

## The Jitters

We are a little jittery these days, sometimes for better reasons than at other times.



Raab

An anti-Semitic television commercial was reported to the Los Angeles JCRC one morning last week. Two different callers complained that a local station had carried a commercial on the energy crisis which said: "Use gas wisely . . . Don't be Jewish." Promptly questioned, the station re-ran the tape of the commercial. What it really said: "Use gas wisely . . . Don't be fuelish."

Another case of the Jewish jitters was stimulated by the TV showing of Sir Laurence Olivier's "Merchant of Venice" the other night. There is good reason for the Jews to be generally wary of that play. Interpreted badly, it can serve to project the most unsavory image of the Jew.

But this version was not badly interpreted. There is some reason to suggest that, as rendered, it was a powerful *pro*-Jewish drama. The climax of the play came as Shylock's cry of anguish was heard off-stage. Those who had bested him were caught in a long and deliberate moment of silent spiritual doubt. They were *not* jubilant and relieved, in the classic manner of the good guys who had finally beaten the bad guys. Avoiding each other's eyes, they were suddenly — and most clearly — touched with some kind of recognition and shame — not for what they had just done, but for what they had always done to "aliens" like Shylock.

So, the central dramatic revelation of the play, as rendered, was that Shylock was less villain than victim. There were no such stage directions from Shakespeare. All the play said was: "Exit Shylock."

**Although there was some brief Shakespearean frippery following this climactic moment, the note is struck again, as apostate Jessica stands alone, staring at a document relating to her destroyed father Shylock — suddenly heavy with her own recognition of what has really happened, as the strains of the kaddish are heard. That was not explicitly in Shakespeare, either.**

Of course, it might be said that the "benighted masses" watching this play on television might not catch its import, might only see a Jewish money-lender bent on bloody revenge. But if the masses are that benighted, of which there can be some doubt, then we might as well abandon hope anyway. More to the point, we might do well not to under-estimate the grass-roots population; nor the effect of powerful art on them.

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While the above is a personal judgment, and certainly subject to debate, there are less controversial mass media events coming up in San Francisco, notably an ORT interview on KGO-TV's "Bay Scene" on March 24 — and sometime later: a documentary on vocational education in the Bay Area to be presented by ORT on station KPIX.

In general, ORT is one of the least controversial organizations in town. The recent questionnaire sent out by the JCRC included a question designed to measure attitudes towards certain controversial Jewish organizations, with a few controls added. It was not meant to be a comprehensive list of important Jewish organizations. Since the question foolishly did not state the limited purpose of that particular question, some people asked why ORT was missing from the list. It was missing, the designers of the questionnaire state, because they already knew that close to 100 percent of the population would approve of ORT's work.

It is not just a matter of ORT's stunning record in vocational education for Jewish communities around the world. ORT has also become involved in the general community program for vocational education, and serves on vocational education committees throughout the Bay Area. ORT was sought out by the Far West Laboratory to help set up a model alternative education program for the United States Office of Education. This program is currently in operation in Oakland.

## Earl Rabb . . .

(Continued from Page Four)

But, more than that, ORT is importantly involved in the whole spectrum of local Jewish community activities. It convened the first women's Soviet Jewish Rally. It provided specific organizational support for drives of the Jewish Welfare Federation and Israel Bonds. With its 3000 members, it is one of the most valued and active members of the JCRC, always responsive to the need for sending wires, writing letters, rallying to action at critical times.

The Jewish jitters are often well justified — and ORT is one of the more positive ways to deal with them.