

THE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL JEWISH ACTIVITY

It would be premature to proclaim that the study of Jewish politics has come of age. The number of scholars struggling to describe and analyze Jewish life and the Jewish people in political terms are few.¹ The theoretical problems are great. Obviously, the Jewish polity, the political values and political behavior of the Jewish people, is not identical with the political behavior of nations or national sub-groups. We have yet to devise a theoretical and analytical framework for describing this polity. Secondly, while there are those who write of a Jewish political tradition and Jewish political thought, the problem of demonstrating its implications for contemporary Jewish behavior has only begun. Probably the most significant contribution to the development of these studies was Daniel Elazar's set of bibliographic essays "The Pursuit of Community," and "The Rediscovered Polity"² surveying the literature of Jewish public affairs from 1965 to 1968. But as Elazar's essays themselves demonstrate, there is very little material directed to specifically political questions, utilizing the vocabulary and tools of political science. Elazar prepared the ground for such studies by demonstrating how serious studies of Jewish history, philosophy, sociology and contemporary life necessarily touch on questions of political concern. But almost none of the literature which he reviewed addressed itself directly to political questions from a political framework.

If Jewish political studies merit undertaking it is because of the assumption that there really is a Jewish polity, that is, an international Jewish community with a political life, political values, political aspirations, a political tradition and at least the semblance of a political structure. In other words, Jewish political study assumes that the political life of world Jewry is not adequately described by studies of one nation-state (Israel), and a series of Diaspora communities. A corollary assumption is that the political behavior of Diaspora Jewry is not simply a function of the political processes and structures of the national systems within which each Diaspora live. It stands to reason, therefore, that the breakthrough studies of Jewish political behavior will be in two areas: those devoted to analyzing Jewish political thought and tradition,

which represent the common heritage of the Jewish polity, and international Jewish activity, which is the keenest expression of Jewish political behavior. It is in these two areas that the unique dynamics and dimensions of Jewish political life should manifest themselves.

This bibliography is devoted to furthering the second area - the study of international Jewish activity. It is concerned with studies of international activity by Jews on behalf of Jews - primarily on behalf of their political rights.

THE FIELD OF STUDY

Our definition of international activity is the coordinated activity of individuals or groups in one or more states on behalf of Jews of another state, or the efforts of Jews in one state to benefit themselves through the assistance of another state. There are a variety of means by which such activity can take place. Jews in one state can offer direct assistance to Jews of another state. Such assistance can be financial or cultural and educational. On rare occasions, such as the smuggling of arms and men from the Diaspora to Israel in the 1940's, it can even be of a military nature. Ostensibly, however, to the extent that Jews act on behalf of the political rights of other Jews, they do so through the instruments of other states. That is, the State of Israel aside, and we have excluded studies of Israel from the bibliography, there doesn't appear to be any way in which Jews of one state can offer political assistance to Jews of another state except through a third party. Surprisingly, this is not the way Jews and Jewish organizations always viewed the situation. Benjamin Peixotta, American consul to Rumania in the late 19th century was very much concerned with the condition of Rumanian Jewry. Peixotta observed that schools such as those of the Alliance Israelite Universelle should be established throughout Rumania as instruments for "revolutionizing the social and religious life of our people and effectually securing their civil and political rights."³ Peixotta believed that "liberalizing thoughts and hopes" of Rumanian Jewry would help secure their political rights. In other words, Jews have believed that philanthropic, social and educational assistance bore political consequences.

Of more direct political consequence, Jews in one state can seek to influence the policies of another state, as Sir Moses Montefiore attempted in his trips through Europe and Asia on behalf of his persecuted brethren in the 19th century. Secondly, Jews in one state can seek to influence their own government to assist the Jews of another nation. This is probably the most typical form of international Jewish political activity. The best contemporary example is Jewish efforts to secure passage of the Jackson-Mills-Vanick amendment on behalf of Sovier Jews. Thirdly, Jews can seek to influence an international conference or organization to secure benefits for themselves or others as they did for example at the Paris Peace Conference, the League of Nations, the San Francisco Conference, and the United Nations. Fourthly, Jews can seek to influence their own government to influence an international organization on behalf of Jews, as, for example, American Jewry did in its efforts to influence the United States to pressure other governments in support of the U.N. partition of Palestine resolution.

Basically, these four types of efforts encompass what we mean by Jewish political activity in the international area. However, we must not overlook the direct financial and cultural assistance which Jews of one state offer to Jews of another, for two reasons. First, as we noted, such efforts, in the opinion of the organizers, had distinct political consequences. Secondly, the internal organization of Jews in mobilizing themselves to offer this kind of assistance touches on the dynamics of Jewish political life we well. In other words, the American Joint Distribution Committee or the World ORT Union does not engage in political activity but their internal organization, relationships with other Jewish and non-Jewish organizations, and decision-making mechanisms raise political questions whose analysis is important for understanding the full breadth of Jewish political life. The obvious analogy is, for example, to political studies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or the U.S. Forest Service. Agriculture and forestry may not be politics but political scientists have deepened their understanding of politics in general and American political life in particular by analyzing the agricultural and forestry services of the U.S. government in political terms.

To summarize, international Jewish political activity can be viewed in two ways. Studies can focus on the external political activity of Jews. That is to say, studies can analyze the political activity of Jews under one or more of the four rubrics we have previously suggested. However, there is, as well, an internal

political dimension of international Jewish activity which is applicable not only to those organizations and groups who undertake direct political activity but is applicable to all international Jewish activity. In the latter, less overtly political area of study, such conceptions as structure, decision making, charisma, authority, recruitment, legitimacy, hierarchy, consensus, etc. become the relevant terms of analysis.

Most international Jewish political activity takes place within a national framework. That is, the Jewish organization undertaking the activity is a national one. However, some of this activity may be coordinated by a multi-country Jewish organization, as to some extent occurred in the coordination of Jewish efforts by the World Zionist Organization on behalf of establishing a Jewish state. Some activity even occurs at the international level through the representation of multi-country Jewish organizations at international governmental forums. It stands to reason, therefore, that an analysis of international Jewish political activity would include an analysis of the Jewish question as it emerged before various international governmental forums regardless of whether Jewish representation at such forums was direct or indirect, formal or informal, through organized representatives of individual contacts.

The bibliography does not include studies of Jewish representation before non-governmental international organizations and congresses. In retrospect, the decision to exclude such studies was a mistake. Such efforts should be considered as part of the study of international Jewish political activity. The congresses of national minorities between the two world wars or meetings of the Socialist International, for example, were perceived by Jews as important convocations for presentation of a Jewish point of view, for the defense of Jewish rights and the establishment of contacts which might be of long range political benefit. Jews undoubtedly exaggerated the importance of non-governmental organizations and their international meetings. On the other hand, the same can be said for most international governmental conferences and organizations. Their importance is not in what they did or did not do for Jews but in the importance which Jews ascribed to them and the various efforts which Jews undertook to obtain representation at these meetings and secure their immediate goals. Indeed, the undue importance which Jews attributed to such meetings was an expression of their own

powerlessness and their need to grasp at straws.

THE LITERATURE

The remainder of this essay is largely devoted to a discussion of the shortcomings of the extant literature on the subject and the reader might well ask why bother to compile and annotate it at all. There are a number of answers. First, there is wheat among the chaff. Indeed, this is a "selected" bibliography and one criterion for selection was the quality of the item. Secondly, serious systematic study necessitates a reexamination of documents and original sources, and the literature cited here at least indicates the availability of original sources. Thirdly, part of the difficulty with the literature stems not from the absence of data but from the organization of the material and from the fact that the authors did not ask politically relevant questions. Thus, there is a point to reviewing these studies again but posing different kinds of questions. Fourthly, whereas the mature scholar will not want to satisfy himself with the secondary literature it does provide a beginning for undergraduate and graduate students to familiarize themselves with the outlines of international Jewish activity. Finally, the bibliography should be of assistance to scholars working in other fields who would like to draw some analogies and contrasts with Jewish political behavior. Such studies are also to be encouraged. Indeed, anything which turns our attention to the possibilities for analyzing Jewish political life is sorely needed.

The various modes by which Jews may act politically at the international level, which were outlined in the previous section, suggest the possibility of theoretical analysis which is sorely lacking in the extant studies. No one has even bothered to undertake a typology of Jewish political efforts at the international level, much less inquire after the relationship between the type of activity and the nature of the Jewish community, the period in which the activity took place, the need which the activity sought to meet, etc. The absence of theoretical concerns seems to be endemic to the study of international Jewish behavior. It could not be otherwise given the fact that most of the studies do not proceed from any systematic discipline and are not directed toward the subject of international Jewish behavior. Rather, they seek for the most part, to illumine one

aspect of another of Jewish life - it is only we who attempt to grasp these studies as part of a unified whole.

But we lack more than just theory. There are major lacunae in the facts at our disposal. Zosa Szajkowski, one of the most prolific though least disciplined of the scholars, refers, for example, to "the famous international Jewish conference held in Paris on December 11, 1876."⁴ Yet, to the best of my knowledge, not a single study is devoted to that "famous" conference.

No less serious is the absence of critical analysis at the most elementary level. We don't even have a good reportage of the major Jewish conferences and meetings. Articles such as that by Robert Weltsch analyzing the crucial 22nd World Zionist Congress of 1946 are extremely rare.⁵

In the absence of an analysis of particular events it is not surprising that we lack systematic comparative studies of international Jewish political behavior. For example, there are individual studies of the efforts of Jews in one country to assist Jews of another country. But we do not have systematic studies comparing the efforts of various Jewish communities to help a particular Jewish community confront a particular crisis, nor do we have studies which trace the efforts of one Jewish community to assist another Jewish community over time. The case of American Jewish effort to assist Russian Jewry over the last century begs for analysis.⁶ Such a study would point out the changing environment, perception and techniques of American Jewry in its political efforts, and would make a critical contribution to our understanding of Jewish political behavior.

No less important would be systematic studies of Jewish representation before international non-Jewish conferences and organizations. The Congress of Vienna marks the first modern international conference. A Jewish question arose at that conference and at virtually every succeeding major intergovernmental meeting. But the nature of the problem and the nature of the Jewish representation changed. One finds a movement from problems of the rights of individual Jews to the problems of group rights, and finally territorial rights.⁷ Secondly, Jewish tactics changed from shtadlanut (petitioning a highly placed official to intercede on behalf of the Jews) by one community on its own behalf to organized representation

of Jews acting on behalf of others as well as themselves, or mobilizing Jewish political pressure on various elected officials.⁸

Finally, we note the absence of systematic comparative studies of international Jewish conferences. Probably the first modern international Jewish conference met in Brussels in 1872 to consider the condition of Balkan, especially Rumanian Jewry. Appropriate to the period, it was a conference of "the best men".⁹ As Kohler notes:

Twenty-five of the delegates sat down at a banquet given in honor of the occasion, and one of the guests remarked, as indicative of their standing, that twenty-one of these Jews had been decorated.¹⁰

The second striking feature of that conference is that the delegates were concerned with "an elaborate and thorough programme for education and moral reforms among the Jews of Rumania..."¹¹ in other words, as we already noted, the Jews believed that Jewish political rights were a function, at least in part, of Jewish self-reform. How and in what ways has this changed? Almost one hundred years later (1971) an international Jewish conference in the same city of Brussels dealt with the condition of Soviet Jewry. The poverty of scholarship and analysis in the area of international Jewish political activity is expressed in the fact that no one apparently thought to compare these two conferences or the many intervening ones in terms of ideology, tactics, participation, organization, Jewish self-perception, or any other meaningful category of analysis.

The realm of the study of international Jewish organizations, while hardly neglected, has certainly not received adequate treatment. There has hardly been an effort to define what is an international Jewish organization much less distinguish among the different types of organizations.¹² The first such organization, the Alliance Israelite Universelle was founded in France in 1860 for political action against anti-Jewish prejudice and discrimination. Its founders envisioned it as a multi-country Jewish organization but, except for a brief period it was an almost exclusively French organization. Other organizations such as the Anglo Jewish Association (1871), the Israelitische Allianz zu Wien (1873), the Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden (1901) and to a lesser extent the American Jewish Committee (1906) and the American Jewish Congress (1917) were formed for identi-

cal purposes but were organized from the very outset on an exclusively national basis. By contrast the Comite des Delegations Juives (1917), the World Jewish Congress (1936), and the World Conference of Jewish Organizations (COJO) (1958) not to mention the World Zionist Organization (1897) were founded as multi-country organizations and continued their existence in that form. There are striking similarities in the goals and activities of all the organizations mentioned above and one would overlook a major dimension of international Jewish activity by confining one's attention exclusively to the multi-country organizations.

It is important to distinguish what particular problems of organization, if any, confronted multi-country as opposed to national Jewish organizations. Indeed, the very contrasts in the dates of founding between the two types of organizations hints at some basic differences and modes of comparison. In general, despite a good number of studies that have been written about some of these organizations (the Alliance, World Zionist Organization and the World Jewish Congress have certainly been subjects of a number of studies) we have very few distinctly political studies that deal with questions of organizational structure, decision-making, organizational conflict, or Jewish leadership much less the more elusive concepts of authority, legitimacy and charisma. It would not be much of an exaggeration to suggest that a good political biography of Nahum Goldmann would do more to illuminate international Jewish political activity in the last forty years than the sum total of everything written on that topic.

A problem to which many scholars allude but which has not received the attention it deserves is the services which Jewish organizations operating in the international areas have or have not performed for their own national governments. Only a few years ago, iron curtain countries accused American Joint Distribution Committee officials of operating as agents of the American government. Charges that Jewish organizations served their own national government's interests rather than exclusively Jewish interests are as old as the history of modern international Jewish organizations. Germans accused the Alliance Israelite Universelle of serving as agents of the French Foreign office and Paul Nathan, founder of the Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden was charged with operating on behalf of the German government.

The Alliance was apparently organized for political purposes but achieved its greatest recognition for its network of Jewish schools. Although the raw material is available to a large extent in the secondary literature, no one has undertaken a systematic study of the operational premises upon which the Alliance and other Jewish organizations engaged in international activity. Were their purposes primarily political, social, philanthropic, educational, or what? A study of organizational goals over time, by country of origin, nature of the founders, and the social environment, would certainly illumine the Jewish identity, self perception and ideology of many leadership groups in the modern Jewish world.

The final example of the type of study we sorely lack is an analysis of Jewish objections to international Jewish activity. Nathan Gelber noted that from the first call by the founders of the Alliance for establishment of an international Jewish organization, assimilated elements of some German Jewry objected out of fear that they would be accused of joining a "Jewish international".¹³ In Austria, on the other hand, opposition to the Alliance came from the Orthodox. Gelber notes that the attempt to organize a World Jewish Congress in the World War I period failed because of opposition on the part of many Jewish groups in both Eastern and Western Europe to be identified as anything other than "Polish, Hungarian, Czech, or German nationals of the Jewish faith". They claimed no interest in world wide Jewish representation. Other organizations, the American Jewish Committee being the outstanding example, have been active at the national and international level on behalf of Jews but oppose organized multi-organizational efforts. The opposition to international Jewish organization and activity, therefore, takes many forms and stems from a variety of ideological positions - or does it? We have passing allusions to this opposition but again no systematic study.

The preceding survey does not, of course, exhaust the types of studies that we lack but was intended to be illustrative of the great amount of work that remains to be done. The sense of Jewish peoplehood and the idea of the unity of the Jewish people necessarily finds expression in activity by Jews across national boundaries. Only empirical study can verify whether the intensity of international Jewish activity is an index to a sense of Jewish peoplehood. As a matter of fact, the thrust for such activity has often come from semi-assimilated segments of the people and the less traditionally religious. Nevertheless, it is clear that in

the modern period Jewish peoplehood requires some structural form for its expression. Above all else, the study of international Jewish activity is important to encourage our understanding of what Jewish peoplehood has meant, does mean, and can mean to world Jewry.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 A good many if not most of them are loosely organized as fellows of the Center for Jewish Community Studies.
- 2 Morris Fine and Milton Himmelfarb (eds.), American Jewish Year Book, 1967, 68 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1967), pp. 178-221 and American Jewish Year Book, 1969, 70, pp. 172-237.
- 3 Max J. Kohler and Simon Wolf, "Jewish Disabilities in the Balkan States and American Contributions Toward their Removal with Particular Reference to the Congress of Berlin," Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, 24 (1916), p. 10.
- 4 Zosa Szajkowski, "Jewish Diplomacy," Jewish Social Studies, 22 (July, 1950). pp. 131-158.
- 5 Robert Weltsch, "The End of the Biltmore Road: The Basel Zionist Congress and Its Fruit," Commentary, (February, 1947), pp. 101-108.
- 6 An exception which we have not seen may be William Korey's, A Century Of Tradition of American Initiatives on Behalf of Oppressed Minorities (N.Y.: National Conference on Soviet Jewry, 1973). However, the title alone suggests that this is not a political analysis of Jewish efforts.
- 7 The question of Jewish settlement in Palestine was already present in the Congress of Aachen in 1818 but until the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 it was not a serious item on the international agenda.
- 8 In many respects, shtadlanut as a tactic deserves more serious study. It has become commonplace to deride it as the outmoded technique of a powerless community. Conceptually, however, the distinction between shtadlanut and the most modern techniques of U.S. Jewry, are not at all clear.
- 9 Kohler and Wolf, op.cit., p. 26.
- 10 Ibid, p. 25.

- 11 Ibid.
- 12 An important exception is Ernest Stock's, "Jewish Multicountry Associations," Morris Fine and Milton Himmelfarb (eds.), American Jewish Year Book, 1974-1975, 75 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1974), pp. 571-597.
- 13 N(athan) M(ichael) Gelber, "Ha'Ichud Ha'Yehudi Be'Hitpatchut," Gesher, 14 (March, 1958).