

Jewish Communal Affairs

American Jews and the Middle East

IN LATE JANUARY, the Hamas victory in the Palestinian Authority elections came as a shock to the organized American Jewish community, as it did to everyone else. Voicing the mainstream consensus, American Jewish Committee executive director David A. Harris told the *New York Jewish Week* (Feb. 3) that despite the clear Western insistence on no recognition of Hamas unless it renounced violence and recognized Israel, contacts on a pragmatic level were “unavoidable.” It was the responsibility of the Jewish community, he said, to make sure that such contacts did not turn into tacit recognition.

AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee), the key pro-Israel lobby, threw its support behind proposed legislation setting strict limits on aid to the PA so long as the ruling Hamas maintained its support for terrorism and refused to recognize Israel. Symptomatic of how single-mindedly AIPAC pressed its case was the reaction of one generally pro-Israel member of Congress, Betty McCollum (D., Minn.), who refused to meet with AIPAC again unless it apologized for a remark she said an AIPAC representative made, that her opposition to the bill made her a supporter of terrorism.

Left-leaning Jewish groups, however, tended to agree with McCollum. that the policy espoused by AIPAC would mean a cutoff of food and humanitarian assistance to innocent Palestinians. Americans for Peace Now, the Israel Policy Forum, and the Religious Action Center (RAC) of Reform Judaism urged amendments to the legislation that would allow such assistance. And Brit Tzedek V'Shalom published a letter to the president, signed by hundreds of rabbis, urging him “to preserve the prospects for peace through constructive engagement of moderate Palestinians and continued humanitarian aid.”

It was at this crucial juncture that the ongoing legal case against two former AIPAC staffers entered a new stage, raising questions about the lobby's ability to argue Israel's case. In 2004, the two — Steven Rosen and Keith Weissman — had been accused of passing classified information to people not entitled to receive it, that is, Israeli agents. In late January 2006, the man who had passed them the information, former Pentagon analyst

Larry Franklin, was given a prison sentence of more than 12 years, subject to reduction should he cooperate with the government in its case against Rosen and Weissman. The judge's remarks at the sentencing, applying the Espionage Act to individuals who did not work for the government, did not bode well for the two men. Fears were voiced in the Jewish community that the case might not only "neuter" AIPAC, but also deter other Jewish organizations from pursuing aggressive pro-Israel advocacy.

Judging by the turnout at AIPAC's annual policy conference in early March, one would not have known that the organization was having any problems. Vice President Dick Cheney was the major speaker, and many of those mentioned as potential presidential candidates in 2008 were prominent participants. Divisive issues, such as how strictly to monitor the ban on contact with the PA, or whether pro-Israel forces should say anything about the situation in Iraq, were played down. The issue arousing the most interest was the threat Iran posed to Israel and the West: officeholders and politicians vied with each other to assure the AIPAC audience that they considered the Tehran regime evil and dangerous.

The AIPAC event took place when many Orthodox Jews were still seething over the Israeli government's evacuation of Amona, a small outpost on the West Bank, in February, in which more than 200 people were injured (see below, p. 261). The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (OU), which saw this as a continuation of an anti-settler policy initiated by the 2005 evacuation of settlements in Gaza and the northern West Bank, sent a letter to Prime Minister Olmert expressing deep dismay at the demonstration of "brutality and palpable hate . . . where Israeli citizens are trampled by horses of their own police force." In June, the OU publicly pleaded with the prime minister to reach out to Orthodox Jews and get their input before proceeding with further territorial withdrawals. Criticized by many of its own members for not speaking out unequivocally against the destruction and abandonment of settlements in 2005, the OU, in December, would pass a formal resolution giving its leadership the authority, for the first time, to take public stands on "Israeli domestic policies and territorial integrity."

In March, meanwhile, Olmert's victory in the Israeli elections and the certainty that his party, Kadima, would anchor the new government coalition induced mainstream American Jewish organizations to pledge support for his stated policy of unilaterally evacuating areas of the West Bank, even as groups on the right and the left expressed their doubts. Olmert's May visit to Washington, where he addressed a joint session of

Congress and met with President Bush and other leaders, brought the fissures in the American Jewish community into bold relief.

The prime minister's eloquent statement before Congress of the case for withdrawal from a significant amount of territory—preferably through negotiations with the Palestinians, but unilaterally if necessary—evoked the wrath of right-of-center Jewish groups such as the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) and Americans for a Safe Israel, as well as their evangelical Christian allies, and they placed ads in the media denouncing the policy as a concession to terror. On the other side of the Jewish political spectrum, the more dovish organizations, Americans for Peace Now, the Israel Policy Forum, and others, sharply criticized the unilateral thrust of the Olmert plan and urged a greater emphasis on negotiations instead.

These debates became academic, at least temporarily, in July, with the outbreak of Israel's war against Hezbollah in Lebanon. Pro-Israel rallies took place across the country. American Jewish philanthropies immediately launched fund-raising campaigns to aid residents of northern Israel affected by the fighting: United Jewish Communities (UJC), the umbrella organization of the federations, announced a \$300-million campaign, New York UJA-Federation set a goal of \$60 million, American Friends of Magen David Adom raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for medical supplies, and many other groups initiated their own emergency drives.

The Jewish community also found itself in a battle for the hearts and minds of the American people and its government. "As Mideast Churns, U.S. Jews and Arabs Alike Swing Into Action," was the headline of a *New York Times* article on the subject (July 28). It noted that American Jewish groups were "sending lobbyists to Washington, solidarity delegations to Jerusalem and millions of dollars for ambulances and trauma counseling" as they had in previous wars, but this time Arab and Muslim organizations were doing the same. The Jews were prevailing, the article noted, as Congress and U.S. policymakers, with scarcely any dissent, took Israel's side and resisted Arab calls for an imposed cease-fire. Equally remarkable, in the reporter's eyes, was the virtual unanimity of the American Jewish community in backing Israel. David Besser, writing in the *New York Jewish Week* (July 28), found that some American Jews were disturbed by Israel's actions, but "there was a deep fear of moving too far outside the consensus views."

Even the July 30 attack on the Lebanese village of Qana, which killed dozens of civilians and aroused criticism both internationally and within

Israel, did not shake American Jewish backing for the war. Martin Raffel, associate executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), told the *Forward* (Aug. 4), "I see 100 percent support and not one iota of decrease in support in the Jewish community for Israel's conduct in Lebanon."

Thus it came as a shock when Adrian Shanker, a college student working as a summer intern at the Religious Action Center (RAC) of Reform Judaism in Washington, collected almost 50 names of other young Jews on a petition urging the Union of Reform Judaism (URJ), which had condemned Arab attacks on Israeli civilians, also to condemn "the Israeli Defense Force's killing of unarmed Lebanese and Palestinian civilians." Shanker explained that Reform Jews sharing his views felt ignored by the movement.

The war was made more personal for Jews in the U.S. with reports that two young Americans were among the Israeli dead. Michael Levin of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, moved to Israel at age 18 and joined the army. He was killed in fighting against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. David Lelchook, a Boston-born resident of Kibbutz Sa'ar, four miles from the Lebanese border, died in a rocket attack as he was riding his bicycle to a bomb shelter.

The war's inconclusive end left American Jews with mixed feelings. The Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), the organization of Modern Orthodox rabbis, issued a statement in late August arguing that Israel had been too solicitous of the lives of Lebanese civilians. Gary Rosenblatt, editor of the *New York Jewish Week*, admitted, in a September 1 editorial, to "Thinking the Unthinkable," the possibility that Israel might cease to exist. The mainstream Jewish organizations, meanwhile, sought to create a linkage between Israel's recent war and another, even more ominous threat. Turning their attention to the pending visit of Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the UN General Assembly session in New York, they organized a rally at the UN on September 20 in support of Israel, in opposition to "global terrorism," and for the freeing of Israeli hostages held by Hamas and Hezbollah.

AIPAC came under considerable scrutiny again in October. *Time* magazine carried a report on its Web site that the FBI was looking into charges that AIPAC offered to use its influence to have Rep. Jane Harman (D., Calif.) named chair of the House Intelligence Committee if the Democrats won control of the House in the November elections, in return for government leniency toward Rosen and Weissman, the two former AIPAC staffers being prosecuted for passing classified information to Is-

rael. While certain wealthy Jewish activists were indeed promoting Harmon for the post, all those involved denied any AIPAC offer of a deal.

Potentially more damaging to AIPAC in the long run was the news that billionaire George Soros was considering getting involved in the creation of an alternative pro-Israel lobby that would advocate more dovish policies. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported on a meeting in late September between Soros associate Morton Halperin and leaders of Americans for Peace Now, the Israel Policy Forum, Brit Tzedek V'Shalom, the RAC of Reform Judaism, and others, where discussions were held about the possibility of joining forces to create a counterbalance to AIPAC's influence. A second meeting, on October 25, was attended by Soros himself and focused on fund-raising. Several of those involved told reporters that the proposed new body should not be seen as an AIPAC competitor, but rather as a collaborator that would have a somewhat different policy focus.

AJC's *Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion* for 2006, which appeared in mid-October, indicated widespread anti-administration sentiment in the Jewish community. For example, only 29 percent of the sample believed that American military action in Iraq had been the "right thing" to do, while 65 percent felt the U.S. should have "stayed out"—11 points more than those opposing the war in the general population, according to a *Newsweek* poll. When it came to Iran, 54 percent of Jews expressed opposition to a U.S. military strike to prevent that country from developing nuclear weapons—roughly the same as in the population as a whole—but a majority of Jews approved of Israel conducting such a strike.

It was hardly a surprise, then, that Prime Minister Olmert raised the hackles of many American Jews when, visiting the White House in mid-November, just after the midterm elections that the president's party had lost, he praised the Bush administration for its Iraq policies. Olmert said, "We are very much impressed and encouraged by the stability which the great operation of America in Iraq brought to the Middle East" and expressed hope for its "full success." Pro-Israel Democrats were especially appalled, but even those who did not see the matter in partisan terms worried that Olmert's remark might provide ammunition to those who argued that the Iraq war was fought for Israel's benefit. Leaders of mainstream Jewish organizations sought to minimize the significance of the Olmert statement, suggesting that it was said out of courtesy to a proven friend who came out strongly against the existential threat Iran posed to Israel.

Iran, in fact, was the central theme at Olmert's other important stop

on his American visit, the annual General Assembly (GA) of the UJC, held this year in Los Angeles. While the prime minister did discuss the recent war in Lebanon and profusely thanked American Jewry for their outpouring of help, the potential nuclear capability of Iran was his primary focus. In this Olmert was joined by Knesset opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu, the head of Likud, who phrased the issue in words that would be quoted often afterward: "It's 1938. Iran is Germany, and racing to acquire nuclear arms."

Iran's Holocaust-denial conference in December further blackened that regime's reputation in American and Jewish circles. The White House and Congress condemned the event, and on December 21 the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations hosted a public meeting where well-known diplomats and jurists denounced the Tehran gathering and called for the UN International Court of Justice to try President Ahmadinejad for incitement to genocide. But Duvid Feldman, an Orthodox resident of Monsey, New York, who attended the conference as part of a delegation from the anti-Zionist Neturei Karta group, said that opposition to Zionism, not Holocaust denial, was the focus of the presentations, and complained to the *New York Jewish Week* (Dec. 22) that even before he returned home from Iran his ten children were being harassed in their ultra-Orthodox school for their father's presence at the conference.

THE BATTLE FOR PUBLIC OPINION

Advocates of Israel's cause in the American public square confronted a highly publicized, double-barreled assault in 2006. In March came "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy," a report by Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, two academicians, charging that pro-Israel forces exercised undue influence on American Middle East policy and effectively silenced all opposition, and in October there was a book by former president Jimmy Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, which suggested a parallel between Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and South Africa's old policy of racial separation.

The Walt-Mearsheimer essay took on something of an authoritative aura by virtue of one author's association with Harvard, the other's with the University of Chicago, and its placement on the Web site of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, after an initial appearance in the *London Review of Books*. (The Kennedy School subsequently announced that it did not necessarily endorse views presented on its site.) Jewish leaders

avoided any public battle with the authors so as not to give them more publicity. When questioned by the media, Jewish organizations pointed out that the idea of an overly powerful pro-Israel lobby was an old and discredited one. They worried that the charge could feed into current disillusionment with the situation in Iraq by suggesting that U.S. actions there were undertaken in Israel's interest, and also focus unwarranted public attention on statements already made by President Bush that in part justified possible action against Iran on the grounds of its threat to Israel.

The argument that the Israel lobby silenced anyone daring to challenge it reappeared in early October. On two separate occasions, critics of Israel charged, invitations to speakers were withdrawn under pressure from pro-Israel forces. The Polish consulate in New York canceled a lecture it was scheduled to host—not sponsor—on October 3 by Prof. Tony Judt of New York University, after Jewish leaders informed Polish officials that Judt was on record in favor of replacing Israel with a binational Jewish-Arab state. And a week later the French embassy canceled an event marking the publication of a new book on Vichy France when it discovered that in a postscript to the volume the author condemned Israeli treatment of the Palestinians.

The Carter book added to the claim of a powerful pro-Israel lobby the incendiary charge of Israeli racism. Appearing less than three weeks before the midterm elections, *Peace Not Apartheid* immediately became a political weapon in the hands of Republicans, who urged Jewish voters to abandon Carter's Democratic Party. But that argument had little effect, as Democratic leaders and candidates disavowed the former president and denied that his views on the Middle East were shared by the party. Several scholars associated with the Carter Center in Atlanta disassociated themselves from the institution to protest not only the book's thesis but also outright misstatements and possible cases of plagiarism they found in it.

Carter himself seemed surprised at the wave of anger the book evoked in Jewish circles and took steps to assuage it. But his meetings with rabbis and other Jewish leaders did little to bridge the gap since he continued to insist that the situation of the Palestinians in the territories was akin to South African apartheid. As his book rose on the best-seller list—it reached number seven on the *New York Times* list in early December—Jewish anxiety grew. AJC executive director David Harris told the *New York Jewish Week* (Dec. 15) that the Jewish community found itself in a bind, eager to defend Israel against the former president

but reluctant to lend credence to the canard that it sought to silence debate. Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), bluntly called Carter's charges anti-Semitic.

THE MIDDLE EAST ON CAMPUS

Complaints over the years about anti-Israel bias in American academia finally received scholarly attention in 2006 with the publication of *The Uncivil University: Politics and Propaganda in American Education*, by Gary Tobin of the Institute for Jewish and Community Research. His key finding was that prejudice against Israel was part of a much broader leftist ideological tilt epitomized by the finding that 63 percent of faculty members said they believed their colleagues were sometimes reluctant to express their opinions against dominant views on campus. Tobin warned that unless the academic community came to see "that ideological uniformity of any kind is dangerous," taxpayers and donors would ultimately withdraw support.

The debate about the treatment of the Middle East conflict on American college campuses took a surprising turn in 2006, focusing on Jewish-sponsored Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts. Brandeis, which despite its Jewish affiliation was nonsectarian, had long struggled with how to balance Jewish and universal concerns. On April 4, 2006, for example, an opinion piece in the student newspaper argued that the university was "too Jewish for its own good" in that its pronounced Jewish identification discouraged qualified non-Jews from applying—a charge the administration vehemently denied.

Brandeis took great pride in teaching the Middle East in a balanced manner. For several years it had conducted a summer program to equip college teachers to develop objective, scholarly courses about Zionism and modern Israel on their own campuses. And its team-taught seminar on the Middle East led by three scholars—an Israeli, a Palestinian, and an Egyptian—received laudatory front-page coverage in the January 6 issue of the *New York Jewish Week*. Almost immediately after that article appeared, however, the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) called on donors to stop giving to Brandeis because the Palestinian professor involved in the seminar, political scientist and pollster Khalil Shikaki, had past ties to Islamic Jihad, and had allegedly passed money to it. In response, Brandeis president Jehuda Reinharz issued a statement saying: "We live in a country where people are presumed innocent until proven guilty."

The ZOA once again attacked Brandeis in the spring, when Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Tony Kushner was awarded an honorary degree. Kushner was a harsh critic of Israel, a fact of which the university committee that decided on honorary degrees had been unaware, Reinharz explained, but he refused to buckle under to the ZOA and rescind Kushner's degree.

YEHOSHUA ON ISRAEL-DIASPORA RELATIONS

AJC marked its centennial meeting in Washington, D.C., in early May with a series of symposia on the Jewish future, featuring major intellectuals and literary figures. One participant, Israeli writer A.B. Yehoshua, used the occasion to declare the irrelevance of Diaspora Jewish life. As an Israeli, Yehoshua said, he had no interest in discussions of Jewish identity, saying, "It's your problem, not mine," and refused to back down from his dismissive stance even when challenged by other panel members and the audience. His presentation generated considerable media attention in Israel, where the classic Zionist doctrine of "negation of the Diaspora" that he espoused had long since been replaced, in much of the population, by ignorance of other Jewish communities.

Communal Issues

INTERMARRIAGE

The debate over whether to encourage the conversion of non-Jewish spouses in mixed-married families continued unabated. In a *New York Jewish Week* opinion column (Jan. 13), Steven Bayme and Jack Wertheimer, founding members of the Jewish In-Marriage Initiative, lauded statements made by some Conservative and Reform leaders in 2005 favoring the promotion of such conversions (see AJYB 2006, pp. 102, 105), and stressed that the transformation of intermarried families into wholly Jewish ones was likely to enhance the Jewish identification of the children and thereby strengthen the Jewish community in the next generation.

Their views received scholarly support from Prof. Sylvia Barack Fishman of Brandeis University, who completed a three-year study of the subject for the American Jewish Committee. Her report, *Choosing Jewish: Conversations About Conversion*, was based on interviews with Jews and

non-Jews involved in intermarriages, as well as with some who had converted to Judaism. She was surprised to find that many of those who ultimately converted had been “waiting to be asked,” which suggested to Fishman that rabbis, community leaders, and Jewish spouses should shed inhibitions about advocating conversion and recast programs for the intermarried to make conversion the explicit goal.

The pro-conversion message aroused great controversy. At a panel discussion hosted by the *New York Jewish Week* in late February, Bayme was attacked by Paul Golin, associate executive director of the Jewish Outreach Institute, and Bethamie Horowitz, research director at the Mandel Foundation, who argued that intermarriage could not be combated in an open society and that the Jewish community had no choice but to put significant resources into programs for mixed-married families without pushing conversion. Editor Gary Rosenblatt, the moderator, came away with the clear sense that most of the audience agreed with their approach.

In November, release of data from the 2005 study of the Boston Jewish community, commissioned by the Combined Jewish Philanthropies and carried out by a team of Brandeis scholars led by Leonard Saxe, appeared to corroborate the view that outreach to the intermarried could work in the absence of conversion. It found that about 60 percent of intermarried families in the city were raising their children as Jews, which was a possible explanation for the Boston Jewish population rising even with an intermarriage rate approaching 40 percent. As in the past, almost all such families in which the mother was Jewish were raising Jewish children; what was new was an increase in the propensity of families where the father was Jewish to raise the children as Jews.

Optimists declared that other Jewish communities might get similar results if they allocated money to replicate Boston’s programs for the intermarried. Some went even further, suggesting that the Boston survey, by showing that intermarriage could generate a net increase in Jewish numbers, should bring to an end the widespread pessimism about the future of American Jewish life. Sociologist Steven M. Cohen, however, expressed skepticism, pointing out that the survey’s criterion for children being raised “Jewish” was rather amorphous and could encompass those raised with no religion, or with Judaism as well as another religion.

JEWISH CONTINUITY

The centrality of Jewish education for the perpetuation of American Jewry received significant attention from private foundations in 2006. In

February, the San Francisco-based Jim Joseph Foundation, with more than \$500 million in assets, announced that it would direct all of its giving to Jewish schools, meaning that it would spend at least \$25 million annually on Jewish education, an enormous sum. And in March, the Avi Chai Foundation announced that its "Match" initiative, cosponsored by the Jewish Funders Network and the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, had raised nearly \$26 million for 159 day schools by matching gifts made by donors to the schools of their choice.

Jewish education was also the subject of scholarly interest. *Linking the Silos: How to Accelerate the Momentum in Jewish Education Today*, a report that appeared in February, noted significant improvement in educational opportunities in recent years. It cautioned, however, that local turf battles and lack of communication unnecessarily fragmented the educational system, leading to breakdowns in coordination and insufficient planning. The report summarized results of a study of seven communities by a team headed by Prof. Jack Wertheimer, and was funded by Avi Chai.

Another institution promoting Jewish identity that attracted both money and scholarly attention was the Jewish summer camp. In early March, the Foundation for Jewish Camping held the first North American Camping Leaders Assembly, which drew a surprising 400 professionals, lay leaders, and funders. The *Forward* (May 19) reported that the Reform movement's camps had boosted their annual philanthropic income from \$30,000–\$50,000 to \$1.5 million by a coordinated, aggressive campaign aimed at alumni, campers' families, and foundations. Of the latter, the Grinspoon Institute for Jewish Philanthropy was by far the most involved. And in December, *A Place of Our Own: The Rise of Reform Jewish Camping* was published, edited by Michael Lorge and Gary Zola. It contained scholarly essays on the evolution and impact of Reform summer camps.

Birthright Israel, the program that, beginning in 1999, provided young American Jews with free ten-day trips to Israel, was widely viewed as a potent means of awakening Jewish consciousness. On December 11, at the annual Birthright Israel gala dinner, a donation of \$5 million was announced from a new foundation started by Sheldon and Miriam Adelson, part of the astounding sum of \$200 million that the foundation was planning to give annually to Jewish causes. Earlier in the year, a team of scholars at Brandeis University measured the impact of Birthright Israel by comparing the attitudes of participants with those of individuals who applied but did not go. The report of the findings, entitled *Birthright Is-*

rael: *Impact on Jewish Identity, Peoplehood, and Connection to Israel*, indeed found that the experience made a significant positive difference in terms of Jewish identity, but also noted that despite their stay in Israel, participants had a surprisingly weak understanding of the country's democratic nature and its role as a refuge for persecuted Jews.

How synagogues might improve their effectiveness as agents of Jewish continuity was the focus of "Synergy," a two-day conference in New York sponsored by the city's UJA-Federation in January. The perception of some of the rabbis present that very few Jews viewed the synagogue as a major focus of their lives was affirmed by Prof. Amy Sales of Brandeis University, whose research found that only a small core of activists even cared very much about what went on in the synagogue. An entirely different—and apparently more successful—synagogue model was featured in the *New York Times* (April 4), which reported on congregations that "refashion their synagogues into religious multiplexes on the Sabbath, featuring programs like 'Shabbat yoga' and comedy alongside traditional worship." The reporter ascribed the new approach to Jewish fears of "shrinking numbers," and compared these synagogues to the evangelical Christian mega-churches.

Despite the closing of the Elat Chayyim retreat center in Accord, New York, due to lack of funds, the vogue of Jewish mystical spirituality that it represented showed no sign of abating. "Kabbalah: The Newest Denomination?" was the headline of a front-page article in the *New York Jewish Week* (Dec. 29) about a conference in San Diego on "Kabbalah for the Masses" that attracted about 100 people. The speakers—students and teachers of Jewish mysticism—agreed that Kabbalistic teachings would continue to be popular and should be spread. Differences developed, however, over whether it should be taught to non-Jews or outside the framework of normative Judaism; especially controversial were the aggressive advertising and marketing practices of the Los Angeles-based Kabbalah Centre.

There were two clear examples during the year of Jewish "spirituality" crossing over into the general American culture. One was the success of Rabbi Irwin Kula's PBS television series on "The Hidden Wisdom of Our Yearnings." Kula was the president of CLAL—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership. The other was the emergence of the bearded, black-coated, Chabad-oriented singer Matisyahu as, in the words of the *New York Times* (Mar. 8), "America's most popular reggae singer."

Perhaps the most heartening Jewish cultural event during 2006 was the

second annual Limmud conference, held in January in New York. Over the course of four days, some 750 Jews spanning a broad spectrum of beliefs and practices attended more than 200 sessions on topics of Jewish interest, ranging from religion to politics to economics. The entire program was organized by volunteers, with financial support from New York UJA-Federation. Limmud was modeled on a similar annual conference in England that had been functioning for 25 years.

WJC WOES

The drawn-out controversies regarding the World Jewish Congress (see AJYB 2005, p. 205; 2006, pp. 110–11) accelerated in 2006. As the year began the organization faced a lawsuit in Israel and an investigation by New York State, both about allegations of financial impropriety, and was seeking to block publication in Switzerland of a series of articles in the newsmagazine *Weltwoche* that contained allegedly damaging information. Seeking to retrieve its reputation, the WJC steering committee, at a meeting on January 19, approved the creation of an audit committee and a policy council; both would include people with international reputations from outside the WJC.

This was too little and too late. The 35-page report from the New York Attorney General's Office, released January 31 in the form of an agreement between the office and the WJC, said that the organization "lacked appropriate financial controls to safeguard charitable assets." Israel Singer, for years the major force within the organization, was barred from any "financial management or oversight" role and would have to pay back \$132,000 to the WJC within 90 days (he had already returned more than \$100,000); others who had worked for the group also came in for criticism.

The WJC reacted to the report by focusing attention on the finding that no criminal conduct had been discovered and on the words of praise for managerial reforms that had been put in place in recent months. It filed a \$6-million lawsuit for defamation against Isi Leibler, an Australian-born former WJC leader now living in Israel, who had initiated the charges against the organization, claiming that his allegations had cost it that amount of money in donations. Leibler responded that the attorney general's report proved his charges of financial impropriety correct and that it was the revelation of Singer's actions that had brought the drop in contributions. In August, under considerable pressure from its affiliates around the world, the WJC dropped its suit against Leibler.

Denominational Life

ORTHODOX JUDAISM

Recent trends in American Orthodoxy received considerable scholarly attention in 2006. In November, the Los Angeles-based organization Synagogue 3000 issued a report by Steven M. Cohen indicating that although the Orthodox constituted roughly 10 percent of the American Jewish community, 37 percent of all children affiliated with synagogues were Orthodox, far more than any of the other streams. “Non-Orthodox Jews ought to think about their relation to the Orthodox,” Cohen told the *Forward* (Oct. 27). “The growing number of Orthodox Jews means they will play a much more central role in defining American Jewry in the years to come.” Sociologist Samuel Heilman, a noted authority on American Jewish life, published *Sliding to the Right: The Contest for the Future of American Jewish Orthodoxy*, which traced what he believed was a sharp decline of the modernistic elements in the Orthodox community. Yet in June, the University of Scranton hosted an international conference on the history of Modern Orthodoxy—apparently the first such formal meeting on the topic ever held in the U.S.—a seeming indication of modernism’s ongoing vitality.

Perhaps subconsciously reflecting trepidation about the swelling Orthodox numbers, Jews were fascinated during the year by stories of Orthodox dropouts. Hella Winston’s well-received book, *Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels*, presented sympathetic profiles of several such individuals, even attracting the interest of the *New York Times*, which published an op-ed by Winston (Apr. 23) about a Passover seder for formerly Orthodox Jews. Other rebels who were not yet ready for an open break with their families told their stories under pseudonyms on Internet blogs. And Adam Vardy’s film *Mendy: A Question of Faith*, which opened in May, depicted the experiences of a Williamsburg Hasid who enters the world of modernity.

American Orthodoxy in 2006 was beset by controversy. As the year opened, the New York City Health Department and some Orthodox groups remained locked in combat over *metzitzah b’peh*, a controversial procedure immediately after circumcision in which the *mohel* sucks blood from the wound. Talmudic law mandated the practice on health grounds, to draw blood away from the place of incision, but many rabbinic authorities—mostly outside the Hasidic community—ruled that the suc-

tion did not have to be done orally. In 2005, the Health Department announced that three babies circumcised by the same *mohel*—who had done *metzitzah b'peh*—had contracted herpes, and one had died. Calls to ban the practice were met by adamant claims, mostly from the Satmar Hasidic group, that it was an integral part of the circumcision ritual and therefore a matter of freedom of religion. That December, the Health Department nonetheless issued an advisory noting that oral suction could spread neonatal herpes and should be avoided (see AJYB 2006, pp. 107–08).

Supporters of the practice saw this as an attempt to go over the heads of the rabbis, and Satmar leaders met with Mayor Michael Bloomberg on January 5, 2006, to get the advisory rescinded. Not receiving satisfaction, they launched an ad campaign in the Orthodox press warning that the authorities were gearing up for an outright ban, and urging parents to call a 24-hour hotline to report any conversations in which doctors or other caregivers criticized *metzitzah b'peh*. An agreement was reached in June between the (Satmar) Central Rabbinical Congress and the New York State health commissioner on practical guidelines for *mohalim* that were expected to reduce the risk to the babies, even as medical experts expressed skepticism.

Another controversial issue for the Orthodox community had to do with conditions in a major kosher slaughterhouse. In March, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) obtained, under the Freedom of Information Act, a 2005 report prepared by the inspector general of the Department of Agriculture about AgriProcessors, the country's largest producer of "glatt kosher" meat—the highest standard of kashrut—located in Postville, Iowa. Both the report and a video of activities in the plant taken surreptitiously by a PETA operative seemed to indicate inhumane treatment of the animals, unsanitary practices, and dereliction of duty on the part of federal inspectors. Subsequent investigations raised claims that workers at the plant, many of them illegal immigrants, were mistreated. The management denied all the allegations. The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations (OU), the country's largest kosher certification agency, said it was studying the charges, and the Conservative movement created a task force to address the issue.

On June 7, Temple Grandin, perhaps the nation's leading expert on humane treatment of animals, visited AgriProcessors and afterward reported that conditions for the animals had improved greatly. But later in the month more problems emerged as a federal grand jury served subpoenas on AgriProcessors and several other kosher slaughterhouses on suspicion of antitrust violations.

Not all the disputes roiling American Orthodoxy involved friction with outside forces. Of the internal squabbles that emerged during 2006 the most bitter was over succession to the leadership of Satmar, the large, insular, and militantly anti-Zionist Hasidic group that was estimated to have about 100,000 adherents around the world. The incumbent *rebbe*, 91-year-old Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum, based in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, died in April (see below, p. 705), immediately setting off a factional fight between the followers of two of his sons, Aaron and Zalman Leib. At stake was not only spiritual leadership of the movement but also some \$500 million in assets. Even while the father was still alive lawsuits and physical violence had poisoned the atmosphere between the two sides. The deceased leader's will declared the younger son, Zalman Leib, his heir, but Aaron and his followers refused to accept the decision. As the parties voiced their respective arguments through public-relations firms, speculation grew about a possible Satmar schism.

For Modern Orthodox rabbis, the big story in 2006 was an unprecedented challenge to their legitimacy from the Israeli chief rabbinate. In its May 5 issue, the *New York Jewish Week* reported that conversions to Judaism supervised by American Orthodox rabbis were no longer being recognized in Israel unless the rabbis' names appeared on a list of about 50 "approved" rabbis, some of whom were no longer alive. Previously, any conversion performed by a member of the (Modern Orthodox) Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) was automatically accepted. In a letter to the *New York Jewish Week* (May 12), the RCA denied that it was being targeted and suggested that the chief rabbinate was merely tightening up standards across the board. Sephardi chief rabbi Shlomo Amar, meanwhile, suggested that rabbis outside Israel could have their conversions accepted if they first came to Israel and passed an examination on the laws of conversion.

Hoping to resolve the problem, an RCA delegation traveled to Jerusalem in June for meetings with officials of the chief rabbinate. Afterwards, the RCA issued a statement announcing "reciprocal understandings and agreements" whereby a joint commission would examine conversion standards "to achieve clarity and consistency whenever possible." Rabbi Basil Herring, the RCA executive vice president, said he had been given assurances that all RCA conversions would be approved. Subsequent reports from Israel indicated a significant drop in the number of RCA "problem" conversions. At year's end the organization said that discussions with the Israeli chief rabbinate were "ongoing."

This episode, symptomatic of growing pressure from traditionalist

forces upon Modern Orthodoxy to conform to stricter standards, necessarily impacted on the behavior of the latter group toward those slightly to the left of it. As if determined to prove their own Orthodox bona fides, elements within the RCA and the rabbinical school of Yeshiva University (YU) sought to block the professional advancement of alumni of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah. Founded in 1999 by Rabbi Avi Weiss in reaction to a perceived rightward tilt at YU, Chovevei Torah espoused what it called "open Orthodoxy," and generally took more liberal positions than were taught at the older school. There had been some reluctance on the part of YU-oriented synagogues to hire Chovevei Torah students as interns and assistants, and now that the new institution had graduated three classes of rabbis, the RCA—made up overwhelmingly of YU-trained rabbis—was called upon to rule on their applications for membership. No decision was reached in 2006.

Edah, another institution founded to fight Orthodoxy's movement to the right, announced in June that it was closing. Created a decade earlier by Rabbi Saul Berman to encourage greater Orthodox involvement in social issues and to enhance the participation of women in Jewish life, Edah could not raise the funds to continue its work, although its highly regarded Internet journal would continue under the aegis of Chovevei Torah. Berman sought to put the best possible face on Edah's demise, suggesting it had succeeded in influencing the climate of Orthodox opinion.

Just two months later there was at least one vivid proof that the climate had indeed changed. In August, Congregation Orach Eliezer on Manhattan's West Side hired a woman, Dina Najman-Licht, as *rosh kehillah* (communal leader). While she was not given the title rabbi and would not perform roles that Halakhah (Jewish law) denied to women, and the synagogue—whose membership was mostly Orthodox—did not formally affiliate with Orthodoxy, her appointment was hailed by Orthodox feminists as a major step forward.

Yeshiva University, meanwhile, seeking to maintain its balance amid the treacherous rightward and leftward Orthodox currents, enjoyed a major financial triumph. In September, President Richard Joel announced that Chairman of the Board Ronald P. Stanton, who had made his money in the transportation of petrochemicals and chemical fertilizers, was donating \$100 million to the university. This was believed to be the single largest gift ever made to a Jewish educational institution. Stanton said he hoped to spur other Jewish philanthropists who gave the bulk of their donations to non-Jewish causes to shift their priorities to the Jewish community.

Allegations surfaced several times during the year about the sexual abuse of children and adolescents in the Orthodox community; in the case of one of the accused, a yeshiva teacher, the abuse was said to have occurred decades earlier. While the charges were often accompanied by assertions that Orthodox authorities covered up for the guilty, spokesmen for Orthodox organizations claimed that the problem was no worse among the Orthodox than elsewhere, and that there was a concerted effort in some quarters to discredit Orthodoxy through such claims.

CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM.

The winter 2006 issue of *Judaism* magazine was devoted to a symposium on "The Situation of Conservative Judaism Today." The 17 contributors, all relatively young rabbis, were asked to identify "the distinguishing features of Conservative Judaism today, the nature of its religious message, the extent of its fidelity to Halakhah, and its animating commitments." Symposium organizer Jack Wertheimer, provost of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), could barely suppress his disappointment at the submissions. They were filled, he said, with meaningless "buzzwords," and pervaded with the assumptions that religion was a consumer good and that contemporary Jews could only be brought into the synagogue "through inducements" that facilitated their "personal journeys."

The central institutions of Conservative Judaism, meanwhile, prepared for a final decision on the religious status of gays and lesbians in the movement, a contentious matter that had been on their agenda for several years. Two issues were under consideration: the ordination of openly gay clergy, and the performance of same-sex commitment ceremonies. The underlying questions were, on the one hand, whether these practices could be condoned without severing the movement's commitment to Halakhah, and on the other, whether failure to keep up with the changing sexual mores of American society might alienate younger people. Orthodox Judaism still retained the Biblical and rabbinic ban on homosexuality, while the Reform and Reconstructionist branches, which made no pretense to be bound by Halakhah, had already eliminated them.

The movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS) met behind closed doors for two days in early March at an undisclosed Maryland location to discuss four position papers that had been submitted to it the year before, which covered the spectrum from maintaining the traditional position to repudiating it outright—the latter view being given

the status of *takkanah*, that is an outright change in the law, rather than a reinterpretation of it. A final decision would be made at the next CJLS meeting scheduled for December.

On March 19, Ismar Schorsch, who was retiring from his post as chancellor of JTS—the major training school for Conservative rabbis—after 20 years, delivered a scathing critique of those seeking to change the status quo on homosexuality. At the annual convention of the movement's Rabbinical Assembly (RA), held in Mexico City, he declared that without adherence to Halakhah the movement was doomed, and charged that “internally, we have already become Reform.” Three days later, the convention delivered Schorsch an implicit vote of no confidence by lowering the threshold required for the 25-member CJLS to pass a *takkanah* and revise, rather than just reinterpret, existing law, from 20 votes to 13, making it far easier to overturn current policy on homosexuality. (A reinterpretation, *teshuvah*, required only six votes.)

On April 4, the search committee designated to choose a replacement for Schorsch as JTS chancellor chose an unconventional candidate, 54-year-old Arnold Eisen, who would become chancellor-designate upon Schorsch's impending retirement, and chancellor a year later, on July 1, 2007. Six days later the JTS board approved the decision. A non-rabbi and a highly regarded professor of Jewish culture and religion at Stanford University, Eisen had very little experience in raising funds, and since his academic position had kept him aloof from the movement's rabbinic battles, Eisen's views on the divisive issues were unknown. A number of Conservative rabbis expressed disappointment that one of their own had not been chosen for the post. In response to questions from journalists, Eisen said he respected the integrity of the Halakhic process, wanted the JTS faculty to play a major role in decision-making, and personally favored the ordination of gays and lesbians. His rabbinic role model was the late Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.

Chancellor Schorsch delivered his final JTS commencement address on May 18, blasting students for rejecting “the dense and demanding discourse of scholarship” in favor of “instant gratification The primitiveness of rap and the consumerism of the mall” Alluding to the inevitable changes on the horizon, he lamented, “Our forebears embraced history to enlarge and enrich Jewish observance; we wield it, if at all, to shrink it.”

In August, the movement's congregational organization, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, held meetings in New York and Toronto to familiarize the lay leadership with the various positions ad-

vanced on the issue of gay rights and to prepare the congregations for what was widely believed to be an inevitable CJLS decision in December to liberalize the movement's stance. The possibility that such a ruling might splinter Conservative Judaism was very much on the mind of Eisen, who spoke at a number of Conservative synagogues in an effort to ease anxieties.

On December 6, the CJLS approved two opinions, one reaffirming the traditional view and the other allowing ordination and commitment ceremonies for gays and lesbians. To the chagrin of many, however, the latter retained the ban on anal intercourse, even though this restriction was hardly enforceable. According to the rules of the movement, both of the mutually contradictory opinions were acceptable; individual Conservative seminaries and congregations might choose between them. Four traditionalist members immediately resigned from the committee in protest. Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue, hailed the result as an exemplary model of Jewish pluralism. The Ziegler School, the Conservative seminary in Los Angeles, was expected to begin admitting openly gay students in the fall of 2007. Conservative congregations in Canada were believed to be opposed to having their rabbis perform homosexual commitment ceremonies, and the movement's seminaries outside the U.S. were unlikely to ordain gays and lesbians. As for JTS, Eisen announced that a decision would be made only after intensive discussions with faculty members and students, and the tabulation of results of a poll by sociologist Steven M. Cohen, who was commissioned to survey the views of thousands of Conservative leaders around the country.

The movement's focus on the issue of homosexuality somewhat obscured the next challenge on the Conservative horizon, the status of children of intermarried Jews. Unlike Reform, which, through its patrilineal descent decision, had accepted as Jewish anyone having at least one Jewish parent and who identified as a Jew, Conservative Judaism retained the traditional principle that only children of Jewish mothers (and converts) were Jews.

In 2006, some 30 Conservative synagogues around the country were participating in the movement's Keruv Initiative whereby rabbis and lay leaders developed programs to make the congregations more welcoming to intermarried families. In addition, a new program called Edud encouraged intermarried families in which the mother was not Jewish to send their children — non-Jews, accorded to the movement's standards — to Conservative synagogue schools until the age of 13, at which point they

could only continue if they converted. In March, Chancellor Schorsch suggested this approach for the Conservative summer camps as well. In December, Rabbi Epstein of the United Synagogue recommended the same policy for the movement's Solomon Schechter day schools. In all three cases the Conservative institutions would clearly have to tailor elements of their programs and curricula to the needs of such children.

REFORM JUDAISM

The status of mixed-religion families was high on the agenda of Reform Judaism as well. Even though the movement, through its acceptance of patrilineal Jews, did not confront questions about the Jewish status of offspring of intermarriages, quite often families belonging to Reform temples included non-Jewish spouses, and many of their children were being raised in two religions. In November 2005, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the URJ, urged the group's biennial conference to do more to encourage such spouses to convert, and thus make the families unambiguously Jewish (see AJYB 2006, p. 102).

There was considerable uneasiness among many Reform Jews about the idea, due both to the widespread notion that Judaism was not a missionary religion and to a distaste for anything smacking of coercion, which seemed to contradict the principle of individual autonomy that was central to Reform. The *New York Times* ran a front-page article on the issue under the heading, "Reform Jews Hope to Unmix Mixed Marriages" (Feb. 12). It described the programs that some congregations had developed to expose non-Jewish spouses to Jewish life without actually pressing for their conversion. One vice president for membership of a New Jersey temple told the reporter, "With conversion you don't want to be too aggressive. That's a personal decision that I would never push on anyone. We're trying to find less in-your-face ways to make people aware that it's an option." In April, the URJ's 90 New York synagogues held a seminar to discuss morally acceptable ways of encouraging conversion.

Another initiative taken at the URJ biennial in November 2005 was passage of a resolution condemning the war in Iraq and calling for "a clear exit strategy" and "specific goals for troop withdrawal." The URJ thus became the first large Jewish organization to repudiate the war, a position in line with the views of a majority of American Jews (see AJYB 2006, p. 102). But the movement's antiwar voice was considerably muted during 2006. While it did initiate and participate in a panel discussion on the war at the annual plenum of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs

(JCPA) in February, it refrained from proposing any resolution to the plenum on the matter. There was some grumbling on the part of Reform antiwar activists in subsequent months, but sources within the movement suggested that a combination of factors had made Reform reluctant to speak out: the perceived priority of the humanitarian crisis in Darfur; concern over the implications for Israel of a precipitate withdrawal from Iraq; and the absence, as yet, of any concrete alternative for Iraq that would not risk chaos and civil war.

Reform's longstanding complaint that Israel, with its Orthodox religious establishment, did not recognize the legitimacy of Reform as a valid expression of Judaism was underlined in June, when Rabbi Yoffie turned down an invitation to a Jerusalem reception hosted by Israeli president Moshe Katzav. Yoffie explained that he made this decision to protest the fact that at previous meetings between the two men Katzav pointedly refrained from calling the URJ president "rabbi." Several dozen Israelis demonstrated outside Katzav's residence in support of Yoffie. The URJ president told the *New York Jewish Week* (June 23) that the insult was "an ongoing incident in a long story." Katzav, who was Sephardi, said he had been brought up to call only "traditional . . . authentic" rabbis by that title. A Katzav spokesman later said that the president was willing to call Yoffie a "Reform rabbi," and complained that the matter should have been handled privately, not through the media.