

L E T T E R S

Southern Rabbis & Civil Rights

The photo of a beaten, bloodied Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld in the Summer 2011 edition highlighting the heroic contributions of Northern rabbis who visited the South to participate in the Civil Rights movement tells only part of the Civil Rights struggle. Much of the work was about effecting *teshuvah*—getting people who were racist to realize that racial equality is the better way. And the decades-long progress to overcome community systems plagued with racism was made by Reform rabbis and other moral leaders who lived in the South.

Rabbi Jacob Rothschild of Atlanta worked to get his congregants to join in the push for desegregation—even though such actions could have endangered their tenuous position in Atlanta society. He also befriended Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and—at a time when this was quite daring—invited him and

Mrs. King to dinner in the Rothschilds' white neighborhood.

Rabbi Zeke Palnick of Little Rock, Arkansas organized a group of prominent clergymen—white and black—to march into the state capitol and convince the governor to desegregate the capitol's dining room. A white Methodist (who would be considered more “mainstream”) served as spokesman, explaining that they were all local and represented local morality. Their moral demand could not be cast as the work of “outside agitators” and thus ignored.

Southern rabbis such as these—and all who supported them—represent both the enduring commitment and the success of our Reform Movement in bringing about social justice.

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Support Collective Bargaining

Those who are opposed to public employees having the right to collectively bargain often base their argument, as does Rabbi Clifford Librach (“Debatable: Should Jews Support a Union’s Right to Collective Bargaining?”), on the misrepresentation that the issue concerns only money and benefits. Collective bargaining is about far more than negotiations over salary and “goodies,” as Rabbi Librach describes them. Here in Wisconsin, Gov. Walker has taken away public employees’ rights to negotiate working conditions—hours of work, size of classrooms for teachers, dangerous overtime for nurses, unsafe conditions for corrections officers, to

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