

December 18, 1986

Village Reform Independent Democratic Club
c/o Ms. Elizabeth Swolenberger
60 East 9th Street
New York, New York 10003

Gentlemen:

Our attention has been called to a letter ostensibly signed by Martin Begun, which was apparently distributed by the Village Reform Independent Democratic Club in the recent contest for District Leader.

I am writing to inform you that the American Jewish Congress deeply objects to the identification of Mr. Begun in this letter as a Vice President of the American Jewish Congress. That is a dishonest as well as an illegal way of implicating the American Jewish Congress in that contest. We would have expressed our objections directly to Mr. Begun. However, he has assured us that he neither saw nor signed the letter that bore his name.

Sincerely,

Henry Siegan

HS:aa

INDEPENDENT
VILLAGE DEMOCRATS



What's the story? Many of you may be wondering about the "Martin Begun issue" that has been argued about in a local newspaper. Here's an up-date. After Elizabeth Shollenberger's political club, VPDC, distributed a letter last year purportedly signed by Martin Begun of the American Jewish Congress (AJC), long time VID member Richard Hartzman wrote to AJC about the matter. Many people were upset and offended by the rhetoric, falsehoods, and distortions contained in the Begun letter. The response from AJC to Richard Hartzman, as well as a letter from AJC to Elizabeth Shollenberger and VRDC, are printed on both sides of this page. Did Begun write the letter? He apparently told AJC he did not, but he's telling the public that he did. Either way, the letter itself was a new low in VRDC's campaign tactics.

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Richard M. Hartzman, Esq.
235 West 102nd Street
Room 16-T
New York, New York 10025

Dear Mr. Hartzman:

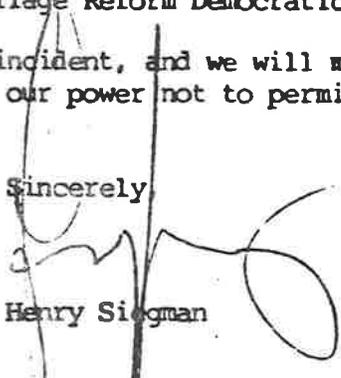
Please forgive the delay of this response to your letter of October 9th, addressed to our President, Theodore R. Mann.

Mr. Mann asked me to take up the matter with Marty Begun. Unfortunately, because of my travels abroad, particularly in Eastern Europe, I did not get around to doing this until quite recently.

You are absolutely correct in your objections to the letter, both to its contents and to the procedure. The short answer is that Marty Begun has assured us that he did not authorize the letter, that he did not see it, nor did he sign it. He agrees that the use of AJCongress' name was highly improper and offensive. Indeed, it was illegal, and we have so informed the Village Reform Democratic Club.

I regret this unfortunate incident, and we will most certainly do everything in our power not to permit its repetition.

Sincerely



Henry Siegman

HS:aa

1986 —

RICHARD M. HARTZMAN
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October 9, 1986

Theodore R. Mann
President
American Jewish Congress
15 East 84th Street
New York, New York 10028

Dear Mr. Mann:

I am writing as a long-time member of the Village Independent Democrats (VID) to express my outrage at the enclosed political campaign letter sent by your vice president, Martin Begun, to Jewish residents of Greenwich Village. This letter, used by the Village Reform Democratic Club (VRDC) as a tool to pander for votes against the VID candidate for District Leader, Sherri Donovan, preys on the fears of anti-semitism. Its upshot may be an increase in anti-semitism.

Begun's claims regarding VID are misleading and full of distortions. By way of brief response to those claims: 1) Jesse Jackson in 1984, received only 38% of the VID vote and did not get the club's endorsement; 2) VID passed a resolution condemning Jackson for his "Hymietown" statement; 3) the president of VID who marched with Jackson did it of her own accord, and shortly afterward, for other reasons, stepped down as president; 4) When VID participated in the April, 1985 March for Jobs, Peace and Justice, the Club was unaware of "U.S. nonintervention in the Mideast" statement, would certainly not support it as far as it may concern Israel, and was subsequently informed that the statement, whatever it meant, was not targeted at Israel; 5) VID has regularly participated in marches for Soviet Jewry; 6) suggesting that our anger with Senator Moynihan because of his policies implied some kind of support of the LaRouche candidate, Melvin Klenetsky, is a ludicrous and malicious contrivance.

In sum, there is absolutely no relation between the evidence Begun uses and the conclusions he reaches. It turns upside down the truth about VID; its consistent opposition to anti-semitism.

What is perhaps most disturbing about Begun's letter is that all his distorted claims involve events which occurred before September, 1985--that is, before Sherri Donovan was even a member of VID. So why did this letter go out? The obvious answer is that Sherry's last name is not a Jewish name. VRDC wouldn't dare use this vicious attack a year ago when Tony Hoffmann was running for re-election as District Leader.

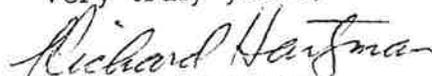
The irony is that Sherri is in fact Jewish--simply bearing her former husband's last name--and has been a staunch advocate of Israel all her life. She has lived and worked in Israel and served on a kibbutz. As for Sherry's relation to the National Lawyers Guild, which Martin Begun made so much of, she was a student officer of a law school chapter. During her tenure no anti-Israel resolution ever transpired at the chapter or elsewhere in the Guild.

The real message of Begun's letter thus appears to be that non-Jews running for public office can expect to be trashed in the Jewish community through the manipulation of fear of anti-semitism. Such tactics will in effect increase anti-semitism, something we can ill afford at this juncture in history.

I have been told that Begun simply authorized the use of his name--that he never saw the letter and did not sign it. The signature is apparently not his. This, along with his allowing the name of your organization to be used in support of a sleazy political tactic, only further substantiates his irresponsible and repugnant behavior as a Jewish leader.

You should reward Begun's conduct appropriately.

Very truly yours,


Richard Hartzman

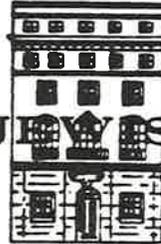
enclosure

POLITICAL SMEAR UPDATE

Here's the latest information regarding last year's anti-VID smear letter signed by Martin Begun and disseminated by Liz Shollenberger and VRDC. Sadly, we expect VRDC to launch another negative campaign this fall.



AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS



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OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

May 6, 1987

Village Reform Democratic Club
60 East 9th Street
Suite 533
New York, N.Y. 10003

ATT: Ms. Elizabeth Shollenberger

Dear Ms. Shollenberger:

I have spoken with Marty Begun, and now have no reason to doubt that he in fact wrote and signed the letter in support of Liz Shollenberger.

Mr. Begun has been informed by the American Jewish Congress that his identification in that letter as a vice president of the American Jewish Congress was entirely unauthorized and inappropriate.

Sincerely,

Henry Siegman

HS.ilb