents an improvement in the security of the United States . . . even the predicament of Soviet Jewry pales before it." The threat of public demonstrations came in for criticism from the Orthodox Agudath Israel organization, which had consistently opposed confrontation with the Soviet Union, preferring quiet diplomacy.

In February this internal Jewish controversy was temporarily drowned out by exultation over the release of Natan (Anatoly) Sharansky, whose years of prominence as a Soviet Jewish activist made him a symbol of the movement in the minds of American Jews. But leaders of the Soviet Jewry cause in the United States warned against any assumption that Soviet authorities had changed their policy. In light of the small number of Jews allowed to leave, said NCSJ executive director Jerry Goodman, the Sharansky episode was a mere public-relations stunt: "There's little doubt that these so-called famous cases are designed to reach American public opinion." Observed Morris Abram, "What we are witnessing is emigration by 'eyedropper'—one Jew at a time."

Meanwhile, Sharansky, who settled in Israel, lent his voice to the hard-line

anti-Soviet position. On a visit to the United States in May, he scoffed at "private diplomacy" and called for "open struggle and open pressure," including a massive demonstration upon Gorbachev's arrival in the United States, which was expected to take place sometime in 1986, "so that the American press will write more about the anti-Soviet demonstrations and less about the dress of Mrs. Gorbachev." In the months that followed, Sharansky spoke out against the renewal of Soviet-Israeli consular relations and against cooperation between the American Bar Association and the Association of Soviet Lawyers, in the absence of any change in Soviet emigration policy. On both these issues he dissented from the NCSJ and sided with the more militant Union of Councils for Soviet Jews (UCSJ) and Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ).

The National Conference, for its part, sought to carve out an approach that would combine public pressure on, and private negotiation with, the Soviet Union. It proposed a new look at the Jackson-Vanik Amendment of 1974, which limited Soviet-American trade by barring most-favored-nation status for the Soviet Union until it liberalized emigration. In July the NCSJ proposed a series of calibrated responses to Soviet behavior: any marked increase in the number of Jews allowed to leave would bring a corresponding easing of the trade restrictions.

REAGAN-GORBACHEV SUMMIT

The announcement of a Reagan-Gorbachev summit to be held in October in Reykjavik, Iceland, raised concern that the human-rights agenda would be overshadowed by the arms-control issue. While the leadership of the mainstream Soviet Jewry movement was satisfied by President Reagan's assurances that their cause would not be neglected in Reykjavik, some activists were skeptical. "Nobody wants to challenge the Administration to take a stand on Soviet Jewry," complained Glenn Richter of SSSJ, "although there is plenty of evidence that the Administration will only go so far on this issue."

Both camps within the Soviet Jewry movement sent observers to the summit; predictably, each group had a different assessment of the talks. For the moderate leaders, the very fact that the subject of human rights was on the agenda constituted a triumph. Morris Abram, recently elevated to the chairmanship of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, commented, "Never before have American leaders gone to a summit meeting so thoroughly briefed on the issue of human rights in the Soviet Union and so thoroughly dedicated to raising it." "Hereafter," according to Jerry Goodman, "it will be difficult for the Kremlin to say that these questions are internal matters that should not be dealt with in an international forum." B'nai B'rith president Seymour Reich added, "We wanted to get world attention. I think we got it." For the UCSJ, however, anything short of an agreement for "the evacuation of all Soviet Jews who wish to leave" spelled failure. The group called for harsh economic sanctions against the Soviet Union and a boycott of Soviet-American cultural and scientific exchange programs.

By year's end it was clear that Reykjavik had not affected Soviet emigration policy. While a few more prominent refuseniks were allowed to leave in the wake of the summit, total emigration remained tiny, and new, restrictive guidelines for the issuance of visas were enacted. Morris Abram, reflecting the American Soviet Jewry movement as a whole, was pessimistic: "If we are forced to assume a confrontational stance toward the Soviet Union it is with reluctance. Yet we are convinced that improved relations are simply impossible so long as the Soviet Union relentlessly crushes its Jewish citizens."

Legacies of the Holocaust

The farther the Nazi Holocaust receded into historical memory, the more insistent American Jews seemed to be about commemorating it. In September thousands of survivors gathered at New York's Liberty Island to remember their liberation from the concentration camps and their first view of the United States, which for many of those present had taken place 40 years earlier at that very spot. Earlier in the year New York's Jewish Museum featured an exhibit on "Justice in Jerusalem Revisited: The Eichmann Trial 25 Years Later." Visitors could view daily continuous videotape screenings of the 165 hours of the trial. Throughout 1986, statements by Jewish leaders on subjects ranging from the Middle East to Soviet Jewry drew frequent parallels to what was done or not done to save the Jews of Europe a generation earlier.

On September 4 the City of New York announced plans to build a \$60-million "Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust" on 165,000 square feet of land in lower Manhattan. The museum would include a six-story-high translucent cube illuminated 24 hours a day, symbolizing Jewish survival. The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize, in October, to Elie Wiesel, Jewry's foremost literary interpreter of the Holocaust, signaled to Jews that their interest in commemorating the Holocaust was legitimate, indeed praiseworthy, in the eyes of the world.

Jewish organizations, without dissent, applauded Justice Department efforts to denaturalize and deport Nazi war criminals who had entered the United States after World War II and criticized those courts and government agencies that delayed the process. In October, when White House director of communications Patrick Buchanan argued that the evidence against one of the deportees—John Demjanjuk—was false, the Jewish community expressed outrage. Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, was particularly outspoken, accusing Buchanan of a "gross interference in the administration of justice."

WALDHEIM CONTROVERSY

But it was the case of Kurt Waldheim that drew most attention from Jews. Waldheim, who had served as UN secretary-general from 1971 to 1981, was a

candidate for the presidency of Austria. In March the World Jewish Congress (WJC) made public information linking Waldheim to Nazi actions against civilians—including Jews—during World War II. When Waldheim admitted that he had known of atrocities but had not actually participated in them, other Jewish organizations entered the fray: the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations called on the UN to open its files on accused Nazi war criminals, the Synagogue Council of America asked the world body to investigate whether Waldheim's Nazi past had influenced his conduct as secretary-general, and the American Jewish Congress canceled its popular tour stop in Austria.

The aggressive anti-Waldheim campaign unleashed by the WJC drew heavy fire from Simon Wiesenthal, the veteran Nazi-hunter. In Wiesenthal's view, by inflaming passions without offering any hard evidence of Waldheim's "crimes," the Congress had insulted Austrian national pride and set the stage for an anti-Semitic backlash against Jews in that country, not to mention enhancing Waldheim's electoral prospects. Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, agreed that the WJC had handled the Waldheim matter in a heavy-handed, counterproductive way.

Waldheim won the election in June. As the WJC continued to release additional bits of evidence about his whereabouts and conduct during the war, many in the American Jewish community called on their government to place Waldheim on the "watch list" of suspected Nazi war criminals who were barred from entering the United States.

An American Jewish Committee initiative in Austria sparked controversy. In August a Committee delegation visiting Vienna concluded an agreement with the Austrian government for a joint program aimed at reduction of anti-Semitism in that country. The plan called for a scientific survey of Austrian attitudes toward Jews and academic conferences and symposia on the subject. According to Committee officials, this was the first time that Austria had cooperated with a non-Austrian Jewish organization. The delegation carefully avoided meeting with the newly elected President Waldheim.

The WJC lost no time in attacking the Committee, going so far as to accuse Marc Tanenbaum, its international affairs director, of serving "as public relations agent of the Austrian government." The Committee's executive vice-president, David Gordis, responded, "The problem with standing on the sidelines sniping at Austria is that it only exacerbates the situation and creates further problems for Austrian Jews." Nathan Perlmutter, national director of B'nai B'rith's Anti-Defamation League, praised the Committee's strategy of distinguishing between Waldheim the individual and the Austrian people, saying, "I don't think any real obstacle exists to greater understanding between Austria and the Jewish community."

With Kurt Waldheim installed as the president of Austria for a six-year term, there was no end in sight to the controversy that still swirled over his role as a Nazi officer during World War II, or to the internal Jewish debate over how to address it.

The Boesky Affair

American Jewish organizational life, which is entirely voluntary, depends heavily on large contributors—the “big givers.” Some of these individuals attain leadership positions in the Jewish community solely on the basis of their wealth and generosity. In 1986 American Jews discovered how risky this could be.

Ivan Boesky was a legend on Wall Street. The son of Russian immigrants, he made millions in risk arbitrage, buying the stock of companies that were about to be taken over by other companies. Boesky gave huge sums to Jewish causes and was appropriately honored by them. He contributed several million dollars to New York UJA-Federation and was its campaign chairman from 1984 until July 1986. Several million more Boesky dollars went to the Jewish Theological Seminary, two million of it for the seminary library, named for him and his wife. Boesky was also on the boards of Yeshiva University and the United States Holocaust Memorial Council. In 1986 he pledged the initial “leadership gift” for a new center of Jewish life at Princeton University. Boesky was politically well connected as the Republican National Committee’s special adviser on Jewish affairs and finance chairman of the National Jewish Coalition, a pro-Republican group.

In November the Boesky myth disintegrated: the Securities and Exchange Commission fined him \$100 million for insider trading, with a criminal investigation to follow. Boesky immediately resigned from all his positions in Jewish communal life, and the organizations he had supported moved quickly to distance themselves from him. “He is no longer our campaign chairman,” a senior UJA-Federation professional reminded the media, “but simply a contributor.” Students at the Jewish Theological Seminary rushed to have their pictures taken in front of the sign that said “Ivan F. and Seema Boesky Family Library” before it was removed.

Shock waves rippled through the American Jewish community. It quickly became known that Boesky had for some time been cooperating with the authorities, even allowing his phone conversations to be tapped. Others in the financial world were sure to be implicated, among them, undoubtedly, more wealthy Jewish philanthropists. Organization heads worried that some big givers might no longer be in a position to donate large sums.

Another concern was potential anti-Semitism. Earlier in 1986 New York City had been rocked by political scandals involving Jewish officeholders. There was fear that Boesky’s downfall, by attracting even more attention to Jewish dishonesty in the metropolis, might provide potent ammunition to bigots, especially in the South and West, who were predisposed against big cities, Jews, and Wall Street.

The Boesky case also raised the sensitive issue of Jewish business ethics. What kind of a community was it, many asked, that could allow a Boesky to virtually buy his way into prominence? What had happened to Jewish moral values? Rabbis of all the movements expressed chagrin. Walter Wurzbarger (Orthodox): “We are too ready to accord all kinds of honors and distinctions to people for no other reason than that they have a lot of money and are willing to make contributions to Jewish

causes. . . . Before a Jewish institution accepts a large gift, they should carefully examine the propriety of the donor." Alexander Schindler (Reform): "The personal morality of the present generation of Jews has deteriorated." Wolfe Kelman (Conservative): "The brightest and best young Jews have been going into investment banking instead of medicine or law. That is a symptom of something that is a distortion of Jewish values." David Teutsch (Reconstructionist): "We no longer do what the Jewish community has customarily done: We do not teach each other about morality."

While just as appalled by Boesky as the rabbis, Jewish lay leaders were far less judgmental about the Jewish community as a whole. Kenneth Bialkin, a former national chairman of the ADL and the immediate past president of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, accused the critical rabbis of "group libel . . . a terrible exaggeration which only plays into the hands of our enemies." The great bulk of Jews on Wall Street, he asserted, were honest. While Bialkin agreed that organizations should investigate the backgrounds of proposed honorees, he said that there was no way that Jewish leadership could have known the truth about Boesky before the SEC ruling was made public. Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz, who was active in Jewish causes, denied that there was any great ethical weakness in the Jewish community, pointing out that "crime is largely a function of opportunity." It just so happened that many Jews worked in the stock market, which was where the chance to do insider trading existed.

A Jewish Response to AIDS

American Jews began to shape a specifically Jewish response to the rapid spread of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Many in the Jewish community argued that Jews suffering from this fatal disease faced special difficulties because of their religious affiliation.

Because intravenous drug use and homosexual activity—the two primary ways AIDS was contracted—were condemned by the Jewish tradition, it was charged, parents and friends often shunned the victims or tried to cover up the nature of the illness. Bitter accusations surfaced about rabbis and Jewish hospital chaplains refusing to visit AIDS patients, and Jewish funeral homes declining to conduct funerals for AIDS victims. There was also some fear that the spread of the disease would precipitate an antihomosexual backlash targeted at Jews, since a number of leading representatives of the gay community were Jewish. Analogies were drawn to the Black Plague of the fourteenth century, when Jews became scapegoats for a deadly disease that no one understood.

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations (Reform)—which included four gay synagogues in its membership—was the first Jewish religious body to assert officially that AIDS research should be a national priority and that discrimination against those suffering from the disease was contrary to Jewish values. In December a special UAHC committee on AIDS recommended that every Reform

congregation set up counseling programs for victims and their families and that rabbis deliver sermons on the topic.

The UAHC also joined with national organizations of the Conservative and Reconstructionist movements, as well as the Council of Jewish Federations, B'nai B'rith, the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Services, and Jewish gay groups, to create a National Jewish AIDS Project. This was to serve an educational purpose, raising the consciousness of rabbis, Jewish agencies, Jewish funeral-home directors, and the general Jewish population about the need for sensitivity and compassion toward AIDS victims.

Congregation Beth Simchat Torah—a predominantly homosexual synagogue in New York City, 60 of whose members and friends had died of AIDS—published a brochure on Jewish funeral and burial practices, giving particular attention to the problems confronted by the families of AIDS victims who wished to follow traditional Jewish practice.

The Community Assesses Its Prospects

Many American Jews spent time in 1986 pondering the future of their community. This interest in collective introspection grew directly out of Charles Silberman's book *A Certain People*, which had appeared the year before. Silberman became a sought-after speaker before Jewish audiences, for whom he elaborated upon his optimistic view of American Jewish life.

The Silberman thesis had a number of parts. He argued, first, that anti-Semitism, while still alive, had ceased to be a problem for most American Jews. This allowed Jews to rise high in the American economic, social, and political structure. And unlike previous examples of successful Jewries, Silberman said, American Jews did not have to abandon their Jewishness in order to "make it." Silberman even found grounds on which to mitigate the potential demographic challenges to the community of a low birthrate and substantial intermarriage: women were postponing, not abandoning, motherhood, he said, and the large number of children of intermarriage who affiliated Jewishly, particularly when the non-Jewish spouse converted, could actually be increasing the Jewish population. All in all, American Jews had good reason for satisfaction, if Silberman was correct.

Students of American Jewish life differed over his findings. Brown University sociologist Calvin Goldscheider published a book in 1986, *Jewish Continuity and Change*, which provided scholarly backing for many of the points that Silberman had formulated in his popularly written volume. Goldscheider claimed that while there certainly had been a drop in traditional indexes of Jewishness in the United States—ritual observance, for example—structural Jewishness remained strong: Jews tended to enter "Jewish" occupations, associated overwhelmingly with other Jews, and lived in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods. While differing in form from the past, concluded Goldscheider, Jewish identification persisted.

Others were dubious. Social scientists Nathan Glazer and Samuel Heilman and

communal leader Arthur Hertzberg, among others, suggested that the “Jewishness” celebrated by the optimists was superficial and of questionable authenticity and was no substitute for the “Judaism” of the tradition. Interestingly, Silberman found that lay audiences took greatest umbrage at his view that anti-Semitism was no longer a serious problem, the one aspect of his book that drew general assent from the scholarly community.

The American Jewish Committee convened a conference of experts in May to deal in depth with the issues arising out of this controversy. What emerged was a recognition that the questions were much more complex than simply whether Jewish life in the United States was thriving or declining. It became clear that demographic data were hard to interpret and even harder to project into the future, and that any assessment of the “quality” of Jewish culture was inescapably subjective. One thesis that drew considerable attention was that, while certain parts of American Jewry were indeed deepening their Jewishness, others were on an accelerated assimilatory course out of the Jewish community.

LAWRENCE GROSSMAN