

15 February 1985

### **Helping Israel – from within**

THE PRESIDENT of the American Jewish Committee, Mr. Howard Friedman, last week told *The Jerusalem Post* that the committee, along with other Jewish organizations, had voiced opposition to amendment of the Law of Return. In order, presumably, to pre-empt any charge that the committee was interfering in internal Israeli affairs, he prudently added that this was a “genuine American issue.”

It certainly is an American-Jewish issue. Indeed, it is a more “genuine” issue for the Diaspora than it is for Israel itself – where not all the proponents of the amendment are motivated by purely religious reasons. For some it is a function of the determination of the Orthodox rabbis, aided by their secular allies, to perpetuate the denial of status to Conservative and Reform rabbis. To others it is a component of the competition among the religious political parties to prove their zeal to the observant electorate.

The latest assault on the Law of Return has been repulsed; but the opponents of the amendment do well to remain alert and active.

MR. FRIEDMAN also told *The Post* that the AJC will soon expand its activities in Israel. It hopes to promote pluralism in Israeli society and to introduce some “American elements and values” that are “rare” in Israel, a country of “ideological polarization and a reluctance to compromise.”

This Mr. Friedman, in all prudence, did not describe as a “genuine American issue.”

Indeed it is not. It is an impertinence. As it happens, Mr. Friedman, if he was correctly reported, is out of touch with Israeli realities. His references to “pluralism” and “compromise” would not stand up to 10 minutes of debate. That however is secondary.

The suggestion that the people of Israel should receive instruction from outside on the nature of its society, and that precisely the American Jewish Committee has a right, or a duty, or the competence, or the intellectual capacity, or the moral authority, or the humility, to inject itself into Israel’s educative process or its social and political development, is as laughable as it is condescending.

If Mr. Friedman and his colleagues are indeed afire with desire to help Israeli society mould itself differently, there is only one way they can do so in dignity: by becoming a part of that society. They can then promote any ideas they wish – as Jews, as Israelis, not as spokesmen for “America.” The Law of Return, and indeed Israel’s open arms, await them.

IN THE MEANTIME, it is permissible to mention to the AJC leaders the concern of many people in Israel at an American phenomenon which is a genuine Israeli issue.

Rightly concerned that converts to Judaism should be welcomed, what steps are the AJC, and indeed other U.S. Jewish organizations, taking to stem the flow of Jewish converts from Judaism?

Closely related to this problem, which palpably threatens the very being of the Diaspora Jews today, what are the AJC and other organizations doing to deal with the fact that a large proportion of Jewish children in the U.S., perhaps a majority, do not

receive any Jewish education at all; and that, of those that do, many complete their minimal studies with a flourish at the age of 13?

In the various publicized preoccupations of the AJC and other U.S. organizations not specifically dealing with education, there is little to suggest that they are aware that a generation of almost certain candidates for alienation and *shmad* is growing up under their very eyes.

REGRETTABLY, the proposed AJC initiative reflects a recent tendency on the part of some American Jews and organizations – self-styled as “liberals” – who, expressing distaste for Israeli policies, real or imagined, talk and behave as though they have a right not only to criticize but to interfere actively in Israeli political – or what is even more insidious, educational – affairs.

Sixteen months ago (October 17, 1983) the *Los Angeles Times* reported, on its front page, a meeting attended by about 70 Jews in a private home “to support and raise money for an organization that says Israel has for too long trampled on the civil rights of a large number of citizens.”

The group is called American-Israeli Civil Liberties Coalition and was described as the American counterpart of “Kol Koreh,” a group of “Israeli intellectuals, sociologists and educators” who, it was stated, organized in 1908 to promote civil liberties in Israel.

A voluble mouthpiece for the group at the meeting was the notorious Mrs. Shula Koenig who, several years ago, toured the U.S., purveying horrendous fantasies about the evils of Israel.

It was announced there that the money being raised was to match a grant by the Ford Foundation of \$95,000 to enable Kol Koreh to develop “curriculum materials and teacher-training programmes on civil liberties in Israel.”

The Ford Foundation is a noted and consistent supporter of “radical left” causes, including “guerrilla” and terrorist movements, in various countries, including organizations favouring the PLO. One can readily imagine what kind of curriculum materials it would like to see distorting and subverting the Israeli education system.

Even that is secondary to the fact that here was an attempt to smuggle extraneous materials into Israeli schools from outside the Israeli education system. The attempt is presumably being made.

Is the Ministry of Education aware of this project? Is it possible that it is permitting this infiltration?

It must be assumed that the Ford Foundation grant and the money raised by the “coalition” is being used somewhere, somehow in Israel.

Does anybody in authority know where or how?

A MORE amusing phenomenon is the attempt by some American Jews (who describe themselves as liberals) to effect a mutual interference by Israel and the United States in each other’s affairs. They want, no less, that Israel should cold-shoulder Americans whom they, the liberals, dislike. Specifically, the issue revolves around the person of the Rev. Jerry Falwell, a consistent and outspoken friend of Israel in many fields.

Leader of the Moral Majority, Falwell espouses causes which they oppose. As his views are close to those of President Ronald Reagan, recently re-elected by a heavy

majority, these views presumably enjoy the support of many other Americans, maybe even a majority.

He is against abortion; he campaigns against homosexuals; he inveighs against a permissive society exemplified by the proliferation of pornographic materials; he wishes to have prayers permitted again in public schools.

These are legitimate subjects for debate; and Jews may legitimately be – and are – on either side, including the debate on school prayer.

The hullabaloo over this subject is a storm in a teacup. Many Jews from other Western countries attended schools where prayers were held. Often (as in the school I attended) the prayers consisted of a teacher's recitation of a Psalm. No Christian felt hurt. At schools where prayers were specifically Christian, Jewish children were excused (and could say their own prayers if they wished).

Nor have we heard British Jews complaining of disabilities in a constitutionally Christian country where the queen - who is monarch of her Jewish – and other – subjects, is crowned by the archbishop of Canterbury, without the chief rabbi even having a look-in.

However, the Americans will decide; some U.S. Jews will be on the winning side, others among the losers, and Israel is not involved.

FALWELL'S Jewish detractors, however, flaunt an "Israel" argument against him. His sympathy for Israel, they say, is not genuine. What he really wants is for all the Jews to be ingathered in Eretz Yisrael, so that the Second Coming of Christ can happen.

It is hard to discern the logic or the force of this argument. After all, as Jews, these critics do not believe in the Second Coming. Even if they have guessed Falwell's "motives" correctly, why are they upset?

The only possible explanation for their agitation is that they recoil from the idea that Jews should go to live in Israel, that they, Heaven forbid, should make aliya.

Alas, in this Israel is on Falwell's side. The ideal of Zionism is the ingathering of the Jewish people. It is called *Shivat Zion*. That is what the Law of Return is about.

In any case, when Mr. Falwell visits Israel, he may expect the warm welcome extended to all of Israel's friends.

*See Letter to the Editor on the following page*

*Readers' Letters – 28 February 1985*

## **RIGHT TO CRITICIZE**

*To the Editor of The Jerusalem Post*

Sir, – Shmuel Katz's misunderstanding of and spurious argument against some of the American Jewish community's positions regarding both Israel and the Moral Majority ("Helping Israel from within," February 15) deserve a response.

Mr. Katz first expresses astonishment that American Jews have the *hutzpa* to "talk and behave as though they have a right not only to criticize but to interfere actively in Israeli political affairs." Forming the largest and most influential Diaspora community and working voluntarily and at great personal expense as financial and political partners with the Israeli government and people, American Jewish leaders have earned the right to criticize Israeli policies when they see fit. One does not necessarily have to agree with the actions of America's Jewish leadership, but they certainly are entitled to express their opinions.

Mr. Katz then proceeds to do exactly what he so sharply criticized American Jews for doing: he, as an Israeli, castigates the American Jewish community's position on the Moral Majority – a purely domestic issue. Yet this is not Mr. Katz's only error. He argues that because popular President Reagan supports many of the Moral Majority's positions, these positions are probably supported by a majority of Americans. Former President Lyndon Johnson also enjoyed a landslide election victory in 1964 while espousing continued involvement in Vietnam. Though a president may be popular, it does not necessarily follow that all his positions are supported by a majority. Recent polls have shown that the Moral Majority's viewpoints on abortion and school-prayer are not upheld by a majority of Americans. And, even if they were, would this make them right, as Mr. Katz implies?

Worse, the same Shmuel Katz who wrote that the American Jewish Committee's criticism of Israeli policies "is as laughable as it is condescending" denigrates American Jewish concern over the Moral Majority's school-prayer policy as being "a storm in a teacup." Mr. Katz supports his argument by mentioning "other western countries" where prayers were held and the fact that "at schools where prayers were specifically Christian, Jewish children were excused." Not only does Mr. Katz totally disregard the tenet in the United States' Constitution advocating a separation of church and state – a Constitution which has made America more free and multidimensional than "other western countries" – but he ignores the inherent lack of sympathy and prejudice in singling out and excluding American Jewish children from the same daily activities as their compatriots.

*DAVID L. SOLOMON*

Tel Aviv.

*Readers Letters – 12 March 1985*

### **THE RIGHT TO CRITICIZE**

*To the Editor of The Jerusalem Post*

Sir, – David L. Solomon, in his letter of February 28, accuses me of denying Americans the right to criticize Israel (in my article, “Helping Israel from within”). I did nothing of the sort. I attacked American Jewish bodies explicitly for trying to *interfere* physically in the practical functioning of Israel’s internal affairs.

As for the Moral Majority, Mr. Solomon was evidently so enraged by my daring to comment on the issue that he appears not to have read properly what I wrote. I wrote that Rev. Falwell’s views are “legitimate subjects for debate,” and that there are Jews on both sides, but that it was objectionable for Americans to dictate to Israel the rejection of Falwell’s friendship because they happen to oppose his policies on American domestic affairs. (On this, Mr. Solomon describes me as “castigating the American Jewish community’s position on the Moral Majority.”)

On Jewish reactions to the idea of school prayers, I expressed my opinion. I did *not* announce the creation of a fund or an Israeli organization to promote, or prevent, prayers in U.S. schools – the kind of interference some American Jews are planning to conduct in Israel. Mr. Solomon would do well to study the difference.

Support for the principle of separation of church from state (which incidentally I share) does not justify the hysteria of some Jews on the subject. In calling the issue a storm in a teacup, I was understating. Behind it, in the case of many of them, is no small measure of hypocrisy.

Many of the zealots who become so heated over the idea of school prayers seem not to turn a hair at the prospect of what will happen if school prayers are permitted, and Jewish children are then permitted to have their own prayers. Many or most of these children will be found incapable of telling one end of a Jewish prayer-book from another, or even one Hebrew letter from another.

If Mr. Solomon, and anybody else, will call *this* “castigation,” they have my sorrowful blessing.

*SHMUEL KATZ*

Tel Aviv.

*Readers Letters – 24 March 1985*

### **THE FORD FOUNDATION**

*To the Editor of The Jerusalem Post*

Sir, – It was with great pain that I read Shmuel Katz’s article, “Helping Israel – from Within.” Mr. Katz goes out of his way to malign the activities of concerned American Jews working to preserve and strengthen civil rights in Israel and America.

This is bad enough, but when coupled with effusive praise for the darling of the religious right, Jerry Falwell, and insinuations that American Jews who choose not to make aliya are anti-Zionists, a response is called for. Just to make sure he's offended enough people, Jewish and non-Jewish, Mr. Katz calls the Ford Foundation "a consistent supporter of terrorist movements."

For over a year I worked on a health project in Galilee partially funded by the Ford Foundation and run with the knowledge, consent and assistance of the Israeli Ministry of Health. The work of the Ford Foundation in combating disease, ignorance and prejudice is well known to me, and throughout the world. I would appreciate Mr. Katz's substantiating his accusations against Ford, as I felt personally accused of "infiltration" and "attempting to smuggle extraneous materials into Israeli schools." All of Ford's work is open and all projects run with the cooperation of relevant government ministries. If Mr. Katz cannot substantiate his allegations, he owes me, as a Ford Foundation worker, an apology.

*WENDY LEIBOWITZ*

Haifa.