

JEWISH ATTITUDES

Many people enjoy the image of Jews as "fallen angels." With some special mixture of sadness and glee, they cluck at the misdeeds of Israelis, or make the point that American Jews are no longer the liberals they were.

Indeed, every now and then, some Jews will announce that they have formed a new organization to resuscitate social liberalism among Jews -- who, they say, have strayed into dark reactionary paths.

Well, at hand is a comparison of some of the social attitudes of American Jews, and of San Francisco-area Jews -- the first measured about a year ago by the American Jewish Committee nationally, and the second by this local Jewish community.

The national and the local results are close. For example, 76 per cent of the Jews nationally, and 80 per cent locally expressed their opposition to government aid for non-public schools. And, by a 3 to 1 margin nationally, and a 4 to 1 margin locally, Jews believed that declared gays should be allowed to teach in the public schools. It should be noted, by the way, that the local "establishment Jews," those in organizational leadership, registered slightly higher on what is considered the "liberal" side of such questions.

By a 2 to 1 margin, the national Jews opposed any substantial cut on social welfare spending. Locally, in answer to a somewhat different question, a clear majority of Jews supported an increase in social welfare payments. On these questions, as others, the Jews have a *radically* more liberal response than that part of the American population which has the same group economic standing as the Jews.

The great majority of American Jews are actively in favor of a reduction in government debt -- which itself may be a liberal response, since we know what political chaos can result from fiscal collapse. But as a group Jews are most reluctant to reduce that debt on the backs of the poor.

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The same majority of Jews nationally and locally support "affirmative action to help disadvantaged groups" -- quite unlike any other white ethnic group -- even though most of them oppose the use of quotas. A good case can be made that the Jews are the only group in this country making a consistently liberal response to those two issues.

Traditional "liberals" might give bad marks to Jews on their support of stronger law enforcement. Nationally, 72 per cent of the Jews oppose the abolition of the death penalty. Locally, 75 per cent of the Jews support longer sentences for convicted criminals. Make of that what you will. But, as a group, American Jews remain uniquely staunch in their support of those issues of social compassion -- welfare, civil rights and civil liberties -- which we have come to think of as "liberal."

Of course, there are differences about strategy -- and of course there are many individual Jews, as there always have been, whose active social compassion could be measured in a teaspoon. Because of them, presumably, we are all sometimes accused of hypocrisy. But, as La Rochefoucauld, pointed out, hypocrisy is the homage which vice pays to virtue. Hypocrisy only flourishes in the midst of the strong virtuous group values which still hold.