

Praise to ACLU

IT IS A RARE coincidence when principle and practice merge in the work of an organization. It is even less frequent when this occurs consistently despite strong opposition and, sometimes, popular resentment.

The organization we are referring to is the American Civil Liberties Union, a national group dedicated to help guarantee the Bill of Rights.

On Sunday night, Dec. 7, ACLU's Illinois division is celebrating at the Park West 60 years of struggle, an amazing record for a group that has been attacked at various occasions from the right, the left and every in-between group in the American political rainbow.

When government tried to trample on people's rights, the ACLU stood up and fought for the victims.

In the 1920s, the ACLU opposed the Palmer raids against aliens. In the '30s, it aided labor organizers. In the '50s, it fought McCarthyism, and in the '60s it attacked racial segregation and defended anti-war protesters. In the last decade it opposed the infringement of civil liberties whether that infringement originated in the White House or in local governments.

Right in our own backyard, the ACLU protected the free speech rights of even those whose aim is to destroy the freedom of others. In the emotionally charged attempts of the American Nazi Party to march in Skokie, the Jewish counsel of the ACLU had to defend a group he despised.

That's the incredible message of the ACLU today: In Voltaire's words, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

Most Americans are proud to embrace that principle, but most of us hesitate to enforce it when it goes against the grain of our own interests.

The ACLU has operated on that principle successfully--sometimes at a great financial loss. That's why it deserves the support of people of every political persuasion. The word "American" in the organization's name is singularly true. ACLU represents the best in American tradition.

Happy birthday and many happy returns.