

THE JEWS ADRIFT

For half a century, the Democratic Party has been the political anchor for world Jewry. That anchor has been slipping, noticeably, in ways that validate the uneasiness of Jews, and should inspire it in many others.

At national conventions, Jews are button-holing each other frantically: "Who are you going to vote for? How can I vote for Carter? Under what conditions could you vote for Reagan? Who is Anderson, anyway?" The current Israeli joke is being transposed into American terms: the American, Goldberg, tells his shocked friend that he is leaving this country for two reasons. The first reason is that either Reagan or Anderson will win the election, and he would rather live in exile than under either of their administrations. But, urges his friend, don't give up so easily; it's quite possible that Carter will win after all. That, Goldberg explains, is the second reason.

Jews have long recognized that Jimmy Carter is not Franklin D. Roosevelt; now they are beginning to recognize that 1980 is not 1932 -- nor even 1928. The lopsided Jewish attachment to the Democratic Party started with Al Smith, not with FDR. Actually, the marked alienation from the Republican Party had begun in 1920; but about two fifths of the Jews voted for the Socialist Debs in that year, and about one fifth voted for the Progressive La Follette in 1924.

There was a walloping Democratic differential in Jewish voting of about 31 percentage points in the Smith-Hoover contest of 1928. That is, about 41 per cent of the general population voted Democratic, against about 72 per cent of the Jews. That Democratic differential in Jewish voting dropped to a still walloping 22 points in the first two Roosevelt elections and rose to about 35 points in the next two. As a matter of fact, although the Jewish figures are approximate rather

than exact, the Jewish Democratic differential has always been walloping, since Smith; there has been a median of about 30 points difference between the general population and the Jews. The differential in the McGovern-Nixon contest was higher than in the first two Roosevelt contests.

There is nothing generally mysterious about that half-century of Jewish addiction to the Democratic Party. For the Jews, the Democratic Party stood against ethnic bigotry and for liberal social reform, starting with Smith -- and then, also, for international anti-fascism, starting with FDR. After FDR, Israel became an added factor in the Jewish political accent.

The weight of these variable issue-factors at any given time is more difficult to fix exactly. The Jewish differential reached its height in the anti-Nazi years. Willkie was seen as a conciliator in 1940. FDR was commander-in-chief of the war against the Nazis in 1944. "Right-wing" Republicanism and its fabled relationship to bigotry was a factor in the Goldwater and three Nixon campaigns. The Israel factor in the Jewish political accent was less salient in the 1950s, when both Eisenhower and Stevenson were weak sisters on the subject, and even in the 1970s than it has become in the 1980s.

Of course, there are always strong non-issue, non-ideological factors at work in party loyalty: notably, generational inertia. Despite all the gaps, children tend to vote the way their parents did. Major party realignments have generally occurred because of new voting segments of the population. The Jewish addiction to the Democratic Party came about less as a result of voter switching, than as a result of new Jewish immigrants and their children coming to the polls for the first time.

But neither the initial impetus nor the generational loyalties are issue-free. It is the issue-direction of the party which is transmitted from one generation to

the next; and, in the case of the Jews, issue-factors have been added to strengthen the continuity. Conversely, the fact that the Jews have so concentrated in the Democratic Party has helped to maintain the compatible issue-orientation of the Party.

However, the substantive issue-factors, both domestic and foreign, have begun to change for the Jews in relation to the Democratic Party. Overseas, for example, the very enemy has changed. In the past decade, American Jews have begun to seriously catch up with the fact that it is no longer German fascism, but Soviet communism which threatens Jews abroad, including the Jews of Israel. While anti-fascism was always seen as the speciality of the Democratic Party, anti-Sovietism was always seen as the speciality of the Republican Party.

For Jews, the issue of Israel and American foreign policy is more salient than it has ever been. Critical to Israel's security is a world view which sees resistance to Soviet imperialism as a priority in the Middle East. Critical to Israel's security is a view of the PLO as an arm of Soviet policy in the Middle East -- and elsewhere -- rather than as an arm of Palestinian aspirations which can be appeased. But while given candidates may be evaluated on the scale of such perceptions, the Party picture is a mixed one. The Democratic Party does have more than its share of appeasers by way of world view; but the Republican Party has more than its share of appeasers by way of oil and trade. Negative attitudes towards the Soviet Union cannot be automatically translated into strategies about the Middle East.

It is true that the emotional edge which Israel enjoyed in America after World War II was most fully expressed by representatives of the Democratic Party. That was partly true because of the relationship of the Democratic Party to the war

against the Nazis. It was partly true just because the American Jews were such an integral part of the Democratic Party. But the war against the Nazis is no longer a factor; the "emotional edge" itself is not the significant factor it may once have been in determining American foreign policy on Israel.

And there are indications that the Democratic Party is fading as the place where American Jews naturally find the best access to political muscle on behalf of Israel. That is not because of Israel-related factors, but because of a significant change in Jewish/Democratic Party relationships, whose roots can be found in the domestic scene.

The Jews in this half century have always been among the vanguard of those supporting heavy government intervention on behalf of the poor, the helpless, the victims of bigotry. That was at once the Jewish accent in domestic affairs, and the Democratic Party accent. When historians talk about the major party realignments of the past century, they customarily identify the realignment of the 1890s as the ascendancy of the urban industrial sections; and the realignment of the 1920s and 1930s as the ascendancy of those forces favoring drastic government intervention in social and economic life. The major Jewish political involvement in America has been contemporaneous with that thrust in our national life.

At the beginning of the half century in review, the lack of such government intervention was a scandal, and a threat to the Republic. To say, as some do today, that labor unions are not really necessary because the natural workings of the free market would protect the worker, is to suffer from a severe deficiency of hindsight. The interventionist NLRB was necessary to the security and mission of the nation. So were the interventionist social security laws. And in the 1950s it took civil rights laws, intervening in private enterprise as well as public, to seriously break the mold of racial discrimination. Few who lived