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## **A FAILURE OF AMERICAN JEWISH LEADERSHIP?**

EARLY in November, the results of a "poll" of American Jewish leaders were published. It was gleefully reported by Joel Brinkley in The New York Times as demonstrating that the tremendous ovation accorded Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir by the 3,000 participants in the annual Conference of Leaders of Jewish Community Federations was not a true reflection of those leaders' views on the conflict in Palestine. The poll had taken in 339 participants, of whom evidently only 205 replied to the questions.

The replies revealed that 88 percent of the 205 respondents favored a "territorial compromise;" 79 percent agreed to a "Palestinian State;" 85 percent rejected Shamir's statement that he would not give up an inch of territory; and 78 percent favored a freeze of the "settlements." One month earlier, the American Jewish Committee published the results of its annual poll of American Jews, embracing 1,125 respondents nationwide, on the same questions. It revealed a considerable hardening of attitudes toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. Eighty-six percent of those who responded agreed that Israel "must hold on to the West Bank," while 14 percent disagreed.

Twenty-four percent favored outright "annexation," while 52 percent favored Israel's "military control with local self-rule for the Arabs." Similarly, the poll reflected a firm attitude toward American pressures on Israel. Seventy-one percent believed that the US "should stop criticizing Israel for expanding the West Bank settlements." Whatever else these two sets of figures portend, they emphasize a long-revealed phenomenon: that the "leadership" is out of touch with the community. They also serve to remind Israelis that the reports in the media of the defeatist ideas of American Jewry, and sometimes threatening minatory doom-laden warnings, are simply absurd. One suspects they are in fact the wishful thinking of a handful of "leaders" (whose names are sometimes mentioned).

THE CONFERENCE of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations - the titular leadership of the community - is not a homogeneous body, and its members are, by and large, no doubt estimable people. None of them, however - with very few exceptions, such as in the Zionist bodies - was elected as president of his organization, social, religious or charitable, because of his special knowledge of Jewish or Arab history; or his knowledge and experience of Zionist questions, or for diplomatic acumen, for the firmness of his backbone, or freedom from those "ghetto" characteristics which have lingered on.

By and large, how has the leadership shaped up in the ongoing period of Israel's crisis and travail? Ever since its inauguration, and in increased intensity since the Gulf war, when it evidently gave the Arab states in the "coalition" promises of the "reduction" of Israel, the Bush Administration has been pressing and bullying and hectoring Israel. It has been pushing Israel step by step along a route towards the consummation of the ultimate American goal of an Israeli return to the Armistice Lines of 1949. The process has been clear for all to see.

There is no evidence, however, that the American Jewish leadership has made any effort against the process. It is not that there is nobody in America who understands.

Enough has been written and published to expose the inimical thrust of the administration's policy.

The Jewish establishment looks on in evidently impotent silence. When Jerusalem agreed to negotiate with the Palestinian Arabs, but only as part of a Jordanian delegation, the Americans, as hosts and co-chairmen of the negotiations in Madrid, sent a separate invitation to the Palestinians - who were consequently given equal status with the state delegations. The American Jewish leadership pretended not to notice that their president had played a confidence trick on the Israeli government and stabbed it in the back.

At any rate, they have not even protested. There was a moment when they acted with dignity. They protested against the administration's refusal to grant to Israel the guarantees for a \$10 billion loan to facilitate the absorption of Soviet Jews, of whom 300,000 had arrived in less than two years.

A thousand men and women went to demonstrate their protest at the White House. President Bush, a consummate tactician, not only rejected the protest, but added an insult transparently anti-Semitic. When the Jewish community erupted in tumult, he invited a delegation of leaders to whom he offered an apology, promising not to do it again.

We have heard of no further public action by the leadership on the subject of the loan guarantees. THE SUBJECT of the loan guarantees, indeed of the required loan itself, raises a severe moral question for the American Jewish community. The community played a great part in the worldwide campaign for Soviet opening of the gates - a campaign that met with some success.

Then, however, with the crumbling of the Soviet system, came the cloudburst. The gates were opened, and Israel was faced with an unprecedented problem. In American terms, this would be equivalent to absorbing 18 million newcomers in two years - with unnumbered additional arrivals still to come within the next two or three years.

Precisely at this point, American Jewry decides no longer to play a major part in the undertaking and makes only a minor contribution to lightening Israel's burden. It expects this to be done by the American government. True, it is fair to expect the American government to fulfill its manifest moral obligation.

But the American government's moral responsibility is certainly not greater than, nor even equal to, that of the American Jews. It is their Jewish brothers and sisters who must be nurtured in the early stages of their integration in the Jewish homeland. The Jews from the Soviet Union are not members of the family of Messrs.

Bush or Baker. There are enough resources in the American Jewish community to solve the problem of the loan guarantees, even of the loan itself. Moreover, can there be any doubt that, particularly when it has become apparent that the US Administration is using the need of the immigrants as a means of extorting far-reaching political concessions from an overburdened Israel, it is the glaring duty of the American branch of the Jewish national family to come to the rescue? We have a right to hope that the leaders of the Jewish community will - at least now in recognition of the historic miracle of ingathering which is being enacted before our eyes - rise up in dignity and take on the financial part of the immediate burden imposed on the whole Jewish people by that miracle.