

GOLDSTEIN, *THE POLITICS OF ETHNIC PRESSURE\**

Two book-length volumes dealing with the American Jewish Committee (AJC) appeared in 1972. The first, Naomi W. Cohen's *Not Free to Desist: A History of the American Jewish Committee, 1906-1966*, has become the standard history of the organization, and is well known to all students of American Jewish history. The second, Judith S. Goldstein's Columbia University doctoral dissertation on the AJC's fight against immigration restriction (1906-1917), is practically unknown, but merits careful reading. With the publication of this dissertation in Garland's series on European Immigrants and American Society, it should now receive more widespread attention.

Goldstein focuses on the two political issues of greatest importance to early twentieth-century American Jews: the battle against immigration restrictions (particularly the literacy test), and the fight to abrogate the Russian-American Commercial Treaty of 1832. Both of these episodes have been widely studied before (and since), Naomi Cohen's work being particularly well known. Goldstein, however, approaches these issues from a novel perspective; she treats them as case studies in Jewish political lobbying and pays particular attention to the AJC's battle strategy and how it evolved. Reading primary sources from this vantage point, she demonstrates that the AJC played its political hand adroitly, utilizing diverse tactics and effective behind-the-scenes techniques of bargaining. In campaigning for abrogation, for example, it skillfully exploited President Taft's sinking political fortunes and turned them to advantage. It also organized public demonstrations against the treaty—a surprise, considering AJC's vehement opposition to these kinds of mass protests in later years. It even dangled discreet political promises concerning "the Jewish vote" when this proved expedient, although publicly, of course, it disclaimed that any such Jewish vote even existed.

Goldstein paints a far more negative portrait of Theodore Roosevelt's relationship to the Jewish community than have previous studies, but on the other hand, her portrait of Taft is more positive. In both cases her correctives are useful. Her conclusion concerning the AJC's attitude toward East European Jewish immigrants is similarly balanced. Without minimizing the paternalism and the feelings of superiority that characterized the "Yahudim" of the AJC, she properly underscores their untiring efforts on behalf of their less fortunate coreligionists. "The AJC leaders always believed," she writes, "that the Russian Jews should have the opportunity and would have the ability to adapt to American life" (p. 5).

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\* Judith S. Goldstein. *The Politics of Ethnic Pressure: The American Jewish Committee Fight Against Immigration Restriction, 1906-1917*. European Immigrants and American Society. New York: Garland Publishing, 1990. Pp. 352.

Those who read Goldstein today must constantly keep in mind that her work was completed almost two decades ago, and has not been revised to take into account important recent scholarship. Nor has her volume been supplied with an index—the minimum that would have been expected from a book carrying such a hefty price tag. Still, the book does deserve a place in all good American Jewish history collections. It may also serve as a model for others seeking a balanced and insightful understanding of American Jewish political lobbying in the twentieth century.

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