

Rabbi Begins Drive: Be Fair to Nixon

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"Good morning, Fairness to the Presidency!"

The receptionist in the Providence, R.I., office answers dozens of phone calls a day. Ten more people work at continually replenished stacks of mail—ripping open envelopes, pulling out cash and check donations from people across the country who think President Nixon needs their support.

The \$100-a-month office in

Providence is headquarters of the National Citizens' Committee for Fairness to the Presidency and a rallying ground for people who believe the President is being unfairly treated by the Senate Watergate committee, the press and television.

A hectic month ago, retired Massachusetts Rabbi Baruch Korff was making his chaplain's rounds at a mental hospital and found a patient making a noose. The patient raged against Presi-

dent Nixon and told the alarmed rabbi, "We're going to have a hanging!"

It was too much for Rabbi Korff, whose previously written letter to The New York Times protesting criticism of the President had gone unpublished. He cancelled a vacation and used the \$1,000, plus more money borrowed and solicited from friends, to buy \$5,700 worth of advertising space in The Times for a tract headed, "An Appeal for Fairness."

The ad started what Rabbi Korff claims is a snowballing, grassroots movement sympathetic to the President. Mail began flooding in, he says, with \$84,000 in cash and pledges raised in less than a month from 10,000 individual contributors. The single ad has spawned a series—two installments so far—appearing in paid space in The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, The

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Washington Post and 19 other newspapers.

The mail his campaign has stimulated, a daily average of 500 letters, is evidence Rabbi Korff believes, of a polarized country: "Hysteria is gripping the nation and painting the President as a villain," he declared. He calculates that 90 per cent of the letters he receives now favor his campaign. In the earlier days, 25 per cent of them were opposed and some contained "wild, wild language and threats to the President."

"For the past decade we have been stalking the presidency as a repository for our own frustrations," Rabbi Korff said. "We have assassinated one, driven another from office by vilification and violence. Now we are visiting assassination by ordeal on a third..."

To Rabbi Korff, the threats of violence to the President and members of his committee are "an indication of the lynching syndrome." A dead cat left outside his Rehoboth, Mass., home carried a note, "This will be your fate."

A heart attack victim who retired 19 months ago, Rabbi Korff was harassed but jubilant in tone when



United Press International

Rabbi Korff reads some of the mounds of mail received in Providence office daily.

interviewed this week: "Sometimes I wish I'd stayed in retirement. My home has been flooded with people and paper. We're steeped in mail." He puts in long hours against his doctor's advice as chairman of the fairness committee and his wife is up until 2 a.m. sometimes, he says writing letters of acknowledgement.

Rabbi Korff spends a good deal of telephone time persuading suspicious reporters his organization is not a front for the Committee for the Re-Election of the President, which has in the past promoted spurious write-in campaigns and newspaper ads supporting President Nixon.

He insists he has had no contact or financial support from either the re-election committee or the White House. "I have never met Mr. Colson," he says in a denial that has become ritual. Nor, says Korff, have any administration professionals helped him and his friends in the drafting of 2,000-word messages. "I write better than they do anyway," he quipped.

(Charles W. Colson, former White House special counsel and political adviser to President Nixon, who resigned in March to go into private law practice in Washington, has been linked during the Watergate hearings with spurious mail and advertising campaigns on behalf of Mr. Nixon. Colson has denied doing anything illegal.)

Asked if the fairness committee might be covertly subsidized by the re-election committee without his knowledge, Rabbi Korff replied, "That is quite impossible." He read a selection of names from various parts of the country, adding, "I can't think they have a coast-to-coast network of 10,000 people. This is madness."

Rabbi Korff says the money has come "in \$1s, \$5s, \$10s and some \$100s," but no larger amounts.

In Massachusetts, where Rabbi Korff is well known as a long-time supporter of Republican Sen. Edward

Brooke, people contacted described him as a brilliant, individualistic man of strong beliefs and one unlikely to serve as the tool of others.

"He's kind of a loner," said Rabbi William G. Braude of Providence. "He's bold and impulsive and once he adopts a cause he pursues it vigorously."

Before the fairness committee, the other cause in Rabbi Korff's life was first the creation, then the well being of Israel. He was associated with a movement that paid for the safe exit of Jews from Nazi Germany during the World War II. Before the division of Palestine, he "morally and financially supported" the Stern gang, although he disapproved, he says now, of the many killings and other acts of violence it carried out.

(The Stern gang (Freedom Fighters for Israel) was a postwar terrorist group formed to rid Palestine of the British. It was dissolved after the state of Israel was founded in May, 1948.)

Yellowing news clippings record that in 1947 Rabbi Korff was the sponsor of a far-fetched plan to parachute thousands of illegal immigrants into Palestine. He was later arrested in Paris for implication in a scheme to aerially bombard London with pamphlets explaining the Zionist cause. This week he said he was cleared of direct involvement in the abortive plan, although he did sanction it.

The advertisements sponsored by the fairness committee and placed by the Providence advertising agency of Bo Bernstein Co., Inc., are skillfully drafted and laced with deft rhetoric. In partisan commentary on the Watergate case, they seek to mitigate its significance, downplay the President's role and discredit the Senate Watergate committee—referred to at one point as "hanging judges."

The press and the Senate committee are accused of conducting a vendetta

against the President and four of the senators are tagged as displaying "anti-administration hostility." Scattered throughout the long text in upper case capitals are rhetorical questions such as, "ARE THEY BEING FAIR?"

Each ad includes a return coupon soliciting money and the use of the donor's name for possible display in future ads. Under Rabbi Korff's chairmanship, the five-man national committee has plans to bring under its umbrella 19 city and regional groups that have asked for affiliation.

To prevent any of the orishoot groups being taken over by "extreme right wingers," Rabbi Korff says they will have to adhere to the unaltered texts of the national organization in their advertisements. They will also be required to pass 50 per cent of their income up the line—necessary, says Korff, because in the first month alone advertising expenditures ran close to \$100,000.

Bo Bernstein, chairman of the advertising agency, said his relationship with the fairness committee was purely professional. The committee gave the agency its requirements and paid cash on the barrelhead, he said. "There seems to be a number of people sympathetic to their view that Watergate is a one-way street, because the mail is very heavy—with and without contributions," he said.

Rabbi Korff says his voluntary and unauthorized defense of President Nixon does not follow naturally on the heels of long and loyal political support. "The first time I voted for him was in 1972. Before that I was independent."

He cites "the carnival atmosphere" of the Ervin committee and "the quite unjudicial proceedings, which reminded me of Joe McCarthy," for his conviction that a response was necessary. "I don't deify the President—we don't even deify Moses—but there was a vio-

lation of my sense of esthetics. I felt sick."

The hate and violence mail began to flow after the first ad. "Some were nefarious, dirty, filthy, as though people had taken leave of their senses."

After disclosure of an alleged plot to assassinate the President in New Orleans this week, members of the committee urged Rabbi Korff to turn the threatening letters over to the FBI. So far he has refused.

Rabbi Korff believes he has a duty to protect the letter writers from the penalties on their excesses: "I think people were victimized by the hysteria. They were held captive by it and said things they would not say in their most sober moments."

More painful to him was the anger and hostility expressed by some members of his former congregation who wanted his stipend cut off.

There has been no encouragement for his efforts from any member of President Nixon's staff according to Rabbi Korff. A letter he wrote to Sen. Brooke expressing outrage at the treatment of the President was copied and sent to the White House by someone on the senator's staff, but that has been the only communication Rabbi Korff says.

The press spokesman for the Committee for the Re-Election of the President, DeVan I. Shumway, disavowed any knowledge or connection with the fairness committee.

A persistent cause for skepticism about the authenticity of the fairness committee is the speed of their fund raising—\$84,000 in less than four weeks after newspaper appeals to only 10 per cent of the population. But a fund-raising expert with the Democratic National Committee is not suprised.

Harlan Lang, deputy to the finance chairman, said: "It's a unique, a one-time appeal and there's no yardstick to measure it with an ongoing program."