

Israeli politics divides American Jewry



FINDS US JEWS IN TURMOIL

NEXT Sunday through Tuesday hundreds of self-styled liberal and progressive American Jews will gather in New York City at the Penta Hotel for a conclave whose aim is to "reconstitute the Progressive Tradition of American Jewish intellectuals." That is how the newest Jewish magazine, *Tikkun*, founded two years ago as alternative to *Commentary*, is promoting its first conference at the very time when American Jews are in turmoil over what is happening in Israel.

Yet the turmoil within much of American Jewry is far more selfish and self-centred than many have been suggesting in recent weeks. Indeed, daily killings and beatings of Palestinians have caused relatively little upheaval among the membership of the three to four dozen organisations that in combination make up what is popularly known here as "the organised Jewish community." Instead, it is the "Who is a Jew?" issue that has galvanised these organisations into action with a panoply of advertisements, tough statements threatening a decrease of American Jewish support and funds, and emergency delegations to Israel.

Nevertheless, just as Israel is becoming more and more isolated in international society, the same can be said for this organised American Jewish community which comprises about two of the six million American Jews in the US. Make no doubt about it; this is a powerful, well-organised, highly articulate, wealthy and influential segment of the diverse American polity. But the associated reality is that nearly two-thirds of American Jewry belong to none of these dozens of organisations that combine to work through AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee which still has a stranglehold on the American Congress, and the Presidents Conference of Major American Jewish Organisations, which speaks to the American political establishment and the press.

Within this "organised Jewish community" it is the liberal wing represented by *Tikkun* as well as the five Jews who recently met with Yasser Arafat in Stockholm that is most in turmoil. Traditionally concerned with human rights and civil liberties it is these liberals who are doing most of the handwringing over the image that Jews everywhere are burdened with because of Israel's actions as well as the shrillness and aggressiveness of the American Jewish lobby.

Hence, in calling progressive American Jews together next week in New York, *Tikkun's* announcement notes that "the biggest success the conservatives of the Jewish world have achieved in the 1980s have been the convincing of the liberal-progressive Jewish majority in the US that it is actually a minority! ... The mainstream media frequently turns to these conservative leaders whenever a 'Jewish issue' is discussed — reinforcing the collective perception that the conservatives speak for the Jewish world ... While *Tikkun* has articulated the position of the majority of American Jews — supportive of Israel and Zionism but critical of the occupation and the repressive policies of the Shamir government — the American Jewish establishment through its control of the institutions of the organised Jewish community and its access to the media, was able to foster the impression that Jews were lining up behind Shamir and his hardline policies."

At first blush outsiders might think, and indeed are encouraged to think, that these words are coming from outside the American Jewish establishment. But in reality what's going on within the organised Jewish community is an internal party and ideological fight brought to American Jews

by the Likud-Labour split in Israel and reflecting the increasing polarisation prevalent in Israel itself.

The American Jewish liberals and progressives, of course, actually represent the supporters of Peres, Eban, and the now amorphous and fractured Peace Now movement in Israel. In opposition within the American Jewish establishment just as Labour Party is on the defensive in Israel itself the liberals are nevertheless at great pain to keep the community together while at the same time attempting to regain a dominant position.

The more concealed agenda of the "Tikkunicks" is to prevent from growing and becoming more popular the more truly progressive elements within American Jewry that are no longer operating within the parameters of the accepted institutions of the American Jewish establishment, whether conservative or liberal. Indeed, even when polled last March, some 29 percent of American Jews were in favour of US negotiations with the PLO and creation of a Palestinian state; and that number is probably larger now. And 56 percent of American Jews did not contribute to any Israel-related cause last year.

The Achilles heel of American Jewish support for Israel, and of the Israel-Jewish lobby in the United States, is that a growing percentage of American Jews are growing alienated from both Israel and the American Jewish establishment and actually favour various forms of dissociation from Israeli policies. As Edward Tivnan, author of *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy*, wrote on the cover of the December 12, issue of *The Nation* magazine: "Clearly, organised Jewish groups and their leadership do not represent the Jews of America, 60 percent of whom do not bother to affiliate with any of these groups."

It is because of this situation that the language being used even within the American Jewish establishment is growing harsher and more contentious, even though the policies advocated even by the liberals are not much different to those of the Left-wing of the Labour Party.

Take for instance this phrasing by the editor of *Tikkun* magazine a few months ago: "The path of least resistance — privately criticising Israel but publicly supporting it or remaining silent — is actually a dramatic betrayal of the interest of our people ... Americans must use every possible means to convey to the Israelis ... that Israel is in deep jeopardy and that the occupation must end".

Thus in an attempt to keep American Jews from fracturing more profoundly, while at the same time trying to help the Labour Party regain dominance in Israel, American Jewish liberals are going on the offensive while knowing that overall they remain on the defensive. Offence is marked by such developments as the *Tikkun* conference, stepped up efforts to support Israeli groups such as Peace Now and the International Centre for Peace in the Middle East (the group to which the Stockholm Jews are affiliated), and insistence that American Jews more outspoken than the liberals, including those calling for aid cuts to Israel, are treasonous radicals. Indeed, in this very context he same editor of *Tikkun* magazine quoted above advocating bold measures to bring the occupation to an end nevertheless refused a paid ad from the Jewish Committee on the Middle East — an alternative group made up of hundreds of American Jewish intellectuals including Jewish professors at over a hundred universities throughout the country who are advocating a complete change in the special relationship with Israel.

Thus the recent trip by a few liberal American Jews to meet Yasser Arafat

in Stockholm should be seen in this overall context of a liberal-conservative, Likud-Labour, battle that is now raging within the American Jewish establishment.

The delegation itself was headed and conceived by Rita Hauser, a New York attorney who some years ago was associated with The American Jewish Committee. Opportunistic, energetic, dedicated — these are all terms those who know Ms Hauser think applicable. While it should be obvious that coming at this particular time the efforts of the group have been useful in giving Arafat further ammunition on the world stage, the overall motivations of those involved on the Jewish side should not go unquestioned. It is true that among the liberals such as Ms Hauser there are many who would now like to see some kind of peaceful settlement between Israel and the Palestinians.

But it is also very important to point out that in her latest public commentary on *The New York Times* Op Ed page a few weeks ago (and before she knew she was going to Stockholm) Hauser argued that the PLO should realise it must accept some form of autonomy, not statehood, for nothing more than that is possible from the Israeli side.

And indeed, this conforms to current thinking in important segments of the Israeli Labour Party.

The Stockholm group should also be thought of as a kind of test probe to see what kind of a dialogue is possible with Arafat's Right-wing of Fatah and then with the PLO if it stays under Arafat's control. Whether this is being done in co-ordination with Shimon Peres or not is not known, but it is very interesting that confidential sources in the US have confirmed that George Shultz was aware of the Jewish group's plans to meet Arafat and gave his quiet blessings.

Even so, confusion within the liberal camp, as within the Labour camp in Israel, is considerable. Hence such greater luminaries as Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg and Rabbi Alexander Schindler — leading personalities in the Conservative and Reform movements of American Jewry respectively — both were invited to join the group to Stockholm, but after considering going declined at the last moment.

Furthermore, the fact that former Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban, the head of the International Centre for Peace in Israel, publicly stated he didn't even know that his American supporters were going to Stockholm and thought they were "reckless" in doing so need not be taken at face value. Indeed it is very possible that at this crucial time in Israeli history with the Likud and Labour struggling to form the next government that the Hauser delegation's efforts were probably known and approved by Shimon Peres just as by George Shultz.

It seems that Arafat's Fatah and Labour's Peres were engaged in very crafty forms of political theatre. The next big step is Arafat's in Geneva. Now Labour will have to decide whether to join in a Likud government sure to continue to try to sabotage all efforts towards negotiations with the Palestinian national movement or to enter the opposition and try to position itself for a better political moment. Whatever it does Labour does not want to alienate the liberal wing of American Jewry who are above all else desperate to avoid a Likud-religious Right coalition in Israel. Labour has to dance very carefully indeed!

Meanwhile, of course Yasser Arafat is at a historical juncture. And that should be reason enough to everyone else to be working overtime for the desired outcome.

residents
a city lik
of the ma
them wan
him alor
home, of
most.
Our cu
rent citie
in the m
remain
Econom
behind t
men ha
ambitor
tant rol
At the
have to
the lead
has gon
sign onl
such in
municip
expropr
of stree
tion.
Perha
plished
a numt
municip
ching f
By
aspect
such a
solving
to the
should
efficier
polluti
The
financi
mayor
can pu
to the
the lar
pendir
of per
has be
Said F
preser
or Dr
At
news
Omar
Holy
ginee
know
mann
well
ment
beco
nistr
there
Mi
our j
evils
er a
In the
who a
on th
grand
risen
primit
nised
Nobe
Too n
and t
go o
cons
natio
Inter
The
statu
orga
AI K
The
forc
less
sive
I do
prot
corr
quo
stat
pos
Fra
role
hop
tha
its i
—
I m
suf
del
ma