

MISUSING THE HOLOCAUST

It is sickening to see how often the Jewish experience of oppression and Holocaust is manipulated and cheapened.

We are told by partisans of one particular position on Central American politics, nuclear arms control, the West Bank, or whatever -- that if we Jews don't support *that* particular partisan position we will be betraying the victims of the Holocaust. That's powerful emotional blackmail -- but it may not be the case at all.

Take El Salvador, for example. Out of their experience and historical sensitivity to human rights, Jews should be actively interested in remedies which would democratize that country and end the inhuman assault of right-wing military forces against civilians. On the other hand, out of their experience and historical sensitivity to human rights, Jews should be opposed to any remedy which would turn the country over to the notably inhumane and anti-democratic left-wing forces of opposition.

This leaves some difficult factors to assess, which have nothing at all to do with the Holocaust. Can the present Salvadoran government be democratized and separated from its more brutal connections? Can the Salvadoran opposition be separated from its more brutal connections? Can a Third Course be developed more easily within one camp or the other? If the U.S. withdraws, will the ascendancy of one oppressive tyranny or another be more certain? If the U.S. becomes more involved, how can it do so in a way that will most effectively deter oppression?

These are questions which are not answered by reference to the Holocaust. Any attempt to do so is sheer demagoguery. By the same token, our concern with forestalling the use of nuclear arms may have been sharpened by our historical experience. But the Holocaust doesn't tell us whether an immediate nuclear freeze is the best way to

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forestall nuclear war or not. The factors involved in that debate had better be discussed on their own merits.

Our experience should prevent us from being indifferent to the oppression of other people. It should help us to understand that we cannot withdraw into ourselves and survive. It should cause us to become actively engaged in general human struggles for spiritual and political freedom. In the Talmud, it is stated: "Whoever is able to protest against the wrong-doings of the world and does not do so is punished for the wrong-doings of the world."

Action, yes; but the alarm bells should go off whenever anyone uses our experience with oppression, and particularly the Holocaust, to enlist us on the side of one option for action against another. It is time to put a halt to this practice, which is often cynical, sometimes just naive, but always demeaning of the Jewish experience. And such demagoguery, so contemptuous of people, is usually a signpost *away from*, not toward, the human rights it pretends to embrace.