

BLACKS AND JEWS

Jesse Jackson has said that the U.S. should put more pressure on Israel, and one of his lieutenants spoke at a rally in favor of Measure E in Berkeley. But while the largely Black precincts in Berkeley voted heavily in favor of Jesse Jackson as a candidate, they voted heavily against Measure E.

In short, those who support a candidate do not necessarily support his whole agenda. What then is that part of the Black agenda which causes the frictions between Blacks and Jews, which the media say are increasing?

The most durable contention between Blacks and Jews is still the question of "affirmative action," as dramatized by last week's Supreme Court decision. Jews tend to support the Court's idea that, when layoffs occur, workers should be laid off on the basis of seniority rather than by racial formula. The Blacks were appalled by that decision.

There is justice on both sides. The Jews are still operating by the civil rights principle that each man should be judged on individual merit -- and are afraid that democracy and justice will go aglimmering if we depart from that principle. The Blacks point out that this civil rights principle just recently came into operation for them, so that naturally they have less seniority. If, as a result, Blacks are always to be the "first fired," or the last promoted, then it will take untold generations for them to recover from the hole that the American society had dug for them. And "generations" is not a faceless term -- it means their children and grandchildren.

Terry François, former San Francisco supervisor, has been a leading Black voice in this city for many years. He has always been close to the Jewish community. His tone is about as moderate as you can find -- too moderate for some -- and for that reason, his comments on the subject of Blacks, Jews and affirmative action are particularly instructive.

"It is true," François says, "that Blacks hold Jews to higher standards than they do other whites. Jews have been their traditional allies and supporters. That is the principal reason why Jewish rejection of affirmative action caused sadness and provoked more resentment from Blacks than did the expected resistance of other whites."

François believes that the Jewish organizations are "confusing the rigid maximum quotas which were historically applied to Jews with the minimum goals which Blacks propose to compensate for past discrimination ... and as Jews become more affluent

Earl Raab  
"Blacks and Jews"  
page 2

and, as a consequence, more conservative, Blacks are becoming more assertive and determined in their yet-to-be-fulfilled struggle for economic, educational and social parity in America."

The fact is that Jews have not been so directly hurt by the application of quotas. There has been no impediment to the production of Jewish lawyers and doctors; and most of the occupations in which Jews are engaged are not seriously affected. The Jews are mainly concerned because we have a self-interest in strong democratic rule -- and a society frozen by group assignment rather than individual evaluation is anti-democratic.

In short, Jews tend to think that the fight against quotas is an extension of the fight for civil rights. Blacks tend to think that the fight for quotas is an extension of the fight for civil rights.

These positions, flowing from two different historical perspectives, are not wholly reconcilable. But there may be ways in which both sides have become too rigid and ritualistic.

Terry François says: "Blacks and Jews have got to talk. We will not agree on all issues but neither Jews nor Blacks can afford to deliberately narrow their base of support by dictating to rather than accomodating each other's interests."