

Christians for Israel

BY LAWRENCE J. EPSTEIN

There is a growing movement to mobilize Christian support for Israel. There are, throughout the country, several dozen Christian groups that have raised money, lobbied legislators, sent telegrams, travelled to Israel, and generally become vocal Zionists.

These diverse groups, with widely differing theological beliefs, have not been coordinated. But now a major effort is underway to form a coalition of Christian groups.

The National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel is an umbrella group whose member groups may disagree on other issues but who have agreed to work together in support of Israel. Dr. David A. Lewis of Springfield, Missouri, is the President of NCLCI and the group's Executive Director is a dynamic minister, the Reverend Isaac Rottenberg.

Rottenberg feels a special affinity for Jews because, in part, he spent the Second World War under Nazi occupation in the Netherlands. His father died in Mauthausen concentration camp. He himself spent two years hidden on a farm.

Working out of his office at the America-Israel Friendship House in New York City, Rottenberg assesses his group's aim. "We want to establish a communication network comparable to a group like the President's Conference. We need a forum. At crucial moments we need to be in touch. During the AWACS debate the Christian community once again failed to speak out in a way that could be heard on the national scene. But there are many Christians out there who care, but until they develop an effective network they won't make much difference. My task is to bring Christians together to express a solidarity with Israel."

Eventually the NCLCI would like a list of key contacts in every congressional district.

In addition to seeking political and economic support for Israel in the halls of Congress and the White House (and elsewhere: the NCLCI has called for Vatican recognition of Israel), the group has repeatedly worked to oppose all forms of anti-Semitism. Reverend Rottenberg is clearly moved as he recounts the history of Christian mistreatment of Jews. He believes much of this history is due to the Christian belief that Christianity had triumphed over Judaism, that the daughter had superceded the mother religion. "Many now recognize that the Church has not replaced Israel. We have become sharers of the promise God made to Israel."

Rottenberg cites such new theological thinking as part of the reason that mainline Protestants are pro-Israel. The Holocaust is another important reason. "We were silent in the past when the Jews were being annihilated. It is our duty now to stand by Israel, to support Israel as an act of repentance."

Besides mainline Protestants there are Roman Catholics and Evangelicals in the NCLCI. Each group supports Israel for different reasons. "The Evangelicals believe that those who bless Israel will prosper. This is what I hear over and over. They point out that in history those who tried to hurt Jews were hurt themselves and those who helped Jews were blessed. They say they are doing it for America." There are, of course, also Evangelicals who believe that Israel's birth fulfills Biblical prophecy. According to most Evangelicals Biblical prophecy about the end of the world includes a strong Israel.

NCLCI works closely with American Jewish groups as well as other pro-Zionist Christian groups. Reverend Rottenberg hopes that such cooperation is indicative of a change in Jewish-Christian relations, a change from dialogue, from talking to each other, to solidarity.

Local attorney Elliott A. Sattler accepted a generous contribution from John Wolf and Loni Kallay of IOLAB for the newly-formed Nevada Eye Bank. Sattler is president of this community service organization established for the proper procurement, preservation, storage and transportation of eye tissue for transplantation in Southern Nevada and surrounding areas.

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WATT ADMITS BLUNDER

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erican Jewish community had "every right to be upset." He explained to the ADL leaders that he seeks support for his energy policies from every segment of American society and that he has no intention of singling out the Jewish community.

ADL national chairman Kenneth Bialkin, who said the meeting with Watt had been arranged for weeks, prior to the disclosure of the letter to Arens, said the Interior Secretary's remarks were made "with great sincerity and in good faith, and we consider the incident closed." Watt was scheduled to meet with American Jewish Committee leaders in Washington.

In the immediate aftermath of the disclosure of the letter Watt insisted that the letter "does not threaten anyone" and that he stood by it because "its intentions were right and it was properly worded." But Jewish lea-

ders and major political figures reacted angrily and many demanded his resignation.

During a nationally televised news conference in Washington, President Reagan was asked if Watt should be fired, as Sen. Daniel Moynihan (D, NY) has suggested. The President answered that Watt "shouldn't be fired." He explained that "What he (Watt) was suggesting with regard to the danger

to Israel, was our vulnerability as long as we are dependent on oil, energy, from insecure sources. And if there should be, as we once had, an embargo, and if we should find ourselves without the energy needed to turn the wheels in this country and the wheels in industry, we wouldn't be much of an ally to our friends and that would certainly include Israel. And he was making it very plain that we are morally obligated to support Israel."

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