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ISRAEL NEWS

A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation

with the successive
attorneys general
responsible for
enforcing their dictums, have
deemed a wide range of actions
by lame-duck governments
unreasonable.

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Commentary...

Hoist with its Own Petard? By Evelyn Gordon

Though Israel's final March 2 election results still aren't in, one thing is clear: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did significantly better than he did in September, and his bloc is close to having enough seats to form a new government. That's a far cry from saying he'll actually be able to form one. But if he does, the legal system will be hoist with its own petard—namely, repeated court rulings that, in defiance of the actual law, barred lame-duck governments from doing almost anything of importance.

To understand why, it's first necessary to understand how Netanyahu's bloc gained three to four seats since September, all of which went to his own Likud party. Granted, many Israelis either don't believe the indictments against him or don't consider them serious enough to justify ousting someone they consider an excellent prime minister, but all those people also voted for him in September.

The tens of thousands of Israelis who switched their votes on March 2 didn't do so because they used to think Netanyahu was guilty but are now convinced he's innocent, or because they used to think Netanyahu was a lousy prime minister but are now convinced he's brilliant. Rather, most are former Netanyahu supporters who grew disgusted with him—enough that they either stayed home or voted for his rival in September.

But they're even more disgusted by Israel's third election of the past year and the ongoing inability to form a new government; they've become convinced that even a bad government is better than no government. And the anti-Netanyahu bloc had no realistic chance of ever forming a government because too many of its constituent parties refuse to sit at the same cabinet table either with each other or with any of the parties that could potentially be wooed away from Netanyahu. Thus the only way to increase the chances of a government being formed this time around was to give Netanyahu's bloc the few extra seats it needed.

But why would these voters care so much about having a new government? After all, the country is basically functioning under Netanyahu's lame-duck government, which remains in office until a new government is formed despite having lost its parliamentary majority last year.

Unlike in America, there's no such thing as a government shutdown in Israel. Public services continue functioning even without an approved budget because they're automatically funded every month to the tune of one-twelfth of the previous year's budget. The army still defends the borders and fights terror. Netanyahu still travels the world expanding Israel's diplomatic relations.

Nevertheless, there are many things a lame-duck government cannot do. It can't make appointments, so senior civil-service posts have been empty for a year. It can't pass a new budget or allocate any funding that wasn't included in the previous year's budget, so vital new programs—like the army's five-year development plan and desperately needed infrastructure projects—have gone unfunded. And vital old programs, including pilot projects to help Israel's neediest, have shut down because their funding was only approved for a year and a lame-duck government can't renew it. The government also can't address the yawning deficit by cutting spending or raising taxes.

To be clear, Israeli law doesn't actually prevent a lame-duck government from doing any of this. Moreover, as the High Court of Justice admitted in a 2001 ruling, this wasn't an oversight; the Knesset considered this issue during the state's early years, but ultimately accepted a public commission's recommendation against restricting lame-duck governments, lest such restrictions hamper their ability to act in an emergency.

But the court, always convinced that it knows better than the legislature and scornful of that quaint democratic principle which holds that law should be made by elected legislators rather than unelected justices, decided decades ago to overrule the Knesset on this issue. True, lame-duck governments are formally empowered to do anything, it declared, but under other High Court rulings dating to the 1980s, no government action is legal unless the court also deems it reasonable, regardless of what the law says. And the justices, together

To understand the absurd lengths to which this has been taken, consider one case now before the court: The government recently created a public commission to probe the Justice Ministry's handling of police misconduct, but the attorney general nixed it, saying a lame-duck government has no such power.

Granted, the timing was political; Ethiopian Israelis, a community Netanyahu sought to woo, are furious with the ministry for what they see as its tolerance of police brutality against them. But so is every other constituency in Israel—left-wing, right-wing, Arab, ultra-Orthodox, you name it. Excluding the police and Justice Ministry staffers, there's a wall-to-wall consensus that the ministry is soft on police brutality. So why bar a lame-duck government from a probe that most Israelis consider long overdue?

Adding insult to injury, the court, as always, is politically biased in enforcing its dictum. Back in 2001, for instance, it deemed it reasonable for Prime Minister Ehud Barak's lame-duck government to reward PLO chairman Yasser Arafat for launching the Second Intifada by offering him most of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and half of Jerusalem, despite overwhelming public opposition. But doing something all Israelis consider essential, like earmarking funds for new hospitals or roads? Absolutely not.

Had the court simply upheld the law and allowed lame-duck governments to exercise their full powers, Israel would not have accumulated such a long list of unaddressed burning issues over the past year, and a critical mass of anti-Netanyahu voters wouldn't have concluded that any government—even one headed by a man under indictment—was better than none at all. In other words, with its own hands, the court created the very problem that may now result in a government willing and able to enact legal reforms that the court itself bitterly opposes.

Reasonable people can disagree over whether that outcome would be good or bad for Israel. But it would undeniably be poetic justice. (JNS Mar 4)

Three Israeli Elections Reconfirm Two Basic Facts

By Jonathan S. Tobin

It took Israeli politics nearly a year to get back to square one.

That's the basic fact to understand about the third round of general voting held within a year. While Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is right to claim the vote as a personal victory, it is only by comparison to his near defeat last September that it can be viewed as a great triumph. Israel's crazy political system may have exhausted and infuriated its citizens, but the three contests held in this period changed very little about the way the country is governed.

As was the case before the first vote, Netanyahu is still the country's most popular politician, though arguments can be made that no one under indictment should stay in power, even if the charges against him are questionable. And yet, a critical mass of Israeli voters doesn't agree, let alone buy the claim that Netanyahu is a threat to democracy or the rule of law. Though it shouldn't have taken three elections to clarify that point, when Netanyahu goes, it will be either of his own volition (something that he doesn't seem to contemplate in the foreseeable future) or because the judicial system takes him down. As long as his fate is in the hands of the voters, he will remain prime minister.

The other main conclusion concerns policy, and it is one that many commentators are ignoring. Though the rest of the world, including some of those running for president of the United States, still advocates for Israel to make dangerous concessions to the Palestinians for peace, the vast majority of Israelis have more or less stopped discussing the issue. Even if many Americans refuse to accept reality, a broad consensus on the lack of a peace partner encompasses not only Netanyahu's right-wing/religious bloc, but also the Blue and White Party, which campaigned on stands virtually identical to those of the prime minister.

These are two basic facts about the country that its foreign friends, and especially its critics, should take to heart.

The process did give birth to a new party—the Blue and White—whose sole goal was to unseat the prime minister.

At times, it seemed as if its members would succeed, despite the

fact that the prime minister's success on both the economic and diplomatic fronts rendered the arguments against him to be more about change for change's sake than anything else. More importantly, at the start of the process, Netanyahu was being threatened with indictments on corruption charges; by the third round of elections 11 months later, he was already indicted. The first procedural elements of his trial take place beginning on March 17.

Netanyahu's opponents underestimated him. They also misjudged the skepticism with which about half the electorate viewed the legal process used to accomplish the desires of the opposition. The effort to topple a sitting prime minister on sketchy charges that, while pointing to behavior that might be characterized as inappropriate, still falls well below the standard that ought to be required in order to unseat an elected leader never seemed credible to anyone that didn't already despise Netanyahu.

All that the three election campaigns have accomplished is to reconfirm that Netanyahu is the country's master politician, and Likud is still its largest party. In the meantime, we've also discovered that Gantz was out of his league by comparison.

While he was a fresh face last April, since then he has been exposed as something of a dud, without a competing vision or much to say at all. Blue and White may have become the new home for those who used to vote for the once-dominant Labor Party; however, Gantz's eagerness to be portrayed as being as tough as Netanyahu on security and as eager to annex the Jordan Valley made him seem superfluous.

Netanyahu helped forge this security consensus with the assistance of Palestinian leaders who have consistently rejected peace offers. And it's reflected in the Middle East plan recently released by the Trump administration—a plan rooted in realism about the Palestinians' lack of desire for true peace and the unrealistic nature of efforts to force Israel to return to the 1967 lines and establish a Palestinian state that won't recognize the legitimacy of a Jewish one, no matter where its borders are drawn.

This realism about security issues is also why the talk about Gantz and Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Lieberman joining with the remnants of Labor to form a government with the participation, either active or tacit, of the Joint Arab List was a nonstarter.

In a refutation of the "apartheid state" libel, Arab voters have the same rights as Jews and turned out to make the Joint List the third largest party in Israel. But no matter how much Gantz and Lieberman might have wanted to replace Netanyahu, they were never going to be able to justify working with parties whose ultimate goal is to eliminate the Jewish state.

Though Netanyahu and his supporters should be pleased with the election results, this isn't a resounding mandate. His bloc will likely fall short of a majority, and he'll need to make a deal with Gantz or defectors from the opposition to form a government to avoid a fourth election. The prime minister likely won't have complete freedom to implement the annexation of Israeli settlements, let alone legislate immunity from the charges that hang over his head.

And though he will remain in office, Netanyahu will be finished if the judges in his trial on corruption charges find him guilty.

In the meantime, his critics need to stop talking about Netanyahu being a threat to democracy. Three elections have confirmed that Israeli voters support the prime minister and his policies, and that the only alternatives can't beat him at the ballot box. The date for the end of the Netanyahu era will only be set by the prime minister himself or the judges at his trial, and not by his political opponents. (JNS Mar 3)

AIPAC Rewards Cory Booker for Abandoning Israel

By Shmuley Boteach

In the fall of 2008, I traveled with Senator Cory Booker to Chicago and presented him to the prestigious AIPAC summit. He then delivered a speech on the Torah portion of the week, Genesis. This speech, and many others that he delivered before AIPAC and pro-Israel audiences throughout the United States, would lead to Cory becoming one of the foremost recipients of pro-Israel donations in America.

But then came the Iran nuclear deal and Cory's utter betrayal of his convictions for political gain. Cory voted to give the murderous mullahs of Iran \$150 billion, facilitating their murder of innocent people worldwide and their wholesale slaughter of political dissidents at home. Even as Iran threatened to annihilate Israel's six million Jews and bring about a second Holocaust, Cory refused to condemn their genocidal promises.

From there, he also voted against the Taylor Force Act that sought to forbid American funds from being used in pay-for-slay salaries to

Palestinian terrorists; condemned the moving of the American embassy to Jerusalem; deleted any mention of Jewish influences or mentorship in his autobiography; voted against the Strengthening America's Security in the Middle East Act, which provided legal cover to state governments that seek to stymie the BDS movement; and infamously took a smiling photograph with Israel-hating BDS leaders, where a text read, "From Palestine to Mexico, all the walls must go." Of course, the wall in Israel has saved thousands of lives from terrorist attacks.

I was shocked to read that at AIPAC's most prestigious plenary session, taking place Monday morning, Cory Booker will follow Vice President Mike Pence as a keynote speaker.

But what has Cory done to deserve such a high honor, unless abandoning Israel's security, funding its genocidal enemies, condemning the United States for recognizing Jerusalem as its capital, and taking selfies with BDS haters counts?

I am a well-known supporter and advocate for AIPAC. But they become their own worst enemy when they undermine their core pro-Israel advocacy with stunts like this. What message does it send to elected officials when those who abandon Israel's security become AIPAC standard-bearers? The people who should be speaking at AIPAC are Democratic heroes like Senator Robert Menendez of New Jersey, Cory's senior senator, who voted against a president of his own party to oppose the Iran deal. Nancy Pelosi's father, Thomas D'Alesandro Jr., was a Democratic congressman who likewise challenged a president from his own party, Franklin Roosevelt, for not doing enough to save Europe's Jews. Heroes like these should be honored by AIPAC.

There is a way back for Cory. He can apologize for having broken his promises to the pro-Israel community. He can acknowledge that being silent in the face of genocide, especially toward a community that loved him like a son, is indecent.

His votes in the Senate must reflect a renewed commitment to Israel's permanence. He should say he regrets condemning America's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and condemn Iran instead for its vile commitment to eradicating the Middle East of all Jews.

Only then, when he has earned it, should Cory be rewarded with the high honor of an AIPAC policy speech. (Agemeiner Mar 2)

The Court must not Interfere with Netanyahu Forming a Government

By David M. Weinberg

Despite Prime Minister Netanyahu's strong showing, it is still not clear what coalition government can or will be cobbled together after this week's Israeli parliamentary election. But one thing is certain: Attempts to use the legal system to thwart a democratic majority government headed by Netanyahu are disgraceful.

The Supreme Court dare not intervene to rule out a Netanyahu prime ministership. Doing so would be a gross overstepping of court authority, a declaration of war against democracy.

Back in January, "Bagatz" (which is the Supreme Court sitting as the High Court of Justice) rejected a petition from a group of hi-tech executives who wanted the court to rule in advance of the election that Netanyahu was unfit to run again for prime minister because of the criminal charges against him. The court rejected the petition on technical grounds – that it was "premature." But it declared the matter "justiciable," meaning the court had jurisdiction and authority to decide Netanyahu's status. It was merely declining to do so at that time.

This week, the court repeated this position. It rejected a petition by The Movement for Quality Government seeking an interim order freezing the president's decision on who to task with forming the next government until government legal advisers issue a detailed opinion on whether the indicted Netanyahu should be allowed to lead a government. Again, the court determined the petition to be "premature" until the president decides who will be tasked with forming the next government.

But in both cases, the court shockingly affirmed its own right to intervene. Some observers had the impression that Supreme Court President Esther Hayut and some of her colleagues, while biding their time, are chomping at the bit to bar Netanyahu from forming another government.

Israel's Basic Laws (essentially, constitutional laws that undergird the entire system of jurisprudence) are clear that a prime minister under indictment can continue to serve; that the President of Israel has absolute personal discretion in giving a government mandate to the MK of his choice; that the President is not subject to the authority of the court (one cannot file a petition against the president); and that the Knesset is free to vote in a government that

reflects the majority will of the people.

But the High Court could, nevertheless, try to subvert the will of the public – which is the core of democracy – and do an end run around the president via a radically expansive “interpretation” of law, as has sometimes been the court’s wont over the past two decades.

The Court is fond of a newfangled term that former court president Aharon Barak concocted, called “essential democracy” (as opposed to pedestrian “functional democracy” where the ballot box is supreme). This means that the court takes on itself a made-up responsibility to set “essential” norms and standards of “decency” for public life, and to apply “broad interpretations” of the law to fit its own perceptions of “reasonability,” “values,” “balance,” “equality” and “propriety” – even if the law books don’t contain any such terms or prescriptions.

Invariably, court decisions that employ such subjective and highly elastic principles tend to usurp Knesset decision-making powers, and almost always are skewed in favor of the radical liberal side of the political spectrum.

For example, the court has acted to dramatically dilute the Jewish dimension of the Jewish-and-democratic equilibrium, by referencing pliant principles of “human dignity and freedom.”

The court also has ruled imperiously with a liberal fist on a broad range of critical issues such as allocation of Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund land, Palestinian residency rights in Israel, rights of foreign converts to citizenship, haredi draft deferments and stipends to yeshiva students, commerce on Shabbat, deportation of illegal migrants and more.

It now threatens to high-handedly annul the all-important Basic Law of 1958: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People – which was a historic, signature piece of supra-court constitutional legislation.

And then we come to Netanyahu. As mentioned, the court already has brazenly determined that it has jurisdiction over the question whether Netanyahu is “fit” to form a government.

This is outrageous. The Israeli public decided that Netanyahu can be prime minister and a defendant at the same time. The Blue & White opposition party made this the central issue of its campaign; and it lost.

Nevertheless, and even though Israeli law expressly allows Netanyahu to continue to serve, the court could fabricate a flimsy, far-fetched rationale for deciding otherwise.

The Supreme Court already has invented gobbledygook terms like “the enlightened values of essential democracy” based on “objective purposes” of the law. This means disconnecting law from the subjective intentions of lawmakers and supplanting such with the “objective ends” of democracy as dictated from on high.

On this basis the court could decide that Netanyahu is too treif (nonkosher) to be sworn in again as prime minister, even before he has his day in court. The court certainly is under pressure from left-wing political and “intellectual” forces to do so.

So much for “innocent until proven guilty” and for “the will of the people.” The gods of the Supreme Court would know better.

In my view, the court mustn’t dare arrogate to itself powers which blatantly usurp and undermine Israeli democracy. It would cause a constitutional crisis that could rip apart Israeli society; it might destroy the court itself.

It is bad enough that Netanyahu’s previous government considered passing legislation that would retroactively grant immunity from prosecution to the prime minister. That would have been indecent. It is bad enough that opposition parties are now considering swift passage of a Basic Law that would retroactively change the rules of the game and prevent Netanyahu from taking office. Equally indecent. Such personally targeted legislation is corrupting and destructive.

For the Supreme Court to get into this rotten game would be disastrous. To the court justices I say: Be careful. Heed Ecclesiastes 2:14, “The wise have eyes in their heads.” (Jerusalem Post Mar 5)

The Rot Inside American Jewish Organizations By Seth Mandel

Something unusual happened in the world of Arab-Israeli negotiations early this year: The Palestinians were given a reason to come to the negotiating table. On January 28, the president unveiled “Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People,” to great fanfare at the White House. The plan leaves open a path to a Palestinian state without holding Israeli security needs and political legitimacy hostage. It calls for a settlement freeze in most of the West Bank and offers amnesty for illegal Palestinian construction, thus giving a boost to Palestinian sovereignty, while allowing Israel to retain control over the areas of the Jordan Valley it deems necessary.

Attending the White House ceremonial release of the plan were envoys from Bahrain, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. In a

statement, the Saudi foreign ministry said it “appreciates the efforts of President Trump’s administration to develop a comprehensive peace plan between the Palestinian and the Israeli sides” and encouraged further talks using the Trump plan as the basis for negotiations. Similar statements came from Morocco and Qatar. Even Egypt chimed in with praise.

The plan is extraordinarily favorable to the Jewish state’s security without condemning a Palestinian state to the dustbin of history, and the Arab world—including Saudi Arabia, the authors of a competing peace plan—are comfortable with it. American Jewry must be over the moon, right?

Well, not exactly.

J Street called it “the logical culmination of repeated bad-faith steps this administration has taken to validate the agenda of the Israeli right, prevent the achievement of a viable, negotiated two-state solution and ensure that Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestinian territory in the West Bank becomes permanent.” A group called National Security Action penned an angry open letter from former administration officials, featuring past U.S. ambassadors to Israel Daniel Kurtzer, Martin Indyk, and Daniel Shapiro, denouncing the peace plan as “a recipe for perpetual conflict” meant to “help re-elect Benjamin Netanyahu.” (This even though Netanyahu’s opponent, Benny Gantz, also backed the plan and enjoyed a smiling Oval Office photo op with Trump the day before.)

The Israel Policy Forum—founded in the wake of the Oslo Accords to satisfy Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s desire for a rival to AIPAC and now advised by prominent philanthropists such as Charles Bronfman, Haim Saban, and Ronald Lauder—called the plan “an Orwellian exercise in doublespeak” intended to bury any chance at peace. The great irony of the Israel Policy Forum’s condemnation is that Rabin himself never expressed support for a Palestinian state and was a consistent opponent of Palestinian autonomy plans that endangered Israel’s security interests in the Jordan Valley.

The idea that the plan might be too favorable to Israel was a particular concern to the Jewish Democratic Council of America. “The complete absence of the Palestinians today speaks volumes about the illegitimacy and naiveté of the process that led to the plan’s creation,” the JDCA said in a statement, blaming everyone but the Palestinians for their intransigence.

True, the American Jewish Committee had only good things to say about it, and the Republican Jewish Coalition and Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations endorsed it. But even AIPAC, while praising Trump’s effort and intentions, equivocated that “both Israeli political leaders view this framework as the basis to restart negotiations with the Palestinians,” distancing the organization from the appearance of a direct endorsement.

What’s happening here is more than a skirmish over a peace plan, or a distressing glimpse into the way American Jewry’s leaders privilege their partisan leanings over the fact that their leadership roles in American society are due to their Judaism and not their Democratic Party membership. What we are seeing is the way American Jewish leaders fail to take seriously the rising tide of anti-Semitism that masquerades as “anti-Zionism”—and even the way progressive groups enable it. Attacking an American plan for its pro-Israel lean is nonsensical for those who should, by the very nature of who they are and what they do, want the United States to have a pro-Israel lean.

There is no future for Jewry without a strong and surviving Israel. Indeed, for the modern Diaspora, no idea has more successfully preserved the notion of an egalitarian Jewish peoplehood—one that crosses languages and religious boundaries—than Zionism. Long before the reestablishment of the State of Israel, Zionists were the Jews dedicated to arguing compellingly for a coherent Jewish identity and thus for Jews as a minority deserving of the rights and recognition afforded others. If American Judaism is to have a chance at survival, it must first realize that that is what it is fighting for.

What does it look like when a national Jewish community understands what’s at stake? The United Kingdom offers a good example. Heading into the December elections, the Labour Party was (and is, for the moment) led by Jeremy Corbyn. He attempted to pass off his admiration for terrorists and his party’s harassment of Jewish politicians and Jewish voters as “anti-Zionism”—as though that were a good thing—but he still ended up proving that the word “Zionist” is just a stand-in for “Jew” in leftist discourse. He claimed that “Zionists,” even those who have lived their whole lives in Britain, “don’t understand English irony.” The Jew, to leftists like Corbyn, will forever be an outsider.

A full 87 percent of UK Jews denounced Corbyn as an anti-Semite. “What will become of Jews and Judaism in Britain if the

Labour Party forms the next government?" Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis wrote in late November in the London Times. "This anxiety is understandable and justified." Jewish Labour groups fought to expose their own party's bigotry, even as whistleblowers faced retaliation. Jews abandoned Labour. In the event, Labour lost the election in a historic landslide.

Such communal solidarity has become distressingly unthinkable in the United States. Consider the story of the anti-Semitic crime spree in New York. For nearly a year, the steady low-level harassment of visible Jews in the Big Apple spiraled deliberately into an open-ended, slow-rolling pogrom outside the city—a broad-daylight massacre at a Jersey City kosher market followed by a Manhattan man driving 30 miles to the Haredi town of Monsey, where he stormed into a rabbi's house with a machete and hacked away at stunned victims.

The media ignored the violence until there was blood in the streets; the organized Jewish world reacted like a deer in the headlights; non-Orthodox rabbis sneered at the Haredi community as it absorbed daily assaults; Jewish intellectuals pretended nothing was happening. Well into the Brooklyn violence, anti-Semitism chronicler Liam Hoare insisted that "despite the endless handwringing about anti-Semitism on the left, it is far-right extremism which constitutes the paramount threat to American Jewish life today." It was a line the Anti-Defamation League had been pushing hard as well. But the renewed violence in the New York area wasn't coming from white nationalists or alt-right posers. Many of the attacks caught on tape featured African-American suspects in outer-borough neighborhoods where religious Jews were framed as land-grabbing outsiders, with some residents telling interviewers they viewed Israel as the point of origin for these Jews. In Jersey City, the shooters were reportedly Black Hebrew Israelites, a kind of extreme black nationalist group, apparently motivated by a conspiracy theory that Jews pull the strings of the police to kill black people—a calumny that took original form as a claim that Israel was training U.S. cops to persecute minorities. "Israel" very quickly becomes "Jews."

The Jewish Democratic Council of America used these horrifying events to try to score partisan points. It tweeted in the wake of the attack: "We stand with the Orthodox community in NY, which has been increasingly under attack, including this past August when NY county GOP leaders launched and defended a Facebook ad campaign alleging Hasidic Jews were 'plotting a take over' of Rockland County."

Such astoundingly vulgar politicking in the wake of a massacre of co-religionists was par for the course for the JDCA, which also announced a swing-state ad campaign calling Trump "the biggest threat to American Jews." The home page of the group's website files every instance of anti-Semitism in America in the past three-plus years under "Anti-Semitism Under Trump." The JDCA even opposed Trump's executive order applying civil-rights protections to Jews on campus with a garbled and petulant statement from its director, the ex-Obama political operative Halie Soifer, that boiled down to not liking it because Trump did it. (The president based his order on an Obama-administration opinion.)

As indefensible as this is, it's tempting to say that we might expect this level of cynicism from an explicitly partisan organization like the JDCA. But there isn't much of a distinction now. Take the ADL, now led—like the JDCA—by a former Obama-administration official guided by partisan politics. During the 2018 midterm election season, the organization put out a guide to "extremist" candidates. All were Republicans. Tablet, meanwhile, put out its own guide to the "Anti-Semitic 8": Four were Democrats, four were Republicans. That is, the Anti-Defamation League had misled American Jews about dangerous anti-Semitism for purely partisan purposes.

What are those partisan purposes? Foremost among them is creating space for the ongoing Democratic Party shift against Israel, which often quickly devolves into rank Jew-baiting and classic anti-Semitic stereotypes. Just look at the Jersey City shooting. The aforementioned conspiracy theory behind it—that Jews manipulate cops to cull the African-American population, based on a program that sees police officers from the U.S. and other countries visit Israel—has been prominently spewed by Linda Sarsour. She was a key electoral ally of New York Mayor Bill de Blasio, and then she led the Women's March, the flagship public protest movement of "the resistance." But Sarsour—who signed a statement saying Zionism is racism, advocates a one-state solution, and says that Israel is built on Jewish supremacism (long a talking point of David Duke's)—is in her most powerful position yet. She is a key campaign surrogate of Senator Bernie Sanders, the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination.

Until recently, the best that ADL's CEO Jonathan Greenblatt could

muster was to announce his "deep opposition to Sarsour's views on Israel." She finally earned tough criticism from Greenblatt late in 2019, but only after years of having her hate whitewashed as legitimate criticism of Israel. That has been the American Jewish leadership's default posture: If a Democrat invokes the word "Israel" or "Zionist," he or she is inoculated against accusations of anti-Semitism.

The result has been an American prefabricated version of Corbynism. Like Malcolm McLaren seeking to re-create the Ramones in London with the Sex Pistols, the Bernie Sanders campaign has become a knockoff, trendy domestic brand. Sarsour is joined in the Sanders camp by Representatives Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) and Ilhan Omar (D-MN). Tlaib has accused American Jews of dual loyalty and remorselessly spread blood libels from Palestinian officials. Omar has also accused Jews of dual loyalty, multiple times, and even faced the possibility of a congressional resolution criticizing her anti-Semitism before Speaker Nancy Pelosi, under pressure from Omar's protector Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and others, backed off. Ocasio-Cortez is also part of the Bernie team and explicitly endorsed Corbyn.

With the backing of Democratic politicians such as these, the left has seized the moment to instigate an all-out attack on the nonpartisan Jewish establishment. In October, the far-left New Israel Fund launched a competitor philanthropy to the Jewish Federations of North America, formerly known as United Jewish Communities. This came after a JFNA would-be donor's gift was rejected by the Federations because it was earmarked for IfNotNow, a radical anti-Zionist group whose members went so far as to facilitate the banning of the Star of David on pride flags at a major gay-pride march in Washington, D.C. As Jonathan Tobin explained at the Jewish News Service, "it is nothing less than an attempt by the Jewish left to topple the basis on which Jewish philanthropy in this country exists."

Just how are groups like IfNotNow punching so far above their weight? The answer is that prominent Democrats, such as Ocasio-Cortez, are promoting them and using them as a shield to deflect accusations that their criticism of Israel strays well outside the mainstream of the American Jewish community. "There are really amazing organizations of young people, groups like IfNotNow, that they are young Jews organizing for justice because they realize that all of our fates and our destinies are intertwined and that there cannot be justice in Israel without justice for Palestinians, too," Ocasio-Cortez told a radio station last July.

It's a deliberate strategy to elevate fringe groups. Tlaib and Omar had a congressional trip to the Palestinian territories canceled by Israel when it was revealed the tour was being funded by an organization that seeks the destruction of the Jewish state. After ripping the Netanyahu government, Tlaib held Shabbat events with the viciously anti-Israel group Jewish Voice for Peace. JVP, to complete the circle, has been one of the more vociferous propagators of the "deadly exchange" conspiracy theory held by the Jersey City shooters.

Substituting progressive politics for religion is one reason that neither the JDCA nor the ADL will cross Team Sanders. But it's a longstanding problem. Following the October 2018 mass shooting at a Pittsburgh synagogue, the Jerusalem Post asked the ADL whether it would finally drop its long-held opposition to federal security grants for synagogues and other houses of worship. The answer was no. The ADL, an official explained, was still opposed on constitutional grounds. In 2004, the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, a project of Reform umbrella groups Union for Reform Judaism and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, put out a memo opposing security funding for Jewish institutions.

Sure, protecting shuls is important, the organization said, but there is "no need to do so in a manner that dangerously threatens the wall separating church and state, which has been a bedrock of democracy and the foundation of religious liberty in our country for more than 200 years." The Reform organization finally dropped its opposition after the Pittsburgh shooting. The "constitutional" issues were a pretext to elevate liberal political stances over Jewish communal needs, but now appear to not be worth the public-relations headache. In December 2019, Trump signed the appropriations bill that included \$90 million in federal security grants for religious institutions, a 50 percent increase over the previous year.

Peace plans that offer Palestinians a pathway to a state are bad; efforts to roust out anti-Semitism on college campuses are bad; federal support for guards protecting Jews at prayer are bad; these are views held in esteem by many rising Jewish organizations.

What happens when not even the Jews will speak out for the Jews? (Commentary Magazine Mar 2020)