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"Jewish Money" and Politics

"Perhaps Ford and Carter should have staged their TV debate in the Jewish Community Center, instead of The Palace of Fine Arts," commented one San Franciscan last week.

The reason for such a facetious comment was, of course, the heavy preoccupation with both Israel and the boycott question in that presidential debate.

Does that preoccupation prove the correctness of Congressman Pete McCloskey, who is running for re-election in the South Peninsula, and who has repeatedly suggested that the Jews exert undue influence on the foreign policy of the United States?

If McCloskey and General Brown are right on that score, how do the Jews exert such undue influence? McCloskey proposed an answer on the Stanford Campus recently. He is quoted by the Stanford Daily as saying: "I'll put it bluntly: The Jewish constituency gives so much money to my colleagues in The House that we are distorted in our Congressional reaction to Middle East problems."

That is not only nonsense, it is malicious nonsense. A disproportionate number of Jewish individuals may make contributions to political candidates, because a disproportionate number of Jews have always been interested in politics, even before Israel was an issue. But the total amount is scarcely overwhelming compared to the contributions made by corporations, labor unions, trade associations, oil company executives and others... Perhaps Congressman McCloskey is distorted in his view of Jewish wealth in this country.

However, that is not the main point. If American support of Israel can be explained so dramatically by the "undue influence" of American Jews, then the strong implication is that Israel is not intrinsically important to America.

Most Congressmen understand that Israel is a key-pin of America's foreign policy. If the United States does not stand by Israel, then the United States' last vestige of credibility is gone, and a good part of the world is automatically ceded to the Soviet Union. That is why no one - including the presidential candidates - can talk seriously about American foreign policy without spending a good deal of time on Israel. The extent of their preoccupation with Israel need not be explained by either Jewish contributions or Jewish votes.

There are legitimate differences about strategy, of course. Israel's security, may well depend on America maintaining a strong, friendly relationship with Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt. But how much does America have to give to those countries in order to maintain that relationship?

That is what the boycott issue is really about. The Arab boycott is probably not so much a threat to the Israeli economy, or to American Jewish businessmen, as it is part of the political chess game. How much can the Arab countries get? How much can they get away with? How much resolve do we have? Where do we put our foot down? After all, they also need us, economically and politically.

There is going to be a political debate soon in a Jewish Community Center. Candidate McCloskey and his opponent, David Harris, are going to debate in the Palo Alto Jewish Community Center on the night

of October _____. Both gentlemen might well be asked how central they feel Israel's security is to American national interest. And how they both feel about the political chess game, with respect to arms sales, and the boycott, and the P.L.O. And, since the subject has been raised, whether they have any comments on undue Jewish influence, or the insidious effect of "Jewish money."