

"WHAT A WAY TO START THE JEWISH NEW YEAR"

By Earl Raab

"There are some Nazis on the corner of Geary and Park Presidio, handing out anti-Semitic leaflets."

That call came last Saturday to the San Francisco JCRC staff, at home. As Gene Block always says: "The anti-Semites don't rest on Shabbas." On the same day, a meeting antagonistic to Israel was being held in Union Square. On the same day, an anti-Semitic slur was being printed in a San Francisco newspaper, according to another phone call. And, on the same day, the phone wires were burning between the San Francisco JCRC and New York and Washington, on the subject of the threatened Austrian closure of the Schoenau transit center for Soviet



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Jews. As one New Yorker, a rabbi, said on the phone, "We work on Shabbas if it has to do with saving lives." But what a way to start the new year!

Several members of the American Nazi Party were indeed handing out leaflets. They haven't been around town for a few years. They may have a couple of hundred members across the nation, but

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according to the law enforcement agencies which keep tabs on such groups, they haven't grown any. San Franciscans who passed by them at Geary and Park Presidio treated them with appropriate contempt.

As always, these Nazis would have liked to have been arrested. That would have given them more public attention. But much more than that: the very democratic institutions which protect the right of Nazis to pass out leaflets, are the democratic institutions which provide the main bulwark against Nazism, or anything like it. Pre-Hitler Germany had laws against group defamation, which didn't help - and they passed those laws easily just because they had weak democratic institutions and traditions.

Even the "slur" in the San Francisco Examiner was probably of more consequence. It was, in fact, an article praising a couple of young Assistant U. S. District Attorneys who are involved in the prosecution of the Agnew case. One was referred to as a "Boston Jew". It struck a number of people awry that no one else was given ethnic or religious identification. Now, it may be considered a bit of "Jewish over-sensitivity" to complain about a man being called a Jew, when the context is laudatory. However, it does remain curious that the Jew is the only one picked out for identification, and it has so been pointed out to the publisher. It is a reminder of the continuing special visibility of - and the special vulnerability of - the Jew, the eternal "stranger." The tempo of that special visibility is picking up again, in this country as well as in the world.

The Austrian situation is an example. The Austrian Chancellor, Bruno Kreisky, made a startling statement about the "pressure" he had been under not to close Schoenau. There had indeed been "pressure." Over that last weekend, for example, the JCRC - on behalf of the total organized Jewish community, had registered protest with the Austrian Consul; had been in touch with Senators and Congressmen from this area (whom it had just been in touch with again on the question of Most Favored Nation status for the Soviet Union), urging them to take a hand; had asked local Jewish organizations to speak out; and had mailed an Action Alert to the two thousand people in this area who have indicated a desire to act on issues - and who have produced hundreds of letters and wires on issues in the past. This kind of action was undoubtedly duplicated in communities all over the country.

In response to this kind of reaction, Kreisky said angrily that he "would not submit to pressures." That's a strange statement to come from a government which had just collapsed before two Arabs. The fact is that the emigration of Soviet Jews might be disrupted by, but would not be halted by the loss of Schoenau. Somehow, Soviet Jewish emigres, if they are allowed out, will still be processed. The most irrevocable part of the whole Schoenau scandal is the total capitulation by Austria to Arab terrorism. That is an intolerable invitation to anarchy.

But its not quite anarchy. There's an old rule of thumb that emerges: The Jew is not only the odd man, as in the Examiner story, but in many parts of the world he's the odd man out.

Happy New Year!