

A DANGEROUSLY FALSE ISSUE

Are American Jews guilty of "dual loyalty" because of their strong political support of Israel?

That old question has been raised anew by Maryland Senator Charles Mathias in the prestigious journal *Foreign Affairs*. His article is making a splash in some Congressional circles; and is all the more significant because Mathias has always been a basic supporter of Israel and of the Maryland Jewish community.

The American Jewish community has been openly, vigorously, and effectively active on public issues related to Israel. Mathias believes that *lobbying* (the effort by citizens to persuade their public officials) is, in itself, absolutely proper; and that American Jews have the absolute right to lobby. But he also believes that "ethnic politics ... carried to excess, have proved harmful to the national interest." He urges Congressmen to pay less attention to such ethnic politics, whether Greek or Jewish.

The "dual loyalty" theme is chilling to Jews because it was the essence of modern European anti-semitism centuries before the State of Israel. In the French Revolution, Clermont-Tonnere ended his famous speech demanding freedom for the Jews by also cautioning Jews that "in France there can only be Frenchmen." He was willing for the Jews to retain their religious beliefs, but wanted them to otherwise drop their communal allegiance to the "Jewish people." In another version of concern with dual loyalty, Lenin said that the Jews should have individual freedom, but must abandon their group identity.

These Europeans failed to understand that, for Jews, individual freedom and communal identity are inseparable -- and, more broadly, European liberalism failed to understand the nature of democratic pluralism, a failure we would not want to recreate in America.

And the fact is that "ethnic lobbying" cannot be measured differently than any other kind of lobbying on foreign affairs -- "economic-interest lobbying," for example. *The measure is American national interest.* That measure must be applied when the farmers lobby to lift the grain embargo on Russia; when big industry lobbies against laws on the Arab boycott; when the oil companies lobby on matters related to Saudi Arabia; when labor lobbies in support of the free trade union movement abroad. It is exactly the same measure to be applied to "ethnic groups," no more and no less.

So the issue is not whether lobbying is good (it is the ultimate democratic good); or whether lobbying groups have a self-interest (of course they do). In foreign affairs, the issue is whether any given lobbying effort is better or worse for American national interest. The American people understand that. As many as a third of the American people have stated they believe that American Jews have a special loyalty to Israel -- *but they do not object* to that special loyalty, because they understand democratic pluralism *and because they see the congruence between American national interest and the survival of Israel.* Mathias agrees when he writes that, while Jewish lobbying may have somewhat increased material aid to Israel, "I remain convinced that even if there were no Israel lobby, the American people would remain solidly committed to Israel's survival."

Although they are fundamentally tied together by common interests, of course the American and Israeli governments will continue to have tactical disagreements. In point of fact, the organized American Jewish community does *not* automatically take sides on all these disagreements. However, because of their special communal concerns, American Jews will naturally be more active than most in pointing out the congruence of interests between Israel and America; and, within that framework, will more vigorously than most react to any perceived departure from basic American support for Israel.

Earl Raab
" A Dangerously False Issue"
page 3

Similarly, the American labor movement will be more active than most in promoting American support for the free trade union movement abroad. What's wrong with that?

The issue is American national interest, not dual loyalty, or the activity of the "American Jewish lobby." Congressman Pete McCloskey of the South Peninsula -- who has been drumming the Mathias theme for some time, most recently in last week's *Los Angeles Times* -- has had some difficulty in understanding that.

McCloskey has complained that the Jewish lobby is just about the strongest lobby in Washington. What does that mean, since Jewish groups do not have the numbers, the money or the extensive Washington apparatus that the oil companies, the farmers, labor or many others have? Over the years, McCloskey has voted in support of Israel on almost every issue. Since he voted that way not because of the Jewish lobby but because of his perception of American national interest, why then does he harp so on the "Jewish lobby"? Did he ever consider that the pro-Israel lobby may be so persuasive mainly because it has such a persuasive case with respect to American national interest?

Congressman McCloskey now believes that it would be in the American interest to help the PLO establish a Palestinian state. Others believe that the PLO is tied to the Soviet Union, is an innate enemy of both Saudi Arabia and the United States and its dominance would be fatal to American national interest. Again, the issue to be debated is American national interest, not the Jewish lobby.

Mathias and McCloskey both complain that Jews tend to call anti-semitic those who disagree with them. Mathias calls for civility in disagreement. That is a fair concern, but civility is a two-way street. As each issue is debated on its merits,

Earl Raab
"A Dangerously False Issue"
page 4

and as the Jews continue to press their perceptions, they *should* do so with civility. Most of them *are* civil, for at least practical reasons: if you accuse all those with whom you disagree of having evil intent, instead of just being mistaken, you will quickly become ineffective.

But the reciprocal side of civility is to scrupulously avoid the implication of impropriety or evil intent in the lobbying activity of American Jews. The real issue in each case is American national interest. To gratuitously raise the issue of dual loyalty, or "hyphenated-Americans" will wrongly imply that support of Israel is the result of undue influence, and therefore not in the American national interest. And dangerous demons of bigotry can be let loose. Let each issue be determined on its own merit. The basic survival of Israel *is* in the American national interest. The American Jewish lobby is a false issue.

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