

**Avraham
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The writer, head of the Jewish Agency Executive's Department of Organization and Information in Israel, is as familiar with the subject on which he writes as anyone possibly could be. He dealt with it in the long years of his work among youth in America, and as the leader first in Hashomer Hatzair here and later in Americans for Progressive Israel. He adopted this article from a paper he delivered to the World Jewish Congress Governing Council in Geneva.

The New Left, Israel and the Jewish People

BY the end of 1967, Jewish conferences under varying auspices and in different parts of the world were beginning to mention the New Left as a factor with which to be concerned. Some took exception to this concern, claiming that the Jewish element within the New Left was small, on the fringes of the Jewish community, and of little importance in the overall problems of the Jewish people.

Within six months (as evidenced by the major place which the Governing Council of the World Jewish Congress, meeting in Geneva in July, 1968, gave to this subject) the New Left and its role and impact in the Jewish communities was part of every important discussion and report on community problems. The reports on the state of Jewish life in various countries showed that the impact of the New Left could no longer be put into a separate, limited category, but had become an integral aspect of the general situation of many Jewish communities.

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False Separation

Attempts have been made to differentiate the so-called general aspects of the New Left from the Jewish and Israel aspects. But this is clearly a false separation. It is part of our problem that those Jewish frameworks such as the World Zionist Organization, the World Jewish Congress, and others which deal with youth and students tend to put them into a special and separate category, particularly with regard to their Jewish activities. Yet it should be clear that any meaningful approach to the problem of the New Left in its relation to Jews and Israel must start from a general analysis that is not specific to Jews, as such, recognizing that there are Jewish implications which follow.

Who are the New Left? There is a considerable lack of clarity and many variations in defining this movement. For the purpose of our discussion, the New Left may be defined as that young generation of students and young academicians who are the products of the post-atomic era's education explosion. In broad terms, this coincides with the last decade in world history. The starting point may be assumed to be some time after World War II, marked by the beginning of the atomic era and especially accelerated by the Soviet Union's Sputnik.

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The Cold War Period

This period reflected the acceleration of technological advance in all areas of society, the development of automation and cybernetics as the instruments of coping with world power and giant corporate growth, the growing bureaucratization of political, economic and even social structures with the ensuing removal of the mass of the population, and particularly the younger generation, from any participation in the decision-making process, including matters concerning their own lives.

We are dealing with the period in the early and middle 1950's, which saw the height of the Cold War conflict between the two World Powers for domination in all aspects of life. In the United States, this conflict simultaneously was reflected in the McCarthy Era with its atmosphere of control and conformity among the youth and the young generation.

The great speed-up in technological change required a vast expansion of university-level education, and the accompanying lag in social change made it necessary, in a certain sense, to introduce a form of repression indicative of the McCarthy Era.

The impact of these developments on the student generation was aptly characterized as the three C's—caution, conformity and careerism. Ten years ago, Jewish organizations in America were very much concerned that their youth, in responding to the pressures outlined above by seeking careers, refraining from joining organizations and carefully conforming to the acceptable modes of society, were endangering the continuity of Jewish community institutions. Again and again, the leaders of the American Jewish community asked themselves what was the future of the new generation's involvement in Jewish life.

Within a few years, the situation had reached the stage that a socio-philosophical analysis of society came to the conclusion best expressed in the title of a book published in that period, *The End of Ideology*, with its even more expressive sub-title, *A Study of the Exhaustion of the Political Idea*.

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The "New" and "Old" Left

In essence, what had become clear was that the values, the forms and the frameworks which were involved in educating and presenting a meaningful and viable model of society towards which the young generation might aspire had exhausted themselves. The "real" problems of the world remained unsolved. Society had moved into a struggle for power and domination. The great technological advance in the wake of World War II had become an end in itself and society had exhausted itself in terms of human values and political structure.

In brief, this is the background which gave rise to the development and thinking of what we call the New Left. By its very name, the New Left differentiates and separates itself from the "Old" Left. The New Left stated quiet bluntly that the "Old" Left had failed. The ideological parties were not providing the answers. The blatant examples were the revelations of the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party and the Soviet Union's repression of the Hungarian revolt of 1956. In the U.S.A., the suppressive atmosphere of the McCarthy Era, and particularly what came to be considered the bureaucratization of thought and ideas, left its mark on ideological frameworks.

But alongside the failure of the "Old" Left was the perhaps greater disappointment with and failure of liberalism as a base and as a model for thought and action. Liberalism was characterized as rhetoric without deeds. It was bound up with a sterile anti-communism—"a Red under every bed."

With the technological development came a rapid growth of affluence. The acquisition of possessions, of property, became an end in itself. The purpose of a career was not to serve society or even to serve oneself, but to become more affluent. You chose your career on the basis of seeking the largest possible income. Thus, there was a combination of tremendous technological potential and widening affluence alongside of festering social and political problems.

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The Failure of Liberalism

Liberalism had received a great impetus by the historic 1954 Supreme Court decision which struck down the separate and unequal educational facilities for the Negro and called for racial integration in the schools. But it soon became painfully evident that the rights of the Black community would not be achieved by such liberal processes.

The election of John F. Kennedy was accompanied by a great feeling of elation. His call to the intellectual community and to the young generation to join him in remaking America and the establishment of the Peace Corps aroused hopes which were soon dashed in the Bay of Pigs incident which was considered an attempted repression of the Cuban revolution, the revolution of a small country and a small people. New Left literature refers repeatedly to the Bay of Pigs. President Kennedy is not remembered in connection with the emergence of a new generation coming into power or the feeling that youth could change the world, but as another example of the failure of liberalism.

These were the contradictions and this was the atmosphere which gave rise to the phenomenon we call the New Left—an amalgam of ideas, opinions, attitudes and cultural style which reflected the failure of liberalism as well as the failure of the traditional ideological Left to provide answers to the great problems of the day.



The mentors and heroes of the New Left begin with the brilliant, prematurely-dead, young sociologist C. Wright Mills, and include such men as Fidel Castro, Albert Camus, Malcolm X, Franz Fanon, Che Guevara and, more recently, Herbert Marcuse and Regis Debray. What unites these men in the eyes of the young generation is the assertion that the young intellectual can be the agency for social change in our time.

Mills, who was possibly the originator of the term New Left, wrote in 1960 about the force of intellectuals as activists. Others dealt with action and commitment not only as instruments for change but as values in themselves. From such a point of view, resistance to the Establishment and to the pressures of the society became the evidence of commitment. And some of the mentors of the New Left stated that if this resistance occasionally spilled over into violence, it could be philosophically justified.

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Intellectuals as Activists

Thus, there developed a revolt against bureaucracy in government, in corporations, in universities, trade unions, political parties and especially the depersonalizing of human relations. It became clear that the people who were being manipulated by the bureaucracy felt it had acquired the feeling that human beings did not count. One young man at an American university expressed this feeling in these words, "I don't want to be a hole in an IBM punch-card." In essence, he was saying that the world had become a series of automatic mechanisms, machinations, manipulations and the human being had ceased to exist in any real sense. Yet almost all of these young people are students studying at universities and thinking about their future. They want to become experts in some fields and this reflects itself very often in their interests and activities.

Anyone who grew up in a Zionist youth movement, particularly in the period between the two World Wars, will readily recognize the atmosphere within the New Left on the American scene. They speak of themselves as part of "The Movement" (*Ha-tnuah*, in Hebrew) and just as it does not have to be explained to someone who grew up in Zionist pioneering youth circles what it meant or means today to be part of "the *tnuah*," so it is with being part of "The Movement" of the New Left.

They have developed a style of life and a serious literature which is unknown to too many of those who are concerned with the New Left phenomenon.

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"The Movement"

In one of these books, the members of "The Movement" are described as "children of parents who were once poor; of scholars who head today's rich academic institutes; of ex-union organizers who run large businesses; of former slum dwellers who develop large real estate tracts, often segregated; in short, all those who have made it."

In essence, they were saying that their elders had exchanged their decision-making rights for the comforts of affluence while retaining a certain rhetoric about democracy and freedom, but actually converting them into instruments for manipulation and losing their own self-recognition.

This is a self-description by the New Left and does not relate to Jews specifically. But it would be difficult for anyone acquainted with Jewish communities in many parts of the world to fail to recognize the application to the Jewish part of the New Left. The excerpt quoted almost sounds like a specific description of Jewish students and perhaps reflects the substantial participation by Jews in the New Left.

Two major issues in American life have been involved in the development and the struggle of the New Left. Both of them reveal a constant counterpoint of Jewish involvement. These issues do not stem from specific Jewish matters, nor do they involve Jews, as such. But a fine thread of Jewish interaction reveals itself in many ways. One issue is the freedom struggle of the Black people and the race conflict in America. The other is the opposition to the U.S. intervention in Vietnam.

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The Issues

The New Left has found its expression primarily in dealing with these issues, although other matters have also engaged them, including university reform and the attack on poverty.

It is not the purpose of these remarks to go into details about the struggle of the Black community for its rights. What is of importance for us is that many Jewish young people were

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actively involved, and provided their share of the martyrs. In short, they helped achieve the goal of lifting the Black South out of apathy and fear into an attitude of struggle.

But having achieved this much, the Blacks dismissed the white youth and said they would do the rest themselves. The stage of Black auto-emancipation had been reached.

The young Jews who were deeply involved, became confused, and they learned that when the Blacks said "no whites," they also said "no Jews."

A related phenomenon occurred in the political sphere. The leadership of the Black struggle sought to work *within* the existing political structure, as in Mississippi where the "Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party" sent a delegation to the Democratic National Convention in 1964 and asked to be recognized as the legitimate delegates, but were rebuffed.

One of the questions the Blacks then asked was, "Why don't the Jews, who are important in the Democratic Party, help us?"

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Two Reactions

Two reactions followed this rejection. One was a growing disillusion with the existing political process and structures. The other was the feeling that if the Jews had really wanted to help them, they had enough influence to do so. From this came the conclusion that since the Blacks were rejected, the Jews apparently did not want to help.



There has been much talk about Black anti-semitism and its relation to the Black Muslim movement, and as a reflection of the Arab-Israel conflict. But the Black Muslim movement was not a reaction to Jews or Judaism or Israel; it was a reaction to the white Christian society. Blacks decided that the epitome of opposition to white Christianity was Black Islam.

The interaction with Jews was a later development reflecting the desire to internationalize the Black problem in the U.S.A. by identifying it with the struggles of the Third World. The Middle East conflict became entangled with this aim and the result was an increasingly complicated ambivalence between Blacks and Jews.

This ambivalence reveals itself in another aspect. Some very interesting sociological research in the United States shows that Blacks prefer Jews as employers above all others. At the same time, they feel that Jews are more responsible for their plight than others.

This ambivalence extends to the American Jewish community as part of the dominant Establishment which is the antithesis of the Afro-Asian Third World. Moreover, since American Jews are identified with Israel to an overwhelming extent, the "logical" extension is not to view Israel as part of the Afro-Asian world, with the resultant antagonism to Jews and to Israel becoming entangled in tragic fashion. Moreover, since Nasser and the Arab countries have identified themselves with the Third World, it followed that the Arab-Israel conflict was resolved by Blacks in favor of the Arabs, without much attention to the facts or the details of the Middle East situation.

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An Encounter

Consider the encounter between the Israel Minister to Washington, Ephraim Evron, and some of the young leaders of the Black community in the Watts district in Los Angeles. Evron tried to explain that Israel was a pioneering and progressive factor in the Middle East, that it sought new forms of society to eliminate the discriminations of modern and earlier times, that it took the desert wasteland and made it bloom—in short, the history and ideals that might be heard at any good Zionist youth gathering.

The young Black leader who answered him said very simply, "But you built all that on our backs!" And when he was asked to explain, he said, "Well, the Jewish employers who paid us low wages and exploited us gave big contributions to Israel so that you could fructify the desert, and you did all that on our backs!" Here is a blatant expression of the entanglement which results in anti-Israel and anti-Jewish attitudes.

We may turn now to the other major issue which concerns the New Left—the anti-war movement. Here again is a general movement which concentrates on rejecting U.S. intervention in Vietnam. It is probable that the major, if not the overwhelming, sentiment among American Jews has been generally against the war. In this sense, the Jewish thread ran parallel to the general anti-war, New Left trend.

But at the same time, there was another kind of involvement, that of the students themselves. Since the possibility of avoiding the draft to serve in Vietnam was largely dependent on one's status as a student, and since a substantial proportion of Jewish youth (probably 75% or more) are students, there was another Jewish thread running through the fabric of the anti-war movement.

The Six-Day War came in June, 1967, and brought with it, in terms of the New Left and the Jews, the real trauma of adjustment. Since the crucial issue was opposition to U.S. intervention in the Vietnam War, the question was immediately raised, why support intervention in the Middle East conflict on the side of Israel?

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An Inaccurate Picture

Debates broke out within the "Old" and the New Left and quickly spread through the entire spectrum of left-wing journalistic opinion. There has been much talk about the largely anti-Israel stand of the Left. This is not an accurate picture. There was a great deal of ambivalence and much confusion. The leading publication of the New Left, *Ramparts*, printed articles on both sides of the question. All five writers who were involved were Jews. Other publications such as the *Village Voice*, *Dissent*, *Monthly Review* and the *New York Review of Books* also showed considerable ambivalence and confusion. Only *The Minority of One* was clearly pro-Israel in its approach, while *The National Guardian* was entirely anti-Israel in its articles if not in the letters from its readers.

It is interesting that the non-ideological tendencies in the New Left, coupled with this ambivalence ("it would be too bad if Israel were destroyed") led to a dependence on "Old" Left attitudes when it came to Israel. There were two self-complementing images involved which distorted the picture and prevented clear analysis and honest thinking. One

was the general approach repeated by the Communists over the years that Israel and Zionism were a creation and tool of imperialism and therefore wrong *a priori*. The other was that the Arab states were part of the Third World and therefore progressive by definition, and thus anything they did was right.

Sober and logical analyses of the Middle East situation were brushed aside because they did not meet the self-image of the New Left. It mattered little if one explained that Israel was born in an anti-imperialist struggle against the British Empire, that its creation was supported jointly by the Soviet Union and the United States, and that it was always opposed by the American oil monopolies, or that the so-called "progressive" Arab world was dominated by military castes or reactionary monarchists and had a history and a present (in the Sudan) of oppressing and massacring Blacks.

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Communist Positions

The fact that the New Left by and large was not prone to ideological analysis led to the adoption of certain positions projected by the remnants of the "Old" Left. The Communist Party, proclaiming the Soviet Union's position, influenced certain parts of the New Left. But there were other approaches which varied according to the group which espoused them.

They included a call for the "de-Zionization" of Israel, while endorsing the rights of the "Hebrew nation" to self-determination; or, the Israel-Arab conflict is a consequence of Soviet-American collusion and the Arab leaders oppressing their own people because they only want a bigger share of the oil—but, since Israel is a "stooge" of the U.S., the Arabs should be supported; or, "a plague on both the Israelis (outpost of imperialism) and the Arabs (only interested in power politics and never struggling against oil monopolies)"; or, Egypt is responsible for Middle East tensions but Israel flouts the United Nations and should return to pre-war boundaries; or, a call for the territorial integrity of all states in the Middle East and the need for direct negotiations; or, the decision of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) to take no position at its convention, although the Arab propagandist was present and tried to force through an anti-Israel resolution which was tabled.

In September, 1967, the New Politics Con-

ference took place in Chicago. It was an attempt to forge a new coalition force on the left, based on bringing together the broad opposition to the war in Vietnam with militant Black elements and anti-poverty groups. The organizers dreamed of a presidential ticket headed by Dr. Martin Luther King (to be murdered less than six months later) and Dr. Benjamin Spock (to be judged guilty of counselling draft evasion less than a year later) to oppose the candidates of the traditional political parties.

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Failure of Communication

The New Politics Conference foundered on the failure of communication between the two groups in its make-up and the lack of support in the labor movement. All the Black delegates, ranging from Dr. King's non-violent followers all the way over to the extreme Black Power elements, formed a Black caucus.

The initiators of the conference included a substantial number of Jews, and the 2,000 delegates, of whom at least forty percent were under thirty years of age, included many Jews, perhaps 25% of the white delegates. The Black caucus numbered about 250, but by threatening to walk out and break up the conference, it dominated the proceedings.

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The Resolution

Much has been written about the so-called influence of Communists among both white and Black delegates, but this observer can testify that the Communists and representatives of other "Old" Left groups who were present found themselves bypassed and even ignored. The fact is that the majority of the delegates, especially the younger ones, simply rejected the idea of working within the political system even under the banner of a radical party. They called for grass roots work "with and among the people." The conference bookshop was piled high with unsold radical pamphlets, tracts and books, while the psychedelic posters and slogan buttons were all sold.

The Black caucus presented a 13-point program which included only one item not related directly to the U.S.A. or the Black community — on the Middle East conflict. When a Black leader was asked why they did not include a reference to the Greek military upheaval which had just taken place, his answer was that it was not "relevant to Black interests."

The Black caucus resolution in its original form read: "We condemn the imperialist Zionist war; this condemnation does not imply antisemitism." A sharp debate apparently took place within the Black caucus. The followers of Dr. King, Floyd McKissick, the leader of CORE, and other moderates sought to eliminate this resolution. They failed. When sharp objection was also voiced by some white leaders, the wording of the resolution was changed to read: "We condemn the imperialist Israeli Government; this condemnation does not imply antisemitism." This was intended to indicate that neither the State of Israel nor the Jewish people were being rejected, but only the actions of the Israel Government.

A few weeks later, McKissick delivered a generally unnoticed speech which was reported in *The New York Times* in which he condemned antisemitism and pointed out that he could not reject Zionism, which was the nationalism of the Jews, because Black nationalism was nothing more or less than Black Zionism.

Only a small number of the Jewish delegates left the New Politics Conference in protest against the anti-Israel resolution which was adopted in a single package with the entire proposal of the Black caucus by a three to one margin. Many of the young Jewish delegates who voted for the resolution as a whole said that they "owed" it to the Blacks to support their demands because of their "past subjugation." Even those who felt uncomfortable about the finger pointed at Israel, revealed attitudes of considerable self-rejection and even self-hatred as Jews.

Robert Scheer, the editor of *Ramparts*, tried to amend the resolution to include condemnation of reactionaries and chauvinists on both sides and calling for efforts by progressives in Israel and the Arab countries to work for peace, but he was voted down.

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Confusion Continues

Following the failure of the New Politics Conference, many, if not all, New Left white elements continued to show confusion. The extremist Black elements, and especially SNCC, led by Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown and James Forman, were fanatically anti-Israel, spilling over into flagrant antisemitism.

Yet, this was not the entire story. The movement for draft resistance continued to

spread among students and young professors, supported by certain church forces and some rabbis. A number of bulletins distributed on various campuses by New Left draft resistance groups included articles on Israel as a possible haven for its followers. One such article spoke of job opportunities there as well as places in Israel universities, and of a sympathetic government and population. The article went on to recommend a year in a kibbutz and consideration of the possibility of emigration. The article, of course, was written by a Jew.

It is erroneous to categorize the entire New Left as an anti-Israel element or as open to antisemitic thinking. Yet, the problem of self-image has often placed Israel, Zionism and Jewish peoplehood outside the acceptable categories of self-identification.

In lecturing on the meaning of Israel in our time at a university campus, the right of the Jewish people to self-determination was projected as the essential meaning of Zionism. A young woman who had spent two years in Israel at a university and spoke Hebrew fluently and then had spent a year in Mississippi teaching in the Freedom Schools and later had participated actively in anti-war demonstrations, responded by equating Zionism with "her mother's Hadassah luncheon" and with the Jewish Establishment. She did not want anything to do with either.

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Failure of Communication

There has been a serious failure of communication. Jewish and Israel community leaders talk *about* the New Left and its Jewish components, but they rarely talk *to* them or work *with* them. There has been little thought about projecting the concepts about the Jewish people, Zionism and Israel that are self-evident to an older generation in terms that are understandable to the younger generation and meet their criticisms of society and of the Jewish community.

Israel is a major factor in all their considerations about themselves as Jews. They have no alternative but to look upon themselves as Jews in relation to their attitude to Israel. If they reject Israel and this fits in with their general alienation from the Jewish community, or their rejection of their particular situation, or the affluence of their own families, the interaction is evident. If they reject Israel while the Jewish community represents those who

support Israel, their attachment to the Jewish community is damaged.

Is it possible that we are in an era analagous to the early days of the Zionist movement? Was not Zionism at that time an attempt to break out of the existing forms and structures of the Jewish community, an attempt to find replacements for the outmoded and petrified aspects of Jewish life? If Zionism at that time represented an effort to change the Jewish image, to create a new Jewish man, to redefine Jewish goals and purposes, then the Jewish situation today requires a similar and renewed effort.

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New Set of Goals

The possibilities of meeting the challenges presented by the younger generation are dependent on setting forth a new set of goals and purposes. What is needed is a renewal of pioneering, of the ideals which went into the making of Israel. It is not accidental that even at universities where Israel's sharpest antagonists are encountered, there is a desire to hear about the kibbutz as a new form of living and as an attempt to come to terms with some of the problems of modern society. The only course dealing with Israel or the Jewish people included in the curriculum of the "Free University" established at the Sorbonne by the rebelling French students after they forced the closing of the universities in the summer of 1967, was about the kibbutz.

The change which must be brought about demands a break in the *status quo* of Jewish leadership. There are two seemingly contradictory aspects to this problem. On the one hand, it should be evident that the entry of the younger generation into the leadership of Jewish communities and organizations can create a new image which enables young people to talk to their peers and students to reach out to other students.

But to ask the present leadership to step aside does not assure that there will be someone to come in their place. The preparatory work has not been done. It is in this connection that a re-examination of the aims and premises of Jewish community life is required.

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Parochialism and Isolation

It has been correctly pointed out that Jewish community life is too often characterized by parochialism and isolationism. It is essential

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that Jews involve themselves in universal hu-
man problems through Jewish channels. This
is a crucial aspect of changing the *status quo* in
the Jewish community and its leadership. We
require fundamental changes in our premises
and forms and a re-examination of our aims
if we are to reach the young.

A revealing example of the problem followed
the great outpouring of young Jews who came
as volunteers in the wake of the Six-Day War.
Approximately seven thousand arrived in Israel
from among the 20,000 who actually registered
in the various parts of the world. Some re-
search about motivations and attitudes was
carried on among these volunteers.

It is not the purpose of this paper to analyze
the results, except for some light they throw
on certain assumptions of Jewish life. One of
the questions asked was about attitudes to
intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews.
Fifty-eight percent ranged from very positive
to neutral and only 36% were clearly opposed.
When asked about intermarriage between
whites and Blacks, 45% were favorable and
again 36% were opposed. Yet, when the very
same volunteers were asked about their atti-
tude to the Jewish religion, 58% responded
that they were favorably inclined. When asked
about their attitude to Jewish culture, 84%
were positive and only 2% were negative. And
these volunteers presumably had a predisposi-
tion to Jewish identification as evidenced by
their volunteering for Israel.

What is clear is that an affirmative involve-
ment with Israel and Judaism does not pre-
clude identification with the attitudes, actions
and thinking of the New Left. Nor does the
reverse, a deep involvement with New Left
actions, as indicated in the previously-men-
tioned comment about draft resistance in
American universities, preclude an affirmative
attitude to Israel and Jewish concerns. When
a student chooses to go to Israel to do some
constructive work in a society which does not
impose the pressures he is resisting, he is be-
ginning to see himself and the Jewish com-
munity differently.

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Is it Worth It?

The final question is whether it is worth
spending time, money and energy on the New
Left, which involves such a relatively small
portion of the total Jewish community. The
answer is that it is eminently worth the effort.

I am convinced that the New Left with all its
confusions and negations is the forerunner of
profound radical changes in our society. Either
we shall learn how to communicate with the
New Left and seek to find channels to their
Jewish elements or we shall lose an important
part of the prospective sources of leadership in
Jewish life.

This will not be achieved by denigrating
their purposes or by returning to standard
liberal cliches and heroes as proposed in a
recent article on the New Left (in *Patterns of
Prejudice*—April, 1968). To blame the New
Left for certain reactionary trends in America
and other countries, is to distort the source of
evil and slough off our own responsibilities.

The World Jewish Congress and the World
Zionist movement, in a deeper sense, have
special roles to play in seeking a new form of
action, universal humanism through Jewish
channels and above all, through Israel. But
neither speeches nor articles are sufficient or
meaningful unless room is found at every leader-
ship table for the younger generation. In short,
it is not only worth the effort, but it is es-
sential if we expect to bring these thinking
young people into the leadership of the
Jewish communities and of Israel in the next
generation.

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