

Dumb As A Fox

BY RICHARD COHEN

"There is no such thing as a harmless bigot anymore than there is such a thing as a friendly cancer or a benign drug-pusher or a lovable murderer or rapist."

Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld, president of the American Jewish Congress, makes this statement in an article de-bunking "The Archie Bunker Syndrome," appearing in the April 28 issue of Congress bi-Weekly, official publication of the American Jewish Congress.

Charging the award-winning "All in the Family" TV program with creating "a freedom to be offensive," Rabbi Lelyveld declares: "If you would think for a moment about applying the same technique of ridicule, of merciless satire, to other social evils of our time, you would think twice about applying lampooning and laughter to bigotry."

"Slums are not entertaining. War is not entertaining. And bigotry is not entertaining."

The American Jewish Congress president said his own children now came home from junior high school "with Polak jokes that have been told to them by their teachers." He issues a sharp warning:

"When policemen are 'pigs' they are fair game for the slaughterer. When Polaks are stupid, subhuman beings, when kikes are shrewd, and dagos or wops are sly and murderous, it is only one step from the epithet to contempt, and another step to discrimination, and another step to persecution, and the final step to the

gas chamber and systematic extermination. "I am not particularly striving to be an alarmist. It is simply that that is the process through which human prejudice moves."

The American Jewish Congress leader challenges the assertion by defenders of the program that Archie Bunker makes people more "tolerant."

"Tolerant of what?" he asks, adding: "More tolerant of the Archie and Edith Bunkers, the stupid bigots and the well-meaning idiots. And he makes us more tolerant of our own bigotries."

"If we can laugh at Archie Bunker and think that he is not so bad after all, then we can put up with our own selves and our own prejudices and think that they are not so bad after all."

"When Archie is left puzzled and defeated we find it funny. At least we think we find it funny."

"In reality, we are deeply satisfied inside because Archie's defeat reinforces our feeling of superiority to that lower-middle-class WASP ignoramus."

Rabbi Lelyveld asserts that the "major sin" of "All in the Family" is that "it is teaching our children disrespect: disrespect for Archie and Edith Bunker, disrespect for blacks and Jews and Italians and people of Polish and other ethnic origins, disrespect for minorities and, essentially, disrespect for all of us -- disrespect for man." He adds:

"Jews have traditionally harbored a deep respect for words -- for the spoken word. Our respect for words is derived from our respect for the human person."

"Do not go about as a tale-bearer. Do not indulge in slander. Do not bear false witness."

"And why not? Because you are kedoshim -- because every human being bears within him a spark of the divine presence."

Jewish tradition abjures mocking the deaf or the ignorant, Rabbi Lelyveld declares, because even though the objects of attack may not be aware of the mockery, the perpetrator and those who hear him are harmed by "this disrespect for human beings."

The April 28 issue of Congress bi-Weekly is available from the American Jewish Congress at 15 East 84th Street, New York, N.Y. 10028, for 40 cents.

The current issue also includes articles by Harry Golden on "The Fear of Busing;" M.J. Rosenberg, on "The Jewish Vote;" Emil L. Fackenheim on "The Human Condition After Auschwitz," and Howard M. Sachar on "America's Jews: The Plain Facts."

JERUSALEM (WNS) -- Observers here viewed the Soviet pledge of new military aid to Egypt as revealed in a communique following Pres. Anwar Sadat's recent trip to Moscow, as little more than "lip service" not likely to alter the current situation.

PHILADELPHIA -- The publication of a new edition of "The Book of Judith" will continue the series of Jewish Apocryphal Literature sponsored by the Dropsie University, dedicated to the memory of the late Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver.

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