

fellows wisely, and in the process do well by themselves and their families. On the other hand, it seems that John O'Hara's Pottsville chose the wrong crowd.

In any event, by the time of the Great Depression, Wilkes-Barre's domination of the northern anthracite region was in swift decline. Not only did the economic collapse of those years break the city's economic hold over the region, but competition from new fuels further undermined anthracite, and then new patterns of industry finished the job. A similar collapse in the bituminous coal region of Western Pennsylvania left considerable desolation in its wake. Professor Davies does not tell us what was left in the East. ■

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The Prophetic Minority: American Jewish Immigrant Radicals, 1880-1920. By Gerald Sorin.

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, Pp. x, 211.
 Preface, notes, bibliography, index, illustrations. \$24.95.)

In 1984 Jewish voters chose Fritz Mondale over Ronald Reagan by a two-to-one margin.¹ This result was all the more remarkable since Jews are now the most prosperous major religious group in America.² If Jews had behaved like other Americans of comparable economic status, their votes would have gone more than two-to-one for the Republicans. For years, some social commentators have predicted that Jewish economic success would eventually stimulate a marked ideological shift of Jews to the right. While the visibility of a number of prominent ex-leftist Jewish intellectuals among the leadership of so-called neoconservatives appears to give credibility to that argument, it has not happened at a mass level. Jews rejected Ronald Reagan in 1984 even more decisively than they had in 1980.³

American Jews have always been disproportionately associated with liberal causes and radical movements. Of all of the ethnic groups in America in the early 1900s, only Finns (a numerically insignificant group from a national perspective) had a greater propensity than Jews to support the Socialist Party. The Jewish Lower East Side in New York was one of two congressional districts in the entire country to

elect a socialist congressman (Meyer London, the son of a Talmudic scholar, elected in 1914, 1916, and 1920). In the 1930s close to half of American Communists were Jewish, while Jews were also dramatically overrepresented in the 1960s among both white supporters of the civil rights movement and the New Left. In Pittsburgh, the Jewish socialist fraternal society, the Workmen's Circle, had nearly 2,000 members in 1910, while more than 1,000 primarily Jewish cigar makers joined an IWW-led strike in 1913.⁴

Gerald Sorin's *The Prophetic Minority* is a collective biography of 170 Jewish immigrants who became socialists between 1880 and 1920. By looking at their lives, he seeks to explain the roots of Jewish radicalism in America. Collective biography, Sorin hopes, will allow him to analyze systematically the question of motivation by discerning patterns among a relatively large number of people. At the same time, since the analysis is based on detailed accounts of the lives of specific individuals, this method potentially allows him to address a much wider range and more intimate set of explanations than alternatives such as quantitative analysis among larger sample populations of voting patterns, collective behavior, or social statistics.

Many other people have written on this theme. One of Sorin's objectives is to refute some of their theories of Jewish radicalism. While such experiences as proletarianization, poverty, and discrimination certainly contributed to the receptiveness of immigrant Jews to radical ideologies, by themselves, Sorin argues, these experiences could not have been decisive. Many other groups suffered as much as Jews, but were not as attracted to socialism. Nor does Sorin find much to substantiate theories which depict Jews as "marginal men" and imply that radicalism was a pathological response of those who were emotionally or psychologically maladjusted or incapable of adapting to the harsh realities of ghetto life. Quite the contrary, Sorin finds that immigrant socialists were well integrated into family, community, and culture and were generally happy, capable, and successful people with no particular tendency for breakdown or emotional problems. Nor do the stories of these people provide any support for the arguments of those who have seen Jewish radicalism as a rejection of Jewish tradition and a form of Jewish self-hatred. Nearly all of the Jews in Sorin's study grew up in households which inculcated Jewish religion and culture. Most of them continued to actively identify with and participate in Jewish institutions after they became socialists. A minority did reject religion as superstition and oppose observation of ritual, but even they continued to draw on Jewish ethical and historical traditions for political inspiration.

To Sorin, these traditions are the key. While other factors contributed, more than anything else the source of Jewish radicalism was the historical memory and ethical content of Jewish culture and above all, Jewish religion.

Sorin's argument is clear and convincing. He may have been too quick, however, to reject the marginality thesis. When *marginal* is defined as *outsider*, rather than in pathological terms, marginality may be quite consistent with Sorin's ethical-religious theory. As Arthur Hertzberg has recently argued,¹ the essence of the chosen people concept, so central to Jewish religious identity, is *self-imposed* marginality. Such key parts of traditional Jewish ritual as male circumcision and Kosher dietary laws were designed to establish the distinctiveness of Jews, marking them off from those around them. Only by remaining outside, different from others, could Jews perform their divinely-ordained role as moral critics and moral leaders by example. In a secular age, the functional content of this doctrine overlapped the vanguardism of classical Marxism and Leninism. Twentieth-century Jewish radicals felt morally driven to criticize the injustices of their fellow men and women, and to stoically withstand whatever abuse they received as a result, just as their ancestors had believed that they had to live righteous and observant lives as an example for the rest of humanity, regardless of the hostility that their customs aroused.

Sorin is occasionally overzealous in establishing his social-scientific credentials and engages in some questionable statistical interpretations (drawing statistical conclusions on small numbers of cases, failing to specify clearly the basis of classifying cases into statistical categories, attempting to quantify personal characteristics that may be too ambiguous to classify and quantify), but these methodological quibbles do not seriously detract from the overall quality and persuasiveness of the book. Anyone interested in the topic will find his argument thought-provoking, his descriptions rich, and his exceptionally fine biography a useful guide to further study. ■

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¹ According to the *New York Times*/CBS News exit poll (*New York Times*, Nov. 8, 1984), the Jewish vote split 66 percent Mondale and 32 percent Reagan. According to some other estimates (see Arthur Hertzberg, "Reagan and the Jews," *New York Review of Books*, Jan. 31, 1985), the Jewish vote for Mondale was a few percentage points higher than the *New York Times*/CBS estimate.

- 2 According to Thomas J. Archdeacon, *Becoming American* (New York, 1983), 224, 27.4 percent of the Jews in a series of surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center in the late 1970s had incomes over \$25,000 per year compared to 7.6 percent of Catholics and 6.4 percent of white Protestants. Episcopalians, the most prosperous Protestant denomination, had 12.4 percent over \$25,000.
- 3 In 1980, the Jewish vote went 39 percent Reagan, 45 percent Carter, and 15 percent Anderson, according to a *New York Times*/CBS News poll.
- 4 Ida Selavan, "The Jewish Labor Movement in Pittsburgh," unpublished M.A. paper, University of Pittsburgh, 1971, 3-12.
- 5 Arthur Hertzberg, "The Triumph of the Jews," *New York Review of Books*, Nov. 21, 1985, 18-22.

The Davis Island Lock and Dam, 1870-1922.

By Leland R. Johnson.

(Pittsburgh: U.S. Army Engineer District, 1985. Pp. ix, 170.

Foreword, preface, illustrations, maps, bibliography.

\$8.50 cloth; \$5.50 paper.)

In commemoration of the centennial of the opening of the first lock and dam on the Ohio River, the Pittsburgh District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has published this small volume by Leland R. Johnson, the "noted historian of waterway engineering." In ten brief chapters, he tells the story of the planning, construction, and development of the Davis Island Lock and Dam which became the prototype of the fifty locks and dams later constructed on the Ohio River and, when completed, was the largest navigational lock and the longest "Chanoine dam in the world." Johnson puts the Davis project, located five miles from the Point, within the overall planning of the corps, the technological evolution of construction techniques, the support of some (but not all) business interests in Pittsburgh, the corrective engineering changes to the lock and dam, and the impact that this project had on subsequent and similar projects. In addition, the significant roles of Col. W. E. Merrill, who directed the project, his engineers, and the leaders of the Pittsburgh business community are made clear.

The continuing problem of low water at Pittsburgh during several months each year prevented steamboats, towboats, and barges from moving down the Ohio River. By 1871, it was determined that the city needed a harbor in order to have year-round navigation. After much debate and research, a lock and dam was deemed more appropriate