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NOTES

THE JEWISH PUBLIC AFFAIRS SYSTEM: IS IT UNRAVELLING?

AMERICAN JEWISH POLITICAL ACTION HAS REACHED A NEW PEAK IN THIS POLITICAL YEAR -- AND SO HAS JEWISH SELF-SATISFACTION. PRO-ISRAEL PACS HAVE MULTIPLIED, AS HAVE THE MEMBERSHIP AND REPUTATION OF AIPAC. AND MOST POLITICIANS HAVE FLOCKED AROUND, WEARING YARMULKES AND SAYING THE RIGHT THINGS.

BUT IN THE MIDST OF ALL THIS VAUNTED ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH, THERE ARE SOME OMINOUS SIGNS OF A LONG-RANGE ORGANIZATIONAL DETERIORATION IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS SYSTEM, WHICH COULD MEAN A LONG-RANGE WEAKENING OF OUR INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN PUBLIC POLICY.

THERE ARE THREE BROAD WAYS IN WHICH PUBLIC POLICIES ARE INFLUENCED, THE MOST DRAMATIC OF WHICH IS A STRONG ELECTORAL PRESENCE. THAT IS WHERE THE AMERICAN JEWISH EFFORT HAS BEEN CONCENTRATED RECENTLY, AND FOR GOOD REASON. GETTING ELECTED AND STAYING ELECTED MAY NOT BE THE WHOLE NAME OF THE GAME -- BUT THERE IS NO GAME WITHOUT THEM.

AS WE ALL KNOW, AMERICAN JEWS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY WELL-SITUATED FOR THE ELECTORAL GAME. JEWISH ELECTORAL STRENGTH IS DOUBLE ITS POPULATION STRENGTH IN GENERAL ELECTIONS -- AND TRIPLE ITS POPULATION STRENGTH IN DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRIMARIES -- AND SURELY AT LEAST FIVE TIMES ITS POPULATION STRENGTH IN ELECTORAL ACTIVISM -- WHICH IS TO SAY, VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY AND THE PROVISION OF EVER MORE NECESSARY ELECTORAL FUNDS. ESPECIALLY IN CERTAIN KEY AREAS, AT CERTAIN KEY TIMES, THE JEWS CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE -- AS THEY DID IN THE RECENT NEW YORK STATE DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY.

BUT WHILE THE DIRECT ELECTORAL PRESENCE IS CRITICAL, THERE ARE AT LEAST TWO OTHER "PRESENCES" WHICH ARE CRITICAL FOR AMERICAN JEWISH INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC POLICY.

ONE WAS ILLUSTRATED BY THE COMMENT OF A NINTH-GENERATION MEMBER OF WEST VIRGINIA'S MOST PROMINENT FAMILY, WHO WAS RECENTLY ENGAGED IN A DINNER CONVERSATION

ABOUT CURRENT AMERICAN POLITICS. HIS DINNER COMPANION SAID THAT NEW YORK'S CUOMO MIGHT BECOME AN ATTRACTIVE PRESIDENTIAL ASPIRANT SOMEDAY. "CUOMO," OBJECTED THE WEST VIRGINIAN. "THAT'S STILL TOO FOREIGN A NAME FOR MOST PARTS." HIS DINNER COMPANION SUGGESTED THAT TIMES WERE CHANGING, AS WITNESS THE ELECTION OF COHEN IN MAINE. THE WEST VIRGINIAN LOOKED PUZZLED. "COHEN," HE SAID, "THAT'S NOT A FOREIGN-SOUNDING NAME."

THAT WAS A COMMENT ON THE INTEGRATED SOCIAL PRESENCE OF JEWS IN MAJOR PARTS OF AMERICA, AND IN ITS MEDIA. THE INTEGRATED SOCIAL PRESENCE OF THE JEWS HAS CONTRIBUTED INDISPENSABLY TO THEIR POLITICAL INFLUENCE. BY AND LARGE, JEWS ARE SEEN AS A NORMATIVE PART OF THE AMERICAN CULTURE; AND ARE VISIBLY ENGAGED IN GENERAL COMMUNITY AFFAIRS AND ISSUES.

THAT SOCIAL PRESENCE, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS BEEN IN SUBSTANTIAL AID OF JEWRY'S EFFORTS TO INFLUENCE AMERICAN PUBLIC POLICY ON THE SUBJECT OF SUPPORT OF ISRAEL. WHEN ASKED TO NAME CHARACTERISTICS OF ISRAELIS WHICH MAKE AMERICANS IDENTIFY WITH THEM RATHER THAN ARABS, THE STRONGEST ANSWER GIVEN BY AMERICANS IS THAT THE ISRAELIS ARE "MOST LIKE US," THAT AMERICAN IMAGE OF ISRAEL BEING A CULTURALLY AND POLITICALLY SIMILAR SOCIETY DEPENDS PRIMARILY ON ISRAEL'S REAL CHARACTER, BUT IS SIGNIFICANTLY BUTTRESSED BY THE INTEGRATED AND FAMILIAR JEWISH PRESENCE IN THE AMERICAN SOCIETY -- WHICH IRONICALLY HAS BEEN BUILT AROUND AMERICAN JEWISH INVOLVEMENT IN MATTERS OTHER THAN ISRAEL.

BUT THERE IS A THIRD PRESENCE -- BEYOND THE DIRECT ELECTORAL AND THE SOCIAL -- WHICH INDISPENSABLY AFFECTS THE INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN JEWS ON AMERICAN PUBLIC POLICY. IT CAN BE IDENTIFIED AS THE "INTELLECTUAL PRESENCE" -- BUT ONE HASTENS TO EMPHASIZE THAT THE MEANING LIES IN THE ENTIRE PHRASE -- IN THE STRENGTH OF THE "PRESENCE" AS WELL AS OF THE "INTELLECTUAL" CONTENT.

TO PUT IT IN HANDY MNEMONIC TERMS, THERE ARE THE "THREE CS" OF THIS INTELLECTUAL PRESENCE: THERE IS INDEED SOME CONCEPTUAL THRUST, SOME SYSTEM OF IDEAS WHICH

ARE BEING PUT FORTH. THERE IS, SECOND, SOME COGENT CONSENSUS ABOUT THAT CONCEPTUAL THRUST WITHIN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY, AND, FINALLY, THERE IS THE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION OF THAT CONSENSUS TO PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND TO THE PUBLIC.

COMMUNICATIONS IS LARGELY A TECHNICAL JOB, AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IS REALLY VERY GOOD AT IT ... VERY MUCH BETTER THAN ANY OTHER IDENTIFIABLE GROUP ... ALTHOUGH PRESUMABLY WE CAN ALWAYS IMPROVE. BUT THE MAJOR AND GROWING FLAWS IN OUR INTELLECTUAL PRESENCE HAVE TO DO WITH THE SUBSTANCE OF THAT COMMUNICATION, NAMELY: CONCEPT AND CONSENSUS, BOTH OF WHICH ARE RELATED.

OUR MODERN COMMUNITY RELATIONS FIELD IS, AT ITS BEST, A SYSTEM OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS CONCEPTS, AND FOR DEVELOPING A CONSENSUS ON THOSE CONCEPTS AND STRATEGIES.

THE SO-CALLED ELECTORAL STRENGTH OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY WILL HAVE LITTLE EFFECT ON THE ELECTION OF CANDIDATES OR ON THE INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS IF THERE IS NOT A CREDIBLE CONSENSUS WITHIN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY ON THE ISSUE AT STAKE.

IN THE POLITICAL CONTEXT, "CONSENSUS" MERELY MEANS A SUBSTANTIAL ENOUGH TILT IN ONE DIRECTION TO MAKE A PRACTICAL DIFFERENCE IN ELECTORAL SUPPORT. A 51/49 SPLIT DOES NOT MAKE A PRACTICAL DIFFERENCE OR CONSTITUTE A CONSENSUS. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT DOES NOT USUALLY REQUIRE A 90/10 SPLIT.

AND THERE IS A FACTOR OF INTENSITY. EIGHTY PER CENT OF THE PEOPLE MIGHT PREFER THE U.S. TO THE SOVIET UNION; AND EIGHTY PER CENT OF THE PEOPLE MIGHT PREFER CHOCOLATE TO VANILLA ICE CREAM -- BUT THE EMOTIONAL AND SACRIFICIAL COMMITMENT IS GENERALLY HIGHER TO THE U.S. THAN TO CHOCOLATE ICE CREAM.

IN POINT OF FACT, THERE ARE TWO HIGH-INTENSITY THEMES OF CONSENSUS AMONG AMERICAN JEWS. ONE IS, OF COURSE, AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE SURVIVAL OF ISRAEL. THE SECOND IS A COMPLEX OF ISSUES CENTERING AROUND ANTI-SEMITISM, FIRST-CLASS CITIZENSHIP FOR JEWS, EQUAL TREATMENT UNDER THE LAW, DUE PROCESS AND THE FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS. A SUB-THEME, IF YOU WILL, RELATES TO AMERICAN POLICY WHICH MIGHT AFFECT JEWS ABROAD, AS IN THE SOVIET UNION.

AROUND THOSE CONSENSUAL THEMES, AT LEAST, HOW DO WE DEVELOP AN ALL-IMPORTANT CONSENSUS ON SPECIFIC ISSUES, WORKING CONCEPTS, STRATEGIES AND TIMING?

THAT IS THE PROBLEM WHICH PRESENTED ITSELF TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AFTER THE END OF THE NAZI PERIOD. THE VARIOUS STUDIES OF THE FAILURE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY DURING THE 1930S INDICATED THAT IT WAS NOT SO MUCH APATHY WHICH LED TO THOSE FAILURES -- BUT FRAGMENTATION. THAT FRAGMENTATION AGGRAVATED AND EXAGGERATED THE POWERLESSNESS OF THE AMERICAN JEW. TRAGEDIES ENSUED.

JUDAH MAGNES HAD DEFINED THE LIMITS OF AN ETHNIC COMMUNITY IN AMERICA IN 1918:

"THE EUROPEAN NOTION OF A UNIFORM ... ALL-CONTROLLING ... KEHILLAH CANNOT STRIKE ROOT IN AMERICAN SOIL ... BECAUSE IT IS NOT IN CONSONANCE WITH THE FREE AND VOLUNTARY CHARACTER OF AMERICAN RELIGIOUS, SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL AND PHILANTHROPIC ENTERPRISES ... THE ONLY POWER THAT THE KEHILLAH CAN EXERCISE IS MORAL AND SPIRITUAL IN ITS NATURE, THE POWER OF AN ENLIGHTENED PUBLIC OPINION, THE POWER OF A DEVELOPED COMMUNITY SENSE."

WHAT KIND OF COMMUNAL ARRANGEMENT CAN BEST SERVE THIS FUNCTION AND EXERCISE THIS POWER IN A FREE AND VOLUNTARY JEWISH COMMUNAL SOCIETY? THEORETICALLY, SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT CAN BE CONSTRUCTED. IT STARTS WITH A CORE MECHANISM WHEREIN ALL THE ELEMENTS OF THE COMMUNITY COME TOGETHER TO SEEK CONSENSUS ... NOT TO LUST AFTER HOMOGENIETY WHICH WOULD FOIL THE PURPOSE, BUT TO SEEK CONSENSUS. THEN WHEN THEY FIND CONSENSUS, THEY SPEAK TOGETHER AS ONE COMMUNITY THROUGH THAT MECHANISM.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT, WHILE IT HAS BEEN CUSTOMARY TO SAY THAT THE IMPORTANT FUNCTION OF SUCH A CONTROL MECHANISM IS TO SPEAK AS ONE COMMUNITY, THAT IS REALLY THE NATURAL RESULT OF A SUCCESSFUL MECHANISM RATHER THAN ITS PRIME WORKING FUNCTION. ITS PRIME WORKING FUNCTION IS TO FIND AND ADVANCE CONCEPTUAL AND STRATEGIC CONSENSUS, AND THEN, AS A NATURAL RESULT, TO ACT IN CONCERT, WHETHER IN ONE VOICE OR NOT.

BUT THAT UNDERSTANDING SUGGESTS THE OTHER NECESSARY ELEMENT OF SUCH A COMMUNAL ARRANGEMENT. THE CORE MECHANISM IS NOT ENOUGH. IN A FREE AND VOLUNTARY SOCIETY THERE ARE INEVITABLY MANY JEWISH INDIVIDUALS AND ENTITIES THAT OPERATE SOMEWHAT AUTONOMOUSLY IN THE FIELD OF JEWISH PUBLIC AFFAIRS. THE NECESSITY, THEREFORE, IS FOR THERE TO BE A SYSTEM, A CONSTELLATION WITHIN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY, WHICH BRINGS THAT CENTRAL MECHANISM AND OTHER ENTITIES AND AUTONOMOUS INFLUENTIALS TOGETHER IN WAYS WHICH INFORMALLY DEVELOP COMMON CONCEPTS AND STRATEGIES.

IT WOULD ALSO BE NECESSARY, ACCORDING TO THIS THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT, TO DEVELOP A PATTERN WHEREBY THIS KIND OF CONSTELLATION EXISTS NOT JUST ON A NATIONAL SCALE, BUT IS REPLICATED EVERYWHERE THERE IS A LOCAL JEWISH COMMUNITY.

THIS THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT, YOU WILL RECOGNIZE, HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED ... SOMETIMES RAGGEDLY AND IMPERFECTLY. THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCILS OR COMMITTEES ARE SUCH LOCAL MECHANISMS. AT THEIR BEST, THEY REPRESENT ALL THE ORGANIZED ELEMENTS OF THE COMMUNITY.

THEY HAVE THE POTENTIAL OF REPRESENTING THE MORE THAN HALF OF THE JEWISH POPULATION WHICH CARES ENOUGH TO BE CONNECTED IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. IT IS TRUE THAT THE DELEGATES ARE NOT DIRECTLY ELECTED -- AND IT IS TRUE THAT THEY OFTEN VOTE ON ISSUES WHICH HAVE NOT BEEN SYSTEMATICALLY DISCUSSED IN THE ORGANIZATIONS THEY REPRESENT. BUT EXPERIMENTS IN DIRECT ELECTION HAVE NEVER WORKED -- FEWER PEOPLE WOULD ACTUALLY BE REPRESENTED IF SUCH ELECTIONS WERE HELD. AND THEY ARE REPRESENTATIVE IN THE WAY THAT A SCIENTIFIC SURVEY IS REPRESENTATIVE -- THEY COME OUT OF THE VARYING ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND WAYS OF LIFE IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. AND ALSO, AT THEIR BEST, THESE CENTRAL MECHANISMS HAVE REACHED OUT AND BUILT AROUND THEM A CONNECTED CONSTELLATION OF CONCERNED AND INFLUENTIAL INDIVIDUALS AND ENTITIES IN THE COMMUNITY.

ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL, THE BASIC MECHANISM CREATED BY THE JEWISH COMMUNITY FOR THIS PURPOSE HAS BEEN THE NJCRAC. THE ELEVEN MAJOR JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS AGENCIES COMPRISE THAT MECHANISM. THE CONSTELLATION, ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL, SHOULD INCLUDE

SUCH OUTRIGGERS AS THE ORGANIZATIONS OF PRESIDENTS, THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SOVIET JEWRY AND AIPAC, THE CJF AND ASSORTED INDIVIDUALS. IN THE OVERALL SENSE, THE NETWORK INCLUDES THE NATIONAL CONSTELLATION AND ALL THE LOCAL CONSTELLATIONS.

WE DEVELOPED THIS SYSTEM THROUGH TWO DIFFERENT PUBLIC AFFAIRS ERAS. THE FIRST PERIOD WAS ONE IN WHICH AMERICA WAS REDEFINING ITSELF, MAINLY AROUND THE ISSUE OF CIVIL RIGHTS AND CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS.

IT WAS EASY FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNITY TO BE CONSENSUAL ON THOSE ISSUES: CIVIL AND CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS. BUT PERHAPS THE IMPORTANCE OF THAT TWO-DECADE PERIOD WAS NOT JUST OUR DIRECT INFLUENCE ON AMERICA -- ALTHOUGH THERE WAS THAT -- BUT THE FACT THAT OUR CONSENSUAL ACTIVITY DURING THAT PERIOD ENABLED US TO BECOME MORE THOROUGHLY ENTWINED IN AMERICAN PUBLIC AFFAIRS LIFE THAN WE HAD EVER BEEN. WE BUILT OUR SOCIAL PRESENCE IN AMERICAN LIFE.

THE SECOND PUBLIC AFFAIRS ERA, THE LAST COUPLE OF DECADES, HAS HAD TO DO WITH ISRAEL. HERE THE SUBSTANCE OF OUR INFLUENCE WAS CRITICAL. OUR CONCEPTUAL THRUST WITH RESPECT TO ISRAEL'S IMPORTANCE TO AMERICA, WAS CRITICAL. AND THE SYSTEM WORKED BECAUSE THERE WAS AGAIN AN EASY CONCEPTUAL THRUST AND AN EASY CONSENSUS.

WE HAVE ENTERED A PERIOD WHEN THE JEWISH CONSENSUS ON NEITHER THE DOMESTIC FRONT NOR ON THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS FRONT IS SO EASY. WHY? ON THE DOMESTIC FRONT, THE SIMPLE CIVIL RIGHTS AND CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES HAVE BECOME MORE COMPLICATED.

TWO PEOPLE CAN BE EQUALLY MOTIVATED BY COMPASSION, AND EQUALLY COMMITTED TO HUMAN RIGHTS, BUT CAN HOLD WORKING CONCEPTS AND STRATEGIES ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THOSE CONCERNS WHICH ARE QUITE IN CONFLICT. MANAGING THE ECONOMY IS NOT AS EASY AS MANAGING THE NATIONAL CONSCIENCE. MOVING TOWARDS EQUALITY OF RESULTS IS NOT AS EASY AS ACHIEVING EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY. HANDLING INFLATION IS NOT AS EASY AS HANDLING DISCRIMINATION. BUT THOSE HARDER SUBJECTS ARE NOW AT THE TOP OF THE NATION'S SOCIAL JUSTICE AGENDA. AND ON THOSE HARDER SUBJECTS, THERE IS AND PROBABLY WILL NEVER BE AS CLEAR A JEWISH CONSENSUS ON SPECIFIC ISSUES, WORKING CONCEPTS AND STRATEGIES.

ON THE SUBJECT OF AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL, THE ISSUES HAVE ALSO BECOME MORE DIFFICULT. THE JEWISH PUBLIC AFFAIRS SYSTEM IN AMERICA HAD ALWAYS LAID DOWN THE GUIDELINE THAT OUR CONCERN WAS WITH AMERICAN POLICY ON ISRAEL, RATHER THAN WITH ISRAEL'S OWN SOVEREIGN POLICIES. AFTER LEBANON, AS A MATTER OF FACT, IT BECAME CLEAR THAT SUCH A DIVISION WAS NOT QUITE SO EASILY MAINTAINED. MORE JEWS FELT VOCALLY THAT ISRAEL'S POLICIES WERE IMPINGING ON AMERICAN POLICY VIS-A-VIS ISRAEL. A DIVIDING LINE STILL HOLDS -- THERE IS UNABATED CONSENSUS ABOUT AMERICAN AID TO ISRAEL, ABOUT THE NEED FOR AMERICA TO SHUN AN UNREGENERATE PLO, ABOUT AMERICA AVOIDING OVER-APPEASEMENT OF ARAB STATES -- BUT A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF AMERICAN JEWS WANT TO EXPRESS THEIR UNEASINESS ABOUT SOME ISRAELI POLICIES -- WITH RESPECT TO THE SETTLEMENTS, FOR EXAMPLE.

AND PERHAPS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT, SINCE BENEATH THE UNEASINESS, THE CONSENSUS ON BASIC ISSUES OF AMERICAN SUPPORT STILL HOLDS FIRM, IS THE NEW COMPLEXITY AROUND THE ISSUE OF AMERICAN SUPPORT. IT HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY CLEAR THAT AMERICA'S SUPPORT OF ISRAEL MAY DEPEND NOT ON FAVORABLE AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS ISRAEL, WHICH PERSIST STUBBORNLY, BUT MAY DEPEND ON AMERICA'S ABILITY TO SUSTAIN THAT SUPPORT. THE QUESTION NOT OF HOSTILITY TOWARDS ISRAEL BUT OF NEO-ISOLATIONISM COMES TO THE FORE. THE QUESTION NOT OF AMERICA'S FOREIGN POLICY ON ISRAEL, BUT OF AMERICA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN GENERAL COMES TO THE FORE. AMERICA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN CENTRAL AMERICA BECOMES DIRECTLY RELATED TO AMERICA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST. BUT AS THESE QUESTIONS BECOME MORE COMPLEX, AS VITAL AS THEY MAY BE FOR AMERICAN SUPPORT AND ISRAEL'S SURVIVAL, THERE IS LESS AND LESS OF A WORKING CONSENSUS AMONG AMERICAN JEWS.

UNDER THE PRESSURE OF INCREASING POLICY COMPLEXITY, BOTH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN, THE JEWISH PUBLIC AFFAIRS SYSTEM WE DEvised, WHICH WORKED THROUGH RELATIVELY EASY TIMES, HAS BEGUN TO FLY APART SOMEWHAT. BUT CONNECTED TO THAT ISSUE PRESSURE, THERE HAS BEEN ANOTHER CENTRIPETAL PRESSURE, ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL.

IN BRIEF, AND PARTLY AS A RESULT OF THE GREAT ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS IN AMERICAN JEWISH LIFE, THERE HAVE DEVELOPED SOME COMPETITIVE INTERNAL STRAINS IN THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS SYSTEM WHICH THREATEN THAT SYSTEM.

THESE DYSFUNCTIONS RELATE TO THE QUESTION OF WHO DEFINES THE AMERICAN JEWISH CONSENSUS WHERE IT EXISTS, AND WHO PUSHES THAT CONSENSUS TO ITS NATURAL LIMIT. THE GENIUS OF THE CURRENT THEORETICAL SYSTEM, AT ITS BEST, IS THAT IT IS A CONNECTED CONSTELLATION BUILT AROUND A CENTRAL PUBLIC AFFAIRS MECHANISM COMPRISING ALL THE ORGANIZED ELEMENTS OF THE COMMUNITY. THAT MECHANISM HAS A UNIQUE COMBINATION OF THREE ATTRIBUTES: 1) IT IS REPRESENTATIVE, CAPABLE OF BOTH ADVANCING AND LEGITIMATING A CONSENSUS; 2) IT IS MULTI-ISSUE, REFLECTING AND RELATING TO EACH OTHER ALL OF THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS CONCERNS OF THE JEWS; 3) IT IS PUBLIC-AFFAIRS INTENSIVE, PUBLIC AFFAIRS BEING ITS ONLY CONCERN, BRINGING WITH IT A CUMULATIVE BODY OF SPECIAL EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE.

OF COURSE, THE COMPONENT PARTS OF THIS CENTRAL MECHANISM ARE MULTI-ISSUE AND PUBLIC-AFFAIRS INTENSIVE, WHICH INDISPENSABLY ACCENTUATES THOSE QUALITIES IN THE REPRESENTATIVE CENTRAL MECHANISM.

THERE ARE THREE ENTITIES WHICH ARE NOT USUALLY AN INNATE PART OF THAT CENTRAL MECHANISM, BUT ARE IMPORTANT PARTS OF THE CONSTELLATION -- AND WHICH HAVE BEEN GROWING APACE.

ONE OF THOSE ENTITIES IS THE FEDERATION ON THE LOCAL LEVEL, AND THE CJF ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL. THESE ARE THE OVER-ARCHING ORGANIZERS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY WHICH SPONSOR THE CENTRAL MECHANISMS, AND HAVE DIFFERING MODES OF RELATIONSHIP TO THEM. THESE DIFFERING MODES OF RELATIONSHIP CAN ALL BE APPROPRIATE, BUT IT IS CRITICAL TO THE SYSTEM THAT FEDERATION BOARDS, LOCALLY AND NATIONALLY, WHILE BEING A POWERFUL PART OF THE CONSTELLATION, DO NOT ATTEMPT TO SUBSTITUTE FOR THOSE MECHANISMS. THEY LACK AT LEAST TWO OUT OF THE THREE -- OFTEN ALL THREE -- OF THE ATTRIBUTES WHICH MAKE THE MECHANISM WORK -- AND THEREFORE MAKE THE SYSTEM WORK. THERE MAY BE SOME TENDENCIES IN THAT DIRECTION IN SOME PLACES.

BY THE SAME TOKEN, THE FEDERATION BOARDS SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO TURN THEIR MECHANISMS INTO ANYTHING MORE THAN THE PLURALISTIC AGENCIES THEY SHOULD BE AT BEST. THE MECHANISM FAILS, AND THE SYSTEM FAILS, IF THE COMPONENT PARTS OF THAT MECHANISM ARE NOT THEMSELVES STRONG AND DISPARATE.

WITHOUT GOING INTO DETAIL, IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT AIPAC, WHICH CANNOT BE DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE CENTRAL MECHANISM, MUST ALSO BECOME A NATURAL PART OF THE SYSTEM WITHOUT CONFUSING IT. AIPAC HAS BECOME ONE OF THE GREAT ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESSES OF JEWISH LIFE, AND FOR GOOD REASON. IT IS A CRITICAL INSTRUMENTALITY FOR THE CONSTELLATION, AND IS POWERFULLY INFLUENTIAL IN THE CONSTELLATION -- BUT IT LACKS AT LEAST TWO OF THE IMPORTANT ATTRIBUTES OF AN EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING CENTRAL MECHANISM -- AND IF IT COMES TO ACT IN THAT CAPACITY, THE SYSTEM WILL GO AWRY, AND TRAGIC FRAGMENTATION AGAIN LIES AHEAD FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNITY.

THE BURGEONING PACS ARE THE LEAST CONNECTED OF ALL, AND MAY POSE THE MOST DIFFICULT DANGERS FOR THE JEWISH PUBLIC AFFAIRS SYSTEM. AGAIN, THEY LACK THE MOST IMPORTANT ATTRIBUTES OF AN EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING CENTRAL MECHANISM -- AND IF THEY COME TO ACT IN THAT CAPACITY IN ANY DE FACTO WAY, THE SYSTEM WILL FLY APART.

IN GENERAL, UNDER THOSE ORGANIZATIONAL PRESSURES, COMBINED WITH THE PRESSURE OF MORE COMPLEX ISSUES, OUR PUBLIC AFFAIRS SYSTEM IS IN DANGER OF FLYING APART UNLESS WE PAY ATTENTION.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

THERE ARE SOME RECOGNITIONS OF AND COMMITMENTS TO OUR SYSTEM WHICH MUST AT THIS TIME BE STRENGTHENED IN OUR COMMON CONSCIOUSNESS -- THERE IS SOME IMPROVEMENT TO BE MADE AND PERHAPS SOME CHANGES. FIRST, WE ALL HAVE A STAKE IN THIS SYSTEM, THIS CONSTELLATION WORKING, WHEREVER WE HAPPEN TO SIT IN IT. EACH OF US IN OUR INDIVIDUAL SPOTS WILL BE LESS IF THE SYSTEM IS NOT WORKING. AND THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS INFLUENCE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY HANGS IN THE BALANCE.

THE CENTRAL MECHANISM ITSELF OFTEN NEEDS REINVIGORATION. IT IS NECESSARY FOR THE INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTS TO BRING MORE VIGOR TO THAT MECHANISM. AT THE SAME TIME, IT IS NECESSARY FOR THE CENTRAL MECHANISM TO ENCOURAGE THE INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTS TO MAINTAIN THEIR INDIVIDUAL STRENGTHS AND SERVE THEIR NATURAL FUNCTIONS.

THE CENTRAL MECHANISM MUST ALSO BE AWARE THAT IT IS DEFICIENT WITHOUT THE LARGER CONSTELLATION AS WELL. BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH UNCONNECTED JEWISH INFLUENTIALS AND ENTITIES IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF ITS JOB.

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ATTENTION TO BE PAID TO THE PERSONNEL AND LEADERSHIP WHICH NATURALLY INTERCONNECTS BETWEEN THE CENTRAL AGENCY, ITS COMPONENTS, THE FEDERATIONS, AIPAC GROUPS AND PACS. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR AIPAC AND PACS, FOR EXAMPLE, THROUGH THAT LEADERSHIP, TO ACT IN NATURAL CONSONANCE WITH THE CONSTELLATION.

AND IT IS IMPORTANT TO PAY MORE ATTENTION TO THOSE OUTREACHES BEYOND THE METROPOLITAN AREAS. WHICHEVER PART OF THE CONSTELLATION IS THERE, SHOULD BRING IN THE REST. THUS, IF IT IS AN AIPAC IN AN OUTLYING AREA, ITS LEADERSHIP SHOULD DRAW IN THE CLOSEST JCRC AND REGIONAL OFFICES OF OTHER AGENCIES.

THAT'S THE ORGANIZATIONAL PICTURE. BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ISSUE COMPLEXITIES WHICH THREATEN THAT CONSTELLATION? THERE ARE AT LEAST TWO SHIFTS WHICH ARE INDICATED UNDER THE STRAIN OF THESE NEW ISSUE COMPLEXITIES.

FIRST OF ALL, WITHIN THE CENTRAL MECHANISMS AND WITHIN THE CONSTELLATIONS, THERE MUST BE MORE ROOM FOR FLEXIBILITY. CONSENSUS IS THE ULTIMATE BUSINESS OF THE SYSTEM, BUT THE CONSENSUS AND THE SYSTEM WILL BE STRONGER IF DISSONANCE IS ALLOWED MORE PLAY. IN CONTEMPORARY CIRCUMSTANCES, MORE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION ON ISSUES DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN SHOULD BE SYSTEMATICALLY AIRED, MORE SOPHISTICATED CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES TO THOSE ISSUES AND DIFFERENCES SHOULD BE DEVELOPED. THIS PROCESS SHOULD TAKE PLACE WITHIN THE SYSTEM, RINGED AROUND BY THE CONTINUING FORMS OF CONSENSUS. OTHERWISE WE WILL FIND AN INCREASING FRAGMENTATION FROM WITHIN, A LOSS OF THE SYSTEM'S CREDIBILITY, BOTH WITHIN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AND IN THOSE POLICY CIRCLES WE ARE TRYING TO INFLUENCE.

A SECOND, CONNECTED SHIFT SHOULD PROBABLY LIE IN A GREATER EMPHASIS, WITHIN THE SYSTEM, OF DEFINING THE JEWISH DIMENSION OF ISSUES, RATHER THAN ALWAYS INSISTING ON FINDING A FULL POSITION ON ISSUES. IT IS A DIFFICULT SHIFT IN FUNCTION. FOR EXAMPLE, ON THE MATTER OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN GENERAL -- AS IT IS RELATED TO AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY ON ISRAEL: THERE IS NO WAY THAT WE ARE GOING TO FIND A JEWISH CONSENSUS ON MAJOR ASPECTS OF WHAT AMERICA SHOULD DO IN CENTRAL AMERICA. WITHIN OUR CENTRAL MECHANISMS AND OUR CONSTELLATIONS, WE SHOULD NOT TRY TO PRETEND THAT WE HAVE A JEWISH CONSENSUS, NOR TRY TO FORCE ONE THROUGH. NOR SHOULD WE AVOID THE SUBJECT BECAUSE OF ITS DIFFICULTY. IT HAS A STRONG RELATIONSHIP TO OUR JOB -- AND THEREFORE, ASIDE FROM GOING OUR OWN WAYS, WE SHOULD TRY TO DEVELOP SOME COMMON CONCEPTS AND STRATEGIES, SOME UNDERSTANDING OF THE JEWISH DIMENSIONS -- AS FAR AS WE CAN, AND WITH WHATEVER VARIANCE ENSUES. THIS TOO WOULD STRENGTHEN OUR SYSTEM.

AT THE VERY LEAST, IT IS A TIME TO PAY SERIOUS ATTENTION TO OUR SYSTEM. IT IS THE ONLY HEALTHY WAY TO APPROACH QUESTIONS OF INTERAGENCY RELATIONSHIPS. AND FINALLY WE MUST REMEMBER THAT, WHEN WE ARE TALKING ABOUT A "SYSTEM," WE ARE JUST TALKING ABOUT AN EFFECTIVE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE FIELD OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS. IT IS NOT TOO WEIGHTY FOR US TO LOOK AT THIS RESPONSIBILITY IN THE LIGHT OF THE TRAGIC FAILURE OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE 1930s.