

THE CONGRESSMEN AND THE POPE

Seldom does one join any gathering of Jews these days, without hearing these laments: "Israel is losing the war for American public opinion ...because of Arab propoganda money ...because of Israeli mistakes ...because of what the Pope is saying ..."

One could spend several hours arguing the causes for the deterioration of American public opinion on Israel -- without anyone ever raising the question of whether there *is* such a deterioration. Jews have plenty to worry about these days. Since, even for Jews, there is a limit on effective worrying, we ought to pick our spots more carefully.

The fact is that fundamental American public support for Israel is getting stronger, not weaker. According to the latest in-depth Harris poll, for example, three quarters of Americans favor American military aid to Israel, despite the Arab threat to cut off oil supplies. That may be higher than it's ever been; it's certainly higher than it was four years ago, in a similar Harris poll.

Aha, but the same poll shows that about half of all Americans are critical of Begin's foreign policies.

Doesn't this figure contradict the finding about greater support for Israel? No! Indeed, the juxtaposition of those figures makes an important point about American public opinion on Israel, worth making over and over again.

Americans support Israel because they think that Israel is good for America. They may disapprove of some Israeli policies regarding Palestinian Arabs, but they don't think those policies have anything to do with whether Israel is good for America -- and therefore, their support for Israel is undisturbed.

Jews want everyone to *love* Israel, so we're often disturbed when there's some criticism, but the only thing we have to *worry* about is how Americans feel about giving military and economic support to Israel. And while we should never take such support for granted, it has become stronger rather than weaker. The increasing support for Israel is partly, at least, the result of world events that affect America: Afghanistan, Khoumeini, Iran/Iraq, Syria/Russia. No amount of propaganda money can offset the impact of real events.

Mirroring American public opinion, both the House and Senate have agreed on the same level of funding for Israel: about a billion and a quarter in grants, and a little less than a billion in loans. No one else gets that kind of aid. At the same time, about 150 members of the House have already signed a letter asking the administration to reject the Saudi request to purchase advanced equipment for its fighter bombers -- because it poses a threat to Israel. About one third of the Congressmen have already signed that letter -- but over 90 per cent of our Bay Area Congressmen have signed that letter: both John Burton and Phillip Burton in San Francisco, Don Clausen to the North, Ron Dellums, Don Edwards, George Miller and Fortney Stark to the East, and William Royer, Norman Mineta and Leon Panetta to the South. Their constituents should thank them for their perspicacity.

The Pope, of course, has special interests which do not necessarily coincide with American national interest. So, he can say about Jerusalem, through the *Osservatore Romano*, that three religions have an equal share there; that it is not enough to assure "free access for all to the holy places;" and that Jerusalem should not be governed "by the will of only one of the parties concerned," namely Israel.

One is tempted to point out that the Christians and Moslems have an interest in Jerusalem only because of their Jewish origins. And one is tempted to point out that, apart from everything else, Jerusalem has a critical relationship to the physical security of Israel, the Jewish homeland -- which it does not have for any Catholic or Arab nation.

However, the point here is that, while the Pope is their revered spiritual leader, his opinion on Israel has ^{EVEN} less effect on the public opinion of American Catholics than his opinion on birth control.

On Israel, they are more likely to follow the lead of their Congressmen.

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