The general election in May gave the Labor government its third consecutive victory, an achievement matched in modern times only by Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government. But Prime Minister Tony Blair and his party were returned to power by a greatly reduced margin. Nearly 60 Labor MPs, including several junior ministers, lost their seats, slashing the government’s majority in the House of Commons from 161 to 66.

A decisive factor in the election was the Iraq war. Voters not only punished Blair for sending British troops there, but his standing also suffered from the discovery that the alleged grounds for the war, that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, had not been true. Blair’s attempts to justify his policy ex post facto were widely seen as nothing more than “spin.” A positive factor for Blair was the unswerving support of Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, often viewed as his successor-in-waiting if not his rival for office, but who emphatically endorsed the invasion of Iraq.

Blair also profited from the absence of a credible alternative to his party. The official opposition, the Conservatives, won less than a third of the total vote after a campaign that presented a pessimistic vision of Britain, although the Tories did pick up 33 seats, electing slightly more women than before and their first black MP. Conceding defeat, Conservative leader Michael Howard announced his forthcoming resignation, at age 63 feeling too old to lead the party into the next election. In December, 39-year-old David Cameron was elected the fourth Conservative leader since 1997. The Liberal Democrats, the third largest party and the one that had been most outspoken against the war, failed to profit sufficiently from the antiwar swing in the country.
In his postelection speech, Blair claimed he had “listened and learned.” Then, despite his reduced majority and a contingent of 30–60 rebel backbench Labor MPs, he embarked on an ambitious legislative program that included many controversial proposals, including a partial ban on smoking in public places. Much of the new agenda was aimed at combating terrorism. The government’s first defeat came in November, when its proposed 90-day detention period for terrorism suspects was cut by the House of Commons to 28 days.

The government’s plan to fight terror came in response to the London bombings in July. During the morning rush hour on July 7, four suicide bombers launched coordinated attacks on central London’s transport system, killing 52 and injuring 700. A similar attempt two weeks later failed when none of the devices exploded, leaving police with sufficient forensic material to charge four young suspects. Their trial was to begin in September 2006.

The government ended the year with its popularity further impaired after controversial minister David Blunkett resigned from the cabinet in November, the second time he had done so. Forced to relinquish the post of home secretary in 2004 (see AJYB 2005, p. 316) after improperly intervening in a visa request, he was appointed work and pensions secretary in Blair’s post-election cabinet reshuffle, only for another row to erupt over his business dealings, leading to another resignation. Making matters worse for Blair, his six-month presidency of the European Union (EU) ended on a low key when he agreed to a cut in the UK’s rebate from the EU in exchange for future discussions on EU funding, including spending on agriculture.

As the year ended opinion polls showed that 42 percent of the electorate would vote for Labor in another general election, indicating that the party was still in good shape. The same could not be said for Blair’s popularity: 55 percent of the public expressed dissatisfaction with his performance. The electorate had more confidence in Gordon Brown, who was expected to succeed Blair during 2006. Only about a third said they were dissatisfied with his performance as chancellor.

Israel and the Middle East

Optimism that Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza and part of the West Bank might set the Middle East peace process back on track pervaded 2005. Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon was right, said Tony Blair, to see disengagement as an opportunity to pursue a better future for Israelis
and Palestinians. A conference held in London in March, prior to the withdrawal, was, Blair told the Jewish Chronicle in February, designed to ensure the support of the whole international community for "the democratic institutions" that the Palestinians "wanted to create" when Israel left Gaza. He said that a Palestinian state should be "viable" not only economically and geographically, but also "in terms of its institutions." Then, disengagement could lead to "getting back to the road map... and then into the final stage of negotiations."

"I look forward to working with you to help achieve this," Blair told Sharon in August, praising his "courage" in implementing withdrawal. That same month Britain urged extremist Palestinian organizations not to attack Israel in the wake of disengagement, and used British aid money to send MI6 agents to help build up PA security facilities in Gaza and Ramallah. At the Labor Party conference in September, held in Brighton (Sussex), Blair, in the presence of Israeli deputy premier Shimon Peres, announced substantial British aid for the PA, noting that economic development was the key to peace. "We must support the PA," he declared, "but must make it clear that there should be two states side by side. Only if both happen will we get peace." Foreign Secretary Jack Straw reiterated the British position at a joint press conference with Egyptian foreign minister Ahmed Gheit in Whitehall in October.

In November, the UK announced it would donate a million pounds plus equipment to the EU team monitoring the border between Gaza and Egypt, and British officials would be among the team’s advance guard. Visiting Israel and the PA that month, Chancellor Gordon Brown announced initiatives toward an "economic road map." In December, Brown hosted a conference in London, organized by the World Bank and the British Treasury, where Israeli and Palestinian businessmen pledged to inaugurate a new economic era in Gaza and the West Bank. Their declaration, including an action plan to overcome obstacles to private-sector investment and growth and to encourage joint projects, insisted on the need for freer movement both within the territories and across borders. Trade and economic cooperation, said Brown, were the foundation not just for prosperity but for peace and security.

In March, the Foreign Office made representations to Israeli officials after the IDF (Israel Defense Force) decided against prosecuting an officer for the murder of British film-maker James Miller. The officer had opened fire at about the time Miller was allegedly killed by an Israeli soldier in Gaza in 2003 (see AJYB 2005, p. 319). Miller's film, Death in Gaza, about the effects of the violence on children, was, in April, awarded the
British Academy of Film and Television Arts prize for best current-affairs production. The premiere of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* took place in October at London's Royal Court Theatre. Corrie, an American pro-Palestinian activist, was killed in Gaza in March 2003 while trying to stop a bulldozer from destroying a Palestinian home (see AJYB 2004, p. 157). Her memory was also honored by a performance of the classical cantata *The Skies Are Weeping* at Northeast London's Hackney Empire, partially funded by the Arts Council and by prominent British Jews active in the theater.

Foreign Minister Straw was cheered at Labor's conference in September when he called on Israel to stop taking over Palestinian land, cease settlement activities, and change the route of its security fence so as to meet Palestinian objections. But in October, Kim Howells, the former parliamentary chair of Labor Friends of Israel (LFI) and appointed in May to be minister of state for the Middle East, described Israel's response to a Hamas missile attack on Sderot as "measured and appropriate." Visiting Israel and the PA, Howells said that the Palestinians had "no excuse now that Israel had left Gaza."

British officials held low-level talks with Hamas in May, following its success in local elections in Gaza and the West Bank. "If we want to know what is going on among the Palestinians, we have to talk to people who understand Hamas," Whitehall sources explained. But the discussions excluded Hamas's military wing, banned in Britain under the terrorism law. In June, Straw vowed that Britain would not recognize Hamas unless it acknowledged Israel's right to exist and renounced terror. British diplomat Alistair Crooke went to the region during August for talks with Hamas leaders. In November, following the Iranian president's call for the destruction of Israel and amid suspicion that Syria was behind the assassination of Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri, Straw told Labor Friends of Israel that Britain was pressing for a UN declaration calling on Iran and Syria to cease supporting terrorist groups.

An Israeli delegation held talks in November with British officials in a bid to prevent any recurrence of an incident that happened in September, when retired IDF general Doron Almog was threatened with arrest at London's Heathrow Airport for allegedly breaching the Geneva Convention by actions he took while commanding troops in Gaza three years earlier. Almog returned to Israel without disembarking.

An out-of-court settlement was reached in December after the Board of Deputies of British Jews withdrew its allegation that the Palestinian charity Interpal was a terrorist organization (see AJYB 2005, p. 322).
ANTI-ISRAEL ACTIVITY

The annual conference of the Association of University Teachers (AUT), whose 49,000 members made it Britain’s largest university faculty union, held in Eastbourne in April, resolved to boycott all Israeli academics except those “opposed to their state’s racist policies.” The resolution went on to single out two Israeli universities, Haifa and Bar Ilan, for boycotts, the former because of alleged discrimination against Ilan Pappe, a leftist professor, and the latter because of its ties with the Judea and Samaria College in the West Bank.

By May, however, intensive efforts by academic bodies, the Jewish community—including the chief rabbi—and pro-Israel groups, condemnations of the boycott, resignations from the AUT, and the formation of new anti-boycott pressure groups forced the teachers’ union to call an emergency meeting that overruled the boycott call. Two of the new bodies that emerged to fight the boycott maintained their operations even after it was defeated, since the issue was likely to come up again. These were the Campaign Group for Academic Freedom, set up by the Board of Deputies to coordinate action with other communal organizations, and Engage, an ad hoc group dedicated to campaigning against “left-wing demonization of the Jewish state.” Meanwhile, the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (Natfhe), a smaller union, adopted a resolution supporting AUT’s original stand, in opposition to “oppression in the Middle East.”

In June, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) joined with the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign and the Stop the War Coalition in calling on the British government to enforce a total arms embargo on Israel. They urged Britain to “break off all military contacts with Israel” and work toward getting the EU to follow suit.

That same month, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), meeting in Birmingham, resolved that members should consider reviewing their investments in companies that continued to support either “the occupation of Palestinian lands” or “violence against innocent Israelis.” The archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, announced support for the resolution. An earlier campaign within the Church of England to urge disinvestment from the Caterpillar company, on the grounds that it sold Israel equipment used to demolish Palestinian homes and build the security fence, had been thwarted by moderates within the organization.

The Center for Intelligence and Security Studies at Brunel University,
North London, announced in September that Muslim extremists were active on more than 30 university campuses. One group, Hizb ut-Tahrir (Islamic Party of Liberation), which called for the establishment of a caliphate in the Middle East run according to Islamic law, was of special concern, and the National Union of Students (NUS) had a policy of providing “no platform for Hizb ut-Tahrir.” In September, however, Hizb ut-Tahrir was invited to participate in a debate at Middlesex University. When the student union president refused to cancel the event, the NUS suspended him from office and voted to expel that student union from the national organization. Students and faculty at Middlesex who supported the invitation then launched a drive to “Defend the Right to Speak on Campus.”

Bir Zeit University, a Palestinian institution on the West Bank, became a focus of campus anti-Israel activity. In October, the student senate of Scotland’s Stirling University passed a motion calling on students officially to twin with Bir Zeit students. The motion, which also condemned “the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine,” was proposed by Stirling’s Palestine Solidarity Group, which was allied to the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign. In November, the Edinburgh student union voted to twin with Bir Zeit and also condemned attacks on Palestinian education by the “illegal Israeli occupation.” Other Bir Zeit affiliates included student unions at Liverpool University and University College, London, the AUT, Natfhe, and the National Union of Students in Ireland. At Leeds University the Palestine Solidarity Group campaigned against the Israeli security barrier, and both Manchester University and Manchester Metropolitan University hosted anti-Israel speakers.

Pro-Israel elements did win some campus victories. In January, the administration at London University’s School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) barred the student union from implementing a decision to prevent Israeli political affairs counselor Roey Gilad from speaking at the college. SOAS authorities also took positive measures to improve the atmosphere, including arranging for legal experts to give a presentation to student leaders “explicitly addressing the inadmissibility of stands such as ‘Zionism equals racism.’” And in December, protests by student groups persuaded London’s Westminster University to cancel a meeting organized by the anti-Zionist Muslim Public Affairs Committee to launch Zionism: The Real Enemy of the Jews, a new book by Alan Hart.

Certain figures in the media were hostile toward Israel. In April, the Israeli government and the Board of Deputies protested the award of an honorary MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) to BBC
Middle East correspondent Orla Guerin in recognition of her services to broadcasting. They said the award could be interpreted as “endorsement of her all too often emotive and biased reports on Israel.” At the end of the year Guerin was reassigned to Johannesburg, and replaced as Jerusalem reporter by Arab specialist Caroline Hawley.

In June, former BBC Jerusalem correspondent Jeremy Bowen was appointed BBC Middle East editor, a new post created to implement the recommendations of the 2004 Balen Report that had been commissioned to meet complaints about bias in BBC Middle East coverage (see AJYB 2005, p. 323). The post of editor, the BBC hoped, would “enhance our audience’s understanding of the Middle East and provide extra commentary, focus and analysis of an increasingly complex area of the world.” BBC’s governors commissioned a review of the impartiality of its Middle East coverage and reporting in September, after both pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian elements alleged lack of balance. The review was charged with assessing “accuracy, fairness, context, balance and bias, actual or perceived.”

In November, BBC’s governors ruled that their correspondent Barbara Plett had breached their impartiality guidelines by describing her tears as an ill Yasir Arafat was transferred from his compound in Ramallah to an airplane bound for France for medical treatment, where he would die (see AJYB 2005, p. 323). Plett was transferred to Pakistan.

In August, extremist Islamic preacher Omar Bakri Mohammed, known as the “Tottenham Ayatollah” and founder of British chapters of the radical groups Hizb ut-Tahrir and Al-Muhajiroun, left Britain for Lebanon as rumors swirled that he was about to be investigated by the government for possible violation of the treason laws. The home secretary announced that he would not be allowed back into the country since his presence was “not conducive to the public good.”

Anti-Semitism

In his High Holy Days message to British synagogues in September, Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks said “there had been times in the past year when it has been uncomfortable to be a Jew in Britain.” Sacks warned of a “new anti-Semitism,” political rather than racial in nature, targeting Jewish nationality. He repeated his warning in a December broadcast, talking of “a tsunami of anti-Semitism engulfing Europe.” In November, the Parliamentary Committee against Anti-Semitism launched an all-
party inquiry into prejudice against Britain’s Jews. “We want to expose the improper and unnecessary fear under which British citizens who are Jews live,” said chairman Denis MacShane.

Yet the number of anti-Semitic incidents reported to the Community Security Trust (CST) fell from 532 in 2004 to 455 in 2005. That 2005 figure, to be sure, was still the second highest number since such statistics were first collected in 1984, leading the CST’s Mark Gardner to talk of “the long-term trend of rising incident levels.” Gardner also noted that 2005 marked the second consecutive year that violent attacks on Jews outnumbered attacks on their property. The number of reported anti-Semitic incidents related to Israel fell sharply, from 114 in 2004 to 57 in 2005. Another source of information about anti-Semitic incidents, the Association of Chief Police Officers, showed a slight rise in their number, from a total of 384 in 2004 to 390 in 2005.

There were four cemetery desecrations (as compared to five in 2004), including three in June. These occurred at the United Synagogue’s cemetery in West Ham, Stratford, East London; the Federation of Synagogue’s cemetery at Rainham, Essex, and Rainsough Cemetery at Prestwich, near Manchester. The Board of Deputies welcomed the Muslim Council of Britain’s condemnation of the desecrations and expressed its sympathy for an attack on the Muslim cemetery in Newport, Gwent. Board director Jon Benjamin said, “When common standards of decency are ignored or matters of mutual concern are at issue, our two communities must speak out together to express our deep disquiet.”

Multiple anti-Semitic acts were sparked by two specific events. Ten incidents were reported in January, after newspapers published photographs of Prince Harry, Queen Elizabeth’s grandson and third in line to the British throne, attending a party dressed as a member of Hitler’s Afrika Korps, complete with swastika armband. His great-aunt, the Austrian-born Princess Michael of Kent, was accused of anti-Semitism when, in February, she attributed the media’s outcry at Harry’s gaffe to “the structure of its ownership.”

Eleven anti-Semitic incidents were generated by a widely publicized event in February, when London’s left-wing mayor, Ken Livingstone, likened Evening Standard journalist Oliver Finegold, who was Jewish, to a concentration camp guard. Livingstone refused to apologize but emphasized he had not intended to downplay the Holocaust, which he considered “the greatest racial crime of the twentieth century.” In December, Livingstone faced the Independent Adjudication Panel for England,
charged with breaching the Greater London Authority’s code of conduct by his remark to Finegold.

Livingstone, in fact, was already at odds with the Jewish community before this episode. In 2004 he not only criticized “Israel’s illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza,” but also welcomed Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a reputed defender of suicide bombings, to a London conference of Muslims, and even after a sharp protest from the Board of Deputies, invited the sheikh to visit the city again (see AJYB 2005, p. 322). In January 2005, Livingstone said that those who complained about this had been “used by a Zionist front organization.” Then, in a television interview in July, he claimed that Arabs and Jews were judged by double standards. The Israeli party Likud and the Muslim group Hamas, he asserted, were “the two sides of the same coin.” Foreign Secretary Straw declared Livingstone’s remarks “as wrong as they were unacceptable,” while Board of Deputies president Henry Grunwald described them as “highly irresponsible.”

In the run-up to the May general election, the Jewish origins of Conservative leader Michael Howard were exploited in such a way as to expose some of his political opponents to charges of anti-Semitism. A Muslim Weekly article by Energy Minister Mike O’Brien in January accused Howard of a negative attitude toward British Muslims. The article was clearly an attempt to woo Britain’s 1.6 million Muslim voters to support Labor. The Commission for Racial Equality found no breach of the race-relations laws. The same month, Labor Party officials apologized to the Jewish community for election posters depicting Howard as a Fagin- or Shylock-type character, and both Howard and Oliver Letwin, a Jew who was shadow chancellor, as flying pigs. Prime Minister Blair promised that Howard’s Jewishness would play no part in his own political campaign. “I’ve been a very strong supporter of the Jewish community and Israel and will always be so,” he said in February. In March, the Jewish Council for Racial Equality, the Churches Commission for Racial Justice, and the Muslim Parliament issued a joint statement opposing “xenophobia and racism” in the election campaign and expressing “mounting concern about the way in which race and prejudice were being used for political ends in the pre-election period.”

The right-wing British National Party (BNP) fielded candidates in 120 constituencies in the May elections and polled some 200,000 votes across the UK, according to Gerry Gable, publisher of the antifascist magazine Searchlight, which, in February, had mounted a major campaign to con-
vince voters not to support the BNP. In the local elections, also in May, the BNP put up 37 candidates, 28 of whom came in last in their constituencies. In June, BNP lost its only London council seat in a bye-election in Goresbrook, Barking, East London.

In May, the executive of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (Natfhe) approved a motion passed by its conference condemning campus anti-Semitism and calling on the Commission for Racial Equality and the Board of Deputies to institute a program to educate academics and students about its dangers. In November, Chancellor Gordon Brown allocated a Treasury grant of £1.5m for a program developed by the Holocaust Educational Trust to give sixth-formers at every British secondary school the opportunity to visit Auschwitz.

Also in May, an independent inquiry was launched into the alleged failure of the National Union of Students (NUS) to tackle anti-Semitism. Three Jewish officers had resigned at the organization’s April conference, accusing NUS of being “a bystander to Jewish hatred” because it failed to act on complaints of anti-Semitic activity at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). In May, too, a delegation that included Board of Deputies director Jon Benjamin and Union of Jewish Students (UJS) campaigns director Danny Stone handed Minister of State for Higher Education Bill Rammell a dossier detailing the hostility faced by Jewish students at SOAS, where, in February, the student union had voted to make Ken Livingstone honorary president (the vote was later declared illegal). The independent inquiry into NUS delivered its report in September, clearing it of any indifference to anti-Semitism but criticizing its “lack of energetic response.”

The Queen’s speech at the opening of Parliament in May promised legislation to tackle extremists who incited religious hatred, after a bill to this effect ran out of time in the previous parliamentary session. But a government measure presented in October outlawing incitement to religious hatred was heavily amended in the House of Lords, where members worried about its impact on freedom of speech.

The courts seemed to be taking a stronger line against racists. In February, an unprecedented six-year jail sentence was meted out to a right-wing extremist charged with aggravated criminal damage for desecrating Birmingham’s Witton Jewish Cemetery in 2004. In November, five racists who produced and distributed a virulently anti-Semitic magazine, Stormer, were convicted of conspiracy to publish with intent to stir up
racial hatred, and given jail terms ranging from one to five years. The five were members of the Racial Volunteer Force, a breakaway group from the Combat 18 organization.

In June, the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (IJPR) published *Hate Crimes against London’s Jews*, an analysis of 1,296 incidents recorded by the Metropolitan Police Service between January 2001 and December 2004, by Paul Iganski, Vicky Kielinger, and Susan Paterson. This project was the result of collaboration between the police and IJPR, and was the first time that an outside body had been given access to London police statistics on anti-Semitism. IJPR itself became embroiled in controversy at the end of the year. Demographer Barry Kosmin resigned as executive director in July to take an academic position in the U.S. The appointment in December of Tony Lerman to succeed him precipitated several resignations from the IJPR by people who felt that Lerman did not take British anti-Semitism seriously enough.

**Nazi War Criminals**

In July, Scotland Yard’s war crimes unit was revived to investigate claims that there might be Ukrainian SS veterans and former concentration camp guards living in Britain. The Home Office had handed files on these individuals to the Metropolitan Police, and an eight-man squad had begun investigating some 75 suspects, some thought to have been guards in Auschwitz. Recently released government papers showed some 8,000 Ukrainians who fought for the Nazis had been allowed into Britain as farm laborers, said Labor MP Andrew Dismore.

The only Nazi war criminal in a British jail, Anthony Sawoniuuk, died in November, aged 84, at the prison unit for elderly inmates with life sentences in Norwich, Norfolk. He had been sentenced to life in 1999 for taking part in mass killing of Jews in Domachevo.

**JEWISH COMMUNITY**

**Demography**

British Jewry had reached “a stable balance over the last three years,” according to statistics published by the Board of Deputies community research unit. “Demographically,” a Board spokesman said, “there is a stable core of people who are involved in the community.” After years of
decline the number of Jewish births recorded in 2003 totaled 2,665, unchanged from 2002. Numbers of synagogue marriages solemnized in 2004 rose to 952 from 929 in 2003, with Reform ceremonies accounting for most of the increase. Numbers of gittin (religious divorces) completed in 2004 fell to 272 from 284 in 2003. Burials and cremations under Jewish religious auspices also fell, from 3,592 in 2003 to 3,257 in 2004, reflecting, according to the spokesman, increasing longevity: Jewish men lived to an average age of 80, and women to 84.

The Reform Synagogues of Great Britain (RSGB) bet din (religious court) accepted 113 adult proselytes and 51 minors in 2005, as compared to 111 adults and 39 minors in 2004.

\[\text{Communal Affairs}\]

British Jewry took two initiatives to counteract London mayor Ken Livingstone's apparent hostility toward his Jewish constituents (see above, pp. 323–24). In February, Jewish cultural groups in London formed Jewish Culture UK, which would work with the Greater London Authority (GLA) to promote Jewish events in the capital and ensure that Jewish culture was recognized and supported alongside African and Asian cultures. The institutions involved included the Jewish Museum, the Jewish Music Institute, and the London Jewish Cultural Center, which taught 55 different subjects to some 30,000 students aged 14–90 annually, and in July moved into Ivy House, Hampstead, North London, one-time home of ballerina Anna Pavlova.

The same concern about Mayor Livingstone led the Board of Deputies to set up, in September, the London Jewish Forum to advocate the political interests and practical needs of Jewish organizations to the GLA. The Board felt these organizations lacked a voice that spoke directly to the mayor's office or the GLA, and they therefore missed out on funding opportunities that benefited other ethnic groups and also had little say on the scheduling of municipal events.

In July, in an initiative launched under the auspices of the Jewish Communal Leadership Council, more than a dozen Jewish charities and other organizations agreed to work together to find ways of saving money through greater cooperation and cost-sharing.

Jerry Wische, previously the executive director of the Jewish community center in Houston, Texas, was appointed in August to be the first executive consultant of the London Jewish community center (see AJYB 2005, p. 327).
A long-simmering feud made the headlines in October when the venerable Zionist fund-raising agency Keren Kayemeth LeYisrael-JNF (KKL) set up its own arm in Britain, KKL Charitable Trust. In doing so it split from its British partner, JNF-UK, on the grounds that the latter misled the public by using KKL’s name to raise funds “for its own causes which are not associated with KKL.” JNF, it claimed, had increasingly failed to align its activities with KKL’s main charitable objective, the development of the State of Israel. Gail Seal, who chaired the JNF Charitable Trust in Britain, responded that JNF considered itself “an independent body” that was not legally required to hand over money to the Israel-based KKL. As the year drew to a close the two organizations were attempting to craft an out-of-court settlement of their dispute over the right to raise money in Great Britain under the names KKL and JNF.

Religion

The United Synagogue (US), Britain’s main synagogue grouping, was "in better shape than it has arguably ever been," said outgoing president Peter Sheldon in July, claiming that a series of damaging problems that had dogged the US had been resolved. The Charity Commission had approved its £3.8m plan to meet a projected shortfall in its staff pension fund. The deficit would be met mainly from the sale of property, including Cricklewood Synagogue, North London, which closed in February. Prudent management and a measured entrepreneurial approach, said Sheldon, had enabled the launch of such new initiatives as Tribe, the US division for young people, which had recruited more than 7,000 members in two years.

The new president of the US, Simon Hochhauser, announced in September a wide-ranging review of the organization’s operations. Three committees would examine core services and relations between US and local communities, including the operations of the London bet din, “in view,” said Hochhauser, “of recent conversion policy controversies.” This was a reference to the widely publicized conflict, in July and August, over the refusal of the US-sponsored Jewish Free School (JFS) to admit two children whose mothers had been converted to Judaism by the Orthodox rabbinate of Israel, but were nevertheless not recognized as Jews by the London bet din.

The issue of agunot, civilly divorced Jewish women unable to remarry because their husbands refused to grant them a get (Jewish divorce), re-
ceived considerable attention. By March, an agunah research unit to assist such women was functioning at Manchester University, and June saw the launch of *Getting Your Get*, a guide to the process of Jewish divorce, by Sharon, Faith, and Deanna Levine. Nick Lowenstein of North London gave his ex-wife in New York a get in September after 16 years’ separation, ending one of the longest-running agunah cases. In March, the bet din had taken the unprecedented step of placing a notice in the *Jewish Chronicle*, the leading Jewish newspaper in the country, naming and shaming Lowenstein.

North London’s Lauderdale Road Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue announced plans in September to train rabbis for mainstream Orthodox congregations. Sponsored by the Montefiore Endowment, the part-time course was designed for both Sephardi and Ashkenazi students and would promote the philosophy of “Torah with modernity.”

In September, the Barnet, North London, council approved plans submitted by the Sternberg Center for a £15-million redevelopment of the Manor House site, which housed the Akiva School, the New North London Masorti Synagogue, the Reform movement’s headquarters, the Center for Jewish Education, and the Leo Baeck College and its library.

Both the Reform and Liberal movements sought to expand. In March, as part of its relaunch to make itself into the mainstream of British Jewry by 2020, the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain (RSGB) changed its name to the Movement for Reform Judaism. This was to reflect its image as “a broad movement,” said its chairman, Andrew Gilbert. In November, its chief executive, Rabbi Tony Bayfield, launched a Conversion Support Team to help converts and the “unconnected generation” of those aged 18–35. “We are going to be more positive, more welcoming... and proactive over conversion,” Bayfield said. Following up in December, Rabbi Jackie Tabick announced plans for a survey of Reform converts’ conversion and post-conversion experiences, based on a questionnaire formulated in conjunction with London’s City University.

Liberal Judaism announced plans in February to expand membership by 10 percent over a period of three years, and set up a 22-member Council of Patrons as part of a campaign to support growth without increasing the levy on local Liberal synagogues or the costs to the head office. In a bid for greater inclusiveness, the movement agreed in December to allow non-Jewish spouses and partners of members to be buried in its cemeteries. That month, Liberal Judaism also announced plans to spend more than £10,000 in 2006 to gain a foothold in Manchester. “I don’t be-
lieve that Liberal Judaism can be a serious organization if it doesn’t have a presence in the second largest area of Jewish population,” said chief executive Danny Rich. Although the city had three Reform congregations, Liberal Judaism had no organized presence in the north of England after the Liberal synagogue in Liverpool left to join the Reform movement in early 2005.

The Jewish Chronicle marked the 350th anniversary of Jewish resettlement in England with a poll of its readers on who was the greatest British Jew. The newspaper announced the winner in December—Rabbi Louis Jacobs, affiliated with the Masorti movement.

Education

The new Orthodox Hertsmere Jewish High School (see AJYB 2005, p. 330) was officially launched in July. In October, the government rejected a £45-million bid for a new cross-communal Jewish secondary school affiliated with ORT, which had been planned to open in Barnet, North London, in 2009, thus quieting fears of half-empty classrooms by 2015 (see AJYB 2004, p. 291).

There were now such situations only in exceptional cases. Avigdor primary school in North London’s Stamford Hill, for example, closed in July with just 100 out of 210 places filled, primarily because of the recent proliferation of ultra-Orthodox, single-sex schools in the area, whereas Avigdor, established in 1929 and run by the Jewish Secondary School Movement, was coeducational. More common was the call for more Jewish primary schools in areas such as Hertfordshire where Jewish population was growing. In July, lay leaders from Shenley, Radlett, and Watford discussed the educational needs of their expanding communities with representatives of the United Synagogue’s Agency for Jewish Education. In November, after the Hertsmere Jewish primary school reported 105 applications for 60 places, a new Hertfordshire Education Forum promised to investigate possible options. In December, it was announced that a new Orthodox primary school would open in Edgware, Middlesex, in September 2006.

In November, the Agency for Jewish Education, backed by the United Jewish Israel Appeal, organized the first-ever national conference for teachers of Jewish studies.

In April, the Hebrew and Jewish Studies Department at University College, London, appointed a reader in rabbinic Judaism, but two other universities dropped programs they had recently introduced: at Leeds in
Jewish civilization, and at Southampton in Jewish history and culture. "The number of people who want to commit themselves to do a Jewish studies degree is very small," explained Tony Kushner, Southampton's professor of Jewish—non-Jewish relations.

In February, a lectureship in Israeli studies was established at Manchester University to complement a recently established chair in the study of the Arab world, and in May, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) appointed Colin Shindler director of its Center of Jewish Studies and lecturer in Israeli and modern Jewish studies.

**Foreign Aid**

After focusing on Belarus in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004, World Jewish Relief (WJR) conducted its third Eastern Europe "Mission Impossible" in Romania. In February, it sent three minivans and an ambulance carrying clothing, toiletries, and eyeglasses to needy Jews there.

WJR continued to help the Jews of Kraków, Poland, build a community center. In May, it announced plans for British rabbis to visit and help regenerate the community. WJR also arranged for exchange visits between young people from that city and their counterparts from the Kinloss Learning Center connected with the Finchley (North London) United Synagogue, which, in December, decided to twin with Kraków.

WJR backed projects run by two Radlett synagogues, Radlett United and Radlett and Bushey, to collect clothing and other essentials for Jewish communities in Belarus. The synagogues also raised funds for an eye operation on a five-year old girl from their twin community of Grodno. WJR paid for the cost of bringing children living in the area affected by the Chernobyl disaster to spend three weeks in Manchester in July.

In November, WJR chairman Nigel Layton announced a change in strategy. It would henceforth provide not only food and welfare, but a complete infrastructure to facilitate the renewal of Jewish life in the states of the former Soviet Union. This would be based on WJR's "Our Town" project, and its blueprint the community center opened in Zaporozhe, Ukraine, in 2004.

In July, a series of events were held under the title "From Russia With Love" at the West London Synagogue to raise money for the new Reform congregation in St. Petersburg, Russia, established by the London synagogue's own former rabbi, Michael Farbman, in 2004 (see AJYB 2005, p. 331).
Publications

Playwright Harold Pinter was awarded the 2005 Nobel Prize for Literature. Born in 1930 to working-class Jewish parents in London, Pinter went on to achieve fame for writing plays of a type that critics described as “the comedy of menace.” He was too ill to travel to Stockholm to accept the prize, instead recording his acceptance speech, which was televised on December 7. In it Pinter castigated the Iraq war and urged that President Bush and Prime Minister Blair be indicted as war criminals.

The 2005 Jewish Quarterly-Wingate Literary awards once again went to non-British authors. The prize for nonfiction went to an Israeli, Amos Oz, for his autobiographical work *A Tale of Love and Darkness*; the fiction award went to David Bezmozgis, a Canadian, for *Natasha and Other Stories*.

It was a bumper year for biographical and autobiographical works. They included *Anna of All the Russias*, Elaine Feinstein’s biography of Anna Akhmatova; *Prague Winter* by Gerda Mayer; *Swimming Upstream* by T. Scarlett Epstein; *When I Grow Up* by Bernice Rubens; *By Jack Rosenthal: An Autobiography in Six Acts* by Jack Rosenthal, with a postscript by Maureen Lipman; *No Fixed Abode: A Jewish Odyssey to Africa* by Peter Fraenkel; *Dropping Names* by David Benedictus; *Confessions of a Serial Biographer* by Michael Freedland; *A Life of H. L. Hart: The Nightmare and the Noble Dream* by Nicola Lacey; and *A Middle Eastern Affair* by Ellis Douek. *Jacob’s Gift* by Jonathan Freedland, an exploration of identity in the world his newborn son would inherit, fell somewhere between autobiography and an exploration of the religious scene.

Published works of poetry included *Reel* by George Szirtes; *For the Living* by Richard Burns; *Ghost Station* by Sue Hubbard; *Multiplying the Moon* by Myra Schneider; *Choose Your Frog* by Harold Rosen; *Tears of Honey and Gold* by Jacqueline Karp; *Empires and Holy Lands* by Michael Hulse; and *The Poems and Plays of Isaac Rosenberg*, edited by Vivien Noakes.

Books by rabbis on religious themes included two collections of essays by Louis Jacobs, *Judaism and Theology: Essays on the Jewish Religion and Rabbinical Thought in the Talmud*; *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks; and *500 Questions and Answers on Chanukah* by Jeffrey M. Cohen. *Three Rabbis in a Vicarage* by Antony Godfrey was the story of Belsize Square Synagogue in North London. ArtScroll published the *Ohel Sarah Women’s Siddur* (prayer book), and the Liberal movement its liturgy for same-sex commitment
ceremonies, *Covenant of Love*. Also on subjects related to religion were *The Essence of Kabbalah* by Les Lancaster; and two books by women: *Toras Imecha* (Your Mother’s Torah), essays by 50 women from Ilford Synagogue (East London), featuring original interpretations of the weekly Torah reading, edited and compiled by R. Alex Chapper; and *Women’s Voices*, edited by Helen Fry, Rachel Montagu, and Lynne Schjolefield, on Jewish-Christian dialogue.

Holocaust studies included *Witness*, marking Beth Shalom Holocaust Center’s tenth anniversary; *Hate and the “Jewish Science”: Anti-Semitism, Nazism and Psychoanalysis* by Stephen Frosh; *Changing Countries: The Experience and Achievement of German-Speaking Exiles from Hitler in Britain from 1933 to Today*, edited by Marian Malet and Anthony Grenville; *Holocaust and the Moving Image*, edited by Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman; and *Forgotten Voices of the Holocaust* by Lyn Smith. *Primo Time* by Antony Sher described the author’s experience of producing a film version of Primo Levi’s book, *If This Is a Man*. Two books on famous trials were *History on Trial: My Day in Court with David Irving* by Deborah E. Lipstadt and *The Lie that Wouldn’t Die: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* by Hadassa Ben-Itto.

Works of history and sociology included *We Europeans? Mass Observation, “Race” and British Identity in the Twentieth Century* by Tony Kushner; *Postwar* by Tony Judt; *East End Chronicles* by Ed Glinert; *The Image of the Jew in European Liberal Culture, 1789–1914*, a collection of essays edited by Brian Cheyette and Nadia Valman; and *Children of War: The Second World War through the Eyes of a Generation* by Susan Goodman.

Books of fiction included *All For Love* by Dan Jacobson; *The Last Secret of the Temple* by Paul Sussman; *An Acre of Barren Ground* by Jeremy Gavron; *Winkler* by Giles Coren; *Honey* by Arnold Wesker; and *Hester’s Story* by Adèle Geras.

**Personalia**

Honors accorded British Jews during the year included a life peerage to Dame Ruth Deech. Knighthoods went to Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks; property entrepreneur Donald Gordon; playwright Arnold Wesker; Westminster City Council leader Simon Milton; Essex University vice chancellor Ivor Crewe; Cambridge professor and nanotechnology researcher Michael Pepper; and property tycoon and British Land Company chairman John Ritblat.
Notable British Jews who died in 2005 included Cyril Trup, national vice president of B’nai Brith, in London, in January, aged 69; Miriam Rothschild, natural scientist, in Ashton Wold, Northamptonshire, in January, aged 96; Richard Wolfson, co-creator of the rock show *Kaddish*, a tribute to Holocaust victims, in London, in February, aged 49; Peter Style, for 14 years head of British Overseas Trade Group for Israel, in London, in February, aged 70; Peter Benenson, founder of Amnesty International, in Oxford, in February, aged 83; Osias Tager, a founder of the Jewish Association for Mentally Handicapped Children (now Ravenswood Foundation), in London, in March aged 90; Isaac Levy, prominent United Synagogue minister, in London, in March, aged 94; Iris Landau, founder and life president, British Friends of Alyn, in London, in March, aged 81; Carmel Narod, printer of Yiddish books, in London, in March, aged 90; Berel Berkovits, Federation of Synagogues *dayan* (religious judge) and Jewish law expert, in Jerusalem, in April, aged 55; Rose Ellis, Jewish rights campaigner, in London, in May, aged 79; Philip Hobsbaum, poet, author, and English scholar, in Glasgow, in June, aged 72; David Daiches, scholar, author, and expert on Scottish literature, in Edinburgh, in July, aged 92; Eva Kolinsky, historian of modern Germany, in Birmingham, in August, aged 65; Joseph Rotblat, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and nuclear scientist, in London, in August, aged 96; Edie Noble, leading figure in Jewish women’s organizations, in London, in August, aged 94; John Simmons, librarian and Slavonic languages expert, in Oxford, in September, aged 90; Majer Bogdanski, exponent of Bundism, in London, in September, aged 93; Lionel Kochan, Jewish historian, in Oxford, in September, aged 83; Hermann Bondi, mathematician and cosmologist, in Cambridge, in September, aged 85; John Rayner, leading Progressive rabbi, in London, in September, aged 81; Norman Morris, creator of the Balfour Diamond Jubilee Trust to foster cultural ties between Britain and Israel, and executive secretary of the Zionist Federation, 1973–80, in London, in October, aged 73; Oswald Hanfling, philosopher, in Oxford, in October, aged 77; Dave Finn, boxer, in Brighton, in November, aged 90; David Paterson, Hebrew scholar and founder of the Oxford Center for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, in Oxford, in December, aged 83; Rose Heilbron, the first woman to hold multiple judicial posts, in London, in December, aged 91.

Miriam Kochan
France

National Affairs

TWO REMARKABLE EVENTS during the year raised serious ques-
tions about the future of the current French government, and, more fund-
damentally, about the course of the nation. The first, in May, was the
resounding defeat of a referendum to ratify the proposed European con-
stitution. The second began with rioting by youths of Arab and black im-
migrant origin in the Paris suburbs on October 27, which quickly spread
around the country and lasted for three weeks. This was the worst episode
of violence seen in mainland France since the end of World War II.

EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION

When French voters went to the polls on May 29 to decide on whether
to approve the European constitution, Austria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary,
Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain had already
ratified; in Germany, the parliament had approved but the president had
not yet added his signature. To the surprise of pundits, the French rejected
the proposed constitution that day by 54.67 to 43.39 percent. Three days
later, Dutch voters rejected it by an even larger margin. Since the docu-
ment required the approval of all 25 current EU members, it was now
highly unlikely that the constitution would ever come into effect.

To be sure, the EU could continue to function on the basis of existing
treaties, but non-ratification of the constitution rendered the EU
decision-making process more difficult. It also prevented further EU en-
largement after the programmed entry of Bulgaria and Romania, since
current EU rules defined it as having 25 members plus two candidates for
entrance, Bulgaria and Romania. Only ratification of the constitution
would have allowed new members in.

French opposition to the referendum came from both the right and left
sides of the political spectrum. On the right, a powerful emotional ar-
gument was the charge that by ratifying the constitution, France would
cede even more of its national sovereignty to "faceless bureaucrats in
Brussels." Furthermore, the proposed constitution would make possible
the admission of Turkey, whose government dearly wanted membership.
Spearheading the campaign against the constitution on the grounds that it would lead to Turkish EU membership was Philippe de Villiers, head of the far-right Movement for France (MPF), who exploited popular fear of accelerated Muslim immigration.

Another key reason for French rejection of the referendum came primarily, but not exclusively, from left-leaning parties and the labor unions. The constitution, it was alleged, would bring the end of protective labor laws and allow free-wheeling capitalism into France, thus doing away with the job security enjoyed by many French workers.

Particularly singled out for criticism was the EU’s “Bolkestein directive,” which allowed firms in EU states to bring in foreign laborers from other EU nations for set periods of several months. While away from their native countries, the workers would receive wages at the level of the host country, but social security contributions and other associated payments would be paid at levels prevalent in their countries of origin. Adoption of such a rule, opponents argued, would allow France’s giant construction firms to flood worksites around the country with East European workers delighted to earn several times what they did at home. They would take away jobs from their French counterparts, who would be shunned by employers seeking to avoid high social welfare contributions for French workers. “Polish plumbers” were particularly singled out by politicians, possibly because there was already a large pool of entirely illegal, but also highly qualified, workers from that country who “moonlighted” on small construction sites in France.

The result of the referendum was a major humiliation for President Jacques Chirac, who had not only campaigned vigorously for approval, but had orchestrated the referendum to begin with. Instead of having the proposed constitution ratified by the French Parliament—as could have easily been done, given the clear majorities his center-right coalition enjoyed in both houses—he insisted on a popular referendum, presumably in the hope that a victory would add momentum to his chances for reelection to a third term in 2007.

On May 31, two days after the referendum disaster, Chirac replaced Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin with Dominique de Villepin, the previous interior minister, who was best known abroad as the French foreign minister during the crisis in Franco-American relations over the invasion of Iraq. Villepin formed a cabinet on June 2, handing the Interior Ministry to Nicolas Sarkozy, who had been finance minister in Raffarin’s cabinet and now became the second highest ranking cabinet member, with the added title of minister of state.
The Riots

On the night of October 27, in the run-down north Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois, two Muslim teenagers, one of Tunisian origin and the other from Mali, were accidentally electrocuted to death when, believing that police were chasing them, they hid in an electric power substation. Other local youths—mostly teenage children of immigrants, already on tense terms with police—reacted that same night by burning cars and stoning fire trucks and police vehicles arriving on the scene.

Nearby areas also erupted into violence, and within days ghetto neighborhoods in some 274 cities and towns were affected. More than 10,000 vehicles were burned, together with some 200 public buildings, including schools and gymnasiums. More than 3,000 people were arrested and about 400 prison terms were subsequently meted out. Most terms, however, were relatively light or suspended, reflecting the government’s fear that imposing harsher penalties would spark further violence. Damage was estimated at about $250 million. As the year ended, most observers and the media agreed that the violence could resume at any time. Not only were none of the underlying issues precipitating the eruption solved, but there was not even a consensus on what those issues were.

Although virtually every major city in France was affected, the overwhelming majority of the non-immigrant public—close to 90 percent of the French population—saw little of the violence except on television news. This was because the incidents took place almost entirely in ghettos that were situated, as they often are in France, in outlying suburbs far from city centers, the very opposite of the situation in the U.S., where comparable neighborhoods are often in run-down inner-city areas. Although there were a handful of car-burning incidents inside Paris and a few other cities, life continued normally for most residents of France, including for those immigrants living outside the sprawling suburban slums where the trouble took place.

Aside from the two electrocuted teenagers, there were no fatalities that could be directly linked to the riots, although two white Frenchmen were killed in separate muggings by youths of immigrant origin; these took place separate from, but simultaneously with, the general violence. Some conservative politicians linked those deaths to the violent atmosphere.

The total of those injured—about 130 among the police and just slightly more among the rioters—was exceptionally low, given the large number of incidents and areas in which clashes occurred. This was largely ascribed to the tactics used by police, whose strategy was to prevent ri-
oters from moving beyond their immediate home areas, but also to avoid chasing them into the buildings where they lived and where they sought refuge when police arrived on the scene. In this way clashes with family members, especially women and children, were avoided.

Even so, critics complained that the riots might have been brought under control sooner had more force been used. Prime Minister de Villepin responded by comparing the performance of the French police favorably to the way U.S. authorities handled urban riots, such as those in Los Angeles in 1992, when National Guard troops and police shot dead several dozen rioters. The fact was that, despite having well-trained and mobile antiriot forces, French police were exhausted and thinly deployed because of the effort required to contain trouble in so many places at once for a period of three weeks. Many experts said that had the violence continued for another week or so, the army would have had to be called in. This would have seriously increased the chances of violence getting out of hand, since the military had little antiriot experience; its handling of riots in Abidjan, capital of the French-speaking African republic of the Ivory Coast, in 2005 resulted in much bloodshed.

A 90-day state of emergency was declared in France on November 8, allowing the imposition of curfews and extended search powers for police. This decree was based on a law passed in 1955 to quell the insurrection in Algeria, leading far-left and civil-rights groups to protest that the use of a colonial-era law was itself incitement against people who had once suffered from colonial oppression. The state of emergency was rescinded on January 4, 2006, its powers having been fully used in only a small number of cases.

Although many incidents took place in or near areas where blue-collar Jews resided and where there were synagogues and Jewish schools—places that had been targets of hundreds of attacks a few years earlier, during the intifada in the Palestinian territories—there were only two anti-Semitic attacks during the 2005 révolte des banlieues (revolt of the suburbs). These occurred on the night of November 3—4, when a petrol bomb was thrown at a synagogue in Pierrefitte, a north Paris suburb, blackening an outer door, and on the following night, when an empty bottle was thrown against a synagogue at Garges-les-Goneses, a poor suburb nearby. Both attacks took place late at night, when the buildings were empty, and no one was hurt.

The rioters did attack five churches, but religion played a negligible part in the events, with one exception. On October 30, fumes from police tear-gas grenades fired nearby wafted into a packed mosque at Clichy-sous-
Bois, forcing the coughing and choking worshipers to flee the building. Police initially denied any connection with the incident, saying it could have been caused by rioters themselves. But authorities quickly conceded “unintentional” responsibility. In a reflection of continued Jewish-Arab tensions in France, local Muslim leaders interviewed on the spot by television news said that the government would have instantly apologized if a synagogue had been involved.

Known Muslim fundamentalists who were under heavy police surveillance played no evident role among the rioters. Some did, however, act as mediators between authorities and youths. Jewish leaders said this worried them because it would inevitably endow these people with some quasi-official recognition.

Riot Post-Mortems

Clearly the violence resembled the urban riots in black American ghettos in the 1960s more than the Palestinian intifada, in that there was no overt political agenda and the violence was nihilistic, directed against society as a whole. Many on the political left blamed the riots on the tough interior minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, for what they said were provocative statements he made in the months before the violence. He had on several occasions referred to juvenile delinquents as racailles, equivalent in tone to “garbage,” if not “scum,” and had pledged to clean out crime-ridden areas with “Karcher,” a brand of industrial hoses. These remarks were widely interpreted to refer to most young ghetto dwellers.

Journalists seeking to interview rioters were often physically assaulted and saw their own vehicles burned and equipment stolen. But in those cases where Baghdad-like “fixers” were found to arrange meetings between journalists and rioting youths, the main reasons given by the latter for their violence were anger at heavy-handed treatment by police, lack of jobs, and perceived racism on the part of French society and its institutions.

France, with one of the most comprehensive social welfare systems in the world, was a prime destination for immigrants from the Third World. But that same wealth of social benefits helped create an economic atmosphere not particularly friendly to enterprise, and French unemployment, hovering at around 10 percent, was one of the highest in the EU. Youth unemployment was much higher, about 20 percent for those under age 25, and often double that for members of immigrant communities, whose scholastic performance was among the lowest in the country.
The result was a high rate of juvenile delinquency. About 60 percent of the country’s prison population, itself overwhelmingly young, was made up of Muslims, mostly the children of immigrants from France’s former North African territories of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Another group of the least-trained, most unemployable elements of society were youths of black African origin, many from Muslim countries like Mali, who were highly likely to get into trouble with authorities as they imitated the mores of black American ghetto culture learned through films and video clips extolling violence.

The government announced the creation of multiple new welfare programs after the rioting subsided, aimed at better integrating immigrants into society. But experts said that without a sudden upturn in the economy—something highly unlikely—there was little chance of an improvement in the situation. President Chirac was widely criticized for his largely hands-off attitude during the riots; he made only one major speech, on November 14, in which he said, “the children of all the difficult neighborhoods must know that, whatever their origins, they are all children of the [French] republic.”

A major obstacle to ascertaining the situation was the paucity of statistics, since French law forbade the registering or identifying of anyone on French soil by race or religion. Registration by nationality was allowed, but that was hardly helpful to statisticians since French nationality was automatically granted to anyone born to parents who were legally on French soil, and most of the rioters were thus French nationals. The strict taboo on racial and religious identification—now under attack by some minority groups that wanted to see U.S.-like affirmative action laws instituted—was a reaction against the wartime Vichy government’s registration of Jews in 1940, which made it simple for Vichy police to arrest and hand over Jews to the Nazis for deportation from 1942 onwards.

French Muslim leaders said they believed their community numbered between five and six million, or about a tenth of the population of France. (The prevailing estimate for the Jewish population was 600,000, 1 percent of the total.) Opinion polls showed only 20–25 percent of Muslims describing themselves as regular mosque-goers, with many saying they came to France precisely to escape from religious pressure at home. Nonetheless, fundamentalist groups were making inroads: during 2005 police discovered several rings that smuggled young volunteers to fight against coalition forces in Iraq.

Among the side effects of the riots was a controversy that rocked France’s intelligentsia and became nationwide front-page news. At its cen-
ter was 56-year-old Alain Finkielkraut, a Jewish child of Holocaust survivors, former left-wing radical, professor at the elite École Polytechnique, and probably France’s foremost living philosopher. “To see the riots as a response to French racism is to be blind to a broader hatred: the hatred for the West, which is deemed guilty of all crimes ...” he told the Israeli daily Ha'aretz on November 18. “When an Arab torches a school, it’s rebellion. When a white guy does it, it's fascism. I’m color-blind. Evil is evil, no matter what color it is. And this evil, for the Jew that I am, is absolutely intolerable.” Ha'aretz, a leftist newspaper, added its own comments equating Finkielkraut’s views with those of the French extreme rightist leader Jean-Marie Le Pen.

On November 24, the influential French daily Le Monde, a champion of France's immigrant communities and a critic of the Jewish leadership in the country and its support for Israel, reported the Ha'aretz story, sparking an outcry against Finkielkraut on the French political left. The Communist-backed MRAP human rights group, in fact, said it would press legal charges against Finkielkraut for racial libel. The anti-Finkielkraut campaign reached its height on December 1, when the weekly newsmagazine Le Nouvel Observateur published a photo of a sinister-looking Finkielkraut on its cover, with the title, “The New Reactionaries.” In the issue was an accusation by journalist and social commentator Claude Askolovitch (who is Jewish) that “the leaders of [Le Pen’s] National Front are reading Finkielkraut and bragging about it!” Another Jew, author Daniel Lindberg, quoted in the magazine, accused the philosopher of creating a “fracture” between communities in France.

The furious onslaught against Finkielkraut generated a contrary movement to defend him. In mid-December the France-Culture radio station conducted a live debate in which Finkielkraut faced some of his accusers. The philosopher described what he had undergone as “lynching by media,” and the station was inundated by messages of support for him. Finkielkraut also received backing from Nicolas Sarkozy, the interior minister with ambitions to be the next president, who told reporters: “If there is so much criticism of Alain Finkielkraut, it might be because he says things that are true. The philosophers who frequent literary salons and live between the Café de Flore and Boulevard St. Germain suddenly find France no longer bears a resemblance to them.” Sarkozy said it was “monolithic thinking by many intellectuals” who denied that mass immigration created tensions, that strengthened the powerful election-time showings of Le Pen. Finkielkraut also got massive backing from French Jewish organizations grateful for his defense of Israel and of the French Jewish community.
POLITICAL Fallout

The failure of the referendum on a European constitution and the three weeks of riots seemed to spell the beginning of the end for the 73-year-old Jacques Chirac's extraordinarily long political career. An additional factor was Chirac's hospitalization on September 2 for what was described as "a slight vascular accident," after complaining of a severe headache and vision problems. Chirac, whose proverbial good health had gotten him the nickname "Le Bulldozer," had not declared if he intended to run for a third term in 2007. But a number of would-be successors made their intentions known. Both Villepin and Sarkozy, from the mainstream right, were increasingly open about their hopes to succeed Chirac. François Bayrou, who was more of a centrist, officially threw his hat in the ring. Further to the right, de Villiers was expected to run, as was the veteran extreme rightist Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Infighting had plagued the opposition Socialist Party since it lost power in 2002. Its avowed or rumored candidates included the party's secretary general, François Hollande, former prime ministers Lionel Jospin and Laurent Fabius, former finance minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn, past cultural affairs minister Jack Lang, and fast-rising public favorite Ségolène Royal, the only woman in the race. Another potential candidate on the left was an independent figure, Bernard Kouchner, who had created the "Doctors without Borders" approach to international crisis relief. Fabius, Strauss-Kahn, Lang, and Kouchner were either Jewish or had one Jewish parent.

But none of them particularly solicited the Jewish community for support, in contrast to the three mainstream right-wing candidates—Sarkozy, de Villepin, and Bayrou—who were regulars at community functions. Sarkozy was most clearly identified with Jewish concerns. He was the son of a Hungarian immigrant father, but his parents separated when he was young and he was brought up by his mother, whose own father was a Jew from Salonica, Greece. It was this grandfather who was the effective "father figure" in Sarkozy's upbringing. In a bizarre development akin to a French bedroom farce, Sarkozy's wife, Cecilia, ran off with French Jewish advertising executive Richard Attias in July. The affair was front-page news in the country for weeks, with Sarkozy angrily implying that rivals in his own camp made sure the press was supplied with racy news and photos of the errant couple, who spent much of their time in New York. (Madame Sarkozy returned to her husband in January 2006, only to go back to her lover two months later.)
On the extreme right, Jean-Marie Le Pen briefly drew attention to himself in February with new, outrageous statements about World War II. He commented in an interview that “the German occupation of France was not particularly inhumane even if there were a few blunders.” Le Pen’s outburst, which generated widespread condemnation by politicians and the media, came amid efforts by his daughter, Marine, 36, to distance her father’s National Front (FN) from its past association with historical revisionism. Marine, who was FN vice president, froze her participation in the party for several months after her father’s statement, but resumed her activities later in the year. As a member of the European Parliament, she joined its Delegation for Relations with Israel, and said late in the year that she hoped to travel to Israel soon. Marc Knobel, a senior official of CRIF (Conseil Représentatif des Institutions juives de France, Representative Council of French Jewish Organizations), said on December 16 in the organization’s newsletter that such a visit would be “incomprehensible.” In the continued infighting within the FN, Louis Aliot, a confidant of Marine Le Pen, was appointed secretary general, replacing hardliner Carl Lang. An extreme rightist publication, Le Libre Journal, which feared Marine Le Pen’s efforts to “humanize” the Front and dilute its hard-right image, charged that Aliot was of Jewish origin.

Israel and the Middle East

Franco-Israeli relations began the year in their usual sour way, as both sides still labored under the burden of the diplomatic row set off by Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon in July 2004. At that time, Sharon had told visiting American Jewish leaders that France was host to “the wildest anti-Semitism.” “If I have to advocate to our brothers in France,” the prime minister went on, “I will tell them one thing: move to Israel, as early as possible.” The French Foreign Ministry called the remarks “unacceptable.” President Chirac asked Sharon to explain himself, and said that until he did so, Sharon would not be welcome in France. The Israeli media later reported that Chirac sent a message to Israeli president Moshe Katzav saying he considered the incident closed. But relations between the two countries remained tense.

On February 12, 2005, at the annual dinner of CRIF—a high-profile event always given considerable coverage by the French media—CRIF president Roger Cukierman strongly criticized the government’s behavior the previous November, when Yasir Arafat died in a Paris hospital (see AJYB 2005, pp. 340–41). In the presence of Prime Minister Raffarin and
no less than 15 cabinet members, who listened stony-faced, and several hundred Jewish community leaders, Cukierman said he felt a "malaise in the face of the aggravation of an anti-Jewish climate... a malaise before what seems to me to be incompatibility between France's foreign policy and its domestic policy of fighting against anti-Semitism. ... Why did France have to offer such a grandiose ceremony to Yasir Arafat [when his coffin was transported from French soil]? Why not have denied more firmly the medieval-like rumors that Arafat was poisoned? Why have tolerated the fake declaration of Arafat's birthplace to an official registrar," Cukierman said, referring to a death certificate issued at the request of Arafat's widow, Suha, which said Arafat was born in Jerusalem when most historians agreed he was born in Cairo.

Cukierman further assailed what he called "ambiguous comments" made when French authorities secured the release of two French journalists earlier kidnapped by Islamic militants in Iraq, a reference to boasts that France had good relations with Iraqi opposition groups. Cukierman also complained that Israel, where a sizable number of residents were native French speakers, had yet to be admitted to La Francophonie, a loose grouping of countries with French speakers that had long rejected Israeli membership because of a Lebanese veto. He was enthusiastically applauded by the overwhelmingly Jewish audience when he left the rostrum to return to the table where Raffarin and his colleagues were waiting.

Prime Minister Raffarin, speaking next, said: "Monsieur le President, I listened to your words attentively. These are serious subjects pronounced at a time when rays of hope for Middle East peace are finally appearing on the horizon. Therefore I will not enter into a debate." It later emerged that Cukierman had toned down his speech from what he initially planned to say, as the CRIF president and the prime minister traditionally exchanged drafts of their speeches before the annual dinner so as to negotiate about statements that might cause unpleasantness.

A thaw was evident in relations between France and Israel just two days later, on February 14, when Israeli foreign minister Silvan Shalom visited Paris for the ceremony reopening Israel's embassy on Rue Rabelais, just off the Champs Élysées, which had undergone nearly three years of repair following a fire in May 2002. French foreign minister Michel Barnier and more than 1,000 other dignitaries from the French political world and the local Jewish community joined Shalom at the lavish event. The Israeli minister told journalists that "there was an improvement in our bilateral relations."

When Prime Minister Sharon arrived for a three-day state visit on July
26, he lavished compliments on President Chirac, whom he called "one of the greatest leaders in the world today." French newspapers spoke of "a new Franco-Israeli honeymoon." Clearly, the two sides had come to understand that there was no ignoring one another: Sharon knew he would make no progress with the EU if he remained on bad terms with Paris, which wielded major influence over the grouping, and France recognized that it could undertake no serious action in the Middle East unless it was back in the good graces of Jerusalem. Other factors helping improve the diplomatic climate between the two countries were the death of Arafat, France's campaign alongside the U.S. to rid Lebanon of Syrian influence, and the terror attacks in Madrid and London that sparked new cooperation between French and Israeli intelligence services.

Nevertheless, France and Israel were still far apart as to what should take place after the projected Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. French diplomats explained to journalists before Sharon's arrival that Paris believed Israel should agree to an international conference led by the Quartet (the U.S., Russia, the UN, and the EU) to discuss post-withdrawal steps, a scenario Israel could not accept.

Sharon, who met with many top French personalities during his stay, avoided any public mention of delicate subjects, sidestepping questions by the influential newspaper Le Monde as to whether he would repeat his controversial call to French Jews to emigrate to Israel. Arab and far-left groups organized demonstrations against Sharon, but they never succeeded in gathering more than a few hundred people, and these, kept well away from the visitor, were virtually ignored by the French media. Foreign Minister Shalom returned to Paris on October 27-28, and discussed with French authorities the dangers posed to Israel and, according to him, ultimately to Europe, by Iran and its threatening nuclear posture.

These meetings, the subsequent Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, and the absence, for a change, of dramatic footage from the West Bank of Israeli troops clashing with Palestinian youths all contributed to altering the image of Israel in the eyes of the French public, according to an opinion poll commissioned by CRIF and conducted November 8-9. According to the poll, some 42 percent of French people expressed sympathy for Israel, as compared to 34 percent who said they felt antipathy. This was a sharp improvement since the previous poll, carried out in April 2004, which indicated 38 percent sympathetic and 48 percent antipathetic.

French Jewish community leaders expressed satisfaction on September 21 after a meeting with the new foreign minister, Philippe Douste-Blazy. CRIF president Cukierman described their exchange as "exceptional."
Participants said Douste-Blazy showed "real understanding" for Israel's problems and quoted him as saying that "Israel is entirely justified in its demand that all [Palestinian] armed militias must be disarmed before the Quartet can envisage the next step on the road map towards peace." Douste-Blazy also promised to back Israel's admittance to La Francophonie.

CRIF president Cukierman, referring to his outburst at the CRIF dinner back in February, said in an interview with the weekly newspaper *Actualités Juives* on December 1: "Today, things have changed considerably and the climate is completely different. I can only say that I am extremely satisfied with the state of Franco-Israeli relations and I would not make the same speech again."

Through the year, French Jewish leaders kept an eye on figures occasionally published by French police concerning the number of French Muslims thought to have gone to join the Islamists fighting against coalition forces in Iraq. They were especially concerned by the police's assessment that those volunteers who later returned to France were likely to engage in terrorist activities. In early October, the national police intelligence division said it had identified 22 French Muslims who had gone to fight in Iraq, seven of whom were known to have been killed and two taken prisoner by American-led forces.

French authorities also expelled a dozen foreign imams during the year for preaching in a way that incited public disorder or was harmful to the government's policy. Most were Turkish or Moroccan nationals. Pascal Mailhos, director of intelligence at national police headquarters in Paris, told reporters in August that about 1,600 Muslim places of prayer around France were under police surveillance. He described 80 of these prayer halls as "sensitive" and constantly under "pressure from radical Islamist organizations," and 20 as being "in the hands of radicals."

**Anti-Semitism**

The number of anti-Semitic acts in France fell sharply in 2005, according to figures compiled by national police headquarters. There were 504 incidents as compared to 974 in 2004, a 48-percent drop. "2004 was the worst year since we began to keep specific statistics on the subject in 1995," a senior police officer told the press, adding that the number of anti-Semitic incidents had already started to drop in the last three months of that year.

In remarks to American Jewish leaders he made while on a visit to the
U.S., CRIF president Cukierman praised the French government's efforts to fight anti-Semitism. "This policy has been exceptional over the past few years, and Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy is particularly active in this struggle. An interministerial liaison committee has been created to fight anti-Semitism . . . . Our cooperation with the Interior, Education and Justice ministries is entirely satisfactory and we have seen the results." But he stressed that the new, lower figures were still several times higher than before the start of the second intifada in the West Bank and Gaza Strip late in 2000.

The number of racist and xenophobic actions that victimized non-Jews (largely Arabs and blacks at the hands of the ethnic French) also dropped in 2005, but only by 21 percent, going from 600 in 2004 to 470 in 2005. A similar difference between the two categories of victims was found in regard to the number of arrests. Some 40 people were arrested in connection with anti-Semitic acts or insults in 2005, as compared to 80 arrests in 2004. Arrests for racist acts against people other than Jews declined at a slower rate, from 71 in 2004 to 55 in 2005.

Of the anti-Semitic acts, 98 consisted of violence directed against people or property (compared to 200 such acts the previous year), including actions where explosives or arson were involved. A further 406 acts (compared to 774 the year before) were categorized as threats, conveyed by telephone, mail, graffiti, leaflets, or words or gestures. Among the racist acts against people other than Jews, 88 involved violence (compared to 169 in 2004) and 382 threats (compared to 431).

French police said the 2005 decline in anti-Semitic acts could be explained by several factors, starting with "effective protective measures of sensitive points and a strong involvement of security forces." They also spoke of "major preventive work in schools and a drop in international tensions," meaning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The region of France where the most anti-Semitic acts were recorded was the Paris area, where about a fifth of France's population resided. Police said that extreme rightists were less involved in anti-Semitic acts. Jewish community security sources attributed the overwhelming majority of anti-Jewish acts in France to youths of North African origin, but there was a worrying tendency for youths of black African origin to imitate them.

A glimpse of how the French public at large viewed their Jewish compatriots was afforded by a public opinion poll conducted in May and published in early June by TNS Sofres for the French Friends of Tel Aviv University. It showed that 92 percent of the French regarded their Jewish neighbors as "just as French as any other French persons." This fig-
ure had dramatically increased in successive polls conducted since the end of World War II. Jews also scored “better” than Corsicans, who were viewed as “just as French as any other French persons” by 89 percent of respondents, and Arabs, at 79 percent. Asked what they thought of having a Jew as a son-in-law or daughter-in-law, some 87 percent said the possibility would not bother them, 9 percent said it would, and 1 percent said they would welcome it. These figures too, when compared to earlier surveys, indicated a marked increase in the social acceptability of Jews.

The old canard that Jews had “too much” power in the country still survived, as 16 percent of the respondents believed it true either entirely or in part, and another 17 percent had no opinion, which, the pollsters suggested, might indicate subtle anti-Semitism. About 67 percent disagreed with the notion that Jews had too much power. Seventeen percent would oppose the election of a Jewish president while 82 percent would not. Asked how they reacted when they first learned that someone they knew was Jewish, 91 percent said it made no difference to them, 7 percent said it made the person seem more attractive, and 1 percent said it made the person seem less attractive.

The poll gave no ethnic or religious breakdown of its representative sample of 1,000 respondents, but a separate survey published later in the year showed extremely hostile views about Jews in the French Muslim community, a tenth of the French population.

In late February, the French government’s broadcast licensing authority, Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel (CSA), ordered the private Eutelsat satellite operator, headquartered in Paris and with 25 satellites covering most of Europe, to cease relaying the Iranian state-backed Sahar-1 television channel, on the grounds that it broadcast programs that were anti-Semitic and incited violence. There was no way of knowing how many households in France tuned in to Middle East-based television stations, but police said they were extremely wary of the influence that such programs could have on France’s six million Muslims, many of whom had satellite dishes precisely in order to have access to programs in their native languages.

The CSA singled out one series, “For You Palestine, Or Zahra’s Blue Eyes,” created in Tehran and relayed by Eutelsat to Western Europe in French and Persian. In the series, a fictional Israeli prime minister, “Yitzhak Cohen,” supervises the forced removal of organs from Palestinian refugees, including the eyes of the child heroine of the series. CSA also charged that Sahar-1 showed a Syrian series called “Diaspora” based on the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, and broadcast an interview with
French Holocaust revisionist Robert Faurisson, whose statements denying the Holocaust violated French law.

A novel, *Pogrom*, was the object of condemnations from the offices of Prime Minister Raffarin and CRIF president Roger Cukierman in March, although no legal action was taken to ban it. The book was filled with violent anti-Semitic diatribes. Author Eric Bénier-Burckel, however, denied anti-Semitic intentions, saying the plot clearly showed that he condemned the characters that he had created. Critics said that the little-known Bénier-Burckel may have been seeking to imitate pre-World War II novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline, a brilliant author who developed an obsession with anti-Semitism, and ended up collaborating with the Nazis during the war.

The Versailles Court of Appeals, on May 27, found the prestigious evening newspaper *Le Monde* guilty of racial libel for the publication in May 2002 of an op-ed article about Israel’s policies toward the Palestinians by eminent sociologist Edgar Morin, a Jewish, left-wing critic of Israel, former French member of the European Parliament Sami Naïr, and university professor Danièle Sallenave. It was entitled “Israel—Palestine: the cancer,” and contained passages accusing “the Jews” (not “Israel” or “the Israelis”) of persecuting Palestinians. The court overturned an earlier lower-court decision that ruled that the text was part of a political debate on the Israel-Palestine question, not “constituting an offence that besmirches the honor and the consideration due to the Jewish community as a whole.”

A court in Nanterre (in the Paris area) sentenced the Paris-based al-Qalam publishing house and its director, Abdelila Cherifi Alaoui, to a suspended three-month prison sentence and a 10,000-euro (about $12,500) fine, plus damages, for incitement to hatred and violence for publishing the book *L’autre visage d’Israël* (The Other Face of Israel). The book was written by Israel Shamir, a fervently anti-Zionist Russian Jew who converted to Christianity and lived in Israel. The charges were pressed after a complaint by LICRA, a French organization that fights racism and anti-Semitism.

Mixed-race “humorist” Dieudonné M’bala M’bala (see AJYB 2005, pp. 345—47) continued to goad the country’s Jewish community, for example stating, during a visit to Algiers in February, that “Zionism is the AIDS of Judaism” and “French authorities have given in to the Zionists... Jews occupy all the strategic positions in France today.” Dieudonné was attacked by three young French Jews when he visited the French West Indian island of Martinique on March 1. These Jews, who had recently
arrived on the island to work as salesmen, ambushed Dieudonné as he emerged late at night from a television studio where he had given an interview. He said the three assailants (a fourth was waiting in a getaway car) pummelled him and called him “dirty nigger.” Dieudonné was not seriously hurt and the four were arrested the same evening. They were later sentenced to six months imprisonment, but their terms were immediately suspended. Members of Martinique’s tiny Jewish community said they feared for their safety after the incident, but no reprisals were reported.

Holocaust-Related Matters

President Chirac, known to be averse to speaking foreign languages in public, did pronounce three words of Hebrew on January 25, when he spoke at the inauguration of France’s Shoah Memorial on the Rue Geoffroy l’Asnier in the Marais district of Paris: Zakhor and Al Tishkah, “Remember” and “Don’t Forget.” The memorial described itself as Europe’s largest center dedicated to information and research on the Holocaust. It opened its doors to the public two days later, January 27, the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the site of another ceremony that was attended by many world leaders, including Chirac.

The eight-story, 5,000-square-meter Shoah Memorial was built on the site of, and around, an existing Memorial to the Unknown Jewish Martyr. The enlarged complex included an auditorium, research facilities, a library, a multimedia center, and offices. The walls in the courtyard bore the names of 76,000 Jews deported from France during the Nazi occupation between 1942 and 1944, many of them identified by the Center for Contemporary Jewish Documentation, which constituted part of the new complex. Among the names were those of some 2,500 survivors, and it was one of them, Simone Veil, the former European Parliament president and onetime French cabinet minister, who spoke when the walls were uncovered on January 25. Madame Veil said, “the memory of the Shoah must not only be carried by the children of the victims. It is all of humanity which was assassinated in the camps.”

In his speech, Chirac pledged that France would “not forget because to refuse to forget is the ultimate defeat of barbarism.” Denouncing Holocaust denial as “a crime against the truth,” Chirac also declared that “anti-Semitism has no place in France.” He said he understood the fears of the French Jewish community and recognized the place of the State of Israel in the hearts of Diaspora Jews. He quoted Elie Weisel’s words: “The Jews may live outside Israel but they cannot live without Israel.”
The day before, Prime Minister Raffarin attended commemorations at Izieu, in eastern France, on the spot where 44 Jewish children and their seven teachers were arrested by the Gestapo in April 1944 and sent to Auschwitz. Raffarin was accompanied by the French chief rabbi, Joseph Sitruk, who burst into tears while speaking to non-Jewish schoolchildren from the Lyons area who had been brought to the site. The rabbi appealed to them to fight anti-Semitism, saying, “You must know that racism does not start with deportation or eliminations. It begins with insults. If one day at school or elsewhere you hear one of your friends call someone a ‘dirty Jew,’ do not let it pass as if nothing had happened.”

To mark the 60th anniversary, the Paris municipality staged several events that were attended by thousands. Between January 25 and March 12, the municipality’s main exhibit hall hosted “The Last Witnesses from Auschwitz-Birkenau Testify,” in which video films were shown of recent interviews with some of the last French-Jewish survivors of the infamous death camp. The municipality also held a historical symposium on the same subject on April 1–2, and another exhibit that ran between April 28 and July 30 on “The Jews of the Marais District—From Refuge to Trap,” which included several rooms full of objects detailing the history of East European Jewish immigration to France from about 1880.

Eric de Rothschild, president of the French Shoah Memorial, signed an unprecedented cooperation agreement on June 16 with Paris police chief Pierre Mutz, according to which the two institutions agreed to exchange microfilm files for the period of the German occupation of France, when collaborationist Vichy authorities placed the French police under the effective operational orders of Nazi authorities. The most notorious instance of police cooperation with the Nazis came on June 16–17, 1942, when about 12,000 Parisian Jews of East European origin were arrested. Nearly all were later killed at Auschwitz. De Rothschild and Mutz also agreed that the Shoah Memorial would hold regular briefings for police trainees about the Holocaust period and about Jews, as part of their preparation for police work.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Communal Affairs

Tunisian-born Frenchman Pierre Besnainou, 50, was elected president of the European Jewish Congress on June 26. He defeated the incumbent,
Cobi Benatoff of Italy, by 48 to 36 percent. Besnainou, who had until then been EJC vice president and treasurer, was also co-treasurer of the World Jewish Congress and a member of the central committee of the Fonds Social Juif Unifié, the main fund-raising welfare organization of the French Jewish community. In addition, Besnainou was the moving force and chief personal contributor to AMI (Aliyah et Meilleure Intégration), an organization dedicated to helping the integration of French Jewish immigrants in Israel (see below).

Paris mayor Bertrand Delanoë, on June 15, inaugurated the Place Bernard Lazare. Located in the Marais neighborhood of the third arrondissement (district), it was named after the French Jewish writer and polemicist who was one of Captain Alfred Dreyfus’s first defenders during the notorious Dreyfus Affair that broke out in 1894.

The city of Troyes in eastern France, backed by the French Ministry of Cultural Affairs and in coordination with Jewish groups, marked the 900th anniversary of the death of the great medieval Jewish scholar Rashi with a series of seminars and exhibits through the year. Rashi, whose full name was Shlomo Ben Yitzhak, lived and died in this main town of Champagne, and ran a celebrated yeshiva there. His fame went far beyond the small local Jewish community, and church documents of the time mention him as “Solomon of Troyes.” In 1475, several hundred years after his death, Rashi’s commentary on the Pentateuch was the first book ever printed in Hebrew. Since 1990, the Troyes European Center for Hebraic Studies and Research had existed in the town. The Jewish-headed institute now had about 150 regular students, including Catholic priests and nuns. Hundreds of other people attended conferences and seminars the institute organized.

**French Jews and Israel**

Relations between the French Jewish community and Israel remained extremely close. The number of immigrants from France to Israel reached 2,980 in 2005, the highest annual total ever. This compared with 2,500 immigrants in 2004, 2,300 in 2003, and 2,600 in 2002, the year of an unprecedented wave of anti-Semitic incidents prompted by the intifada. The annual number before the intifada was usually less than 1,000. No figures were available for emigration by French Jews to the U.S. and Canada. These were other choice destinations, as witnessed by several “fairs” advertising life in these countries; one, for example, informed French Jewish pharmacists of their prospects if they chose to settle in Florida.
Estimates of the rate of reverse immigration back to France of French Jews who had moved to Israel since 1967 ran as high as 30 percent. In March, a new group, Aliyah et Meilleure Intégration (AMI) was established to keep such French immigrants from returning home disappointed if their integration ran into difficulties, especially due to economic reasons. The acronym AMI spelled the French word for "friend" and the Hebrew word for "my people." At its launching ceremony, the organization said that it had already collected $1.5 million, much of it donated by Pierre Besnainou, the successful French-Tunisian businessman who was subsequently elected president of the European Jewish Congress (see above).

AMI was set up with the help of the Jewish Agency. Avi Zana, AMI's secretary general, told journalists that many French Jews immigrated in the summer and received a full benefits package from the Israeli government lasting six months. Whether or not immigrants found employment by then, the benefits were sharply curtailed at the end of that period. Many of the newcomers were faced with serious financial problems, compounded by wintry weather as well as social isolation in a country where they had yet to make friends. In such situations, AMI would step in and supplement the family income for at least another six months until employment was found. AMI also planned to offer scholarships to immigrant students, organize pre-departure Hebrew courses, and open an office in Israel to help immigrants from France find places to live in neighborhoods where other French Jews had already settled.

There was also a new phenomenon, "Boeing Aliyah," whereby well-to-do French Jewish professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, settled in Israel with their families but maintained their practices in France, commuting between the two countries. Since the flight time between France and Israel is about four hours, some family heads were reported to be spending four days a week in France and three in Israel. Others were organizing their work schedules in such a way as to travel between France and Israel twice a month, staying longer periods in each country. The French edition of the Jerusalem Post estimated that several hundred people, mostly males with children still young enough to integrate easily into Israeli society, had opted for this way of life.

Tourism from France to Israel was up, 311,400 people arriving in Israel during the year, compared to 257,484 in 2004. The 2005 figure made France the second largest source of tourism to Israel, after the U.S. (457,521 Americans came, among a total 1.9 million tourists). The overwhelming majority of French tourists were Jews.

An unpleasant aspect of the substantial French tourism in Israel were
complaints, echoed in the French Jewish press, that El Al Airlines as well as Israeli hotels and restaurants were guilty of price gouging. French Jewish leaders complained in June to Prime Minister Sharon that visitors from France were being charged $1,000 for a round-trip ticket to Tel Aviv, nearly one-third more than the price of a ticket from London, which was further from Israel. El Al replied that French Jewish tourists tended to travel en masse at the time of school holidays. Therefore, El Al said, aircraft had to fly to France empty to pick them up, and empty again after bringing them back home after the holidays. The higher prices paid for fuel on the empty legs.

Throughout the summer, French Jewish radio aired a stream of reports from returning tourists that restaurants and hotels in the Tel Aviv area, where many French Jewish tourists converged, overcharged them. Allegedly, restaurant menus listed significantly lower prices in the Hebrew-language column for the same dishes. The complaints were investigated and confirmed by the Israeli newspaper Yediot Aharonot.

Well-to-do French Jews were reported to be heavily engaged in the purchase of property in the Tel Aviv area, especially in fashionable northern areas of the city close to the sea. According to reports on French Jewish radio, prices had gone up by 20 percent in the area when owners realized how eager rich French Jews were to acquire vacation apartments that they could later use as retirement homes.

Israelis also traveled to France. This made the news on May 13, when an Israeli youth group, aged 12–14, was involved in a confrontation with Arab teenagers in Lyons. The Israeli Jewish youngsters, arriving at a local school for a visit, were accosted and insulted by some 20 Arab youths. Three French Jewish security guards hustled the Israelis into the school and then turned to face the assailants, injuring one of them. Police arrested the three guards for initiating physical violence. They spent the night in jail, but were released the next morning. No subsequent judicial action is known to have taken place.

**Interreligious Relations**

The death of Pope John Paul II on April 2 evoked messages of sympathy from French Jewish leaders to the heads of France’s Catholic Church. Chief Rabbi Joseph Sitruk described the late pope as “a great Christian and a great man.” He said the pope’s legacy was “unique and exceptional in the sincere repentance that he introduced into the building of a fraternal dialogue between Jews and Christians, as well as his recognition of the responsibility of the Church in the groundwork that
led to the Shoah, just as it was largely responsible for anti-Semitism as a whole.” The rabbi especially hailed the pope’s visit to Israel, which, he said, “profoundly marked the people of Israel just as it marked the whole Jewish people.”

Cardinal Jean-Marie Aaron Lustiger, the Jewish-born archbishop of Paris, retired on February 11 at the age of 78. Lustiger, the son of Polish immigrants to France and the grandson of a rabbi, had, the month before, represented the pope at the 60th anniversary commemoration in Poland of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp, where more than a million Jews, including Lustiger’s own mother and much of his family, were killed. Lustiger converted to Catholicism at the age of 14, during the Nazi occupation of France, while he was being hidden in a provincial boarding school run by the church. His father and sister survived the war and remained Jews.

Beset by poor health in recent years, he had at one point been rumored to be a contender to succeed Pope John Paul II. Lustiger played a key role in improving relations between Christians and Jews since becoming archbishop in 1981, but the French rabbinate, made up increasingly of Orthodox Sephardi rabbis, was wary of him, fearing that he harbored conversionary designs. He denied such intentions, but his repeated public claims that although a Catholic, he “had never ceased to be a Jew” exasperated Chief Rabbi Sitruk, as normative Judaism did not recognize such a hybrid category. Although retired from his functions as Paris archbishop, Lustiger maintained contacts with French Jewry and was an important presence in Rome on October 27, when the Vatican celebrated the 40th anniversary of its Nostra Aetate declaration that opened the way for reconciliation between Christians and Jews. French Jewry sent the largest foreign delegation to the ceremony, headed by CRIF president Cukierman.

Lustiger accompanied his successor, the new Archbishop André Vingt-Trois, when the latter was ceremonially received by the French Jewish community on May 2 at the French Shoah Memorial. Vingt-Trois had already met with Jewish leaders when a community delegation attended a requiem mass for the late Pope John Paul II on April 3, and presented condolences to him the following day. The ceremony at the memorial was marked by a speech by Cukierman, expressing the hope that the new prelate “would pursue and develop the good relations established by Cardinal Lustiger.” Speaking in front of the wall with the names of the French Jews killed during World War II, Archbishop Vingt-Trois called for “the necessary vigilance in the face of anti-Semitic statements and acts. We are very conscious—and on this spot more than anywhere else—
as to how veiled and discreet anti-Semitism can become an element which favors persecution."

Relations with organized Islam were generally limited to regular, businesslike meetings between Jewish community officials and Dr. Dalil Boubakeur, rector of the main Paris mosque and president of the Council for the Muslim Cult (CFCM), whose authority was underwritten by the French government but who was not believed to be particularly popular among French Muslims. During the November riots, when he ventured into a troubled Muslim immigrant neighborhood, his car was immediately pelted with stones when he was recognized.

A notable exception to the cool but correct relations between Jews and Muslims was the "Tour of France," a bus trip for young people of both faiths sponsored by Amities Judéo Musulmanes de France (Jewish-Muslim Friendship Group of France) in June and July. The chartered bus visited some 40 cities and towns around the country to promote improved ties between the two religions. At each stop the riders distributed leaflets and held meetings with youth groups. The only unfortunate incident during the trip occurred at Vénissieux, a largely Arab immigrant-dominated suburb of Lyons, where local hoodlums assaulted a regional television team covering the event. The tour also included side trips outside France to Brussels and Milan.

Publications

A number of original works of Jewish interest were published in France in 2005.

Novels: Liliane Messika’s *L’Occidenté* (The Westernized One); Emilie Frêche’s *Le Sourire de l’ang* (The Smile of the Angel); Michel Gurfinkel’s *Le Roman d’Odessa* (The Novel of Odessa); Colette Fellous’s *Aujourd’hui* (Today); Sylvie Weil’s *La Bulle cauchemar* (The Nightmare Caption); Pierre Assouline’s *Lutéia*; Gilles Rozier’s *Fugue à Leipzig* (Running Away to Leipzig); Jacquot Grunewald’s *La Tentation du rabbin Fix* (The Temptation of Rabbi Fix); Laurent Sagalovitsch’s *Loin de quoi?* (Far Away From What?); Robert Bober’s *Laissées-pour-compte* (Abandoned); Patricia Gotlib’s *Le Fuji Yama boréal* (The Boreal Fuji Yama); Michèle Kahn’s *Le Roman de Séville* (The Novel of Seville); and Malka Ribowska’s *Je n’ai plus de nouvelles de Simon* (I No Longer Have News of Simon).

Ideas and Current Affairs: Pierre Gréminon and Françoise Piotet’s *Georges Friedmann, un sociologue dans le siècle, 1907–1977* (Georges
Friedmann, A Sociologist in the Century); Mathurin Maugarlonne's *A la rencontre des disparus* (Going to Meet the Disappeared); Jean-Jacques Moscovitz’s *Lettre d’un psychoanalyste à Steven Spielberg* (A Psychoanalyst’s Letter to Steven Spielberg); Nathan Weinstock, Alexandra Richter, Patrik Alac, and Bertrand Badiou’s *Paul Celan, La bibliothèque philosophique* (Paul Celan, The Philosophical Library); Gabriel Benichou’s *L’Adolescence d’un Juif d’Algérie* (The Adolescence of an Algerian Jew); Michel Abitbol’s *Les Amnésiques: Juifs et Arabes à l’ombre du conflit du Proche-Orient* (The Amnesiacs: Jews and Arabs in the Shadow of the Middle East Conflict); Gérard Bensussan’s *Qu’est-ce que c’est que la philosophie juive* (What Is Jewish Philosophy?); Luc Rosenzweig’s *Lettre à mes amis pro-palestiniens* (Letter to My Pro-Palestinian Friends); Claude Berger’s *Les Siècles aveugles de la gauche perdue* (The Blind Centuries of the Lost Left); Yves Azeroual’s *A-t-on le droit de défendre Israël?* (Does One Have the Right to Defend Israel?); Michel Onfray’s *Traité d’athéologie* (A Treatise of Atheism); Claude Vigiée’s *Danser vers l’abîme* (Dancing Towards the Abyss); Anne Rothschild’s *Palais du désir* (The Palace of Desire); Alain Finkielkraut’s *Nous autres modernes* (We, the Modern Ones); David Chemla’s *Bâtisseurs de paix* (The Peace Builders); Alexandre Adler’s *Rendez-vous avec l’Islam* (A Meeting with Islam); Pierre-André Taguieff’s *La Foire aux illumines* (The Cranks’ Fair); Jean-Michel Salanski’s *Talmud, science et philosophie* (Talmud, Science, and Philosophy); François Rastier’s *Ulysse à Auschwitz, Primo Lévi, le survivant* (Ulysses in Auschwitz, Primo Lévi, the Survivor); and Arno Klarsfeld’s *Israël transit.*

History: Jean Nainchrik’s *Les Vengeurs* (The Avengers); Gilbert Cahen’s *Lévy Mirabelle*; Amaury du Close’s *Les Voix étouffées du IIIe Reich* (Strangled Voices of the Third Reich); Michel Laval’s *L’Homme sans concession—Arthur Koestler et son siècle* (The Man Without Concessions—Arthur Koestler and His Century); Xavier Ternisien’s *Les Frères musulmans* (The Muslim Brotherhood); Stéphane Israel’s *Les Etudes et les normaliens dans la tourmente* (Studies and War: the École Normale Supérieure during the Storm); Michèle Rotman’s *Carnets de mémoire. Enfants cachées 1939—1945* (Notebooks of Memory: Hidden Children, 1939—1945); Catherine Lawton-Lévy’s *Du colportage à l’édition* (From Peddling to Editing); the Shoah Commission of the Paris Consistory’s *Les Derniers témoins. Paroles de déportés* (The Last Witnesses: In the Words of Deportees); Walter Spitzer’s *Sauvé par le dessin—Buchenwald* (Saved by Drawing—Buchenwald); Alain Vincenot’s *Je veux revoir Maman* (I Want to See Mommy Again); Salomon Malka’s *Franz*
Rosenzweig, La cantique de la révélation (Franz Rosenzweig, The Hymn of Revelation); and Chantal Meyer-Plantureux's Les Enfants de Shylock ou l'antisémitisme sur scène (Shylock's Children, or Anti-Semitism on Stage).

Some of the major films of Jewish interest were L'Amitié plus forte que la haine (Friendship is Stronger than Hate), a full-length documentary about Jewish-Arab relations in France, directed by Daniel Kupferstein; Va, vis et deviens (Live and Become), directed by Romanian-born, Paris-based Radu Mihaileanu, a feature about Ethiopian Jewish aliyah that was a surprise hit on French screens, drawing more than half a million spectators, but which flopped in Israel; La Maison de Nina (Nina's House), a feature directed by Richard Dembo until his sudden death in 2004, then completed by his wife, helped by two family friends, the non-Jewish directors Constantin Costa-Gavras (Z) and Jean-Pierre Rappeneau (Cyrano de Bergerac), about the homes created by French Jewish organizations after World War II to receive Holocaust orphans; Belzec, a full-length documentary by Guillaume Moscovitz about the Nazi death camp, hailed by critics as a "natural follow-up" to the memorable Shoah, whose director, Claude Lanzmann, encouraged Moscovitz in his work; and La Petite Jérusalem (Little Jerusalem), a feature by Karine Albou about the place women occupy in religious Jewish North African families living in the drab Paris suburbs.

Deaths

Hungarian-born Bela Grunberger, aged 98, died on February 26. He was a psychoanalyst and author of L'Univers contestataire (The Counter-Culture Universe), written with his wife, Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, and Narcissisme, christianisme, anti-semitisme (Narcissism, Christianity, and Anti-Semitism).

Joseph Fisera died on January 9, aged 93. He was a Czech non-Jew who saved Jewish children in France during the occupation by hiding them among children of non-Jewish Czech refugees. Fisera was named a Righteous Among the Nations by the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem. He taught law in France after the war.

Raymond Moretti died on June 3, aged 73. An Italian-born Jewish painter, he was best known for decorating the great wall of the Forum des Halles in Paris, and the Rashi memorial in Troyes.

BERNARD EDINGER
Belgium

National Affairs

Belgium, a constitutional monarchy, is a loose confederation of three “regions” based largely on language: the Flemish Region, predominantly Dutch-speaking, in the north; the Walloon Region, predominantly French-speaking, in the south; and the Brussels-Capital Region, with a mixed-language population. Each enjoys a significant degree of autonomy, with Dutch, French, and German (spoken in Eupen and Malmédy) all official languages. The bicameral Parliament is elected by proportional representation. The cabinet, by law, must contain an equal number of French- and Dutch-speakers. A four-party center-left coalition continued to govern, under the leadership of Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt of the Flemish Liberals and Democrats (VLD), who had been in office since 1999. The sole Jewish MP was Claude Marinower, a member of the Reformist Movement (MR), the French-speaking liberal party.

In October, legislation was introduced to “improve the methods of investigation in the fight against terrorism and grave and organized crime.” Among the provisions were eliminating some existing limitations on house searches, allowing suspects to be filmed without judicial authorization, and the creation of confidential files on suspects to which the latter and their lawyers could be denied access. Human rights organizations objected, and the year ended with no action taken.

The threat of a far-right, xenophobic, separatist movement in the Flemish Region remained strong as the renamed Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest), formerly known as Vlamms Blok (Flemish Bloc), won 24 percent of the vote in the Flemish Region’s elections in June, making it the second largest party there. It was already the largest party on the Antwerp City Council and the fifth largest in the Federal Parliament. It appealed to those fearful of immigration, particularly the influx of Muslims, associating such newcomers with crime and violence. Filip Dewinter, the party leader who planned to run for mayor of Antwerp in 2006, claimed that 5,000–6,000 non-Europeans were entering the city annually, and could soon constitute a majority. He campaigned for the votes of the city’s