

INFLUENCING THE MEDIA

Is the Moral Majority wrong in trying to pressure the media into changing some of its content?

"Pressure," of course, is a loaded word. More neutrally, the question is whether the outside community should try to have some effect on the media. The answer is: "as much as possible."

Take the matter of the recent Holocaust week. There were many hours on San Francisco TV and radio, and many column inches in the newspapers, educating the public about the Holocaust. Most of those hours and column inches were there because the Jewish community made the effort to put them there.

So, the Mass Media Project of this Jewish community reported that there were special local programs on KGO-TV and KPIX, coverage of the events set up by the Jewish community on KGO-TV and KTVU, as well as some films on KQED, special programs on KCBS and KGO radio, special announcements on KNBR, KGO and other radio stations, and a special newspaper interview.

It is not that the media were resistant. Quite to the contrary, they were pleased to do it. But they would not have done most of it, if the Jewish community had not provided the stimulus and the material.

By the same token, Jack Anderson's column in the *San Francisco Chronicle* last Monday noted that, while the American press has heavily featured the plight of Soviet Jews, the fact is that more Baptists and Adventists than Jews have been imprisoned in the Soviet Union. The American press has paid more attention to Soviet Jewry partly because the American Jewish community has so constantly and sharply brought *that* matter to their attention.

Thus is revealed the nature of the beast. The media will cover those events and issues which are brought to their attention. That's the way they operate, along with public officials. What's wrong with that? It may be imperfect, but it's better than if they sat in some ivory tower and made abstract decisions as to what should be done.

As a matter of fact, the "squeaky wheel" concept is the only way in which some democratic process is applied to the media. It's proper enough, as long as the media don't allow themselves to be unduly mau-maued out of their own judgements. It is proper enough for the Jewish community to complain if something in the media offends it unnecessarily; and it is proper enough for the Moral Majority to do the same. Complaining vigorously to the media is not a violation of the First Amendment; it is, rather, quite in keeping with the spirit of the First Amendment.

The Jews have sometimes been accused of controlling the media, which, of course, they don't. But they *are* one of the squeakiest wheels in American life, and therefore do have more of an effect on the media than most other groups. That's a working principle of democratic life, too. The *active* citizenry has the edge over the passive citizenry, and why not?

So if you see something in the media you don't like, if you think the journalism is flawed or biased, don't be bashful. Phone or write. It sometimes makes a difference. And it's as much a citizenship duty as writing your Congressman.