Western Europe

Great Britain

National Affairs

Prime Minister Tony Blair’s Labor government retained its popularity, as opinion polls gave the government a 10-to-25-percent lead over the Conservative opposition through the course of the year. While Labor’s strength was undoubtedly due, in part, to the weakness and occasional ineptitude of the opposition, the government could boast a number of substantial achievements. Most important was an apparent resolution to the Northern Ireland impasse, at least for the moment. With the Ulster Unionists prepared to trust the judgement of their leader, David Trimble, that the IRA would disarm, on November 29 a power-sharing executive was inaugurated in Belfast embracing both Unionists and Republicans. A former terrorist, Martin McGuinness, became minister of education in the devolved executive. In June two other forms of devolved government emerged following elections for a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly. The system of proportional representation kept Labor from securing a clear majority in either body. The elections themselves were uninspiring affairs, and the first act of each set of representatives was to argue over their perquisites and their pay. Another constitutional innovation was the virtual abolition of the upper house of Parliament, the House of Lords, largely dominated by hereditary peers. It remained uncertain how a revised upper house will be constituted.

On the economic front the year went well. Unemployment continued to fall, and inflation, at 2.2 percent, remained lower than the government’s 2.5-percent target. Rises of .25 percent in the minimum lending rate in September and again in October seemed to moderate any inflationary tendencies. Prices in many sectors were static or even declined, although rising costs for services constituted a worrying counter-symptom. The chancellor’s budget statement in March and his November preview of next year’s budget combined redistribution to the working poor with incentives to entrepreneurs. The chancellor was also successful in keeping discussion of possible entry into the unpopular European Monetary System out of the limelight. This tactic was politically wise because the Tories’ more explicitly negative view on joining the single-currency system was the one issue on
which the public agreed with them rather than with Labor. The lack of interest in Europe was shown by the very low 23-percent turnout in the June elections to the European Parliament.

In light of the government's popularity, the Tory opposition, led by William Hague, made little impact. The party did enjoy some minor successes. In the local elections held in May, for example, the Tories won a total of about 1,300 seats with 33 percent of the vote, just three points behind Labor nationwide and neck-and-neck in England. But these successes could not compensate for some self-inflicted wounds toward the end of the year. The party's candidate for the elected mayoralty of London had to resign suddenly when it was disclosed that he had encouraged a friend to commit perjury on his behalf; the Tory treasurer was the subject of damaging financial allegations; a leading MP, sacked from the Tory front bench over his support for gay rights, defected to Labor; and Hague's policies came under attack from senior members of his own party who claimed that he had neglected the middle ground by "lurching to the right," especially on the single-currency issue.

On the eve of the millennium celebrations Dr. George Carey, the archbishop of Canterbury, joined with representatives of virtually all other Christian churches in apologizing for "falling short" of Christian standards, and for the wars, acts of racism, and other sins committed in the name of Christianity over the last two millennia.

Israel and the Middle East

Early in the year British relations with Israel were problematic. In February a Foreign Office statement seemed to put the onus for ending violence in Lebanon solely on Israel. In April Derek Fatchett, Foreign Office minister responsible for Middle East affairs, voiced "deep concern" over Israel's decision to close three Palestinian Authority offices at Orient House, East Jerusalem. Britain, he said, would ask the European Union to look into the issue. And in May Prime Minister Blair told the Jewish Chronicle that he was "very concerned" about the deadlock in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and about the "failure to implement" the Wye River agreement whereby Israel was to cede further land on the West Bank in exchange for security guarantees.

Although in April Foreign Office minister Tony Lloyd stressed Britain's opposition to any unilateral Palestinian declaration of independence when the period envisaged in the Oslo accord expired in May, more than 60 MPs from all parties, including Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesman Menzies Campbell, signed a parliamentary motion in the House of Commons favoring the European Union's backing for the creation of a Palestinian state, and in May the British Friends of Peace Now organized a petition, signed by some 300 Anglo-Jewish personalities and published in the Jewish Chronicle, calling for the creation of a Palestinian state.

The election of Ehud Barak as Israeli prime minister marked a new phase in relations between Britain and Israel. On his first official visit to London, in July, Barak received "101 percent support" from Prime Minister Blair for his peace ef-
forts. Describing Blair as not only a friend but “a partner in international support of the Middle East peace process,” Barak outlined Britain’s potential leading role in helping unite the European Union behind the peace process and in providing “both political and financial support, especially to the Palestinians.” At the Labor Party conference in Bournemouth in October Blair praised Barak’s “courage and leadership” and pronounced Britain “ready and willing” to encourage peace talks. Peter Hain was named the new Foreign Office minister in charge of Middle East policy in August. Disavowing his anti-Zionist past, Hain promised to work toward a “peace settlement that was lasting, secure and rooted in absolute concrete.” Michael Abraham, the Lord Levy—Labor peer, businessman, and communal personality—was described as the “prime minister’s special envoy in the Middle East.” In December Hain said Levy’s three informal visits to Damascus in 1999 helped bring about talks between Israel and Syria.

In June Foreign Office minister Geoff Hoon summoned the Iranian ambassador to the Foreign Office to make clear his concern about 13 Iranian Jews held in an Iranian prison on a charge of spying for Israel. The following month, as the Board of Deputies of British Jews staged a protest vigil outside the Iranian embassy in London, Foreign Secretary Robin Cook warned Iran that Britain took the fate of the 13 extremely seriously. In September Cook met with Iran’s foreign minister about the case. At the Labor Party conference in October, Poale Zion, the socialist Zionist group, moved a resolution voicing concern about the prisoners, which passed unanimously. In December a Hanukkah demonstration was held outside London’s Syrian embassy in support of the release of four missing Israeli servicemen.

Also in December, lack of funds forced the Britain-Israel Public Affairs Center (BIPAC) to close. For 23 years it had provided an information service on all aspects of Israel and Middle East policy.

Anti-Semitism and Racism

The government’s dream, said Home Secretary Jack Straw in October, was to celebrate “the rich diversity of a multi-racial Britain.” Throughout the year the government introduced measures against racism and worked to promote ethnic harmony.

In February Straw told Board of Deputies president Eldred Tabachnik that he fully understood the Jewish community’s concern about the threat of terrorism and that police would continue to provide enhanced protection for Israeli and Jewish institutions. In April nail-bombs exploded in Brick Lane (East London) and Brixton (South London), and the neo-Nazi group White Wolves claimed responsibility. In response, an unprecedented security operation was mounted in Jewish neighborhoods, including surveillance by MI5 (the national security services) and by Scotland Yard’s new antiracist task force. A similar security alert was ordered after threats were received from Islamic extremists in September, just prior to the High Holy Days.
In March and May the antiracist task force staged major operations against far-right extremist organizations suspected of planning violence—such as Combat 18—seizing weapons, ammunition, racist literature, and computer disks, and making arrests. Following the March action the Ministry of Defense emphasized its determination to root out racism from the armed forces.

In April, in the run-up to the June elections to the European Parliament, the Union of Jewish Students and the Oxford University Jewish Society persuaded the Oxford Union to withdraw a speaking invitation to John Tyndall, leader of the far-right British National Party (BNP). The next month groups opposed to racism tried to persuade the BBC not to transmit BNP political broadcasts, and asked the attorney general to examine the BNP's election manifesto for incitements to racial hatred. Postal workers, backed by the Communication Workers' Union, refused to handle BNP campaign leaflets, and the Board of Deputies urged Jews to turn out on election day to prevent British extremists from winning a foothold in the European Parliament. Although it contested all 82 seats in England and Scotland, the BNP made little impact, securing only 102,647 votes, 1.11 percent of the total. Following the elections, 86 MPs signed a parliamentary motion charging that the BNP breached the Representation of the People Act by providing false addresses on nomination papers for some candidates.

In January Assistant Commissioner John Grieve, the head of Scotland Yard's antiracist task force, promised a massive campaign against racism. In July he told a meeting of the Indian-Jewish Association in London that arrests for racial crimes had increased threefold, and that much more was now known about the activities of racist organizations. The next month Grieve sought to involve religious institutions in a campaign to increase the reporting of racial offences. The Board of Deputies Community Security Trust was to play a leading role, training volunteers to collect information. Already in April the London metropolitan police had launched a program to recruit more officers from ethnic minorities, including Jews. At that time there were 75 known Jews on a force of 26,000.

In August Home Secretary Straw renewed the 1986 exclusion order against Louis Farrakhan, leader of the U.S.-based black nationalist Nation of Islam. This followed a campaign by MPs, peers, and Jewish representatives to keep him out of the country. Straw said that continuing the ban was conducive to good race relations and the maintenance of public order. In September an invitation to anti-Zionist Holocaust revisionist Roger Garaudy to address a conference at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies was canceled due to protests by the Board of Deputies. Then in October, public protest surrounded the visit to London by Austrian far-right leader Jörg Haider. And that same month communal leaders urged Straw to deport Germar Rudolf, a neo-Nazi who had fled from Germany to Britain in order to escape a prison term for breaching Germany's Holocaust-denial laws.

In November communal leaders welcomed government plans, announced in the queen's speech at the opening of Parliament, to strengthen the laws against racial discrimination to cover the acts of public bodies, including the police. In fact the
Board of Deputies wanted the new legislation to go even further and outlaw discrimination on grounds of religion. Also that month the Immigration and Asylum Act received royal assent and became law despite efforts by the Board of Deputies, the Jewish Council for Racial Equality (JCore), and the Labor Zionist organization Poale Zion to eliminate from it the withdrawal of benefit rights to asylum seekers, plans to disperse refugees around the country, and the replacement of cash awards by vouchers for the purchase of essentials.

Holocaust-Related Matters

In February the Board of Deputies, which had been allocated some £220,000 from a Swiss humanitarian fund for needy Holocaust victims, set up a mechanism to distribute the money to survivors. In July the British Foreign Office hosted the first annual meeting of the International Fund for Needy Victims of Nazi Persecution. One-third of Britain's contribution to the fund is earmarked for needy survivors in the UK; the remainder, which goes to survivors in Eastern Europe, is distributed by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

After months of discussion, in February the Department of Trade and Industry set up a secretariat for restitution payments for assets seized by the Custodian of Enemy Property during World War II under the Trading with the Enemy Act. The next month the department published the names of thousands of people whose bank accounts and assets had been seized; by July more than 200 applications had been received and ten approved. The money will come from a fund set up by the government.

In October the government released a proposal, backed by the prime minister, for the establishment of a national day of Holocaust remembrance.

Nazi War Criminals

Britain's second war crimes trial ended in April when Anthony Sawoniuk received a life sentence. The Old Bailey jury, which in February had visited Domachevo in western Belarus where the crimes took place, found Sawoniuk guilty on two counts of murder under the 1991 War Crimes Act: the shooting of two Jewish men and a woman; and the machine-gunning of 15 Jewish women who were forced to strip and stand at the edge of an open grave. The killings were carried out when Sawoniuk was a member of a Nazi-recruited local police force. He denied all charges.

In October Scotland Yard detectives referred to the Crown Prosecution Service the case of a 78-year-old Georgian-born man living in Wales, whose name was not disclosed, suspected of involvement in an operation by an SS extermination squad.

Considerable anger greeted the decision at the end of the year to allow Konrad Kalejs, aged 86, an alleged Nazi death-squad officer, to leave Britain voluntarily for Australia. Kalejs, who had been deported from the U.S. in 1994 and from
Canada in 1997, had lived in Leicestershire since September. He was accused of involvement in the killing of 30,000 people, mainly Jews, in Latvia, but according to the Home Office there was insufficient evidence to justify his prosecution. Home Secretary Straw, who earlier had said that he was minded to deport Kalejs because his presence "was not conducive to the public good," met with Board of Deputies leaders to explain his change of mind. Many disagreed with the decision on the ground that the case had not been sufficiently investigated. Foreign Secretary Cook promised Lord Janner, the chairman of the Holocaust Education Trust, that British diplomats would pass on any new information about Kalejs to relevant overseas authorities.

### JEWISH COMMUNITY

#### Demography

After rising for the previous two years, the number of marriages conducted under Jewish religious auspices fell from 986 in 1997 to 921 in 1998, a drop of 6.6 percent, according to statistics published by the Board of Deputies of British Jews Community Research Unit. Only marriages performed under the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations significantly increased in number, accounting for 21 percent of the total. The number of gittin (religious divorces) completed in 1998 remained constant at 233. Burials and cremations under Jewish auspices fell to 3,910 in 1998 from 4,070 the year before. The estimated number of births, based on figures for circumcision, was 2,663 in 1997 compared with 2,897 in 1996.

A profile of an aging provincial community emerged from a population survey of Glasgow Jewry released in October, which identified 5,500 Jews from the membership lists of synagogues and cultural and recreational groups. Commissioned by five local Jewish welfare organizations, the survey found that only 15 percent of the total were 18 years old or younger, while 28 percent were 60 and above and 17 percent over 70.

#### Communal Affairs

Norwood-Ravenswood, the Jewish community's largest child-and-family-services organization, announced in January that it was cutting 16 jobs and closing one of its North-West London administrative offices due to lack of funds, though in October it opened a new center in Redbridge. In May a major welfare organization, Jewish Care, announced the closing of its only seaside resort residential home, in Bournemouth, Hampshire.

In July the Central Council for Jewish Community Services, the umbrella organization for some 50 Jewish welfare bodies, announced that it would close. Asher Corren, the director, said that it had "fulfilled its original purpose in the light of changing community needs." Founded in 1972 to coordinate the work of
the Jewish social-care organizations, it had been the prime mover in bringing about partnerships between hitherto independent welfare organizations.

British Jews raised over £100m in 1997 for Jewish causes, according to a survey by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research. The survey, based on a representative sample taken from more than 2,300 listed Jewish organizations, also showed that Jewish communal groups spent a total of over £419m, more that 43 percent of which went for staff salaries.

Religion

A vigorous campaign kept alive the plight of *agunot*, "chained" wives whose husbands refuse to give them a religious divorce. Activists organized a fast on their behalf on International Women's Day in March, and conducted a vigil outside the chief rabbi's office in October. Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, accused by the protesters of "moral blindness" for his alleged inaction in the face of Judaism's "discriminatory" divorce laws, insisted that he identified totally with the plight of the *agunot* and pledged to do his utmost "to make firm and sustainable progress" in the matter. In June he met with Rabbi Moshe Morgenstern of New York, who had developed a controversial annulment procedure to free such women. But Rabbi Sacks found the Morgenstern method "a breach of Halakhah" (Jewish religious law). Instead, he announced that he would set up a special post at the London Bet Din (religious court) dedicated to solving the problem "within the framework of Halakhah." Yet Dayan (Judge) Ehrentreu, the head of the Bet Din, told representatives of the campaign for *agunot*: "If there was a loop-hole, we would have found it by now." Meanwhile, religious courts of the Orthodox mainstream United Synagogue (US), the Orthodox right-of-center Federation of Synagogues, and the Sephardi religious community invalidated a wedding, conducted secretly by Morgenstern, of an erstwhile *agunah* whose first marriage Morgenstern claimed to have annulled.

By the end of the year a combination of communal sanctions against recalcitrant husbands and rabbinic mediation had been successfully employed in individual cases. Rabbi Sacks himself mediated in one instance, after pro-*agunah* campaigners joined by US leaders staged nightly protests in November outside a North-West London kosher restaurant owned by the husband's family. In October Rabbi Yitzhak Schochet of the Mill Hill Synagogue and Rabbi Pini Dunner of the Saatchi Synagogue announced that they would name and shame uncooperative husbands over the Internet. Hope of help for *agunot* from the British legal system diminished in June when the Lord Chancellor's Office announced a delay in implementing the Family Law Act of 1996, which enabled judges to withhold a civil divorce until the completion of religious procedures. And in July a family-court judge ruled that the prenuptial agreement drafted by the Chief Rabbi's Office, whereby both parties pledge to follow Jewish divorce law should the marriage break up, was unenforceable in British law.

Sacks also came under fire from Orthodox elements over implementation of
“communal peace” meetings between the US and Reform, Liberal, and Masorti (Conservative) movement leaders. Although the US sent no rabbis to the meetings, the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations (Adath) rabbinical council in March expressed “anguish and bewilderment” that Sacks and US leaders were showing respect for those aiming “to lead Jews away from the paths of the Torah and uproot basic beliefs of Judaism.” The Federation of Synagogues and the leaders of British Agudath Israel also voiced disapproval. In June the Chief Rabbi’s Office launched a newsletter, Renewal, as part of a program to make the chief rabbi more accessible. In November Chief Rabbi Sacks expanded and reshuffled his “cabinet,” bringing in ten new rabbis and creating eight additional portfolios, including one for the Internet and another for the electronic media.

The US, Britain’s largest synagogue grouping, experienced mixed fortunes. A report by independent accountants, commissioned in September 1998, was published in March 1999. It found no evidence of dishonesty or deliberate omission of data, but it criticized specific individuals for lax management and control. Among the problems described were the burial society scandal at Waltham Abbey cemetery, Essex, which lost the US at least £750,000; by October, 12 people had been arrested. The report also dealt with the theft of books from the London Bet Din by Dayan Casriel Kaplin, which was resolved in February when US honorary officers ratified a “full and final settlement” whereby Kaplin paid £280,000 toward the cost of the books and the US’s expenses. Kaplin was stripped of his title and barred from communal honors within the US.

The US did its utmost to put its affairs in order. In April it ended a seven-year dispute by paying £2.5m to settle legal claims against it by its own pension fund. In June a New York auction of 150 manuscripts and rare books from the Bet Din library fetched a record $4 million, part of which would replenish the depleted pension fund. A further boost to the fund was projected in November when the US announced plans to sell 30 valuable silver items through Sotheby’s, Tel Aviv. In June co-treasurer Jeremy Jacobs reported a rise in US membership from 33,811 in 1997 to 34,066 in 1998. This was coupled with a healthier financial position: total income had risen from £16m to £17.1m. The deficits, Jacobs said, had largely disappeared through the sale of property and cost-cutting measures, such as making the heder (elementary Hebrew school) system and the mikveh (ritual bath) operations self-supporting.

In September the US appointed Katherine McDermott, a Catholic, as its first head of fund-raising. It also mediated successfully to end a dispute with an alternative minyan, aiming for a more informal and participatory service, at Golders Green Synagogue, North-West London. The minyan, temporarily housed in the premises of the Jewish Vegetarian Society, voted to return to the synagogue when Golders Green voted in a team of honorary officers pledged to reunite the community. In April the US embarked on a series of open meetings designed to make it more responsive to members’ needs, while the US’s rabbinical council appointed its first-ever executive. The US launched a mentoring program for young
rabbis in September. Business consultant Peter Sheldon was elected US president in October. The vote had been postponed several times when competing candidate Malcolm Cohen challenged Sheldon’s eligibility. Cohen finally decided to withdraw.

The police received complaints in May about the management of the L’Chaim Society, the organization run by Shmuel Boteach, the maverick American-born rabbi. The charity commissioner launched an inquiry in August and ordered L’Chaim’s bank accounts frozen.

Edgware Masorti, one of the largest synagogues in the Masorti group, was rocked by discord which began when some members objected to women wearing the **tallit** (prayer shawl) and **kippah** (skullcap). The introduction of separate egalitarian services to run parallel with the main service did not heal the breach, and in December the synagogue’s officers resigned en bloc.

In response to an offer from the Council of Christians and Jews to choose a second Jewish officer in addition to the chief rabbi, who served as vice president, the Liberal and Reform movements agreed in October to name as associate president Rabbi Dr. Albert Friedlander, emeritus minister of the independent progressive Westminster Synagogue and dean of Leo Baeck College. In November Reform leaders launched a £4m appeal over five years to promote the 40,000-member movement as “the most dynamic force in Anglo-Jewry.”

**Education**

In 1999 approximately 45 percent of Jewish primary-age pupils and 33 percent of secondary-age pupils attended Jewish schools. The government continued its support of Jewish educational institutions: in May two more Orthodox elementary schools were awarded voluntary-aided status, one in North-West London, the other in Gateshead. Some 30 Jewish schools will be state-aided by the end of 2000. In December the Jewish Community Day School Advisory Board, formed in May by members of the Reform, Liberal, and Masorti movements, opened the Clore Shalom school in Shenley, Hertfordshire, with five classes and a total of 120 pupils drawn from across the Jewish religious spectrum.

In March the London School of Jewish Studies (LSJS), the former Jews’ College, appointed its first full-time woman lecturer, Shani Berrin, and a month later Rabbi Dr. Sasha Stern was named Leon and Freda Schaller senior lecturer in Jewish studies. In June LSJS signed an agreement for academic cooperation with London University’s School of Oriental and African Studies. London’s first modern Orthodox yeshivah, Ohr Torah, launched in 1998 by Rabbi Chaim Brovender, announced in July that it was merging with LSJS since it had become clear that there was not sufficient demand for an institution like Ohr Torah. LSJS director David-Hillel Ruben resigned in August to establish a London campus for New York University. He was replaced in December by Dr. Ian Rabinowitz, who had been director of the Department of Medicine at University College, London.
Pursuing its policy of fostering Jewish renewal, the United Jewish Israel Appeal (UJIA) launched a magazine in March aimed at raising the profile and enhancing the self-esteem of Jewish educators. In April it established two lecture-ships “to encourage professional excellence” in Jewish education, one (Orthodox) at LSJS, the other (progressive) at Leo Baeck College. In October, in the absence of suitable applicants, Jewish educator Clive Lawton, former chief executive of Jewish Continuity, the erstwhile national fund-raising program for education, was appointed consultant to help the LSJS set up a program in Jewish education. Chief executive Jonathan Kestenbaum told UJIA’s annual general meeting in October that the organization was blending its two roles of rescue and renewal into a single mission to embrace young Jews worldwide. He reported a 12-percent increase in the number of donors from the previous year, but a fall in income from £19.1m in 1997 to £12.8m in 1998. In December UJIA launched its Ashdown Fellowships program to train prospective Jewish teachers and youth leaders. The same month UJIA’s Makor educational resource center merged with the Association of Jewish Youth to create a single agency serving over 20,000 young Jews.

Historian Bernard Wasserstein, the controversial president of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies (OCHJS), announced in April that he would leave the post in January 2000. Peter Oppenheimer, an Oxford economist, was appointed the new president in October, with specific responsibility for OCHJS funding; Hebrew literature specialist Dr. Glenda Abramson was named to the new position of academic director.

In January Sussex University’s Centre for German-Jewish Studies received a grant from the Anne Frank Foundation to fund the post of director of research; in July historian Tony Kushner became the third professor in the Department of Jewish Studies at Southampton University; and in October Girton College, Cambridge, launched a scholarship for postgraduates studying modern Hebrew.

**Overseas Aid**

British Jewry reacted promptly throughout the year to a number of threats to overseas Jewish communities, and enlisted British government intervention when possible. British Jews also aided non-Jewish victims of hostilities abroad.

Concern over rising anti-Semitism in Russia caused more than 40 MPs from all parties to sign a motion in January sponsored by Labor Friends of Israel (LFI) chairman Stephen Twigg. It called on the government to put pressure on Russia to crack down on anti-Semitic statements by opposition members of its parliament. Redeeming a promise to the “35s” — the Women’s Campaign for Jews in the Former Soviet Union — Foreign Secretary Cook, on a visit to Russia in March, relayed to the Russian leadership Britain’s concern about anti-Jewish propaganda, reinforcing a similar message already conveyed by the UK’s ambassador to Moscow.

Jewish organizations launched projects to help Jews in the former Soviet Union.
World Jewish Relief (WJR) focused on Ukraine. In January it sent tape recorders to blind and elderly Jews in Odessa, and in July it dispatched to the western Ukraine two mobile “welfare centers” called “Chesedmobiles” (chesed = act of kindness) to help Jews living in remote areas. The WJR also announced plans to set up ten community centers in western Ukraine over the next three years. In February and November the 35s made two separate appeals for unwanted fur coats for pensioners in Belarus.

In April British Jewry donated almost £250,000 to an emergency appeal fund, launched and later coordinated by United Kingdom Jewish Aid and International Development (UKJ Aid), to help victims of ethnic cleansing in Serbia. The Jewish Emergency Aid Coalition (JEAC) convened a meeting of Jewish groups to collect money for Kosovo refugees. Part of the money raised was used in May by the Jewish Council for Racial Equality (JCore). Backed by the Board of Deputies and all the major Jewish religious bodies, JCore joined forces with the Refugee Council, assigned by the government to coordinate contingency planning for the possible arrival in Britain of 1,000 refugees weekly. JEAC, in partnership with the Albanian Educational Development Project, used some of the money to erect mobile schools for Kosovar refugee children in Albania. In October the final allocation from the fund went to reopen the first school in the devastated Gjakova district in Kosovo. UJIA raised funds to take 500 Jews from former Yugoslavia to Israel.

Publications

The 1999 annual Jewish Quarterly-Wingate literary award for fiction went to Israeli-born Dorit Rabinyan for her novel Persian Brides; the nonfiction prize went to Edith Velmans for Edith’s Book, an account of her wartime years in hiding in Holland. The controversy which erupted over the authenticity of the 1997 nonfiction winner, Fragments, Memories of a Childhood, 1939–1948 by Binjamin Wilkomirski, was the subject of a television program.

The Jewish Quarterly, founded in 1953 and with a current circulation of 2,000, announced plans to merge with Jewish Book News and Reviews, launched in 1986, published three times a year, and selling 700 copies. The new journal would incorporate all the elements of Book News, including its bibliography of Jewish books available in Britain.

Books on anti-Semitism published during the year included Demonizing the Other: Antisemitism, Racism and Xenophobia edited by Robert Wistrich; Remembering Cable Street: Facism and Anti-Fascism in British Society by Tony Kushner and Nadia Valman; and Patriotism Perverted: Captain Ramsay, the Right Club and British Anti-Semitism 1939–40 by Richard Griffiths.

Works dealing with Israeli-Arab affairs were Acting Up by David Hare, his diary of producing the play “Via Dolorosa” that deals with Israeli-Arab relations; Israel in Search of a War: The Sinai Campaign, 1955–56 by Motti Golani; Gideon's
Spies: Mossad’s Secret Warriors by Gordon Thomas; Drinking the Sea at Gaza by Amira Hass; and Touching Peace: From the Oslo Accord to a Final Agreement by Yossi Beilin.

The large and varied body of biographies and autobiographies included Sir Sidney Hamburger and Manchester Jewry by Bill Williams; Stranger than Fiction, an autobiography by Mark Braham; Are You Still Circumcised? A Collection of Autobiographical Stories by Harold Rosen; World’s End for Sir Oswald by Alf Goldberg; Lord Goodman by Brian Brivati; Rembrandt’s Eyes by Simon Schama; Lip Reading by Maureen Lipman; Rodinsky’s Room by Rachel Lichtenstein with Iain Sinclair; The Writing Game by Rosemary Friedman; They Called Him Mr. Brighton, David Winner’s biography of Lewis Cohen, who revolutionized the building-society movement and ended up a millionaire socialist; The Arithmetic of Memory by Anthony Rudolf; On Life and Death: The Tale of a Lucky Man by Zvi Aharoni; God Made Blind: Isaac Rosenberg, His Life and Poetry by Deborah Maccoby; Roses from the Earth: The Biography of Anne Frank by Carol Ann Lee; Eyes Wide Open, Frederic Raphael’s memoir of his collaboration with Stanley Kubrick on the film “Eyes Wide Shut”; and Football Memories by Brian Glanville.

Books on Anglo-Jewish and local history were Scotland’s Jews by Kenneth Collins; Care in the Jewish Community, a history of the Jewish Welfare Board and Leeds Jewish Housing Association by Heinz Skyte; Anglo-Jewry in Changing Times by Israel Finestein; and The Lost Jews of Cornwall edited by Godfrey Simmons, Keith Pearce, and Helen Fry.

Holocaust studies were The Cap by Roman Frister; To See You Again: The Betty Schimmel Story by Betty Schimmel with Joyce Gabriel; Studying the Holocaust by Ronnie S. Landau; Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps by Tzvetan Todorov; My Mother’s Diamonds: In Search of Holocaust Assets by James Kirby; Images of the Holocaust: The Myth of the “Shoah Business” by Tim Cole; Just One More Dance by Ernest Levy; One Young Man and Total War: From Normandy to Concentration Camp: A Doctor’s Letters Home by Robert Barer; Resisting the Holocaust edited by Ruby Rohrlich; In the Shadow of the Swastika edited by Donald Kenrick; I Have Lived a Thousand Years by Livia Bitton-Jackson; Spectator in Hell by Colin Rushton; Shake Heaven and Earth: Peter Bergson and the Struggle to Rescue the Jews of Europe by Louis Rapoport; Refugees in an Age of Genocide by Katharine Knox and Tony Kushner; From Anschluss to Albion: Memoirs of a Refugee Girl, 1939–40 by Elisabeth M. Orsten; and My Darling Diary by Ingrid Jacoby.


Among works on Judaism were Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism by Hyam Maccoby; The Twilight of Jewish Philosophy:
Emmanuel Levinas's *Ethical Hermeneutics* by Tamra Wright; *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* by Menachem Kellner; *The Explorer's Guide to Judaism* by Jonathan Magonet; and *Jewish Religious Law: A Progressive Perspective* by John D. Rayner.

Notable fiction included *The Oxford Book of Jewish Stories* edited by Ilan Stavans; *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges* by Nathan Englander; *The Mighty Walzer* by Howard Jacobson; *Foreign Brides* by Elena Lappin; *Children of the Rainbow* by Moris Farhi; *Erotic Stories* by Arnold Wesker; *Gravity* by Erica Wagner; *Live Bodies* by Maurice Gee; and *High on a Cliff* by Colin Shindler.

Books of verse included *Testament without Breath*, Jon Silkin's last volume; *A Moon at the Door* by Wanda Barford; and *Poet to Poet* edited by Richard McKane.

Two books on Yiddish were *Yiddish Proletarian Theatre: The Art and Politics of the ARTEF, 1925–1940* edited by Edna Nahshon; and *When Joseph Met Molly: a Reader on Yiddish Film* by Joseph McBride.

**Personalia**

Vivien Stern, secretary-general of the Penal Reform International Centre for Prison Studies, received a life peerage, while knighthoods went to industrialist Maurice Hatter, vice-president of World ORT, for his contribution to public services; to ORT's British president, David Sieff, for services to the National Lottery Charities Board; to Arthur Gilbert, an American multimillionaire but a British citizen, who donated a £75m art collection to Britain; to Tate Gallery director Nicholas Serota for services to the visual arts; to Professor John Krebs, chief executive of the Natural Environment Research Council, for his contribution to behavioral ecology; to Victor Blank, chairman of the Mirror Group; and to international-law expert Nigel Rodley for his contributions to human rights and international law.

Prominent British Jews who died in 1999 included Rabbi Jonah Indech, emeritus rabbi of the Bournemouth Hebrew Congregation, in Bournemouth, in January, aged 90; George Nador, Talmudist, in London, in January, aged 78; Sir Emmanuel Kaye, engineering magnate, in Hampshire, in February, aged 84; Alec (Al) Phillips, former boxing champion, in London, in February, aged 79; Gerry Dickson, driving force of the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues outreach program, in Watford, in February, aged 56; Salmond S. Levin, scholar, educator, and president of the United Synagogue, 1977–81, in London, in February, aged 93; Minna Keal, composer, in London, in March, aged 90; Rabbi Bernard Hooker, first executive president of the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, in Ledbury, Herefordshire, in March, aged 77; Rosalie Gassman-Sherr, general secretary of the Federation of Women Zionists, 1940–1972, in Hemel Hempstead, in March, aged 87; Yehudi Lord Menuhin, internationally renowned violinist, in March, aged 82; Max, Lord Beloff, Oxford historian, in London, in March, aged 85; Gladys Dimson, social worker for Jewish and national projects, in London,
in March, aged 83; Lionel Bart, composer, in April, aged 69; Charles Rappaport, communal civil servant, in London, in April, aged 85; Flora Leipman, artist and author, in London, in April, aged 81; David Englander, social historian, in Milton Keynes, in April, aged 49; Norman Williams, philatelist, in London, in April, aged 85; Arthur Levin, medical pioneer, in London, in April, aged 86; Bert Firman, band leader, in London, in April, aged 93; Monty Henig, pillar of the Leicester Hebrew Congregation, in Hove, Sussex, in May, aged 84; Corinne Bellow, art historian, in London, in May, aged 71; Harry Blech, musician, in London, in May, aged 89; Mollie Fishberg, WIZO stalwart, in London, in May, aged 87; Adam Raphael, journalist and broadcaster, in London, in May, aged 61; Henry Grunfeld, chairman and president of S.G. Warburg merchant bank, in London, in June, aged 95; Joseph Vandernoot, musician, in London, in June, aged 84; Harry Blacker, cartoonist, in London, in June, aged 89; Sir John Wolf, television producer, in London, in June, aged 86; Joe Hyman, textile magnate, in Surrey, in July, aged 77; Manfred Altmann, academic philanthropist, in London, in July, aged 87; Max Pianka, organic chemist and Zionist, in London, in August, aged 83; Prof. Percy Cohen, anthropologist, in London, in September, aged 71; Frankie Vaughan (Frank Abelson), leading entertainer, in Oxford, in September, aged 71; David Baum, pediatrician, in Norfolk, in September, aged 59; Tony Crombie, jazz drummer, in London, in October, aged 74; Ralph Sallon, cartoonist, in London, in October, aged 99; Allan Burke, one-time general secretary of the Anglo-Israel Chamber of Commerce, in London, in October, aged 84; Mitzi Lorenz, milliner, in London, in October, aged 88; David Kessler, for 50 years chairman and managing director of the Jewish Chronicle, in Stoke Hammond, Buckinghamshire, in November, aged 93; Emanuel (Meyer) Freilich, for 38 years cantor at Hampstead Garden Suburb synagogue, North London, in London, in November, aged 85; Rabbi Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, honored and respected chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth, 1967–91, in London, in November, aged 78; Alexander Baron, novelist and film writer, in London, in December, aged 82; Ralph Finn, writer, in Middlesex, in December, aged 87.

Miriam & Lionel Kochan
France

National Affairs

The two key facts of French public life during 1999 were political cooperation between the right and the left, and economic growth.

Political "cohabitation," as the French called it, involved sharing executive power between the two rival blocs. On the one side was Jacques Chirac, head of the leading right-wing party, who had been elected president in 1995 for a seven-year term; on the other side was Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, head of the leading left-wing party, which had won the 1997 legislative election.

Under Prime Minister Jospin, the parliamentary majority, made up primarily of Socialists, Communists, and Greens, passed a number of laws that furthered the agenda of the political left, instituting a maximum 35-hour work week, recognizing a nonmarital contractual partnership for couples (including same-sex couples), and requiring political parties to run an equal number of male and female candidates in elections. Against the advice of his own allies in the right-wing parliamentary opposition, President Chirac supported some of these laws. Chirac and Jospin planned to run against each other in the next presidential election, expected to come in 2002.

Jospin hoped to advance his popularity on the basis of his economic policies, and the statistics were indeed impressive. France's Gross Domestic Product grew by 2.7 percent in 1999 (compared to approximately 2 percent in the euro-currency area and 1.4 percent in Germany). With an extremely low inflation rate of 0.5 percent and a 3.6-percent increase in exports, business exuded optimism and created new jobs. Almost three million people were unemployed in France at the beginning of 1999, but by the end of the year that number had fallen by 330,000. Nevertheless, the unemployment rate at year's end, 10.6 percent, was slightly higher than the EU average.

The new European currency unit, the euro, was introduced on January 1, 1999. Eleven countries created a zone, nicknamed "Euroland," inside which they adopted fixed exchange rates and will eventually have a common currency. The euro will not replace the national currencies (including the franc) until January 1, 2002. Before then, prices will be listed in both currencies, but payment will be made solely with the national currency. In 1999, then, this currency revolution remained purely symbolic. But the major publicity campaign surrounding the impending changes strengthened consciousness among the French of their membership in the European community. Even though the euro had a rough ride in the world of international finance (it lost 16 percent of its value against the
American dollar in the course of 1999), the simple fact of its existence represented, for the French, the prospect of a stable and prosperous Europe.

In June 1999, France — along with the other EU countries — elected representatives to the European Parliament. These elections, in which seats are divided proportionally, generally offer a good indication of the state of public opinion in France, even though the stakes are much lower than in French national politics. Fewer than half the voters turned out, a very low percentage for France. The parties of the left won more than 38 percent of the vote, compared to slightly more than 32 percent for the parties of the right. The Socialists, the main left-wing party, had 22 percent, far outpacing the Communists, who came in at 7 percent. The biggest surprise came from the Greens, who, under the leadership of Daniel Cohn-Bendit — one of the leaders of the French student revolt of May 1968 — won almost 10 percent of the vote.

On the right, the surprise was the success of a dissident group, the “sovereignists,” who opposed what they considered the excessive power held by European authorities in Brussels. They received a little more than 13 percent of the vote, placing the new faction first among the right-wing parties, just ahead of President Chirac’s own party. Charles Pasqua, an old friend of Chirac, and Philippe de Villiers, representing the most conservative (although not racist or anti-Semitic) strain of the French right, led the new party.

THE NATIONAL-FRONT CHALLENGE

The National Front — the extreme right-wing party led by Jean-Marie Le Pen that obtained 15 percent of the vote in the presidential election of 1995 and again in the legislative election of 1997 — suffered a harsh blow when Bruno Mégret and his followers broke away. Disagreement between Le Pen and Mégret, who until then had been the number-two figure in the party, became public in late 1998. Their argument was not ideological, although Mégret claimed to have a more modern approach (not necessarily a more democratic one) to the shared principles of the far right.

The split became final on January 23, 1999, during a conference organized by Mégret’s faction. Following a fierce legal battle, Le Pen won the right to keep most of the National Front’s assets, consisting primarily of the party’s bank accounts and some properties owned by the party. The party’s moral assets were also at stake: On May 11, 1999, a Paris court decided that only Jean-Marie Le Pen could use the name “National Front” and its insignia (a tricolored flame). This enabled Le Pen to strengthen his image as the legitimate leader, at the expense of the “traitors” led by Mégret.

Nevertheless, the post-split National Front — undermined by internecine fighting and diminished in the public eye — no longer resembled the one that appeared to be a threat to French democracy in the second half of the 1990s. In the European elections in June, Le Pen’s list received 5.7 percent of the vote (less than
the party representing hunters and fishers), while the group led by Mégrret obtained 3.3 percent (less than a small Trotskyist party). Even combining the votes of the two factions, the tally added up to less than 9 percent.

Although kept below the symbolically significant 10-percent mark, the far right continued to pose a danger. Confusion unleashed by socioeconomic changes, and fear that immigration and globalization could erode national identity still left the door open to demagogues. But the threat that Le Pen's theories would become accepted and commonplace, which loomed large for at least a decade, now appeared remote. A survey conducted in April 1999 by SOFRES, France's leading market- and opinion-research organization, indicated that 11 percent of the French population "completely agreed with or mostly agreed with" Le Pen's ideas, while 86 percent "mostly disagreed with or completely disagreed with" them. This was the worst showing for the National Front in the 15 years that SOFRES polls had included this question.

Le Pen also faced legal problems. In 1999, courts in both Germany and France found him guilty for repeating, at a public meeting in Bavaria on December 5, 1997, his remark that the gas chambers constituted a "detail" in the history of World War II (a French civil court had previously required him to pay damages). He was also convicted for shoving a Socialist candidate during an election campaign, and was declared removed from elective office, although this was not to take effect until the year 2000.

In October 1999, the rupture in the ranks of the far right became complete when the camp led by Bruno Mégrret took the name National Republican Movement (MNR). Some activists were shocked by the use of the term "republican," which is not part of the French far right's tradition. But an internal movement document clarified that "using our adversary's terms does not mean that we are using the same content," and that the "republic" according to the MNR was not the republic of the French Revolution of 1789.

Israel and the Middle East

On January 24, 1999, France introduced a new stamp commemorating the 50th anniversary of France's recognition of the State of Israel. The stamp, on which the flags of the two countries framed the words "Relations diplomatiques France-Israel" (France-Israel diplomatic relations), was covered extensively in the press. It was later boycotted by the Lebanese post office.

Counsel Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France (CRIF, the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions of France) engaged in intense diplomatic activity early in 1999. After meeting with Israeli foreign minister Ariel Sharon and Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in Paris, CRIF's president, Henri Hajdenberg, traveled to Tunis where he met Tunisian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. He then attended the funeral of King Hussein in Jordan, where he met Hussein's son and successor, King Abdullah.
CRIF also sent a delegation to the Middle East, March 7–10, which met with President Mubarak, Yasir Arafat, King Abdullah, and Israeli president Ezer Weizman (a planned meeting with Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu had to be canceled at the last minute). This initiative by CRIF elicited some criticism, most notably from France’s chief rabbi, Joseph Sitruk, who called it “a form of pressure exerted on the cabinet in Jerusalem.”

An odd event concerning French-Israeli relations occurred on May 3, when Mohammed Daoud Odeh, a Palestinian better known as Abu Daoud, was refused entry into France, where he had hoped to promote the autobiography he had written in collaboration with a French journalist. Abu Daoud had been responsible for the hostage-taking incident at the 1972 Olympic games in Munich, during which 11 members of the Israeli contingent were killed. In 1999, however, Daoud sat as a member of the Palestinian National Council, and moved freely between Gaza and Ramallah without being disturbed by Israeli authorities. France treated him more harshly than the Israeli government. This was because Abu Daoud had been arrested in France in 1977, and the government of the day, not wanting to turn him over to the German justice system for fear of unleashing a wave of terrorist attacks, chose instead to expel him from French territory. This expulsion order, never annulled, was still in place when Abu Daoud tried to cross the border in 1999.

France followed the Israeli election of May 1999 with great interest, and public opinion across the political spectrum favored Ehud Barak. Thus the editor of the right-wing daily newspaper Le Figaro wrote the day after the election, “Israel had to find in Ehud Barak an heir worthy of Yitzhak Rabin, so that the parenthesis of the Netanyahu era could be closed so authoritatively.”

For his part, the new Israeli prime minister promised Europe—France in particular—a role to play in renewed diplomatic efforts to find peace in the Middle East, and the French were quite receptive to this prospect. Both President Chirac and Prime Minister Jospin applauded Barak’s visit to France in September, followed a few days later by a visit from Yasir Arafat, as the beginning of a new era for French involvement in Middle East diplomacy.

Anti-Semitism and Racism

In January 1999, the International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism (LICRA) — which was, despite its name, a French organization — elected Patrick Gaubert as its new president. A dentist by profession, Gaubert has been an adviser to right-wing politician Charles Pasqua when the latter had been minister of the interior, and in this capacity Gaubert had done much to combat racist activities. This record — plus the fact that he was Jewish — earned Gaubert vicious personal attacks from the far right, including death threats.

The National Consultative Commission on Human Rights, a body under the aegis of the prime minister’s office (though the prime minister is not obligated to follow its advice), published the results of its annual survey, conducted by the CSA
Institute, on the state of racism and xenophobia in France. The commission reported that 38 percent of the French population described themselves as "rather" or "a bit" racist, compared to 24 percent who were "not very" racist, and 36 percent who said they were "not racist at all." Compared to the findings of previous years, this marked a slight decline in the proportion of self-declared racists.

The findings on attitudes toward immigrants showed some contradictions. Thus 79 percent agreed with the statement, deliberately phrased to identify latent as well as overt anti-immigrant feeling, that "the behavior of certain people can sometimes justify racist reactions," and 50 percent agreed with the statement, "Today, in France, one no longer feels at home as in the past." But at the same time, 67 percent accepted the idea that one of the criteria for judging a democracy was "its ability to integrate foreigners," 69 percent believed that "immigrant laborers should be regarded as being at home here because they contribute to the economy," and 60 percent endorsed the statement that "immigrants in France offer a source of cultural enrichment."

The survey also asked respondents to rate different minority groups: 62 percent found North Africans "nice" ("sympathique"), a figure that rose to 74 percent for black Africans, 75 percent for Jews, 78 percent for Asians, and 85 percent for those from the French West Indies (Martinique and Guadeloupe, which are part of the French republic). On the other hand, 51 percent declared that there were too many Arabs in France (down from 70 percent in 1990), 30 percent that there were too many blacks (46 percent in 1991), 24 percent that there were too many Asians (35 percent in 1991), and 14 percent that there were too many Jews (21 percent in 1991).

In May 1999, France witnessed an unprecedented event: the official opening of legal proceedings against one of the top judges in the land for "racial insults." The case was brought against Alain Terrail, who was, until quite recently, general counsel to the Appeals Court, one of the highest positions in the French judicial hierarchy. In 1998 Terrail had written an article for the newsletter of a small judges' association with a distinctly right-wing political stance. In the article, he had attacked a judge named Albert Levy in such a way that Levy's name was strangely linked with the word "oven." Terrail denied that he was suggesting a connection with the Nazi crematoria, and asserted that no anti-Semitic slur was intended. But the minister of justice, Élisabeth Guigou, reacted immediately. Terrail was forced to resign, and charges were laid against him. Another judge, Georges Fenech, who was publisher of the newsletter at the time the article attacking Levy appeared, was also charged.

In September, Jean d'Ormesson published a book, Le Rapport Gabriel, which recounted a conversation he had had with François Mitterrand shortly before the end of Mitterrand's presidential term in 1995 (he died a year later). D'Ormesson raised the issue of the criticism Mitterrand had received for maintaining his friendship with René Bousquet, chief of police under the Vichy government and organizer of the roundup of Jews bound for Auschwitz at the Germans' request. In response, Mitterrand had brought up "the powerful and noxious influence of
the Jewish lobby." Publication of this comment by Mitterrand—which d'Ormesson quoted but did not endorse—brought impassioned reactions. Some were certain that it was false, that Mitterrand could never have said such a thing; others declared that even if he said it, that did not make him an anti-Semite; still others agreed with the remark. In France, the word "lobby" carried a decidedly negative connotation. The very idea that a group could organize itself to protect its interests separate and apart from the general political will was considered intolerable, no matter how legitimate those interests might be. What's more, the concept of a "Jewish lobby" harked back to the rhetoric of France's far-right tradition—from Philippe Pétain to Jean-Marie Le Pen—against "the Jews and the freemasons."

**Holocaust Denial**

In the portrait gallery of Holocaust deniers, 1999 saw the arrival of a new character. He was Jean Plantin, 35 years old, who lived in Lyons with his 75-year-old mother—with no officially declared income. On May 27 Plantin was given a six-month suspended sentence and a 10,000-franc fine for having "advertised for a publication that is dangerous to young people" in the third issue of a small magazine he published, Akribeia. The publication in question denied the reality of the Holocaust. This did not discourage Plantin, however, and in the next issue he published material that earned him yet another conviction on October 7. This time the charge was "contesting the existence of crimes against humanity," and he got a six-month suspended sentence and a 30,000-franc fine.

A decade or so earlier, Plantin had studied history in his home town of Lyons, and in 1990 he submitted a master's thesis dedicated to Paul Rassinier, the founder of Holocaust revisionism in France. The next year he published a thesis for his advanced diploma (under the French university system, this is between a master's degree and a doctorate) on the typhus epidemics in the concentration camps, which, he argued, were what killed most of the Jews who died during World War II. These two revisionist theses were approved at the time by two professors at the university. Plantin's recent revisionist activities attracted attention to those earlier writings, and criticism came from the press and from within the university, since, in France, Holocaust denial constitutes a crime. The two professors who had approved the theses affirmed that they rejected Holocaust denial, but in late April both announced that they would no longer direct postgraduate research projects at the university.

**Other Holocaust-Related Matters**

According to a poll conducted by the CSA Institute and published on December 20, 1999, in the daily Le Parisien, a plurality of the French considered the fall of the Berlin Wall "the political event of the century" (47 percent, with
up to three responses allowed). The Holocaust took second place (26 percent), followed by the French student revolt of May 1968 (23 percent). World War I (22 percent), and the assassination of John F. Kennedy (20 percent). That more people chose the Holocaust than World War I—during which France lost a million and a half killed, and which was, despite the passage of time, still commemorated by monuments to the dead in even the tiniest village—was astonishing.

In the collective consciousness of contemporary France, the Shoah (this Hebrew term had entered fully into current usage, as the word *Holocauste* had practically disappeared, and the word *génocide* had a much broader application) had come to symbolize the inability of people in the 20th century to control the forces of evil. Actually, French historians had not studied the ghettos of Eastern Europe, the mass executions in Russia or the extermination camps, and the French public was not particularly well informed about the details of any of these. Rather, people were fascinated by the French dimension: the roundups of Jews (usually by the local police chief under orders from the occupying German commander) and their transport to Auschwitz (handled directly by the Germans).

**Papon**

The year 1999 saw the conclusion of the jury trial of Maurice Papon, which had begun two years earlier in the city of Bordeaux. From 1942 to 1944 Papon had served as a young bureaucrat in the collaborationist Vichy government led by Philippe Pétain. Papon was accused of having organized, under orders from the occupying Germans, four convoys of Jews from Bordeaux to a camp called Drancy, from which the Germans then took them to Auschwitz. After a six-month trial, he had been sentenced on April 21, 1998, to ten years in prison for "complicity in crimes against humanity."

Much about the case was symbolic. Papon had been quite low in the French administrative hierarchy when the crimes took place. Furthermore, he was not considered a Nazi collaborator or even an anti-Semite. In a profound sense, the verdict was a judgment against the Vichy government's participation—often passive, but nevertheless real—in the persecution of the Jews. In 1995 President Chirac had publicly acknowledged the responsibility of "*l'État français*"—an ambiguous term that could mean either the French state as an abstraction, or, specifically, the Vichy state of World War II—for the events of that time. The Papon trial translated that principle to the legal arena—a translation all the more stunning since Papon, who joined the Gaullist movement at the end of the war, went on to a brilliant administrative and political career.

The trial's end turned out to be heavy with symbolism as well. Papon, who appealed his conviction, remained free until the appeal could be heard and decided by France's highest court. But on October 19 it was discovered that Papon had fled. For ten days, all of France focused on this incredible episode, as the police launched a manhunt for an 89-year-old former police chief and minister. Some
imagined him already in Latin America, in a country that had no extradition treaty with France. Finally, he was traced to Switzerland, where he had been hiding since October 11 under a false identity. On October 22, Papon was returned to France, where, his appeal rejected, he began to serve his prison term. But his lawyer had already launched another appeal, this time to the European Court of Justice. Meanwhile, some of his friends asked that he be pardoned because of heart problems (President Chirac denied the request a few months later).

**Nazi War Criminals**

During 1999, the French judicial system completed the procedural steps to try Alois Brunner for crimes against humanity. This would mean a trial in absentia, since the Nazi criminal was last seen in Syria, where he found refuge during the 1950s. If alive, he would be 87 years old. Right-hand man to his fellow Austrian Adolf Eichmann, Brunner supervised the deportation of 130,000 Jews—Austrians, Germans, Greeks, French, and Slovaks. Based in France in 1943 and 1944, he was best known for running the Drancy camp from which French Jews were deported to Auschwitz.

In 1954, Brunner was condemned to death in absentia for war crimes by courts in both Paris and Marseilles. But he was beyond the reach of French justice, having taken refuge in Damascus under the name Georg Fischer. Since then, there had been news about Brunner: He had been wounded by a parcel bomb addressed to him, and there was the text of an interview he gave in 1985 to a German magazine. But the Syrian government consistently refused to respond to questions about Brunner. According to the official line in Damascus, no one had ever heard of him.

The two lawyers who initiated the legal proceedings, Serge Klarsfeld and Charles Libman, focused on elements that were not considered in the two earlier cases. The most important of these was Brunner’s removal from Drancy of 352 children, of whom 345 were deported either to Auschwitz-Birkenau or Bergen-Belsen, and 284 of whom were later murdered. This fell under the category of crimes against humanity, and according to a French law passed in 1964, such crimes were subject to no statute of limitations.

**Restitution**

On February 2, 1999, the commission charged with reviewing the archives on property stolen during World War II, headed by Jean Mattéoli, submitted its second interim report to the prime minister. The final report was expected early in 2000.

On March 24, the French Banking Association solemnly promised to restore “all the heirless property held in banks that belonged to victims of the Shoah.” This promise, though late, was met with satisfaction. According to Professor Ady
Steg, former president of CRIF and vice president of the Mattéoli Commission, "When we started, the banks were very reticent. They told us the records could not be found, there had been mergers since the liberation, etc. Then they went to work. Little by little, the truth became apparent. To me, their cooperation is now 100 percent. The banks are walking the walk."

In 1998, the Mattéoli Commission (whose mandate was limited to fact-finding) had proposed the creation of a special commission to review individual restitution requests. Prime Minister Jospin had agreed in principle in November 1998, and Justice Minister Élisabeth Guigou announced in July 1999 that such a commission would be established. This happened at the end of the year, and it was scheduled to begin its work in earnest early in 2000. Presided over by Pierre Drai—an Algerian Jew who, as first president of the Court of Appeals, held the highest position in the French judicial system—the new commission is to have broad powers to examine individual claims, even beyond those the law normally allows, and trustees will be required to accept its rulings.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Demography

Little was known about the Jewish population of France, either in terms of demographic trends, religious practices, perceptions of Jewish identity, or incidence of mixed marriage. Religious or ethnic identity was not recorded in any official document or in the national census, and any such mention would have been against French law. Responses to public-opinion polls taken in the last few years indicated that Jews made up about 1 percent of the French population, approximately 700,000 people. Membership in Jewish communal institutions was low—but a reluctance to affiliate with nongovernmental organizations, including labor unions, was a characteristic of French society generally. Jewish organizations jealously guarded their membership records. Paradoxically, while Jews had become more visible in French society and culture, they remained statistically elusive.

Education

Jewish schools remained the strongest institutions in French Jewish life. According to the department of education of the Fonds Social Juif Unifié (FSJU, United Jewish Philanthropic Fund), 23,104 students were registered with Jewish schools in 1999 in classes "under contract" with the national Ministry of Education. This "contract" meant that the students received an education based on the official programs used in the public schools, and that the state paid the teachers' salaries for those subjects. The schools had the option of offering additional subjects, the fees for which were paid by parents or by associations supporting
the schools. In addition, there were Jewish schools “without contracts,” and hence not subject to direct state control, and they had slightly over 2,000 students. Thus approximately 25,000 children, some 20 percent of Jewish school-age children (6–18 years old) attended a full-time Jewish day school.

This was a remarkable phenomenon in historical terms. Just after World War II, France had only three Jewish schools, and in 1999 it had 220. In the last ten years the number of students attending Jewish schools had increased by 40 percent. Previously, the schools had welcomed younger students, but steered the older ones toward public schools. Recently, however, schools had been adding classes for the older grades.

While the “contract” system, with its state funding, provided a financial boost for the growth of day schools, and a decline in the reputation of the public schools led many families to send their children to private schools, the new popularity of Jewish day schools also indicated parental interest in transmitting Jewish identity. Almost all of the schools had a religious orientation, with the Orthodox tendency heavily represented.

Communal Affairs

On April 18, the closing concert of one of the most important popular-music festivals in France, the Printemps de Bourges, was dedicated to Judeo-Arab music. The main performer was Enrico Macias, who had achieved fame performing songs with melodies inspired by Arab-Andalusian folklore and lyrics that told the stories of the pieds noirs—the million French people who had to leave Algeria when it became independent in 1962, after a long and bloody war.

Macias, born Gaston Ghrénassia, was the son of a Jewish Algerian musician. He had made his debut alongside his father in the band led by Raymond Leyris, which, in the Algerian city of Constantine, was a symbol of Jewish-Arab cultural symbiosis. Leyris (“Sheikh Raymond”), son of a Jewish Algerian and a non-Jewish Frenchwoman, was Macias’s teacher and father-in-law. His assassination in 1961 by Muslims fighting for independence marked the end of an era for the Jews in the region. Now, in 1999, the concert at Bourges in tribute to Sheikh Raymond brought Macias together with the Algerian band of Taoufik Bestandji. This collaboration between a Jewish singer and an Algerian band seemed to hint at the beginning of a historic reconciliation between Algerian Jews, forced to leave a country where they had lived for centuries, and the Algerian people of today, and, in a broader sense, between the Jewish world and the Muslim Arab world.

On July 29, 1999, Odette Abadi committed suicide in her Paris apartment at the age of 85. Born Odette Rosenstock, she had studied medicine, and at a very young age had joined the ranks of the antifascists in the Spanish Civil War. While in Nice in 1942 she became reacquainted with Moussa Abadi, whom she had known before, a young Jew from Syria who had come to France to study literature. When the Italian army, which had occupied Nice since 1940, handed it over
to the Germans, the two started "the Marcel network," an underground operation to hide Jewish children, with help from Archbishop Rémond of Nice. They saved 527 children this way. In April 1944, the French police arrested Odette and handed her over to the Germans, who sent her to Auschwitz. There, and in Bergen-Belsen, she survived by working as a doctor. On returning to France, she found Moussa Abadi, who had escaped the Nazis, and they married. They remained very discreet about their role in the Resistance, and only the loyalty of the "Abadi children" caused the story to come to public attention. Moussa Abadi died in 1997, and apparently Odette, who had no children, decided to follow him, after leaving good-bye letters to her friends.

Two Jewish social-service organizations merged in 1999—CASIP (Comité d’Action Sociale Israélite de Paris, the Israeliite Social Action Committee of Paris), and COJASOR (Comité Juif d’Action Sociale et de Reconstruction, the Jewish Committee of Social Action and Reconstruction). CASIP, founded 190 years ago and headed by Éric de Rothschild, helped Jewish families in and around Paris, the majority of which were of North African origin. COJASOR, led by Jean-Claude Picard, was established soon after the Holocaust to care for refugees, and in recent years it had primarily run social-service programs and retreat centers. The organization born of the merger, Fondation CASIP-COJASOR, will have Éric de Rothschild as president, Jean-Claude Picard as vice president, and Gabriel Vadnai as director general, the same post he held in CASIP.

Religion

The French republic did not recognize any "religion," since religion was regarded as belonging to the private sphere. Instead, the republic recognized what it called "cultes": institutional manifestations that benefited from tax advantages and were eligible to receive donations and bequests. To be recognized as a culte, an institution was legally required to meet three criteria: universality, respectability, and respect for public order. In addition to Christian denominations, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism were recognized as cultes.

The traditional framework for administering the Jewish culte in France was the consistory system. Established by Napoleon I in the early 19th century, the consistories were religious institutions made up of directors elected at a local or regional level by synagogue members. With typically French logic, this structure was crowned by a Central Consistory of France, whose rabbi was the chief rabbi of France, just as the rabbi of the Paris Consistory was the chief rabbi of Paris.

However, the consistories were not guaranteed protection from competing organizations, and they had no legal power (except in the three eastern departments that were part of Germany when France separated religion from state in the early-20th century). Thus they could not claim any special legitimacy relative to the "nonconsistorial" communities that developed over the years. In fact, the consistories labored under burdens not shared by their competitors. In light of their
central position in the tradition of French Jewry, the consistories were required
to assume certain tasks in the public interest (maintenance of synagogues, social
functions), which absorbed a large part of their budget. The non-consistorial
communities, however, could choose their spheres of activity. One consequence
of this imbalance was the dominant position of independent ultra-Orthodox
communities—Chabad-Lubavitch in particular—in education, where the consis-
tories played only a marginal role.

In recent years considerable conflict had arisen between the Central Consis-
tory and the Paris Consistory, to a great extent rooted in disagreements over the
central body's demands for assessment payments that would have had to come
out of the money the Paris body received for certifying kosher products. Rela-
tions between Central Consistory president Jean Kahn and Paris Consistory
president Moïse Cohen had deteriorated, a situation made more difficult by
Kahn's serious health problems. Tensions increased during 1999, and although
not all the incidents reached the public ear, by the end of the year the cohesion
of the consistorial system appeared seriously compromised. Complicating mat-
ters even further, Chief Rabbi Joseph Sitruk, who was formally responsible to the
Central Consistory, expressed his autonomy by continuing to maintain his own
network of followers and donors. On October 31, he organized a large public rally
near Paris called Yom HaTorah (Torah Day).

Jewish-Christian Relations

On February 7, 1999, Paul Thibaud was elected president of the AJCF (l'Ami-
tié Judéo-Chrétienne de France). France's Jewish-Christian friendship organiza-
tion. He succeeded historian Pierre Pierrard, president since 1985. Thibaud, for-
ter publisher of the magazine Esprit, was one of France's most eminent Catholic
intellectuals. At the same time, four people were elected to the AJCF board:
Shmuel Trigano, sociologist and head of the Collège des Études Juives, the Jewish-
studies college at the Alliance Israélite Universelle; Paul Bernard, a 22-year-old
student and member of the Mouvement Juif Libéral de France (Liberal Jewish
Movement of France); Guy Petitdemange, a Jesuit and philosophy professor; and
Jean-Claude Eslin of Esprit.

Culture

For 22 years, the port of Douarnenez in Brittany had hosted an annual festi-
val devoted to "the cinema of minority and minoritized cultures." The theme of
the 1999 festival was "Yiddishland." From July 10 to 17, visitors could see a large
selection of Yiddish-language and other Jewish films. There were also concerts
of Yiddish songs and klezmer music, lectures on Ashkenazi Jewish culture, and
a display on the Yiddish press, as well as exhibitions of paintings and pho-
tographs, debates on Jewish culture and human rights, and Jewish books for sale.
Some of the visitors were Jews from various regions of France (there were very few Jews in Brittany), but many were French non-Jews who viewed Jewish culture as a minority expression deserving of protection. This event was organized by Jean-François Malthête, grandson of Georges Méliès, one of the founders of French cinema. Malthête, though not Jewish, had devoted years to learning and teaching Yiddish and Hebrew.

A noteworthy event in the world of film was the release of Emmanuel Finkiel's *Voyages*, shot partially in Yiddish, which dealt with three women's memories of the Holocaust. Praised unanimously by the critics, this was Finkiel's first full-length feature. Also worth noting was *Un spécialiste*, a film by Rony Brauman and Eyal Sivan about the Jerusalem trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, which consisted entirely of documentary footage.

Also in 1999, the library of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, the main Jewish library in France, celebrated the tenth anniversary of its renovation. Located in Paris, it had a large collection of documents and historical works. The anniversary was celebrated with a number of public events, and leading French personalities participated.

In theatre, the Molière prize for best play was awarded to Jean-Claude Grumberg's *L'Atelier* (The Workshop), a play about the Jews in France just after the Holocaust that had been performed periodically by various French theatres over the last several years.

Finally, there were two exhibitions, in Aix-en-Provence and Marseilles, devoted to Varian Fry, an American who saved thousands of people during World War II, including many Jews. Fry had to work against the opposition of the Vichy government and his own consulate. The exhibitions, which received considerable attention in the press, presented the works of artists whom he helped to escape from France. Fry, who died in 1967, wrote a memoir of the period, *Assignment: Rescue*, which appeared in French as *La liste noire*.

**Publications**

A number of significant nonfiction works on Jewish themes appeared in 1999: Georges-Elia Sarfati's *Discours ordinaire et identités juives* (Ordinary Discourse and Jewish Identities); Maurice-Ruben Hayoun's *Le Zohar — Aux origines de la mystique juive* (The Zohar: The Origins of Jewish Mysticism); Claude Klein's *Israël, un État en quête d'identité* (Israel: A State in Search of an Identity); *Jésus dans la littérature arabe et hébraïque contemporaine* (Jesus in Contemporary Arabic and Hebraic Literature) by Jean-Marie Delmaire and Najib Zakka; Philippe Landau's *Les Juifs et la Grande Guerre* (The Jews and the Great War, referring to World War I); Annette Wieviorka's *Auschwitz expliqué à ma fille* (Auschwitz Explained to My Daughter); *Le Mal et l'Exil* (Evil and Exile) by Elie Wiesel and Michaël de Saint Cheron; *Yiddishland* by Gérard Silvain and Henri Minczeles (an album of period postcards with commentary); *Enseigner le judaïsme à l'univer-
sité (Teaching Judaism in the University) by Jean-Christophe Attias and Pierre Gisel; Gérard Nahon’s *La Terre sainte au temps des kabbalistes* (The Holy Land at the Time of the Kabbalists); Shmuel Trigano’s *L’idéal démocratique à l’épreuve de la Shoah* (The Democratic Ideal Confronts the Holocaust); Gérard Israël’s *La question chrétienne* (The Christian Question, about how Jews have viewed Christianity); *La loi juive à l’aube du XXIe siècle* (Jewish Law at the Dawn of the Twenty-first Century) by Rivon Krygier, a French Conservative rabbi; Delphine Deroo’s *Les enfants de la Martellière* (Children of the Martellière, about a group of children who were hidden during World War II, most of whom were eventually deported by the Nazis); Nadine Fresco’s *Fabrication d’un antisémite* (a biography of Paul Rassinier, one of France’s first Holocaust deniers); Stéphane Mosés’s *L’Éros et la loi* (Eros and Law, a biblical study); *Le judaïsme libéral* (Liberal Judaism) by Pauline Bebe, a French Reform rabbi; Mireille Hadas-Lebel’s *Hillel*; Marek Halter’s *Le judaïsme raconté à mes filuleuls* (Judaism Told to My Godchildren); *La parole et l’écrit* (The Spoken and Written Word) by the late Orthodox rabbi Léon Askénazi.

Works of fiction included Emmanuel Mosès’s *La danse de la poussière dans les rayons du soleil* (Dance of the Dust in the Sun’s Rays); Michèle Kahn’s *Savannah*; Maya Nahum’s *Les gestes* (Deeds); Cyrille Fleischman’s *Un slow des années 50* (A Fifties Slow Dance); Laurent Seksik’s *Les mauvaises pensées* (Bad Thoughts); Robert Bober’s *Berg et Beck* (Berg and Beck).

**Personalia**

Henry Bulawko, president of the Amicale des Anciens Déportés d’Auschwitz (Society of Former Auschwitz Deportees) and vice president of CRIF, was named a commander of the Legion of Honor. Théo Klein, a lawyer and former president of CRIF, was named an officer of the Legion of Honor. Rabbi Paul Roitman, an activist for religious Zionism in France and, more recently, in Israel, was made an honorary citizen of the city of Jerusalem.

The following prominent Jews died in 1999: Yves Jouffa, former president of the Ligue des Droits de l’Homme (Human Rights League), 78, on January 13; Elie Kagan, news photographer, 70, on January 25; Jean Pierre-Bloch, former president of LICRA, 93, on March 17; Loleh Bellon, actor and playwright, 74, on May 22; Nathalie Sarraute, writer, 99, on October 19.

**Meir Waintrater**
Italy

National Affairs

In March, former Italian prime minister Romano Prodi was named president of the European Commission. Carlo Azeglio Ciampi became president of Italy in May, succeeding Oscar Luigi Scalfaro. Throughout the spring, Italy was a key staging point for NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia. The left-wing government of Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema was strained by squabbling among coalition partners and fell briefly in December, but D'Alema managed to put together a new government—Italy's 57th since World War II—within a few days. The Kosovo bombings and general instability in the Balkans, which spurred thousands to seek asylum in Italy, made immigration and refugee issues major themes throughout the year.

On a visit to the synagogue in Turin in January, President Scalfaro praised ethnic diversity. Turin had been the scene of recent tensions between native Italians and Muslim immigrants. Although Scalfaro had had numerous previous contacts with Jewish leaders, the visit was believed to be his first to an Italian synagogue as president.

Italy's commitment to diverse ways of life came into question in the summer over a child-custody case. A family court in Genoa separated two Israeli girls from their mother, who had become Orthodox, and placed them in the custody of their non-observant father, who was living in Italy. The court dismissed the claim of the mother, Tali Pikan, to her daughters because, it said, she belonged to a "religious cult"—fervently Orthodox Judaism. The court strictly limited her contact with the children and even barred her from speaking Hebrew to them. Instead, it ordered the father, Moshe Dulberg, to wean the girls from Orthodoxy so that they might “gradually reenter alternative cultural and behavioral models.” Agudath Israel, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, the European Council of Rabbis, and other international groups protested that the decision showed bias against the Jewish religion. In December, a Genoa appeals court threw out the ruling and set a new custody hearing for April 2000.

In February, Gianfranco Fini, the leader of the right-wing Alleanza Nazionale, made a brief visit to Auschwitz. Many Jewish commentators viewed the trip as part of Fini's continuing effort to prove that his party was a “normal” democratic right-wing party despite its neo-fascist roots.

During the summer, Jews protested an attempt by Italy's Radical Party to forge an alliance in the European Parliament with France's far-right Front National.
The alliance—which was to be purely administrative, with no ideological or programmatic implications—was part of a broader Radical plan to link up with a number of other small European parties that operated outside the major political blocs in the European Parliament. One of the most vocal protests came from Bruno Zevi, a prominent Jewish architect who was honorary president of the Radicals. In December Zevi announced he was quitting the party over this issue.

Attempts to affix plaques or to name streets in honor of supporters of the fascist regime created controversy. In November the local government of Palermo decided to reconsider a decision to name a street after Giuseppe Maggiore, a former rector of the University of Palermo, after a newspaper pointed out that he had strongly supported the fascist-era anti-Semitic laws. In September, after years of debate, the University of Pisa decided to commemorate an illustrious alumnus and professor, Giovanni Gentile, who was Mussolini's education minister before being killed by partisans in 1944. A plaque would be affixed that honored Gentile as a philosopher, but condemned his involvement in the fascist regime.

Israel and the Middle East

There was considerable contact between Israel and Italy of a political, commercial, cultural, scholarly, and touristic nature. Italy was Israel's third largest trading partner, after the U.S. and Germany, and the Israeli embassy's cultural section promoted concerts, performances, and exhibits by Israeli actors, artists, writers, and filmmakers.

Israeli foreign minister Ariel Sharon visited Italy in April. In July the small town of Scanzano Jonico, in southern Italy, became a sister city with Ashkelon. On a state visit in October, President Ciampi planted an olive tree in the Forest of Peace in Jerusalem in memory of his longtime friend, scientist Elvio Sadun. Also in October, when soccer star Roberto Baggio went to Israel to promote soccer contacts among young people, Prime Minister Barak received him. In October, too, in Rome, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem held its 18th European Conference for Peace, on the theme “Jerusalem, cradle of three religions, in the coming millennium.” Jews, Christians, and Muslims took part. Prime Minister D’Alema celebrated Christmas in Bethlehem at the invitation of Palestinian president Yasir Arafat. At the beginning of December, D’Alema paid a landmark visit to Libya where he and Libyan head of state Col. Muammar Qaddafi issued a joint statement pledging to fight terrorism.

Vatican-Mideast Relations

After months of speculation, the Vatican announced in November that the pope would make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in March 2000 to mark the start of the third millennium of Christianity.
There was talk that the pope might go to Iraq, since it was known that he wanted to visit Ur, the traditional birthplace of Abraham, as part of his millennial pilgrimage. Opposition came from the U.S., Britain, and Jewish groups, as well as from Iraqi exiles hostile to Saddam Hussein’s regime. Vatican officials traveled to Iraq in November to discuss plans for the trip. But in December, a Vatican spokesman announced that it would not take place, citing Iraqi complaints about UN sanctions, as well as security concerns.

Throughout the year the Vatican maintained an interest in the peace process and other events in the Middle East. In April Israeli foreign minister Sharon met for more than two hours at the Vatican with top church officials, including a half-hour private audience with the pope. According to a Vatican statement the talks centered on “the tormented peace process in the Middle East, on the conditions of the presence and activity of the Catholic Church in the country, as well as on the necessary cooperation in view of the celebration” of the millennium. Sharon told reporters that he had underscored that “Jerusalem has been the capital of the Jewish people for 3,000 years and the capital of the state of Israel for 51. It will never be divided. It will always be the only and indivisible capital of Israel.” The Vatican had long maintained that Jerusalem should be either internationalized as a holy city, or made the capital of both Israel and an eventual Palestinian state. Vatican officials had called the Israeli occupation of eastern Jerusalem illegal.

In June the Vatican sent a letter to the World Jewish Congress calling the arrest of 13 Iranian Jews a “matter of concern” to all those committed to human rights. In September the pope met with King Abdullah, Jordan’s new monarch. The pope discussed with him his own desire to visit biblical sites as well as the “new positive climate” for peace in the Middle East. That same month, in a message written to three teenagers from the Israel-based Peres Center for Peace, the pope urged Israeli and Palestinian youth to maintain the momentum of the Middle East peace process so that it “will grow ever stronger and lead to an effective and lasting peace.”

Israel’s attempt to defuse a Christian-Muslim conflict in Nazareth soured relations with the Vatican and called into question whether the pope would visit the town during his March 2000 millennium pilgrimage. The conflict centered on plans to construct a mosque in Nazareth near the Basilica of the Annunciation, believed by Christians to be the spot where the Archangel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would bear the son of God. Israel granted the go-ahead for the mosque after two years of mounting tension and violent clashes between local Christians and Muslims. Muslims laid the cornerstone at a ceremony on November 23. In protest, churches throughout Israel shut their doors for two days, November 22–23, and the Vatican lashed out at Israel for fomenting division among religions. Israeli foreign minister David Levy told Israel Radio that the Vatican statement was “very grave” and that “we reject it.”
Holocaust-Related Developments

A commission set up by the government at the end of 1998 examined hundreds of documents relating to the confiscation of Jewish possessions under the fascist regime before and during World War II. The material confiscated, it turned out, had included not only valuables but also household objects such as brooms, bathroom fixtures, nightgowns, books, and shower caps.

Senior government officials, including President Scalfaro, took part in commemorative ceremonies in Rome on January 27 and 28 marking the liberation of Auschwitz. On January 27, the actual anniversary of the liberation, there was a ceremony marking the establishment of the Children of the Shoah Association. Several speakers renewed calls for the government to declare the day a national "Day of Memory." That same day, in a downtown Rome piazza, there was a separate, open-air "Day of Memory" commemoration sponsored by the Jewish community, a Roma (Gypsy) study center, and other private organizations. On January 28, Luciano Violante, president of the Chamber of Deputies (who is himself of Jewish origin) launched a book, published by the chamber, *La persecuzione degli ebrei durante il fascismo—Le leggi del 1938* (The Persecution of the Jews During Fascism—The Laws of 1938). The book was made available free to schools around the country. Also at the end of January, Rome’s mayor Francesco Rutelli led a delegation of 400 Roman students and various dignitaries on a commemorative visit to Auschwitz.

In March, Scalfaro, Rutelli and other top government officials marked another anniversary, that of the March 24, 1944, massacre of 335 Roman men and boys, 75 of them Jews, at the Ardeatine Caves south of Rome. The massacre, the worst Nazi atrocity in Italy, was ordered in retaliation for a partisan attack that killed 33 German soldiers. Elio Toaff, chief rabbi of Rome, and a Roman Catholic priest presided at the memorial ceremony. Some Jewish and partisan groups, however, protested posters put up by the Rome municipal government to advertise the ceremony, which read: "Rome, city of peace, confirms its support for those who fought and died for democracy, and expresses respect and mercy for the defeated." The protestors complained that this seemed to pay respect to the Nazis. Indeed, there were right-wing Italians who blamed the Ardeatine Caves massacre on the partisans, arguing that the massacre would not have taken place had those who killed the German soldiers turned themselves in. Surviving members of the partisan squad were sued by two right-wing Italian parties for having provoked the massacre, but in March Italy’s highest court threw out the suit, ruling that the partisan attack was a legitimate act of war.

On October 16, the 56th anniversary of the Nazi deportation of Roman Jews, the San Egidio community, a Catholic group that advocates human rights, joined the Rome Jewish community in sponsoring a memorial march through the center of the city. Marchers carried a banner reading: "Those who don't remember the past are condemned to repeat it."
A case involving stolen artwork was resolved in October. In 1997 Italian authorities had confiscated five paintings from a gallery in Florence—on loan from a New Zealand museum—because a Florentine Jewish family claimed the paintings had been taken from their home during World War II. The case was settled by compromise: three of the paintings went back to New Zealand and two to the family.

In November a survey carried out for the magazine *Liberal* asked which event Italians thought was the most important of the century. The largest number of respondents—37 percent—cited the landing on the moon, while the second largest, 32 percent, said the Holocaust. A similar year-end poll by the daily *Corriere della Sera* put the Holocaust in first place.

**Nazi War Criminals**

The trial of former Nazi officer Theodor Saevecke, accused of killing 15 anti-fascist Italians in Milan's piazza Loreto on August 10, 1944, continued before a military court in Turin. In mid-December, 87-year-old Erich Priebke, the former SS captain who was sentenced to life in prison in March 1998 for his role in the Ardeatine Caves massacre, was hospitalized after suffering a heart attack. Priebke had been serving his sentence under house arrest.

**Anti-Semitism and Racism**

There was concern throughout the year over skinhead and other extreme right-wing activity. As in several other countries, particular attention was focused on the behavior of extremist soccer fans who often waved anti-Semitic banners. For years Jewish leaders had been trying to get soccer authorities to do something about the problem. In March there was a conference on the issue at the Rome Jewish Center, with the participation of journalists, soccer personalities, and even Rome's mayor. In September, Enzo Foschi, a member of Rome's Municipal Council, warned that skinhead fans were turning whole sections of stadiums into "a megaphone for the xenophobic and racist extreme right" and driving out other fans. He criticized the authorities for not taking action.

There were two disturbing incidents in November. A rudimentary bomb damaged the entrance to Rome's Liberation Museum in downtown via Tasso, an institution dedicated to commemorating the anti-fascist resistance. Three days later police defused a similar homemade bomb at the entrance to a Rome movie theater that had presented a special screening of a documentary on Adolf Eichmann. Anonymous callers saying they represented the "anti-Zionist movement" claimed responsibility for both bombs (police, however, were inclined to believe that the second was a copycat crime). Authorities stepped up security at other possible targets, and the government vowed once again to clamp down on racist and anti-Semitic behavior in the soccer stands. On November 28, in an important match
in Rome, players took the field in overshirts bearing the slogan "No to Anti-Semitism, Violence and Racism." On December 8, the Rome Jewish community, in cooperation with other organizations, sponsored a daylong program of concerts, debates, and discussions at the Liberation Museum to promote tolerance and protest racism.

Earlier in the year, a multimedia kit, Antisemitismo Perche? (Why Anti-Semitism?), was prepared as a project by students at a Rome high school and made available to the public. It included interviews with skinheads and other right-wingers, as well as historical documents.

**JEWISH COMMUNITY**

**Demography**

About 26,000 people were registered as members of Italian Jewish communities. Since many others did not formally affiliate, the total number of Jews was estimated at 30,000 to 40,000. Three-quarters of Italy’s Jews lived in two cities: Rome, with about 15,000, and Milan, with about 10,000. The rest were scattered in a score of other towns and cities, mostly in northern and central Italy.

About half of Italy’s Jews were born in the country, and most of the others had arrived in the past few decades. Somewhere between a third and a half of Rome’s Jews were Libyan Jews, or their offspring, who fled after bloody anti-Jewish riots following the 1967 Six-Day War. The Milan Jewish community included recent arrivals from more than two dozen countries. The largest contingent was from Iran, with many Jews hailing from other Middle Eastern countries.

How to maintain Jewish life and Jewish identity in small, scattered communities was an ongoing problem. At the national congress of Italy’s Jewish communities in 1998, representatives of small communities—some with only a few score or a few hundred members—complained that the two big communities, Rome and Milan, ignored their interests. This year, on March 14, representatives of small and medium-sized communities—Casale, Genoa, Bologna, Padova, Venice, Mantua, Pisa, Turin, and Florence—met in Florence to discuss common challenges. This was the first such meeting ever held.

**Communal Affairs**

Italy’s Jews are nominally Orthodox—there are no Reform or Conservative movements. Those converted by non-Orthodox rabbis abroad are not permitted membership in Italian Jewish communities, and adult conversions, even of the Orthodox variety, are discouraged. Three types of rites are celebrated: Sephardi, Ashkenazi, and Italian—a local rite that evolved from the Jewish community that lived in Italy before the destruction of the Temple.
Chabad-Lubavitch was also a growing presence in Italy. In Venice, a Chabad House as well as a Chabad yeshivah, almost all of whose students were foreigners, operated in the historic ghetto, and there was also a Chabad-operated kosher restaurant and a Chabad Venice Web site. But Chabad had little contact with the established Venice Jewish community, and its presence was resented by some. Chabad also sponsored giant Hanukkah menorahs in several cities and erected a sukkah in a Milan public square for the holiday of Sukkot that attracted as many as 500 people a day.

Most Italian Jews, however, were not strictly observant, and even observant Jews tended to be highly acculturated, with a strong Italian identity. The rate of intermarriage was estimated at 50 percent or more. In recent years, however, there had been a move toward stricter observance in several communities, including Rome and Milan, and this created friction between increasingly militant traditionalists, on the one hand, and nonobservant and "cultural" (secular) Jews—many of them married to non-Jews—on the other.

In Milan the large number of Jews from Muslim countries who maintained their own rites and meticulously Orthodox lifestyles complicated the situation, setting the stage for emotional religious-secular debates. The Milan Jewish community organized several open meetings to discuss such topics as "Why and How to Remain Together in One Community." The role of Jewish schools was a particularly touchy matter. An announcement for one public meeting, held in March, summed up the pressing issues: "The Jewish world is going through many tensions: between 'secular' Jews and 'religious' Jews; between different conceptions of being Jewish. The Jewish Community of Milan must decide who has the right to enroll in its schools, what attitude to take toward children of mothers who are not Jewish and intend to become involved in Judaism."

In the spring, the board of the Milan Jewish community formally recognized and granted funding to Shorashim, an organization that had for ten years been teaching Jewish topics and promoting Jewish identity among children of mixed marriages, outside the auspices of the community. For three years Shorashim had been receiving financial support from the Province of Milan.

In Rome religious and political tensions exacerbated by personal animosities led to the dissolution of the Jewish community board in the fall. The Rome community, whose schools and other institutions were beset by budgetary problems, was also shaken during the summer by the suicide of a Jewish couple who were being squeezed by loan sharks. In his Rosh Hashanah sermon, Chief Rabbi Elio Toaff said such tragedies occurred because "we are too assimilated into the worst part of the people among whom we live. With the drugs, violence, immorality, marital infidelity, and slander." But the suicides were also taken as a sign of the failure of the Jewish community: How could Jews have been driven to such desperate straits without the community knowing anything about it? In his Rosh Hashanah message, community president Sandro Di Castro called for more communal solidarity in the coming year. On October 16, at the Pitigliani Jewish com-
Community center, there was a soul-searching roundtable discussion about the future of the Rome Jewish community.

Jewish communities, Jewish centers, and other Jewish organizations throughout Italy made increasing use of the Internet. Jewish publications such as Shalom, the monthly put out by the Rome community, ran regular columns advising readers about Jewish sites on the World Wide Web. Among the most important Italian Jewish Web sites was www.menorah.it.

Despite the difficulties they faced, the larger Jewish communities continued to maintain a wide range of activities. In Milan alone, for instance, there were three Jewish choirs. In November, in collaboration with the European Council of Jewish Communities, the Rome Jewish community hosted "Yachad," a singles weekend for young Jewish adults from all over Europe, and there were a number of other large social and educational get-togethers over the course of the year. In May a large delegation of Italian Jews attended the general assembly of the European Council of Jewish Communities, held in Nice. In Rome, a small new synagogue in a residential neighborhood was opened with joyous ceremony in December.

Jewish-Catholic Relations

Formal relations between Catholics and Jews had their ups and downs during the year. There were a number of positive developments. The pope met with Jewish representatives in the U.S. in January, and on Holocaust Memorial Day, April 13, a huge menorah donated by American Jews was dedicated in a courtyard of the North American College, a Roman Catholic seminary just outside the Vatican. Jews took part in a major interfaith meeting at the Vatican in October. And throughout the year a number of leading Catholic figures expressed public apology for anti-Semitism committed by Catholics, in line with the pope's call to Catholics to ask forgiveness for sins as part of the run-up to the Holy Year of 2000. On September 29, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini of Milan joined the city's mayor and chief rabbi for a visit to the Chabad sukkah.

Nevertheless, early in the year, Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy, president of the Vatican's Commission for Relations with the Jews, expressed concern about the course of Catholic-Jewish dialogue. He criticized the "aggressive" anti-Church attitudes of some Jewish organizations. "Jewish responses to what we seek to do to improve our relationship are often so negative," Cassidy said, "that some now hesitate to do anything at all for fear of making the situation worse." And he suggested that the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), the official Jewish partner for dialogue with the Holy See, had essentially ceased functioning.

What Cassidy had in mind included the controversy over the wartime role of Pope Pius XII: Plans were going ahead to beatify him despite criticism by Jews and others that he had not done enough to prevent the Shoah. In May, Rabbi
Marvin Hier of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in the U.S. described Pius as "the pope of the Holocaust" who "sat on the throne of St. Peter in stony silence, without ever lifting a finger, as each day thousands of Jews were sent to the gas chambers with his full knowledge." Hier and others called on the Vatican to open its secret wartime archives to uncover the truth. In the fall, British author John Cornwell, himself a Catholic, further inflamed the controversy with his highly publicized book, *Hitler's Pope*. Claiming to base his findings on previously unavailable documents, Cornwell accused Pius of anti-Semitism and of having fostered the rise of Hitler. The Vatican rejected the accusations and said that Cornwell had not had the access to secret archives that he claimed.

In response to Cassidy's warnings of a possible crisis in Catholic-Jewish relations, Jewish organizations involved in interfaith dialogue held a "summit" in April in New York. The meeting took place less than a week after the death at the age of 76 of Israeli scholar Geoffrey Wigoder, the chairman of IJCIC. During the summer Seymour Reich was named to replace him. Representatives of IJCIC, including Reich, met with Cardinal Cassidy at the Vatican on October 18. As a first step toward clarifying the Church's role during the Holocaust, a six-member group of scholars—three Jews and three Catholics—was charged to review the Vatican documents that had already been published. They held their first meeting in December, in New York.

Also in December, Pope John Paul II cleared the way for the beatification of two other former popes by signing decrees recognizing the "heroic virtues" of John XXIII and a miracle attributed to Pius IX. John XXIII, who reigned from 1958 to 1963, had worked to save Jews during World War II when he served as apostolic delegate to Turkey. Then, as pope, he had called the Second Vatican Council in 1962 that produced the Nostra Aetate decree repudiating the collective responsibility of the Jewish people for the death of Christ, thus opening the way to formal Catholic-Jewish dialogue.

The possible beatification of Pius IX, however, who reigned from 1846 to 1878, was viewed by some Jewish commentators as highly problematic. The last pope with temporal power, Pius IX was also the last pope to confine Jews to a ghetto: The Jewish ghetto in Rome was not abolished until 1870, when he lost his temporal power. And in 1858 he was behind the notorious kidnapping of seven-year-old Edgardo Mortara from his home in Bologna, after a servant told a priest that she had secretly baptized the boy when he was a baby. That incident sparked a public outcry and a wave of international protests, but Pius refused to yield, and the boy grew up to be a priest. In a statement released to the Italian media, Amos Luzzatto, president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, expressed "embarrassment and displeasure" at the news of the impending beatification. The Mortara case, he said, had left a wound "that has never been closed, and, whatever the theological reasons for beatifying Pius IX might be, represents for the Jewish community a tragic memory that has never been overcome."
Culture

Throughout the year Jewish cultural associations and other organizations in cities around Italy sponsored a wide variety of exhibits, debates, lectures, concerts, courses, workshops, sports activities, film series, Jewish studies encounters, festivals, and other events. The Pitigliani Jewish Center in Rome was particularly active, as was the Rome Jewish Culture Center, which was celebrating its 25th year of operation.

Many of these events were sponsored jointly with municipal bodies or non-Jewish private organizations. The Israeli embassy was very active in sponsoring cultural events. Another indication of rising interest in things Jewish within the general population were the numerous articles, broadcasts, and cultural events on Jewish themes not organized under any Jewish auspices but rather sponsored commercially or by non-Jewish institutions.

A few examples illustrate the variety of Italian Jewish or Jewish-themed cultural life. A Jewish Film Festival took place in Milan from October 9 to November 7. In Turin there was a photographic exhibition on Jewish wedding practices in June. In November the Venice Jewish community sponsored a daylong seminar on the Sephardi experience, ranging from history to music to culinary traditions. Also in November a multimedia presentation on “The Legend of the Dybbuk” was held under the patronage of the presidency of the Lazio region, and was sponsored by several radio stations and the Hungarian and Polish cultural institutes in Rome, among others. And the November issue of Gulliver, a popular travel magazine, had a special 65-page section devoted to “Yiddishland”—Jewish-theme tourism in a number of countries.

At the end of March, after Purim, RAI—Italian government television—broadcast a new feature film on the Purim story, the 16th episode in a series of feature-length television movies on biblical themes. Before it was aired there was a special showing for Chief Rabbi Toaff of Rome, other community leaders, and 400 pupils from Rome’s Jewish school. Roberto Benigni’s controversial Holocaust film “Life Is Beautiful” won three Academy Awards—for best actor (Benigni himself), best foreign-language film, and best music. A festival of Jewish film and culture, focusing on the image of Jewish women, took place in the Tuscan village of Pitigliano, once a thriving Jewish community, October 30—November 1.

Several institutions of higher learning had Jewish studies programs or offered courses in Jewish studies. From January through March the philosophy department of Milan University sponsored the second semester of a special seminar for scholars, artists, and writers on the question of whether there is such a thing as a Jewish aesthetic. In the spring, the Giorgio Perlasca Study Center in Pignataro Maggiore held a conference on “The State of Israel, fifty years of history, millennia of hope.”

The theme of the prestigious Ravenna Music Festival in June and July was “Toward Jerusalem,” and the inaugural concert featured 13 cantors from Jerusalem.
representing diverse cantorial traditions. In July the fourth annual Klezmer Music Festival took place in Ancona. In August, Moni Ovadia, Italy's leading Jewish performer, produced the opera by Rossini, "Adina, or the Calif of Baghdad," at the annual Rossini Opera Festival. A sprawling festival of Jewish culture called "Zachor" took place in July and August in Senigallia, home to but a few dozen Jews. A festival of Jewish music took place in Pisa in December. In August members of the Israeli Philharmonic, conducted by Zubin Mehta, shocked concertgoers in Sardinia when they took off their black tuxedo jackets and performed the second half of their concert in shirtsleeves because of the heat.

There were a number of activities relating to Jewish sites. At the end of August a number of synagogues and other historic Jewish buildings were part of the international "Open Doors" initiative promoting the Jewish cultural heritage and tourism in Europe. In October the 600-year-old Jewish cemetery of Venice was rededicated and opened to the public after more than a year of restoration, funded by a long list of public, private, and international donors. All the tombstones were photographed and cataloged, and, during the restoration, more than 130 tombstones were found buried. In November there was a conference on "Jewish Cultural Heritage" at the Gallery of Modern Art in Turin, which included the premiere of a film on the synagogues of Piedmont by Daniele Segre.

In May a new Jewish museum in Bologna opened its doors, sponsored by the city and region of Emilia Romagna. Conceived as a "virtual museum," it displayed few actual objects, but instead functioned primarily as an information center, which served as an educational base linked to other Jewish museums in Emilia Romagna, such as those in Soragna and Ferrara, where collections of ritual objects and other material were displayed. The Bologna museum also organized concerts, lectures, and tours. In July the Jewish community of Milan announced that it would open a Jewish museum in the building complex that housed the main synagogue. The regional government of Sicily announced that it would sponsor a Jewish museum in Palermo.

Publications

The main Jewish community periodicals were the monthlies Shalom in Rome and Bolletino in Milan. Several smaller communities, including Turin, Florence, and Genoa, issued newsletters. Other publications included the intellectual journal, Rassegna Mensile d'Israel. In addition to the growing number of Jewish Internet sites, there was a regular Jewish slot on state-run television and a regular Jewish music program on state-run radio.

Scores if not hundreds of books by Jewish authors or on Jewish themes were published in Italy, including histories, biographies, memoirs, essays, religious works, and fiction, as well as "how-to" books, Jewish travel guides, and cookbooks, some written originally in Italian and others translated. A well-stocked Jewish bookstore, Menorah, operated in Rome and maintained its own Web site,
while the Claudiana and Tikkun bookstores in Milan specialized in Jewish themes. The first Jewish book fair in Rome was held March 6–7, while the third annual Jewish book fair in Milan was held in May.

The mainstream press gave books of Jewish interest broad exposure. There were also numerous public book signings and book launches, as well as lectures, interviews, and public appearances by authors. In September, for example, Israeli author A. B. Yehoshua, who is very popular in Italy, made a number of personal appearances and conducted a four-day seminar on writing for 25 aspiring authors in Turin.

**Personalia**

In March, Radu Mihaileanu, the Romanian-French Jewish director of the Holocaust comedy “Train de Vie,” received the silver ribbon for best European film, awarded by the Italian Union of Cinema Journalists. Also in March, Maria Luisa Moscati, author of a Jewish guidebook to the Marche region, was given an award by that regional government for her work in promoting Jewish heritage and culture. Rita Levi-Montalcini, who won the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1986, turned 90, an occasion marked by an international scientific symposium. President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi received the International Primo Levi award, in Genoa, for his contribution to “the promotion of a society founded on peace, justice, and freedom.” In May, Cobi Benatoff, past president of the Milan Jewish community, was elected president of the European Council of Jewish Communities. In July, Gad Lerner, who wrote for leading publications and also hosted television programs, received the Alfio Russo journalism prize. In October, the Friends of the Hebrew University presented the Scopus Award to Giancarlo Elia Valori, president of Italy’s Autostradas.

Award-winning writer, poet, and editor Alberto Vigevani died in February at the age of 80. Aldo Sonnino, a writer, editor, teacher, and leading figure in the Rome Jewish community for decades, died in the spring at the age of 88. In June, Shulamit Kaczyne-Reale, the daughter of Polish photographer and Yiddish writer Alter Kaczyne, died in Rome at the age of 80. The widow of an Italian diplomat and parliament member, she worked tirelessly to bring her father’s work to public attention. Leo Valiani, a Jewish hero of the resistance and senator-for-life, died in September at the age of 90. Many Jews were indignant that his official funeral, attended by the highest government officials, was held on Yom Kippur. Noted Trieste-based author and intellectual Giorgio Voghera also died at the age of 90.

RUTH ELLEN GRUBER
Switzerland

National Affairs

In 1999 the rotating one-year presidency of the Swiss Confederation, a position more of honor than of power, was held by Ruth Dreifuss, a Social Democrat who became the first woman and the first Jew to be president of Switzerland. During her year in office, and to some extent because of her urging, the government addressed a number of sensitive issues such as the Kosovo war and its refugees, the need for a better health-care system, and the debate over Switzerland’s role during World War II.

The same broad-based coalition that had controlled the Swiss government for 40 years continued in power, and the seven members of the Federal Council, re-elected in December, continued the so-called “magic formula”: two Christian Democrats (Catholics), two Radicals (right-wing Protestants), two Social Democrats, and one representative of the Swiss People’s Party.

At the parliamentary elections in October, the big winner was the Swiss People’s Party (SVP/UDC), a nationalist populist party that received 22.5 percent of the vote. The SVP/UDC ran many extreme-right candidates for local office and focused its campaign on nationalistic themes: severe limitations on refugees seeking asylum; fewer naturalizations; staying out of the European Union, the UN, and NATO; and opposing the establishment of a Swiss Solidarity Foundation to fight bigotry and youth violence. Many speeches by party leaders—most notably Christoph Blocher, head of the Zurich branch—contained explicit xenophobic and anti-Semitic statements.

The Kosovo war sent thousands of refugees streaming into Switzerland, stimulating a major debate over asylum policy. About two-thirds of the 45,000 refugees admitted to Switzerland in 1999 came from the former Yugoslavia. After the war the Swiss government provided financial inducements for the refugees to go home, an opportunity seized by more than 16,000 of them. Former Yugoslavs now numbered 160,000 in Switzerland, and they represented the second largest foreign community, after those who came from Italy. The Kosovar refugees elicited a mixed reaction in Swiss society. There were racist and populist speeches, but also generous donations of food, clothing, and other material support.

The Swiss economy was the last in Europe to emerge from recession, and 1999 was a year of growth, especially in the service sector (banks, insurance companies) and high-value-added industries (chemicals, watches, technological research). The unemployment rate decreased from 3.9 percent to 2.4 percent, though some disparities between cantons remained. The Swiss people voted against ma-
ternity insurance, making their country one of the last in Europe with an incomplete welfare system. At the same time, to the growing dissatisfaction of the population, health insurance premiums had steadily gone up. Such anomalies reflected deep dichotomies in Switzerland's identity. It was a European country outside the European Union, a centuries-old democratic system sometimes paralyzed by its own democratic institutions, and a rich country with a growing number of people on welfare.

**Israel and the Middle East**

Relations between Switzerland and Israel were somewhat tense in 1999. The Swiss government and people expressed their annoyance after the Knesset awarded prizes to Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress, and Alfonse D'Amato, then senator from New York, in 1998, for their fight to retrieve dormant accounts from Swiss banks. Following the Swiss uproar, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu canceled an official visit to Switzerland at the last minute. This left a residue of resentment in Switzerland, even after both D'Amato and Netanyahu were voted out of office.

In July 1999 Geneva agreed to host an unprecedented meeting of the 188 states that had signed the Fourth Geneva Convention, in order to examine Israel's record on the treatment of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. The conference was called in response to an Arab request at the UN General Assembly. It took place in Geneva because Switzerland is depositary of the 50-year-old conventions extending protection to sick, wounded, and captured combatants and civilians. Not once in the previous 50 years had the Fourth Convention—the one that applies to treatment of civilians—been invoked against a state, and its use against Israel was clearly intended to make a political statement. In the end, however, the Swiss-chaired meeting took only a few minutes. Israel was never mentioned in the text of the statement adopted and there was no finding that Israel had committed grave breaches of the Fourth Convention.

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), a branch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, repeatedly funded publications libeling Israel and lauding Palestinian achievements. The Israeli embassy and local Jewish organizations vigorously protested the use of federal funds for a purpose that violated Switzerland's legendary neutrality.

In addition, the press often blurred the distinction between Jews and Israelis. Much of this seemed deliberate, and anti-Semitism often lurked behind criticism of Israel. One could often hear comparisons between the Holocaust and Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, and criticism of Switzerland's past was sometimes countered with: "Let Israel face its own behavior towards the Palestinians before accusing Switzerland of wrongdoings."
Holocaust-Related Issues

What started in 1995 as the “dormant accounts controversy” grew into a major debate about Switzerland’s role during World War II, encompassing Holocaust victims’ accounts, high-ranking Nazi officers’ accounts, Nazi gold laundered by the Swiss National Bank, looted art, unpaid insurance policies, and the closure of borders to Jewish refugees.

The controversy over Switzerland’s role during World War II was exacerbated in 1999 by the publication of the Volcker report on dormant accounts and the Independent Experts’ Commission report on Switzerland’s asylum policy before and during the war. In August 1998 a global settlement had been reached between Jewish organizations, lawyers representing class actions, and the two major Swiss banks, Union Bank of Switzerland and Crédit Suisse. According to the agreement, $1.25 billion would be distributed to Holocaust survivors who held bank accounts or other assets in Switzerland during the war, or to their heirs.

Judge Edward Korman of Brooklyn Federal Court in the United States, authorized to examine thousands of claims of Holocaust survivors or their heirs, was expected to release a list of valid claims in the spring of 2000. Money from the fund is then to be distributed among the plaintiffs. Judge Korman’s research will be facilitated by the report of the International Committee of Eminent Persons (ICEP), chaired by Paul Volcker, the former head of the U.S. Federal Reserve. This seven-member committee (three appointed by Swiss banks, three by Jewish organizations, and Volcker) was commissioned to audit most of the Swiss banks that were active before and during wartime. The Federal Council voted a unique lifting of banking secrecy laws to allow auditors to examine the accounts. After careful review of the relevant documentation still available for some 4.1 million accounts that were open in the 1933–1945 period, 54,000 dormant accounts were judged to be “probably or possibly related to victims.” These accounts represented $20 million for that period, which, with interest, came to an estimated $150–270 million in 1999. The Federal Banking Commission had yet to authorize the publication of the 25,000 names of account holders for further identification.

This gigantic audit was not well received by a number of banks, some of which denied archival access to the audit teams. Overall, the Volcker report, released in early December in Zurich, did not receive much attention from the Swiss press. There was a broad consensus that the research had been conducted seriously, and everyone seemed satisfied by the results. Swiss banks were relieved that the amount found in dormant accounts was not higher, while Jewish organizations felt that their claims had been confirmed. The Swiss government also expressed satisfaction.
BERGIER REPORT

That very same week in December came another report, from the Independent Experts' Commission headed by Swiss historian Jean-François Bergier. Following up on its 1998 report about gold transactions made by the Swiss National Bank during the war, the commission now released a study of Switzerland's asylum policy before and during wartime.

While the findings were hardly new to scholars, media coverage was intense because this was the first time that a report commissioned by the Swiss government was so critical of Swiss politicians during World War II. The study clearly showed that anti-Semitism motivated many political decisions even before the war. For instance, Swiss leaders pressed Nazi Germany to find a way to identify Jewish refugees arriving at Switzerland's borders, and in 1938 the Nazis agreed to stamp the letter "J" in the passports of German and Austrian Jews. From then on Swiss customs officers could easily deny access to Jewish refugees. The J stamp also prevented German Jews from entering other countries.

The report also proved that Swiss authorities knew, by 1942, that the Nazis had decided to exterminate all European Jews. Nevertheless the Swiss closed the borders to Jewish refugees in August of that year. The report concluded that Switzerland could have taken in many more Jewish refugees than it did (22,000 were admitted and many thousands turned back). It also stressed that while government officials were motivated by anti-Semitic feelings, the Swiss population as a whole could not be considered anti-Semitic, nor were all Swiss collectively responsible for the official policy at the time. Many individuals, in fact, took great risks to organize the illegal entry of refugees into Switzerland, or to shelter and feed them.

It was too soon to assess the political and educational impact of this remarkable study. It was well received by the media, but less so by the prewar generation and nationalist circles. The Federal Council issued a lukewarm statement that repeated old apologies for the J stamp and focused on Switzerland's defense of human rights after World War II. The final report of the commission is due in 2001.

The Volcker and Bergier reports refocused public attention on the Holocaust at a crucial time, when the issue had begun to recede from Swiss consciousness. The Switzerland-World War II task force set up in 1996 to defend the official view had been dissolved, reflecting the government's desire to bury the debate. The special fund for Holocaust victims, created in 1997 by major banks, the Swiss National Bank, and some industries, had almost finished distributing its $180 million to needy Holocaust survivors around the world. The beneficiaries, mostly Jews, but also Gypsies and handicapped people, had each received about $500 from this humanitarian fund.

The last pending Holocaust-related project was the Swiss Solidarity Foundation, proposed in 1997 but not yet approved. The idea was to use almost $4.5 billion of gold reserves to fight poverty and violence both domestically and inter-
nationally, especially among young people. But the goals of the foundation were never well defined, and the expenditure elicited loud criticism, especially at a time of economic crisis. One of the strongest critics of the project was Christoph Blocher of the Swiss People's Party who wanted to use this gold to fund social security. The topic was expected to be addressed by the parliament in 2000.

Four more Swiss citizens who helped Jews during the war were granted the title “Righteous among the Nations” by the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem, bringing the number of Swiss recipients of the title to 35.

Other issues related to the Holocaust included the escape into Switzerland of Maurice Papon, the 89-year-old French war criminal convicted to ten years in prison for his role in deporting Jews from Bordeaux. He was arrested by the Swiss police and handed over to French authorities. A few months earlier a local Jewish newspaper discovered that Josef Mengele, the notorious Nazi doctor, had often vacationed in Switzerland after the war. One day the Swiss police came to arrest him, but he had fled.

**Switzerland Facing the Holocaust**

In spite of the challenges to the old myths about Switzerland's role during World War II, no serious political step had been taken to assimilate the lessons of the past. The Federal Commission against Racism, appointed in 1995 by the Federal Council, issued an important report about anti-Semitism in late 1998, but few of its recommendations had been implemented. Nothing had been done in the areas of education, culture, religion, or general information.

Since each canton (state) was responsible for its own school system, there were no national textbooks or curricular guidelines. The choice of topics, books, and approach was made by each school individually, and often by each teacher. Some teachers and schools espoused recent findings about Switzerland's not-so-glorious past while others refused to break with the myths. And the recommendation for the establishment of a museum for tolerance went nowhere.

There was as yet no serious attempt to make the general public sensitive to issues of racism, anti-Semitism, tolerance, and remembrance. So far, all projects had relied on the ideas of individuals, funded privately by nongovernmental organizations, religious communities, teachers or intellectuals. The Jewish community of Switzerland was often solicited for the financial support of such projects.

**Anti-Semitism and Racism**

The wave of anti-Semitism that greeted the World War II debate did not abate. Anti-Jewish feelings were regularly expressed publicly and privately. Even many people with no previous history of anti-Semitism tended to associate Jews with stereotypes of money and power. As for racism and xenophobia, shelters for
refugees were set on fire, and, depending on their nationality, foreigners could have great difficulty acquiring Swiss citizenship. Some right-wing politicians sought to limit the number of foreigners in residential buildings and to separate native speakers from immigrants in public schools.

**Mainstream Politics**

In July 1998, weeks before the global settlement between banks and Jewish organizations was reached, a representative of Basel in the Federal Assembly, Rudolf Keller—head of the far-right Swiss Democrats—issued a press release calling for a boycott of “all American and Jewish stores, restaurants and travel offers.” The Federal Assembly voted to lift his immunity so that he could be tried for violating the antiracism law. But in June 1999 the Council of States, the upper house of parliament, refused to follow suit, and Keller did not have to stand trial. The Keller case, which dragged on for almost a year, touched off intense debate in Switzerland. Antiracist associations across the country joined forces in an attempt to make the public sensitive to the expression of anti-Semitism in mainstream politics. Two organizations collected thousands of signatures from citizens of various backgrounds and religions asking the upper house of parliament to agree to lift Keller’s immunity. Prominent Jewish and non-Jewish personalities added their voices to the protest. Despite the failure to bring Keller to account, this national mobilization against racism made a deep impression on a country not accustomed to popular demonstrations.

Anti-Semitism reappeared before the federal elections of October 1999. According to media reports, at least five candidates on the Swiss People’s Party (SVP/UDC) lists were notorious far-right activists, and some of them had been convicted under the antiracism law. Roger Etter, from Ticino, was a Waffen-SS sympathizer. Michael Mathys, from Argau, contributed racist comments to an Internet forum. Jean-Jacques Kottelat, from the Jura, had been convicted for racist slurs against refugees. Pascal Junod, a Geneva lawyer, had close ties to Holocaust deniers, skinheads, and neo-Nazis. On the same Geneva list stood Pierre S chiff ferli and Henri Rappaz, both of whom had been active in a defunct xenophobic party. None of these candidates, however, was elected.

The SVP/UDC leadership did not oppose any of these candidates on the party’s lists, nor did it distance the party from their views. Thus extreme-right militants—Holocaust deniers, anti-Semites, and racists—found respectability by entering mainstream politics with the SVP/UDC. In fact, two weeks before the election, a Zurich court convicted Christoph Blocher, head of SVP/UDC’s Zurich chapter, for a 1997 speech aggressively attacking Jewish organizations that demanded the restitution of dormant accounts. For using anti-Semitic stereotypes associating Jews with money, Blocher was fined $7,000. He has since appealed. A week later, a newspaper disclosed a 1997 letter signed by Blocher lauding a pamphlet written by Switzerland’s most notorious Holocaust denier, Jürgen Graf.
Blocher responded that he had not read the 18-page pamphlet but liked the title, *The Downfall of Swiss Freedom.*

Outside mainstream politics there was no evidence that far-right groups were growing in numbers, though they had become more active. The World War II and asylum debates reinvigorated their notions of a Jewish plot to milk Swiss banks, of the Holocaust as a hoax made up by Jews to gain financial compensation, and of the "white race" being threatened by immigration. Far-right groups seemed to be well organized both within the country and internationally, exchanging mailing lists and advertising, and importing propaganda from abroad. Skinheads, who probably numbered only about 500, increased the frequency of their "private concerts" that attracted hundreds of people from outside the skinhead movement itself. (The "private" label avoided prosecution under the antiracism law, which applied only to public events.) The police seized neo-Nazi propaganda (music, publications, and clothing) worth many thousands of francs. Hooligans yelled racist slurs at soccer games.

Holocaust deniers continued to hold secret lectures in various cities. The New Right, with close links to deniers and skinheads, held an increasing number of them. At these meetings of Thulé, Proudhon Circle, European Synergies, or Friends of Robert Brasillach, propaganda was distributed. Other anti-Semitic organizations included a group of Catholic fundamentalists based in Ecône, in the Valais canton, esoteric cults like the Universal Church, and the far-left Parti National-Communautaire Européen.

Popular anti-Semitism was inflamed by the World War II debate. Though not as numerous in 1999 as in the two previous years, anti-Semitic letters were still sent to newspaper editors (and sometimes published), to Jewish leaders, and to antiracist organizations. Anti-Semitic, racist or xenophobic statements were regularly heard in public places such as restaurants, streets, and offices. Anti-Semitic graffiti, posters, and flyers were common. An Israeli tourist was stabbed in downtown Zurich because his skullcap identified him as a Jew. The assailant turned himself in to the police but had not yet been tried as the year ended.

**Fighting Anti-Semitism**

Under the antiracism law passed in 1994, a few hundred cases had been tried in the courts and many led to convictions. In an atmosphere already tense over asylum policy and Holocaust victims' assets, far-right parties attempted to have the law suppressed, but three national attempts failed.

In the meantime, the Federal Court issued a major decision in 1999 affirming that anyone distributing or selling racist propaganda was just as culpable as the author or publisher. This resolved an ambiguity in the original law and was expected to help in a number of pending trials, including one involving veteran neo-Nazi Gaston-Armand Amaudruz, scheduled for April 2000. Holocaust deniers convicted for their writings, such as René-Louis Berclaz, Jürgen Graf, and Arthur
Vogt, lost their appeals. The implementation of this law presumably discouraged many far-right activists from writing, publishing or distributing materials that could send them to jail.

Beside the Geneva-based CICAD (Committee against Anti-Semitism and Defamation), another Jewish organization with a similar purpose was founded, this one in Zurich. Called DAVID, the Center against anti-Semitism and Defamation, it reacted vigorously, in the media and other public forums, against anti-Semitism. The Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities continued to be a leading voice in the expression of Jewish opinions and concerns, and individual members of the Jewish community became more forthright in their public denunciations of anti-Semitism.

Non-Jewish reactions to anti-Semitism tended to come from individual teachers or priests who organized special classes or lectures, people who sent letters to newspaper editors, and antiracist organizations that held public events.

**JEWISH COMMUNITY**

**Demography**

The number of Jews in Switzerland remained at about 18,000. The ethnic background of the Jewish community was diverse: old Swiss families of German and East European background lived in the German-speaking part, while Jews of Middle Eastern origin outnumbered Ashkenazim in the French-speaking part (especially Geneva). Some small communities, like the one in La Chaux-de-Fonds, were declining, since younger people were moving to larger cities.

**Communal Affairs**

The umbrella organization of Swiss Jews, the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities, renewed efforts to modernize and improve the efficiency of its operations. The impetus for this was the World War II controversy, which put Swiss Jewry under an unaccustomed spotlight. The federation was both a political and a religious body, though it still refused to allow in the two Reform communities in Geneva and Zurich, which had a combined membership of 2,000. The keynote speaker at the annual meeting in St. Gallen was the president of the Swiss Confederation, Ruth Dreifuss. Since the incumbent, Rolf Bloch, was not seeking a new term, the federation would elect a new president in June 2000.

**Culture**

A number of books about Switzerland and World War II were published in 1999, and some were very critical of the government’s asylum policy, such as

**Personalia**

Ruth Dreifuss was the most prominent Jew, thanks to her position as president. But she was not primarily identified as a Jew in the public mind because she actually personified, for many, several minorities: a woman, a social democrat, a native French speaker, as well as a Jew.

Dr. Branco Weiss, a successful high-tech entrepreneur and generous patron of educational projects, emerged as an outspoken voice against anti-Semitism in Switzerland. He personally stood against the political decision not to lift the immunity of the anti-Semitic parliament member Rudolf Keller, and resigned from various national boards in protest. Weiss also initiated DAVID, the Zurich-based center that combats anti-Semitism.

Edmond Safra died in a mysterious fire in his Monaco apartment on December 3. The successful Lebanese-born banker had recently sold his Republic National Bank to HSBC. He considered Geneva his second home and was a generous benefactor of many institutions, among them the Jewish school, the restored Ashkenazi synagogue — now named Beit Yaacov in his father’s memory — and numerous other Jewish charities.

Brigitte Sion