

JEW-SCARING

Someone's always trying to scare the Jews. We were told that Secretary of the Interior Watt tried most recently.

According to last Saturday's San Francisco *Chronicle*, Watt "cautioned the Israeli Ambassador that U.S. support for Israel could be jeopardized" if American Jews opposed Reagan's energy policies.

The protection-racket version of Jew-scaring is quite common. A number of Congressmen and Senators tried it during the AWACS debate. "Gee, it would be terrible if anti-semitism swept the country -- but that's likely to happen unless you Jews withdraw your strong opposition to the AWACS sale."

Now, contrary to the usual myth, the least scared people in history have probably been the Jews of the Diaspora. Oh, they have been fearful enough on occasion, for good reason, but, by and large, they have not been scared into denying themselves. So, Emma Lazarus wrote of the Jews at the end of the 19th century:

"Coward? Not he who faces death,
Who singly against the world has fought,
For what? A name he may not breathe,
For liberty of prayer and thought."

Or, as Mark Twain put it, a little less elegantly: "(The Jew) has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages, and he has done it with his hands tied behind him."

The myth that the Diaspora Jew has been cowardly was created by our enemies; it is a myth which many Jews have themselves swallowed, out of some form of self-contempt. The Diaspora Jew may have been a wily old bird in stiff-necked protection of self-identity; but he has also been a tough old bird. Most often in history, Jews could have found safety by relinquishing their identity. They did not do so.

In the history of the Diaspora, the Jews have had "their hands tied behind them" least of all in the United States. Surely, here, we are least likely to submit to Jew-scaring. The attempts to scare us into silence during the AWACS debate failed, predictably and completely. So would a Watt effort at Jew-scaring.

But did Watt really make such an effort? An actual reading of Watt's letter to the Israeli Ambassador does not reveal such a threat. It was a dumb letter because it implied that the Israeli Ambassador might be able to influence American Jews on a domestic issue. But *there was absolutely nothing in the letter to suggest that "U.S. support for Israel could be jeopardized"* if the American Jews did not support the President's energy policy. It just said that the U.S. would not be in as good a position to help Israel if the U.S. didn't become energy-independent.

Then why did the *Chronicle* story (reprinted from the *Washington Post*) create such an outright fiction? Well, Jew-scaring seems to be an entertaining subject, even if it has to be made up -- and newspapers are joining TV news in being part of the entertainment industry. Perhaps it wouldn't be so entertaining if we didn't rise to the bait so easily.

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