

**POLITICS & GOVERNMENT***Doves' Debate*

"Fighting Among the Doves" by James Finn, in *Worldview* (Apr. 1977), 170 E. 64th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Among American former antiwar activists, as *Worldview* editor Finn reports, bitter controversy has broken out over evidence of totalitarian repression in South Vietnam. In Manhattan, one faction (including Finn) sent a public "Appeal" to Hanoi, December 29, protesting the Communists' detention of many leading non-Communist foes of the wartime Saigon regime. They urged Hanoi to "honor the concern for human rights which you have expressed [to visiting] peace activists." The Appeal's 120 signers included singer Joan Baez, writer Daniel Ellsberg, historian Staughton Lynd, poet Allen Ginsberg.

A paid counterstatement later appeared in the *New York Times*. Its signers included Princeton law professor Richard Falk, pacifist David Dellinger, and Richard Barnet of Washington's Institute for Policy Studies. South Vietnam, they asserted, was a special case; the "present suffering" there was "largely a consequence of the war itself," for which the United States bears a "continuing responsibility." Assessing the doves' continuing debate, Finn quotes from French journalist Jean Lacouture: "It is better for someone trying to preserve intact his admiration for a revolution not to know its victims."

*American Jews as Voters*

"The Roots of American Jewish Liberalism" by Ben Halpern, in *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* (Dec. 1977), 2 Thornton Rd., Waltham, Mass. 02154.

Why do American Jews consistently vote as political liberals, regardless of party alignment, class status, and economic interest? Many analysts cite traditional Jewish cultural values—charity, reverence for learning, and a concern for "life-in-this-world"—as an explanation. Halpern, professor of Judaic studies at Brandeis, believes otherwise. Jewish liberalism, he argues, is a political development largely influenced by Western European immigrants whose descendants constitute a minority of the Jewish population.

The traditional Jewish political attitude, he says, is one of conservatism and detachment, conditioned by a historic awareness that safety from persecution depended on the protection of the ruling authorities. Among Eastern European Jews (from Russia, Rumania, and parts of Austria-Hungary), from whom the majority of American Jews are descended, this noninvolvement was reinforced by language barriers and cultural insulation; among Western European Jews, by ghetto life in France and Germany and the constant fear of expulsion.

Inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution (and its subsequent Napoleonic extension into the Low Countries, Italy, and Germany), the Western European Jews became the forerunners of today's liberals. They adopted the language, manners, and fervent patriotism of their

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adopted countries and re-oriented their own institutions so as to support non-Jewish causes. Defense of the universal interest, they argued, was defense of their own interests. Eastern Europeans, with no hope of emancipation, had no such alternative.

The constitutional ideals of the young American Republic favored the growth of this Western-style liberalism, first transplanted here by Jewish immigrants from Bavaria and southern Germany in the 1820s and '30s. Massive immigration of Eastern European Jews began in the 1880s. At first, these immigrants were absorbed by Democratic political machines; later waves brought socialists and anarchists who, along with a lively Yiddish press and the trade union movement, stimulated independent Jewish voting and a high level of political participation. A generalized liberalism was the result.

How long this phenomenon will last is unknown. The Holocaust and the founding of Israel have rekindled Jewish traditions of self-interest. Many American Jews have also begun to question "conventional liberal assumptions" concerning the Jewish-Gentile relationship. "In the last resort," Halpern observes, "Jews are isolated and will not be effectively aided by others."

### *Social Security's Generation Gap*

"Facing the Social Security Crisis" by Martin Feldstein, in *The Public Interest* (Spring 1977), National Affairs, 10 E. 53rd St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

Concern for the financial health of Social Security has prompted the White House, under both Ford and Carter administrations, to propose emergency legislation to shore up the sagging system. Social Security now carries an unfunded liability of \$4 trillion. Current trust funds are equivalent to only 8 months' worth of benefits, compared to 15 in 1970. The depletion rate is accelerating.

But unlike private pension programs, says Harvard economist Feldstein, Social Security's actuarial soundness has a friend in government coercion. Although bankrupt by conventional standards, there is no *economic* reason why Social Security need ever fail because "the government's power to tax is its power to meet the obligations" to future beneficiaries. The key issue, therefore, is not the administration's short-term structural tinkering but whether taxpayers are prepared to support the Social Security system.

Maintaining political support, contends Feldstein, will become increasingly difficult. The rate of return on Social Security—the excess of benefits over lifetime Social Security taxes—will fall sharply in the near future, both in real terms and relative to return on private investment. In part, this is due to the "demographic swing" from baby boom to baby slump. Where there are now 30 retirees per 100 workers, 40 years from now there will be 45. Simply to maintain the existing ratio of benefits to previous earnings, the tax will have to be increased by at least 50 percent. (There is no possibility, however,