

## Watergate And The Systems

Good laws, rather than good men, make a good society. That, at least seems to be an emphasis in Jewish life and history.

**In other words, you can't depend on making every man a saint—or even on making every man abide by the law. You have to depend on systems of laws and social institutions which are more durable than evil or criminal men. The Jews always were great partisans of system rather than of the arbitrary actions of men, good or bad. Thus, it is written in Leviticus: "Ye shall have one manner of laws. . ."**

There is no indication, for example, that there were fewer anti-Semites in the United States in the 1930's than there were in Germany. Indeed, the surveys that we do have from that period suggest that anti-Semitic stereotypes were just as prevalent in this country for all practical purposes. But, the democratic *system* was substantially stronger in this country, and protected the Jews, a la Leviticus, even when people didn't like Jews. And when we finally got around to giving some justice to the Blacks in this country, it was not because Americans had lost their prejudices, but because the *system* finally was made to work for them as well, in a way that has no chance to work, say, in South Africa.



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In these practical terms, a society is measured not by the relative number of bad men who turn up in public office—although that may be a warning signal. It is finally measured by how well the system stands up, despite them. And certainly the remedy has to do with repairing the systems that are involved, rather than trying to directly cleanse all men of corruption.

Thus, Jews tend not to rely on demonology, either in their religion or in their politics. Politics is not so much a matter of good guys versus bad guys, as it is a matter of better systems versus worse systems. In the case of the Watergate corruption, one system needing overhaul obviously relates to election procedures.

But the larger system that's involved is the American system of free inquiry and free expression, which emerges victorious in the Watergate scandal. In commenting on Watergate—or on the Pentagon Papers—the foreign press has constantly noted, with some awe, how strongly the American system and its first Amendment protects free inquiry—which is more vigorous here than in any of their countries.

**The American Jewish community has always had an historic sensitivity to the importance of such a system. For example, several times the California Legislature has offered to pass a "Group Defamation Law," which would outlaw defamation of religious or racial groups. Many legislators thought that such a bill would please the Jews, and indeed there were debates within the Jewish community. But always, the organized Jewish community of San Francisco and of California ended up opposing such a law; because no one was able to devise one which did not seem to tamper dangerously with the basic system of free speech.**

Rockwell, then head of the American Nazi Party, came to San Francisco several years ago and held a public meeting in front of City Hall. Many people were understandably tempted to bar him from the city, or to attack him physically. But corporate Jewish instinct knew that our freedom would not finally be protected by annihilating this bad man or that bad man, but rather by the soundness of our constitutional system.

The current national scandal should outrage us, and, as always, the individuals involved should be held accountable. But our historic sense might tell us not to be so obsessed with the demons involved that we lose perspective on the need to maintain the systems which have triumphed in the course of this debacle, and on the need to change the systems which have failed.