The American Council for Judaism

MAY-JUNE 1998

SPECIAL INTEREST REPORT

A digest of news items and articles in the area of The Council's Interests

Post Office Box 9009, Alexandria, Virginia 22304 • Allan C. Brownfeld • Editor • Vol. 27 No.3

Doubt Over Future And Internal Divisions Temper Israel's 50th Anniversary Celebration

Israel's Jubilee Anniversary "is prompting a heavy dose of introspection, and there is little sense that Israelis are happy about what they see," writes *Washington Post* correspondent Doug Struck (April 30, 1998). "The reflection is of a country mired in a tense deadlock with Arabs, beset by internal squabbling, soured on its institutions and coping with a slowing economy."

Writing in the Israeli newspaper *Maariv,* commentator Hemi Shaley, declared: "There is much more division in the air, a lot less feeling of togetherness. We are much less tolerant and hate much more." Writing in *Haaretz,* Israel's preeminent novelist Amos Oz, notes that, "Israel as conceived by the founding fathers and mothers was a naive wish. What resulted? A society of arguments. Sit in a cafe or get on a bus and you seem to hear more arguments than there are people. Everyone is shouting at the same time, The new state was to be the most biblical, the most socialist, the most aesthetic. Obviously it was impossible to fulfill all these dreams. A few actually materialized. But even those that became flesh ultimately assumed the frayed, disenchanting shape of any dream that is fulfilled."

Uri Avnery, 75, a long time liberal critic of Israeli government policy, said: "Those of us who were here when Israel was created and took part in it find this is not the state we were hoping for. As we say in Hebrew, it's not the child we have prayed for."

Writing from Israel in *USA Today* (April 29, 1998), Carol Morello describes the strife between ultra—Orthodox and secular Israelis: "Many Israelis believe this domestic conflict will dominate the nation's second 50 years the way the Arab-Israeli conflict defined the first...This is not the way Israel's pioneers envisioned the Jewish state would be. David Ben-Gurion...imagined that within two or three generations, Jews from the Diaspora would meld into a homogeneous culture with shared values. His vision of a 'new Jew' was a Western-style democrat who was tolerant of religion but committed to a secular, socialist state. It didn't quite turn out that way. While possessing a democracy that has no rival in the Middle East, Israelis have all but abandoned socialism for capitalism, which has lifted their standard of living to the level of Britain's. And rather than blending into seamless whole, Israel has grown strikingly heterogeneous. Though the state still defines itself as a Jewish state, a large minority is not Jewish, including Arab Israelis and non—Jewish spouses and children of immigrants. They cannot wed in the country because marriage and death rites are controlled by Orthodox rabbis and their strict rules of lineage and religious conversion."

In a poll taken by the Tarni Steinmetz Center for Peace Studies at Tel Aviv University, 79% of Israelis polled said they expect violence to erupt between secular and Orthodox Jews, compared with 61% who anticipate more violence between Arabs and Jews. And 69% said the domestic conflict is Israel's greatest threat, only 30% cite the Palestinians.

Avner Shaki, a leader of the National Religious Party, states; "Before being a democratic Jewish state, we have to ensure it is a Jewish state." He favors limiting immigration by banning spouses and children who are not Jewish. At the same time, former Prime Minister Shimon Peres says that Israel's very survival depends on curbing the power of religious parties.

"This unholy alliance between religion and state has to be addressed or we are doomed," says Uri Regev, a Reform rabbi who has been fighting to have conversions by Conservative and Reform rabbis recognized in Israel. "After dedicating 50 years to building its infrastructure, military battles and the mass absorption of immigrants, Israel is going to find the next 50 years marked by this struggle." ●

Israelis Concede Pollard Worked For Them; Jewish Groups Are Criticized For Urging Pollard's Release

Israel officially recognized Jonathan Pollard, an American Jew jailed in the U.S. for spying for Israel, as its agent—13 years after he was denied sanctuary in its Washington Embassy. (*The Washington Times,* May 12, 1988)

"The state has announced that Jonathan Pollard acted as an Israeli agent," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's spokesman said.

Reuters reported that, "Pollard embarrassed Israel and American Jews when he was caught in 1985 after passing to the Jewish state information on Arab countries that he said the U.S. had withheld from its Israeli ally. Israel originally distanced itself from the spy...and said he had been part of a rogue operation. But two years ago, the Israeli Government made Pollard a citizen as a public campaign intensified to win him official recognition as an agent."

Many Jewish groups in the U.S. have engaged in a campaign urging Pollard's release. In 1997, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Reform Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) and Rabbi Raphael Butler, executive vice president of the Orthodox Union, wrote a letter to President Clinton which said that, "We—the representatives of the broadest spectrum of the American Jewish community—come together in the spirIt of unity and out of a clear sense of fellowship and brotherhood as fellow Jews to raise Jonathan's plight with you once again." (*Washington Jewish Week,* May 15, 1997)

The rabbis said that while they did not condone Pollard's actions, "his sentence is grossly disproportionate to his crime." They said that "it is wrong for American justice to treat Pollard, a contrite offender, as you would those who committed high treason against our nation."

Writing in *The Wall Street Journal* (May 6, 1998), E.V. Kontorovich, a contributing editor of *The Forward* as well as a member of the Journal editorial page staff, sharply criticized those Jewish groups working in behalf of Pollard's release: "Jonathan Pollard has become the Jewish Mumia Abu-Jamal. Or rather, the campaign to commute the life sentence of the intelligence analyst turned spy—which has gained considerable impetus in recent weeks—has all the hallmarks of the 'Free Mumia' movement on behalf of the Black Panther propagandist turned cop-killer. Both movements rely on inflammatory appeals to ethnic solidarity and groundless charges of bigotry in the criminal justice system...Jews of all stripes and persuasions have rallied to Pollard's defense. Now, 13 years after his imprisonment, the movement for his release has reached a fever pitch...The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish organizations, representing more than 50 groups, signed on recently..."

Referring to "paranoia" on the part of Pollard's defenders, Kontorovich quotes columnist Anne Roiphe who wrote, "While Mr. Pollard remains in jail...no Jew can place complete trust in this country."

The fact is, Kontorovich declares, that, "Pollard got well over $60,000 in cash and jewels for his perfidy. The intelligence community says that Pollard did real damage to U.S. security...He seemed proud of his actions, and considers himself a martyr. In various interviews...he seems unable to restrain himself from bragging about the importance and nobility of his actions. He called the U.S. a 'foreign' country in a January interview...It's striking that...the American Jewish establishment has come together in