

LEFT-RIGHT

Are you a left-wing or a right-wing Jew?

In either case you now have a new organization to join. There is the American Jewish Forum, which has just been established "to become a national action center for Jews with conservative views." And the New Jewish Agenda has been created as an organization to involve "those who feel the politics of the American Jewish community have turned rightward and inward."

There was a time when left-wing or right-wing Jews joined *general* left-wing or right-wing organizations. Now there are *Jewish* organizations for them to join. Is this another sign of the growing self-consciousness of Jews, and is it good or bad for the Jews?

Of course, there is a slightly prior question. What does it mean today to be "left-wing" or "right-wing?" Let us count the ways. There is the Old Left, the New Left and the Near Left. There is the Old Right, the New Right and the Near Right.

The Old Left is the Leninist species -- Stalinist, post-Stalinist and anti-Stalinist -- all of whom would impose a conventional totalitarianism. Not many non-suicidal Jews are interested anymore. The New Left, less cohesive, rejects both the Old Left totalitarianism and the American political and economic system. But they don't quite know what the third alternative is, often talking wistfully about small-is-better and the economic cooperative movement of the 19th century. A lot of young Jews have been involved with the New Left -- but anti-Americanism too quickly turns into a Third-World, anti-Israel ideology, which doesn't make Jews comfortable.

The Old Right is the Birch-Society species: deep economic laissez-faire and isolationism. They would like to repeal the New Deal and everything that's happened in the last fifty years, which makes them a pretty revolutionary force. The New Right is

more pragmatic. They want to cut back the state as much as possible and renew traditional values but they don't want to unglue the social system that's been built up, they just want to reform it. The Old Right never attracted many Jews, the New Right has attracted some more, but not an overwhelming number.

The Near Right is the species which is often called neo-conservative; and, like the Near Left, is reformist rather than revolutionary. The Near Left has a chief concern with broadening economic and political opportunity in traditional ways. The Near Right is mainly moved by concerns about political freedom at home and totalitarian imperialism abroad. The Near Right is also interested in reducing the state, in the belief that the reduction would be good both for political freedom and everybody's economy. There has always been a large proportion of Jews in the Near Left; but there does seem to be a considerable Jewish seepage to the Near Right.

There are a lot of reasons for this seepage. Take the matter of Congressional authorization for American defense; and compare the voting of Jewish Congressmen and New York City Congressmen with heavy Jewish constituencies, with the voting of the rest of Congress. In 1971, while 85 per cent of the rest of Congress was voting to support defense appropriations, only 30 per cent of the "Jewish" delegation was voting that support! In 1974, the support vote of the "Jewish" delegation sailed up to 65 per cent (from 30), while the rest of Congress just went up to 90 (from 85).

What happened in the interim? The Yom Kippur War, for one thing -- and a surging "right-wing" consciousness among Jews that a strong American defense structure was still important for freedom around the world. There were similar surges in domestic policy: sentiments about too much government and too much inflation being enemies of a stable and democratic society.

Earl Raab
"Left-Right"
page 3

The consciousness that these issues affect Jews, *as Jews*, has resulted in *Jewish* organizations such as the American Jewish Forum and the New Jewish Agenda. It is probably good that there are such special groups with emphatic points of view. They will help stir and inform the minds of most Jews who, like most Americans, are not determinedly left or right, but are just trying to find the best practical answers to problems as they arise.

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