

Less Of Mom's Apple Pie

Although it was asked to, the organized Jewish community in the San Francisco area took no position on Proposition 9, the election reform referendum recently voted by Californians.

Subsequently, this was one of the issues in front of the organized Jewish community of the nation, meeting in Detroit: the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, composed of the leading national Jewish agencies and synagogue groups, and 98 local Jewish communities.

The NJCRAC was considering election reform, among many other issues, out of its traditional concern for a strong democratic system as the chief safeguard of American Jewish security.



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But some speakers and delegates pointed out that life isn't that simple. "Election reform" sounds as virtuous as "Mom's apple pie," but more than one loving child associates his mother's apple pie with acute indigestion. A professor of political science, who is a Board member of the American Civil Liberties Union, pointed out one of the pitfalls.

"We have spent all of these years trying to protect privacy, and especially the privacy of political action," he said. "We have emphasized, over and over, that this is one of basic democratic protections. And now we are proposing that anyone who gives \$50 or \$100 to a political campaign will have to disclose it publicly."

Other proposals for election reform, it was pointed out, could do the democratic process a lot of damage. For example, there is a problem of laying too much emphasis on financing political campaigns by public rather than private funds. What governmental apparatus is going to decide how such funds should be distributed?

This was not anti-election-reform talk, but it was evidence of a growing tendency to take a second look at all traditional liberal "mom's apple pie" proposals, to see what stingers they might present for the contemporary world.

As another example one paper prepared for Detroit took a "second look" at the amnesty issue. A recent Gallup poll found isolationist sentiment on the rise in America. So is the tendency to downgrade America's role in the world. That may well be understandable in the light of the Vietnam experience. That was a moral as well as a military disaster. But, scarred and soiled, the United States remains the only potential and potent force for freedom on the international scene.

Take Israel, for example—not as a refuge for Jews, but as a democratic political state in the Middle East. As such, it has stood as a thwart to the imperialistic designs of the Soviet Union, one of the world centers of totalitarianism. Without the strong support of the United States, diplomatic and otherwise, it is not so likely that Israel could stand. If the internal temper of America follows the tendency to down-grade America's involvement in the world, the likelihood of that support becomes slim. Checking this tendency is a thousandfold more important for Israel's security than all of the informational bulletins and ads the friends of Israel can put out in this country about how great and good and legitimate Israel is.

It was not just to Vietnam that an undetermined number of defectors objected; one of the streams of sentiment in the anti-war movement was not as much hostility to the Vietnam involvement, as to any American involvement in the world, if not to America itself. Unqualified amnesty, it was suggested in that Detroit paper, could serve to legitimize that sentiment, and intensify the general "down-grading" temper in the country.

The people in Detroit were in favor of some kind of election reform and some kind of amnesty considerations. But they were not about to embrace all seemingly virtuous propositions without a sober second look. In that, certainly, they accurately reflected the new mood of the contemporary American Jewish population.