

Have Jews Learned the Lessons of Nazism?

This week marked the dark anniversary of Kristallnacht, which took place in Germany on November 9-10, 1938. Next week the City of San Francisco will take notice of what happened there.

Kristallnacht was the turning point in the treatment of German and Austrian Jewry. It was the point at which the Nazis served notice of exactly what they had in mind for the Jews. A German diplomat had been assassinated in Paris by a Polish refugee named Herschel Grynzpan. The Nazis took that moment to unleash a systematic attack on the Jews of Germany. There were individual murders, 50 thousand Jews arrested, attacks on Jewish-owned property, and the demolition of 276 synagogues.

America exploded with protest. Almost every American newspaper, including the San Francisco Chronicle, shrieked with protest. America withdrew its diplomatic envoy as a mark of protest. Every public official in America spoke out. The Jews held mass demonstrations. In New York, 30 thousand stores closed their doors. A serious boycott of German goods was mounted. American Veterans groups protested, and broke up American Nazi meetings. Catholic and Protestant leaders protested. The Gallup Poll found that 94 per cent of the American people disapproved of the Nazis in general and Kristallnacht in particular. But it was all too late -- for reasons which many Americans, including Jews, have forgotten.

Next week, in San Francisco, the City of San Francisco has declared an official week devoted to: "Holocaust: Reasons to Remember." It will start this Monday, November

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14, at noon at City Hall, with the Mayor and others in a program sponsored by the interfaith San Francisco Conference on Religion and Race and Social Concerns. You should be there. A year of remembrance will follow, with the cooperation of the mass media, church groups, the schools and others.

It is a crime for citizens in general not to know more about Nazism. Right now, they think of it vaguely as just some kind of an anti-Jewish pogrom. The important fact of the matter is that Nazism was everybody's enemy. It used anti-semitism as the Trojan Horse with which to destroy everyone's rights and humanity.

It is also a crime that many Jews do not know much more about Nazism than that it was a pogrom against Jews. That is a tragic loss of historical memory. Jews should know more about why and how it happened. They should know, for example, about the kinds of social and political conditions in Germany which made the triumph of anti-semitism and anti-humanism possible. And they should know about the relationship between Kristallnacht and Munich, 1938,

Kristallnacht came on the heels of the "Munich Agreement," when Prime Minister Chamberlain of Great Britain effected a shameful "peace" with Germany, which turned Czechoslovakia over to Germany. But, of course, you do not appease a wolf's hunger.

When the Kristallnacht pogrom took place, heralding things to come, political observers around the world pointed out that Munich had given Germany the confidence for that

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murderous event. With Munich, the civilized world had said: "We are afraid of you. We do not have the will to stop you. Do what you want." Because of Munich, the protests in America and the world were ineffective. Protests are only effective if the target of the protest is bothered by it.

Some American Jews, weak on history and having fallen victim themselves to the mass media, are perhaps a bit too preoccupied with what is in front of their nose, and don't see the deeper precipices ahead. There are some swastika Nazis around in America, reminding us of what happened. There are dangers in this country - even though about 95 per cent of Americans still disapprove of Nazis; and if Nazism comes in this country, it will probably come under some other name than Nazism, and some other banner than the Swastika.

But the Nazi experience should also be instructive to us with respect to possible disaster for two other major bodies of Jews. With respect to the security of the Jews in Israel, we should be mindful of the possible effects of any Munich-like appeasement in the Middle East.

And with respect to the security of the Jews in the Soviet Union, we should also remember the relationship between Munich and the Holocaust and World War II. Those of you who are concerned about the recurrence of Nazi phenomena: have you protested the impending action against Scharansky? Or the condition of any other imperilled Soviet Jew? Have you written the State Department, supporting their recent note of

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concern to the Soviet Union about Scharansky? Have you written your Congressman, pointing out the relationship between peace and the need for the U.S. to effectively protest against the massive violation of human rights in the Soviet Union, with special attention to Scharansky? If not, you have not taken seriously enough the historic lessons of Nazism.

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