

FEW PEOPLE dare aspire to having a syndrome named for them, and it was flattering to see a *Jerusalem Post* editorial [see page 20 - Ed.] headed "The Siegman Syndrome." It seems to me, however, that insofar as the term syndrome conjures up a pathological phenomenon, it may more appropriately apply to the editorial itself.

What triggered the editorial's paroxysms were my comments in *The Jerusalem Post* on the preceding Friday. I said that, contrary to the soothing assurances brought here regularly by American Jewish leaders to the effect that, despite the increasing tensions between this government and the U.S. administration, the fundamental ties between the U.S. and Israel remain unimpaired, it is in fact those ties that are beginning to erode. The editorial insists that Jewish leaders have been "brutally frank" in their assessment of the situation, but on the front page of that very same day's *Post*, Seymour Reich, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, is quoted as taking issue with me and insisting that "the fundamental relationship between the two countries is not unravelling." So much for brutal frankness.

A clue as to which of these two conflicting assessments is closer to the mark is contained in the findings of a major poll, whose results appeared in the *New York Times* that very same morning. The poll finds overwhelming evidence of significant erosion in Israel's position in American public

Mocking the messenger

Henry Siegman

opinion, and especially among opinion-shaping elites. Anyone who believes these poll results have no impact on the U.S. administration and on the U.S. Congress lives in a fool's paradise.

What apparently infuriates the editorial writer most is that these critical assessments are not limited to private conversations with Israeli government officials, but appear "on the pages of the *New York Times* and in *The Jerusalem Post* and on Israel Television." In fact, my assessment was not expressed to the *New York Times*, only to the Israeli media. Apparently, *The Post's* editorial has reached the extraordinary conclusion that American Jews must not only avoid expressing controversial opinions in the U.S. but must also refrain from any criticism of Israeli governmental policies - even while in Israel - to Israeli citizens.

The editorial seems to dismiss the credentials of Jewish leaders whose opinions it does not like, and urges that Israeli government ministers not meet with them. That is strange advice from the only Israeli newspaper that freely chooses to report my views under a two-column banner headline - on its front page, with photograph.

DESPITE THE authoritative tone assumed by the editorial in describing

American Jewish life, let me correct several of the more egregious mistakes:

□ Far from having "no connection" with the World Jewish Congress, leaders of the American Jewish Congress established the World Jewish Congress, and for many years the World Jewish Congress operated out of one of the AJC's back offices. We remain a constituent member of the WJC.

□ The editorial speaks of AJC's "meagre" membership. Of the three leading national Jewish defence agencies in the U.S., AJC's is the largest. The American Jewish Committee has a somewhat smaller membership, and the Anti-Defamation League is not a membership organization at all.

□ When American lawyer Allan Dershowitz criticized AJC for its meeting with Cardinal Glomp in Poland, he did not do so as an American Jewish leader or a spokesman for American Jewry, but as an attorney representing a particular client. AJC's meeting with Cardinal Glomp took place at the urging of the most knowledgeable Israeli officials involved in that situation and resulted

in Prime Minister Masowiecki's decision to use Poland as a transfer point for Soviet Jews on their way to Israel.

□ Probably most revealing of the mindset of the editorial is its comparison of AJC to the anti-Zionist Council for Judaism, an entity whose anti-Zionist attitudes were a major reason for the creation of the AJC. The other major reason AJC came into being nearly 75 years ago was to advocate and lobby for a national Jewish homeland before the League of Nations. The AJC is unique among American Jewish defence organizations, and support for the Zionist enterprise is one of its explicit purposes, enshrined in its constitution.

It is precisely because we take our Zionist convictions seriously and because we have a long and consistent history of Zionist and pro-Israel advocacy in the U.S. that we speak out when we believe those Zionist principles to be jeopardized by a provincial, ideologically rigid and exclusivist reading of the Jewish and Israeli situation.

Furthermore, because we are not seen as mindless cheerleaders, our views are taken more seriously by the U.S. administration than those of most other organizations. We opposed the ill-advised Helms Amendment, intended underhandedly to abort the U.S.-PLO dialogue, to the

great displeasure of some in Israel. But it was the AJC's intervention with the U.S. administration to end the dialogue after the recent terrorist action on Tel Aviv's beaches that carried the most weight. The same is true of the stand we took opposing President Bush's misguided references to East Jerusalem and of our opposition to Yasser Arafat's visit to the U.S. to address the UN.

Those in Israel who rush to discredit American Jewish organizations and their leaders the moment they detect disagreement should be aware of the damage they do their own cause. They cannot speak and write derisively of the allegedly undemocratic character of American Jewish life and of its venality (it must come as a great shock to Israelis that financial contributions play a role in the leadership of American Jewish organizations, something that is of course unheard of in Israeli politics!) without doing themselves lasting damage. If American Jewish organizations and their leaders are, as they say, undemocratic, unrepresentative and without influence, there is surely no reason why a U.S. administration or the U.S. Congress should pay any attention to them.

These McCarthy-like polemics, unbecoming to a democratic society and particularly unseemly in newspapers that observe minimal journalistic standards, may become self-fulfilling prophecies.

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DON'T



Bill Hutmán reports on a
stages of madness

MINORITY

ONE OF the most amorphous terms in today's American lexicon is "Jewish leader." Some earn this appellation legitimately, either by leading active organizations with large memberships, or heading political action and lobbying groups that have shown concrete results in articulating the concerns of the Jewish community. These leaders, like the majority of the Jewish rank and file in America, proudly associate themselves with Israel in good times and bad. They convey their critical assessment of Israel's policies and of its relationship with the U.S. to Israeli officials, privately and without publicity. And they do not attempt to interfere in policy decisions which affect Israel's security, knowing that only those whose lives are on the line have the moral right to do so. Their work has added immeasurably to Israel's standing and welfare, and has made possible the rescue of Jews from other diasporas.

Unfortunately, there are others who also call themselves leaders. They have little background in Jewish community activity or support for Israel, but they have found that almost anyone can buy his way to the presidency of impressive-sounding Jewish organizations. Some such presidencies go for as little as \$25,000, which is considerably less

FOLLOWING THE German victory in the soccer world-cup games, young ultra-nationalists rioted in German cities. Four people were killed and hundreds - including 54 policemen - were injured. The rioters were particularly violent in East Berlin. Waving Nazi-era flags and symbols, singing *Deutschland uber Alles* on the Unter den Linden and yelling antisemitic slogans, they attacked the police and clashed with communist groups. There were saner demonstrations, too. The football triumph fed the national euphoria over the first steps towards the reunification of Germany. More flags were seen in public squares than at any time since World War II. As one veteran German journalist put it, "Today we lost the modesty which has characterized us for 40 years."

German nationalism is too closely associated with Nazism, antisemitism and Holocaust for the scenes from Berlin

The Siegman syndrome

than the price of a British peerage and is sure to provide much more excitement. These "leaders" can then rub shoulders with the president of Egypt, the king of Jordan, PLO leaders, Nelson Mandela and others, all of whom are under the sorely mistaken impression that all jet-setting Jewish "leaders" have impact on American policies and access to congressional pockets. Until recently, the Israel government contributed to this delusion by permitting such leaders free access to the prime minister, which in turn gave them *entree* to the corridors of the U.S. Congress and the White House. Administrations unfriendly to Israel, sensing that these "leaders" can be easily manipulated, have showered them with attention in the hope they will replace the real leadership and help pressure Israel.

One of the most deleterious of Jewish organizations today is the American Jewish Congress. In the past, it had a few articulate pro-Israel leaders, but it has now joined the trendy bash-Israel crowd. Its impressive name - often confused with that of the World Jewish Congress, with which it has no connection - is

misleading. Its membership is meagre - much of it acquired through organized tour packages - and its weight in the American Jewish community is insignificant. But it displays hutzpa in inverse relation to its importance. It has come out with pretentious statements about what Israel's policies should be and at one time attempted to "mediate" between Israel and Jordan, an effort which the Israel government was too timid to nip in the bud.

One of the AJC chapters, numbering 1,200 members, disbanded last March, stating: "We are tired of seeing those in the media who oppose Israel quoting our executive director, Henry Siegman. The constant public criticism of Israel... especially by the AJC, has resulted in undue pressure on Israel to accept terms that may jeopardize Israel's security... Policies such as AJC's have led at least in part to the president's recent statements concerning Jerusalem."

Indeed, the AJC's excursions into high diplomacy are far from harmless. Alan Dershowitz, professor of law at Harvard University and one

of the world's leading human rights lawyers, tells of the obstructive role the AJC played in the "convent at Auschwitz" affair. After Jozef Cardinal Glomp blamed the Jews for creating antisemitism in Poland and accused Rabbi Avi Weiss, who had led the sit-in at the convent, of "having set out to kill the nuns," Dershowitz demanded a retraction, to which Glomp's emissaries agreed in principle. But then the AJC leaders rushed to meet with Glomp and, according to Dershowitz, they not only failed to criticize the cardinal's antisemitic statements but agreed with him that Rabbi Weiss contributed to antisemitism in Poland. Siegman was quoted in the Solidarity movement newspaper as having "explained to Primate Glomp that Rabbi Weiss acted destructively and in an irresponsible manner." Not surprisingly, the cardinal promptly withdrew his offer to retract. Six weeks ago, Dershowitz vigorously argued the case in the Polish District Court. The presiding judge agreed that Cardinal Glomp was not above the law and should retract his outrageous libel against Rabbi Weiss. Without AJC's undermining inter-

ference, the retraction would have come months ago.

Now, using similarly vindictive language, Siegman accuses American Jewish leadership of being "reckless and irresponsible" for allegedly lying to Israeli leaders about Israel's standing in America. Siegman knows that those he has accused - the leadership of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations - have made special trips to Israel to give the government their sober and brutally frank assessment of the situation. But those leaders have preferred to do it in private and not, as is the wont of the AJC, on the pages of *The New York Times* and *The Jerusalem Post* and on Israel Television. It may be that in accusing others of prevaricating in order to preserve their close access to Shamir, Siegman is expressing his frustration at being *persona non grata* at the prime minister's office. It can only be hoped that all other ministers will take their cue from the prime minister. Without access to the Israeli leadership, the likes of Henry Siegman will be relegated to their rightful place as true heirs to the late and unlamented Council for Judaism, the anti-Zionist, anti-Israel organization assiduously shunned by all proud Jews.

USSR antisemitism

many to Siberia, often with a xenophobic and antisemitic roar. Even the great hero of the Solidarity movement, Lech Walesa, found it necessary to revile "the Jews" who opposed him. Nor is the phenomenon rooted only in reawakened nationalism. Throughout the world, unadulterated, classical antisemitism is no longer camouflaged as anti-Zionism. It has become quasi-respectable, standard fare. Some observers believe it is more virulent and widespread than it was before the war.

Yet one must differentiate between antisemitism - no matter how virulent and widespread - in a democracy, and state-sanctioned antisemitism in non-democratic regimes - if for no other reason than to prevent the Jewish

gimes or to "traditional" Russian antisemitism is immaterial. A floundering ship of state, deteriorating living conditions, injuries to the national ego inflicted by the loss of empire, ethnic rivalries, and accumulating bitterness at the leadership's "betrayal" are classic breeding grounds for scapegoating. For a while, Stalin served the purpose, but now there is a general realization that the havoc must be blamed not on the aberration of one monstrous figure but on the "system." Which, according to current antisemitic dogma, was imposed on the country by Russia-hating Jews.

True, official Soviet antisemitism *per se* was ended by Gorbachev in 1986. He opened the gates to emigration, improved relations with Israel, promoted a

tism and antisemitic organizations. Last summer, he rejected a petition signed by 200 members of the Congress of People's Deputies to discuss antisemitism. And although article 74 of the Russian Criminal Code makes it a crime to "stir up national enmity and discord," it has never been used to arrest antisemites inciting violence. Official Communist Party publications, like the *Komsomol* monthly - organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth Organization - still publish virulent antisemitic writings and cartoons in which Jews are depicted as bloodthirsty murderers, disciples of Stalin (!) and members of an international cabal.

Perhaps most worrisome is the close-

children and elders in the occupied Arab territories" - is now prosecutor general of the Soviet Union. Valentin Rasputin, a noted writer and environmental leader of the Movement for the Preservation of Lake Baikal, is a member of the new Soviet Presidential Council and a close Gorbachev adviser. Last January he told *The New York Times*: "I think today the Jews here should feel responsible for the sin of having carried out [the Bolshevik] revolution and for the shape that it took. They should feel responsible for the terror that existed during the revolution. They played a large role and their guilt is great - both for the killing of God and for that."

Ironically, antisemitic groups which habitually refer to Jews as Judeo-Nazis have adopted the Nazi Nuremberg Laws' definition of "Jew" ("All those who have any Jewish blood, are married or have been married to Jews"). By this definition the number of Jews in the Soviet Union may easily exceed 10 mil-

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