

A CITY'S BURDEN

At 9:30 last Monday morning, this message came to the Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco: "Mayor Moscone will be present at the November 29 Middle East rally; and he will be present at the December 17 Chanukah affair." In little more than an hour, he was to be dead.

George Moscone's involvement with the Jewish community was more than a politician's chore. He was seriously dedicated to the survival of Israel, and he worked at it. He called Washington in crises; and he sold Israel Bonds. He went to the Soviet Union and visited Soviet Jews, at the request of the Jewish community. He became one of the state's most active champions of the Soviet Jewry cause. Just last week, he told the JCRC that he was anxious to set up a Holocaust memorial on city property. George Moscone understood. He understood because he was, above all, a man of deep feeling. One did not have to be with George Moscone long to sense that deep well of feeling.

"Feeling": love, tenderness, sympathy towards fellow men. It is in shorter supply because of his absence. But there is something else that he would have seriously worried about. On Monday morning, before the assassin struck down George Moscone and Harvey Milk, feeling was already benumbed in his community.

The Jonestown tragedy had its origin in San Francisco, and touched thousands of relatives, friends, acquaintances. How does the deliberate killing of over 900 men, women and children affect our capacity to be "feeling?" We are told that "one human life is worth the whole of Creation." But it is possible to be brutalized as we see one life after another taken wantonly.

A brutalized climate is dangerous because it can breed more killing. The constraints are off the pathologues, the suggestibles. But it is more than that. There is a more profound danger. If life is not sacred, then meaning escapes from everything. There

-- no longer reason to be tender to children, caring about the old, concerned about the sick, loyal to our friends, faithful to our families. There is no longer reason to take our own lives seriously. There is no "feeling" left, and without that we are done.

That was the nature of the special depression which hung over San Francisco the week before last. It was deepened by the murders of Moscone and Milk. It was a depression even beyond our sense of loss at the death of those we knew. We were getting overwhelming signals that life is cheap.

But we were getting those signals from people who hold life cheap. George Moscone's message was this: Now it is important for the rest of us to send out stronger signals that life is not cheap, that life is still sacred. We do that by holding on to our feeling, as he did, and insistently acting with feeling in everything we do.

There are more of us, who affirm life, than there are of them, who destroy life. Indeed it is too easy in a month like this to exaggerate the size and growth of "their" ranks. We are not really surrounded by assassins, and -- whatever grief they may cause us -- they are not taking over. It is useful to remember the evidence that there is no higher rate of mental illness today than there was in the nineteenth century. It is useful to remember that there is more public and official regard for the poor and the disabled than there was thirty years ago. And it is useful to remember that the rate of willful murder in this country has been lower in the 1970s than it was in the 1930s. We will lose to the life-detractors only if we turn the field over to them in despair.

This does not mean that we do not mourn. Mourning, unlike despair, is a matter of "feeling," of feeling loss, of affirming life. And so it is that we can say this week: "The memory of the righteous shall be for a blessing."