

ment-wide Israel Emergency campaigns.

We also use the funds to support our advocacy efforts, such as securing passage of legislation requiring that hot meals be served in Israeli public schools. We are lobbying for a “Good Samaritan” law which would allow businesses to donate leftover food without fear of litigation. We are also part of coalitions which advocate on behalf of disadvantaged groups such as single mothers, people with special needs, and Darfurian refugees seeking asylum in Israel.

What is IRAC doing to try to break the Orthodox monopoly on religious affairs?

IRAC confronts this monopoly on multiple levels. Legally, through our Resource Allocations Monitoring Project (RAMP), we track the amount of money allocated to Orthodox institutions and rabbis as compared to non-Orthodox organizations and then use the evidence we find of unjust and unequal government funding to prove discrimination. This becomes the basis for our cases concerning Reform synagogue buildings, Reform representation on local Religious Councils, and recognition of Reform rabbis in Israel. We also use litigation when Orthodox communities or institutions abuse their power, such as taking over synagogues or forcing gender segregation on some public buses.

Simultaneously, on the advocacy front, we support the passage of bills that will promote a more pluralistic and democratic Israel, such as the creation of a civil marriage option. And our staff is constantly blocking a barrage of proposed bills that would further enshrine Orthodox party power, such as a proposed law that would have made it mandatory for all government committees to have an ultra-Orthodox representative.

I’ll be the first to admit, however, that even with all of our legal and advocacy work, it is difficult to make headway.

Why is that?

In large part because neither the left nor the right has been able to gain a clear majority in the Knesset. After every election the ruling coalition is dependent on the Orthodox voting bloc, which demands

“One of our projects is a used-clothing store inside Reform Congregation Kehillat Tzur-Hadassah for haredi (ultra-Orthodox) single mothers. The ‘customers’ fill large plastic bags with the (donated) clothes they need—as well as garments they later resell. I asked one of the single mothers what she thought of this unlikely relationship, and she said, ‘Oh, we didn’t know Reform Jews were such good people.’”

full control of Israel’s Jewish religious institutions as the price of joining the coalition—and the Reform and Conservative Movements thus are sold out.

Another reason is that North American Jews have been too passive about demanding their full religious rights in Israel.

Maybe we’re just realistic—we don’t have the numbers to constitute a swing vote in Israel.

That’s a false, Orthodox argument. Not long ago the Minister of Religious Affairs said to me, “We’ll talk when you bring a million Reform Jews to Israel.” “If we were to bring a million Reform Jews to Israel,” I told him, “then one of our leaders would be the Minister of Religious Affairs—and not you.” In a democracy it’s the minority’s rights that must be protected. If Israel claims to be the state of the Jews, with Jerusalem the capital of the Jewish world and the Western Wall the holiest site of the Jewish people, then Israel has to adopt practices that reflect the realities of the larger Jewish world. Let’s not buy the line: “When you make *aliyah* en masse, we’ll talk.” We must speak out now so we are heard now.

Why do you think Reform Jews are so reluctant to speak out?

They have been conditioned to sacrifice their desires and needs for the sake of Jewish unity: “Don’t stir up trouble; don’t rock the boat. Israel has much bigger challenges to deal with right now.” Well, in all this time there’s never been a quiet moment for Israel, so that line of thinking is simply a copout. If we believe Union for Reform Judaism President Rabbi Eric Yoffie when he says that what happens in the Jewish state determines what’s going to happen in the Jewish world as a whole, let’s go fight for the future of the Jewish world by demanding that Israel be a pluralistic, egalitarian, and tolerant society. If the largest stream of Judaism in North America makes a nuisance of itself with the Israeli public, decision makers, and government policymakers, it will be

heard in Israel—and that’s political power. That’s how change happens.

Let me add here that the Reform Movement in North America has been very influential for us in other ways.

How so?

One of IRAC’s leading strategies, which we’re putting into practice in our “Just Communities” (*Kehillat Tzedek*) project, was actually taught to us by your Rabbi Jonah Pesner [director of the Union for Reform Judaism’s “Just Congregations” project]: organizing for social change by getting to the root of the problem and joining forces with other stake-holding groups. Also, with the guidance of Rabbi Richard Address [who heads the Union’s Department of Jewish Family Concerns], we’ve implemented *Kehillat Tzedek* caring community programs in more than fifty congregations across Israel. And when I say “we,” here I mean Reform, Conservative, secular, and Orthodox activists—ten Modern Orthodox communities have joined the group. This diversity of activists working together in Israel is a very hopeful development and, I believe, emblematic of Reform Judaism’s unique contribution to Israel: social action in a religious setting.

One of our projects is a used-clothing store for *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) single mothers in the development town of Beit

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