

## The Jerusalem Report

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Women still excluded from Jewish leadership positions For the first time, a woman may fill the top job in organized Jewry in the United States.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the umbrella group of the American Jewish community has never had a female chairman in its 31-year history.

Now, Shoshana S. Cardin of Baltimore, chairman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ), is strongly in the running to succeed incumbent Seymour Reich, who will step down next month.

Women are largely excluded from leadership positions in U.S. Jewry. Aside from women's groups, there are only two major Jewish organizations with female presidents: the NCSJ and the American Joint Distribution Committee.

Not one of the "big-four" Jewish organizations—the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, Anti-Defamation League, and B'nai B'rith has ever had a female president.

In the local federations—the heart of power in the Jewish community—the figures give the same picture. Of the 187 federations nationwide, only 40 have been headed by women.

"Even Jewish organizations who have had female presidents rarely follow them with other women," observed Jackie Levine, who became the first, and so far only, female president of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council in 1983. Nor do there seem to be many female presidents on the horizon, for which she blames the "failure or the slowness of the hierarchy to adapt to the winds of change from the feminist movement."

Women who became presidents of American Jewish organizations say that while they encountered little overt sexism, conventional wisdom is that a woman has to be better than a man to succeed.

"You really have to do your homework and work harder," said Sylvia Hassenfeld, president of the American Joint Distribution Committee.

Esther Leah Ritz, who became the first female president of several organizations, including the Jewish Welfare Board, said she was often told she was "tough," a euphemism for "unwomanly."

"Sometimes I could sense men sitting back and saying, 'show us what you can do.' I did it, not because I was challenged, but because I was there to do a job," she says.

Potential female Jewish leaders also suffer from a Catch-22. Without more women in power, there are fewer women on committees who would be inclined to elect women as presidents.

"Part of the problem is that they don't have a network, so when a group of men draws up a list of candidates, there may be only one or two women on it," says Cardin.

The old-boy's network is manifested most clearly in fundraising, an activity that increasingly occupies a president's schedule.

If women want more leadership possibilities they will have to start giving money in their own name and building a network of donors, maintains Robert Lifton, president of the American Jewish Congress. "Any number of women are more or less fully qualified decision-makers. But few, if any, are capable of doing the tough, unhappy part of fundraising based on networking."

Ritz disagrees, pointing to the skilled fundraising done by many national women's organizations. She faults national Jewish organizations for failing to target women as potential donors. "Women have a large, untapped capacity to give substantial amounts," she argues.

Also hindering women in rising to the top are their busy schedules. Between their childcare role and full-time work, there is little time.

"You have to really want like crazy to be president of an organization," says Peggy Tishman, a long-time Jewish activist who became the first woman to head the UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York after her children were grown. "Women have to say 'I can do this job and I'm willing to sacrifice for it.'"

But other female leaders insist that Jewish organizations need to actively promote women within their ranks.

"Many women told me of deliberately being overlooked in their federations," recounts Levine. "There are topnotch women leading their national and local federations. We have to make a conscious effort to seek them out or they will go into other areas."

Cardin, in her early 60s, has held top positions before, notably as president of the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF), and on the boards of the Jewish Agency and the United Jewish Appeal. She is known as an articulate and effective inside player. Natan Sharansky, associate editor of The Jerusalem Report, praises her ability to "cut through the hot air and get right to the point." He recalls that, as president of the Council of Jewish Federations, she alone among the leaders of the national Jewish organizations supported from the outset the effort to organize what became the 250,000-strong rally in Washington, on the eve of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's December 1987 visit.

A former high school teacher, Cardin credits her success to a tomboy background and parents who encouraged her.

"You have to learn you will not be loved by everyone. Leaders often find themselves in competitive situations where someone loses and someone wins. Boys are socialized to accept that, but I'm not sure girls are."

She adds, "I'm not afraid of power. I see it as a positive force to move the community in a positive direction."

She may soon get her chance to prove it. o Will **Shoshana Cardin** follow Seymour Reich, left, as Conference of Presidents head? Wolfson