

JERUSALEM LETTER

Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

JL:107 8 Adar II 5749 / 15 March 1989

SPECIAL REPORT

WHAT ARE THE PROFESSIONAL LEADERS OF AMERICAN JEWRY THINKING ABOUT ISRAEL?

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[Editor's Note: The sharp response of American Jews to the "Who is a Jew" issue and involvement of certain "American Jewish leaders" in bringing about the opening of a U.S. dialogue with the PLO has once again raised the question of a potential change in American Jewish attitudes toward Israel. There now exists a fairly substantial body of data about the attitudes of American Jews as a group, but since most of what is done in the Jewish community is really done by the leadership, and within the leadership the professionals are of critical importance, it is crucial to understand how they are thinking since they are the ones who work daily on current issues. What follows is a preliminary report on one facet of a survey of Jewish communal

professionals conducted by Gerald B. Bubis and Steven M. Cohen for the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, focusing on the attitudes and opinions of American rabbis and Jewish communal workers toward Israel.]

The Jerusalem Center Survey of Rabbis and Jewish Communal Professionals

Are there really "American Jewish leaders," professional or otherwise, who are followed by some marching phalanx of American Jewry? Do these so-called "leaders" of the American Jewish community truly represent that community? How can we know if their views really coincide?

We at the Jerusalem Center have also been intrigued by the fact that while there have been studies concern-

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ing the values of communal lay leaders, those who work full-time for the Jewish community -- the rabbinate and the Jewish communal workers -- have been overlooked. This latter group consists of the professionals who staff the agencies and organizations in America -- the federations, community centers, family services, American Jewish Congress, etc. Our study sought to focus on the degree to which these people had attitudes which were at one with the general Jewish population and whether or not there were any variances that could be measured.

In the spring of 1987, a modified version of a questionnaire developed by Steven M. Cohen to study the attitudes of American Jews was mailed to self-identified Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform rabbis as well as members of the Conference of Jewish Communal Service (CJCS). Specifically, 500 Orthodox, 500 Conservative, and 500 Reform rabbis were selected randomly from a list of 5,400 rabbis, and 500 communal workers were selected randomly from the 3,000+ members of the CJCS. The respondents were asked to react to various statements with five degrees of agreement or disagreement ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Overall there was a 33 percent return rate, yielding 602 usable responses broken down as follows:

	#	%
Rabbis:	263	44
Orthodox - (OR)	75	12
Conservative - (CR)	86	14
Reform - (RR)	102	17
Communal Workers:	339	56
Orthodox - (OCW)	52	9
Conservative - (CCW)	113	19
Reform - (RCW)	122	20
"Just Jewish" - (JJCW)	47	8
Unidentified	5	1

Religious Ideology the Best Predictor

The results showed religious ideology as the most important predictor of Israel-related attitudes and opinions by far. For

communal workers this is a turnaround from the past. Beginning in the 1930s and for the following thirty years, the major figures in the field of Jewish communal service were mostly secularists. The belief system that dominated the field fit the criteria Jonathan Woocher has identified as a "civil religion." Those who were highly identified with Jewish religious movements were in the minority. Since 1967 a palpable change has taken place. Those in the field identifying themselves as "just Jewish" (a code phrase for secular) are now a small aging minority.

What we found was a continuum with Orthodox rabbis (OR) at one end, then moving toward the center the next group was Orthodox Jewish communal workers (OCW). The next group was Conservative rabbis (CR), then Conservative Jewish communal workers (CCW), Reform Jewish communal workers (RCW), secular self-identified Jewish communal workers (JJCW), and finally, at the other end, Reform rabbis (RR). The most politically "conservative" were the Orthodox rabbis as an identifiable group and the most politically "liberal," the Reform rabbis. Even the old secularists were, as a group, not as liberal as Reform communal workers. They were, however, more frequently closer to the rabbis and their political positions than they were to their other Jewish communal colleagues.

That continuum can be portrayed as follows:

RR--JJCW--RCW--CCW--CR--OCW--OR

[In the tables that follow, data on the non-professional general Jewish community (GJ), taken from Steven Cohen's mid-1980s studies of American Jews for the American Jewish Committee, has been included for comparison.]

Put another way, the Jewish communal workers, regardless of their religious identity, clustered toward the middle, whereas the so-called extremes were in the rabbinic field. This should not be so surprising. Jewish communal life operates within a

consensus model. Everything is done to blur the edges, get away from the extremes, move toward the center. The Jewish communal worker's self-perceived role is to bring people together. This is a style of leadership that is process-oriented rather than outcome-oriented. But having said that, there still are very distinct differences among Jewish communal workers which show that their attitudes toward Israel are only predictable in light of their religious identification.

A Profile of the American Jewish Community

Let us first look at the overall profile of the American Jewish community, drawn from studies done in the past eight years in most of the major communities in the U.S., to serve as a point of comparison. Nearly 80 percent of American Jews are native-born (recent immigration from Russia, Iran, South Africa, and Israel pull the figure down). Between 60 and 70 percent of the adults are married, fewer than 10 percent divorced, and the rest single or widowed.

About 10 percent are Orthodox, from 15 to 25 percent report themselves as "just Jewish," and the balance are divided between Conservative (33 percent) and Reform (25 percent). Synagogue membership ranges from a low of 26 percent in Los Angeles to a high of 84 percent in St. Paul, with a majority belonging to synagogues at one time or another in their lives. Over 90 percent celebrate Passover in some way, most celebrate Hannukah, and if they have children nearly 9 out of 10 families report lighting Hannukah candles.

Well over half of all adults have some college education and, if the elderly are removed, the percentage is much higher. Only 55 percent of American Jews have ever travelled outside of the United States, but over two-thirds of these have been to Israel. This works out to at least one-third of all Jews in the U.S.A. and is a higher percentage than commonly believed. Overall, about 35-38 percent of all

American Jews have been to Israel. Most Jewish children receive some kind of Jewish education.

When these data are examined more carefully, however, some disturbing trends emerge. Reform Jews, who have in their midst many of the biggest contributors to Jewish federation drives, show the lowest level of commitment to Israel. While 34 percent of Orthodox Jews have been to Israel more than once, only 7 percent of Reform Jews report multiple trips, as compared with 10 percent of "just Jewish" and 13 percent of Conservative Jews. By contrast, 90 percent of rabbis and communal workers have been to Israel at least once. It is a requirement for all rabbinic students of the Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist movements to spend a year in Israel and communal workers come over with missions if they have not come over for study.

American Jews' knowledge about Israel is very limited. Only one-third of American Jews knew that Menachem Begin and Shimon Peres were from different political parties. Only one-third knew that non-Orthodox rabbis in Israel could not perform marriages, and only 3 out of 10 knew that Arab and Jewish children did not attend the same schools. In all cases the averages were raised because Orthodox Jews scored markedly higher.

The Emerging Picture of Rabbis and Communal Workers

According to the JCPA survey, politically and ideologically, a much higher percentage of communal workers and rabbis are self-identified liberals and/or Democrats than the general Jewish population. Thus, the key to understanding the ideological frame for communal workers' beliefs is their religious identification. The attitudes of communal workers correlate most closely to those held by the rabbis in their respective movements. While exceptions were noted, Orthodox communal workers' beliefs are close to those of Orthodox rabbis, and the pattern holds true for Conservative and Reform communal workers

and rabbis as well. In general, Reform rabbis are the most liberal politically, with "just Jewish" and Reform communal workers slightly less so. The Conservative communal workers hold positions somewhere between the Orthodox communal workers and the Conservative rabbis.

Communal workers might have been expected to be even more liberal than rabbis on Israel issues, but this was not the case. Orthodox communal workers tended to be more moderate than the Orthodox rabbis and the same was true for Reform and Conservative communal workers and the rabbis in their movements. Communal workers thus tended toward the center.

Where to Live a Full Jewish Life

It is well-known that American Jews in general feel at home in the U.S.A. and believe that they can live as Jews as fully as they want to. When presented with the statement: "It is easier to live a fuller Jewish life in Israel than in the U.S.," 73 percent of Jews in general disagreed with the statement, while only 10 percent agreed. This contrasted sharply with the responses of nearly 7 out of 10 Orthodox rabbis and 6 out of 10 Orthodox Jewish communal workers who agreed with the statement, doing so at least four times as frequently as Reform rabbis and Jewish communal workers, and as compared with the agreement of 1 out of 2 Conservative rabbis and 1 out of 3 Conservative communal workers.

God and the Land of Israel

What place do Judea and Samaria hold in the ideological beliefs of Jews? Those who view these areas solely in geo-political terms will likely see matters differently than those who base their attitudes on strong religious beliefs. Respondents were asked about their degree of agreement or disagreement with the statement: "I firmly believe God promised the entire Land of Israel -- including Judea and Samaria -- to the Jewish People."

Predictably, about 90 percent of Ortho-

dox rabbis agreed -- but so did 7 percent of Reform rabbis and 12 percent of Reform communal workers. Over a third of Conservative rabbis and a fourth of Conservative communal workers agreed, as did 75 percent of Orthodox communal workers. Conversely, however, 77 percent of Reform rabbis and 67 percent of Reform communal workers led the way in their extent and degree of disagreement. Nearly half of the Conservative rabbis (48 percent) and just over half of Conservative communal workers (50 percent) disagreed with the premise.

Jews in general were evenly split three ways: one-third in agreement, one-third in disagreement, and one-third not sure. A markedly smaller percentage of communal workers and rabbis were unsure, ranging from 2 percent of Orthodox rabbis to 23 percent of Conservative communal workers.

Territorial Compromise for Peace

No one can predict what Israelis would do and how American Jews would respond if and when a negotiating process regarding the territories was in place. A review of public opinion polls before Sadat came to Jerusalem showed that a high percentage of Israelis and American Jews questioned the wisdom of territorial compromise in Sinai. The responses to questions regarding the future of Judea, Samaria and Gaza are shaped by the levels of suspicion, fear and trust which are at work at the time of each poll.

As previously noted, the data analyzed here were collected in early spring, 1987. The respondents were asked to react to the statement: "Israel should offer the Arabs territorial compromise in Judea and Samaria (West Bank) in return for credible guarantees for peace." Once again the responses of the Orthodox rabbis and communal workers were in sharp contrast to others. Seventy-three percent of the Orthodox rabbis and 66 percent of the Orthodox communal workers disagreed with the statement, while 20 percent of the Orthodox rabbis and 24 percent of the Orthodox communal workers agreed. These

responses contrast with the agreement of 80 percent of Reform rabbis and 69 percent of Conservative rabbis.

Excluding the Orthodox, between 55 and 80 percent of all other rabbis and communal workers report favoring some territorial compromise. In this case, as a group they were much more in agreement with Israel's engaging in territorial compromise than were the non-professionals who had responded to the same question in the American Jewish Committee study. In 1985, 29 percent agreed, 36 percent disagreed, and the balance were not sure (listed as "GJ" - General Jewish - in the table below).

Table 1
"Israel should offer the Arabs territorial compromise"

%	RR	JJCW	RCW	CCW	CR	OCW	OR	GJ
Agree	80	62	56	65	69	24	20	29
Disagree	15	19	30	27	18	66	73	36

Assessing the Occupation

A comparison question was posed asking people to respond to the proposition that Israel's "continued occupation of the West Bank would erode Israel's Jewish nature." Once again nearly the same percentage of Orthodox rabbis disagreed (70 percent) as Reform rabbis agreed (65 percent). Over half the Conservative rabbis agreed (55 percent). Conservative and Reform communal workers were less certain with about 50 percent being in agreement. The Orthodox communal workers were nearly at one with the Orthodox rabbis in their degree of disagreement (65 percent). What emerges is a confirmation of differences which is predictable along ideological lines. The Orthodox rabbis and communal workers are clustered in a markedly different way than their communal worker counterparts.

On this question there was a clear difference between the general community and the rabbis and communal workers -- 63 percent in the general Jewish community disagreed, with 31 percent being unsure,

while only 6 percent agreed, even fewer than Orthodox rabbis or communal workers.

The Democratic Nature of Israel

The survey was conducted before the intifada (the Palestinian Arab uprising), but included the question: "Continued Israeli occupation of the territories will erode Israel's democratic character." Three out of 4 Reform rabbis agreed, while 2 out of 3 Orthodox rabbis disagreed. Two out of 3 Conservative rabbis agreed, as did 1 out of 2 Reform and Conservative communal workers.

A far greater minority of communal workers did not agree than was the case among the general population. One can speculate as to reasons. Far more communal workers (and rabbis) have been to Israel than is the case in the general population. Ninety percent of the respondents had been to Israel as compared to 33 percent of the general Jewish community. Perhaps the experience in Israel, coupled with the nature of work assignments, resulted in a higher percentage of respondents being more optimistic about the strain to Israel's democratic character, even as a substantial percentage are concerned about the long-range effects.

Support for a Palestinian Homeland

A second statement tried to explore the issue of territory and the Palestinians in a somewhat different way. People were asked to respond to the statement: "Palestinians have a right to a homeland on the West Bank so long as it does not threaten Israel."

The Orthodox rabbis and communal workers were in strongest disagreement with 75 and 73 percent respectively so stating. At the other end of the response spectrum, 57 percent of "just Jewish" were in agreement as compared to 50 percent of Reform rabbis. Conservative rabbis and Reform communal workers were nearly in agreement (45 percent), while only 32 percent of Conservative communal workers agreed.

Table 2
"A Palestinian homeland on the West Bank"

%	RR	JJCW	RCW	CCW	CR	OCW	OR	GJ
Agree	50	58	45	32	45	15	8	48
Disagree	28	28	36	45	35	73	75	31

Collectively, 37 percent agreed, while 44 percent disagreed. This split was more evident among the rabbis and communal workers than was the case among the general population where nearly half (48 percent) agreed to Palestinian rights to a homeland while 31 percent disagreed. About 20 percent in both studies were not sure.

The Los Angeles Times reported in April 1988 that 61 percent of Jews favored the Schultz plan, 67 percent favored an accommodation with Palestinians, yet only 31 percent favored any territorial compromise. Clearly, the Arab uprising had not resulted in a major shift among Jews in general in the two-year period since the last AJC study. The rabbis and communal workers (except the Orthodox), while split, represent a more liberal position than their constituencies on these issues.

Freedom to Speak Out

One of the issues that always proves vexing in the organized Jewish community has to do with the place of dissent in Jewish life. Certainly the vitality of Israel is confirmed by the rigor and at times intensity of the policy debate in the Jewish state. We posed the statement: "Jews who are severely critical of Israel should nevertheless be allowed to speak in synagogues and Jewish Community Centers," in order to take the measure of the community's readiness to offer a platform to minority or unpopular positions within the Jewish community.

On this issue, the Orthodox rabbis were split with 44 percent agreeing and 42 percent disagreeing. Forty-five percent of the Orthodox communal workers similarly agreed, with only 32 percent disagreeing.

Conservative rabbis and communal workers clustered together remarkably closely. Sixty-three percent of both rabbis and communal workers agreed, while nearly 25 percent disagreed.

Consistent with the response patterns to other questions, Reform rabbis had the most liberal response with 82 percent agreeing and only 10 percent disagreeing. Reform and "just Jewish" communal workers clustered together with about 70 percent agreeing.

Since Orthodox Jews represent about 10 percent of all Jews, without the Orthodox respondents over 4 out of 5 rabbis and communal workers (84.4 percent) hold to the liberal position. In this instance, the general Jewish community is in slightly less agreement with the need for a free platform with 72 percent agreeing, 14 percent disagreeing, and 15 percent unsure.

Table 3
"Critics of Israel should be allowed to speak in synagogues"

%	RR	JJCW	RCW	CCW	CR	OCW	OR	GJ
Agree	82	70	74	63	62	42	42	72
Disagree	10	6	13	24	25	32	42	14

Popularity of Political Figures

Public figures in Israel have come to be known in the U.S. for their opinions and positions regarding "land for peace," attitudes toward Arabs (both Israeli and Palestinian), and the like. Increasingly, many of these political figures have circumvented Israeli laws controlling the amount that can be spent on elections and political party activities by raising money in the diaspora. The extent to which Americans truly understand the positions of many Israeli public figures and/or even know who they are has been explored in the general Jewish population.

This study is the first to explore the reactions of rabbis and communal workers to some of these same figures. Six names were ranked: Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin, Yitzhak Shamir, Ariel Sharon, David Levy,

and Meir Kahane.

In the American Jewish community in general, there is a descending order of support. Peres was the most favorably viewed political figure (63 percent), followed by Rabin (58 percent), Shamir (49 percent), Sharon (40 percent), Levy (11 percent), and Kahane (9 percent). In ranking the most unfavorable Israeli political figure, Kahane was clearly the candidate most widely viewed in negative terms (62 percent), followed by Sharon (24 percent), Shamir (9 percent), Peres (6 percent), Levy (5 percent), and Rabin (4 percent). A significant percentage of Jews reported not knowing what their impression was vis-a-vis some of the men mentioned. Perhaps even surprisingly, 20 percent reported that they did not know what their impression of Kahane was. American Jews reported not knowing what their impression was or having no impression (depending upon how they understood the question) about the remaining men as follows: Peres (31 percent), Sharon (36 percent), Rabin (37 percent), Shamir (41 percent), and Levy (84 percent).

Rabbis and communal workers are more knowledgeable as a group about Israeli political figures than the general Jewish population. The pattern among them was once again differentiated when analyzed according to the various religious movements. Orthodox rabbis were most favorably impressed by Shamir (71 percent), with Peres and Rabin not too far behind (63 and 60 percent respectively). Sharon was perceived favorably by 53 percent of Orthodox rabbis, Kahane garnered 44 percent, and Levy was favored by 34 percent.

More than three out of four Orthodox communal workers were favorably impressed by Shamir (78 percent), followed by Rabin and Peres (56 and 55 percent). A bit more than a third viewed Sharon favorably. Aside from David Levy, where 52 percent of Orthodox rabbis and 47 percent of Orthodox communal workers had no clear impression or did not know about him, both the rabbis and communal workers rarely lacked opinions about the other figures.

Table 4
Favorable Reactions to Political Figures

%	RR	JJCW	RCW	CCW	CR	OCW	OR	GJ
Peres	93	87	88	47	69	55	63	63
Rabin	83	72	82	87	93	56	60	58
Shamir	31	43	50	61	54	78	71	49
Sharon	5	11	16	23	16	38	53	40
Levy	30	11	20	32	33	35	34	11
Kahane	3	2	1	3	1	21	44	9

Some General Observations

Overall, we found far less understanding of subtlety and nuance than one hoped would have been the case among the people who are believed to form and shape attitudes in Jewish life, with the rabbis far less loath to take positions based upon where they sit ideologically, and with the communal workers taking bridging positions but not holding to anything strongly. The only thing communal workers agree about is the need to seek consensus, but where that consensus may be is affected largely by their religious persuasion or the movement with which they identify.

The questions of who leads whom, how leadership shapes its ideals, ideas and positions, and what one does with one's own ideals and positions when one finds oneself out of step with the community are difficult ones. This is especially true in light of the results of this survey which found that in many instances the attitudes of the leaders were clearly not the same as those of American Jewry as a whole.

Jewish attitudes toward Israel seem to have been undergoing a kind of sea change ever since the Lebanese War. As one tries to take the measure of what American Jewry wants or expects of Israel, rightly or wrongly, it still has to be cast in a context of understanding. For the past forty years Israel essentially has been a source of comfort for the diaspora. When one takes that premise and juxtaposes it with American Jewish society, which is caught up in being American and in that spirit seeks comfort on all levels — material, psychological, sociological, economic — and repels and distances itself from any-

thing that is discomfoting, one comes to appreciate the complications of what Israel comes to be seen as being in the minds of a group of people who are in the comfort-seeking business. The Israeli reality today at the time of the Arab uprising is not comforting and psychology tells us that the ways one handles such things are to either repress, distance from, sublimate, or reject the source of the discomfort.

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The survey described in this Jerusalem Letter was undertaken with the assistance of the United Israel Appeal and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.