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Kosher In San Rafael

For the first time, all meals of the West Coast Conference of Jewish community centers workers, held last week in San Rafael, were Kosher.

Does that mean a sudden growth in the number of center workers who are observing kashruth in their personal lives? Not at all. Not any more than the Kosher quality of our San Francisco Jewish Welfare Federation affairs in the past few years means a spectacular growth among kashruth-observing Jews in this community.

Nor is it just a practical matter of accommodating the small minority of kashruth-observers. The question is, why now? It is a sign of the times.



Roth

The new practice describes a communal circle around all Jews, however different some of their observances. And it further establishes a link with the *idea* of Jewish tradition itself, with the Jews of the past.

If that seems too high-flown, just take a look at "The Shechita Battle" in Sacramento in recent years. For about five years running the San Francisco JCRC was involved in a fight to maintain the legality of shechita — kosher slaughtering. There were bills introduced in the state legislature in the name of humane slaughter which would have outlawed kosher slaughtering in the state of California. Every year it became necessary to carefully explain to perplexed legislators what was involved, including the fact that shechita is not inhumane. In June of 1967, when the attention of the JCRC was turned towards the Middle East, the Assembly actually passed such a bill, and the State Senate was about to ratify it. On discovery, the bill was diverted in the nick of time.

Now, flash back to the year 465 when a Gallic Church Council attacked kashruth, saying that the refusal to eat "Christian dishes" made it appear as though the Christians "were inferior to the Jews." Or 1893 when shechita was outlawed in Switzerland, followed later by Norway, Sweden, Germany, Hungary, Italy and others. These anti-shechita laws were spearheaded by openly anti-Semitic movements. By contrast, the sponsors of the recent California legislation which would have outlawed shechita were notably not anti-semitic.

However, there was one common thread that ran through all those centuries of anti-kashruth efforts. On the part of the non-Jews involved, there was a persistent push for uniformity, a certain displeasure with deviation. On the part of the Jews was a persistent resistance to social conformity which would interfere with personal belief.

That may be one light in which to see why an overwhelmingly non-kashruth-observing San Francisco Jewish community expends major energies to defend the practice of kashruth. Or why groups like the Welfare Federation and the Community Center workers have taken to kashruth observance at institutional occasions. It is in part a celebration of the persistent resistance of Jews to conformity — and to extinction. It is therefore a ritualistic bow in itself to the Jewish past and to the wholeness of the Jewish community in the present. At most, it is a renascent religious impulse; at the least, it is the mark of a new "sense of community." The two are not altogether unconnected.