

Membership woes hurt ACLU while others gain

By DIANE DUBEY
Correspondent

WHILE THE American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has suffered a significant loss of membership and funding due to participation in the ongoing Nazi controversy, another group has greatly benefited from its stand on this issue.

"We're getting a broad base of support among middle-American Jews who are finding out that violence is not our basic theme," said Buzz Alpert, director of the Chicago area chapter of the Jewish Defense League (JDL).

Alpert told *The LIFE* Wednesday, May 24, that local JDL membership has expanded from the core group dating back to the early 1970's to more than 250 at present.

"People realize that violence sometimes becomes necessary in order to preserve Jewish life and continuity," he said.

In contrast, the ACLU Chicago office, which chose to provide legal coun-

sel to neo-Nazis who have been planning to march in Skokie, has lost about 25% of its membership and nearly one-third of its budget, according to David Hamlin, ACLU executive director.

BUT, HAMLIN said, the members who have chosen to abide by the ACLU decision "are providing a little extra support."

The national ACLU organization recently raised \$400,000 in a special solicitation for the Nazi defense, he said.

"This shows an institutional willingness to support even unpopular litigation."

Leaders of both the JDL and the ACLU share an interest in preserving First Amendment rights, but they are of different minds in determining what these rights are.

"Any person of reasonable intelligence would not kid himself to think that the founding fathers formulated a First Amendment that people could use

as an excuse to preach death," Alpert said.

Hamlin maintains that all ideas have the right to be aired so that people have sufficient information to make an intelligent decision.

"The greater exposure (Nazi leader) Frank Collin gets, the safer I am from him," he said. "The more critical examination of his philosophy, the more people who will understand how evil and dangerous that philosophy is."

ACCORDING TO Alpert, 95% of the JDL feels that the current battle is not a question of the First Amendment. "We believe that the judicial system does not have the courage to uphold the law," he said.

To Hamlin, however, the legal system in this country "serves rather well ultimately. It's slow and arduous, often ponderous and weighty, but it gets the job done," he said.

Asked if he is frustrated by the
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ACLU loses members

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seemingly unending legal struggle between Skokie and the Nazis, Hamlin replied that he is "Frustrated in the sense that this controversy has a way of not going away and we'd like to move on to other things."

But, he added, "This is the way the legal system works, and besides, I'm too tired to be frustrated."

While the ACLU is paving legal roads for a Nazi march in Skokie, JDL members are preparing for the same day.

WE'LL DO what we have to - We're conducting classes in street fighting, teaching firearms, and pre-

paring to meet them head on," Alpert said.

"While this is going on, Frank Collin is laughing at his Jewish lawyer (ACLU attorney David Goldberger) and the courts - he's the last one to believe this has anything to do with First Amendment rights."

What Alpert finds frustrating is the fact that the JDL is also engaged in another conflict-with its own national organization.

He told *The LIFE* that this week the Chicago and California JDL chapters formed a coalition and split from the national body.

"We were willing to work together for the sake of unity, but the New York JDL says we don't exist," Alpert said.

ALTHOUGH CHICAGO members are still willing to cooperate with any chapter including New York Alpert said he sees no reconciliation as long as Bonnie Pechter remains national director.

The Chicago and Los Angeles-based chapters still recognize JDL founder Rabbi Meir Kahane as their "spiritual leader," he added.