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Report

THE 33rd WORLD ZIONIST CONGRESS



Israel: **AFTER LEVY'S RESIGNATION
WILD DECEMBER AT THE KNESSET
MEET EHUD BARAK**



WHAT AILS ZIONISM? (continued)
A JEW IN CHINA: TWO-GUN COHEN
JEWISH SECULARISM'S FUTURE



In Memoriam

ADA SERENI • GEN. UZI NARKISS

SINCE 1934 • A LABOR ZIONIST JOURNAL

JEWISH Frontier

SINCE 1934

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The 33rd Congress

Commencement of a New Century

By Daniel Mann

The 33rd World Zionist Congress, which met in Jerusalem in late December, brought to a close the centennial celebration of organized political Zionism, marking 100 years since Theodor Herzl convened the First Zionist Congress in Basle. But more significantly, it was a week of achievement for Labor and its progressive allies in the leadership of the Zionist movement and a beginning for important initiatives in its rejuvenation. Thus, somewhat like a graduation, the Congress was a commencement no less than the conclusion of a celebration.

There were two dramatic developments toward the end of the Congress, focusing on the disparate issues of religious pluralism in Israel and youth representation in the governance of Zionism. Those events were in sharp contrast to what had preceded during two-and-a-half days of delegate accreditation, administrative reports, political negotiations, the excessively "general" debate that is apparently an unmovable fixture of such meetings, and committee as well as plenary consideration of some 100 resolutions in which the platitudinous and the hortatory were indiscriminately mixed with the provocative and the historic. To be sure, much of this activity pervades any democratic public organization; at least, the organizers of this one are to be commended for telescoping the deliberations into a three-day format, even though the Congress meets only once every four-five years and comprises over 1,000 participants from all over the world.

But in the end there was drama, particularly on the question of religious pluralism. Everyone knew that this would be a central theme of the Congress, in view of the overwhelming victory of the Reform and Conserva-

tive Zionist organizations in the election of the American delegates this past September and the touch-and-go efforts of the Ne'eman Committee to produce an acceptable compromise on the matter of non-Orthodox conversions in Israel. Indeed, no matter what the announced theme of a plenary session or the official assignment of a committee, both the rhetoric and the resolutions dwelled on pluralism. By the final day there was a long list of proposals generated by one or another of the progressive movements and requiring plenary action, countered by threats from Mizrachi (Orthodox) to tie up the proceedings through secret ballots and other parliamentary maneuvers.

On the final evening the creative and charismatic chairman of the WZO, Avraham Burg, appeared in the meeting hall after a long day of negotiations involving key representatives of the Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox streams of Judaism. Several extended intermissions followed, as each movement met separately to consider a composite compromise resolution, drafted by Burg. His presentation of his work to the caucus of his own movement, Labor, hastily convened on the platform of the meeting hall during one of the breaks, was a memorable moment for all of us in attendance and was greeted by our spontaneous applause.

Much later that night it turned out that despite Burg's personal pleas the compromise formulation was rejected by Mizrachi. On the other hand, that faction withdrew its parliamentary challenges. The Burg resolution was then adopted overwhelmingly, and the Congress adjourned on a respectable note.

What was the wording Burg offered, and what can we learn from it? First, the resolution cited two statements adopted — likewise over right-wing opposition — by the previous Congress in 1992, explicitly advocating religious pluralism and equality for all streams of Judaism. The new resolution also invoked some of the wording of a resolution that omitted the red-flag phrase “religious pluralism” and therefore passed without opposition at the Jewish Agency Assembly in 1996. (It should be noted that the WZO constitutes one half of the Jewish Agency Assembly.) Burg’s document went on to affirm the unique “voluntary, democratic [and] pluralistic” character of the Zionist movement, which “respects, in theory and practice, the multiplicity of interpretations of Judaism and its traditions” and “maintains cooperation among all the streams of the Jewish people based on equality and mutual respect.”

On the practical level, the resolution empowered the governing bodies of the Zionist movement to oppose changes in the Law of Return or the enactment of any other divisive legislation and denounced inflammatory speech and actions directed at any wing of Judaism. The final paragraph is worth quoting in full:

If the efforts of the Ne’eman Committee are alas unsuccessful, the Congress calls on the [Israeli] Government, in accordance with the motion of Labor-Meretz, the New Faction [Reform and allies], Mercaz [Conservative], and others to avoid passing the Law of Conversion. The Congress notes the stance of Mizrahi, Likud, Tsomet, Moledet, and others who are opposed to this position for reasons of religion and conscience.

In retrospect, despite the valiant efforts of Burg and others on all sides, it is not surprising that the compromise resolution was not acceptable on the right, although even Mizrahi stated its agreement with those sections urging full cooperation with the Ne’eman Committee and other attempts at dialogue as well as the aforementioned condemnation of inflammatory activity. What is new and significant is that the World Zionist Organization has now adopted a notably far-reaching and comprehensive statement on what is probably the most contentious issue in the current relationships of the Jewish state and the Jewish world. If the Government and the Knesset are at all sensitive to the policies and positions of World Jewry and particularly of the Zionist movement with its legal standing in Israel and its

commitment to the unity of the Jewish people and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life, then they will have to avoid damaging actions and instead work toward the success of the Ne’eman Committee and/or similar undertakings. At least once before, some ten years ago, the Israeli polity, however sovereign, listened to the voice of the Diaspora and backed off from amending the Law of Return. This time that voice is even more authoritative since it comes from a definitive majority of the entire World Zionist Organization.

In my article “Toward the Second Century” in the last (November-December) issue of this journal, I concluded my discussion of the Congress election with the statement that “only Labor has the standing and strength to lead the WZO” and that “we look forward to . . . a broad progressive coalition at the Congress, to be led by Labor and its dynamic candidate for reelection as chairman, Avraham Burg.” That is exactly what happened at the Congress. Of course the delegations from the Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform movements made their presence felt and contributed a large number of the votes in favor of religious pluralism, but it required a movement like Labor, with major political strength in Israel together with a creditable presence throughout the Diaspora, to lead the process culminating in the resolution adopted on that dramatic final night of the Congress. (It should be noted that Meretz joined with Labor to constitute the single largest faction at the Congress, but ideological differences between the two partners on such issues as settlements persisted, and it was Labor’s Burg who led the battle on the question of pluralism.)

In my previous article I also described recent deliberations on Jewish Agency funding for pluralistic programs and projects in Israel narrowly defined as those of the religious streams, and I asked, “Will the Conservative and Reform movements, now further emboldened by the Congress elections, succeed in simply replacing Orthodox hegemony with a new three-denominational parochialism?” A similar comment can now be expressed about some of the rhetoric at the Congress proclaiming that the future of organized Zionism is to be found almost exclusively in the synagogues, thus once again ignoring the considerable weight of Zionist movements and related organizations that are secular. Let us hope that the

advocates of pluralism understand that protecting and enhancing that principle requires a full partnership with all Zionist forces in all settings and contexts.

The other element of drama at the Congress came from the presence and participation of well over 100 young-adult leaders of Zionist youth and student movements worldwide, with a particularly high proportion of representatives of the Labor Zionist youth movement, Habonim Dror. Here the drama did not begin the last day, for they were seen and heard throughout the proceedings, culminating with the adoption of a special resolution giving all the young leaders who were not already full voting delegates through their respective movements a vote, albeit restricted in certain respects and limited to this Congress. What was most impressive was the ability of this cadre to combine political realism with principled idealism. A more permanent and inclusive process giving this element an appropriate place in the governance of the WZO needs to be adopted well before the next Congress. Of equal importance were resolutions, many of them originating within the World Labor Zionist Movement, giving practical substance to what had appeared as an amorphous initiative, the establishment of a new "Hagshamah" (realization) Department within the WZO, by according top priority in its budget and operations to the needs of the Zionist youth and student movements.

As is normally the case, the Congress elected a new Executive reflecting a wall-to-wall coalition of all factions. This emerged from complex negotiations led by Labor's Yehiel Leket, who is himself now moving from many years of distinguished service in the WZO Executive to a top leadership role in the Keren Kayemet (Jewish National Fund), in rotation with a representative of Likud. Midterm rotation was a new element and somewhat of a wild card in this year's political process. For several decades there have been understandings about *balance* between key movements, notably that if the chairman came from Labor then Likud would designate the treasurer, and vice versa. This time the arrangement is somewhat more complicated. Avraham Burg was indeed re-elected as chairman, but for only two years, after which he may very well run once again for the Knesset, while Salai Meridor of Likud

is slated to succeed Burg as WZO chairman beginning January 1, 2000. There will be a parallel midterm rotation in the position of treasurer, as well as in the aforementioned chairmanship of JNF.

Truth be told, this entire arrangement, which emerged in the public discourse of Zionism over a year ago, is not what many of us would have preferred, and it contributed to the ambivalence surrounding the Congress elections. If the WZO ever needed continuity in leadership, it is in this new term, since Jewish Agency funding is guaranteed only through the end of 1999. It is to be hoped that these various political personalities will not wait until the rotation scheduled to coincide with that fiscal deadline, but will rather begin immediately to provide unified leadership in the endeavor of assuring the work of the Zionist movement.

However, those future considerations were superseded in the days just preceding the Congress by a more immediate phenomenon providing its own drama of sorts. The *principle* of rotation has been agreed to long since by Labor and Likud and acquiesced in by all others, and the individuals coming from the Labor side, such as Burg and Leket, were likewise generally known and accepted. Within Likud, rotation was an altogether different matter. Salai Meridor had already emerged as their most likely candidate for the rotating WZO chairmanship based on his organizational experience and personal qualities, but Prime Minister Netanyahu in his capacity as the leader of Likud was opposed to Meridor because of intraparty conflicts: Salai Meridor's brother, Dan, had been deposed by Netanyahu as Minister of Finance only a few months before. In the end the Prime Minister had to agree to Meridor, once again proving the political wisdom that you can't beat somebody with nobody.

But that turned out to be only one part of a stormy process within Likud involving *all* of the key positions, including their candidates for the rotating JNF chairmanship and the head of their world movement itself. For several days prior to the Congress, while most other movements from left to right were holding their respective world conventions with dignity (and therefore without publicity), Likud was making the headlines every morning. Netanyahu's candidate for Likud world chair-

man was his own recently resigned chief of staff, Avigdor Lieberman, a rather controversial figure in Israeli public life. An opponent of Netanyahu within his cabinet, Communications Minister Limor Livnat, ran against Lieberman. Finally a compromise candidate was elected: Zalman Shoval, former Israeli ambassador to the United States and a one-time disciple of David Ben-Gurion.

Even that development was overshadowed by the contest for the rotating KKL/JNF position, where one of the leading candidates was Jacques Kupfer, the leader of Likud in France, whose notoriety included a record of disrupting pro-Oslo events in his country and proclaiming that while Rabin should not have been shot, he should have been put on trial. Even with that record Kupfer was barely defeated by an experienced WZO official, Shlomo Gravitz, but not before Kupfer and his colleagues had blocked a staircase trying to prevent the various elections. These chaotic proceedings coincided with growing splits within the Likud-led government on both the 1998 budget and the peace process — all in all, a sorry spectacle for Zionism and Israel alike. Fortunately, a week that began with riots with-

in Likud ended with the considerable achievements of a World Zionist Congress led by Labor and dominated by progressive forces.

One week following the adjournment of the Congress, on January 1, the restructuring of the Jewish Agency (covered in my previous article) went into effect, as did the aforementioned two-year countdown for the WZO to define its place in that structure and to determine its own future — as stated at the outset, truly a commencement. What was accomplished at the Congress should help to set a positive tone for the new term that launches the second century of World Zionism. □

Daniel Mann, national president of the Labor Zionist Alliance, was reelected at the World Zionist Congress to the Presidium of the World Zionist General Council.

CORRECTIONS: In the article, "Toward the Second Century" (November/December 1997) the percentage of seats at the Zionist Congress reserved for the delegation from the United States should read 29%, not 25%; and the year of the last elections in Israel should be 1996, not 1995.

National Committee for Labor Israel
salutes Israel on its 50th anniversary,
and the unique role of Histadrut
in building the nation.

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50

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Meet EHUD BARAK



Lt. General (Res.) Ehud Barak was born in 1942 in Kibbutz Mishmar Hasharon. He joined the Israel Defense Forces in 1959, serving as a soldier and Commander of an elite unit. He held a variety of other command positions, including Tank Brigade Commander and Armored Division Commander, as well as General Staff positions including Head of the Military Intelligence Service.

While serving in the I.D.F., Ehud Barak earned a B.Sc. degree in Physics and Mathematics at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (1968) and an M.Sc. degree in Economic Engineering Systems from Stanford University, California (1978).

During the 1967 "Six-Day War", Barak served as a Reconnaissance group Commander. In the 1973 Yom-Kippur war he served as a Tank Battalion Commander on the southern front in Sinai.

At the age of 37 Ehud Barak was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General. In January 1982 he was promoted to Major General.

During the 1982 "Peace for Galilee" operation, Major General Barak served as Deputy Commander of the Israeli Forces engaging the Syrians in Lebanon.

In January 1986 he was appointed Commander of the I.D.F. Central Command and in May 1987, he was appointed Deputy Chief of the General Staff.

In April 1991, he assumed the post of I.D.F. Chief of the General Staff and was promoted to the rank of Lt. General, the highest rank in the Israeli military.

From the time of the signing of the Cairo Agreement in May 1994, dealing with the implementation of the Gaza and Jericho self-government security arrangements, Lt. General Barak oversaw the I.D.F.'s redeployment in the Gaza strip and in Jericho. During this time, he also met with his Syrian counterpart General Hikmet Shihabi.

Ehud Barak played a central role in finalizing the peace agreement with Jordan in 1994. Well before the signing ceremony he had met with King Hussein and his Jordanian counterparts.

As Chief of the General Staff, Lt. General Barak was a regular participant in Government Cabinet meetings.

During his military career, Ehud Barak was awarded the "Distinguished Service Medal" and four other citations for courage and operational excellence. He is the most highly decorated officer in I.D.F. history.

In July 1995, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin appointed Ehud Barak as Minister of the Interior and in November 1995, following Yitzhak Rabin's murder, Barak was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs by then Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

After the May 1996 elections, Ehud Barak was elected as a Member of Knesset where he serves on the Committee on Security and Foreign Affairs. In June 1997 Ehud Barak was elected to the position of Chairman of the Israel Labor Party.

Ehud Barak and his wife Nava have three daughters. □

J'accuse!

100 years ago, on January 13, 1898, the French writer Emile Zola, outraged by the infamous Dreyfus Affair, published an open letter accusing the French army of falsifying evidence of treason against a Jewish army officer, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, who was serving a life term. Finally, Dreyfus was exonerated. The affair was a major factor in arousing Theodor Herzl to study the "Jewish Problem" and create the World Zionist Organization in 1897. □

After Levy's Resignation

By Misha Louwish

The resignation of David Levy, leader of the Geshet faction and Foreign Minister in Binyamin Netanyahu's government, has thrown Israeli politics into confusion. For the time being Netanyahu has weathered the storm; he has managed to get the 1998 budget approved by a small majority in the Knesset and hopes that his coalition of seven parties can continue to govern until the end of its statutory term in the year 2000.

I believe, however, that Levy's drastic step has a significance beyond the effects it will have on the future of the Government. In the next few months or even years, I see it as a flare that lights up Israel's political landscape and may presage significant developments.

In the next few weeks Netanyahu has another difficult hurdle to overleap: the problem of the second withdrawal from part of the "West Bank," as stipulated in the Oslo agreements concluded by the Labor-led government in 1993 and 1995 and the agreement on withdrawal from most of Hebron signed by Netanyahu himself.

It is important to remember that the negotiations at Oslo were based on the peace treaty with Egypt signed in 1979 (in accordance with the previous year's Camp David accord) by the late Likud leader Menahem Begin. Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat was not content with an Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula, which had been occupied in 1967 in repelling Arab aggression. He insisted that this must be only a prelude to a comprehensive settlement of Israeli-Arab relations.

Accordingly, Begin accepted at Camp David "the principle of self-government" for the Arab inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza. He undertook that "the Israeli military government and its civilian administration shall be withdrawn as soon as a self-governing authority has been freely elected by the inhabitants of these areas to replace the existing military

government," and that there should be "a withdrawal of Israeli forces and . . . a redeployment of the remaining Israeli forces into specified military locations."

Nearly twenty years later Israel has not yet carried out these undertakings. It was only after PLO leader Arafat, in 1988, recognized Israel's right to exist and declared that the Palestine Liberation Organization's genocidal National Covenant was obsolete that the Rabin-Peres government agreed at Oslo in 1993 on a partial execution of the Camp David principles.

Instead of an immediate withdrawal of Israel's military government and military forces as stipulated at Camp David, it was agreed that "further redeployment" (FRD) should be carried out in three stages, to be followed by negotiations for a permanent settlement.

Netanyahu declared, on taking office, that he would comply with the previous government's official undertakings, and himself negotiated a similar agreement in regard to the city of Hebron, from which the withdrawal had not yet taken place. At a historic meeting at the White House he shook Arafat's hand and described him as "a friend and partner."

When it came to action, however, the picture changed. It was true that the extent of each FRD did not have to be negotiated with the Palestinians, but Netanyahu's offer to "redeploy" in the first stage from less than two per cent of the West Bank made a mockery of his promises.

Now, under American pressure, he has to offer a second RDP in order to get the peace process moving again. It was reported that he had unofficially promised that this time he will withdraw from at least ten per cent of the area, but he denies any such undertaking. The second RDP may be announced now, but it will not be carried out until Israel is satisfied with the PLO's compliance with all the condi-

tions it has undertaken to ensure Israel's security. Moreover, Netanyahu wants to skip the third RDP and go straight to the final peace negotiations.

This might have been acceptable, *faute de mieux*, if there was some confidence in Netanyahu and a real prospect of a satisfactory settlement, which would meet at least the minimal needs of the Palestinians. A proposed final map of the territory published by Arik Sharon, who is closely involved in the framing of the Israeli proposals, however, does not give much hope for such a solution. It provides for Israel to hold on to a broad north-south strip along the Jordan Valley, another along the "Green Line," the border between pre-1967 Israel and the West Bank, and two west-east strips dividing what would be left into three Palestinian islands. It is also stipulated by Likud spokesmen that no Jewish settlement shall be dismantled or left isolated in a Palestinian Arab sea.

It must be remembered that peace means not just a settlement that protects Israeli interests, but one that also recognizes, in the words of the Camp David accord, "the legitimate rights of the Palestinians and their just requirements." What the Palestinians are demanding is not merely "land for peace," as is often stated, but freedom from foreign rule. Could they accept a solution that will leave them divided into four separate mini-territories (including the Gaza Strip) dependent on Israel for all communication between them? Netanyahu often promises to make peace; how can he be sure that the Palestinians will agree to terms compatible with the ideology of Herut?

Arye Deri, the leader of the Sephardi orthodox Shas party, claims that only a right-wing government can make peace, for its concessions will be supported by the left, while a settlement concluded by the left, like that made by the Rabin-Peres government, could only command the backing of a tiny majority and would split the nation.

Here we have what could be described as the "Catch-22" of Israeli national policy. It is obvious that a settlement concluded by the right would command more widespread Jewish support, but it is difficult to envisage any proposals by the right that could be the basis for a real peace accepted by both sides.

This difficulty is clearly exemplified by the present situation. Netanyahu says he is prepared for a further redeployment, but there is a "Land of Israel Front," consisting of Knesset members of various coalition parties, which threatens to join a no-confidence vote and precipitate premature elections of the prime minister and the Knesset if Netanyahu hands over to the Arabs one more dunam of Holy Land soil.

At the same time the attitude of Yasir Arafat and the PLO is not helpful, to say the least. While calling for peace, he keeps on making belligerent statements, featuring calls for "jihad," "holy war," which his apologists interpret as meaning non-violent struggle but could be interpreted more literally. He has not complied with his undertakings to eschew anti-Israel propaganda, suppress terrorist organizations like Hamas and extradite those guilty of terrorist outrages. When Netanyahu demands compliance with such PLO undertakings, he undoubtedly has widespread Israeli support, but at the same time it is difficult to envisage PLO acceptance of an offer to withdraw on condition that Netanyahu is satisfied with Arafat's compliance with his obligations.

The attitude of Labor, as formulated by its new leader, former Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Ehud Barak, is clear. Labor would support a further redeployment and realistic negotiations for peace, which would clearly separate Israel from a self-governing Palestinian Arab entity, but it would also support a vote of no-confidence in Netanyahu and his government, which would entail premature elections of the prime minister and the Knesset. Former prime minister Shimon Peres is reported to have suggested the establishment of a national unity government, but Labor will not support such an administration under Netanyahu's leadership.

It seems possible, therefore, that this year the Netanyahu government will collapse and there will be new elections, which Barak would probably win, as recent public opinion polls give him a massive advantage over Netanyahu. Then the road will be clear for realistic negotiations for a historic peace settlement with the Palestinians, to be followed by even more difficult negotiations with the Syrians, which would open the road for peace

on the border with Lebanon. It will not be easy for Arafat to carry out his side of the bargain by suppressing terrorism, but neither Palestinians nor Israelis have a realistic alternative to peace.

In addition to the immediate problems of peace-making, far-reaching and significant questions arise after David Levy's resignation, which casts a vivid backward light on his own career and the attitudes of the oriental communities from which he came. What has he, a proletarian by any criterion, been doing for over twenty years in Herut and the Likud? When he decided to enter political life, why did he choose to join a party founded on extreme nationalism and the rejection of socialist principles in any shape or form? What is the common ground between his outlook and that of the anti-socialist Likud?

In his rejection speech Levy wholeheartedly denounced the attitude of the Netanyahu government to social problems and the welfare of the common people. Were these policies exemplified only in the latest budget, prepared by Jacob Ne'eman, the lawyer of top-ranking business enterprises? Were the gov-

Eve, Wondering

*"Because you have done this,
Cursed are you. . . ."*

Genesis 3:14

Adam was not alone in the naming of names: *Forbidden fruit*, God spoke, as in A is for apple, the first of many temptations he chose to proclaim.

And what did He expect? And how was I to know it was not a game, the fruit so ripe and beckoning

as I explored the garden there, that nosegay of innocence entwined like a ribbon in my hair?

And what could I have understood of consequence, there in the garden where, truly, ignorance was bliss. □

— Michael S. Glaser

ernments of Menahem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir much better?

Why did Herut and the Likud get such massive support in the new towns and other areas populated mainly by new immigrants from Iraq, Yemen and North Africa? A large part of the answer lies in the objective difficulties involved in absorbing large numbers of unskilled and uneducated people, who quite naturally blamed the government and the dominant Labor Party for their difficulties. Does Levy's resignation presage a change of heart among the oriental communities? Will they realize, at last, that their future lies with the labor movement, and not with the defenders of capitalism? □

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four of our outstanding
chaverim

DR. IRA SWEET

who took a special interest
in Habonim youth

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whose generosity
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JACK LEVINE

who was a
contributing writer
of *Jewish Frontier*

LENNY KOMAR

who was our historian,
secretary, and
all-around wit

Israel's Economic Battleground

A WILD DECEMBER AT THE KNESSET

By Susan Hattis Rolef

Because of the Budget Law and the Financial Allocations Law, that must be passed by December 31st, December is usually a month in which one hears a lot about economics. However, December of 1997 will be remembered as an especially charged month in economic terms.

The month opened with a general strike declared by the Histadrut, which lasted for only four days, but which highlighted the intensity with which the trade unions in Israel may be expected to struggle a rear-guard battle for workers' rights in coming years, and the emergence of Histadrut Chairman Amir Peretz as a popular labor leader. Then we were informed that while the annual rate of inflation was comfortably within the single digit limits, this has had less to do with the success of the high interest rate policy of the Governor of the Bank of Israel, Prof. Ya'acov Frenkel, than with the economic slump Israel has entered. One of the indicators of this situation is that the total number of unemployed in December had passed 150,000, with unemployment rates in some towns in the South reaching close to 15%. The development town of Ofakim tops the list, and for at least a week all the media and politicians — including the Prime Minister — were focused on it. Then, as the month came to a close, the annual budget-passing farce in the Knesset entered high gear, with voices being heard, even within the Coalition, that this might be the last budget to be passed by the Netanyahu Government.

In the case of the strike, the straw that broke the camel's back, or perhaps the match that finally lit the pile of dynamite, was a statement by Minister of Finance Ya'akov Ne'eman to the effect that "we no longer need

external enemies — we have bombs which are ticking — bombs which are exploding, of our own making." He was referring to the Histadrut leadership, which was threatening to take extreme measures if a whole row of problems concerning the workers and social services, were not resolved. The Histadrut leadership preferred to explain that Ne'eman was referring to all the workers in Israel, and then all hell broke loose, resulting in an almost complete standstill in the economy for four days, including an almost total shut down of all the entrances and exits from the country — not a pretty sight.

But beyond games of prestige and the flexing of muscles, the strike was about some very real and painful issues. There was a major debate about whether the Ministry of Finance ought to fulfill the terms of an agreement signed on the eve of the 1996 elections by then Labor Minister of Finance Avraham Shohat and Amir Peretz regarding the pension funds of the state employees — an agreement extremely favorable to the workers and undoubtedly signed by Shohat without sufficient preparation against the background of the approaching elections. "*Pacta sunt servanda*" argued the Histadrut. "An agreement must be reasonable," responded the Ministry officials, not hiding their opinion that this particular agreement was not reasonable and would eventually cost the state treasury some 32 billion shekels (no one ever explained how this figure was arrived at).

But there were other issues, both overt and covert, involved. The Finance Ministry's intention to hit hard at the national health insurance system instituted in 1995 was

another, and the news that the Ministry had stated that there would be no money for certain drugs required by cancer and AIDS patients, highlighted the problem. True, the health funds have not been very efficient or even honest in running their budgets, but what the public remembered were pictures of a bald-headed young cancer patient at the President's official residence, begging for a promise that she will receive all the treatment she requires and bursting into tears.

Then there is the continuous problem of municipal and local council employees not receiving their salaries. Again, financial mismanagement by municipalities and local councils is not rare — but a worker, working for little more than the minimal wage and not even receiving that on time, is certainly not a pretty sight. Added to all this was some local color (and smell) caused by a prolonged strike by the sanitary workers in the Tel-Aviv municipality because Tel-Aviv Mayor Ronnie Milo was determined to employ private cleaning contractors to work side by side with the municipality workers. The stench caused by garbage that piled up in the streets of Tel-Aviv made only the stray cats happy, but the sanitation workers — many of them reformed former convicts — raised a point, which is very sore among workers in the Israeli economy, and likely to become more acute: namely, that more and more employers prefer to hire workers on personal contracts or through manpower agents, and to use contractors to perform jobs, all at the expense of organized labor. In terms of job security and social welfare, this is without doubt a regression, which only the social Darwinists can rejoice at. That the Histadrut should fight back, is not surprising.

The strike was finally called off after the Ministry of Finance backed down from some of its positions. But the strike cost the economy some 200 million shekels (according to the Manufacturers' Association). Histadrut crossed a dangerous red line when it chose to disregard back-to-work orders by the Labor Court, and the sad fact remains that even though Amir Peretz emerged as an authentic and inspiring labor leader, his style of leadership is rather autocratic (some would even say dictatorial), and the organization he leads is, to all effects and purposes, bankrupt. One of the major mistakes made by the "New His-

tadrut" soon after Haim Ramon was elected Secretary General back in May 1994, was to move its headquarters from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This act of folly has cost the Histadrut as much as 50 million shekels, and will soon be reversed. But 50 million shekels is small change compared to the organization's other liabilities.

Rising unemployment in Israel is naturally also part of the reason for labor unrest. There are many reasons for the rise in unemployment. Some of it is structural. For example, it has been a well-known secret for at least a decade that there is no future for Israel's textile industry, which is not competitive due to relatively high wages compared to various Third World countries. The industry has been kept artificially alive, but now the day of reckoning is here, and many textile companies are either closing down altogether, or are in the process of moving their operations to Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian authority. Another source of structural unemployment — which has been going on since the early 90s — concerns the Israeli aircraft and arms industries. Together with massive layoffs, constituting part of recovery plans, the workers are worried by rumors regarding privatization — fearing that under private ownership there will be further layoffs and a deterioration in the unemployment picture.

In addition to the structural unemployment there is unemployment caused by economic crises abroad (over which the Israeli Government has no control) and by a slowdown in the Israeli economy resulting from the almost total collapse of the peace process (for which the Israeli Government certainly bears at least part of the blame). The latter type of unemployment is primarily in the tourist industry (there has been a fall in the number of tourists entering the country) but is also caused by the slowdown in new foreign investments and in the development of peace-related economic activities. Only in one sphere is there a shortage of workers — computer software. One of the problems is that beyond long-term macro-economic remedies, the Government hasn't come up with any answers to the problem of unemployment. The great performance put on by the Prime Minister, who during a visit to Ofakim announced that there

were 300 new job offers in and around the town (most of which turned out to be bogus), was typical of the Government's superficial approach.

But nowhere has the reliance on long-term macro-economic remedies, and absence of any detailed planning regarding economic and social goals and priorities, come to view than in the case of the budget. At the time of writing (December 30) it is not yet clear whether the budget and financial allocations (what is known in Hebrew as "*Hok Hahesterim*", by means of which financial "goodies" are distributed to members of the Coalition best at playing the blackmailing game) will actually be passed before midnight of December 31st, or whether Netanyahu will have to make use of the provisions of the new version of the Basic Law: the Government (or the law for the direct election of the Prime Minister), which enables the Government to continue to function even without the budget being approved for three months after the entry of the new FY on January 1st.

In financial terms, the horse-trading around the 1998 budget has been about half to two percent of the total budget (depending on whom you ask — the exact figures are still being kept secret), even though with regards to certain items the increases demanded by MKs from both the Coalition and the Opposition benches, have reached more than 100 percent of the original sums allocated. Unlike Ne'eman, the Prime Minister has been inclined to give in to the demands coming from his coalition partners, even though he might, once again, have been bluffing.

The problem with the Prime Minister has had less to do with the framework of the budget being broken, than with the message he is conveying: namely, that the body known as the Government of Israel is totally disjointed, has a backbone made of jelly and no coherent policy on any of the central issues which are in dispute in the Israeli society today. These issues have mostly to do with the shape and nature of the State of Israel in coming years — its borders, the relations between religion and state and social gaps. The one issue, which has made the most headlines, and over which the Government is most lacking in a coherent policy, with Ne'eman and Minister of Health Yehoshu'a Matza

standing at the two extreme edges of the debate, has been that concerning the national health services.

The strangest thing about the farce being enacted these very days (and nights) in the Knesset — including the Opposition's rotating filibuster (since MK Michael Eitan's 10-hour filibuster back in 1992, which almost caused the Knesset doctor a heart attack, the rules of procedure have been changed so that no one Member of Knesset can speak for more than 15 minutes) and a string of successes by the Opposition in getting various clauses in the financial allocations and budget laws changed — is that everyone has been aware of its futility.

The reason why there was never any doubt about the budget being passed, is the same reason why 61 members out of the 120 Members of Knesset of the 14th Knesset are unlikely to vote for a motion of no-confidence in the Prime Minister during the term of the current Knesset: because there isn't a majority among the members of the 14th Knesset, who believe that new elections will result in their respective parties becoming stronger or the ideological issues they believe in being better served. The National Religious Party and Tsomet, for example, are dissatisfied with Netanyahu's policy *vis-à-vis* the peace process — especially his apparent willingness to hand over territories to the Palestinians in the West Bank. But they also know that the policy of any alternative government will be much worse from *their* perspective. Geshet is dissatisfied with Netanyahu's social policy (or absence thereof), but knows that its chances of getting five Knesset Members (what it currently has) into the 15th Knesset are close to nil. The 23 Knesset members from the three religious parliamentary factions have no way of knowing whether their number will not fall in the next elections, and they certainly cannot remember a government that was more receptive to their demands and wishes. Furthermore, especially in the Likud, there are many Members of Knesset who are not sure whether they will get reelected to their party's list for the 15th Knesset. Thus, none of the members of the coalition have a real interest in bringing the government down.

Under the circumstances it is not clear why Netanyahu seemed so eager to give in to the demands of his coalition partners and

even members of his own party, and thus create the danger of his Minister of Finance — who is not a Member of Knesset — deciding to give up in disgust and resign. Ne'eman has not been very sensitive either on social affairs or on labor relations. But at least he appears to have a policy and a backbone.

What the picture portrayed above says is basically two things. The first is that the current government has made quite a mess of the economic situation, and its habit to repeat parrot-like that the situation is the result of the irresponsible policies of the previous Labor Government (that was over 18 months ago!) is not convincing. Though the Rabin/Peres Governments made some economic mistakes, under the economic leadership of Shohat, and former Minister of Industry and

Trade Micha Harish, most of the economic indicators of the Israeli economy were much more positive than they are today, and the economic atmosphere was one of optimism.

The second observation is that now is the time for the Labor Party to start laying down an alternative economic policy. Though it is not at all certain that Labor chairman Ehud Barak will, in fact, manage to bring about elections in the course of 1998, sooner or later elections will be held and under the circumstances it is not too difficult to come up with a coherent and convincing alternative. The only problem is that no election in Israel was ever won or lost over economic issues, and finally it is other issues that will decide the results. □

POETRY

WHEN THE BOOK WAS CLOSED

In an ancient village in the Galilee
the aging bullet holes on the tower
are left there, and unless you asked
no one would mention them,

possibly because in a town known for
extraordinary holiness, it is easier
to remember Deborah's army facing
the iron chariots of the Canaanites,

the dented shields and split heads,
and nervy Jael driving a tentpin
with a mallet into the sleeping head
of a runaway Canaanite general.

These things happened yesterday, too.
What, then, are a few bullet holes
in the cement tower of a hill town
where pine trees whistle in Ivrit.

Some of the boys on guard at night
may ponder the meaning of violence
and human destiny. Others, brothers,
take it as it comes, seeing that
these things were worked out long ago
when the Book was closed. □

Mahane Yehuda

Palming a melon
the woman sounds it
with the heel of her hand,
listening for sweet densities.

She is a solemn type
and takes her time.

When God looked over
the newly made world,
He, too, took his time
and decided it was good.

She shoulders the crowd towards
the man she must bargain with,
remembering how God backed down
in the face of Abraham's plea
not to destroy Sodom for the sake
of fifty righteous, forty, thirty,
twenty, ten . . . she smiles.

At that moment the suicide bomber
pressed the toggle on his belt. □

— Edmund Pennant

What Will Replace the Jewish Secular Movement?

By Si Wakesberg

Recently, the media has been having a field day with that eternal subject: Jewish assimilation. While many exotic areas of the subject have been plumbed — particularly intermarriage — few, if any, of the analysts have taken the pains to examine a truly critical development: the disappearance of that particular Jewish secular movement which was intimately bound up with the Yiddish language.

I make this distinction because Jewish secularism is a broad umbrella term. The Yiddish-based secular movement, one of the gemstones of Jewish immigration to the United States, cast its bright rays into all facets of Jewish life, illuminating even the poorest areas, if one were to judge by the old East Side educational center, the swarm of Jewish organizations, the reading room of the public library, the row of Yiddish newspapers. That secularism left an enviable record of achievement — a record, however, that is fast being forgotten.

When I was young, there were Yiddish schools in neighborhoods all over New York; many Jewish secular institutions flourished and their meetings attracted thousands. During the summer months Jewish organizational camps were filled with youngsters; one could still go to the Yiddish theater; and there were Yiddish newspapers available at the corner newsstand. Nearly all of this has vanished as if it never was.

One need not be a statistician to evaluate the distance the American Jewish community has traveled the past 50 years. The gulf that separates 1947 from 1997 is indeed wider than its chronological divide. During those five decades, the Yiddish-based secular movement in the United States, once a strong and impacting factor on the Jewish community, simply disappeared. While it was not an overnight occurrence and the erosion took place slowly, we can only now look back and see what happened.

A suburban Americanized Judaism began to develop in the postwar years. Its origins can be found in the displacement of Jews from congested urban areas into regions formerly “restricted” and not accessible to Jews, particularly middle-class Jews who had been transformed by the postwar economic boom.

Coming into alien territory, uncertain as to how they would be received, filled with anxieties, uprooted from their normal city sites, Jews searched for an institution around which they could mobilize. They now had to face their lawn-mowing Christian neighbors who went to church on Sunday — how could they develop their own comparative and competitive religious affiliation? They found the answer in their neighborhood synagogue. Around the synagogue and its constituent institutions, including the Jewish Center, they began to build their activities.

These transplanted Jews were middle-class, urban and un-orthodox and it is not therefore surprising to find in recent statistical data evidence of the upsurge of the Reform and Conservative movements in the United States. Recent demographic studies* have noted that while during World War I, a survey of New York synagogues showed 94% of them to be Orthodox, 1989 denominational preferences were different: Reform 41.4%; Conservative 40.4%; and Orthodox 6.8%. There is also evidence of a move away from stricter observance to “marginality”, despite the media spotlight on Jewish orthodoxy.

The change in the Jewish community in the United States took place at a time when the establishment of the State of Israel had given rise to doubts about the validity of Zionism in a post-State world, and when the value of socialism was being questioned. The Yiddish language itself was vanishing in the theater, in the home, in the newspapers, and even in the

so-called Yiddish school. The synagogue was left to bring Jews together, provide them with a sense of identity, and give them the needed "face" in their new inter-faith communities.

One can still find remnants of that secular generation which nurtured a tradition of Jewish culture and education, which supported the Yiddish language, which built large and effective Jewish organizations such as the Workmen's Circle, the Labor Zionist Organization, the Sholem Aleichem Institute and others. Some of these institutions are still operating but their ranks have been thinned and many of their members have joined the new wave.

The disappearance of the Yiddish school, or "shule" as it was known, is a particularly sad and rueful memory. "I would have sent my children to a Yiddish shule if there was one in the vicinity," recently said a mother who herself was the product of a Workmen's Circle school, "but there was none in my neighborhood, so I sent them to a religious school because I wanted them to receive a Jewish education."

Those of us who attended the now-gone secular Yiddish schools and progressed on to the so-called *mittl shul* or high school (these were afternoon or weekend schools) received an unbelievable and forever-to-be-remembered education in Jewish history, literature, and Jewish culture, steeped in the intimacy of the Yiddish language. Supplementing this were the organizational camps — Kinderwelt, Boiberik, the Workmen's Circle camps, the I.W.O. camps — all had a specific Yiddish flavor although their political ideologies were different. Nearly all are gone.

The non-Orthodox camps and schools to which Jewish children are sent these days are "minimalist" Jewish education centers as opposed to the old Yiddish "maximalists" of the past. This is said not to denigrate present systems but to differentiate them from those that preceded them. Anything that continues to preserve Jewish identification is good. But in an analysis one can perceive the vast difference in what is being preserved.

Similarly there has been a resurgence of the Yiddish language as a subject in the college curriculum. Many universities, some in off-beat geographical areas, have added Yiddish to their list of studies. As a result, many young people are encountering Yiddish in their colleges for the first time — and that too is all to the good. But it should be noted that this Yid-

dish is a "subject", another foreign language. It is not a language heard in the home, in the theater, or seen in the press. When one walks the streets of a big city in the United States these days one may hear Spanish or Chinese — but rarely Yiddish.

A valiant and courageous effort by Aaron Lansky and his group has saved thousands of Yiddish books from extinction. They now reside in a new library — a testament to one man's vision and daring. But who will write the Yiddish books of the future? If a community cannot support its newspapers, how will it be able to produce books?

The question that is up for debate is: Can the synagogue culture which has replaced the secular movement eventually develop an equivalent rich Jewish environment? Can it build a Jewish culture of comparable dimension? The older generation of Jews who came to these shores brought with them an overwhelming desire for education, a sense of brotherhood and a passion for liberty and democracy. Out of this passion and hard work arose a network of Yiddish schools and camps, a Yiddish press, and a thriving Yiddish culture.

But in the end the secular movement gave way and one might well ask why this happened. Was it that Americanization finally took hold in the emerging wealth and the new status of middle-class Jews? Was it the failure of socialism and the vulnerability of liberalism? Or was it the destruction of the inner cities? Was it that Yiddish culture and the Yiddish language, nurtured in the world of Eastern Europe, had seen its heyday and like many other civilizations simply was doomed?

Whatever answer one chooses, it is clear that the Yiddish-rooted Jewish secular movement is gone, vanished from the contemporary scene. It has become just another historical episode to be studied in the dusty textbooks of the future. What, if anything, will replace it? □

* "Highlights of the CJF National Jewish Population Survey", A Publication of the Council of Jewish Federations, in Association with The Mandell Berman Institute-North American Jewish Data Bank, The Graduate School & University Center, CUNY.

"Papers in Jewish Demography — 1989", edited by U.O. Schmelz and S. Dellapergola. Published by the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The End of Democracy?

Should Jews Be Concerned about Father Neuhaus?

By Sanford Pinsker

Father Richard John Neuhaus, editor of *First Things* (a monthly journal of religion and public life), cuts a dapper figure at Manhattan cocktail parties where conservative intellectuals meet to swap war stories and discuss strategy. Tallish, svelte, with a thinning pate and a face just this side of craggy, he seems fashioned from nearly equal measures of charm and intellectual toughness. A former Lutheran minister, the sixty-year-old Father Neuhaus converted to Roman Catholicism in 1990, the same year that *First Things* was launched. Writers associated with *Commentary* magazine offered the new magazine their aid, comfort, and not least of all, some very practical advice about funding sources. Some even agreed to serve on its editorial board, largely because the two magazines shared a conservative vision of American culture and politics.

So it came as something of a shock when the November 1996 issue of *First Things* included a symposium with the attention-grabbing title, "The End of Democracy?" Granted, others had raised sharp questions about "judicial arrogance" and "the judicial usurpation of power" before, but never with the suggestion that our democracy itself was endangered, if not already past the point of repair; and never with such nakedly religious zeal: "This symposium," Father Neuhaus explained in his Introductory remarks, "addresses many troubling judicial actions that add up to an entrenched pattern of government by judges that is nothing less than the usurpation of politics." The politics that Father Neuhaus has in mind are court decisions about abortion rights and doctor-assisted suicide, as well as the fear that gay marriages and other instances of secular liberalism will soon become the law of the land.

Father Neuhaus worries that America is becoming a godless and tyrannical land that people of conscience and moral principle must now vigorously oppose: "The question here ex-

plored, in full awareness of its far-reaching consequences, is whether we have reached or are reaching the point where conscientious citizens can no longer give moral assent to the existing regime."

Even members of Father Neuhaus's staff were uncomfortable with the "far-reaching consequences" that might result from an insistence that America was no longer a democracy, but had, in fact, *become* a regime. Some of the consequences arrived more quickly than even Father Neuhaus had imagined they would: prominent intellectuals such as Peter Berger, Walter Berns, and Gertrude Himmelfarb — members of *First Things*' Advisory Board — immediately resigned, and their public statements made it clear that Father Neuhaus had crossed the line from a responsible conservative to a wild-eyed revolutionary.

Himmelfarb, one of our country's most distinguished historians, pointed out that by framing the discussion "in apocalyptic, revolutionary terms, *First Things* has opened up a rift among conservatives that threatens to become a major fault line." And *rift* there surely was, on both sides of the political aisle. Paleo-conservatives grabbed the opportunity to announce that neoconservatism itself had been repudiated, while liberals were downright gleeful about the prospect of stirring up more infighting on the political Right. The latter was most famously expressed in Jacob Heilbrunn's long article, "Neocons vs. Theocons?," in *The New Republic*. In it, he argued that the Thomist view of natural law was on a collision course with liberal democracy. No matter that he wrongly imagined *First Things* as representing an exclusively Catholic viewpoint (it doesn't) or that he concluded that many of its sharpest critics were Jewish when, in fact, they were not; the flap soon took on a life of its own.

Father Neuhaus watched as the arguments

pro and con multiplied, no doubt gratified that so much public attention was now being paid to his journal, but also disconcerted by the nagging sense that a healthy disagreement had turned into a nasty, very personal controversy. The symposium and the wide range of responses it generated have now been collected in *The End of Democracy?* (Spence Publishing Company), a book that also includes Father Neuhaus's eighty-three-page survey of the controversy entitled "The Anatomy of a Controversy."

Why should Jews care about Father Neuhaus? If he has agitated — even alienated — a certain number of fellow New York/Washington beltway intellectuals, so what? The fact, however, is that we dare not ignore Father Neuhaus for two reasons. First, a growing number of Americans are becoming ever more distrustful of our national government (the violence advocated, and sometimes perpetrated, by militant militia groups is only the tip of a much larger, much more cynical iceberg). And second, because the wall dividing church and state is being battered by the religious right.

American Jews are concerned about both, but it is the second that especially exercises them — for a strong federal government, one that keeps religion out of the town square, safeguards the rights of a Jewish minority. Small wonder, then, that any effort to overturn this long-established status quo rightly makes many Jews nervous.

Meanwhile, Father Neuhaus has advocated "religion in the public square" since the early 1990s, but lately there has been a shift from a generic or religion-neutral version of the idea to one that is Jesus-based. Perhaps the distinction never amounted to much in the first place, but now Jews have solid reasons to believe that they will hardly be equal partners in the governing theocracy Father Neuhaus imagines.

Take, for example, the hot-button issue of abortion. Father Neuhaus writes passionately about judicial rulings that make abortion "on demand" — and at increasingly later stages of pregnancy — legal, and he does this not only from the traditionally Catholic perspective one might expect him to hold, but also in ways that makes it increasingly clear that what slavery was to fiery Abolitionists, the Pro-Choice movement is to him. Slavery was so deeply a moral wrong, so unacceptable on every level, that Garrison burned his copy of the Constitution be-

cause it legalized what a Christian God could not possibly countenance; Father Neuhaus makes much the same argument about "higher laws" with regard to one of our society's most vexing issues. A democracy that countenances abortion is not, Father Neuhaus would argue, a legitimate authority — even if the majority of voters are, in one version or another, pro-choice. True, there is a considerable difference between, say, John Brown (the Abolitionist who translated Garrison's oratorical passion into direct, bloody action) and Father Neuhaus. But in choosing a Garrison quotation as one of the sidebars to illustrate the history of moral dissent, the *First Things* symposium looks backwards — and with undisguised approval — to a dangerous precedent, and forward toward a future in which revolution is painted as a viable option.

Father Neuhaus is a threat, not because he is an anti-Semite of the Pat Robertson/Pat Buchanan sort (he is decidedly *not* in those camps), but rather because his conservative politics is energized by an allegiance to higher laws, and therefore his proposed solution is anti-democracy. Ironically enough, that is why the *First Things* symposium may well be of consequence to the average Jew, for it puts a great many half-understood tensions into bold relief. To what extent, if any, should Jews act as moral citizens with respect to hotly debated public issues? And should we be concerned about those — like Father Neuhaus — who feel that democracy no longer serves those Americans who want to see their moral convictions represented in legislation?

The recent *First Things* symposium and the recent book-length account of the controversies it generated, revives the angry strains of discontent and disenfranchisement that have long been dormant among many Americans. Add to this the rhetoric of revolution and the result has shivery implications that go well beyond the quarrels that intellectual journals manufacture and live by.

While many Jews may share in aspects of Father Neuhaus's quarrels with the judiciary and even more with his sense that moral values have gradually eroded in what he calls "the public square," they will not join him at the barricades. Jewish interests are best protected by a government committed to religious tolerance, not one that answers to a particular belief system. □

General Two-Gun Cohen

by Joseph Adler

Certain military figures in history are remembered for their talents as leaders of men. For the West, Julius Caesar, and Napoleon I, and for the East, Genghis Khan and Mao Tse-tung come readily to mind. Behind these men, their generalship and policies, there were often to be found underlings vital to their success, shadowy figures largely unknown to the general public. Such an individual was Morris Abraham Cohen (1887-1970) whose life story impacted on much of the modern history of China. To better understand his role it is essential to discuss briefly events in China before Cohen's arrival there in 1922.

"Double Ten" is a red-letter day in the history of modern China. On the tenth day of the tenth month in 1911, the revolution which overthrew the Manchu ("Ch'ing") dynasty broke out. It was a badly planned affair, catching both the revolutionaries and the imperial governors by surprise. Soon after the initial uprising the revolt quickly turned into a national revolution.

When the first blows were struck against the Manchus, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, a leader of the revolutionary movement, was in the United States. He had worked for many years (since 1895) to end the imperial dynasty, hoping to establish a democratic republic in his homeland. Before Sun Yat-sen could return home the revolutionaries had gained control, and made some dangerous compromises to gain stability. Since Sun Yat-sen was eager to move ahead with the building of a republican regime, he went along with the arrangements.

A key figure in the "deals" connected with the Revolution of 1911 was the veteran politician and military leader, Yuan Shih-kai. Shortly after the initial uprising the Manchu government placed him in charge of the imperial army. But Yuan was an opportunist who wanted to advance his own political fortune. Accordingly, after giving the revolutionaries a taste

of his military superiority, he struck a bargain with them. The Manchu emperor was to abdicate, thus bringing the Ch'ing dynasty to a close. For their part the revolutionaries agreed that Sun Yat-sen, who was acting as provisional president of the newly formed Chinese Republic, would stand aside in favor of Yuan.

However, Yuan Shih-kai, well known for his treachery, had no sympathy for a republican form of government. Instead, to Sun Yat-sen's dismay he established a military dictatorship based in Peking and maintained his power by bribery and coercion. Sun, in 1913 tried to oust Yuan, but failed and was compelled to flee the country. For several years his fortunes were at a low point.

During the period of World War I, Yuan Shih-kai died and Sun Yat-sen reorganized his followers into the Kuomintang or National People's Party and in 1917 established a nationalist government in southern China (Canton). Lacking a strong central authority, China fell into almost total anarchy. Bands of brigands terrorized the countryside, and provincial warlords ruled their domains like feudal chieftains, frequently fighting with each other. Adding to the chaos, the victorious Allied Powers at the close of World War I granted the Japanese territory and concessions in China which had formerly been under German control.

Disillusioned with the West and stimulated by the example of Lenin and the successful Bolshevik Revolution, Sun Yat-sen became more radical. He turned for help to the Soviet Union, and opened the ranks of the Kuomintang to the Chinese Communist Party which had been founded in 1921. The Soviets sent military and political advisors to help Sun Yat-sen's government. But the wily Chinese leader did not fully trust them and for his bodyguard chose a Jewish maverick named Morris Abra-

ham Cohen. The latter was born to Orthodox Polish immigrants in the East End of London. As a youngster he attended the Jew's Free School, but because of his habitual fighting and juvenile delinquency he was sent to a reform school at age ten. Upon his release, his parents sent him to Canada in the hope of keeping the teenager from a life of crime.

In Saskatchewan, Cohen tried his hand at ranching, peddling, smuggling, boxing, and gambling. Extremely handy with firearms, he achieved fame throughout Western Canada as an extraordinary marksman. On one occasion he used his skill with firearms to shoot and wound two cowboys who had called him a "dirty Jew". Years later in China, western correspondents would name the fiery bodyguard of the Chinese leader "Two-Gun Cohen" because of the pistol braces he regularly wore.

Ultimately drifting from Saskatchewan to Edmonton, Alberta, Cohen used his predilection for gambling to make a small fortune as a real estate speculator. He became a ward boss in the Chinese quarter of Edmonton. In his business and political contacts he befriended the city's Chinese community. Learning their language and customs, Cohen devoted himself to working for Chinese rights during a period of intense anti-Asian sentiment. In 1913, Cohen lobbied successfully in the provincial legislature for the repeal of the head tax clause in the Chinese Immigration Act, an action that greatly enhanced his standing with the local Chinese population.

Some years earlier, Cohen had met Sun Yat-sen when the Chinese revolutionary was in Canada seeking support for his movement. The Chinese patriot, learning of Cohen's ability with firearms and badly in need of a bodyguard, suggested that the latter return to China with him as part of his entourage. Cohen, sensing the war clouds gathering over Europe and feeling that Canada might need him, turned down Sun's offer.

At the outbreak of World War I, Cohen enlisted in the Irish Guards, in which he headed a Chinese labor battalion in France. After the war, Sun Yat-sen once again invited Cohen to join him in China. This time the soldier of fortune accepted and became Sun's aide-de-camp and commander of the presidential bodyguards. On several occasions Cohen reportedly saved Sun from assassins' bullets. He was also

instrumental in saving Madame Sun from an attempt on her life in Hong Kong. Besides protecting the president and his family, Two-Gun was also put to work purchasing arms and recruiting officers for Sun's army, as well as organizing banking and customs services for the "republic".

When Sun Yat-sen died in 1925 he was succeeded by Chiang Kai-shek. The latter, a more pragmatic leader, altered Sun's policies. He concentrated on trying to achieve by force the unification of China. Chiang, however, realized that his army was ill-prepared for the task. Accordingly, he asked Cohen, who had remained in the administration as a key military advisor, if he could transform the "republic's" peasant soldiers into a smooth working military force. Two-Gun accepted the challenge, and in less than a year succeeded in organizing the Kuomintang army into an efficient fighting machine. For this accomplishment, Cohen was commissioned a general in the Chinese army, and assigned to the Ministry of War. Cohen remained in the latter post from 1926 to 1928, and in all but name operated virtually as the Chinese Nationalist Minister of War.

In 1926, Chiang set in motion a campaign to smash the warlords in the northern provinces. Although some progress was made, the campaign fell far short of its objective as a result of a split which had developed in the national revolutionary movement. The Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party had little faith in each other and had for some time been drifting apart. The final break came in 1927 when Chiang purged the Kuomintang, the army, and his government of Communists. The Communists then withdrew to a remote part of China and formed a guerrilla army. Only in 1937, after the Japanese had launched an invasion of China by way of Manchuria, did Chiang and the Communists suspend their civil war to create a united front against the common enemy.

General Two-Gun Cohen took part in the military campaigns against both the Communist forces and the Japanese invaders. Indeed, the 19th Route Army, which he helped assemble, was one of the most successful of the Chinese military forces to confront the Japanese.

In 1941, Two-Gun Cohen was taken prisoner by the Japanese after their capture of Hong Kong. During his twenty-one months of inter-

ment he was brutally tortured. Sentenced to death in 1944, he narrowly escaped at the last moment being executed by a Japanese firing squad. Eventually repatriated, Cohen returned to Canada.

In 1949, Cohen visited China several times in attempts to reconcile the Communists and Chiang's Nationalists. However, his efforts proved futile as the Communists under the command of Mao Tse-tung had successfully routed Chiang's forces, and proclaimed a Chinese People's Republic. His forces badly mauled, Chiang had withdrawn the remnants of his army to Taiwan, one hundred miles from the Chinese mainland. Although Cohen's peace overtures had failed, he remained one of the few individuals to find a warm welcome in both Peking and Taipei.

Disillusioned by his inability to change the course of Chinese history, General Two-Gun settled in England, and spent his declining years in Manchester. Unlike most of China's generals and warlords he would die peacefully in his bed.

Throughout his extraordinary life the sharp-shooting general had let it be known that he was a proud and loyal Jew. He frequently used his Hebrew name in his public and private transactions. The Chinese, unlike the Western correspondents who had dubbed him Two-Gun, called him "Cohen Moisha". This odd reversal of his family name and his Hebrew name had come about when he filled out a form upon joining the Chinese military. Similarly, when questioned why he had devoted so much energy and years to China, Cohen would reply by noting that the Chinese were one of the few nations that had never persecuted Jews. The soldier of fortune was also a staunch supporter of Zionism, and frequently appeared on Jewish platforms and in rallies in support of the creation of a Jewish state.

Kibbutz Trends

In 1996 the cotton industry was prosperous, breaking both Israeli and world records for yield per dunam.

Non-agricultural kibbutz industries declined by a third. But in 1997, leading kibbutz businesses that did well included nappies (Kibbutz Amir's Tafnukim) and irrigation systems (Na'an and Netafim).

Kibbutzim and moshavim are gearing up for a public campaign against expropriation of their arable land for the construction of the new cross country highway.

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Ada Sereni A Woman of Valor

ADA SERENI, widow of Enzo Sereni, and a heroic figure in her own right, died in November at age 92, and was brought to rest in Kibbutz Givat Brenner, which she and her husband helped found when they made *Aliya* from Italy in 1927.

Born in Rome in 1905, Ada was a daughter of the aristocratic Ascareli family, which had arrived in Italy from Spain in the 15th century. After completing her studies at the University of Rome, she married Enzo and gave birth to their first daughter, Chana. They were attracted to the Zionist vision and arrived in Eretz Israel in 1927. After a half year in Rehovot, they joined a collective group which evolved into Givat Brenner, now one of Israel's largest kibbutzim. There the family grew, with the birth of another daughter, Hagar, and a son, Daniel. In 1954, Daniel and his young wife were killed when watching an air show at Maagan, and a plane crashed into the crowd of spectators on the ground.

Although she was the wife of the dynamic leader, Enzo, Ada herself became a leading personality in the kibbutz, and assumed major responsibilities, including management of the *Rimon* factory which produced juices and jams.

During World War II, Enzo joined the daring group of parachutists and dropped behind the Nazi lines in Italy. He was caught, tortured and executed at Dachau.

After the war, before Enzo's fate was known, Ada went forth to seek him. She was asked to



Enzo and Ada Sereni and their oldest daughter, before their departure for Palestine in 1927

volunteer as director of a soldiers' recreation center. After a short while, she was called to aid in *Aliya Bet*, the so-called illegal immigration operation breaking the British blockade of Palestine.

The "woman in black" was secretary of the organization and financial manager. In due time, she managed to establish good relations with government circles in Italy, her native country. Her fluent Italian and her aristocratic bearing helped her wield influence in important quarters. She was thus able to facilitate acquisition of boats for the "illegals" and obtain permits for their departure from Italian ports. Hundreds of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust thus made their way to their safe haven, Eretz Israel.

Ada wrote up this historic chapter in her book, "Ships Without Flags", written in Italian. From 1954 to 1967, she lived in Rome and worked on behalf of Soviet Jewry.

In 1964, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol bestowed upon Ada Sereni the *Haapala* Medal for her contributions to the rescue of Jewish survivors. After the Six-Day War, Eshkol imposed upon her to serve in Gaza, in an effort to solve the refugee problem.

On her 90th birthday, Ada received the prestigious Israel Prize.

In her last years, Ada Sereni lived in Jerusalem, where she died after a long illness. She was a rare woman, blessed with grace and courage, one of Israel's finest daughters. □

Remembering Ada

By Saadia Gelb

My contacts with Ada Sereni were mainly contained in three phases of her life: in the United States, in Jerusalem and in *Nofei Yerushalayim*, a senior residence in Israel's capital.

In 1935, the Histadrut Labor Federation sent abroad an emissary of Western European origin to serve the Zionist youth movements and Hechalutz (pioneer training organization). Before that, the custom was to send a person of Eastern European roots, good people, serious and devoted — but nevertheless not always suitable.

Enzo Sereni, a native of Italy, who succeeded remarkably well in Germany, was the best bet to tackle the task in North America. Enzo arrived in New York in 1936 and after a whirlwind survey reported that there was ground for building a significant Zionist youth movement. He requested that his family be sent to join him in New York. (Minutes of the Histadrut Executive reveal that there was a heated debate on this matter, since Enzo's views were unorthodox, especially with regards to the Arabs.)

In the summer of 1936 Ada arrived with Chana, Hagar and Daniel, and went directly to the Habonim camp at Accord, New York, which I led. There were no special complications, except that we were all enthusiastic about their arrival and taken by Ada's beauty and gentle manner, and by the children's normality and freedom of expression. We got to know each of them intimately. Naturally, we agreed to Enzo's suggestion that we live with his family as a commune. He told us of the success of such a commune in Germany. We dispatched a Chaver to locate an apartment for the commune, for 14 people — the 5 Serenis and 9 Habonim leaders. In that search we discovered Ada's superior leadership qualities.

Since we had a very limited budget, we looked for space in low-rent neighborhoods. Ada vetoed this approach. She volunteered to seek suitable quarters, and within a week reported that she had rented a place at 900 Riverside Drive, in a luxurious section of Manhattan, overlooking the Hudson River. As we trooped into the apartment, one by one, the superintendent looked on in surprise, but as we paid the rent on time and behaved properly, we were not expelled.

The period of the commune was a turning point in the life of each of us. And also a milestone in the history of our movement. Eight rooms, two bathrooms, a long hallway and a large living room which was immediately converted into a social hall. Ada was the general manager. Enzo maintained discipline. He invited guests of all types — potential members, intellectuals, friends, curiosity seekers, young and old. We jointly celebrated all the Jewish holidays. The atmosphere was always lively and colorful. One was a pianist. One helped out with the children, in addition to her organizational duties. One was a student, another a technical secretary from Canada. We were all leaders in the Movement. With all the good, there was the constant economic pressure. A \$15 weekly allowance, out of which we had to pay our share of the rent, did not leave much for food. Ada was an excellent cook. Limited as to what she could buy, she had to protect the contents of the refrigerator with notices: "For the Children". Without such safeguards, Enzo would have found an empty fridge upon his return from trips out-of-town.

The Sereni kids were a pleasure. Daniel was a notorious imp. What can one expect from a boy with two older sisters? A mother with high

principles? And a mob of adults all around? On one hand, he was spoiled by everyone. On the other, everyone felt obliged to "educate" him. That is, to control him.

Ada was a curious mixture of modernism with elements of a conservative monastic upbringing. The daughter of an aristocratic Jewish-Italian family, the Ascarelis, she was sent to the best school available, a Catholic convent. Nevertheless she was a paradigm of persistence and flexibility. She displayed neatness and discipline. Also a great deal of common sense. It was hard on her, and we saw signs of fatigue. The ebullient Enzo was not easy. Once she said, "Half my life is a debate with Enzo — he would urge me to walk a little faster, and I would answer, perhaps you will walk a bit more slowly!" Ada would dress meticulously in good taste in spite of her limited wardrobe. That was the lady Ascareli-Sereni the Halutza.

We were an extended family. Suddenly, everything halted because of politics. Enzo was recalled from his mission, in spite of his success in America, after a heated debate in the Histadrut Executive. We discovered this many years later. The reason, we were told, was that he was needed for other assignments. Our commune on Riverside Drive was dissolved. The rest is history.

The second time my life was intertwined with Ada's was after the war, and the tragedies that befell the Sereni family. In the years 1951-52 and 1955-59 I was the Kibbutz treasurer and later treasurer of the Regional Council of Upper Galilee. This necessitated many trips to Jerusalem. This time I met a mature woman of many experiences and astounding accomplishments which became part of the history of the rebirth of the Jewish state. Whenever I was in Jerusalem and was not hurrying between banks and government offices I dropped in to see Ada. She had a small car, Italian make, which she loved. We drove in it to see many vistas.

Ada did not hesitate to tell of her activities on behalf of Aliya Beth, of her contacts with Italian government officials, military and economic. She had a sharp eye and her portraits of people were brilliant. She did not spare criticism but was also considerate of weak-

nesses. Once, she told me, she had to deal with a general, to obtain a certain permit. The general agreed, and came to her home. As they sat in the dining room, at a round table, his hand wandered toward her. She moved away and he followed. He approached, she retreated. They played this game for a half hour. She got the permit, and the general departed, disappointed, wondering at her rejection of his advances.

I encouraged Ada to write up her story, as did her friends and her daughters, who realized that she should not hide the story of her unusual life. Finally, she gave in, and did publish a good deal of her memoirs.

Our third episode: Ada bowed to the advancement of age and to her physical pains. She moved into Nofei Yerushalayim, a senior residence. She was still full of life and intellectual vigor, despite the physical strains. She watched television programs from Italy. On radio she listened to Israeli news. On the telephone, she conducted countless conversations. She welcomed visitors cordially. I felt privileged when she allowed me to prepare coffee and hand her a cup. Our conversations were now more philosophical, from the perspective of a long life. There was still the inner conflict between modernity and conservatism. Once I came to her in the company of a young foreign journalist, an attractive blond. Ada suspected that there was more than a journalistic link between us. Suddenly, she turned formal and gracious, at the same time throwing a disapproving glance at me.

Ada hated the religious establishment but distinguished between religion and the official set-up. She knew the Catholic Church and never ceased repeating that there was forgiveness for every sin except one — criticism of the establishment. Also in Judaism she differentiated between believers and functionaries who exploited the community for their own welfare. Likewise Ada distinguished decent politicians from egotistic careerists. When it came to honesty and integrity, there was no compromise. A liar and cheat was *tref*.

My last visits to Ada saw her in need of constant care. Soon, her telephone was disconnected. She was resigned to conclude her eventful life, at age 92.

What a wonderful woman was Ada Sereni. □

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Daniel Mann, president of the Labor Zionist Alliance, headed its delegation to the 33rd World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem.

Gen. Uzi Narkiss

Led Liberation of Old City

General Uzi Narkiss, who led the Israeli troops into Jerusalem's Old City during the Six-Day War in 1967, died in December at age 72 after a bout with cancer.

Born in Palestine in 1925, Uzi joined the pre-State Palmach at age 16. He was involved in smuggling Jews through Lebanon into Palestine. During the War of Independence in 1948, he fought in and around Jerusalem. He rose in the ranks of the Israel Defense Forces and served as a military attache in Europe.

In 1962, Narkiss founded and directed the National Security College. In 1965 he was promoted to brigadier general and named commander of the Central Command. In that capacity he led to the liberation of the Old City. This historic event has been immortalized by a photo showing three Israeli generals walking together — Yitzhak Rabin, Moshe Dayan and Uzi Narkiss — celebrating the return of all Jerusalem to Jewish sovereignty. Another highly emotional scene in those days was the approach of Israeli soldiers to the long-forbidden Western Wall.

The Israeli daily *Haaretz* reveals that in an interview with General Narkiss he said that hours after the Old City had been taken by troops under his command, the chief army chaplain, Rabbi Shlomo Goren privately urged him to blow up the Moslem places of worship. Of course, nothing came of this absurd idea. Narkiss gave the interview to *Haaretz* on condition that it not be published until both he and Rabbi Goren had died. Hence the belated disclosure of the incident.

After retiring from the army, General Narkiss served with the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization in New York. During the United Nations debate on revoking the infamous resolution equating Zionism with racism, Narkiss was actively involved in rounding up votes on Israel's side.

Uzi is survived by his wife Esther, a son, two daughters and nine grandchildren. □

Who Are the Fundamentalists?

By Jacob Chinitz

In these days of conflict with those we have chosen to label Fundamentalist, I raise the question: Why give such a nice name to the crazies? I happen to believe that my brand of Judaism is Fundamentalist. I do not believe that the laws of *Moser*, *Rodef*, *Apikores* are applicable, if they ever were, even though my branch of Judaism has not formally amended these laws. I believe that Messianism does not demand blowing up the Mosque of Omar, killing the Prime Minister, killing Arabs, or even reinstating animal sacrifices, or even rebuilding the Temple. With Moses Maimonides I believe that the Messiah is a natural man, coming to leadership in natural ways, and that even in the days of Messiah the lion will not actually lie down with the lamb — this is a prophetic metaphor indicating peace and good will among men, not necessarily among wild animals. I believe my Jewish faith is more Fundamentalist than the faith of those who do think the laws of *Moser*, *Rodef*, *Apikores* are applicable today, that the Mosque of Omar must be destroyed to make room for the Bet Hamikdash. Why should they be given the honor of being called Fundamentalist?

I am not making the idea of a natural Messiah up from whole cloth. Here are the words of Maimonides, in his code, Mishna Torah, also called *Yad Hachazakah*, *Hilkhot Melakhim*, Perek 12, the final chapter in the book.

Do not entertain the idea that in the “days of the Messiah” anything will change in the conduct of the world. Or that there will be any novelty in the works of creation. The world will continue in its customary course. What is said in Isaiah about the wolf dwelling with the lamb and the leopard lying down with the goat, is a fable and a parable. The crux of the matter will be that Israel will live in safety with the wicked of the world . . . and they will all return to the true faith. They will not steal and will not destroy, but will eat what is permissible pleasantly together with Israel. . . The Sages say that there is no difference between

this world and the days of . . . Messiah except for the yoke of the kingdoms.

As the late Yeshayahu Leibovitz used to say: Pashut Nimas Lonu Meol Hagoyim. It is just that we were fed up living under the gentiles. That is what Zionism, at least Herzl’s Political Zionism, was about. Jews living under Jewish political sovereignty. Does that idea not deserve the name of Fundamentalism?

Now, as Lincoln said, this concept is being sorely tested in the State of Israel, approaching fifty. Herzl’s words about “keeping the clergy in the cloisters” are being reversed, when the forces that were against Political Zionism to begin with are now taking over the national shrines in the name of God, desecrating the memory of the soldiers who died in 1967 while capturing the Kotel. What would they think, what do their followers in Zahal think, when they see the police obeying the dictates of smiling smug Haredim and pushing Jews out of the Kotel area?

Perhaps we slipped somewhere along the line. Back in the fifties and the sixties we were calling for separation of religion and state. Then we switched to Pluralism, thinking that if we can’t separate religion from state, let us get in on the goodies and get our share of the religious pie being cut up by the government. We accepted government funds for our institutions, never getting what the Orthodox were getting, but compromising our moral position vis-à-vis the issue. Now we are being told and shown that we can get money, but we can’t get legitimacy. Perhaps we lost secularist support when we compromised our stand. Professor Amnon Rubenstein may praise us as religious Halakhic Jews, but he is not being joined by too many other secularists. In fact, an editorial in *Maariv* actually mentioned our activities at the Kotel as an example of national corruption and scandal mongering. *Maariv*, not *Hatzofeh*. That is our reward for cozying up to the Ortho-

dox and some of us trying to show how kosher we were.

One of our colleagues boasted to me that he is registered to perform weddings even though he spent his career in our movement. Another refuses to comment on what happened at the Kotel while being interviewed on radio.

Some of us may get through the tight cordon of discrimination to which the movement is subjected. But for most of us, the truth is that as long as we keep a separate name, Masorti, Conservative, and have our own Seminaries, synagogues, schools, we will be labelled as deviants. There are many within official Orthodoxy whose theology, and even practice, are not different from ours. But since they keep the proper label, they get funds, plus recognition.

BARAK CALLS FOR RECRUITING YESHIVA STUDENTS AND ARABS FOR NATIONAL SERVICE

In a dramatic departure from conventional political wisdom, Labor Party leader Ehud Barak has called for the termination of the tradition of granting automatic exemptions to draft age Orthodox Yeshiva students and Israeli Arab youth. Arguing along with many in the Israeli military establishment, that the number of exemptions given to Orthodox youth has reached unacceptable proportions, Barak said:

"All of the young people in the country should be involved in sharing responsibility for society." If elected, he said "I will seek passage of legislation establishing a program for alternative national service for all Israeli youth who do not serve in the army. This service will be performed in the educational system, in social welfare institutions, in absorption centers, in community centers etc. within the participants' own communities."

Reaction on the part of representatives of the ultra-Orthodox religious parties was fast and furious. The chair of Agudat Israel, Menachem Porush, said:

"Barak's program is a certificate of divorce between religious and the Labor Movement. As long as he (Barak) takes this position, he will remain in the opposition."

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So Help Me, Hanna

By Haim Chertok

On nights when the Negev air tastes cool and fine, of late I often rouse around 3:00 a.m. and, in robe and slippers, fortified by a cup of coffee, sit alone on the ledge outside my front door where I survey the unlikely *mise-en-scène* of my past two decades. These are my preferred moments for self-reflection. Temporarily deserted is the *hatzair* — the paved path that, like left-handed and right-handed gloves, separates one row of four adjoining “villas” from its symmetrical opposite.

When we first moved to what was then a new Yeroham neighborhood, the west-facing villas, together with the one on the far right, were occupied by a small *garin* of English-speaking immigrant families. Most of us were former Americans, but there were also an ex-Brit, former Aussie, and, occupying the villa on the far right, a Dutch family. Theirs is now home to Hanna and her sister, both in their forties, unmarried, and their ailing mother. When our five-family strong “intentional community” did not wax, the empty slots gradually got filled by local Moroccans.

OCelestial Demographer, census taker of mid-life turmoil and vision, how have these twenty winters dealt with our communalist fancies? For the most part with humor, charity, and ironic grace. Nevertheless, while my own brood has taken root and thrived, an auto crash and two divorces have splintered two *garin* households. A third returned after five years to America, bequeathing us their son and his growing family. And yet another four years thereafter moved themselves to the center of the country to join its middle-aged spread. Today, not to put too fine a gloss on things as they are, our *hatzair* score has shifted from Anglos 5, Moroccans 3, to a three to five imbalance.

Of the Moroccan households, two may be

counted secular (color TV glares through Friday evening windows) and three predominantly “traditional.” Diversity reigns in these latter with occupants who range from bearded, black-garbed Shasniks to mini-skirted chickadees. A pile of sand pyramids by the front door of the third family on the right. These least communicative of neighbors are merrily engaged in remodeling. It seems no sustained period passes without one or another household’s commitment carting loads of sand, tile, pipe, and crew to remodel their snug domain into closer accord with their dreams. Over the years, minor points of friction have arisen — sassy kids, nipped irises, jagged adolescents, an unofficial parking lot at the far end of the *hatzair* — but, with varying degrees of intimacy, at least seven of the current cast of dwellers in my Yeroham version of Allen’s Alley get along rather amiably.

On two occasions the *hatzair* has tried to organize itself into a public works committee only to discover anew that our styles and priorities simply do not square. That three of the four *hatzair* gardens happen to front the homes of the three Anglos homesteads is hardly coincidental. On both times our *hatzair* committee lapsed into desuetude, but not before one memorable undertaking which recent events brought to mind.

At the farther end of the *hatzair*, which is about halfway to our neighborhood synagogue, trash had been piling up just over the wall that bordered the backyard of Hanna and her sister: newspapers, corrugated containers, boards, tree limbs, plastic bottles, concrete chunks . . . even two tires. Each time I walked to shul, I would take rueful note of the inexorable rise of this no-man’s mound. Like a left-over exemplum from the worse-is-better cant of the Sixties, only when such a heap becomes volcanic do the town authorities take notice

and haul it off. This one seemed well on its way. But when would worse become worse enough for municipal action?

And so it happened that one day in spring Leah (our next-door neighbor) conspired with Hanna to arrange that on the following Sunday afternoon at 4:00 the entire *hatzair* would participate in a neighborhood clean-up. We would demonstrate that, given the challenge, we Jews could out-cooperate the Amish. And sure enough, between 4 and 4:15 on that salubrious day, armed with shovels, brooms, pitchforks, and plastic trashbins, a spirited group of us congregated at the base of Mount Hanna and began to slog trash. We dug, we piled, we raked, we loaded, we shlepped. We relieved one another, downed a glass of beer or coke, and then came back for more. For more than two hours parents and kids carted load after load either to the dumpster to the west or to the dumpster to the north. Little by little, the infested patch yielded to our sweat and good will.

As a matter of sociological interest, who do you imagine was actually on hand that day? Believe it; every last person over the age of six from the three Anglo villas. As for the others, excepting Hanna and her sister, only the lady-of-the-house from the Arctic zone in #3 deigned to make a ten-minute cameo appearance: she swept and hosed the patch in front of her own front door. Thereafter, *exeunt* within.

Naturally, all this did not pass entirely unnoticed, but despite this ethnic canker, we Yankee *freirim* — chronic suckers from Anglodom — were too busy enjoying our collective endeavors for it to make any difference. Chuckling at the self-absorption of our concealed neighbors, we quaffed yet another drink and carried on. Hanna, at least Hanna had been working as diligently as any. Then all of a sudden it struck me and my neighbor Moshe almost simultaneously that, in spite of our labors, it had been some time before the mountain of trash had ceased appreciably to erode. In fact, now that we began to take notice, it appeared to have self-generated additional layers of detritus. What blighted miracle was this! And then it was that we spotted Hanna and her sister laboring from the *inside* of their backyard. Faster than ten Woody Allens could cart it off, the cheeky mermaids were industriously hoisting heavy slabs of broken concrete, boards, cartons, bottles over

their wall and onto the pile.

Hutzpah! The task the rest of us had been consigned to was not merely to dispatch a public eyesore but also to handle a vast accumulation of trash that had collected on the inside of Hanna's wall. Had this been a hidden codicil to our *hatzair's* work accords? Should we not stomp off huffily; or, for the greater good, should we overlook Hanna's indulgently loose, self-serving interpretation of our agreement? For some minutes the balance could have tipped in either direction. I think it was Moshe who then remarked, "Hell, what really is the difference? Let's finish the job."

Congratulating ourselves on our fidelity to Zionist praxis, several hours later we had combed the ground adjoining Hanna's villa as smooth, as level, as clean as the velvet, black flank of night which, as I swallowed the final, now cold mouthful of coffee and set the cup down on the pavement, was just beginning to mottle the sky overhead. The shrewdness of my neighbor lady woman, who so accurately intuited the measure of my temperament, cannot deter me: "Hanna, I know your life is not so very easy. I celebrate and affirm your creative ploy."

Nearby, an invisible bird signals contentment to another a great distance away. Astonished anew by the realization that such a great swath of life has flown since first I moved into my "villa," into this *hatzair*, into this quirky "mixed community," as Yeroham rouses for another day, I withdraw within for a brief, final snatch of slumber, best cradle for invoking grown-up dreams. So help me, Hanna, notwithstanding some heavy patches of moodiness, it seems in retrospect as clear as dawn that the Negev gambit I played so many years past remains as elegant as any played by distant intimate friends and cousins, both the quick and the dead, whose spectral voices float to me from a span of seven, eight, or even ten time zones away. □

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What Ails Zionism?

Dear Sir:

I found myself troubled by the first reading of Henry L. Feingold's essay, WHAT AILS ZIONISM? I read it for a second time and I realized that what troubled me was the fact that the question posed by Professor Feingold is never answered.

The essay wanders over the history of Zionism and tells, in little bits and pieces, what Zionism meant to various leaders of the Jewish world at various times in the history of Zionism. The quip about Zionism being for someone else as is illustrated by the joke of a Jew gathering money from another Jew to send a third Jew to Palestine or Israel, as the case may be, is in fact not a joke. Zionism was a political and social movement whose aim was to establish a Jewish homeland, ultimately in Palestine. It took six million lives and the conscience of the world but Zionism prevailed and a Jewish homeland was established. It wasn't for everyone and we are fortunate that those who would not make *aliya* had the means to help others who would.

Before we can answer the question of WHAT AILS ZIONISM?, we must try and understand what became of Zionism once its aims were established, its goals attained and the State of Israel came into existence. In the opinion of this writer Israel and Zionism became one. Those problems which beset Israel, beset Zionism. And now we come to one of the most unusual aspects of the essay. When is the last time that you read an essay on Jewish life or a Jewish movement that did not mention the word religion? The reason that the word is not mentioned is because Zionism never had anything to do with religion and in reviewing the history of Zionism religion plays no role.

But if Israel and Zionism are one and the government of Israel can be brought down by a religious political party then both Israel and Zionism are ailing. There was a reason why the writers of the American Constitution saw the need for keeping church and State separate. It is not to the credit of the founding fathers of Israel that they failed to see the logic of this doctrine and find that no government can survive without the extra votes provided by the religious political faction.

Let the scholars, the rabbis and the philosophers fight out their differences, publicly and privately but not in

the Knesset. An MK may be orthodox or an agnostic but his interest should be solely in the welfare of the state and the constituency which put him into the Knesset. Religious matters, however, irrespective of how involved they may be in Jewish life should not be the subject of debate by Israeli law makers and if the Zionist movement would go back to its historical roots and realize that being involved in religious debate under the pretext that this is a function of government, it will realize what ails it.

I am obviously a strong believer in the doctrine of the separation of church and state and I am sure that there are many supporters of the State of Israel who also support this concept. Yet I must say that, in all my reading, I do not recall ever having this idea put forth, probably because, it would be said the idea is impractical. But then again, what did they say when Herzl proposed a homeland for the Jewish people?

Very truly yours,
LEON H. GILDIN
Sedona, Arizona

Prof. Feingold Replies

Dear Mr. Gildin:

I fully understand your vexation with the spoiling role played by the religious bloc in the Israeli polity. It becomes all the more frustrating when it is realized that at least some of that bloc is composed of people who opposed the creation of the Jewish state. They now use the democratic instruments of that state to maintain a virtual stranglehold on its political process. But I have some caveats regarding your basic assumptions about religion and Zionism.

It is not true that "Zionism never had anything to do with religion." I would not risk making such a declaration at a Mizrahi convention or in the dining hall of one of the several religious kibbutzim. One can argue that the religious quest to return to Zion preceded political Zionism, and after Herzl continued to be part of the weave of the Zionist movement. Religious Zionism has ancient and legitimate roots in Jewish history.

Your assumption that Israel and Zionism became one after the founding of the state is also questionable. Rather the Zionist movement became a world

wide support network for the fragile state. Its role in fund-raising and garnering political support was sometimes crucial. But it remained separate not only in fact but also in ideology. Israelism is merely the latest form of Zionism. There were ideologists like Achad Ha'am and his followers who, while never denying the centrality of Zion, spoke of the need of a Jewish renaissance wherever Jews lived. In fact, some felt that such a renewal of the Jewish spirit should precede the return to Zion.

Most important is your staunch advocacy of state/church separation, to which I add *halewei*, if it could only be so. But you must be aware that a wall of separation between church and state is by no means requisite for a democratic system to function, although it helps. Democracies like Poland, Ireland, Spain, even England do not have such a wall. Even in our own country there are states in the bible belt where separation is little apparent. In these countries the religious and the national ethos are so intertwined that separation may undermine the state. In Poland and Ireland the Church is considered the keeper of the national soul. Without it the state would lose its reason for being.

I do not think that is the case in Israel. Judaism has for millennia survived without a national container. It should not surprise us that the state finds it difficult to put it in a box. Now I want to say something that may surprise you coming from a Labor Zionist. I am uncertain that Ben-Gurion made an error when he gave Orthodoxy such a strong position in the polity. What I am increasingly aware of is that the secular Zionism that so impassioned us in our youth with its wonderful spirit expressed through song and dance and an image of "building and being rebuilt by building," proved to be too thin to sustain itself, to use the words of Michael Waltzer. I am not certain whether secular Zionism as embodied in the WZO can embody the spirit that Israel needs to survive. Certainly we need an umbrella large enough to embrace all those who are committed to Judaism, whether in secular or religious form.

Meanwhile, we agree that something does ail Zionism. You think it's the religious bloc in the Knesset that leads to attempts to tamper with the "law of return" and otherwise to read non-Orthodox Jews out of the fold. I see it as an episode in the *Kulturkampf* that has marked Jewish history since before the age of modernity. The malaise is in ourselves and our history. We cannot rid ourselves of its burden without also destroying what we have. □

HENRY L. FEINGOLD

BOOKS

The Empire of Kalman the Cripple by Yehuda Elberg.
Syracuse University Press; 1997. 326 pages. \$24.00.

Reviewed by Dr. Gustave Pearlman

Jewish life in a Polish shtetl between 1878 and 1933 is the background of this novel. Basically, it is the story of an individual, scorned and mocked as a child by his contemporaries and teachers because of his physical disabilities and selfish nature. As he matures, he becomes contemptuous and revengeful to all he encounters.

A picture of the general population is presented: Jews, gentiles, some simple, others wise, or cunning, observant, or non-observant, rich and poor, striving for existence under difficult conditions of life. The dignity and honesty of labor, as portrayed by Matus the glazier, is contrasted with Kalman's scheming rapacity and that of the Pan and his gentile agent. The psychological study of the metamorphosis of Kalman into a helper of the less fortunate, predominates.

There is a story behind the story which unfolds like a mystery, with flashbacks from the 20th to the 19th century to the lives of Kalman's grandparents and other relatives of past generations. Many incidents modify the progression of the narrative; fires, bankruptcy, wars and natural calamities, replete with descriptions of inadequate and obsolete medical care plus a dollop of sexuality such as I.B. Singer and other modern novelists never omit. Although it is only 326 pages long, it reads like the work of the great literary giants of the past, i.e. J.J.

Singer's "The Brothers Ashkenazi", Shalom Asch's "Yoshe Kalb" and Chaim Grade. Sadly, one can foresee the inevitable ending, which occurs in 1933 as a simple suggestion of the obvious; the Holocaust which is to follow.

The author, Yehuda Elberg was born in 1912, to a rabbinic family and received *S'micha* (ordination). In World War II he was active in the Jewish Underground. Afterwards he started the first Jewish newspaper in his hometown, and established a writers' union. He wrote this novel in Yiddish and at the age of 85 translated it into English himself. The characters traverse the spectrum of Jewish shtetl life.

Brief little poetic descriptive pieces dot the narrative like little gems.

"Hanukka was not yet over, but an early cold spell held the land in its grip. During the night raging winds wrestled with the roofs, tore at the window shutters and threatened the chimneys with an eerie howling. The wind finally died down, leaving huge heaps of snow that blocked entrances. The long night faded away with an almost serene quietness. On the fields the seeds nestled safely under a cover of white down; in the orchards the trees swayed with soft movements, as if careful not to shake off the sparkling white trim acquired during the snowfall."

It was a pleasant surprise to read this well-constructed, constantly moving little novel, so different from what the modern writers produce and so reminiscent of the great literary works of the past. □

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