A dramatic change of government and a major organizational restructuring in the Jewish community were among the key events of late 1996 and 1997.

In May 1997, 18 years of Tory rule ended with a spectacular defeat for the Conservative Party and Prime Minister John Major. The Labor Party, headed by Tony Blair, came to power with 43.1 percent of the popular vote and an overall majority of 177 seats in the House of Commons—the largest majority of any party in the postwar era. The Conservatives, who polled their smallest share of the vote since 1832 (31.4 percent), were left with 165 seats in the House. The center-left Liberal Democrats more than doubled their representation to 46 seats, all the gains being made at the expense of the Tories. The upset was predicted by the pollsters, all of whom up until the actual election gave Labor a lead of more than 15 points.

The Tory defeat, coming at a time of falling unemployment and growing prosperity, had little to do with economics. Obviously, after 18 years of Toryism, sentiment favoring change was a strong factor. But this was powerfully reinforced by multiple examples of sleaze among Conservative MPs, deception of Parliament by ministers, and above all, a perception that Premier John Major had traded national leadership for increasingly desperate attempts to maintain some sort of party unity between Europhiles and Europhobes in his cabinet.

The Labor Party, by contrast, not only displayed a greater degree of skill in its presentation of policies but was also careful to promote an image that promised change, especially in respect to education and the national health service, while still pledging to remain within spending totals set by the Tories and not to raise the income tax. Only weeks after the election, new chancellor of the exchequer Gordon Brown transferred the power to set interest rates from the Treasury to the Bank of England, a historic move that removed politics from monetary policy.

At the Labor Party conference in September, Premier Blair proclaimed his aim
of presiding over "one of the great radical reforming governments of our history." This took the form initially of winning referenda for devolution in Wales and Scotland, reducing benefits for single parents, and deferring a decision on whether to participate in the European Monetary Union until a referendum early in the next Parliament (due in 2002). The reason given was that the British economy had not yet converged sufficiently with those of the other likely participants. There was some concern that party unity might not survive the exigencies of reform of the welfare state: in December, 47 Labor MPs voted against the bill to reduce benefit payments to single parents. This was part of a welfare-to-work program, the full dimensions of which had yet to be revealed.

The far-right British National Party (BNP) did not fare well in the May 1997 general election. It fielded more than 50 candidates (thus qualifying for a TV election broadcast), but garnered only some 40,000 votes nationally. Most BNP candidates received less than 1 percent of the poll in their respective constituencies.

Israel and the Middle East

Following Labor’s victory in May 1997, there was little to distinguish its Middle East policies from those of its Tory predecessors, though Labor, said Foreign Office minister Derrek Fatchett, was ready to become more actively engaged in regional diplomacy. Returning from his first official visit to the Middle East the following month, Fatchett spelled out Labor policy: "We believe in the principle of land for peace; we support the United Nations resolutions; and we are passionately committed to the peace process."

Both parties saw a major role for Britain in this process. As negotiations jolted from one crisis to the next, Britain pressed constantly for speedier implementation of the Oslo accords, at times tending to blame Israel for delays. In September 1996 both Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind and Labor’s shadow foreign secretary, Robin Cook, called on Israel to take immediate steps to redeploy its troops in Hebron. In October 1996 Rifkind described Netanyahu’s policies as "primarily" responsible for introducing recent uncertainty into the peace process.

Jewish settlements in the territories were "illegal and an obstacle to peace," said a Foreign Office spokesperson in September 1996, when news broke that 900 houses were being built at Kiryat Sefer, just inside the West Bank. In February 1997 Rifkind was urging the Israeli government not to proceed with plans to build Jewish homes at Har Homah in southeast Jerusalem, which in his view could only detract from the positive atmosphere created by the Hebron agreement. In December 1997 Robin Cook, now foreign secretary, described the peace process as in stalemate, indicating that he attributed much of the blame to the Israelis. "We will make it clear to all parties — but specifically to Mr. Netanyahu — that they are bound by the Oslo accords, which have the status of an international treaty," he declared.

Israel’s periodic closure of the territories also caused concern. In September
1996 both Rifkind and Cook called on Israel to suspend measures causing economic hardship to the Palestinians. "Any restrictions that are not legitimate on grounds of security should not be there," Rifkind said in October. Foreign Office minister Baroness Chalker, visiting Israel and Palestinian self-rule areas in January 1997, stressed British unhappiness with closure: it harmed the Palestinian economy and hampered aid workers seeking to enter Gaza. She announced that direct British aid to the Palestinian Authority would continue at an annual rate of some £10 million, to fund a water and infrastructure project in Hebron and to train Palestinian police.

Criticism notwithstanding, the Foreign Office's Fatchett insisted that Britain was not partisan. "We believe passionately in security for Israelis as we do in justice for Palestinians," he said in July 1997. He criticized both the Israeli government and the Palestinians: the former for failure to make some key commitments to the Palestinians, such as the release of prisoners and further troop redeployments, and the latter for human-rights violations and suspected financial corruption.

In May 1997 Foreign Secretary Cook said that he favored European action to help resuscitate the stalled negotiations between Israel and her Arab neighbors. In December he pledged that saving the peace process would be a "very high" priority when Britain took over the European Union presidency in January 1998.

Britain's active role was demonstrated by a series of diplomatic visits during the period under review. In September 1996 and November 1997 Netanyahu was in London; in November 1996 Rifkind was in Israel, and Israeli defense minister Yitzhak Mordechai, Syria's foreign minister, and King Hussein of Jordan visited London; and in February 1997 Israeli president Ezer Weizman enjoyed a spectacular state reception in his honor when he visited London. In July 1997 Palestinian Authority president Yasir Arafat had talks in London with Prime Minister Tony Blair, who reiterated British support for Arafat's work "in the cause of peace in the Middle East."

During Weizman's visit in February 1997, Prime Minister John Major talked of the "unprecedentedly close ties" between Jerusalem and London that began with the launching of the peace process. This was underscored by the Queen's speech at the opening of Parliament in May promising that the government would promote efforts for a durable peace in the Middle East. An event expressing the strength of the relationship took place in December 1997, when Prime Minister Blair lit the first Hanukkah candle at his constituency home in Sedgefield, Durham, to mark the start of Israel's 50th-anniversary celebration.

OTHER MATTERS

In October 1996 the British-Israel parliamentary group wrote to the Iranian embassy urging the Teheran government to give "a definite statement on the current state" of Ron Arad, the Israeli airman held captive since 1986. In May 1997
Foreign Office minister Derrek Fatchett called for Arad's release when he met with Arab leaders during his Middle East visit. The Foreign Office, he said, viewed the case as a serious violation of human rights.

Also in May, the National Lottery Charity Board gave £280,000 to the New Israel Fund for preschool education for Bedouin children, and more than £400,000 to three London-based charities aiding Palestinian causes: Friends of Bir Zeit University, Friends of the Spafford Children's Center of Jerusalem, and Medical Aid for Palestine.

Anti-Semitism and Racism

Traditional expressions of anti-Semitism in Great Britain continued to decline, according to the 1997 Antisemitism World Report, published by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) and the American Jewish Committee. “Jews in Britain do not experience the same levels of racism as other, more visible, ethnic groups,” the report noted, but warned that the threat from Islamism and terrorism still existed. Figures in the report, based on statistics collected by the Community Security Trust (CST), which replaced the Board of Deputies Communal Security Organization, showed recorded anti-Semitic incidents falling for the third consecutive year in 1996 to 227, an 8.1-percent decrease over 1995. The report attributed the decreased harassment of the Jewish community and the reduced threat of racism to effective action by the police and judicial authorities against racists and neo-Nazis.

Nevertheless, in October 1996 CST warned that the police and other authorities thought the Jewish community to be at risk. “There is a clear and present danger,” with the main threat posed by Islamist and Arab terrorists and right-wing groups such as Combat 18 and the British National Party. The police believed these dangers would persist for the foreseeable future.

In July 1996 JPR reported on the growing use of cyberspace by far-right propagandists, which it judged particularly dangerous as an effective device for Holocaust deniers and because it enabled violent groups to coordinate activities. The report recommended inter alia that the Internet be subject to the same laws as other publishing processes. In November 1996 CST urged Jewish organizations to take precautions when using the Internet lest they disclose sensitive information.

The Board of Deputies continued to press for tighter legislation, especially against Holocaust-denial material. In June 1996 Prime Minister John Major told board president Eldred Tabachnik that he understood the concern but preferred to combat such material by education and use of the Public Order Act. The October Labor Party conference in Blackpool adopted a motion that had been proposed by Poale Zion (the Labor-affiliated Zionist group), calling on the future Labor government to make Holocaust denial a criminal offense. In January 1997 a private member's bill to outlaw Holocaust denial was given an unopposed first
reading in the House of Commons, passed its committee stage in the House of Commons in March, but failed to make it into the statute books.

In July 1996 the director of Public Prosecution decided not to act on Holocaust-denial leaflets sent to schools, finding them "not insulting in the meaning of the Public Order Act." The same month the Crown Prosecution Service decided against prosecuting Dr. Mohammed al-Massara, a London-based Saudi dissident who called for the annihilation of the Jews.

Not all racial actions went unpunished. In November 1996 Aston Villa goalkeeper Mark Bosnich was fined £2,000 and warned about his future conduct, after he gave a Nazi-style salute to Tottenham Hotspur fans at a football match a month earlier. In January 1997 the parents of children who six months earlier caused damage estimated at £37,000 to tombstones at Rainsough Jewish cemetery, north Manchester, were fined £750. In April three youths were sentenced to custody terms of between three and six years at London Crown Court for attacks on Orthodox Jews in Stamford Hill, North London. In August plans for a large neo-Nazi music festival in South Wales were foiled by police action. In September a Feltham trash collector, Mark Atkinson, was jailed for 21 months for publishing two issues of *Stormer*, a magazine of Combat 18.

The new Labor government acted quickly to implement promises made in its election campaign and in the Queen’s speech at the opening of Parliament in May 1997. A Crime and Disorder Bill that would strengthen existing laws against racial discrimination was announced by Home Secretary Jack Straw (Labor) in October, on the release of a Runnymede Trust report on problems facing British Muslims. The bill, which would make racial violence a specific offense and increase sentences for crimes where racism was a factor, received its second reading in the House of Lords in December. The government also intended to give racism priority when it took over the presidency of the European Union in January 1998.

Militant Islamic groups were increasingly frustrated in their campus activities. Manchester University Islamic Society withdrew a heavily contested anti-Zionist motion in October 1996; the same month, the Committee of University Vice-Chancellors and Principals set up a working group to advise colleges on ways to crack down on extremism and to confront groups inciting racial, religious, or political hatred. In September 1997 supporters of the militant Muslim group Hizb ut-Tahrir were ejected from Manchester student fairs for breaching bans imposed on their campus activities.

Off campus, local councils in Harrow and Brent canceled Muslim rallies in July 1996 because promotional literature denounced Israel and Jews. In November Home Office minister Timothy Kirkhope rejected a call to instruct the police to clamp down on Hizb; however, he reiterated the government’s commitment to insuring that police had full powers to deal with any racially motivated crime. The same month Nottingham City Council canceled a Hizb meeting because the organization held "extremist views" offensive to Jews, women, and homosexuals.
In March 1997 Hackney Council in North London passed a motion describing the local presence of Louis Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam as an “unacceptable threat to the building of bridges between the borough’s communities.” Farrakhan supporters should be made as unwelcome as the local BNP, it averred.

There was an effort to bridge the racial divide in July 1996 when Jewish, Asian, and black representatives launched a Commission for Racial Equality program, “Roots of the Future,” designed to promote acceptance of Britain as a multiracial nation. In October 1996 soccer coach Glen Hoddle backed a “Let’s kick racism out of football!” campaign, initiated by the Commission for Racial Equality in conjunction with the Professional Footballers’ Association. In January 1997 Sir Sigmund Sternberg and British Muslim leader Dr. Zaki Badawi launched a forum for Muslims, Christians, and Jews, to promote dialogue and understanding in London. In February the Union of Jewish Students (UJS) joined forces with the National Black Alliance to counteract the threat from the BNP. In March the National Union of Students’ Blackpool conference passed a motion introduced by Jewish and black leaders, backed by Labor students, urging students to campaign against racism on campuses and condemn activities by far-right political organizations.

**Nazi War Criminals**

The first case brought in Britain under the 1991 War Crimes Act ended in January 1997 when the jury at the Old Bailey found 86-year-old Szymon Serafimowicz unfit to plead. Serafimowicz, charged with the murder of Jews in Nazi-occupied Belarus between 1941 and 1942, died in August 1997.

In September Andrzej Sawoniuk, a retired British Rail worker from Bermondsey, East London, became the second man charged under the act. Accused of murdering five Jews in Domachevo, Belarus, between September and December 1942, Sawoniuk was remanded on conditional bail when he appeared at Bow Street magistrates court in November. The trial, at which the prosecution planned to call some 20 witnesses from Belarus and Israel, was expected to open at the end of March 1998. Sawoniuk denied all charges.

**JEWISH COMMUNITY**

**Demography**

The estimated number of Jews in Great Britain was 300,000. The steady decline in synagogue marriages since 1990 was reversed in 1996, according to the Board of Deputies Community Research Unit. The total number of marriages rose 9 percent to 947 in 1996 from 866 the previous year, with rises recorded in all groups except the Progressive sector, which continued to decline. The number
of religious divorces completed in 1996 rose to 272, an 18-percent increase over the 1995 figure but still below the 1991 level. Burials and cremations under Jewish auspices fell 2 percent to 4,167 in 1996 from 4,233 in 1995. The unit estimated that 3,013 Jewish births took place in 1995, as compared with 2,377 in 1994.

Communal Affairs

In July 1997 Yasir Arafat met with leaders of the Jewish Board of Deputies, who pledged their support for the peace process. This caused Likud-Herut G.B. (British branch of the Israeli Likud Party) to accuse the board of undermining communal unity, even though communal unity was not, in fact, greatly in evidence. Benjamin Netanyahu's two visits to London—in September 1996 and November 1997—were accompanied by conflicting action by British Jewry, demonstrating the polarized sympathies within the community. In October 1996 British Friends of Peace Now called for a candlelight vigil outside London's Israeli embassy to press Netanyahu's government to move ahead with the peace process, while both left-wing opponents and right-wing sympathizers wrote to him to express their contradictory views. In November 1997 two letters with multiple signatures appeared in the Jewish Chronicle: one backed Netanyahu's tough stance; the other, attacking his conduct of the peace talks, was placed by the British Friends of Peace Now, who also demonstrated outside a United Jewish Israel Appeal (UJIA) event addressed by the Israeli premier.

A report by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR), based on a detailed analysis of its 1995 communal survey, found that the sense of attachment to Israel had weakened among young Jews since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995. Far from being a source of cohesion and consensus, Israel was becoming a source of division.

Major Organizations Merge

A merger took place in January 1997 between Jewish Continuity, the national fund-raising program for education, and the Joint Israel Appeal (JIA), the community's leading Israel funding body, significantly changing the landscape of Anglo-Jewry's fund-raising. "There will basically be two major organizations, ourselves and Jewish Care," said Brian Kerner, chairman of the board of directors of the new organization.

Efforts to preserve Jewish Continuity as an independent entity failed in June 1996, purportedly due to right-wing Orthodox opposition to its broad, cross-community orientation. Launched amid high hopes in 1993 to promote and strengthen Jewish education, Continuity was plagued by contention. In November 1996 representatives of Continuity and the Joint Israel Appeal (JIA) voted to merge, starting in January 1997.

Officially inaugurated in September 1997, the new body had a new name—the
United Jewish Israel Appeal (UJIA); new leadership—Jonathan Kestenbaum, former director of the Chief Rabbi's Office, who replaced Clive Lawton as chief executive; and a new structure. Instead of its predominantly Israel-oriented activity, UJIA now planned a two-pronged campaign: one would focus on "rescue," continuing support for new immigrants to Israel; the other on "renewal," domestic projects, though retaining Israel as a key element in educational initiatives. Each of the two branches had its own lay and professional officers, both supervised by Kestenbaum.

Funding was adjusted to reflect the two-way split. Half the proceeds of UJIA's 1997 Kol Nidre Appeal supported the immigration to Israel of Jews from the former Soviet Union, and half was allocated to domestic causes, which received only 30 percent in 1996. Operating policy also differed from Continuity's: UJIA planned to fund only selected programs that fit into its overall strategy, rather than make numerous small grants. It would try to work in partnership with existing organizations rather than launch its own projects. Its program emphasized consolidation and development rather than innovation. Lastly, it would work across the whole religious spectrum. "We raise funds across the community," Kestenbaum said. "We will work impartially across the community."

In October 1997 UJIA received its biggest single donation, £1.5 million from the Ashdown Charitable Settlement, earmarked for its leadership program. It will be used to create UJIA Ashdown Fellowships, "the first of their type," said Kestenbaum, "built exclusively for the British community, through British Jewish graduates and with British Jewish money." Also in October it was announced that UJIA's Kol Nidre Appeal had raised over £1 million.

**Other Matters**

In November 1996 a merger between Jewish Care and the Brighton and Hove Jewish Home was approved by the Charities Commission. In April 1997 Jewish Care opened a residential home in Finchley, North London, for 120 frail, elderly, infirm, and disabled Jews with an average age of 90. As of June 1997 Jewish Care encompassed 10 charities and 54 centers, with an annual budget of nearly £32 million, according to chairman Michael Levy. In December 1997 chief executive Melvyn Carlowe warned that Care faced a £1.4-million shortfall in its 1998 social-service budget because of cutbacks in local authority spending.

Mergers in the interest of increased efficiency and reduced duplication and waste dominated the communal scene. In July 1996 Manchester's two major social-service organizations, the Jews' Benevolent Society and Jewish Social Services, agreed to merge. In December Norwood Childcare and the Ravenswood Foundation formally merged to form Norwood Ravenswood, with 65 buildings, 6,000 clients, and an £18-million budget. In September 1997 Norwood Ravenswood announced plans to spend over £6 million on a series of pioneering housing projects around London, to provide small, homey accommodation tai-
lored to the needs of individual residents. In April 1997 the B'nai B'rith Housing Society and the JBG Housing Society merged to form the BBJBG Housing Association, the largest provider of sheltered housing in the Jewish community.

In May 1997 the first shelter in England (and in Europe) for battered Jewish women and their children became operational, after a five-year campaign by Jewish Women's Aid.

Efforts on behalf of foreign Jews primarily concentrated on Eastern Europe. World Jewish Relief (WJR) was involved in a number of projects: renovating a Jewish community center in Sofia, Bulgaria; sending aid worth over £400,000 to Jewish communities in former Yugoslavia; raising over £65,000 to provide eye-testing and glasses for impoverished elderly Jews in Odessa in the Ukraine; providing Passover help for Ukrainian Jews in the form of food parcels, and also, in conjunction with the League of Jewish Women, gifts of material goods. In July 1997 WJR announced that it would concentrate its overseas program on Jewish communities in the Ukraine, spending some £400,000 on providing food parcels and, in conjunction with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, building welfare centers in Vinnitsa and Lvov. In December 1997 WJR went a step further, shedding its domestic responsibilities entirely in order to concentrate on specific areas of need among Jews abroad.

**Religion**

Synagogue membership in the United Kingdom declined over 8 percent in 1996 from 1990 levels, according to a report by the Board of Deputies Community Research Unit. Some 93,684 households belonged to 365 synagogues in 1996, as compared with 102,144 members and 356 synagogues in 1990. Membership loss mainly occurred in the mainstream Orthodox (United Synagogue) sector, which accounted for 61 percent of total membership in 1996. Other groupings either increased or were stable. Some two-thirds of total synagogue membership belonged to 193 Greater London synagogues.

In January 1997 seven United Synagogue (US) synagogues were seeking full-time rabbis. In June 1997, after the US's budget of £220,000 for the chief rabbinate was cut by £50,000, it was announced that Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks would preach part-time at the Western-Marble Arch Synagogue, Central London. Payment for his services would be made directly to the Chief Rabbi's Office.

Relations between Orthodox and Progressive Jews hit a new low in August 1996 following the death of Rabbi Hugo Gryn, president of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain (RSGB), senior rabbi of West London Synagogue, a Holocaust survivor, and a nationally respected television personality. After new US president Elkan Levy was criticized by RSGB executive director Rabbi Tony Bayfield for lack of Orthodox representation at Gryn's funeral, Levy apologized; he paid tribute to Gryn's "unique contribution" to communal life and represented the US at a packed memorial service for Gryn in December 1996. But Chief Rabbi
Jonathan Sacks continued to ride an unhappy line between the left and right wings of his constituency. Hoping to appease the Progressives, Sacks agreed to attend a memorial meeting for Gryn in February 1997, organized by the Board of Deputies and the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ). This brought an accusation of "hilul Hashem" (profaning God's name) from Dayan Yisroel Lichtenstein, head of the Federation of Synagogues' Bet Din (rabbinic court).

Notwithstanding, Sacks attended the meeting in his role as a CCJ president, praising Gryn without referring to his rabbinic status. Hopes of communal unity evaporated in March 1997 when the Jewish Chronicle leaked a letter from Sacks to Dayan Chanoch Padwa, head of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations (an umbrella body of right-wing communities), describing Gryn as one of "those who destroy the faith" and Reform as "a false grouping." Progressive leaders knew, wrote Sacks, that they had "no enemy and opponent equal to the Chief Rabbi." In May Reform, Liberal, and Masorti leaders called on CCJ to appoint a second Jewish president alongside Sacks and its five Christian presidents. It also invited the US to discuss establishing a representative structure that would be a "fair, effective and a truthful reflection of our community." Although there was no official response to this request, it was announced in June that US, Progressive, and Conservative leaders would hold informal discussions to try to heal the rift over the chief rabbi's role.

In June 1996 all communal factions concerned with the plight of agunot ("chained women" whose husbands refuse them a religious divorce) welcomed the passage by the House of Commons of the Family Law Bill, which contains a clause enabling a spouse to ask a judge to defer granting a civil divorce until a get (religious divorce) is provided. The same month it was reported that of 80 couples seeking authorization from the Chief Rabbi's Office to marry in May and June, 33 signed the Prenuptial Agreement (PNA) introduced in April. A year later, in April 1997, the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues (ULPS) introduced a document resembling a get, called Sefer Keritut (document of release), to meet "people's growing desire to have some sort of ceremony to mark the end of their marriage," said ULPS rabbinic board chairman Rabbi Harry Jacobi.

Although the government had agreed in September 1994 to permit Britain's first eruv (Sabbath boundary marker) in North-West London, subsequent legal challenges prevented implementation. In August 1996 a prestigious Leverhulme Trust grant enabled Prof. David Cesarani to undertake a study of the controversy.

In September 1996 Reform rabbi Elizabeth Sarah had to cancel a decision to officiate at a Jewish lesbian wedding. Her support for such ceremonies did not reflect RSGB policy, Rabbi Bayfield stressed. In March 1997 Rabbi Sarah resigned as RSGB program director. In June, a working group set up by RSGB's Assembly of Rabbis to examine the question of same-sex commitment ceremonies in relation to Jewish tradition deferred its findings to 1998; in August, the assembly set up a Responsa Committee to examine controversial issues and advise on policy.
In July 1996 Blooms, Britain’s leading kosher food company, sold its manufacturing rights to Gilberts Kosher Foods after a deal with Greenspan Continental Meats fell through. In November a High Court judge found against managing director Michael Bloom in proceedings he initiated for a legal review of the London Bet Din’s decision to revoke his kashrut license in December 1995.

In the wake of the scare over “mad cow disease” (BSE) and a concomitant 45-percent drop in kosher beef consumption, in July 1996 the London Board for Shechitah, London’s main kosher meat supplier, dismissed 10 of its 45-strong workforce. At the same time, after consulting its rabbinic authorities, the board opposed the decision of Manchester’s Kashrus Authority to license the import of frozen Argentinian beef.

In September 1996 Radlett and Bushey Reform Synagogue in Hertfordshire joined the increasing number of United Kingdom Progressive congregations offering support to emerging communities in the former Soviet Union, when it twinned with the Menorah community of Grodno in Belarus and organized a visit by its members to Belarus in November 1997. In February 1997 Andrew Goldstein, rabbi of Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue, was appointed honorary rabbinic adviser to Bejt Simcha congregation in Prague.

Education

News that Carmel College, Britain’s only Jewish boarding school, located in Wallingford, Oxfordshire, was to close in July 1997 shocked the community. Pleading falling enrollment and mounting debts, the school’s governors planned to sell the 80-acre riverside campus to property developers. Indignant parents mobilized into a “Save Carmel College Campaign” (SCCC), but in July Carmel’s governors rejected the group’s plan to keep the school open. In August the site was sold for £4 million to the Sephardic Exilarch Foundation, which, said founder-trustee Nairn Dongoor, would use it for communal, notably educational, purposes.

In July 1997 Chief Rabbi Sacks announced a review of the future of Jews’ College, the Orthodox educational and rabbinic training center in London. Without a more clearly defined role, he said, it would be difficult to raise the college’s annual budget of £500,000.

Jewish studies at universities expanded. In June 1996 the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) announced plans to teach Yiddish, with instructors supplied by the Oxford Institute for Yiddish Studies. In October 1996 the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies launched a £5-million appeal to mark its silver jubilee. The same month, a center for Jewish studies was launched at Leeds University. In June 1997 the University of Wales established a Judaism chair and appointed Progressive rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok as its first incumbent. In August 1997 Mark Geller, professor of Semitic studies at University College, London (UCL) was appointed Jewish Chronicle Professor of Jewish Studies at UCL. The
same month Bernard Jackson, Queen Victoria Professor of Law at Liverpool University, was appointed to the Alliance Chair in Modern Jewish Studies at Manchester University.

In January 1997 eminent Yiddishist Dovid Katz left his job as research director of the Oxford Institute for Yiddish Studies, which he co-founded in 1994, after a bitter split with the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies. In August Katz took the institute to an industrial tribunal, claiming racial discrimination and unfair dismissal, but withdrew his plea during the hearing.

**Publications**

Binjamin Wilkomirski, a Swiss-based professional musician, won the £4,000 Jewish Quarterly award for nonfiction in 1997 for *Fragments, Memories of a Childhood, 1939-1948*. The fiction award was divided between W.G. Sebald for *The Emigrants* and Clive Sinclair for *The Lady with the Laptop*, a collection of short stories.

New works of poetry included *The Flying Bosnian* by Miroslav Jancic; *The Skin Off Your Back* by Michael Rosin; *Rhymes at Midnight* by Fran Landesman; *Odd Mercy* by Gerald Stern; *Selected and New Poems 1980-1997* by Lotte Kramer; *Sugar-Paper Blue* by Ruth Fainlight; *Poems and Adolphe 1920* by John Rodker; *Poems* by Ellis Sopher; *Erotika or the Banquet of Love* by Gordon Jackson; *The POW! Anthology* edited by Michael Horovitz and Inge Elsa Laird; and *Daylight* by Elaine Feinstein. Jon Silkin published *The Life of Metrical and Free Verse in 20th-Century Poetry*; and two books appeared on Hugh Manning: *Hugh Manning: Poet and Humanist* by Ivan Savidge, and the *Selected Poetry of Hugh Manning*.

Books on religious subjects included *1,001 Questions and Answers on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur* by Rabbi Dr Jeffrey Cohen; *The Politics of Hope* by Chief Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks; *Beyond the Graven Image* by Lionel Kochan; and *Fountain of Blessings* by Dayan Pinchas Toledano, devoted to laws concerning Shabbat, festivals, and the High Holy Days, the second volume in his *Code of Jewish Law* series. *Mourning Becomes the Law* by Gillian Rose is a work of philosophy.

Books on Zionism included *Western Jewry and the Zionist Project, 1914-1933* by Michael Berkowitz; and *Theodor Herzl and the Zionist Dream* by Julius H. Schoeps.


Some new studies of anti-Semitism were *East London for Mosley: The British*
Union of Fascists in East London and South-West Essex (1933-1940) by Thomas P. Linehan; A Pariah People: The Anthropology of Antisemitism by Hyam Maccoby; and The Accused: The Dreyfus Trilogy by George R. Whyte.

Works of autobiography and biography included Accidental Journey: A Cambridge Internee’s Memoir of World War II by Mark Lynton; Life in Three Cities by Fred S. Worms; A Very British Subject by Barnet Litvinoff; I Remember, I Remember Chaplin in Brick Lane by Michael Chapman; and Odyssey of a Jewish Sailor by F. Ashe Lincoln.

The corpus of Holocaust literature continued to expand. Survivors’ accounts included The Children Accuse, edited by Maria Hochberg-Marianska and Noe Gruss; Lost in Labyrinth of Red Tape by Armin Schmid and Renate Schmid; The Darkest Chapter by David Ben-Dor; and The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak: Five Notebooks from the Lodz Ghetto, translated by Kamil Turowski, edited by Alan Adelson. The War After: Living with the Holocaust, is by Anne Karpf, the daughter of Holocaust survivors; The Boys by Martin Gilbert, is about Holocaust survivors whom the CBF brought to England in 1945. Other works are Nazi Germany and British Guilt by Cecil Genese; The Chosen People: The Story of the “222 Transport” from Bergen-Belsen to Palestine by A.N. Oppenheim; Blood Money: The Swiss, the Nazis and the Looted Billions by Tom Bower; Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing and Representation by Omer Bartov; Alfred Wiener and the Making of the Holocaust Library by Ben Barkow; and The Myth of Rescue: Why the Democracies Could Not Have Saved More Jews from the Nazis by William D. Rubinstein. Belsen in History and Memory by Jo Reilly, David Cesarani, Tony Kushner, and Colin Richmond is a collection of papers given at a conference in 1995 to commemorate the liberation of the concentration camp.

Historical works included The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara by David Kertzer; British Policy and the Refugees, 1933-1941 by Yvonne Kapp and Margaret Mynn; Those Wonderful Women in Black: The Story of the Women’s Campaign by Daphne Gerlis; A History of the Jews in the English-Speaking World: Great Britain by W. D. Rubinstein; A World Apart: The Story of the Chasidim in Britain, by Rabbi Harry Rabinowicz; and The Jews of Lithuania by Masha Greenbaum. Lions of Judah by John Colvin contains accounts of Jewish fighters or fighting Jews.

New works of fiction included The Cast Iron Shore by Linda Grant; My Affair with Stalin by Simon Sebag Montefiore; The Slow Mirror and other Stories: New Fiction by Jewish Writers, edited by Sonja Lyndon and Sylvia Paskin; The Days of Miracles and Wonders by Simon Louvish; Visitors by Anita Brookner; and The Knot by Eva Figes.

Among new books on Israel were Germany and Israel: Moral Debt and National Interest by George Lavy; Sharing the Promised Land: An Interwoven Tale of Israelis and Palestinians by Dilip Hiro; and War and Peace in the Middle East: A Concise History by Avi Shlaim.

New works of literary criticism included Realism, Caricature and Bias: The Fi-
tion of Mendele Mocher Sefarim by David Aberbach; Seriously Funny by Howard Jacobson, a dissection of comedy through the ages; Between "Race" and Culture: Representations of "the Jew" in English and American Literature, a series of essays edited by Bryan Cheyette; and A Home Within: Varieties of Jewish Expression in Modern Fiction by Leon Yudkin. In The Birth of Shylock and the Death of Zero Mostel, Arnold Wesker describes the trials and tribulations of trying to stage his play.

**Personalia**

Peerages were awarded to advertising tycoon Maurice Saatchi, responsible for some Tory campaign material; Sir Peter Levene, Prime Minister Major's adviser on efficiency and effectiveness; Michael Levy, Jewish Care chairman and a key Labor Party fund-raiser; Greville Janner, former Labor MP; film producer Sir David Puttnam; Andrew Stone, Marks and Spencer joint managing director; Sir Anthony Jacobs, chairman of the Liberal Democrats' federal executive; and Michael Montague, former English Tourist Board chairman. Knighthoods went to Guenter Treitel, Oxford University's Vinerian Professor of Law; Jack Baer, former chairman of the Society of London Art Dealers, now a member of the Museums and Galleries Commission; physicist Michael Berry, Bristol University research professor; Jeremy Isaacs, for services to broadcasting and the arts; Judge Stephen Tumim for his work as chief inspector of prisons; Prof. David Goldberg, director of research and development at the Maudsley Hospital's Institute of Psychiatry; and former foreign secretary Malcolm Rifkind. Richard "Dickie" Arbiter, commercial radio court correspondent, was appointed Lieutenant of the Royal Victorian Order (LVO), a personal honor from the Queen.

Prominent British Jews who died in the second half of 1996 included Barnet Litvinoff, author, who edited Chaim Weizmann's writings, in London, in June, aged 78; Peter Montefiore Samuel, Viscount Bearsted, philanthropist, in London, in June, aged 84; Rabbi Robert Shafritz, minister of Wimbledon Reform Synagogue, in London in July, aged 51; Alfred Marks, comedian, in London, in July, aged 75; Dayan Joseph Apfel, senior member of Leeds Bet Din, in Leeds, in August, aged 87; Prof. Albert Neuberger, internationally renowned biochemist and Zionist, in London, in August, aged 88; Abram Games, graphic designer, in London, in August, aged 82; Louis Mindel, grand old man of the United Synagogue, in London, in August, aged 103; Hugo Gryn, Holocaust survivor and nationally acclaimed and respected Reform rabbi, in London, in August, aged 66; George Levy, antiques dealer and chairman of the Jewish Museum executive committee, in London, in September, aged 69; Jacob Gewirtz, former executive director of the Board of Deputies defense and group relations committee, in London, in September, aged 70; Sylvia Daiches Raphael, French scholar and translator, in Kingston, Surrey, in October, aged 82; Berthold Goldschmidt, musician, in London, in October, aged 93; Robert Carvalho, pillar of London's Sephardic com-
munity, in London, in October, aged 89; Geoffrey, Lord Finsberg, former Tory minister, in Stockholm, in October, aged 70; Gerda Charles, novelist, in London in November, aged 81; S. Herbert Frankel, economist, in Oxford, in December, aged 93; Alma Baroness Birk, one-time Labor minister, in London, in December, aged 79; Raphael Samuel, English social historian, in London, in December, aged 62; Sefton David Temkin, Jewish historian, in Manchester, in December, aged 79; and Arthur Jacobs, musicologist, in Oxford, in December, aged 74.


Miriam & Lionel Kochan
France

National Affairs

France’s troubling social situation and political malaise persisted throughout the second half of 1996 and 1997, despite a dramatic election upset in May–June 1997. France had been in the grip of doubt and uncertainty for several years. Neither the left nor the right offered simple solutions to unemployment, international competition, immigration, and urban violence—all of which contributed to a faltering sense of national identity. The National Front (NF), the far-right party led by Jean-Marie Le Pen, took advantage of the situation by trying to attract dissatisfied voters and presenting itself as an “alternative” to the two main political streams. It talked about defending “national values,” rejected “globalization,” and was hostile toward immigrants.

President Jacques Chirac, a man of the right, supported by a right-wing majority in the National Assembly and a government led by Prime Minister Alain Juppé, concentrated on restructuring public finances, not on fighting social breakdown. While these measures were considered essential in the context of the integration of European economies, citizens whose primary concerns centered on social problems were disappointed, and the acclaim that greeted the right on taking office was short-lived. The personal style of the prime minister, whose culture and intelligence sometimes went hand in hand with a lack of tolerance for the weaknesses of others, did not add to the government’s popularity.

The NF kept working to solidify its position, focusing especially on infiltrating trade unions and organizations and slowly developing a broader base. Previously, “Le Pen-ism” had been a far-right ideology limited to small groups of extremists. Now, however, there was also a new “reactionary Le Pen-ism” prevailing among people who felt disappointed by a right they deemed too modern, as well as a “leftist Le Pen-ism” appealing to people dissatisfied on social issues who found no outlet for their views in the parties on the left.

On February 9, 1997, the NF won the municipal election in Vitrolles, a city with a population of 35,000 in the south of France, near Marseille. The new mayor of Vitrolles was Catherine Mégrét, wife of the party’s delegate-general and second most important figure, Bruno Mégrét. In reality Mme. Mégrét was a figurehead, a stand-in for her husband, whose candidacy had been invalidated because of technical infractions committed during the previous election. This victory was a major success for Bruno Mégrét, who, despite some internal opposition, was considered the most likely person to eventually succeed Jean-Marie Le Pen at the head of the NF.
The National Front’s election victories along with public debates about immigration issues revealed a deep-seated uneasiness in French politics, which the Juppé government was not able to dispel. Nevertheless, people were surprised when President Chirac announced in April 1997 that he was exercising his constitutional right to dissolve the National Assembly and hold new legislative elections. Although elections were not required until the following year, the president hoped a new legislative mandate would breathe new life into his policies and make it possible for the government to conduct some long-term planning.

The result was catastrophic. In the first round of voting on May 25, the right received 36 percent of the vote as against 44 percent for parties from the left. This was the right’s weakest showing since Charles de Gaulle established the Fifth Republic in 1958. In the end, voters in the second round on June 1 elected a National Assembly with a clear majority from the left: 320 deputies from the left compared to 256 from the right and the NF. As a result, Chirac nominated the leader of the Socialist Party, Lionel Jospin, as prime minister. The new government contained a large majority of Socialists, plus three Communist ministers and some representatives of other smaller parties. Once again, as had occurred twice during François Mitterrand’s presidency, France was governed under a “cohabitation” arrangement in which power was shared between the popularly elected president and the prime minister.

The Jewish community counted both President Chirac, a Catholic, and Prime Minister Jospin, a Protestant, as genuine friends. No one could doubt their sincere determination to combat all forms of racism and anti-Semitism. The only question mark remained the National Front and its impact on the political situation.

Although some politicians foresaw an alliance of the NF and the parliamentary right, the leaders of the two main right-wing political parties, the Rally for the Republic (RPR) and the Union for French Democracy (UDF), categorically maintained their opposition to such an arrangement. On August 30, 1997, Le Monde quoted the president of the RPR, Philippe Séguin, as saying, “As long as I am with the party, there will be no alliance with the National Front.” And the secretary-general of the UDF, Claude Goasguen, told the Jewish monthly L’Arche in November 1997, “There will never be an alliance between the UDF and RPR with the NF.”

Still, by the late 1990s, the National Front, formerly relegated to the margins of political life, had become a force to be reckoned with, even though it was still publicly rejected by majority opinion in the other parties. More disquieting than its actual direct influence was the “Le Pen-ization of thought” — the increasing importance given by politicians and parties that ostensibly opposed the NF to certain themes championed by that party, specifically, an attempt to link immigrants with urban crime and loss of jobs, a call for fighting (legal or illegal) immigration and expelling unwelcome immigrants, and a tendency to limit the rights of foreigners living in France.
Israel and the Middle East

The changes that occurred in the domestic arena in 1997 did not affect France's relations with Israel, where continuity was the rule. This was true partly because Jacques Chirac, Alain Juppé, and Lionel Jospin were all longtime, genuine friends of Israel, although, at least in Chirac's case, there was also a desire to keep close to the Arab world. In addition, foreign policy fell within the president's "special domain," where the president is considered personally responsible for action, and the prime minister — from whatever party — is expected to work in harmony with the president.

The French diplomatic corps continued to behave toward Benjamin Netanyahu's government with a combination of courtesy and reserve. France's legislators, on the left and on the right, repeatedly stressed their ongoing support for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process as defined by the terms of the Oslo agreement. In this regard, the actions of the Israeli government elicited increasing impatience from French politicians, sometimes bordering on — or even crossing the line into — irritation.

A revealing incident occurred during Jacques Chirac's visit to Jerusalem on October 22, 1996. While walking in East Jerusalem, the French president expressed an interest in conversing with some Arabs on the street. Israeli security personnel, citing strict instructions regarding his personal protection, prevented him from making any such contact. Chirac was furious. "What do you want?" he yelled at the person in charge of security. "Do you want me to get back on the plane? This is a provocation." Members of the president's entourage filed an official complaint with the Israeli authorities, who apologized. The incident was declared closed before Chirac returned to France, but it gave him an opportunity to express his personal views, according to which "Jerusalem should remain an open city — open to Christians from Palestine as well as Christians from all over the world; open to all religions, naturally."

The president of the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions of France (CRIF, Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France), Henri Hajdenberg, who accompanied the French president on his visit, made a declaration on their return in which his discomfort showed through: "I personally do not doubt Jacques Chirac's intentions, but his approach was misguided. It was decided to create a diplomatic spectacle to make France's presence felt in the Middle East. It is a risky type of diplomacy, because once this kind of incident occurs, it can take on huge proportions" (Le Monde, October 27, 1996). "Showing the French flag in the Middle East" is in fact one of the most problematic aspects of what has been called for many years "France's Arab policy." According to this doctrine, it is essential that France maintain a special relationship with certain Arab countries based on, among other factors, local use of the French language, trade, military sales, and political influence.

In late 1997 Prime Minister Jospin used two separate occasions to express his
feelings about Israel. On November 29 he attended CRIF’s annual dinner, as is the custom for French prime ministers. The date had been chosen deliberately, and in his remarks Jospin spoke of the 1947 United Nations decision to partition Palestine and create a Jewish state. While recalling his “long-standing and vigorous support for Israel,” he also commented on his “concerns about the policies Israel’s leaders are currently pursuing.”

On December 23, in an unprecedented gesture, Jospin received Israeli ambassador Avi Pazner, the diplomatic corps (including U.S. ambassador Felix Rohatyn), and representatives of France’s Jewish community in his official residence at the Hôtel Matignon, to mark the start of Israel’s 50th anniversary celebrations. After noting that it was the eve of Hanukkah (although there was no candlelighting, out of respect for the secular character of the state), Jospin referred to the birth of Israel as a “tremendous and wonderful lesson of hope.” He emphasized “the right of the people of Israel to make their homeland in a place with which they have never ceased to have a unique connection.” He added, “For France, the birth of Israel represented first and foremost the correction of a terrible injustice begun at the time of the Roman Empire, perpetuated all through European history and brought to a horrible climax with the Holocaust—especially since this was a horror in which French people, and the regime in charge at the time, played their part.” Then the prime minister affirmed, “France hopes that the government of Israel, building on the openings created at Madrid and Oslo, will resolutely continue negotiations with Yasir Arafat on the future of the occupied territories.”

The Jewish community focused on the first part of Jospin’s remarks, notable for their warmth and sympathy. In its report, Agence France-Presse emphasized the second part of the speech, which expressed concerns shared by all French leaders regarding the situation in the Middle East. Both parts accurately expressed the reality of Franco-Israeli relations.

**Anti-Semitism and Racism**

According to most observers, when National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen talked about his favorite targets, immigrants and Jews, his remarks not only reflected his personal views but were also part of a strategic plan. Thus, on August 30, 1996, Le Pen declared, “Yes, I believe in the inequality of the races, yes of course, it’s obvious. All of history demonstrates this.” He was without a doubt expressing his deep personal conviction, but he was also sending a signal to the far-right activists who were the basis of his movement and who worried that their message would be watered down in the quest for a wider following. And he was discouraging those “tacticians” tempted by the idea of an alliance between the far right and the traditional right wing in France. For all that, this racist rhetoric was not translated into action. Racially motivated attacks remained rare in France, and they were almost never attributed to NF militants.
In the period under review, two racially motivated murder cases were tried in court, more than two years after the murders took place. Three young men were accused of throwing an immigrant from Mali into a Paris canal on July 13, 1994; at the trial in Paris in November 1997, one of the three was found not guilty, one was given a suspended prison sentence, and one was condemned to 12 years in prison. In the second case, two young men were convicted of having pushed an Arab immigrant into the harbor at Le Havre, where he drowned on April 18, 1995. One of the two culprits flew to his native Portugal, where he was put on trial in July 1997; the other underwent trial in Paris in December 1997. Both were condemned to 18 years in prison. In both cases the perpetrators were on the margins of society, traveling in the same circles as the “skinheads” and combining a taste for violence with hatred of blacks and Arabs.

Although these were isolated events, and most of the actual violence came from juvenile delinquents, there was nevertheless a clear connection between them and the climate of intercommunal tension that had its epicenter in “difficult” neighborhoods where immigrant populations coexisted as best they could with “old stock French.” The tension was unquestionably linked to the economic crisis from which the country had not yet completely emerged, but it also reflected the difficulties France had experienced in absorbing an unprecedented wave of immigrants, primarily from Africa and predominantly Muslim.

In a poll conducted in September 1997 by SOFRES, France’s leading market and opinion research organization, for the weekly Figaro Magazine, 85 percent said that immigration constituted a “very important” or “fairly important” problem; 50 percent felt that France should “not allow new immigrants into France,” and another 15 percent wanted to “return a substantial number of immigrants to their home countries.” Most people (58 percent compared with 36 percent) had the impression that immigrants made “little effort” or “no effort at all” to assimilate, although a small plurality (50 percent compared with 43 percent) believed that “most immigrants living in France can be integrated into French society.”

While many French perceived the problem as one of cultural rather than racial differences, in some quarters a hostile attitude toward immigration translated into racist behavior. Jean-Marie Le Pen’s comments on the “inequality of the races,” mentioned above, were surely premeditated. By contrast, those of the new NF mayor of Vitrolles, Catherine Mégret, appear to have been spontaneous. In an interview with the German newspaper Berliner Zeitung, on February 21, 1997, she attributed insecurity in Vitrolles to residents of the city who came from North Africa and announced her intention to encourage them to leave. Her remarks led to legal action, and in September 1997 a court in Aix-en-Provence handed out a three-month suspended prison sentence to Mme. Mégret (whose father is Jewish) for “complicity in provoking racial hatred.” She refused to retract her words, however, arguing that they belonged in the realm of “public debate and political opinions.”
Episodes such as this, while perhaps contributing to the NF's political isolation, had very little effect on its sympathizers. On September 10, 1996, Prime Minister Juppé accused Le Pen of being “racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic.” The next month his minister of justice, Jacques Toubon, prepared a bill (which ultimately was never brought to a vote in the National Assembly) significantly strengthening France's legislation against racist speech. None of this, however, appeared to seriously threaten the NF. Le Pen and his associates typically responded to such efforts by denouncing the “media lynching” of which they were victims.

The NF's stance toward Jews illustrates the gap between the electoral rhetoric and its stronger, more “hard-line” language, reserved for its activists. According to a poll conducted by SOFRES for RTL radio, the leading commercial network, and Le Monde in March 1997, 25 percent of all French people, and 88 percent of those who identified themselves as potential NF voters, approved of Le Pen's comments about immigrants. On the other hand, Le Pen's denunciation of “Jewish influence over political life in France” received approval from only 4 percent of all French people and met with disapproval from 84 percent of the population. Among potential NF voters, only 19 percent agreed with Le Pen on this issue, compared with 63 percent who did not. Even among NF activists, 33 percent agreed with their leader's comments about Jews while 50 percent did not. These results indicated that rhetoric directly addressing the issue of immigration was “politically useful,” while more ideologically based racism, such as attacks on Jews, did not go over well, even among people close to the NF.

While the far right's anti-Jewish preoccupation was usually only voiced internally in activist circles, occasionally it was expressed in action. One such occasion was the desecration of the Carpentras cemetery, an incident that was finally brought to a close in 1997 after occupying public attention for seven years.

It began on May 10, 1990, when someone discovered 34 vandalized graves in the Jewish cemetery of Carpentras, a city in the south of France. The vandals had exhumed the body of a man who had recently been buried, Félix Germon, and set up his body as if it were impaled. Emotions ran high. On May 14, more than 200,000 people, including President Mitterrand, marched silently in Paris to protest the act. The minister of the interior, Pierre Joxe, blamed the incident on “racism, anti-Semitism and intolerance,” thus clearly pointing to the National Front. In response, Le Pen denounced what he called “an attack organized from on high.”

The investigation dragged on far too long. Rumors suggested that the incident involved young people from well-to-do Carpentras families who had engaged in a macabre game, with no political agenda. The NF continued to denounce what it called a frame-up designed to hurt it. On November 11, 1995, NF activists marched in Carpentras to demand an apology for what Le Pen called a “state lie.”

On July 30, 1996, however, a former militant from a far-right group—separate from the NF—made a spontaneous confession that led to the arrest of three other young people who moved in the same circles. The four vandals, whose profiles
closely matched those of the other racist aggressors described earlier, admitted that their action had been motivated by anti-Semitism. Yannick Garnier, the first to repent, declared in court, "I was a racist and anti-Semite because I needed a scapegoat. Since then I have made peace with myself." The four were tried in Marseille in March 1997 and given prison sentences ranging from 20 months to two years.

The primary current manifestation of anti-Semitism in France was Holocaust denial. Its main representative was Robert Faurisson, a former professor of literature who called the Jewish Holocaust a "fiction." Use of Holocaust denial to spread anti-Semitic messages under the guise of historical research had led to legislative measures, despite some reservations about this course of action. The Gayssot Law of July 13, 1990 (named for its author, a Communist deputy and as of 1997 a minister in the Jospin government), defined the "questioning of crimes against humanity"—that is, Holocaust denial—as itself a crime.

Several cases of "questioning of crimes against humanity" were dealt with in the courts in recent years. The writer Roger Garaudy was prosecuted for his 1995 book *Les mythes fondateurs de la politique israélienne* (The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics), as was Robert Faurisson for a text called "Les visions cornues de l'‘Holocauste’ " (Horned Visions of the "Holocaust"), distributed on the Internet in 1997 by an American service provider. In April 1997 a mathematics professor in a country high school, who had already been found guilty of distributing tracts denying the reality of the Holocaust, was barred from teaching in a public institution because of his denial activities.

On December 5, 1997, it was Jean-Marie Le Pen's turn to broach this subject during a press conference in Munich, Germany. "I say and I will say again at the risk of being sacrilegious," the NF leader affirmed, "that the gas chambers are simply a historical detail of the Second World War." And he added, "There is nothing dismissive or contemptuous in these words. If you take a 1,000-page book about the Second World War, which led to 50 million deaths, the concentration camps will take up two pages and the gas chambers 10 to 15 lines. That is what's called a detail."

These remarks were not impromptu. They were an almost word-for-word repetition of a declaration he had made a few months earlier to a special correspondent for the *New Yorker*. In fact, Le Pen had used the characterization of the gas chambers as a "detail" as far back as September 1987. At the time, several organizations brought him before a civil court (the Gayssot Law was not yet on the books), which ordered him to pay damages along with the cost of publishing the judgment in the newspapers.

Again after his Munich speech, organizations brought complaints to civil court, and on December 26, Le Pen was ordered to pay symbolic damages along with 300,000 francs ($50,000) to publish the decision. Criminal proceedings were also brought against Le Pen under the Gayssot Law. Once again, the political commentators questioned the NF leader's motives: simple repetition of a strongly held belief, or deliberate provocation to reaffirm his party's hard-line stance?
A booby-trapped package was sent to the Jewish Tribune on December 4, 1996. No one knows whether the package, which was defused before it could go off, was sent by an Islamic group (as a letter sent later seemed to indicate) or by the far right.

In December 1997 the trial of Illitch Ramirez Sanchez, alias Carlos, came to an end. Carlos, a “defender of the Palestinian cause” who was responsible for several assassinations around the world, was charged with the murder of three men in Paris in 1975. Before being sentenced to life in prison, he embarked on an incoherent monologue that combined an attack on “the Zionists” with a tribute (which would not be out of place in a National Front document) to “the true France that has lost its voice.” It was an opportune reminder of the links that had always existed between the anti-Zionism of the ultra-left and the most traditional forms of anti-Semitism.

Holocaust-Related Matters

In July 1996 a commission chaired by historian René Rémond reported its findings on the “Jewish file” that had been found in the archives of the Ministry of Veterans Affairs in 1991. The commission had been appointed to perform two tasks: to determine the nature and origins of the file and to recommend what should be done with it.

With respect to the file’s origins, experts concluded that it was actually a hybrid dossier, put together during the German occupation. The dossier contained excerpts from the general census of the Jewish population carried out at the time, along with lists of people interned in camps awaiting deportation to Germany. A majority on the commission recommended that the file be transferred to the National Archives. But the president of the Central Consistory (the central Jewish religious organization), Jean Kahn, wanted to see it at the Center for Contemporary Jewish Documentation, the CDJC (Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine), a Jewish institution in Paris devoted to study of the Holocaust. In October President Chirac decided in favor of Kahn. The file, now a symbol of the French administration’s collaboration in Nazi persecution of Jews, would be given to the CDJC, to be housed in the Memorial to the Unknown Jewish Martyr in Paris, which stands in the CDJC building, in a section placed under the authority of the National Archives.

The episode highlighted the discrepancies between the memory of the war held by the general French population and that of French Jews. Half a century after the events in question, the issues remained unresolved. Pieces of information that were previously ignored or forgotten were only beginning to surface. Most recently, questions were being raised about the fate of Jewish property that was confiscated between 1940 and 1944, either by the Germans or by the French. Of the roughly 300,000 Jews living in France at the time, some 75,000, or 25 percent, disappeared in the Holocaust, and the process of restitution that followed the lib-
eration was far from systematic. This is why, as a result of information published in Brigitte Vital-Durand's 1996 book Domaine privé (Private Domain) and in response to public questioning, the city of Paris established a commission of inquiry to study the history of some buildings inherited by the city after the war.

Art constituted another area of concern. During the four years that they occupied France, the Germans virtually plundered the country's museums and private collections. At the time there was also an "art market" where one could obtain works stolen from Jews or sold by Jews at artificially low prices because of their situation. Some restitution was later made, but the journalist Hector Feliciano demonstrated in his 1995 book Le musée disparu (The Vanished Museum) that national museums still held stolen works. The resulting debates, which continued through 1996, only intensified the prevailing distress.

Subsequently, additional questions were raised, such as the fate of businesses that were "Aryanized" by the pro-German Vichy government led by Marshal Pétain or the status of Jewish bank accounts regarded as heirless by French banking officials.

While many of these issues were addressed after liberation, doubts persisted as to how open and thorough the investigations actually were. That is why, in early 1997, in response to a demand by CRIF, Prime Minister Alain Juppé established a "working group" on the plundering of Jewish property by the Nazis and the Vichy regime. He appointed Jean Mattéoli, president of the Economic and Social Council, an official advisory body, to lead the group. A 74-year-old former member of the Resistance, Mattéoli was well respected and widely viewed as independent. Over the course of the year, other subjects were added to the group's agenda, most notably the fate of gold recovered by France and complaints filed in New York against French banks.

All of this was followed closely by Jewish leaders in France—so much so that the national press largely began to echo the Jewish point of view in these matters. But statements made by the president of the Jewish Agency, Avraham Burg, elicited active protests. Burg declared that the "next target" of Jewish organizations on the question of restitution would be France itself, even if that meant "carrying on regardless of reservations on the part of the French Jewish community, which fears stirring up passions and anti-Semitism" (Journal de Genève et Gazette de Lausanne, December 22, 1997). The president of CRIF, Henri Hajdenberg, immediately expressed "shock and indignation" and affirmed that he "did not need any lessons" on the subject, especially since Burg "has no real knowledge of the dossier." Clearly this issue would remain on the agenda, both national and international, for the foreseeable future.

PAPON TRIAL

In September 1996 a court in Bordeaux announced that Jacques Papon, accused of "complicity in crimes against humanity," would have to appear in criminal
court. This decision was confirmed in January 1997 by the French Supreme Court; the trial began nine months later on October 8.

The French justice system had already tried one Frenchman on the same grounds: Paul Touvier, who was in charge of information services for the Lyon militia during the occupation. But Touvier (who was sentenced in April 1994 to life in prison and died in prison on July 17, 1996) was not a prominent man, and by any standard was at the margins of French society.

Maurice Papon, on the other hand, was a rising young civil servant between 1942 and 1944, serving as secretary-general of the Gironde prefecture. More than that, he later had an extremely successful career in government and in the ranks of the Gaullist party, and even held a cabinet portfolio between 1978 and 1981. He was accused of having taken part in the arrest and deportation of more than 1,500 people as part of his duties with the Gironde prefecture, in the city of Bordeaux, between June 1942 and August 1944. The legal proceedings, launched by the victims’ families, began in 1981.

The accused maintained that he had always acted as an underling, carrying out decisions taken by his superiors in the Vichy administration under constant German pressure. The plaintiffs and the government argued, to the contrary, that Papon showed tremendous zeal in carrying out orders, did nothing to slow the roundups and deportations of Jews, and at times even took the initiative, going beyond what had been ordered. In the absence of living witnesses, the court’s only basis for making its decision consisted of administrative documents from the time. Many of the arguments focused on the distribution of authority within the hierarchy of the prefecture, on what information people had in 1942 about the fate of Jews who were deported, and on the correct interpretation of copies of letters bearing Papon’s signature.

The initial sessions of the trial were devoted to the personality of the accused and the historical period in question. Some uncomfortable reminders of the past came out of this stage of the trial. For one, leading Gaullists were testifying as character witnesses for a person accused of collaborating with the Germans; furthermore, it appeared that Papon had been associated with the Gaullist movement from the liberation on, even though he had no proof of having taken any real action to serve the Resistance. Other testimony dealt with the period during which Papon was prefect of police under President de Gaulle. During this period, on October 17, 1961, a demonstration of Algerians was severely repressed, under circumstances that were never clarified.

The Gaullists felt as if they were under attack. Philippe Séguin, president of the Gaullist party, the RPR, heatedly condemned “the trial of General de Gaulle and Gaullism, and the trial of France,” and denounced what he called a “climate of collective expiation and permanent self-flagellation.” Interior Minister Chevènement also attacked the “climate of national masochism.”

The trial—marked by incidents in the audience, conflicts among lawyers, and the accused’s health problems—did not proceed easily. Initially scheduled not to
go beyond the end of 1997, it dragged on and seemed as if it would have to last through 1998. The media continued to cover the trial in exhaustive detail, and although sections of the public sometimes became impatient with remembering these long-ago events, the process seemed to have an educational effect on a generation that had not experienced the occupation. Even those who were somewhat uncomfortable with seeing an old man of 87 judged according to criteria that were laid out half a century after the events took place acknowledged that people today needed to be familiar with this far-off time. As *Le Monde's* reporter at the trial put it, "Before we can turn the page, we need to read everything that’s on it."

**France Facing the Holocaust**

Beyond the guilt of one man, the Papon trial called into question the behavior of an entire country. In a way, Maurice Papon symbolized a France that had lived through this period under the dual authority of German officials and the Vichy government—a France more or less voluntarily complicit in policies that included the persecution of Jews.

Even a few years earlier, trying a case of this sort would no doubt have been impossible. The French were not psychologically ready. But President Chirac had already broken a taboo in July 1995 when—unlike his predecessors from Charles de Gaulle to François Mitterrand—he solemnly recognized France’s responsibility in the “Vél’ d’Hiv’ roundup” of July 16 and 17, 1942, in which more than 13,000 Parisian Jews were arrested and turned over to the Germans.

Lionel Jospin, at that time leader of the opposition, endorsed Chirac’s move. On July 20, 1997, Jospin, as prime minister, commemorated the Vél’ d’Hiv’ roundup by reiterating Chirac’s remarks of two years earlier. He repeated Chirac’s use of the word “irreparable” to describe the behavior of the French government and administration, which turned over the Jews to the Germans. And he declared, “This crime should mark our collective conscience.”

Another symbolic declaration was issued soon afterward. On September 30, Bishop Olivier de Berranger read a “declaration of repentance” for the behavior of the Catholic Church toward the Jews between 1940 and 1944. He read the declaration at the site of the camp at Drancy—which is located within his diocese of Saint-Denis—the place where the victims of the Vél’ d’Hiv’ roundup were taken, and the main camp where Jews were brought together before being deported to Auschwitz. The document represented a position taken by all of France’s bishops and was signed by those whose dioceses included the sites of the major internment camps where Jews were held under the German occupation.

Speaking in the name of the Catholic Church, the bishops solemnly asked for “pardon” for the church’s silence in the face of the persecution carried out by the Vichy regime. In the same document, they acknowledged the Christian roots of anti-Semitism, noting the “tradition of anti-Judaism” with which “Christian doctrine and teaching” were infused. “This was the compost,” they said, “that nour-
ished the poisonous plant of Jew-hatred." The declaration of repentance was widely and sympathetically covered in the media, and the chief rabbi of France, Joseph Sitruk, hailed it as a sign of "heroism." The declaration also served as a reminder that the church's collaboration with the Germans was far from monolithic. Bishops protested against anti-Semitic measures, and priests and many Christians risked their lives to save Jews. The only negative responses to the declaration of repentance came, predictably, from the far right.

The bishops' statement awakened other people's consciences. A week after the Drancy declaration, one of France's major police unions, the SNPT (Syndicat National des Policiers en Tenue), sent a delegation to the Memorial to the Unknown Jewish Martyr in Paris, where it issued a statement condemning its "predecessors' unspeakable acts" and asking for "pardon" for the role that police officers played in the roundups of Jews. On October 11, Prof. Bernard Glorion, president of the Ordre des Médecins, the body that regulates the ethical behavior of all physicians in France, recalled the exclusion of Jewish doctors under the occupation and said he "regrets and solemnly and humbly disavows" the acts that were committed at that time.

Other institutions also undertook a discreet process of internal reflection. Some people, however, reacted negatively to all this self-criticism. The SNPT's apology was contradicted by other police unions and even by Jospin's minister of the interior, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who invoked the same argument that Charles de Gaulle and François Mitterrand had used: all the evil was committed by the Germans and by a few French people acting directly under their orders.

The Papon trial clearly gave new life to old arguments. For a variety of reasons, many French people were not ready to allow crimes committed in the name of their country to be remembered. They stuck to the traditional version, according to which "Vichy was not France," because the real France was in the Resistance or in London with General de Gaulle. Hence no acts of repentance or requests for pardon were needed.

On November 2, 1997, President Chirac gave an indirect reply to this version of history in his message at the inaugural ceremony for a memorial near the city of Thonon in the department of Haute-Savoie, close to the Swiss border. The memorial was dedicated by the Central Consistory to the tens of thousands of "Justes," righteous Gentiles who saved Jews during the occupation. "Two years ago," Chirac said, "I insisted on solemnly acknowledging the responsibility of the French state in the arrest and deportation of tens of thousands of Jews. Yes, betraying the values and the missions of France, the Vichy government acted, sometimes zealously, as the occupier's accomplice. Fifty years later, our country has to assume all of its history — the bright with the dark, the moments of glory with the shadows."

Chirac addressed the subject again on December 5, when he participated in a ceremony in which the "Jewish file" was deposited at the Memorial to the Unknown Jewish Martyr in Paris, in conformity with his decision of October 1996
After recounting the fate of the Jews under the occupation, Chirac said, "Good and evil alike have to be recognized and assumed. This is the least we can expect of an adult people, who have made the struggle for liberty and human dignity their highest mission. . . . At this very moment, the entire nation is accomplishing a difficult task of memory that has been put off for too long."

JEWSH COMMUNITY

Demography

In the absence of reliable statistical data on Jews in France, there is one generally accepted benchmark: in a variety of surveys taken over the last quarter-century, the proportion of French people who define themselves as Jews has always been around 1 percent. Since France has a population of just under 60 million, these surveys validate the common view that the number of Jews in France is in the neighborhood of 600,000.

Communal Affairs

The community celebrated the 40th anniversary of ASH, Social Action Through Housing (Action Sociale par l'Habitat). The celebration took place in Paris, on October 15, 1996, with the participation of André Péressol, at the time the minister of housing in the Juppé government. French law requires every employer to pay an annual assessment to an agency providing housing for social cases. The Jewish community established ASH in October 1956 in order to receive funds from this assessment, to be used for what was then one of the community's leading priorities: housing refugees from Egypt and North Africa. ASH collected 20 million francs (at the time, the franc was worth about US $0.0025) from this assessment, to which was added a grant of 25 million francs from the American Jewish Committee and a loan of 25 million francs from the French branch of the Jewish Trust Corporation. This was the beginning of a program that now involved managing 1,600 dwellings and providing technical and financial assistance to a variety of Jewish organizations working in related areas: retirement homes, student housing, children's homes, apartments for youth, shelters for the homeless, and the like. The current president of ASH was Joël Rochard, a senior civil servant in the Finance Ministry.

In December 1996, with then Prime Minister Alain Juppé in attendance, FSJU, the United Jewish Philanthropic Fund (Fonds Social Juif Unifié), which serves as the umbrella organization for Jewish community services, officially opened its new headquarters, in a building called Espace Rachi (Rashi Place), located in Paris's fifth arrondissement, not far from the Latin Quarter. In addition to FSJU, a number of other institutions also have their head offices in the building: the
United Jewish Appeal of France; CRIF; Coopération féminine (Women’s Coopera-
tion); Jewish community radio; and the monthly magazine L’Arche. Mindful
of the bombing of the headquarters of Jewish organizations in Buenos Aires in
1994, those responsible for the building worked with French police to install un-
usually rigorous security precautions.

Community Relations

France’s national debate on immigration and nationality had a significant im-
 pact on the Jewish community—even though it took place outside the commu-
nity and Jews were barely mentioned in that context.

Under the provisions of an immigration bill introduced in November 1996 by
Interior Minister Jean-Louis Debré, a French person could be arrested for shel-
tering a foreigner without making a declaration to that effect. A collective of film-
makers and other artists launched a protest movement that quickly mushroomed.
The obligation to declare the presence of a foreigner was compared to the de-
nunciation of Jews under the Vichy regime, and during a demonstration against
the Debré Law, demonstrators were seen symbolically carrying suitcases outside
the Paris railroad station from which Jews had once been deported.

While many Jews condemned exaggeration of this sort, they were clearly con-
flicted, whatever their political tendencies. Many Jews had themselves immi-
grated from Eastern Europe between the two world wars and had been in France
without proper documents, and Jews who came from North Africa in the 1950s
and 1960s had intimate experience of the tragic aspects of immigration. Chief
Rabbi of France Joseph Sitruk, who generally had little inclination to get involved
in the political sphere, noted that “a Jew cannot be indifferent toward the
stranger.” In this, the chief rabbi was in harmony with representatives of other
religious communities, most of whom had taken a very “advanced” position on
the immigration question.

Protests and problems of conscience didn’t stop the Debré Law from being
passed on February 27, 1997. Inevitably, Jews were invoked as witnesses in a
drama in which they were, in a way, involved. A few days after the vote on the
bill, President Chirac received representatives of the Jewish community at the
Élysée Palace. The occasion was the 190th anniversary of the Grand Sanhédrin,
the body convened by the Emperor Napoleon to formalize the entry of France’s
Jews into the French nation. In his speech at this celebration, Chirac used the ex-
ample of the Jews to uphold “the ideal of integration.” He also affirmed that clan-
destine immigration had to be treated with “great firmness.”

The president’s remarks, no doubt motivated by the best of intentions in pre-
senting the Jews as a positive example of integration, were viewed as a double-
edged sword. Jews could no doubt pass for “good” immigrants in French public
opinion, setting an example that immigrants from black Africa or North Africa
should follow. However, at a time when immigration was regarded as a problem,
the comment also reminded French people who might have forgotten that many Jews were immigrants too.

The parameters of the debate changed with the election of a Socialist majority in the National Assembly in the spring of 1997. The new prime minister, Lionel Jospin, commissioned two reports from a sociologist, Patrick Weil, one dealing with immigration and the other with the right to nationality. The bills that came out of these studies were regarded as too lenient by the right and too strict by elements of the left, but they were passed in late 1997. In the course of the debate, in a long interview in Le Monde, the philosopher Jacques Derrida recalled his own childhood experience as an Algerian Jew deprived of nationality by the Vichy government. He used this experience to support his proposition that "there can be no culture or social ties without a principle of hospitality."

Israel-Related Activity

France's Jewish community traditionally took a "legitimist" attitude toward successive Israeli governments. The community avoided taking a position on subjects on which Israeli society was divided. At the same time, when the Israeli government was attacked in French political circles or—more often—in the press, it loyally defended the government and often questioned the motives of those behind the attacks.

The election of Benjamin Netanyahu in May 1996 was greeted in the same spirit. While most Jewish leaders supported the peace process begun at Oslo, they refused to question the new prime minister's intentions. CRIF president Henri Hajdenberg met with Netanyahu in Israel in early August 1996. The weekly Actualité juive described the atmosphere as "cordial" and emphasized that the Israeli prime minister had "clearly" explained to his French visitors "that he intended to pursue the peace process"—on the condition, of course, that the Palestinians respected the agreements. A meeting was arranged for late September, when Netanyahu was scheduled to be in Paris. The newspaper added, "He accepted the invitation to address the Jewish community within the framework of CRIF."

In coordination with the Israeli embassy, CRIF sent out invitations for the evening of September 25 for the meeting with the prime minister, who would effectively be in Paris for just one day. A week before the event, however, it was learned that Netanyahu would spend that evening at a banquet organized by his own party, the Likud; CRIF was offered a one-hour meeting in the afternoon instead. The reaction was one of shock followed by anger. "I regret," Hajdenberg said, "that the prime minister of Israel has chosen to attend the evening meeting organized by a marginal group that represents a clique." The affair became front-page news in the Paris newspapers, with Likud-France president Jacques Kupfer making statements that cast doubt on how representative CRIF itself was. (His own organization was a member of CRIF, through the Zionist Federation.)
The CRIF leaders considered boycotting Netanyahu's visit completely, but a compromise was reached, and Hajdenberg met with Netanyahu privately. Agence France-Presse declared that "the incident is closed" and quoted Hajdenberg as saying, "I believe that the prime minister of Israel has understood very well who the representatives of the Jewish community of France are. He has committed himself to coming to the next CRIF dinner the next time he is in Paris." In the event, Netanyahu's meeting with the CRIF steering committee took place in Israel a few months later, in December.

It would be an exaggeration to reduce the relations of France's Jewish community with Israel to matters of protocol, but incidents of this kind clearly leave their mark, especially if they are seen as indicating a state of mind. Geographically, France and Israel are not far apart. Many Jewish families that left Eastern Europe after the Holocaust have members in both France and Israel. The same is true of families that left North Africa after decolonization. More than two thousand French Jews settle in Israel every year, one of the highest levels in the world, with the exception of the special case of the former Soviet Union. As a result, Israel is an integral element of the personal identity of French Jews.

On the institutional level, however, the Jewish community felt slighted by Israeli representatives. The language barrier is not a full explanation, especially since, while few Israeli leaders speak French, a growing number of Jewish leaders in France speak Hebrew. Thus, most of the activity conducted in support of Israel by the Jewish community, both internally and on the broader public stage, was the result of local initiatives and not developed jointly with Israel.

Religion

There was a major innovation in French religious life: the establishment of a labor union at the Paris Consistory, the venerable institution that manages Jewish religious life in the Paris region and is the main component of the Central Consistory (the national body). The Paris Consistory's finances were openly in crisis starting in the spring of 1996. The problem was at least partly related to the deep split on the group's board of directors, which was divided between 13 representatives of the ACIP-2000 slate led by Benny Cohen, president of the Consistory from 1989 to 1993, and 13 representatives of the AVEC slate led by the new president, Moïse Cohen. This "Cohen versus Cohen" conflict—a delight to religious columnists in the national press—did not facilitate sound management, especially since relations between the two camps were extremely strained. The new team accused the old one of having emptied the Consistory's coffers over a period of several years by embarking on an "extravagant" investment policy and "irresponsible" commitments.

The Consistory's deficit was accentuated by a substantial loss in revenue from kosher meat slaughter and supervision. This was related to the fear that "mad cow disease" would spread to France from its origin in the herds of Britain, which led to a drop in French beef consumption in 1996. When the president of the Con-
sistory announced budget cuts, which meant that some people would have to be laid off, employees established a “defense committee” of ten people, five of whom were rabbis. This committee gave rise to a union local, affiliated with one of France’s three major union confederations, Force Ouvrière, with a rabbi as the secretary of the local. Le Monde reported a threat of militant union activity, including “a burial and wedding strike.” Fortunately, a compromise was found. The union local and Consistory management signed a collective agreement in which the employees agreed to a pay cut in exchange for keeping the work force at its existing level. The local continued its activities, publishing a newsletter in which articles about the Consistory’s internal problems appeared side by side with rabbinic decisions on “Judaism and trade unionism” taken from the Hoshen Mish-pat, a 14th-century compilation of Jewish law. Throughout this period, the leaders of Force Ouvrière acted with great discretion, giving Consistory employees advice on ways of managing the crisis with as little publicity as possible so as not to harm the image of the Jewish community.

However, the Paris Consistory’s financial problems were not resolved, and alarming reports continued to circulate throughout 1997. With elections for 14 of the 26 seats on the board scheduled for late 1997, the pre-election climate accentuated the anxiety. Meanwhile, personnel changes were announced in management: Moché Cohen took charge of Consistory activities with the new title of secretary-general, while Péguy Lévy became assistant secretary-general. The appointment of Lévy represented a first step in the “feminization” of the Consistory; a more important one was to follow. In the November 1997 elections—in which for the first time people voted for individual candidates rather than slates—the three highest vote-getters were women, as was the fifth-place winner. This result led to a brief and ultimately inconsequential rabbinic debate on whether women were eligible to sit on the board. Moïse Cohen, who shortly afterward was reelected president of the Consistory, said he was happy with the feminization of the organization. This breakthrough, along with the unionization of personnel, would mark 1997 as a year of change in the Consistory’s annals.

In other developments, the Synagogue de la Victoire, which in its architecture and history (although not in the size of its membership) was the most prestigious synagogue in Paris, appointed a new rabbi, Gilles Bernheim, in September 1997. The Liberal Jewish Movement of France, the MJLF (Mouvement Juif Libéral de France), published a new prayer book, compiled by Rabbi Daniel Farhi and entitled Taherent Libéenou. The MJLF also welcomed a new rabbi—Gabriel Farhi, son of Rabbi Daniel Farhi.

**Education**

The 1996 Zalman Shazar Prize, an Israeli prize for achievement in Jewish education and culture in the Diaspora, was awarded to two civil servants responsible for developing Hebrew-language education in France, Jacques Kessous and
Joseph Cohen. Kessous was the supervisor of Hebrew teaching for the French Ministry of Education at the national level; Cohen, based in Lyons, was the regional supervisor for the south of France.

After France and Israel signed cultural agreements in 1959, Hebrew became an official modern foreign language in French schools. The Education Ministry’s programs provide for the teaching of Hebrew both as a language of communication and as a language of Jewish culture and heritage. There were currently about a hundred Hebrew teachers, accredited and paid by the government, in French schools; more than 5,000 students were enrolled in Hebrew classes, and each year nearly 1,500 chose Hebrew as a modern language in various examinations. Hebrew was also accepted as a foreign language in the highly competitive entrance examinations for some of France’s most prestigious specialized post-secondary institutions (grandes écoles).

Some 25,000 children were enrolled in 110 Jewish day schools, in which secular instruction was paid for by the government, while the community supported Hebrew and Jewish studies. A community agency, the André Neher Institute, trained teachers and principals specifically for these schools, from kindergarten to university entrance level. This training, which complements general studies pursued through French institutions of higher learning, leads to a diploma recognized by the national education system. In September 1997 the Neher Institute began offering a course by videoconference from Bar-Ilan University in Israel.

The Jacob Buchman—Mémoire de la Shoah Prize, administered by the Fondation du Judaïsme Français (French Judaism Foundation), was awarded jointly in 1997 to Jean-François Forges’s book Éduquer contre Auschwitz (Educating Against Auschwitz) and to Fragments d’une enfance 1939–1948 (Fragments of a Childhood 1939–1948), a French translation of a German work by the Swiss writer Binjamin Wilkomirski. Forges, who is not Jewish, teaches history in a secondary school in the Lyons area. His book was published as part of a collection of educational studies intended for teachers and was based on his experience of teaching the Holocaust to young students.

Finally, a new Jewish day high school was opened in Paris in 1997: the École Georges Leven, under the aegis of the Alliance Israélite Universelle.

Culture

A large gathering called “Judéoscope,” which brought together 10,000 people under the aegis of CRIF on February 2, 1997, was the occasion for a series of debates on Jewish identity, Israel, and the problems of French society, with a variety of participants including politicians from all parties except the National Front.

On the whole, increasingly varied images of Jews were presented in the media and the arts in France—for better and for worse. One of the most successful French films at the box office in recent years was Thomas Gilou’s La vérité sije
metis! (The Truth if I Lie!). Gilou, who is not Jewish, offers a humorous sketch of the Sentier neighborhood of Paris, a center of the wholesale garment trade carried out mostly by North African Jews. In the film, Jewish actors play non-Jewish characters and vice versa, although some Jews also play Jews. Many French moviegoers, Jews and non-Jews alike, found the result amusing, though the image of the Sentier and its residents was criticized by some as a caricature.

A film that made the “Jewish question” a focus of discussion in French cinematic circles was Claude Berri’s Lucie Aubrac, starring Daniel Auteuil and Carole Bouquet, released early in 1997. It tells the true story of Raymond Aubrac, a French Jew who was one of the leaders of the Resistance, and his non-Jewish wife, Lucie, who organized his escape in 1943 after he fell into German hands. Raymond and Lucie Aubrac are still alive and very active. The release of the film sparked new interest in this period in French history along with the beginnings of a controversy about the exact circumstances of Aubrac’s arrest and escape. For Berri, this was a return to the subject matter of his very first film, Le vieil homme et l’enfant (The Old Man and the Child), the semiautobiographical story of a Jewish child hidden by a French anti-Semite during the war.

Another film with a Jewish theme released in 1997 was Abraham Ségal’s Enquête sur Abraham (Inquiry into Abraham), a documentary on the various ways the story of the common ancestor of the Jewish and Arab peoples is told. The film was based on Ségal’s own book, Abraham, enquête sur un patriarche (Abraham: Inquiry into a Patriarch), published in 1995. Arnaud des Pallières’s film Drancy Avenir (Drancy Future), which came out late in 1997, is devoted to remembering Drancy, the city near Paris from which Jews were transported to Auschwitz. Des Pallières, who is not Jewish, considers it “a scandal” that the task of remembering the Holocaust, which should be “shared by the whole community,” had been “abandoned to the Jews themselves.” Another film released in 1997, Charles Najman’s La mémoire est-il soluble dans l’eau? (Is Memory Soluble in Water?), portrays the way a woman (Najman’s mother, who played herself) relates to her past during the Holocaust and her desire to go on living. Finally, from October 25 to November 3, 1996, the Mediterranean film festival in Montpellier presented a retrospective of the work of Israeli director Uri Zohar.

In the theater, two new works deserve special mention. Adam et Ève, by Jean-Claude Grumberg, the most explicitly Jewish of contemporary French playwrights, opened early in 1997. It tells the story of two elderly Jewish Communists in France. In Enzo Cormann’s Toujours l’Orage (Ever the Storm), staged in Toulouse and then in Paris in 1997, a young theater director struggling with his Jewishness meets a Shakespearean actor who survived Terezin.

In September 1997 the French choreographer Maurice Béjart, director of the Béjart Ballet in Lausanne, staged a version of S. An-Ski’s The Dybbuk in Paris. Béjart, who was brought up as a Catholic but converted to Sufi Islam, was careful to use authentically Jewish elements in his production, taking his inspiration from the version he saw performed by the Habimah Theater of Israel in 1957. He
even used the voice of the great Israeli actress Hanna Rovina in the soundtrack.

An international encounter entitled “La traversée des musiques juives” (The Course of Jewish Music) was held in late July 1996 in a setting familiar to all Parisians: Parc de la Villette and Cité de la Musique. Organized by the percussionist Youval Micenmacher, this event lasted an evening, a day, and an entire night. American, Israeli, and French musicians performed Jewish music from Eastern Europe, Yemen, Georgia, Ethiopia, Morocco, Tunisia, and elsewhere.

In late 1996 the historian and art critic Itzhak Goldberg presented an exhibition entitled “Signes de terre” (Signs of the Land) at the prestigious Seita museum-gallery in Paris. The exhibition consisted of works by two Israeli artists: one Muslim, Asim Abu-Shakra (1961–1990), and the other Jewish, Avi Trattner (born 1948).

Finally, the sixth congress of the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews was held at the Sorbonne in Paris in October 1996.

**Publications**

The renewed interest being shown in the classic novel form in France had not had much impact on Jewish literature. Works of fiction dealing with Jewish subjects were fairly rare and of uneven quality. A few worth mentioning are Patrick Modiano’s *Dora Bruder*, a fictional inquiry into the disappearance of a young Jewish girl during the occupation; Michèle Kahn’s *Shanghai-la-juive* (Jewish Shanghai), a novel about the influx into Shanghai of Jews fleeing Nazism; and Marc Weitzmann’s *Chaos*, a largely autobiographical work in which Weitzmann’s cousin, the writer Serge Doubrovsky, figures prominently.

Historical writing remained the strong point of publishing on Jewish themes in France. During the period under review, the following noteworthy historical works were published: *Un antisémitisme ordinaire, Vichy et les avocats juifs* (1940–1944) (Ordinary Anti-Semitism: Vichy and the Jewish Lawyers, 1940–44), by former justice minister Robert Badinter; Esther Benbassa’s *Histoire des Juifs de France* (History of the Jews in France); Mireille Hadas-Lebel’s *Le peuple hébreu* (The Hebrew People); François Fejto’s *Juifs et Hongrois* (Jews and Hungarians); Régine Azria’s *Le judaïsme* (Judaism); Gérard Nahon’s *La Terre sainte au temps des kabbalistes* (The Holy Land in the Time of the Kabbalists); Carol Iancu’s *Les Juifs en Roumanie (1919–1938)* (The Jews in Romania, 1919–38); Maurice Blanchot’s *Les intellectuels en question* (Intellectuals in Question), a reflection on the Dreyfus affair; Pierre Pachet’s *Conversations à Jassy* (Conversations in Jassy), a return to the author’s father’s native town in Moldova, which in 1941 was the scene of a terrible pogrom; *Un Juif nommé Jésus* (A Jew Named Jesus) and *Le Juif Jésus et le Chabbat* (Jesus the Jew and Shabbat) by the Catholic writer Marie Vidal; and a collection edited by Yves Plassereaud and Henri Minczeles, *Lituanie juive, 1918–1940* (Jewish Lithuania, 1918–40).

Another well-represented category was biography and autobiography: Roland
Goetschel's *Isaac Abravanel, conseiller des princes et philosophe* (Isaac Abravanel: Adviser to Princes and Philosopher); Myriam Anissimov’s *Primo Levi, la tragédie d’un optimiste* (Primo Levi: The Tragedy of an Optimist); *Examen de conscience* (Examination of Conscience) by August von Kageneck, a German journalist who had been a young Wehrmacht officer on the eastern front; Pierre Assouline’s *Le fleuve Combelle* (The Combelle River), on the friendship between a young Jewish journalist and a former Nazi collaborator; Serge Moscovici’s *Chronique des années égarées* (Chronicle of My Lost Years), a memoir; Georges Wajsbrot’s *Es-toucha*, a biography of his mother, a Jewish Communist; and Maurice-Ruben Hayoun’s *Moïse Mendelssohn* (Moses Mendelssohn).

A number of works on Judaism were published, among them *Les rites de naissance dans le judaïsme* (Birth Rituals in Judaism) by Patricia Hidiroglu; *Le Sicle du Sanctuaire*, an annotated French translation by Charles Mopsick of *Shekel ha-Kodesh*, a 13th-century kabbalistic work by Moses de Leon; Rabbi Gilles Bernheim’s *Un rabbin dans la Cité* (A Rabbi in the City); Raphaël Draï’s *Freud et Moïse. Psychoanalyse, Loi juive et Pouvoir* (Freud and Moses: Psychoanalysis, Jewish Law and Power); Théo Klein’s *Le guetteur* (The Sentry); *Un judaïsme dans le siècle, dialogue avec un rabbin libéral* (Judaism in the Secular World: A Dialogue with a Liberal Rabbi) by Rabbi Daniel Farhi with Francis Lentschner; *La tendresse de Dieu* (The Tenderness of God) by Chief Rabbi René-Samuel Sirat with Martine Lemalet; and Alain Finkielkraut’s *L’humanité perdue, essai sur le XXème siècle* (Lost Humanity: A Reflection on the 20th Century).

*La démocratie d’Israël* (Democracy in Israel), a study by the French-born Israeli constitutional expert Claude Klein, was published in France.

Finally, the appearance of two CD-ROMs, *Histoires du ghetto de Varsovie* (Stories of the Warsaw Ghetto) and *Histoire de la Shoah* (History of the Holocaust), is worth noting. Clearly, Jewish cultural output remained heavily influenced by events that occurred half a century ago.

**Personalia**

In 1997 France’s Jewish community added another name to the long list of Jewish Nobel laureates. Claude Cohen-Tannoudji, who received the Nobel Prize for physics jointly with Steven Chu and William D. Phillips, was born in Constantine, Algeria, in 1933. In an interview with *Le Monde* in October 1997, he noted that because he grew up in Algeria he was able to escape “the deadly fate that Nazi ideology held in store for us.” He explained in the same interview that working as both a researcher and a teacher allowed him “to remain faithful to the long-standing Jewish tradition of text study and commentary, detailed analysis of the range of possible interpretations, and transmission of knowledge to succeeding generations.” Cohen-Tannoudji was not the first French Jew to win a Nobel Prize; however, his inclination to lay claim to his Jewish heritage and the ready audience he found for this avowal in the French media are worth noting. (As early
as 1992, when Georges Charpak won the Nobel Prize in physics, the story of his coming to France as a Jewish immigrant child from Poland was widely reported in the press.

Art historian Pierre Rosenberg was elected to the Académie Française in November 1996. Biologist and 1965 Nobel laureate François Jacob was elected to the Académie Française in November 1997. Physicist Claude Cohen-Tannoudji (see above) was named an officer of the Legion of Honor. Franco-Israeli poet Claude Vigée received the grand prize for poetry of the Académie Française (and was named an officer of the Legion of Honor). Rabbi Charles Liché and magistrate Myriam Ezratty were named commanders of the Legion of Honor; Léon Masliah, executive director of the Central Consistory, and Maurice Lévy, president of the Publicis advertising firm, were named officers of the legion; and Roger Bennarosh, founder and president of the Liberal Jewish Movement of France, the MJLF, was named a knight of the legion.

Prominent French Jews who died in the second half of 1996 included businessman and community leader Sylvain Kaufmann, 82, in August; businessman and community leader Claude Kelman, 88, in September; rabbi and educator Léon Askenazi ("Manitou"), 74, in Israel, in October; businessman and community leader Jean-Paul Elkann, 75, in November; businessman and community leader Michel Topiol, 86, in December; filmmaker Michel Mitrani, 66, in December; and Daniel Mayer, 87, Resistance fighter and Socialist leader, in December.

Prominent Jews who died in 1997 included Yiddish journalist and writer Léon Leneman, 89, in January; doctor and community leader Lucien Bouccara, 65, in February; lawyer Paul Garson, 76, in March; Moussa Abadi, 86, theater critic and former Resistance fighter, in September; Laura Margolis-Jarblum, 93, widow of the French Zionist leader Marc Jarblum, in Boston, in September; doctor and community leader Marcel Goldstein, 66, in October; journalist Jacques Derogy, 72, in October; the great French singer Barbara, 67, whose original name was Monique Serf, in November; banker Edmond de Rothschild, 71, in November; sculptor Michel Milberger, 75, in December; Léon Poliakov, 87, historian of anti-Semitism, in December.

Meir Waintrater
The Netherlands

National Affairs

The Netherlands during the latter half of 1996 and 1997 enjoyed political stability and remarkable economic prosperity. Despite a number of minor crises, the government—a coalition of Labor (PvdA), the Liberals (VVD), and the Centrum—left Democrats 1966 (D'66)—was never really in danger, and Labor premier Willem Kok was generally praised for his pragmatic approach.

The extreme right, represented mainly by the Centrum Democrats (CD) was, in contrast to rightist parties in Belgium and France, unsuccessful. It had three of the 150 seats in the Second Chamber of Parliament and none in the 75-member Senate. Only one CD representative, Hans Janmaat, was known to the public. The other more extreme right-wing parties—CP'86 (an offshoot of the CD), the VNN (Volks Nationalisten Nederland), an offshoot of CP'86, and the Netherlands Blok, led by Joop Glimmerveen, had no seats in Parliament.

The main social problems confronting the Netherlands during the period under review were the environment, in particular in connection with the possible expansion of Schiphol Airport; drugs, including the use of Holland as a transit center; and crime.

The economy grew by over 3.4 percent, and inflation by only 2.8 percent. The Amsterdam Stock Exchange broke all records a number of times. Unemployment decreased by over 100,000 to some 350,000 and stood at about 5 percent of the working population. Most of those unemployed were the so-called hard core of unskilled and allochthones, i.e., recent immigrants from Third World countries. Privatization continued of hitherto government enterprises, such as the Telephone Services and the railways. The exception to the general prosperity was the Fokker Aircraft Factories, which went bankrupt and could find no buyers.

Israel and the Middle East

During the first six months of 1997, when the Netherlands held the presidency of the European Union (EU), Holland had more contacts than usual with Israel and the Palestinian National Authority. Generally, the Netherlands adhered to the policies of the European Union in these relations.


Yasir Arafat visited The Hague February 2–4 and met with Premier Kok and
Foreign Minister Hans Van Mierlo, following which they gave a joint press conference. Arafat emphasized that Europe could play an important role in the peace process in the Middle East, supplementary to the role of the United States. He stressed the importance of a seaport in the Gaza Strip and accused Israel of intentionally blocking its construction. He criticized Israel for the continued closure of access to the West Bank which, he claimed, caused an economic catastrophe of some $7 million daily. Arafat also met with the parliamentary foreign affairs committee and representatives of the construction firms connected with plans for the harbor in Gaza, for which the Netherlands had donated about $20 million.

A few weeks earlier Van Mierlo had written a letter to Arafat, but not to the Israeli prime minister, with guarantees of the EU that the Oslo agreements would be fully implemented. Van Mierlo also said he did not want to visit Israel if he could not, during his stay there, visit Orient House, a disputed Palestinian building in East Jerusalem.

During a stopover at Schiphol Airport on his way to the United States, on February 12, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu met for an hour and a half with Premier Kok, followed by a brief press conference. The Gaza harbor was on the agenda of this meeting as well. To allay Israel’s fear that arms could be imported through the harbor, Kok promised to give Israel special safety equipment for detecting weapons.

The parliamentary chairman of the Liberal Party (VVD), Frits Bolkestein, visited Israel in the second week of February to attend the meeting of the Liberal International Union, of which he was chairman. He also visited Arafat in Ramallah. Bolkestein urged that the EU limit itself to a supplementary role to that of the United States; he also opposed a visit of Van Mierlo to Orient House. He was received by President Ezer Weizman and met with Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai and opposition leader Shimon Peres.

Benjamin Netanyahu, accompanied by Mrs. Netanyahu and their two children, visited the Netherlands April 8–9. This time his visit was intended in particular to promote economic relations between Israel and Holland. To this end the Netherlands-Israel Chamber of Commerce arranged a meeting for him with Dutch captains of industry to discuss cooperation in high technology and other fields. Netanyahu also met with Premier Kok, who later called the meeting “frank,” with Foreign Minister Van Mierlo, and with the members of the parliamentary foreign affairs and defense committees of both the Second Chamber and the Senate. An official dinner was given in his honor.

On April 10 Foreign Minister Van Mierlo visited Arafat in Gaza. Mrs. Suha Arafat visited Holland at the end of May, at the invitation of the representative of the Palestinian Authority in The Hague. Together with the wife of Premier Kok, she visited an Institute for the Blind and with the wife of the Dutch Minister of Agriculture the flower auction in Aalsmeer, where Palestinian flowers are auctioned.
King Hussein and Queen Noor of Jordan visited the Netherlands June 10–11 as guests of the Dutch royal couple, who were friends of long standing.

Queen Beatrix and Prince-Consort Claus paid an official visit to Egypt November 17–19. The visit was first planned some years ago, but was postponed because of security risks. Ironically, on the very morning of the royal couple’s arrival in Cairo, fundamentalist Muslims carried out a terrorist attack on tourists in Luxor. Although the Dutch royal couple decided to continue the trip, so as not to appear to be insulting their hosts, the visit was limited to Cairo and its immediate surroundings.

A 35-year-old Palestinian, Imad Sabi, a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, who had spent 20 months in administrative detention in Israel, arrived in Holland on August 28, after having been released by Israel the previous day. The purpose of his visit was to study at the Institute for Social Studies in The Hague, which had granted him a stipend for 15 months. To obtain his release, he had to promise that during his stay abroad he would refrain from anti-Israel activities and would stay away from Israel for four years.

On February 7, the last Friday of Ramadan, some 600 Muslim fundamentalists including many women and children, demonstrated in The Hague—as they had in past years—against Israel and the United States. Many carried portraits of Iranian leaders. The mayor of the city gave permission for the demonstration provided it did not pass the American and Israeli embassies and that the banners had slogans only in Dutch so that they could be checked by the police. The demonstration received little publicity. On the following Monday representatives of the Jewish community expressed their concern to the mayor.

As in previous years pro-Iranian Muslims demonstrated in front of the Israeli embassy in The Hague on several occasions. On July 11 some 250 of them protested against the poster distributed in Hebron by an Israeli woman on which Mohammed was shown with a pig’s head. The police did not interfere as the demonstration was directed against Israel but was not anti-Semitic.

Leadership of the Netherlands-Israel Society passed from Dick Dolman, former chairman of the Second Chamber of Parliament, to Willem Deetman, the outgoing chairman of the Second Chamber of Parliament and currently mayor of The Hague.

The 1992 crash of an El Al Boeing cargo aircraft over the Bijlmer district in the southeastern tip of Amsterdam, which resulted in the deaths of three crew members, one woman passenger, and 39 Bijlmer residents, was still a matter of controversy. Among other issues, there were charges that residents of the district were ill from toxic substances released in the crash. The fifth anniversary of the disaster, on October 4, 1997, received wide coverage in the news media, though the official commemoration was attended by only a few hundred people, including many officials. Boeing had assumed full responsibility for the disaster and paid the next-of-kin of the victims, mostly poor recent immigrants from Ghana and the Caribbean, the enormous sum of over $50 million, in addition to compensa-
tion from the Amsterdam municipality. Following publication of a book on the disaster last year by journalist Vincent Dekker, another journalist, Pierre Heyboer, published a book containing accusations against El Al, which was still being sued. Mystery novelist Thomas Ross published a semifictional thriller based on the incident in which the Mossad plays an important role.

**Anti-Semitism, Racism, Extremism**

Racism was not a serious problem in Holland. A case that was originally considered to involve racism and that received enormous publicity in Holland and abroad, in particular in Turkey, eventually proved to emanate from private motives. On March 26, 1997, in a popular quarter in The Hague, an incendiary bomb was thrown through the letterbox into the apartment inhabited by the Közedagh family, Turkish Kurds, causing the deaths of the mother and five of her ten children. A Turkish government delegation arrived in The Hague to protest the attack, and in The Hague itself a large demonstration took place organized by “white” residents. The firebomb was eventually found to have been thrown by a nephew of the father, who bore a grudge against his uncle.

According to Jaap Donselaar, an expert on the extreme right in Holland, there were only some two hundred extreme right-wing activists in the country, and they were internally divided. Some maintained contact with neo-Nazi groups in Germany, Denmark, and Belgium and took part in their demonstrations.

Hans Janmaat was convicted by the district court of Zwolle in April 1997 of having shouted racist slogans during a demonstration in that city in February (“The Netherlands for the Dutchmen” and “One’s own people first”). He was sentenced to four weeks’ imprisonment, of which two weeks could be served on probation. He appealed. Questions were raised about whether such demonstrations should be forbidden in advance or whether the police should intervene only when illicit slogans were shouted or shown on banners. The mayor of Zwolle, himself a staunch antifascist, demanded clear instructions from the government.

A monument at the former concentration camp at Vught, near Bois-le-Duc, which had been smeared with swastikas two years earlier by unknown persons, was smeared again on the eve of Memorial Day on May 4, 1997, this time with swastikas and the letters KKK, standing for Ku Klux Klan. The new Auschwitz monument, in the Wertheim public garden in the center of Amsterdam, was rededicated officially on the last Sunday of January 1997. Two years earlier it had been damaged by a disgruntled drug-addicted employee of the glass-blowing firm that constructed it,

**Holocaust-Related Matters**

Material claims by Jews resulting from the Nazi occupation were again in the news, partly as a result of developments abroad, in particular in Switzerland.
The subject of Dutch gold in Swiss banks covers four distinct categories of property: (a) the monetary gold of the Netherlands State Bank (Nederlandse Bank, DNB) that was looted by the Nazis and partly transferred to Switzerland; (b) the gold that residents of the Netherlands were forced to sell to the DNB during the Nazi occupation; (c) gold that residents of the Netherlands, before and during the Nazi occupation, transferred to Switzerland privately; and (d) the gold that was taken by the Nazis from individuals, largely Jews, some of which found its way to Swiss banks. For the first two categories the Netherlands received partial compensation in 1952, in an agreement called a final settlement; for the last two categories it did not.

In May 1997 Minister of Finance Gerrit Zalm established a commission, headed by Prof. Jos van Kemenade, the present governor of the province of North Holland and a former cabinet minister of education. The commission, which included some financial experts of Jewish origin as members, was to investigate to what extent Jews and other Nazi victims could be compensated. It worked in consultation with the newly formed Committee of Jewish Organizations on External Matters (CJOEB). In December the commission announced that it would make Fl. 20 million available from compensation it had received, of which Fl. 19 million would go to Jews and Fl. 1 million to others, mainly Romanies (Gypsies) and homosexuals. In addition, the Dutch Treasury donated Fl. 20 million for the rehabilitation of Jewish Nazi victims in Eastern Europe.

In consultation with the CJOEB (and in contrast to the recommendation of the U.S. commission headed by Under Secretary of Commerce Stuart Eizenstat), it was decided not to distribute the funds to individual victims but to use the money for general Jewish objectives, such as the restoration of neglected Jewish cemeteries and tombstones. The decision was strongly criticized by some, including those survivors who wanted to receive the sums to which they were entitled, however small. Others pointed out that the CJOEB did not represent all the present Jews of the Netherlands, since only a minority were affiliated with any of its constituent bodies. And the Orthodox claimed that many Orthodox Jewish charities were not represented in the JMW, the Jewish Social Welfare Foundation, and would be excluded. The Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad (Dutch Jewish weekly) was filled with letters on the controversy. At the end of the year, the matter had still not been resolved.

Two long lists with names of persons from abroad who had accounts in Swiss banks in 1940–45 were published in Dutch papers in July, but they contained almost no names of Jews from Holland.

A situation came to light at the end of the period under review that aroused enormous interest and emotion. The progressive weekly De Groene Amsterdammer reported on December 3 that students temporarily living in the building formerly occupied by the Amsterdam branch of the Ministry of Finance had found, in the attic, a number of archival lockers with a card file of some 3,000 cards from the records of the Lippman-Rosenthal Bank. This bank, owned by
Jews until 1940, had been taken over in 1941 by the Nazis, who compelled all Jews to transfer to it their bank accounts, property, and valuables. The cards (from an original file of 13,000 cards) contained the names and last addresses of the owners and lists of the possessions they were forced to hand over on their arrival at Westerbork transit camp, such as fountain pens, watches, rings, and bracelets. The lockers in the attic had been overlooked when the Amsterdam branch of the Treasury moved to other premises some years ago.

Another discovery concerned the fate of the confiscated property. It was found that, whereas most of the objects had been returned to the former owners or their heirs in the course of the years, a number of heirless items had remained at the Amsterdam offices of the Treasury. In 1968 it was decided that employees of this office could buy them at the estimated value of ten years earlier, which they did. Disclosure of this episode caused widespread indignation. A commission headed by retired State Comptroller Frans Kordes, a highly respected man, was appointed to investigate the matter.

As for the 3,000 Lippman Rosenthal (generally called LiRo) cards, they were given into the custody of the JMW, which in turn made them available for inspection in the Amsterdam Municipal Archives. The cards could be examined only by filling in a form on which the applicant indicated his or her relationship to the person named on the cards. The total LiRo archives were kept in the General State Archives (ARA) in The Hague.

A related case was the so-called Treasure of Almelo. A Canadian soldier who participated in the liberation of the eastern part of the Netherlands in April 1945 wrote a letter a few years ago to the Municipality of Almelo, a town that he had helped to liberate. He wrote that in April 1945 he found in a villa in that town, which had served as local German headquarters, a large suitcase full of Jewish ritual objects and other valuables, which he turned over to the Almelo branch of the Netherlands State Bank. Now he wanted to know what had happened to the find. The Almelo bank branch had long been closed, and various efforts to investigate were fruitless. A high-ranking police officer, Erik Nordholt, who retired in the fall of 1997 as Amsterdam chief commissioner of police, was appointed to conduct a thorough investigation.

Another case that emerged during the period under review, and whose solution was also likely to take several years, involved the ownership of the Goudstikker art collection. Jacques Goudstikker was a well-known Amsterdam Jewish art dealer who specialized in 17th-century Dutch masters. On May 14, 1940, after the Nazis invaded Holland, he managed to escape with his young wife, Vienna-born Desi von Halban Kurz, and their infant son, Edward, by boat; however, during a stroll on deck at night, Goudstikker fell into an open cargo hold and lost his life. He had made no special provisions for his paintings, which were later sold by two of his non-Jewish employees to Nazi leader Hermann Göring and other German art collectors. After the war, many of the artworks were traced
and returned to Holland, confiscated by the state as enemy property, and distributed to several Dutch museums.

Mrs. Goudstikker and her son had emigrated to the United States, where she later married the former Amsterdam lawyer A.E. von Saher. Her son officially adopted the name of his stepfather and was baptized. After the war, Mrs. Goudstikker tried, and failed, to get the collection back. In 1952, in order to avoid further difficult and expensive litigation, she agreed to a settlement in which she waived her rights to the collection in return for the sum of Fl. 2 million ($1 million), which was far below the actual value of the collection. Both Mrs. Goudstikker von Saher and her son, Edward, died in 1996. Edward von Saher's widow, a former German skating champion, and their two daughters announced that they would file suit against the Netherlands for the return of the collection. Netherlands under secretary of culture Aat Nuis asserted that, since Mrs. Goudstikker had given up her rights to the collection in 1952, the claim had no legal basis, but the Von Sahers maintained their position.

OTHER MATTERS

In October 1996 Fred Ensel, the then chairman of JMW, the Jewish Social Welfare Foundation, and Isaac Lipschits, retired professor of modern history at the University of Groningen and author of a history of the JMW, claimed that Dutch notaries-public still had bank balances of Jews who had perished during the years 1940–45. The Royal Fraternity of Dutch Notaries-Public announced on February 25, 1997, that a thorough investigation had shown that of the 1,200 or so notaries-public in Holland, only a few were involved, and that the total amount in their hands was only about Fl. 450,000 ($225,000)—mainly West German payments under the Wiedergutmachung to persons who had in the meantime passed away and whose heirs could not be traced. JMW had created the impression that the amount was much larger. The Fraternity of Notaries-Public and JMW reached a settlement with the Treasury by which these balances were transferred to JMW.

A new phenomenon was the claim for the payment of life insurance benefits to heirs of Jews who had taken out life insurance policies in 1940–42. The difficulty was that some claimants had no documents to substantiate their claims and that some insurance companies had in the interim merged with other firms. Still, several companies decided that if a claim was plausible the money would be paid. Claims were also made by holders of post-office savings accounts, often of very small amounts, and by heirs of subscribers to a burial fund that had never financed the burials, since the subscribers perished in Eastern Europe. In all these cases, those involved took an accommodating view.

The Anne Frank House in Amsterdam was visited in 1997 by over 700,000 persons, mainly tourists from the United States, Japan, Great Britain, and Germany.
To accommodate the large numbers, adjoining houses were being demolished to allow for expansion.

Steven Spielberg's Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Project completed its work in Holland in June 1997. A total of 1,066 persons recounted their wartime experiences in video-recorded interviews.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Demography

No official statistics exist on the number of Jews living in the Netherlands, but it is estimated at about 25,000. Of these only about one-third are affiliated with any of the three main communities — Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and Liberal. According to the Jewish Social Welfare Foundation (JMW), there were also some 10,000 Israelis living in Holland, many with non-Jewish partners.

The Netherlands Ashkenazi Congregation (NIK) had 5,313 members at the end of 1996, some 200 less than the previous year. Of these some 3,000 were in Amsterdam and the Amsterdam suburb of Amstelveen, 340 in The Hague area, and 332 in the Rotterdam area. In Almere, a new satellite town of Amsterdam, a group of some 40 Jews was formed.

Communal Affairs

An important achievement in 1997 was the establishment, after much initial opposition, of the Committee of Jewish Organizations on External Matters (CJOEB), also called CJO, to represent the entire Jewish community. Members of the new body are the Netherlands Ashkenazi Congregation (NIK), the Sephardi Congregation (PIK), the Liberal Jewish Congregation (LJG), the Federation of Netherlands Zionists (FNZ), Jewish Social Welfare (JMW), and the CIDI (Center for Information and Documentation on Israel). The CJOEB was formed to enable the organized Jewish community to approach the Dutch government on matters of common Jewish interest with one voice instead of many. The recently established Federatie Joods Nederland, which consists of Orthodox Jews only, at first opposed the CJOEB, on the ground that the Liberal community (LJG) had members who were not Jewish according to Halakhah (Jewish law).

The Jewish Social Welfare Foundation celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1997 with several festive events, the largest, on March 2, attended by some 3,000 persons. Founded a year and a half after the liberation of the Netherlands to coordinate charitable activity among the survivors, it developed into a large professional organization. Since financial aid was provided mostly by the government, the JMW offered primarily social, psychological, and cultural services. One staff
member was assigned to work with Israelis living in Holland, to try and keep them within the Jewish community.

The Ashkenazi communities of The Hague and Rotterdam now had a joint administration, located in Rotterdam, led by Hans M. Polak, the retired secretary of the Amsterdam Ashkenazi Congregation. Johan Sanders, who became secretary of the NIK in 1973, retired partly on August 1; he was to be succeeded by Ruben Vis.

Rabbi Pinchas Meijers, a Chabad Hassid, left The Hague for Antwerp, where he found the atmosphere more congenial. The only Orthodox rabbi left in The Hague was now his younger Chabad colleague, Dov Katzmann.

The new Beth Chiddush group of progressive young Jews, some from the United States and Great Britain, held an alternative Kol Nidre service on the eve of the Day of Atonement in 1997. The brief service was conducted by a woman rabbi from Great Britain.

The only kosher butcher in Rotterdam closed down, leaving the whole of the Netherlands with only two kosher butchers, both in Amsterdam.

In the Liberal Jewish Congregation of Amsterdam the longtime board retired. The new chairman, 52-year-old Lucas Stranners, stated that the advisory committee of nine members would propose a number of new policies.

The highly regarded Reverend Barend Drukarch, himself Ashkenazic, who had served for a long period as rabbi of the Sephardic community of Amsterdam, retired on the approach of his 80th birthday. Part of his position was assumed by the young Moroccan-born Moshe Enekar.

The Federation of Netherlands Zionists (FNZ) was much occupied with preparations for the elections to the World Zionist Congress in December 1997, in which the FNZ was entitled to three delegates. One delegate each was elected from Arza (the Liberal Zionist movement), Mizrahi, and Poale Zion.

In 1996 the United Israel Appeal in the Netherlands (Collectieve Israel Actie) raised over Fl. 12 million (over $6 million, $500,000 more than in 1995). In 1997 the appeal brought in over Fl. 15 million (over $7.5 million), of which well over half consisted of inheritances and legacies.

Culture

In May 1997 the Jewish Historical Museum (JHM) in Amsterdam celebrated both its tenth anniversary in its present building — the complex of former Ashkenazi synagogues in the center of town — and the 65th anniversary of its founding in its former modest premises. The museum, which received over 100,000 visitors a year, is largely subsidized by the government, which appoints and pays its staff. On the occasion of the jubilee, the JHM organized an Open Day on May 11, which was attended by some 3,000 persons. Eighteen authors — Jewish or with some Jewish background — read selections from their works, and "Jewish" pastries were served. The JHM also opened a temporary exhibition of Jewish ritual
textiles that had been expertly restored, with an exhibition catalogue, in English, titled *Orphaned Objects*. Other temporary exhibitions were "Jews in Berlin," a smaller version of the large exhibition on the same subject held in Berlin, and "Vriendelijk Bedankt" (Thank you very much), some 150 of the 1,100 objects that had been donated to the museum during the past five years, most of which could not be permanently exhibited.

The JHM also issued a CD, "Chazzanuth in Prewar Amsterdam," containing rare recordings of Chief Cantor Isaac Maroko and the choir of the Great Synagogue in Amsterdam, conducted by S.H. Englander. Maroko, most of his family, and most of the choir members perished in the Shoah.

Though there were few Yiddish-speaking Jews left in Holland, there was considerable interest in Yiddish. On November 30, 1997, the centenary of the Bund, which had not more than a handful of members left in Holland, was celebrated by the Yiddishe Krais group, with the participation of the Haimish Zajn choir. Klezmer music was prominently featured in the International Jewish Music Festival, held November 13–30, 1997, in different towns.

As in previous years, numerous courses and lectures on Jewish subjects were given in Amsterdam and throughout the country, intended for the general public as well as for Jews. The University of Amsterdam’s extension department offered a course on "Changing Identities in Modern Judaism," with well-known Jewish speakers from the United States, such as Arthur Hertzberg, Michael Meyer of the Hebrew Union College, Daniel Boyarin of the University of California-Berkeley, and Paula Hyman of Yale University.

The Netherlands Society for Jewish History, which is sponsored by the Netherlands Royal Academy for Arts and Sciences, held its annual symposium in Amsterdam in November 1997. It was devoted to "Contributions of Jewish Artists to European Civilization," with papers by speakers from Holland, Israel, and other countries, all of them, as it happened, women.

In connection with the symposium, there was an award ceremony for the biennial Hartog Beem Prize, named for the Dutch-Jewish historian and given for an M.A. thesis on a Jewish subject that was completed at a Dutch university during the past two years. Eight theses competed for the prize, all of them, according to the judges, of high quality. The prize went to Mirjam Alexander for her paper on Hebrew inscriptions on paintings by 17th-century Dutch painters.

American-born Judith Frishman was appointed professor of Talmud at the Roman Catholic Theological Institute in Utrecht (KThU). This was in addition to her post as adjunct professor of Christian-Jewish relations in the Theological Faculty of the University of Leyden, where she received her doctorate. The chair was established about a century ago by a Protestant theological society.

Athalya Brenner was appointed professor of Old Testament at the (Protestant) Theological Faculty of the University of Amsterdam. Originally from Israel, Brenner had been living in the Netherlands for some years and specialized in feminist theology. Irene Zwiep, a specialist in medieval mystical Hebrew literature,
was appointed a professor of post-Biblical Hebrew in the Literary Faculty of the University of Amsterdam. Some criticism was voiced at the selection of the last two over equally qualified male candidates.

In May 1997 Prof. Wouter J. van Bekkum delivered his inaugural address as “professor extraordinary” (adjunct) in modern Jewish history—a special chair funded by the Jewish Studies Foundation—at the University of Amsterdam. He succeeded Rena Fuks-Mansfeld, the first occupant of the chair, whose three-year appointment had come to an end. Van Bekkum, a full professor of medieval Hebrew poetry at the University of Groningen, lectured one day a week in Amsterdam during a ten-week term. His courses, which began in December 1996, attracted mostly older students, both Jews and non-Jews.

The work of restoring defunct synagogues, at local non-Jewish initiative, continued. The buildings served as cultural centers, with special emphasis on cultural events of a Jewish character. In the restored synagogue in Bois-le-Duc, the capital of the province of North Brabant, an exhibition opened in December 1996 on the history of the Jews in that province. Part of the building was reserved for use as a synagogue, but too few male Jews were left in Bois-le-Duc to guarantee weekly services. In the former large synagogue in the Folkeringestreet in Groningen an exhibition on Jewish life around 1900 was organized by the Jewish History Foundation in that city. An illustrated book on the subject was published for the occasion, and five works of art were unveiled, depicting both the Jewish and non-Jewish history of the city.

**Publications**

Four books, all written by non-Jews who were born after or shortly before the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, deserve special mention. Iddo de Haan’s *Na de Ondergang* (After Destruction of Dutch Jewry: Memories of the Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands 1945–1985) describes the different ways in which Jews and non-Jews remember the persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands. Regina Grueter’s *Een fantast schrijft geschiedenis. De affaires rond Friedrich Weinreb. (A Beguiler Invents History: The Friedrich Weinreb Affair)*, originally a Ph.D. thesis at the University of Leyden, is the story of a Jewish swindler who sold phony exit permits to Jews during the war. Arie Kuiper’s *Een wijze ging voorbij* (A Wise Man Passed) is a biography of Abel J. Herzberg (1893–1989), before 1940 a well-known Zionist leader, after 1945 a successful author who, though no longer active in the Jewish community, was frequently consulted as a media spokesman on Jewish issues. And Nanda van der Zee’s *Om erger te voorkomen* (In Order to Prevent Worse) aroused controversy, suggesting that Queen Wilhelmina’s departure in May 1940 to London enabled the Germans to install a civilian instead of a military administration, one that was far more unfavorable to the Jews and resulted in the high percentage of deportees.

Books by Jewish authors on their wartime experiences continued to appear in
print. A fairly new phenomenon were novels by second-generation Dutch Jews on the impact of their parents' wartime experiences on their own lives. Among these were *Tralievader (Father Behind Bars)* by Carl Friedman (a woman.)

Jessica Durlacher—a daughter of the late author Gerhard L. Durlacher and the wife of the Dutch-Jewish author Leon de Winter, who herself earlier translated into Dutch Art Spiegelman's *Maus*—published *Het Geweten (The Conscience)*, whose main character is called Edna Mauskopf. Two novels by Arnon Grünberg (born 1973, the son of Holocaust survivors, and now living in New York), *Blauwe Maandagen (Blue Mondays)* and *Figuranten (Supernumerary Actors)*, enjoyed tremendous success in Holland and also abroad.

Gerhard L. Durlacher's *Collected Works* were published posthumously; three earlier published novels by Leon de Winter (*Hoffman's Hunger, Kaplan, and Supertex*) were issued in one volume. Salvador Bloemgarten wrote *Henri Polak*, a voluminous biography of the Dutch Jewish trade union leader and founder of the A.N.D.B., the Diamond Workers Union (1860–1943). Other new works included Marga Minco's *Nagelaten Dagen (Posthumous Days)*; I.B. van Creveld's *Kille-zorg (Three Centuries of Social History of Jews in The Hague)*; and, by Salvador Bloemgarten and J. van Velzen, *Joods Amsterdam 1890–1940*, a collection of historic postcards.

**Personalia**

Judith Herzberg, who was born in 1934, received the 1997 P.C. Hooft Prize, the highest Dutch literary honor, for her entire oeuvre, mainly poetry. Her father, the late Abel J. Herzberg, received the same prize in 1974.

Among prominent Dutch Jews who died in 1996–97 were Willem G. Belinfante, for many years a top official at the Ministry of Justice and the only surviving male member of the Sephardic community of The Hague, aged 92; Koos Caneel, who for many years after the war, together with his wife, was an itinerant Jewish teacher on behalf of the NIK, teaching Jewish children scattered over the countryside, aged 84; Yiddish singer Leo Fuld, aged 84; Leo Th. Keesing, retired director of Keesing's Publishing Company, which was founded by his father, aged 84; TV host and interviewer Jaap van Meekren, aged 73; Isaac Pais, longtime chairman of the Sephardic community of Amsterdam, aged 101; and journalist and filmmaker Sam Wagenaar, aged 89.

*Henriette Boas*
During the second half of 1996 and all of 1997, Italy's leftist government, which took office after the April 1996 general elections, consolidated its hold on power and implemented economic policy aimed at enabling it to join Europe's planned single currency. After Prime Minister Romano Prodi, an economist, assumed the premiership, Italy's deficit was cut by more than $57 billion. Gross Domestic Product for 1997 was estimated at above 2 percent, and the 1997 inflation rate was also estimated at around 2 percent. In December 1997 the International Monetary Fund praised Italy's efforts to overhaul the economy. The unemployment rate remained high, however—12.4 percent nationwide in October 1997, with higher jobless rates in the south.

On the political front, calls for a more decentralized, federal form of government remained strong in the north, although the separatist Lega Nord (Northern League) dropped somewhat in support, partially due to grandiose gestures such as declaring the "independence" of a so-called "Padanian Federal Republic" in September 1996.

Gianfranco Fini, leader of the right-wing National Alliance Party, continued his efforts to distance his party from its Fascist roots. Part of this entailed his support for Holocaust commemorations and other Jewish causes. In December 1997 he called on the European Union to press for the restitution of Jewish property seized during World War II. The same month, he condemned the anti-Semitic laws introduced in 1938 by the Fascist government of Benito Mussolini, and he also condemned the so-called Salo Republic, a die-hard Fascist-run enclave set up by Mussolini in Nazi-occupied northern Italy after the Allied invasion in World War II.

Israel and the Middle East

Italy continued to maintain friendly relations with both Israel and the Palestinians. While supportive of Israel, Italian leaders did not disguise the fact that they disapproved of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policies on Jewish settlements.

In September 1996 Italy sent emergency medical supplies to Gaza in response to an urgent telephone request from Palestinian Authority president Yasir Arafat to Italian foreign minister Lamberto Dini. The Italian Foreign Ministry said the five-ton shipment was organized with the agreement of Israeli authorities. Italy
had already put $100,000 at the disposal of the Palestinian Authority for purchase of medicines and equipment, following the outbreak of clashes over the opening of a tunnel in Jerusalem. Also in September, on a one-day visit to Rome, Arafat met with Italian and Vatican leaders. He paid another brief visit to Italy a month later, stopping in Naples en route between Tunis and Paris to brief Italian leaders on the outcome of the Middle East summit in Washington earlier in the month.

Prime Minister Netanyahu met with Italian leaders during a brief visit to Italy in February 1997, one day after he had met with Yasir Arafat in Davos, Switzerland. Netanyahu discussed the peace process with Italian officials, who said that the Israeli prime minister seemed determined to make progress on Middle East peace efforts.

Prime Minister Prodi, during a visit to Syria in March 1997, spoke to reporters of his “concern” about Israel’s decision to build housing in east Jerusalem.

A survey published in the spring of 1997, carried out by the Pragma organization, showed that Italians were divided as to whether Italy should defend Israel if it were in danger. They also overwhelmingly favored a Palestinian state—but only one that would coexist peacefully with Israel. In response to the question “If the existence of Israel were threatened, should Italy intervene together with American and European allies to defend it?” 25.3 percent said “certainly” and 27 percent “probably”; some 15.3 percent replied “certainly not”; and more than 11 percent said “probably not.” Nearly 21 percent of respondents said they would be “doubtful” of such action. To the question “Do the Palestinians have the right to their own state?” 81.7 percent of respondents replied “yes, but only if such a new state coexists peacefully with Israel.”

After talks with Lebanese president Elias Hrawi during a three-day visit to Lebanon in November 1997, President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro said that Italy—Lebanon’s biggest trading partner and one of the main financial contributors to reconstruction efforts after the 1975–90 Lebanese civil war—backed a United Nations resolution calling for Israel’s withdrawal from south Lebanon.

Italian leaders demonstrated support for Israel by participating in a public menorah-lighting ceremony on the first night of Hanukkah, in December 1997, inaugurating celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of Israel. President Scalfaro, Prime Minister Prodi, Rome mayor Francesco Rutelli, and other VIPs took part in the ceremony, which was held at the Arch of Titus in the Roman Forum. A symbol of Jewish exile for nearly 2,000 years, the arch bears a carving of the menorah brought back to Rome by Roman conquerors as booty after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.

A Palestinian convicted of taking part in the hijacking of the Achille Lauro cruise ship in 1985, who escaped in 1996 from a Rome prison, was extradited back to Italy from Spain in December 1996. In October 1997 a Libyan wanted in the 1986 bombing of the La Belle disco in Berlin that killed three people and injured 230 others was extradited to Germany from Italy, where he had been arrested in July after fleeing Germany.
Vatican-Israel Relations

The Vatican continued its “even-handed” approach to political events in the Middle East. At the same time, relations between the Vatican and Israel broadened and intensified in a manner that had practical as well as symbolic manifestations.

Yasir Arafat, on a one-day visit to Rome in September 1996, discussed the status of Jerusalem and difficulties in the Middle East peace process with the Vatican’s top diplomats, Cardinal Angelo Sodano and Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, the person responsible for Vatican foreign relations. Arafat discussed Middle East issues, including the status of Jerusalem, with Pope John Paul II during another one-day visit to Rome in December.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu had a 20-minute meeting with the pope at the Vatican in February 1997, in which he reiterated Israel’s standing invitation for the pope to visit Israel. The pope replied, “God bless Israel.” In a weekly Sunday address from his Vatican window in March, Pope John expressed concern over Israeli policy, which, he said, could “seriously harm” the Middle East peace process. He appeared to be referring to the recent Israeli announcement that Jewish housing would be built in east Jerusalem. The same month, the Vatican announced that it would establish full diplomatic relations with Libya. In June the pope sent letters to both Netanyahu and Arafat expressing his deep concern over the deadlock in the Middle East peace process and urging the two leaders to overcome obstacles and resume dialogue.

In April Aharon Lopez arrived in Rome as Israel’s second ambassador to the Holy See since diplomatic ties were established in 1994. He replaced Shmuel Hadas.

In November the two states signed an agreement regularizing the legal status of the Roman Catholic Church and its institutions in Israel. The accord was considered the most important step forward since bilateral relations were established.

On December 23, the first night of Hanukkah, a menorah was lit for the first time ever at the Vatican, a moving reminder of the positive changes that had taken place since the historic “Nostra Aetate” declaration of 1965. As the personal representative of Pope John, Edward Cardinal Idris Cassidy, president of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, lit the first candle. Archbishop Tauran also took part in the ceremony in the Vatican garden, which was attended by Israeli and Italian Jewish representatives.

Holocaust-Related Developments

There were a number of official state, regional, or local initiatives honoring Jews or commemorating the Holocaust. Rome mayor Francesco Rutelli presided at a ceremony in 1996 at Rome’s town hall, the Campidoglio, marking the 53rd anniversary of the deportation of the Jews of Rome on October 16, 1943. In De-
cember 1996 a plaque was unveiled in Padova to honor Giorgio Perlasca, an Italian businessman who saved thousands of Jews in Budapest during World War II. In October 1997 a square in the town of nearby Teolo was named in Perlasca’s honor.

In early 1997 several parliamentarians launched a move to have January 27 of each year, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, commemorated in Italy as a national day of remembrance of all people who were deported or persecuted by the World War II Fascist regime—victims of racism and political persecution as well as anti-Semitism.

In June 1997 Italy’s Assicurazioni Generali insurance company announced that it would set up a $12-million fund for Holocaust victims. The fund was inaugurated with a ceremony at the Knesset, in Jerusalem, in November. The fund, which was established after Israeli legislators threatened to boycott the company if it did not honor policies held by Jews killed in the Shoah, would make payments in accordance with criteria that were to be determined by a committee headed by a retired Israeli Supreme Court justice.

At the same time, in setting up the fund, Generali reiterated its position that it had no obligation to honor individual policies of Holocaust victims, as its Eastern European operations had been taken over by post–World War II Communist governments. It was not known how many Holocaust victims held Generali policies. Generali, which was founded by Venetian Jews in 1830, had extensive operations throughout Central and Eastern Europe before World War II.

In August the Italian government handed over to the Jewish community five sacks of valuables and personal belongings plundered from Jews at the Nazi death camp of San Sabba near Trieste, the only death camp on Italian soil during World War II. The sacks were discovered lying in a Treasury vault earlier in the year. They had been taken by retreating German and Austrian troops at the end of the war, but brought back to Trieste later by the Allies and sent to Rome for safekeeping in 1962.

Reports surfaced in the summer of 1997 that the Vatican might have stored 200 million Swiss francs ($130 million), mostly in gold coins, for Croatian Fascists after World War II, in order to keep the money out of Allied hands. The reports were based on a previously classified U.S. document from 1946 that was made public by an American cable television network. The Vatican denied the reports and also said it had no plans to open its archives of the World War II period.

In May 1997 the pope approved sainthood for Edith Stein, a Polish Jew who converted to Catholicism in 1922 and became a nun before she was killed at Auschwitz in 1942. In November the pope beatified Hungarian bishop Vilmos Apor, who resisted Nazi occupation and helped Jewish deportees in his hometown of Gyor in 1944. He was shot to death by Soviet soldiers in 1945 while trying to save women refugees hiding in his church from being raped.
Nazi War Criminals

On August 1, 1996, a military court in Rome found former SS captain Erich Priebke guilty of having taken part in the 1944 massacre at the Ardeatine Caves south of Rome, but set him free because of mitigating circumstances and a statute of limitations. (See AJYB 1997, pp. 321-22.) The verdict, after a three-month trial, touched off a storm of protest. Friends and family of victims barricaded the courtroom. Priebke was rearrested eight hours later and jailed again pending a German request for extradition and expected appeals. Within a month, he had received more than 600 pieces of mail from well-wishers.

In October 1996 an appeals court quashed the verdict and ordered a retrial. Priebke went back on trial in April 1997, this time along with another former Nazi, Karl Hass. In July they were both found guilty but were given sharply reduced sentences. Hass went free, and Priebke ended up with about half a year to serve. He was allowed to serve his sentence under house arrest.

Anti-Semitism, Racism, Fascist Rehabilitation

At the end of December 1996, Jewish tombs in a Rome cemetery were desecrated, prompting condemnation from city officials as well as from Jews. On New Year's Eve, vandals spray-painted swastikas and racist and anti-Semitic slogans on walls and shutters of shops and banks in Mentana, a small town near Rome where no Jews live. In March 1997 a crude firebomb was hurled at Rome's main synagogue, causing minor damage to the entryway. The synagogue was empty at the time and no one was hurt. Police immediately detained a suspect, identified as a 34-year-old Egyptian who appeared to have been drunk or mentally disturbed.

Vittorio Mussolini, second child of Italy's World War II dictator Benito Mussolini, died in June 1997. In addition to family members and right-wing politicians, about 60 extremists, dressed in black shirts that recalled Fascist garb, gave the stiff-armed Fascist salute after the funeral in Rome. They waved a flag of the period, and a wreath bore the image of Benito Mussolini. Vittorio Mussolini, a dedicated Fascist who also had a career in the film business, was buried in the family tomb in Predappio, in north-central Italy.

The same month, it was announced that Villa Feltrinelli, on Lake Garda, Benito Mussolini's final residence before he was shot dead by partisans in 1945, would be turned into a luxury hotel. Developers of the project said the Mussolini connection would be a tourist draw, and that guests could even sleep in the bed occupied by the dictator and his mistress.

An exhibition on Benito Mussolini in the small Tuscan town of Seravezza caused controversy. The show, "Man of Providence: Iconography of the Duce, 1923-1945," presented a number of Fascist-era artworks that celebrated the wartime leader. Organizers received a flood of protests against it before the sched-
uled July 1997 opening and postponed the opening for six weeks. At around the same time, an exhibition opened in the town of Brescia about Mussolini's Jewish lover, Margherita Sarfatti.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Demography

Some 26,000 people were registered as members of Italian Jewish communities, but since there were believed to be thousands of others who did not formally affiliate, the total number of Jews was generally estimated at 30,000 to 35,000. Most Italian Jews lived in two cities—Rome, with about 15,000, and Milan, with about 10,000.

About half of Italy's Jews were born in Italy, and half were immigrants who had come to Italy in the past few decades. Milan had a particularly diversified community, with Jews from a score of different national origins, including Iraq, Iran, and Lebanon. In November 1997 a ceremony at Rome's Campidoglio marked the 30th anniversary of the mass immigration to Italy of 2,000 Libyan Jews following a pogrom touched off by the Six Day War.

Communal Affairs

Although most Italian Jews were nominally Orthodox (following the Ashkenazic, Sephardic, or Italian rite), they were not strictly observant. The intermarriage rate was said to be 50 percent, and as many as 60 percent of Italian Jews were estimated to be either in mixed marriages or the children of mixed-marrieds.

At the same time, the composition and character of Italian Jewry was changing. Italian Jews, traditionally pluralistic and worldly, had become, following Emancipation in the mid- to late 19th century, highly assimilated. "Secular" Jews became prominent in politics, business, the professions, and the arts—and still are today. In the past few years, however, there was a move toward stricter Orthodoxy among a portion of the Jewish community, which resulted in some friction. A number of young people have sought identity in a return to religious Judaism, inspired by several younger, more rigorous Orthodox rabbis. In Milan, where the Jewish community is made up of immigrants from a variety of national backgrounds, many from Arab countries, some tension was caused by ultra-Orthodox Jews from these backgrounds asserting their role in the larger community. Chabad also had a growing presence in Italy; in Venice, Chabad opened a kosher restaurant just off the ghetto square in September 1996.

The delicate issue of conversion of children of mixed marriages was a particular catalyst for deep concern and sharply divided public opinion. The issue was seen as a symptom of the tension between the new conservatism and the tradi-
tional open Italian Jewish approach, broadening into a debate over “Who is a Jew?” and how Judaism should be practiced. The crisis erupted in the wake of a ruling by the Italian Rabbinical Assembly in October 1997 that the only children whose conversion would be permitted would be those whose mothers asked to convert at the same time. Rome’s elderly chief rabbi, Elio Toaff, considered a liberal, did not hide his disagreement with this decision. Heretofore, it was standard practice to convert infants of mixed marriages at birth, even if the mother did not convert, if the family intended to raise the child as a Jew.

It was in Milan that the furor over the new ruling took on particular intensity when Milan chief rabbi Giuseppe Laras made it known that unconverted children of mixed marriages would not be permitted to attend Jewish schools. The case that triggered sharpest debate involved a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother whose son had been converted at birth and was enrolled in the Milan Jewish nursery school. The now pregnant mother and her husband withdrew the boy from the school when they found out that the baby about to be born—who under the new ruling would not have the possibility of being converted—would not be allowed to go to the Jewish school. Jewish public opinion in Milan was sharply and loudly divided on the problem, which became the community’s key internal policy issue. The local Jewish newspaper was inundated with letters and op-ed pieces on the conversion issue and the broader divisions it represented. Meetings and open discussions were held, and some Jews went so far as to predict that the central community organization would split—the question being, which faction would leave and which would stay.

In Rome, community elections in May 1997 voted in a new leadership that was composed of many younger, more religiously conservative Jews, who were also much more militant in proclaiming a specific Jewish identity. This added to the polarization and led to accusations by liberals that the mounting fundamentalism sought to marginalize secular Jews in the community and narrow the horizons of Judaism. The conservatives, in turn, criticized more secular or liberal Jews for their attitudes toward the faith, which they considered too lax. Lia Levi, the founder and editor of the 30-year-old Rome Jewish community monthly, Shalom, and her husband, Luciano Tas, who was a lead writer on the paper, both quit Shalom because of what they said was pressure from the conservatives.

Under new income tax regulations, in 1997 Italians, regardless of their religion, were allowed to designate a tiny fraction (8 per mil) of their tax payments for the benefit of the Jewish community. This option had already long existed for some other religious organizations, including the Roman Catholic Church. The Jewish community carried out a publicity campaign, aided by testimonials from prominent Jews, to urge even non-Jews to contribute to the Jewish community, as a means of fighting racism and fostering democracy and pluralism in Italy.

Italian Jewish communities participated in international and interregional activities linking Italian Jews with Jews in other countries in Europe as well as with Israel. Many of these activities were coordinated through the European Council
of Jewish Communities (ECJC). At Purim 1997, the ECJC arranged its first "Mifgash"—a singles weekend for Jewish adults in their 30s, which drew several dozen participants from six European countries.

The Venice Jewish community was awarded the 1996 "Venetian of the Year" award, sponsored by a local civic group, a local bank, and the Veneto region regional council. Venice's Jewish history is respected by Italians, and the Jewish ghetto of Venice is an important tourist attraction.

Jewish-Catholic and Jewish-Muslim Relations

In July 1996 the Union of Italian Jewish Communities sent a letter to the Israeli ambassador, for transmission to the Education Ministry and the Religious Affairs Ministry, deploring actions by some Israeli Jews in Hebron that deliberately insulted the Islamic religion and the prophet Mohammed.

In November 1996 Israeli singer Rinat Gabay joined two other singers—an Italian Catholic and a Muslim—in performing the song "The Tree of Faith and Peace" during celebrations at the Vatican marking Pope John Paul II's 50th anniversary as a priest.

During a brief visit to Sarajevo in April 1997, the pope awarded his International Peace Prize and $50,000 each to the Sarajevo Jewish community's social aid organization, La Benevolencija, and to three other Sarajevo-based religious humanitarian organizations—one Roman Catholic, one Muslim, and one Serbian Orthodox.

Also in April, the Vatican responded to Jewish protests over a stamp issued by the Vatican post office that shows Jews wearing the pointed hats of the medieval ghetto. A Vatican spokesman said no offense to Jews was intended by the stamp, which was part of a series reproducing miniatures from the 13th century. In one of the series, Jesus is shown speaking to an audience that includes people wearing headgear that identifies them as Jews.

During an 11-day visit to his native Poland in June, Pope John paid tribute to the millions of Jews who were killed in the Holocaust. He said that remembrance of their past tragedies and common heritage should spur reconciliation between Poles and Jews.

In July the Italian publisher Mursia withdrew a book about Jews and the Catholic church, following pressure from the Vatican and charges by Italy's Jewish leadership and others that it contained anti-Semitic historic revisionism. Italian Christian-Jewish friendship organizations also protested. The book, Gli ebrei e la Chiesa (Jews and the Church), was written by a priest, Vitaliano Mattioli, who teaches at two Roman Catholic colleges.

In September the Vatican issued a 300-page book for religious teachers to use with the Universal Catechism that urges them to pay particular attention to Judaism, to promote "tolerance, understanding and dialogue," and to educate against anti-Semitism.

The Vatican held an unprecedented closed-door symposium, October 30–
November 1, 1997, to examine “The Roots of Anti-Judaism in the Christian Environment.” The meeting was attended by senior cardinals and other Vatican officials as well as about 60 Roman Catholic scholars and theologians. Representatives of other Christian denominations, including Protestant and Orthodox, also attended, but no Jews were invited. During the symposium the pope strongly condemned anti-Semitism and said long-standing anti-Jewish prejudice was responsible for the passivity of many Christians in the face of the Nazi persecution of Jews. The symposium did not produce a major papal document on anti-Semitism; however, a final statement at the conclusion of the meeting said that Christians who manifest anti-Semitism “offend God and the church itself.”

Culture

A wide range of lectures, concerts, performances, classes, and other Jewish cultural events were programmed by Jewish communities and cultural centers in various cities. Rome and Milan featured several Jewish events virtually every week. In addition, many Jewish-themed events, including conferences and university study programs, were held outside the sponsorship of Jewish bodies, or were jointly sponsored by the Jewish communities and local civic authorities. Jewish events also drew an increasing audience of non-Jews. Amos Luzzatto, editor-in-chief of the Jewish intellectual journal La Rassegna Mensile di Israel, referred to this phenomenon as “an impressive growth of Jewish cultural interest in non-Jewish milieux.”

Among exhibits on Jewish themes in 1997 was one of photographs of concentration camps by Erich Hartmann, in September, at the Palace of Expositions in Rome, one of the city’s leading museums, and another in the town of Carpi, an exhibition on local Jewish history, in the spring.

There were several conferences and other events in 1997 marking the tenth anniversary of the death of Italian Holocaust survivor and writer Primo Levi, who died in April 1987, an apparent suicide. These were sponsored by civic institutions as well as by Jewish organizations.

Some noteworthy events under Jewish sponsorship were an international conference on “The Function of Jewish History and Culture Centers in Contemporary Society,” organized by the Milan-based Center for Contemporary Jewish Documentation in February 1997, to inaugurate its newly remodeled premises. The same month, several Jewish organizations sponsored a symposium in Rome on “The Risorgimento and Religious Minorities.”

Jewish music underwent a boom of popularity, particularly Klezmer music, and many mostly non-Jewish Italian Klezmer bands were formed. In the summer of 1996 and 1997 the city of Ancona hosted an International Festival of Klezmer Music, sponsored by a local youth organization. A Center for the Study of Jewish Music was founded in Milan in early 1997, and its director, Francesco Spagnolo, hosted a weekly program on Jewish music on a popular Milan radio station. In June 1997 the Venice municipality helped sponsor the city’s second
Festival of Jewish Culture, and in September the Jewish Culture Center and the Rome municipality jointly organized a three-day festival on Roman Jewish culture. Jewish music and performance were featured at a number of other festivals around the country.

There was particular interest in Yiddish and East European Jewish culture. Yiddish courses were taught in Rome and Venice, and there were numerous concerts of Yiddish music in various cities. More than a dozen Yiddish films from the 1920s and 1930s were offered on video in Italy for the first time in 1996.

Jewish studies were taught at several universities, and in early 1997 a Jewish Studies Center was established at the University of Milan, thanks to a grant by a family foundation headed by Romanian-born Holocaust survivor Avram Goldstein-Goren, who has lived in Milan since the end of World War II.

Two major feature films and a documentary with Holocaust themes were released in 1997. Memoria, a documentary on Italian Holocaust survivors, was released early in the year. La Tregua (The Truce) is based on the memoirs of Primo Levi, and La Vita e' Bella (Life Is Beautiful) is a tragicomedy set in a death camp, directed by and starring one of Italy's top comedians, Roberto Benigni. The latter, released in December, was the biggest box-office hit of the Christmas-New Year season.

Conservation of Jewish monuments and heritage was a theme addressed by a conference in Rome in April 1997. Several historic synagogues in Italy were in various phases of repair or restoration. A Jewish museum opened in Ferrara in June 1997. A new seat of the Rome Jewish Community archive opened the same month, with Rome mayor Francesco Rutelli attending the inaugural ceremony.

**Publications**

Scores, if not hundreds, of books on Jewish themes—including fiction, history, biography, essays, Holocaust, religious works, and translations—were published by mainstream publishing houses as well as the Florence-based Jewish publisher, Giuntina. Menorah Bookstore in Rome, Italy's only Jewish bookstore, moved into new, larger premises and put its expanded catalogue on the World Wide Web.

Books on Jewish themes were given high exposure. The publication of the Italian editions of two books by Israeli author A.B. Yehoshua, for example, merited more than half a page in La Stampa newspaper in October 1996. A new book of essays by Nobel Prize-winning Jewish scientist Rita Levi Montalcini in November 1996 rated a full page of coverage in the newspaper La Repubblica. In September 1997 President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro took part in the ceremony launching a major new two-volume history of the Jews in Italy. Various political and cultural VIPs took part in events marking the publication of L'Impostore, the diaries of Giorgio Perlasca, the Italian businessman who saved thousands of Jews in Budapest during World War II.

A 22-year-old Jew, Mike Rabba, created a splash with his comic coming-of-age
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novel *Che differenza c’è tra una papera, un’anatra e un’oca?* (What Is the Difference Between a Duckling, a Duck, and a Goose?). Among other books of note were *La Parola Ebreo* (The Word Jew) by Rosetta Loy, a memoir by a non-Jew of the effects of the Fascist, anti-Jewish racial laws; *L’ebreo corrosivo* (The Corrosive Jew) by Moni Ovadia; *Un’Aringa in Paradiso* (A Herring in Heaven), an encyclopedia of Jewish humor by Elena Loewenthal; and two new volumes in a series of guidebooks to Jewish heritage in each Italian region.

In 1996 the Jewish intellectual journal *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* issued a special two-volume edition on Yiddish. One volume included essays on Yiddish culture, and the other was a collection of Yiddish stories translated into Italian. In 1997 the magazine *Letteratura Internazionale* devoted an issue to Yiddish literature, and the Jewish publishing house Giuntina issued the first Italian translation of the works of Krakow Yiddish bard Mordechaj Gebirtig, who was killed in the Holocaust. The book was sold along with a cassette of Gebirtig’s songs.

**Personalia**

Tullia Zevi, president of the Union of Jewish Communities in Italy and one of the most prominent women in Italy, received a number of honors. In May 1997 Rome mayor Francesco Rutelli awarded her the Premio Simpatia for “her commitment in working for peace and tolerance among peoples, without ever forgetting the tragedy of the Holocaust.” In June she received the Artisti Uniti Prize in Florence for similar work, and she also received the Donna Roma Prize in Rome, an annual award given to outstanding women in the fields of culture, art, science, and public affairs. (Suha Arafat and Matilda Cuomo also received the award.) Also in June, the Italian government appointed Zevi to an unprecedented high-level commission charged with carrying out a probe of allegations that Italian troops had carried out brutal human-rights abuses when stationed in Somalia as peacekeeping forces between late 1992 and 1994.

At a ceremony in New York in October 1996, Prime Minister Romano Prodi was awarded the Appeal of Conscience Foundation’s 1996 World Statesman Award.

Author Lia Levi won the 47th Castello Prize for children’s literature in 1997 for her book *Una Valle Piena di stelle* (A Valley Full of Stars). In June 1997 journalist Fiamma Nirenstein was awarded the Ilaria Alpi Journalism Prize for her articles in various newspapers.

RUTH ELLEN GRUBER
Switzerland

National Affairs

In the political life of Switzerland, 1997 was the midterm year of the four-year national legislature. Elections in several of the 26 cantons and in a few major cities showed, with very few exceptions, the same pattern as the national elections in 1995: the Social Democratic Party on the left and the Swiss People's Party on the right (the latter established almost exclusively in the German part of Switzerland) were the winners. Both parties belong to the four-party coalition forming the Swiss government, with a balanced partisan spread of ministers: two Catholic, two Liberal, two Social-Democratic, one Swiss People's Party. This phenomenon has been dubbed the “magic formula,” insuring political stability without a formal opposition.

The Social Democrats were increasingly a party of the liberal, middle-class, young to middle-aged, urban, educated professionals and managers, whereas some of the traditional Social Democratic voters, the workers, seemed to be drifting to the right, fearful of unemployment, foreigners, and economic crises. Often they opted for the People's Party, with its populist pro-Swiss agitation against foreigners.

The gains of the two big parties in local, regional, and cantonal elections highlighted the rapid decline of the traditional middle parties, including the religiously defined Catholic and Protestant parties. The Greens, the ecological party, were small but growing steadily.

Recession held Switzerland in a firm grip again in 1997 despite an optimistic outlook at the end of 1996. Unemployment rates, which were negligible up to the early 1980s, rose to an alarming 10 percent or more in certain parts of the country, the French- and Italian-speaking parts suffering more than the rest. Consumers stopped spending money, the National Bank did not help the situation by changing its restrictive money policy, and Switzerland almost reached deflation at the end of the year.

Tourism declined and picked up only at the end of the year, thanks to early snow in the mountains. The economic community was rocked at the beginning of December by the announced merger of two of the three big banks, Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS) and Swiss Bank Corporation (SBC), to form one of the largest banks in the world, together with the announcement that in Switzerland alone some 2,000 jobs would be eliminated. The outlook was dim. Apprenticeships for high-school graduates were scarce, inflicting fears of an increase in juvenile unemployment and related juvenile crime. Drugs were a big problem, al-
though an experimental program of controlled dispensing of cheap heroin to selected addicts won international acclaim.

Switzerland was still not a member of the main international alliances, with the exception of the Organization for Security & Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which it presided over for a year up to the middle of 1997. It accepted NATO's invitation to the Partnership for Peace, however, and Swiss diplomats carried out missions for various international organizations such as the UN, the OSCE, and others. A contingent of "yellow caps" performed unarmed logistics duty in Bosnia, as they did in other countries upon UN request, and there were UN military observers in Swiss uniform serving in a few hot spots in the world. But the bilateral negotiations with the European Union were stalled. Many politicians in Switzerland urged that full membership in the EU and the UN be put before the people again, although both had been rejected in earlier polls.

Switzerland's absence from the EU meant that the country was excluded from the so-called Schengen agreement, regulating the movements of thousands of legal or illegal foreigners seeking refuge and a better life outside their native lands. The parties to the Schengen agreement could send foreigners back to the country of their first entry in Europe; Switzerland could not. Knowing this, bosses of criminal drug gangs sent their agents to Switzerland to conduct business, while they stayed clear of danger themselves.

**HOLOCAUST-RELATED ISSUES**

Underlying and overshadowing all events of the year 1997 was the ongoing debate about Switzerland's actions during World War II. Various issues had been raised and investigated on and off since the end of the war. Most of the questions centered on the role of Swiss banks and other financial institutions—specifically, the fate of the personal accounts opened by European Jews and others, and the gold and other assets plundered by the Nazis from conquered state treasuries and individuals and deposited in Switzerland. Both issues—the dormant accounts and the plundered gold—had long and tangled histories, but they came under the most intense scrutiny now, 50 years after war's end. During 1996 and 1997 there was considerable activity in regard to the former; the latter was also the subject of investigation.

A report issued in May 1997 by then U.S. Under Secretary of Commerce Stuart Eizenstat, on efforts to recover assets stolen or hidden by Germany during World War II, harshly criticized the actions of most Allied and neutral countries for failing to aid Holocaust victims both during and after the war. In a detailed account of Swiss financial dealings with Nazi Germany, the report suggested that, by acting as bankers for the Nazis, the Swiss helped to prolong the war. The Swiss Federal Council called the report "one-sided" and some of its conclusions "unfounded."
Dormant Accounts

The matter of unclaimed or heirless assets of survivors had been on the agenda of the Allies at the end of the war, but it took second place to the larger questions of reparations and refugee settlement. Efforts beginning in 1947—both by individuals and by Jewish organizations—to identify heirless assets were hampered by Swiss bank secrecy regulations (ironically, the very laws passed in 1934 to help tax-evading French citizens that would also help to protect Jewish deposits from appropriation efforts by the Nazis). Survivors who knew of family assets in Switzerland met with numerous bureaucratic roadblocks in their searches, such as requirements that death certificates be produced for relatives killed in concentration camps.

The Swiss Jewish community began lobbying in the early 1950s for a change in the laws so as to facilitate the identification process. Everyone understood how formidable a task this would be, with many accounts untraceable due to the use of pseudonyms, numbers, or intermediaries. There was also some hesitation about publishing names of individuals who might be living in Iron Curtain countries, for fear that Communist governments would seize the assets or otherwise endanger those involved.

In 1962, after years of pressure by the Swiss Jewish community, the Parliament passed a law creating a central registry that would both identify and catalogue assets in dormant accounts and search out rightful owners who had been persecuted on political, racial, or religious grounds, or their heirs. A survey produced an inventory of assets worth more than 9 million Swiss francs (then about $2 million) held by banks, fiduciary companies, private administrators, and insurance companies, in 961 separate accounts. Of the 7,000 applications received, most were rejected on grounds of insufficient information; some 132 claims were approved, for 1.6 million Swiss francs; 151 accounts belonged to individuals in Eastern bloc countries, and no further action was taken in these cases; and 228 identified owners, most of them Jews, could not be located. At the end of the period 1966–77, during which this process took place, the unassigned assets, almost SF 2 million, were placed in a trust fund, 60 percent of which was given to the SIG (Schweizerischer Israelitischer Gemeindebund/Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities), and the balance to the Swiss Refugee Aid Society. The SIG decided to share its allocation with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), which had helped Swiss Jews during the war to support Jewish refugees.

The 1962 process was viewed as only partially satisfactory. For one thing, there were loopholes in the law itself—which among other things allowed for no auditing or oversight of the banks' search procedures; for another, the implementation of the law was regarded as inadequate.

The persistence of individual claimants and Jewish organizations forced the Swiss to return to the issue in 1995. Early in that year, Rolf Bloch, president of
the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities, learned that the Federal Banking Commission had ordered the Swiss banks to look for accounts dormant for more than the legally required ten years. He asked the commission and the Swiss Bankers' Association (SBA) to widen the search to include accounts dormant longer than 50 years. (Paperwork may legally be destroyed after ten years, but records of accounts must be kept permanently.) A few months later, the World Jewish Congress (WJC) made the same request. In September 1995, the SBA, the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities, and the WJC agreed that a search should be conducted for accounts opened between 1933 and May 8, 1945, the end of the war. It was further agreed that, starting in January 1996, the acting ombudsman of the Swiss banks would open a central information service to expedite all individual requests for searches.

In early February 1996, the SBA announced that its own internal investigation of Holocaust-era accounts had found 775 accounts containing some $32 million. The WJC criticized the search as inadequate, and its president, Edgar M. Bronfman, appealed to Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, chairman of the U.S. Senate's Banking Committee—which oversees foreign banks' activities in the United States—to look into the actions of the Swiss banks. D'Amato held the first of several hearings in April, during which Holocaust survivors testified to the difficulties they had encountered in trying to reclaim family assets.

In early May, with publicity and public pressure mounting, the SBA, clearly hoping to relieve the growing tension with the United States, agreed to set up a commission to investigate the status of Holocaust victims' assets. Signed on May 2 by the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) and the Swiss Bankers Association (SBA) in New York, the Memorandum of Understanding called for creation of a body of prominent individuals, to include Swiss non-Jews and Jews who were not Swiss, to oversee "forensic" audits of all the Swiss banks that were operating during the Nazi years, to be conducted by three internationally renowned auditing firms. The Independent Committee of Eminent Persons (ICEP)—whose expenses would be covered by the SBA—became known as the Volcker commission, for its American chairman, Paul Volcker, former head of the Federal Reserve Board, who was chosen by the other committee members. The ICEP audit was delayed in starting because the auditors wanted to be insured against possible future lawsuits. After a pilot audit in six banks, the major work in all the banks was set to begin in January 1998.

Meanwhile, in the course of 1996 and 1997, the ombudsman's office received 2,500 applications. Of these, 1,000 were excused from paying the required fee of SF 100 on humanitarian grounds. The SF 150,000 in fees collected from other claimants was donated to the private Foundation for Humanity and Justice headed by parliamentarian and university professor Gian-Reto Plattner in Basel. In 1997 the foundation disbursed SF 1 million in contributions to Holocaust survivors, Jews and Roma (Gypsies) alike, in Belarus and Latvia. While the donation by the ombudsman to Plattner's foundation was regarded as generous by
some, others thought it inappropriate—a forced payment by survivors to help other survivors. Some 200 claims were submitted to the ombudsman through Senator D’Amato’s office, for which no fees were paid. By June 1997, the ombudsman’s office had uncovered SF 10 million, out of a claimed SF 17 million, belonging to nine Jewish victims. One Jewish individual alone, identity not revealed, claimed most of the SF 10 million.

In the early summer of 1997, after insisting for two years that they had no papers older than the legally required ten years, the banks began unearthing documents. The Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS) and the Swiss Bank Corporation (SBC) worked on their documents in various locations throughout Switzerland, using the knowledge and memories of retired personnel. Crédit Suisse (CS) brought truckloads of papers to Zurich, to an old warehouse, where they filled shelves 12 kilometers in length. These more aggressive searches were productive. On July 23, the SBA published newspaper advertisements in 28 countries and on the Internet listing 1,756 dormant accounts, along with names of owners and people with power of attorney. It was unclear, however, how many of these were Holocaust victims; also, two-thirds of the accounts were valued at less than $3,500. The total value of the accounts advertised was more than SF 60 million, roughly $42 million. The discrepancy between this and the $30 million reported earlier was explained by Swiss Bank Corporation as an error on its part—failure to report accounts because information was not transferred to a computer database in the 1970s. Paul Volcker described publication of the list as only a first step in a much broader process.

On October 29, the SBA made public a new list of 3,687 dormant accounts opened by non-Swiss individuals prior to the end of World War II—with a total value of approximately $4 million. An expedited applications process was put into place, requiring a “relaxed standard of proof” from claimants.

As chairman of its claims resolution tribunal, in November 1997 the ICEP elected Jewish law professor Hans Michael Riemer, from the University of Zurich, an experienced judge. There was some concern at the end of 1997 that only 6 of the 15 arbiters had been selected, since the claims resolution process was scheduled to speed up in 1998. The board of trustees for the claims resolution tribunal was chaired by Volcker himself. The two other members were Israel Singer, secretary-general of the WJC, and Swiss law professor and senator René Rhinow.

Swiss Government Task Force

Only the Memorandum of Understanding of May 1996 had succeeded in “waking up the Swiss government,” Swiss foreign minister Flavio Cotti said in an interview with the Swiss Jewish weekly Jüdische Rundschau in November 1996. Until then, the Swiss government had pretended that the issue was a private business matter of the banks, with no connection to Switzerland as a state.

A month earlier Cotti had established a task force within the Foreign Affairs
Ministry, under the chairmanship of Ambassador Thomas Borer, deputy secretary-general of the ministry, to investigate the Holocaust assets controversy. Borer represented Switzerland during numerous hearings in Congress and other bodies and acted as liaison to Jewish groups in the United States.

One of the task force's first achievements was the swift commissioning of serious historical research into the semi-secret contracts between Switzerland and Poland in 1949 and similar contracts later with Hungary, in which the Swiss agreed to turn over the dormant assets of Polish citizens in Swiss banks, in order to compensate Swiss citizens in Poland for their nationalized property. The Poles got some SF 600,000; the deal with Hungary was never implemented.

**Humanitarian Fund**

On January 1, 1997, Swiss government minister Jean-Pascal Delamuraz made a statement calling demands for the compensation of Holocaust victims by Swiss banks and threats to boycott Swiss banks "blackmail." (See more, below.) Jewish leaders in the United States, incensed by his comment and the failure of the Swiss government to repudiate it, withdrew from their ongoing negotiations. At the end of January, the City and State of New York threatened sanctions against U.S. affiliates of the Swiss banks. Quick to respond to these threats, on February 5, the big three Swiss banks agreed to set up a humanitarian fund of 100 million Swiss francs (around $70 million) to help needy Holocaust victims. Jewish leaders in New York responded positively a day later, saying they would not support a boycott of the Swiss banks. The fund was subsequently augmented by other Swiss banks, insurance companies, and businesses as well as by the Swiss National Bank. There was some fear that a contribution by the latter, which is almost entirely state-owned, could be challenged if put to a vote in Parliament. In the end, Parliament left it to the bank to decide on its own. With the addition of the SNB's SF 100 million, by the end of 1997 the fund totaled close to $200 million. The fund's board includes representatives of Jewish organizations and private Swiss citizens and is chaired by Rolf Bloch, head of the Swiss Jewish community; it is administered largely by the World Jewish Restitution Organization.

It proved difficult to disburse the money to former victims. The work was hampered initially by internal disagreements, with chairman Bloch insisting that all victims, not just Jews, benefit from the fund. It was agreed that the first recipients would be the so-called double victims in Eastern Europe, those who had suffered both from the Nazis and from Communism and had been ruined by the inflation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It also became clear very quickly that the affiliated organizations of the World Jewish Restitution Organization could not deliver the necessary lists to the fund as quickly as originally hoped. The first recipients of $400 each were victims in Riga, Latvia. The next disbursement was made in Hungary to about 20,000 people. It was subsequently decided that needy survivors in the United States, Israel,
and Western Europe would receive the equivalent of SF 2,000 ($1,350). The first Roma (Gypsy) victims were given DM 2,000 in southern Germany at the beginning of the year; the Romani Federation turned over a list of some 16,000 names and addresses to the fund administration. The problem in the Western world is that victims, even Jewish victims, are eligible only if registered with a survivor- or refugee-support organization linked to the WJRO. In Switzerland, there was some confusion about whether the approximately 400 members of a self-help group of survivors would have to have their eligibility verified by the WJRO—which they regarded as unnecessary—or could apply directly to the fund administration in Bern.

The fund’s directors were concerned that its purpose could be misinterpreted and made sure to stress that it was not a fund for restitution—based on specific wartime experiences—but was a purely humanitarian gesture for all victims who had suffered in any way under Nazism. Chairman Bloch frequently explained that the fund’s purpose was to demonstrate that the Swiss people cared about and commiserated with the victims.

**Proposed Solidarity Foundation**

Early in March 1997 the Swiss government proposed revaluing its gold reserves to create a $4.7 billion solidarity foundation, the earnings from which would be used to help victims of natural catastrophes and oppression everywhere—possibly including groups and projects of Holocaust survivors. The proposal for this foundation was subject to approval by parliamentary consent and national referendums to be held in 1999 and 2000.

**Independent Commission of Experts (Bergier Commission)**

The Memorandum of Understanding had requested Switzerland to investigate its role during the Nazi years; however, it was not the government but Parliament that initiated legislation, in December 1996, creating a historians’ commission, which began functioning in March 1997. Its members include American historians Sybil Milton, from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, and Harold James of Princeton University; the Pole Wladyslaw Bartoszewski; and the Israeli historian Saul Friedlander, himself a child survivor. The research director is Dr. Jacques Picard, author of the standard work *Switzerland and the Jews 1933–45*. The commission of experts, known as the Bergier Commission for its chairman, Prof. Jean-François Bergier, noted Swiss French historian, issued a preliminary report in December 1997 on the Swiss gold trade with Nazi Germany. According to statistics in the report, the Reichsbank shipped roughly $450 million worth of gold taken from the central banks of Nazi-occupied countries to Swiss banks during the war, and sent $146 million worth of looted individual assets to Switzerland (in today’s dollars worth more than $4 billion and more than
The report was prepared for an international conference convened in London that addressed the issue of the $70 million in so-called residual gold from World War II—gold plundered by the Nazis from occupied countries. The conference was organized by British foreign minister Robin Cook at the request of Lord Greville Janner. The conference commended Switzerland for the work it was doing in this area. Stuart Eizenstat, representing the U.S. government, proposed that the remaining millions of dollars of Nazi gold that the Western allies' tripartite gold commission had still not distributed to its original owners go into a fund for Holocaust survivors.

The historians' commission was also scheduled to research the flow of possible perpetrators' assets into Switzerland, the archives of firms conducting business with Nazi Germany or using slave labor in its affiliates just across the border in Germany, and Swiss refugee policy during the Nazi era.

The Meili Affair

On January 8, 1997, Christoph Meili, a night watchman in the Union Bank of Switzerland's headquarters on Bahnhofstrasse in Zurich found documents in the shredder room that he identified as dating from crucial wartime years. They were from the Eidgenössische Bank (Federal Bank), a big bank during that period that conducted business exclusively with Nazi Germany and its satellites, went broke after the war, and was taken over by the UBS. Meili knew that three weeks before, the new legislation creating a historians' commission contained a paragraph forbidding the destruction of all documents from the Nazi era. All the banks had issued even stricter orders a few days later, forbidding the destruction of any documents, no matter from what period. The documents he chose to save were a handwritten record book of loan grants during the 1920s, up to 1926, and account records from the 1930s up to the '70s, identifying properties in Berlin, with exact addresses, obviously in the possession of Eidgenössische Bank and later of UBS.

Meili took the papers home and decided to turn them over to a Jewish institution. Since he did not want to travel to Bern, to the Israeli embassy, or to send the papers by mail, he telephoned Information and asked for something "Israelit." The operator gave him the first entry in the list, the Israelitische Cultusgemeinde Zürich (ICZ), the largest of the four Jewish community organizations in Zurich. After their security people received Meili and his papers and thanked him, Werner Rom, the ICZ president, and secretary-general Ada Winter decided to turn over the papers to the police.

Since it was a Friday, nothing happened until Monday morning, to the dismay of the ICZ leadership. On Tuesday morning, the district attorney, a former bank lawyer (with CS), allowed the UBS to issue a communiqué of its own about the matter, before publishing his own, which said that thanks to the full cooperation of the bank, the matter had been satisfactorily cleared up. Upon this, the ICZ called a press conference, where Meili, who had turned himself in to the police
on Monday night, appeared and explained how and why he had saved the documents. He was a deeply religious person, he said. When God gave the papers into his hands, he felt called on to take action. The ICZ put its lawyer at his disposal when he turned himself in.

From that day on, Christoph Meili was an international media personality. News teams from all over the world went to see the young family every day in their modest house half an hour from Zurich. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato and his staff tried to convince him to come to the United States to appear before a Senate committee. After then UBS president Robert Studer accused Meili on TV of simply seeking publicity, Meili was asked by his supporters to put off going to the United States for a scheduled television appearance, so as not to play into the UBS's hands.

The ICZ paid to send the Meilis to a religious retreat, when they needed most to be incommunicado for a while. Their lawyer got them a secret phone number and a new mobile phone with a new number. The family received a few invitations for Friday night dinners and food baskets from Holocaust survivors. For Swiss Jews, and also for the rest of the population, Christoph Meili was a hero. The Parliament introduced a motion to protect people like Meili from being fired, a process that was not finished, in part because the Meilis left Switzerland secretly and sought refuge in the United States, which changed the Swiss public's opinion of him.

Meili had been suspended by his guard firm immediately after he removed the papers from the bank and was subsequently fired, with due notice. He got his full salary until the end of April 1997, and the ICZ pledged to help him over the months of unemployment if he did not find a job at once. Community leaders were in a difficult position: they could not risk appearing to be Meili's benefactors, for fear that people would believe they had bought his help. This was usually one of the first questions journalists posed to Meili: How much did the Jews pay you? The sinister assumptions and allegations never stopped, especially after Meili left Switzerland.

With some difficulty, the ICZ found a job for Meili, not a very good one, but at least something to fill in until he got something better. But before starting the job, as soon as his last bank salary payment arrived, Meili and his family left secretly for the United States. When they arrived there at the end of April, New York attorney Ed Fagan and Senator D'Amato took them under their wing. On June 4, 1997, the U.S. House immigration subcommittee voted to grant sanctuary to the Meilis.

The Zurich legal system took nine months to decide on whether or not to accuse Meili of breach of banking secrecy or not. The chief of the UBS archive, who was responsible for the unlawful destruction of relevant documents, was never in danger of being charged with breaking the federal law forbidding the destruction of wartime materials. So the book was closed on both cases in October.
**Swiss Reaction**

Many Swiss people started to feel uneasy as Switzerland's government and citizens found themselves increasingly in the limelight. Suddenly Switzerland was depicted as a wrongdoer, a war profiteer who dealt with looted and victims' gold from the Reichsbank, sold arms to Nazi Germany, and turned over Jewish refugees to the Gestapo. The Swiss banks were attacked as hoarders of dormant accounts belonging to Holocaust victims, demanding death certificates from their heirs.

The younger generations were better able to deal objectively with these accusations and to confront the past without prejudice than the deeply offended older generation that had struggled through World War II, the men standing guard at the borders, the women looking after farms, shops, and businesses. The discussions between historians, politicians, the people in the street, and in the media became heated. Some letters to the editor were openly negative or even anti-Semitic, and the general attitude toward Jews, Jewish organizations in the United States, and Israel was very angry. The controversy was ongoing, fueled almost every day by new revelations and discoveries of facts, documents, and deeds, the stream of historical and media reports, TV films, accusations, attacks, excuses, claims, complaints, statements, and interviews. Experts predicted at the end of 1997 that the debate would last for at least another two years, if not more, virtually guaranteeing a hostile environment in which to pursue justice for the victims. But fairness for Switzerland was demanded as well—an acknowledgement that the overwhelming majority of the population was anti-Nazi, helped to support Jewish refugees, and did not even know what their leaders did behind their backs. (The formula "justice for the victims and fairness for Switzerland" was first coined by Dr. Rolf Bloch, in a hearing of the U.S. House Banking Committee in December 1996.)

**Anti-Semitism**

Anti-Semitic slurs began at the very end of 1996 when a member of the Swiss Parliament’s upper house said in all earnestness that Swiss Jews should ask American Jews to stop their continued attacks on Switzerland if they did not want to risk anti-Semitism here. To this expression of anti-Semitism in the guise of concern, Rolf Bloch, president of the Jewish community, merely responded that this was the wrong reproach to the wrong address.

The year 1997 was the worst for Swiss Jewry since the 1930s and World War II. It started immediately on January 1, when Economy Minister Jean Pascal Delamuraz, in interviews with two French-language newspapers in Geneva and Lausanne to mark the end of his one-year term as Swiss federal president, said that the money asked by the World Jewish Congress for a Holocaust victims’ fund was blackmail and a demand for ransom. He said that there was an attempt under way
to undermine the financial standing of Switzerland. Worst of all, he said that in view of all the attacks on Switzerland, he had to ask himself whether Auschwitz was in fact in Switzerland, not in Poland. His spokesman had demanded that this sentence be withdrawn from the printed interview; one paper complied, one did not.

There was instant outrage at his words—but also widespread approval. Delamuraz got hundreds of letters congratulating him. There were letters to the editor full of praise. Delamuraz declined for two weeks to apologize. When he did, in a letter to World Jewish Congress president Edgar M. Bronfman, he said only that he was sorry for the reactions his words had caused.

Delamuraz's words opened long-closed floodgates. The offices of the Federation of Jewish Communities, the communities themselves, and well-known Jewish personalities were besieged with hate mail for weeks, even months. It did not arrive anonymously, but mostly with names and addresses. After a while, positive mail started to arrive, too, in roughly equal amounts. But elderly Jewish men and women who had fled to Switzerland from anti-Semitic countries said that they felt as if they were reliving the 1930s.

A few swastikas were painted on community centers and Jewish shops and hastily removed. A Jewish journalist found a dead rat in her mail. Boys and men from the Orthodox community—who were easily identifiable by their skullcaps and traditional clothes—suffered abusive language in buses and in the street, with very few people coming to their defense. The members of the Orthodox community never complained officially, but more secular Jews stood up and talked back, especially the younger ones.

In the summer of 1997 a well-known Jewish lawyer received two murder threats, something unheard of in Switzerland. The first threat reportedly came from followers of a militant animal-rights activist, a man who agitates against ritual slaughter, which happens to be forbidden in Switzerland (all kosher meat is imported, with the exception of poultry) and publicly compares the kosher slaughter of animals to the Nazi destruction of the Jews. The lawyer, one of the best-known Jews in Switzerland, had to be protected by bodyguards when he went to court.

JEWISH RESPONSE

Swiss Jewry was thrown into an identity conflict. Long believing themselves well-liked and integrated into Swiss society, at the same time able to maintain their identity as Jews, they now saw themselves standing on thin ice. Early in the year, when the leaders of the Zurich community realized the degree of uneasiness Jews were experiencing, they organized an evening meeting at which people could openly express their fears and hopes. The big hall was packed as never before. It was, people commented, as if the Jews were seeking shelter in the flock. Jews of all ages felt they were being put to a severe test. Although anti-Semitism never quite vanished in 1997, it lost some of its earlier momentum. But hostile letters
to the editor could be found in the press almost every day, especially after new verbal attacks were made on the Swiss banks by the World Jewish Congress or the Jewish Agency.

During this period, Jewish leaders expressed their opinions forcibly and they were listened to by political and other public figures and also by the general public. The churches came to their rescue, denouncing anti-Semitism sharply. The synod of the Protestant church of the canton of Zurich apologized publicly for not having played a more active role in rescuing refugees during the war. The churches pledged SF 250,000 to preserve and properly store the valuable archive of the Jewish refugee organization.

Many Swiss expressed their concern, denouncing anti-Semitism and invoking the harmony of their country, which is based on minorities bound together by a constitution that protects their different identities and cultures. Many Swiss took a new interest in the religion and culture of the Jews and showed solidarity in various ways. In the first six months of 1997, the Zurich Jewish community had to offer four times as many guided tours of its historic synagogue in the heart of the city as in the whole of 1996.

The strong wish of the Jewish community was not to repeat the mistakes of the past, when wartime Jewish leaders had not dared to stand up against the anti-Semitic policies of the government.

Extremism

A privately commissioned Jewish survey and a government study both showed that right-wing activity, such as by known skinhead groups, had increased, and it was mainly directed against foreigners, not Jews. Police departments in rural areas were often ill-prepared to handle the situation when a right-wing group rented space for a meeting in a restaurant or hall. The arrest and trial of such people often ended with sentences of probation. The Zurich police especially had been accused of turning a blind eye to right-wing activity, but some improvement was noted. The Jewish establishment was watchful, but not overly concerned.

Israel and the Middle East

The Swiss government enjoyed friendly relations with Israel, and Foreign Minister Flavio Cotti even announced plans to pay his long delayed visit to Israel in its 50th birthday year. Israel had come to accept the Swiss government’s opening of low-level diplomatic relations with the PLO after the signing of the Oslo accords, and there were no diplomatic incidents. Attacks on Switzerland by Israeli politicians and the Jewish Agency for its wartime performance were always treated separately from the bilateral relations. For that reason, Swiss officials were offended when Israeli president Ezer Weizman canceled his visit to Basel for the Herzl centennial early in the year with a not very diplomatic excuse. It seemed
clear that the change in plans was due to the tension over dormant bank accounts.

Switzerland agreed to provide a sizable army unit for background logistical support and additional protection if needed at the Herzl centennial in Basel in August, commemorating the first Zionist Congress in 1897. This friendly offer by the Swiss government was criticized in some non-Jewish quarters, due to the ongoing debate, but with so many Jewish and Israeli delegates coming to Basel, officials felt the extra security precautions were necessary. There were in fact threats beforehand from extremist circles, but no danger materialized.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Demography

The Jewish population of Switzerland has long fluctuated around 18,000, augmented by many Israelis living and working in the country. Jews in the German part had largely come from Germany in the last century; some East European Jews came to the country early in this century, most since World War II as refugees. The Jewish population in the French part includes many French and a large community of Sephardic Jews, longtime residents of the country.

Most Jews, some 6,000–7000, live in the agglomeration of Zurich. The largest of the four Jewish communities in Zurich, the Israelitische Cultusgemeinde, had since the war become the largest German-speaking community in the world. A small number of Swiss Jews emigrated to Israel every year—largely professionals and yeshivah or university students.

Communal Affairs

The overwhelming flood of anti-Semitism and the ongoing Holocaust-era debate kept communal life in turmoil. In addition, most communities felt the grip of recession as individual Jews lost jobs or had reduced incomes. With decreased revenues, communities were hard-pressed to keep up with the rising costs of maintaining communal institutions and, in the larger communities, providing security arrangements. A few communities that were no longer able to pay their dues to the Federation of Swiss Jewish Communities ceased to be members, thus weakening the ability of that body to speak with one voice for all Jews living in Switzerland.

Also not part of the federation were the two Liberal communities of Zurich and Geneva, with a combined membership of about 1,000. Their mode of religious life was not acceptable to the Orthodox communities, which regarded the federation as primarily religious—not a political umbrella organization—in which membership was based on Halakhah, Jewish law. The only areas in which leaders of the federation were permitted to interact with the Liberal communi-
ties were security, anti-Semitism, and national political matters, and this degree of contact had only been approved by the delegates a few years earlier, after heated debate. The Liberals did not insist on membership for fear that this would cause the Orthodox communities to leave the federation and further weaken its role as the official voice of Swiss Jews.

The gala opening of the Assembly of Delegates in May 1997, in Basel, in honor of the Herzl centennial, was attended by the only woman and only Jewish member of the Swiss government, Ruth Dreifuss. Some Jews were offended when the government declined to send a member to the main Herzl centennial event in August and instead sent Judith Stamm, then president of the Parliament and technically in a position superior to that of a government minister. But Dreifuss agreed to attend a dinner during the celebration. Swiss Jews noted with pleasure Parliament's election of Dreifuss in December 1997 as vice-president of the Swiss confederation for 1998. She was slated to be federal president in 1999, and would be the first woman and the first Jew in that position.

The Jewish federation was working to modernize its structures as it looked toward the next century and millennium. A first position paper on the subject was rejected because it proposed, among other ideas, the inclusion of the Liberal communities, which was unacceptable to the Orthodox.

The situation with kosher meat was a difficult one. Imported meat was expensive, unaffordable in fact for many people, who were reduced to eating frankfurters on the Sabbath. At the same time, new eating habits, with less meat being consumed, meant reduced business for the two kosher butcher shops in Zurich, each supervised by one of the two Orthodox rabbis. There was some talk of a joint supervision arrangement, for economic reasons.

Culture

The Herzl centennial and the Holocaust debate were the impetus for widespread cultural activity, both for the Jewish community and for the general public. The Zionist centennial was the subject of many exhibitions, and the Holocaust debate produced several series of lectures in universities and popular universities, exhibitions, and performances. The biannual Jewish Culture Week in Zurich, organized by the Israelitische Cultusgemeinde, proved to be a big success with the non-Jewish audiences, featuring concerts by Klezmer and Israeli bands, theatrical productions, and exhibitions.

GISELA BLAU