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THE PEOPLE OF THE LETTER

Phone call for phone call, letter for letter, public officials hear more often from their Jewish constituents than from any other constituency.

Well, there's a lot to write about.

First of all, there are the matters to which only Jews are mainly alert. Soviet Jews, for example, have entered a new era of trouble. Emigration is at a trickle. More visa applicants are being turned down than ever before. More Jewish activists are being arrested and persecuted than before. ~~Amaly Schenckly has just been given~~. Jewish study groups are being broken up.

Perhaps the Soviet authorities feel this is the time to break the back of the Soviet Jewry movement, and to bury the Soviet Jews for evermore. Or perhaps they are setting up another bargaining chip with the United States. After all, Soviet Jews have fared best at times of American pressure, during Soviet/American trade and exchange negotiations.

And that's the point. This administration which has spoken of its concern for Soviet Jewry, must be urged to place this issue on its active agenda with the Soviet Union. Now, there's a letter. If the administration doesn't know we care, it won't pay much attention either.

And then, of course, there's the matter of Israel. This is a very critical period, when a number of people are apparently playing around with the idea of making Saudi Arabia the cornerstone of our Middle East policy. That would be like making a sand-pile the cornerstone of the Golden Gate Bridge.

There's a letter to be written, too. The administration needs to be constantly urged to support the Camp David agreement as the cornerstone of our Middle East policy. As a matter of fact, we have a contractual agreement to do so. And the administration should be reminded that Israel is the only politically stable and militarily viable ally we have in that area. At this point, the administration should be actively pursuing some concrete "strategic involvement" with Israel, such as using Israel as a military supply base.

Of course, all public officials are not American. In the case of the Ethiopian Jews, American public officials don't have much clout. The more than twenty thousand Ethiopian Jews are undoubtedly in more immediate danger than any other body of Jews. They are being tortured and killed daily. Rescue efforts are difficult and dangerous, but must be accelerated - skillfully. The largest single group of Falashas in recent history has just reached Israel. That still leaves over twenty thousand in captivity. There's another letter - this time to the Israeli government, which should be thanked for its efforts, and urged to make even more strenuous efforts. Every government needs to be reminded of what its friends have on their minds.

Then there are matters in which Jews have a stake along with others. The issue of nuclear disarmament comes to mind, because of current U.S./Soviet discussions. Everyone is certainly in favor of universal nuclear disarmament - except perhaps the few Khaddafys of the world. The objective, of course, is to find some verifiable agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union which will create some equity and stability between the two. That's the only road to nuclear peace.

So, it would seem timely to write the administration, heartily supporting its expressed interest in finding such an agreement during the current talks - and making clear your high interest in the matter.

Too many letters? But that's your lifeline to the government. Public officials are paying more and more attention to their mail in this populist era. And mail is more influential than public opinion polls which do not register the intensity of people's feelings. A letter a week is a good habit to develop - short letters, addressed to one subject at a time, with copies to your Congressmen or other appropriate people. In these times, we must be the People of the Letter as well as the People of the Book.

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