

October 30, 1956

Dear Mrs. Gruen,

Thank you for showing me the October 19 copy of "Peace News." I was happy to have the opportunity of acquainting myself with the Pacifist point of view.

However, I must say that I was shocked and dismayed by the lead story in that issue, entitled "Israel and Jordan" by Brijen K. Gupta. In what purports to be an "inside story" on the Middle East crisis, I have found a most intemperate and one-sided condemnation of Israel certainly not calculated to pacify inflamed passions in that international cauldron.

The correspondent's thesis is that Israel's policy of "massive retaliation" is the very factor that is disturbing the peace, and that this is traceable to Ben Gurion's "aggressive Zionism." The sophisticated reportorial verbiage aside, this is the essence of the position of the Arab war lords who have been threatening for over eight years now to "push Israel into the sea." Israel, according to this point of view, must behave like a gentleman and remain supremely oblivious to the murder of its citizens on its own soil, the boycott against it, the closing of international water-ways to its shipping and constant warmongering against it. And if Israel raises a finger in its own defense, that is "naked aggression." It calls to mind the story of the youngster reproached by his father for fighting with his friends. "Who started the fight?" asks Father. "He did," replies the youngster, "he hit me back first."

"Israel," the correspondent advises, "must take a lead in creating an atmosphere of mutual trust and peace." Does not this correspondent, who announces that he is giving "the inside story," acknowledge any of the facts of recent history? Does he not know, or want to know, that Israel from the day of its birth has been asking for peace with the Arabs, and has even included this request in its Declaration of Independence? - that for years now its representative at the U.N. has been asking vainly for the Arab delegates to sit down with him and begin negotiating a permanent peace? Does he not know that the Arabs have consistently refused to discuss peace with Israel or recognize her existence, and have deliberately maintained a state of war with her? - that the Arabs, in Nasser's words, believe that "Israel is an artificial state that must disappear?" Has he never heard of Radio Cairo, which is government owned and operated, and which spews forth such poison as, "Weep O Israel, cringe and fear, grit your teeth and regret that you were born. Prepare yourselves for extermination...your end is close and your agony will be hard, for the Arabs are on their way towards Tel Aviv...We cry vengeance, and vengeance means the death of Israel." In the face of these facts, the correspondent's preachments become a piece of gratuitous advice that Israel oblige its enemies and commit suicide.



To disagree with Israel's policy of retaliation on grounds of efficacy or strategic wisdom is one thing. To condemn it on moral grounds is quite another. Now while one can appreciate the deep sincerity of the pacifist position, it is difficult, logically or morally, to accept the proposition, implicit in Mr. Gupta's criticism, that Israel is morally culpable because pacifism must dominate even where national extinction and wholesale murder is the only alternative. For certainly that is the case. The many hundreds of Israeli citizens - including women in their homes and children in prayer - murdered by Arab infiltrators and border police were not casualties of fanatical super-patriots acting on their own initiative. Not long ago, before Mr. Gupta wrote his article and in time for him to acquaint himself with the facts, Egyptian Minister Hassan al-Bakuri, speaking over government owned Cairo radio station ~~Saout~~ Saout al-Arab, said, "there is no reason why the loyal Fedayeen (Egyptian guerillas), who hit their enemies, should not penetrate deep into Israel and make the lives of its people a hell." Will Mr. Gupta deny the Israelis the right to prevent their lives from becoming "a hell?" As recently as October 10, the Jordanian paper "Falastin" wrote, "The way to the solution of the Palestine problem is much shorter without a pact. The sword has always offered more promise than ~~words~~ pacts or discussions." The next day, Damascus Radio promised that Syria would never consent to any kind of settlement with Israel, Lebanon said it "there is no readiness to discuss peace with Israel," and Baghdad Radio urged a fight against "the cancer which is Israel." Mr. Gupta's arguments look mighty pale when faced with the incontrovertible facts.

There is a note in his article which is profoundly disturbing. In only one sentence in a rather lengthy report does he refer to the Arab raids on Israel, and then immediately returns to his attack on Israel in an unforgivable manner. He admits that the Arab murder of innocent Israeli citizens cannot be overlooked or condoned. Then what follows is a pat-on-the-back together with a stab-in-the-back: "But one does expect something better from Israel because in the first place Israel is a suffering people...." Does he seriously mean to suggest that Israel must continue to remain a "suffering people?" Is it necessarily a virtue to suffer? And is it not more cynical than virtuous to recommend suffering to others? One of the primary reasons for the creation of the State of Israel was to prevent those who had suffered for so long from suffering any more. ~~It~~

Pacifism, whether one agrees with it or not, must be acknowledged as arising from deeply moral sentiments. It is deeply disconcerting, therefore, to find a pacifist organ giving such prominence to an article where moral judgments are pronounced with such ease and self-righteousness, and not with the soul-searching and ~~and~~ introspection which should precede such a wholesale condemnation of a people fighting for their very lives.

Sincerely yours,

Rabbi Norman Lamm