

6 January 1984

Dissent or deceit?

FOUR YEARS AGO, the American Jewish Committee's board of governors came to Israel "to study the Israel condition in depth." They visited many places and conducted many conversations. At the end of the study, their president, Richard Maass, chose to announce that it would be "hard to 'sell' Hebron settlement in the U.S."

It transpired later that in all their "studies" they had not discussed the subject of Hebron with a single person who might have been expected to express a positive opinion and explain settlement in Hebron for the general policy of re-establishing the Jewish presence in all of Western Eretz Yisrael.

To epitomize their method of "study" – they did arrange a meeting with Peace Now, but not with Gush Emunim; they talked to Bethlehem Mayor Elias Freij, but failed to call on Miriam Levinger of Hebron – who could have told them in good American English how it was possible without much difficulty to "sell" the Jewish return to Hebron in the U.S.

NOW THE AJC has produced a new study-in-depth – on "attitudes of American Jews towards Israel and Israelis." Some of its published findings, on crucial political questions, have been widely quoted. It consists of two polls: of American "Jewish leaders," and of the Jewish community.

There are 36 "major Jewish organizations" in the U.S. (not to mention others, presumably not so major). No explanation is offered by the editor of the poll (Dr. Steven M. Cohen) as to why he chose to poll the leaders of only five of these many organizations – American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, A.D.L., B'nai B'rith and U.J.A. Conspicuously unpolled are the leaders of explicitly Zionist bodies – the Z.O.A., Zionist Federation, Young Israel, and the largest of them all, Hadassah. Religious leaders, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform – all are excluded.

In the results, the "chosen" leaders inevitably appear as very very "doveish" compared to the community. However, to learn that these "leaders" are not representative of U.S. Jewry (though they are the ones usually quoted in the U.S. media hostile to Israel) we do not need Dr. Cohen's poll.

EVEN MORE significant are the methods adopted by Dr. Cohen in the "popular" poll. The names of the people approached were culled from lists prepared by a Professional marketing organization, out of telephone directories. Throughout the U.S., of 1,200 people reached 640 responded. Maybe these 640 *are* representative.

It is no longer a secret that the results of a poll are weighted not only by the subject of the questions, but by the way they are worded. In this poll a new dimension was added to the slant: the *omissions*, the essential questions left unasked. Here is an example of this method:

Dr. Cohen asks for a reaction to 12 "positions often articulated by some of Israel's principal political leaders and parties." Two of these positions are not relevant to the debate on the Arab-Israel conflict and we can ignore them here. Of the other ten positions, nine (repeat nine) are hostile to the positions of the government. Thus all but one of the Likud positions are not articulated in this questionnaire at all.

Thus Cohen quotes a position (pages 33-34): “Israel should offer the Arabs territorial compromise on Judea, Samaria and Gaza in return for credible guarantees of peace” (roughly the Labour Party position).

He does not quote the Likud position, which could read: “Surrender of territory will not bring peace but, as in the past, will encourage renewed Arab aggression as dictated by Arab and Moslem religious doctrine.”

He quotes: “Israel should suspend the expansion of settlement in order to encourage peace negotiations.”

He does not quote: “Israel should continue to settle in Judea and Samaria, which ensure the essential security of the State.”

He quotes: “Palestinians have a right to a homeland on the West Bank and Gaza, so long as it does not threaten Israel.”

But not, for example: “A Palestinian Arab state already exists, occupying three-fourths of the country: Transjordan (now called Jordan), originally given to the Arabs to serve the interests of British imperialism.”

And so on, and so on.

THIS distortion of the realities of opinion in Israel did not quite achieve the desired result. On “territorial compromise” in exchange for credible guarantees of peace 45 per cent of those polled resisted the soothing syrup of “compromise” and “peace guarantees.” Not unexpectedly, when faced with the one position identifiable with the Likud – “Israel should maintain permanent control over Judea and Samaria” – 59 per cent said “Yes.” (Of the leaders, so carefully selected, 26 per cent . . .)

Are the AJC leaders conscious of the bias and consequent falsity of the report?

ON THE STRENGTH of my own observations over many years of study of the attitudes of the U.S. Jews who care about Israel, I venture to predict that a balanced poll of a fair sample of the community (if this is possible) will show that a clean majority of the people – in spite of years of brainwashing by the American media and of misdirection by many of their leaders – supports ensurance of Israel’s security and future, and Jewish national rights, by the restoration of the territorial integrity of Western Palestine in a Jewish State with equal civil rights and obligations for all; and the right of Jews to live in every part of the country, provided nobody is thereby displaced. Jews who remain in the U.S. will, of course, not be able to decide the future of Israel. But they should not be misrepresented by wobbling leaders or by manipulated polls.

A MUCH LESS subtle ploy, indeed a glaring fraud was practiced recently – by another organization, new-born in the U.S., called Committee of Concerned American Jews (CCAJ). The fraud was exposed by Abba Eban. Last April, Prof. Seymour Martin Lipset, a founder of this body, sent out a circular letter appealing for funds to promote – in effect – a movement in Israel designed to fight the present government. The letter charges that “powerful forces” in Israel are working for policies which imperil her security and indeed her democracy; and that “desperately needed and deserved” is “assistance to those Israelis seeking to reclaim for Israel the vision, the idealism and the very values which motivated” the original pioneers.

Lipset's letter also berates those Americans who support the present government of Israel which, in characteristic impertinence, he describes as "the political faction now in control of the Israeli government."

In his long screed, peppered with unctuous references to love (of Israel) and truth, he enclosed a letter from Abba Eban. (Presumably his own name and the names of his colleagues were not deemed sufficiently attractive to win support.). Recipients were asked to send their messages of support, and their money, to Mr. Eban at the Knesset.

Lipset's letter was sent (according to an article in *Present Tense* magazine by Wolf Blitzer) to 61,507 people by Lipset's associate Alan Barton, and some 18,000 had already been collected.

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ON MAY 6, *The Jerusalem Post* published a letter from Mr. Eban accusing the CCAJ of fabricating the letter "from Mr. Eban," as well as the letter-head.

"I had no knowledge," he wrote, "of the very existence of this organization and did not and do not endorse its aims."

He had protested vehemently, he wrote, to Prof. Lipset "against this outrageous conduct," and Lipset had sent him a telegraphed apology. Lipset claimed he had no personal knowledge that "those in Washington" had manufactured the letter, but accepted responsibility for "this outrageous action."

IT MAY be intellectually satisfying to see how one's political opponents find it necessary to call to their aid misinformation, distortion, and even – exceptionally – downright fraud. This however provides small comfort in the light of the harm brought to the Jewish cause by their activities – usually cloaked in the semantics of liberalism or presented with the brazen pretence of objectivity, but invariably exploited by the enemies of Israel.

Reader's letter, 7 February 1984

SUSPECT POLLS

To the Editor of The Jerusalem Post

Sir, – In his article entitled "'Dissent or Deceit?'" (January 6), Shmuel Katz leveled grave accusations indeed against the American Jewish Committee. Mr. Katz exposed as rigged and fraudulent two polls produced by the AJC: the one – a poll of American Jewish "leaders," the other – of the Jewish community at large.

Even Shmuel Katz's opponents concede that he is a serious writer of great ability and high integrity; even *The Post's* opponents concede that it is a prestigious and responsible publication. I would therefore have expected that the AJC would have reacted to Katz's article. One would have thought that the AJC would hasten to deny the charges, explaining why they were unfounded (and why, for example, the pollster, Dr. Steven Cohen, had selected the views on Israel and Israelis, of the "leaders" of only five of the 36 major Jewish organizations in the United States), or – in the alternative – considering the reputation and standing of the AJC, one would have hoped for an apology on their part for their biased, weighted and misleading questions and "findings," and a withdrawal and correction of the offending report.

The silence of the AJC in the face of Katz's accusations speaks for itself.

Dr. BINO ZION

Tel Aviv

9 February 1984

Case of distortion or disappointment?

By STEVEN M. COHEN

SINCE 1981 I have been conducting public opinion surveys of American Jewry for the American Jewish Committee (AJC). The results of the most recent study, which focused on attitudes towards Israel, were released last September. That study made two crucial points. First, American Jews are heavily involved with Israel, much more so than many well-informed observers believed. Secondly, while near-unanimous in their concern for Israel, American Jews have diverse views regarding Israeli foreign policy; and owing to their political liberalism (still quite strong) and their pragmatic approach to resolving international conflicts, they lean towards a dovish (or Labour party) point of view.

In a recent article in these columns ("Dissent or Deceit?," January 6), Shmuel Katz attacked the integrity of the study. His critique consisted of four points: The AJC somehow influenced my research to the extent that the findings are fundamentally distorted. The sample might be unrepresentative of American Jewry; I picked the leaders of the "wrong" organizations to comprise the leadership sample. Too many questions voiced Labour Party positions and not enough expressed Likud policies; had there been more balance, the results would have been markedly different.

I should like to answer each point head-on.

MR. KATZ fails to recall that a year earlier, the AJC and I had little difficulty in conducting and publicizing the results of a study he probably liked. Contrary to early media reports, we showed that American Jews massively supported Israel's attack on the PLO in Lebanon.

My experience with the AJC, and that of other university-affiliated researchers, is that the AJC defines a research problem in broad terms, leaves the execution up to the researcher, and then manages the publicity. With regard to the latter, the AJC press release of my study rejected the headline-grabber, "U.S. Jews Oppose Begin's Policies." Instead, the lead paragraph spoke of the deep commitment American Jews have for Israel and the "diversity" of views on Israeli foreign policy.

So much for AJC bias.

□ The public sample consisted of households with distinctive Jewish names (e.g., Cohen, Levy) listed in the nation's telephone directories. This is the cheapest way we know of drawing a national sample of American Jews from all sorts of backgrounds: 11 per cent had Christmas trees; 11 per cent had no Passover Seder; 17 per cent of those married were intermarried; 29 per cent were Reform, 44 per cent Conservative, and 15 per cent Orthodox; 59 per cent belonged to a synagogue. All in all, the sample was representative of American Jewry in general. Its small bias, if any, was in the direction of the more "Jewish" Jews. But more to the point, this sample was incredibly involved with Israel. Over a third reported "family" in Israel and an equal number of the same people had "personal friends" there.

So much for sample bias.

WE DREW our sample of leaders from the top ruling bodies of the Jewish communal organizations which serve as the principle interlocutors between Israel and the U.S. Thus,

we included the Big Three defence agencies – the AJC, the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League. We also had the participation of the United Jewish Appeal (certainly a major institution in the Israel-Diaspora relationship). We agreed to the request of B'nai B'rith to be included in the study. Other organizations were not included simply owing to our estimation of the limited extent to which they shape Jewish “foreign policy” in the U.S.

Mr. Katz’s aspersions against the leaders aside, we found them much more involved with Israel than the public. They were much more likely to have been to Israel twice or more (78 per cent as against 17 per cent of the public), to have personal friends in Israel (69 per cent against 35 per cent), to have recently contributed money to a pro-Israel political candidate (76 per cent against 30 per cent); and on and on.

In short, the organizations these leaders represent are neither inconsequential nor, as Mr. Katz implies, anti-Israel. Perhaps, in retrospect, we should have included Hadassah, the second largest membership organization after B'nai B'rith. But I’m not sure Mr. Katz would have liked Hadassah leaders’ opinions any more than those from the other groups. I recall that during the last Zionist Congress, the Hadassah delegation sided with the Labour-led delegates on issues of settlements across the Green Line and expenditures on development towns within Israel proper.

So much for leadership bias.

WE DID ASK more Labour-oriented than Likud-oriented questions, for a very simple reason: we wanted to gauge the depth of dissent. But where questions were neutral or expressed a Likud position, the sample had no trouble in rejecting Likud positions or personalities.

Thus, the proportions who had an “unfavourable impression of Israeli leaders” were: Sharon (41 per cent); Begin (30 per cent); Peres (16 per cent); Rabin (8 per cent); Eban (4 per cent); and Navon (3 per cent).

By 57 per cent to 31 per cent, the sample rejected the view that “American Jews should not criticize the government of Israel’s policies publicly.” By 70 per cent to 17 per cent they rejected the view that “Israelis who strongly criticize some of the government’s policies are bad for Israel.”

My conclusion that American Jews tilt in a dovish direction, and that they have become more dovish of late, derives from the rich information contained in the 1983 study and the few comparisons we can make with the studies of August 1982 and December 1981. Thus, support for U.S. Jewish criticism of Israeli policies dipped during the height of the Lebanon War and reached its maximum in the most recent study. Support for “territorial compromise” was split 41 per cent to 41 per cent in 1981, declined in 1982 (31 per cent to 52 per cent), and rebounded dramatically in 1983 (42 per cent to 34 per cent).

The problem Mr. Katz alludes to is known in the methodological literature as “acquiescence” effects – the tendency for people to agree rather than disagree. The most recent authoritative research has demonstrated that acquiescence effects are smaller than first supposed and are particularly concentrated among respondents with low education. Thus, they are hardly a problem for our respondents, the best-educated group in the U.S. In short, Mr. Katz cannot get around the fact that American Jews fundamentally disagree with him when they overwhelmingly endorse (48 per cent to 26 per cent) the view that

“Palestinians have a right to a homeland on the West Bank and Gaza, so long as it does not threaten Israel.”

So much for question bias.

I’m sorry if Mr. Katz is disappointed in the results. But his disappointment gives him no warrant and no basis to disparage this significant research.

The writer is a visiting research professor at the Hebrew University’s Center for Jewish Education in the Diaspora.

17 February 1984

Probing a poll

THE ARTICLE by Steven Cohen in *The Jerusalem Post* of February 9 does not refute any of the disturbing facts in my article “Dissent or Deceit” (January 6). They were of course culled from Mr. Cohen’s own report of his poll on American Jews. Indeed the explanations he offers of his approach and his method will inevitably deepen the concern evoked by a report which can only mislead public opinion and misdirect those who shape it.

The poll was in two parts, one of Jewish communal leaders, the other of “American Jews” at large. The only collective Jewish leadership in the U.S. is the Presidents’ Conference. It is far from being completely representative, but one can accept broadly the statement this week by its current chairman, Julius Berman, that its “37 secular and religious bodies” represent “every stream in Jewish life” and speak “on behalf of the overwhelming majority of organized Jewry.” For his poll of Jewish leaders Cohen *excluded* the leaders of 32 out of the 37. It was thus a “poll” of less than a handful of leaders picked by Cohen.

What more needs to be said?

HOWEVER, IT IS interesting to learn from Mr. Cohen how and why he chose precisely those five.

“We drew our sample of leaders,” he writes, “from the top ruling bodies of the Jewish communal organizations which serve as the principal interlocutors between Israel and the U.S. Thus, we included the Big Three defence agencies – the AJC (American Jewish Committee), the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League.” Further on he suggests that these are the bodies that “shape Jewish ‘foreign policy’ in the U.S.”

This is pure nonsense. No Jewish body or leaders serves as “interlocutor between Israel and the U.S.” except perhaps, at times, AIPAC (American-Israel Public Affairs Committee), the so-called lobby. The Presidents’ Conference, recognized by the U.S. administration, and by Israel, as representing the Jewish community, has never appointed the “Big Three” (Cohen’s appellation) or its leaders as its spokesmen. The glaring untruth in Cohen’s statement can be seen from one simple fact. In the last 10 years, of the five men who successively served as chairman of the Presidents’ Conference (and each was automatically its chief spokesman on “foreign affairs”), *four* did *not* represent any of Cohen’s “Big Three.” They were Rabbi Miller, Tom Mann, Rabbi Schindler, and now

Julius Berman. The only exception was Howard Squadron of the American Jewish Congress.

There is more to come. Cohen has separate criteria for the leaders of the two other organizations he chose. The UJA was picked because it is a “major institution in the Israel Diaspora relationship.” But there are no other major institutions in the “Israel Diaspora relationship,” such as for example B’nai B’rith?

Ah, yes, the B’nai B’rith leaders *were* included – but for another reason entirely: the cosy reason, as Cohen explains, that they *asked* to be included. How wonderful for B’nai B’rith to have some good old-fashioned *protektsia* with Cohen.

No less illuminating is Cohen’s reaction to the reference in my article to *Hadassah* among the Zionist organizations he had ignored. He taps his forehead and exclaims: “Perhaps in retrospect we should have included *Hadassah*, the second *largest* membership organization after B’nai B’rith.”

Here then you have the sum total of elements in the scientific method of Cohen’s own arrogant selection; a paramountcy (non-existent) in “foreign affairs”; a relationship with Israel; *protektsia*; and an afterthought on the possible importance of size.

Throughout this farrago of absurdities there is not a word of explanation why, having decided to arrogate to himself the right to make a selection, he excluded the leaders of all three major religious organizations – whose membership surely outnumbers that of the other 34 organizations put together – and of all the Zionist bodies, whose intricate involvement with Israel is by definition the reason for their very existence.

As an appropriate footnote to this analysis, Cohen’s report informs us that about half of the leaders who were approached did not respond to the questions.

ON THE “POPULAR” poll Cohen suggests I charged that there was bias in the sample. Of course I did nothing of the sort. How could he influence a sample of names picked from telephone books? By choosing more Levys than Cohens? Indeed, I wrote that the sample *may* be representative. It also may not. Who knows – when the total number of respondents is 640 (about half the acceptable minimum for a serious poll), when they were chosen by the Jewish sound of their names (excluding Jews with non-Jewish names) and when half of those approached did not respond even after three or four reminders? Who can know?

Cohen’s replies to the charges of bias I *did* make are mind-boggling. He had asked:

Below are positions often articulated by some of Israel’s political leaders and parties. Indicate whether you agree with those Israelis advocating each of the following positions:

He then poses 10 “positions” relevant to the Arab-Israel dispute. Of these, only *one* is a position one can ascribe to the “Likud” school; nine are adversary to “Likud” positions.

To this criticism Cohen replies: “We did ask more Labour-oriented than Likud-oriented questions.” More? Nine to one is just “more” – or, as it is in fact, a minuscule fig-leaf to cover his withholding all but one of the Likud-oriented positions from the respondents to his poll?

He admits now that his method was deliberate. “We wanted,” he pleads, “to gauge the depth of dissent.” So, the object of the poll was not, then, as stated in his Report: “To increase understanding of how American Jews feel about Israel and why.”

Let us ignore – for lack of space – the relevant question of his *motive* for wanting to gauge and publicize dissent. But if dissent – dissent from what? From positions that Cohen does not even present to the respondent? Is that how one honestly measures dissent? By *not* stating the positions from which the respondent could dissent?

COHEN REFRAINS from explaining why he did not pose any of the statements I suggested (or similar ones) which would represent at least part of the positions of the present Israeli “Establishment.”

To justify the now admitted deliberate bias of his questions he clutches desperately at the excuse that “the most recent authoritative research has demonstrated that acquiescence effects” – the tendency of people to agree rather than disagree – “are smaller than first supposed and are particularly concentrated among respondents with low education.”

Then, presumably realizing the implications even of this authoritative finding, he clutches at the thin air. “Thus,” he says, “They are hardly a problem for our respondents, the best-educated group in the U.S.”

What remarkable mystic powers Cohen ascribes to himself. He picks 640 names taken from telephone directories and he knows that they are “the best-educated group in the U.S.”

UNFORTUNATELY for Mr. Cohen, this final twist only helps to emphasize the fatuity even of his excuses. Let us have a look at the one opportunity he provides for judging the validity of his own alleged belief.

He exults in the “fact” that “American Jews overwhelmingly endorse (48 to 26 per cent) the view that Palestinians have a right to homeland on the West Bank and Gaza as long as it does not threaten Israel.”

Now, if 48 per cent of his respondents hold this view, they obviously must reject the *contrary* view that “Israel should maintain permanent control over Judea and Samaria (the West Bank).” But when Cohen posed this position (the only Likud-oriented one in the series), only 26 per cent opposed it (against 42 per cent supporting it). What happened to the other 19 per cent?

To top it all, Cohen in yesterday’s *Post* (“Who speaks for U.S. Jewry?”) challenges Julius Berman’s statement on the consensus in the Presidents’ Conference on the major questions of Israeli policy. These views contradict absolutely Cohen’s findings. He now has the hutzpa to declare that it is his poll that represents “the plurality” of American Jews – when what he is in fact talking about is the plurality of 640 Jews whose names were plucked out of telephone books and who were then subjected to a series of tendentious questions by clever Mr. Cohen.

Reader’s letter, 5 March 1984

TAINTED FINDINGS

To the Editor of The Jerusalem Post

Sir, – Steven Cohen’s methodology in polling American Jews and Jewish leadership was demolished with such devastating precision by Shmuel Katz in his February 17 article that any further criticism might seem like kicking a man when he’s down. Nevertheless, the job must be done – even assuming (which I do not) that Cohen’s sampling technique is defensible. That is because his assault of February 16 on the representative and consensual nature of the positions expressed by the chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations was so irresponsible that exception must be taken not only to his methods, but to the conclusions he drew.

In asserting that the position expressed in *The Jerusalem post* by Julius Berman, Conference chairman, “actually misrepresents and distorts the views of the constituency in whose behalf it claims to speak,” Steven Cohen leveled a charge that, if it is to be taken seriously must be substantiated. How did he do so? By begging the question. Three examples will suffice:

By 48 to 26 per cent, he wrote, American Jews support the statement that Palestinians have a right to a homeland on the West Bank *so long as it does not threaten Israel.*” (Emphasis added.) By 42 to 34 per cent, he claimed, American Jews support the idea that “Israel should offer the Arabs territorial compromise in the West Bank and Gaza *in return for credible guarantees of peace.*” Finally, by 70 to 17 per cent, he asserted that American Jews agree that “Israel should talk with the PLO *if the PLO recognizes Israel and renounces terrorism.*” This justifies the conclusion, according to Mr. Cohen, that American Jewish opposition to the PLO is “highly conditional.”

The surrealistic conditions Mr. Cohen attached to these statements speak for themselves. If the PLO recognizes Israel and renounces terrorism, it will no longer be the PLO and even Shmuel Katz might agree to negotiate with its leaders. Indeed, the possibilities opened by Steven Cohen with his big “if” are fascinating. If the Soviet Union abandoned Communism, the American people would quickly lose their distaste for the regime in the Kremlin. If the Ayatollah Khomeini turned his back on theocratic fanaticism, Americans might well urge reopening the U.S. embassy in Teheran. Does that mean that U.S. opposition to Soviet Communism and Khomeinism is, in Cohen’s phrase, “highly conditional”?

Steven Cohen has rendered a disservice to the science of polling not only by his faulty sample, but by the way he posed his statements and the conclusions he drew from the responses to them. And he has done a disservice to the American Jewish community by attacking the legitimacy of the views expressed by its most representative organization on the basis of his tainted findings.

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