

Hyman Bookbinder z"l

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Hyman Bookbinder, the Washington representative of the **American Jewish Committee**, passed away last Thursday, as **the Forward** and **the Jewish Week** report. Bookbinder was also involved in founding the **National Jewish Democratic Council**, although he **felt that American Jews should be active in both political parties**. In tribute to his memory, an excerpt from "**We Jews in the Democratic Process**", a Bookbinder essay for *Sh'ma* from 1989:

In our pluralist society, each group is permitted to advocate and even press its own agenda, but, in the final analysis, it must be able to demonstrate that its interests are compatible with, and dependent upon, the general interest. No groups in America have understood this better than the Jewish community and the labor movement. It has become a political cliché these days to refer to the "powerful Jewish lobby"—too often carelessly called the "Israel lobby." I have often said that the Jewish lobby is not as strong as some think, but not nearly as weak as some would like. Jews have interests. We intend to defend them. We do not apologize for whatever strength and influence we have. Tragically, there were times when our strength—our ability to affect government action—was not effective enough. We had not yet learned how to use the precious right of advocacy; our people suffered dire consequences as a result. We are determined not to let that happen again...

...So American Jews have developed the skills for mobilizing our community and the general community on behalf of the security of our people—in Israel, in the Soviet Union, in our own country. But we have never forgotten that we are only six million Jews—less than 3 percent of all Americans. We must be able to persuade at least another 48% that our case is just, our concerns real, and that America's own ideals and interests are in harmony with ours. Getting this support, I am convinced, is not the job alone of the

professional Washington-based Jewish lobby. In a very real sense we must think of the entire Jewish community as that lobby—the totality of Jewish influence in the country exercised by a wide range of secular and religious institutions, and by individuals publicly recognized as Jewish leaders and spokespersons. And in the larger sense we must think of the allies and the friends the Jewish community has acquired across the land—the churches, women, labor, civil rights, education, urban affairs and so many other groups in our society. We have won these allies, these friends, in two ways: by educating and appealing to them on the merits of our case, and by demonstrating our interest and commitment to the broader community's agenda.

There are some in our community who argue against involvement in these broader public issues, believing that our immediate Jewish problems require all of our attention and energies and resources. My response has always been that I am proud that over the years we have defined our Jewishness, our Judaism, as a commitment to justice for all people, to peace for all people, to freedom for all people. Such a commitment to universal justice does not short-change our Jewish interest; it is, in fact, the only way to protect such interests. But as a pragmatic lobbyist, if you please, I see this broader activity also as a necessary strategy to establish credibility, to make friends, to win trust. "How can Zionism equal racism," we want Congressmen and black leaders and journalists to ask themselves, "when Jewish representatives we work with or observe day after day are promoting fair housing and fair employment and fair immigration policies?"

There is no conflict between our great love and great hopes for this blessed land and our deep feelings for Israel and for our Jewishness; not only are such feelings compatible, they are mutually reinforcing.