

Letters from Readers

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Jewish Radicalism in America

The following letters refer mainly to the articles which appeared under the overall heading "Revolutionism and the Jews" in our February 1971 issue: "New York and Jerusalem" by Walter Laqueur, "Appropriating the Religious Tradition" by Robert Alter, and "The Tribe of the Wicked Son" by Norman Podhoretz.—ED.

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Most everyone of the "religious type" smiles wryly when he hears the quip, "Converts are the worst kind." They either know from experience, or have heard, that those born to a religious tradition frequently do not match the zeal with which a convert approaches his new religious identity. In Judaism, it is not uncommon to find the convert. Now the magazine and its to, and involved in, the practices of Jewish life, than one who has lived for a lifetime "within the *mishpocha*." And as often, they embrace and express the most fundamental forms of the faith with uncritical ardor.

COMMENTARY, under the aegis of its editor, Norman Podhoretz, is the most glamorous of the latest crop of Jewish converts. After years of supercilious sneering at Judaism and Jewish life in America, after years of condescension toward matters Jewish, after years of deliberately trying to "make it" as a generally intellectual, but decidedly not Jewishly-affirming journal, COMMENTARY has now decided to convert. Now the magazine and its editor pose as the great defenders of Jewish survival, and they do so in such extremely conservative terms that some of us who have been Jewish survivalists for a long, long time can only cry out: "Heaven help us! Preserve us from our new allies." If Jewish survival in America depends upon the cynical intellectual posturing of those who have only recently discovered the virtues of Jewish ethnicity but who display little if any real awareness of the more complex tensions and balances that Judaism contains at its deeper levels, then we are indeed in great trouble!

COMMENTARY's recent broadside, "Revolutionism and the Jews," is not simply a critique of Arthur

Waskow's *Freedom Seder*. It is an attempt to destroy for American Jews the options of a perspective which is trying to help Jews, particularly young Jews, live through the shattering crises of Agnewism, My Lai, secret governmental surveillance of its citizens, calculated deceptions from the highest quarters about the war and about SST's and ABM's, and to do so without either losing their sanity, copping out of America, or giving up their tradition of faith. Waskow, and those of us who associate ourselves with him in these efforts to reassert the value of restructuring American-Jewish life, are *not* the villains in the piece. The real villains, the really wicked sons, are those who fail to see the truly Jewish quality of new (here some would want to read "radical") acts, thoughts, and reformulations of traditional Jewish modes. They are villains, not because they disagree with the product of these new efforts, but because they seek to deny the validity of the process. They betray an unutterable *chutzpah* in presuming to judge who among their fellow Jews is "kosher" and who is "treif"—who falls within the pale and who has strayed beyond the COMMENTARY line—who should be tolerated and who should be wiped out. Editor Podhoretz has the litmus paper, and he gives out the new Jewish seal of Good Housebroken Approval. An intellectual, pseudo-Jewish McCarthyism, presided over by COMMENTARY, is something new and ugly under the sun! That is what is anti-Jewish, masking in the guise of Jewish affirmation.

Norman Podhoretz and Robert Alter accuse the author of *The Freedom Seder*, and those who were involved in it either by actual participation or by lending their names, of being Jewish anti-Semites, which is to say "self-haters." And why? Because 1) the Waskow Haggadah, in their judgment, emphasizes the universal over the particular; and 2) it seeks to use the Jewish historical experience "as a point of departure for political activism." This latter emphasis seems especially noxious to Mr. Alter who, while describing *The Freedom Seder* as "a crude political rape of a religious tradition," at one point

also suggests that its authors "lack any sense of humor" when they cast Grayson Kirk or Clark Kerr as pharaohs in the administration building, "harassing the young and breaking their freedom." This casting, he observes, "reflects a ghastly absence of perspective on the concrete historical meaning of oppression." But the issue is really joined over whether the tradition of Judaism—its rituals, its words, indeed its message—advocates or seeks to direct its constituents toward a specific societal direction or whether this past of ours has no particular social thrust. If the latter is true, *The Freedom Seder*, and all other similar attempts to give the present instructive relevancy from the past, is fundamentally wrong. If, however, the former is a true view of what Judaism is all about, then the excesses in *The Freedom Seder* (and there are some which I pointed out from the beginning), with which Mr. Alter seems to be obsessed, are, while worthy of note for corrective purposes, essentially unimportant. Certainly one cannot brand *The Freedom Seder* as anti-Semitic, or as a documentary expression of self-hatred, because it emphasizes the universal over the particular, the redemption of humanity over the saving of just the people of Israel.

Does Judaism have a particular social thrust? I believe it does. Do its constituents have an obligation to give this thrust particular, even political, application? I believe they do and I believe Judaism would counsel Jews so to act. That is what "the prophetic message" is all about; "to break every yoke," "to let the oppressed go free" (see Isaiah 58:6). Throughout our long history, this theology found particular, practical expression by those who embraced the faith. I am sure that the editors of COMMENTARY know enough about Nathan, Amos, Isaiah, Mattathias, and Stephen Wise to know that. None was content with "moral exhortation." Theirs was "a politics of God" which angered the men of their day precisely because it sought to apply the particular of Judaism to the universal of humanity and to do so in specific ways. They refused to be "religious fuzzies" moralizing in general or applying their message to Jews only. It is only as contemporary exponents of Judaism retreat into the social, religious, and political conservatism represented of late in COMMENTARY by the writings of

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Earl Raab, Nathan Glazer, Irving Kristol, Milton Himmelfarb, and Norman Podhoretz, that they distort this basic universal thrust of Judaism, deceive their readers into thinking that Judaism and separatistic theology are synonymous, and what is perhaps worst of all, turn off many of our best Jewish youth who mercifully, and despite the damnably conservative efforts of too many of their affluent elders, retain a commendable commitment to prophetism and incidentally flock in droves to the Freedom Seders (10,000 at Cornell last Spring and 800 in Washington in 1969 when the Freedom Seder was first celebrated). There they participate with gusto in a Jewish ritual which, in its cry for freedom and liberation from brutal political repression, makes contemporary enslavement seem even more terrible and intolerable than it already is.

The Freedom Seder is an effort which may even be more important than it is new. It represents an attempt by some of our more thoughtful Jewish youth to take the dim, starved, devitaminized awareness of their Jewish past which their parents gave them, and with that poor *yerushah* mold a useful Jewish identity. At least this way they might not end up hating themselves.

The Freedom Seder is only the first effort. Mr. Alter mentions such others as the Seder of the Los Angeles Radical Jewish Community. Different, equally radical, rituals and rites around other holy days and holidays will undoubtedly emerge from the creative minds of our Jewish young because some of the most thoughtful of them, thank God, are going to persist in using Jewish forms to find themselves—forms about which their parents knew too little, cared too little, and could not transmit to their progeny. To demean these efforts with niggling, nitpicking, snide criticism, or worse, to denigrate these efforts by cynically impugning the motives and the personal intelligence of those who so struggle (note Alter's comments on "Waskow's serious theology, if he has one"), is as tragic as it is ineffective. I would rather spend a Shabbat with the Jews for Urban Justice group in Washington or sit at Arthur Waskow's home Seder table than pass such moments at the tables of the editors of *COMMENTARY*. One wonders what they, or the members of their edito-

rial board, do on Shabbat or for Seder. For that matter, one wonders where they are on Succot or Shavuot.

The inversion of values becomes completely apparent when one reads on the editorial pages of *COMMENTARY*, as well as in its articles, that those who embrace the universalistic over the particularistic are the "self-loathers who masquerade as self-affirmers." With this, *COMMENTARY*, for all its sophistication, reveals either its ignorance of Judaism (I can't believe that) or a failure in objectivity about Judaism which casts a shadow of suspicion on the validity of its credentials as a true commentator on the Jewish tradition. Surely, those who write for and edit *COMMENTARY* must know that the universalistic demand in Judaism is as compelling as the particular one. God's reminder to His people, as articulated through the voice of Deutero-Isaiah, is that "My house shall be called a house of God for all people." The gloss in the ninth chapter of Amos which raises as a rhetorical question, "Are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians unto Me . . . ?" and the efforts of the writer of the Book of Ruth to counteract the narrow particularism of Ezra, feature as prominently in biblical writing as any articulation of Hebraic particularism. The truth is that universalism and particularism stand in a polarized tension. A Jew must maintain both his particular appreciation of himself as a Jew, and his universal commitment to the larger community. This is what makes being a Jew an eternal dilemma. It is part of what has always made Jews cry out: "*Shver tzu zein a Yid.*" At different times, under varying circumstances, Jews have emphasized one over the other, but the moment any Jewish community sacrifices one for the other, it either assimilates or retreats into a shriveling isolation.

There are some in American Jewish life—and apparently the circle around *COMMENTARY* has become the latest to convert to this position—who say that these are times for Jews to concern themselves with Jewish things exclusively; who say that Jews must devote themselves to themselves, citing as justification Christian indifference to the cause of Israel's survival in the Middle East, or the prominence of some black anti-Jewish rhetoric which Jews now

equate with a renaissance of anti-Semitism of major proportion, or the general drift to the Right in American thought. In those instances, if I may use similar words in different ways, one can discern a perfect example when one generalizes from the particular. It is a generalization which is already having disastrous consequences. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy and Earl Raab is perhaps its chief proponent, particularly when he writes in the pages of COMMENTARY ["The Deadly Innocences of American Jews," December 1970]: "The prevailing liberal directions are . . . becoming inhospitable to Jewish life. . . . The fact that so many Jews have actively participated—and still do—in helping to retract that political frontier [is] evidence of a massive and deadly innocence which affects not the Jews alone." Is the mentality of the JDL, the atmosphere of a Nixon-Agnew-Hoover regime, more "hospitable" to Jews?

In other words, anyone who refuses to see this current in American life and who subsequently refuses to "withdraw from involvement in the struggle to make a civilization out of our jungle" is naive—that is, "a simple son and, worse in some ways, a traitor to his Jewishness and his Judaism."

1984 has arrived early! For here is as classic a case of double-thinking as any I have read anywhere. It implies that one who sees Jewish survival from the context of human survival, and works out of Jewish motivation, is an assimilationist or worse, a liberal, 1940-style.

As a Jew, I look at everything through the magnifying glass of history. Reference to history is, in the final analysis, at least the first way to define a Jew. Historically, I know that a regressive society is bad for the Jews. I know that an economically unstable society is bad for the Jews. I know that a society in which Jews are either isolated, or in self-isolation from the larger society, is bad for the Jews. I know that a polarized society is bad for the Jews. I know that an apartheid society is bad for the Jews.

As these tendencies exist in America, Jews have an obligation to resist them, if only out of the motivation of enlightened self-interest. Characterizing such efforts as naive does not at all change this necessity, for if these forces of drift to the Right and to conservatism

continue unchecked, we may become "the first nation in history to go fascist by democratic vote," and that would be disastrous for Jews and for everyone else. If the prevention of such a swing requires radical (read: new, different, and more activist) tactics, then let Jews be in the forefront.

Jews must be more than just frightened by black-Jewish conflicts. It is the failure to think and act beyond the superficialities of that fright which is blindness. One who experiments with new forms in and for a Diaspora Jewish community which he believes must survive coequally with the community of Jews in Israel is not a negator of the tradition, but its preserver. Moreover, Jewish criticism of Israel can never be equated with Jewish treason. We must refuse to be driven into so narrow a mold. Ethnicity is great, but not sufficient for survival. Love of Israel, commitment to the Zionist ideal, never did, and must not now, demand slavish silence, and one's credentials as a Jewish self-affirmer must not be held suspect because he is sometimes pained by what he sees and who, because of this pain, cries out within the bosom of the Jewish family. Candor is often more important than popularity.

It is too bad that COMMENTARY chooses to run with, rather than buck the tide of, Jewish withdrawal from the larger society. By so doing, a journal with COMMENTARY's prestige only strengthens the shortsighted, bellicose, pseudo-leaders in our midst, and confirms a trend among Jews who lack real vision of what is fundamentally our stake in this country. Running back into our Jewish "Hobbit-holes" will not bring the Messiah. We cannot give up our willingness to take risks (that, too, is a very Jewish trait)—for when we do, we insult our heritage of political activism as a device to bring to reality what we consider to be God's will. We need to resist those who would draw us into the exclusivity of isolated particularism, as we need to resist their rhetoric of slander.

Finally, we need to resist the cheap appeals to our emotion which titillate our sense of guilt but which, even if followed, could not bring the messianic age.

There is no salvation in vigilantism, as there is no salvation in Jews copping out of America. The writer of Proverbs is more trenchant today than he was 3,000

years ago when he warned us, "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

(RABBI) BALFOUR BRICKNER
Union of American Hebrew
Congregations
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I find it hard to believe that the articles on "Revolutionism and the Jews," particularly when accompanied by the editor's remarks, are anything but a planned campaign of vilification against the emerging Jewish Left, and against Arthur Waskow in particular.

I happen to share many of Robert Alter's reservations about *The Freedom Seder*. I too question the political appropriation of traditional symbols. Norman Podhoretz's use of the "wicked son" image to characterize Arthur Waskow strikes me as a prime example of such usage. Worse still: not only a political appropriation, but one involving personal defamation in public.

Waskow's efforts should be taken by the Jewish community not as evidence of self-hate, but as an attempt, albeit a sometimes clumsy one to relate Jewish symbols to a certain element of the young Jewish Left. Self-haters do abound in the Jewish ranks of the New Left, but they are not having Seders together, old style or new! Self-haters are to be found both in the New Left and within the ranks of established, respectable Jewish organizations. Surely the Left has no monopoly on escapist assimilation.

To set the record straight in one more area, it should be said that Waskow and others have spoken out consistently, within leftist circles, in *opposition* to the Fatah position, and demanding Arab recognition of Jewish/Israeli *national* rights in the Middle East. (See for example the recent position paper formulated by Waskow and Paul Jacobs.) Such a stance has not made them popular with the Left; but they have nevertheless stood up for "Jewish interests" which they feel to be justified. For COMMENTARY to revile such Jews as self-haters or "wicked sons" can only remind one of the old right-wing trick of lumping the entire Left together for purposes of defamation. Surely COMMENTARY can do better!

(RABBI) ART GREEN
Havurat Shalom
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TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Although COMMENTARY's disparaging treatment of "The Counter-Culture and Its Apologists" [December 1970] did not give me cause to expect a warm reaction to similar developments in Jewish life, I was not quite prepared for the shrill and callous reactions of Messrs. Podhoretz and Alter.

To Norman Podhoretz, it may indeed be "certain" that the majority of American Jews have always been hostile to both the political and cultural manifestations of the youth movement. That remark, however, hides the obvious fact that American Jews, as a group, have not only been relatively tolerant of the new trends, but have been active in the leadership of both the "Movement" and the counter-culture. When Mr. Podhoretz is forced to go to the absurdity of *naming* the non-Jews in the Movement, he is admitting the essential weakness of his own argument, and reminds me of the classic paranoid Jew, whose modern type has been drawn so brilliantly by Philip Roth, who feels continually compelled to hit back wildly, and who, when pressed, will name all the Jews who have won the Nobel Prize, and other such things.

There is a good deal of careless talk about the "Movement," and the New Left in particular, in relation to young Jews. As far as I can understand, the "Movement" is a rather ambiguous and collective term embracing everything from liberal Democrats to the farthest Left points on the spectrum. By and large, the majority of "Movement" people are not anti-Israel, but are genuinely confused about the Middle East, with a sizable element who (especially during the past three years) call themselves Zionists. The New Left, on the other hand, which comprises only a small portion of the Movement, has distinguished itself by a fascinating kind of political insight according to which Israel is a fascist, colonialist power, and the Arab states are progressive and revolutionary. This is the same New Left which had nothing in particular to say when Czechoslovakia was invaded, and which speaks dreamily of a worker-student alliance in America.

Thus, it is possible, as Robert Alter realizes, for a Jew to be part of the Movement without necessarily rejecting his own identity. On the contrary, thousands of young Jews are now realizing that Israel

is the culmination of the Jews' struggle for national liberation, and that, furthermore, there is no great inconsistency between being a Jew and a leftist in America. Some, like Arthur Waskow, would go further, and claim that to be a Jew *means* to be a revolutionary.

Young American Jews are currently involved in a variety of projects which would suggest that the revolution and the Jews are not as far apart as COMMENTARY might wish them to be. They are active on behalf of Israel, often critical, but never suggesting that it hasn't a right to exist. They are publishing journals, newspapers, operating free Jewish universities, and forming *havurah* groups.

Finally, I am shocked by COMMENTARY's unwarranted and rather vicious attack on Arthur Waskow. Many of us in the new Jewish counter-culture find it ironic that publications like COMMENTARY should call *anybody* a self-hating Jew, least of all someone who is honestly attempting to come to grips with his heritage, in his own particular way. Although I am not particularly impressed with *The Freedom Seder*, it has been a great force in creating a radical Jewish entity. To disagree with Waskow is one thing; but to call him, contemptuously, a wicked son, clearly demonstrates just how smug COMMENTARY is, and how wide the gap between the Jewish Establishment and the young.

BILL NOVAK

Editor, *Response*
Waltham, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

On first reading, "The Tribe of the Wicked Son"—together with some of the other articles on "Revolutionism and the Jews"—seemed to call for a defense of particular persons who had been subjected to personal attack, the meanness and intensity of which were quite shocking. The February issue as a whole also seemed to require some response to the rather consistent post-1967 COMMENTARY disparagement of those Jews who, in the tradition of Samuel, continue to regard "like all the nations" as perhaps the supreme example of Jewish "self-abasement." But that was only on first reading.

The real question would seem to be: Is COMMENTARY any longer to be taken seriously as an honorable publication? In a magazine sponsored to "enlighten and clarify public opinion on problems of

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Jewish concern, to fight bigotry and protect human rights . . ." what place has the malice and personal abuse of "The Tribe of the Wicked Son"? And if there is something to Nathan Glazer's insistence on the need for liberalism, tolerance, and nonviolence, how shall we regard a publication whose editor so grossly violates these very qualities? . . .

(RABBI) EVERETT GENDLER
Stoughton, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:
. . . Norman Podhoretz writes and implies all kinds of horrendous evils about the "Movement" and then zooms in on *The Freedom Seder*, claiming for it and for its supporters—including "prominent rabbis" and then mentioning Rabbi Balfour Brickner by name—that it is more than self-hatred; that it in fact creates anti-Semitism. If I believed, which I do not, that a Jew could create anti-Semitism, then Mr. Podhoretz himself would be my candidate. . . .

It seems to me that the accusations Mr. Podhoretz levels against Arthur Waskow, Rabbi Brickner, and others for betraying "one of the most essential principles of the religion of [their] fathers" in truth apply to editorials like "The Tribe of the Wicked Son" in which Mr. Podhoretz attempts to defame fellow Jews with whose viewpoint he disagrees.

(RABBI) ROBERT E. GOLDBURG
Congregation Mishkan Israel
Hamden, Connecticut

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:
Early in his article Robert Alter castigates the Jewish Liberation Project for combining Jewish tradition with revolutionary struggle. Somewhat further on, in a more complimentary vein, he quotes extensively from the *Jewish Liberation Journal* "issued apparently by students having some connection with Columbia University." If Mr. Alter had done his homework, he would have been aware that the *Jewish Liberation Journal* is published by the Jewish Liberation Project, which is in turn affiliated with Americans for Progressive Israel—Hashomer Hatzair. . . .

It seems to me that Mr. Alter does not understand that "revolutionary struggle," as it is used by the young Jewish radicals of today, is deeply rooted in the idealistic, humanitarian tradition of the Prophets. Although the Prophets advocated feeding the hungry, clothing

the poor, and turning swords into plowshares, they were not noted for their patience and/or humility. They were angry, often bitter men. What makes the youth of today bitter? Could it be that many of the actions of the Jewish Establishment are responsible for turning off Jewish youth? . . . At the same time that COMMENTARY starts labeling "wicked sons," it should also start putting the finger on the "wicked fathers" who debase and dishonor our most sacred and precious heritage. "Justice" and "righteousness" are two of the most frequently used words in the Prophets. How do justice and righteousness manifest themselves in the world? This is the question which preoccupies our young people, and thank God for it.

IRMA WEINSTEIN
Baltimore, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:
We would like to congratulate Robert Alter for a fine article. It is, to date, the most knowledgeable and sympathetic article in COMMENTARY (in fact, in the "overground" Jewish media) concerning radical Zionists.

Mr. Alter commits, however, some serious errors. The Jewish Liberation Project is not connected with Arthur Waskow and the Jews for Urban Justice. The Jewish Liberation Project, in fact, was one of the groups which founded the Radical Zionist Alliance. Itzhak Epstein, whose article in the *Jewish Liberation Journal* is quoted quite sympathetically later on in Mr. Alter's article, was a founding member of the Jewish Liberation Project. . . .

Secondly, Mr. Alter compares the *aliyah* orientation of the new radical Zionists to the "Zionist youth movements of the late 40's." Some of us, he says, actually go on *aliyah* "soon after graduation." We suggest that the above analogy might have something to do with the fact that the *halutzic* Zionist youth movements, which are still very much alive today, and which began developing concepts of radical Zionism in the early 60's, played a key role in the formation of the Radical Zionist Alliance. Habonim and Hashomer Hatzair are the two largest constituent organizations within the Radical Zionist Alliance.

Finally, Mr. Alter's identification of Ber Borokhov as the leader "in the pre-Revolutionary period of the Poalei Zion, the Russian Left

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Labor Zionists" is misleading. Poalei Zion is actually the world Labor Zionist movement, which includes among its constituents the Israeli Labor party, and to this day regards Ber Borokhov as a seminal theoretician of the entire movement.

We were, however, rather disturbed by Walter Laqueur's article. It seems to us that his article is filled with the same illogic and Manicheism with which he faults the Jewish radicals. He writes: "The vast majority of European Jewry west of Russia flirted with radical politics only for relatively brief periods in the wake of a widespread revolutionary wave, such as before and during 1848." But Western European Jewry was a minority of European Jewry. The most populous and culturally central community of world Jewry lay east of the Oder-Neisse. These Jews were neither "middle-class in character," nor "middle-of-the-road liberal." They were mostly poor, and supported on a mass scale ideologies of revolutionary socialism. In interbellum Poland, the Jewish socialist Bund was one of the dominant parties of Polish Jewry. While the Western European Jewish communities were busy battering down the barriers which prevented their entry into society. . . , Eastern European Jews were, quite literally, laying the foundations for a socialist Jewish state.

Mr. Laqueur says that "not one of the ideologists of revolutionary socialism, for instance, foresaw that in our time internationalism would give way everywhere to national socialism—a trend which has had unfortunate consequences for Jewish socialists, for Jewish communities, and for the world in general." If by "national socialism" Mr. Laqueur means socialist nationalism (and not fascism, which caught no Marxist by surprise), some Jewish revolutionaries did predict this trend. Some examples are Moses Hess, Nachman Syrkin, Ber Borokhov, Berl Katznelson, David Ben-Gurion, and Golda Meir.

Mr. Laqueur quotes from a certain William Zukerman, who stated in 1937 that the Jews had a future in Germany and would outlast the Nazis there. "Zukerman's thesis," he writes, is "incredible to read today." He then writes: "Zionist thought has never quite accepted the fact that—a few idealists apart—people leave their native lands only because of extreme

economic or political pressure, of the kind that is unlikely to arise in America." If Zukerman's thesis is incredible to read today, how much more incredible is it to see Mr. Laqueur quote him and then draw the same conclusions about American Jewry two pages later. Revolutionary socialist Jews like Borokhov, Arlosoroff, and Ben-Gurion predicted disaster for the Jews as long as they existed as a nation-class in the Diaspora. No doubt there are other factors involved, for economics, sociology, and politics are at all times inexorably intertwined. Arlosoroff is ridiculed by Mr. Laqueur for conjecturing, in 1919, that there would eventually be an outcry against Jewish dominance of the media and literary establishments. Yet today we are seeing the beginnings of a cultural reaction in America, led by the Vice President himself, against precisely those parts of the media which are heavily populated by Jews. Can one think of a more apt euphemism for Jews than "effete intellectual snobs"?

Mr. Laqueur writes: "Various interpretations have been offered to explain the particular fascination exerted by the party of revolution on the Jewish intelligentsia. Of these, the anti-Semitic thesis known as the 'ferment of decomposition' has been advanced in different form in many countries. Briefly it runs as follows: unable to establish a state of their own, reduced to a marginal, parasitic existence among the peoples of the earth, Jews developed over the centuries an overwhelming destructive urge. Having no fatherland, they wished to deny one to everybody else as well."

This statement, which is classed as an "anti-Semitic thesis," is a simplistic and negatively-worded version of a generally-held Zionist concept. To quote Mr. Laqueur again: "To the generation of Israelis who grew up on Berl Katznelson and shared his contempt for Jews willing to fight the social and national struggle of every people but their own, the Movement of the 1960's would have appeared totally incomprehensible." Quite simply, the Jew who has no relationship to his own people, to his particular national identity, is always the first to sacrifice himself on the altar of "internationalism," because he is the last to recognize the truly national character of the struggles around him. Who else but an internation-



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alist Jew would misunderstand the nationalism and particularist essence of the Vietnamese struggle? Unfortunately, Mr. Laqueur is not the first, nor the last, to call Zionism anti-Semitic.

Mr. Laqueur writes: "The binational solution that some American radicals have advanced may indeed be a wonderful concept, but where in the world has it ever worked?" This is misleading. The uneducated reader might suppose that American radicals invented this solution. In truth, it was advanced by more than one Zionist group, including Mapam, and by such notables as Martin Buber. This *yichus* grants the solution no greater validity, but it is still important to know the facts.

The "strange and contradictory" nature of Mr. Laqueur's argument pales by comparison with his abysmal ignorance of his main topic. Mr. Laqueur asserts that our "doctrines betray strange and contradictory ideological influences." Certainly if he is going to lump together the totalitarian (anti-Israel) Left, the Jews for Urban Justice (a quasi-religious libertarian Left group), *ACIID* (a magazine subtitled "A Critical Insight into Israel's Dilemmas"), the *Jewish Radical* (a left-wing Zionist newspaper), and Havurat Shalom (a traditionalist religious seminary), he will find contradictory streams. . . .

It seems to us that one cannot intelligently discuss "Revolutionism and the Jews" without a basic working understanding of the socialist-Zionist tradition. The Borokhivist analysis of Diaspora Jewish life, faulty as it may be, is far more relevant to America today than Mr. Laqueur's indecision on the question of American Jewry. . . .

DAVID TWERSKY

J. J. GOEDBERG

Habonim and Radical Zionist
Alliance
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:
. . . None of the articles in the February issue explains the component parts and main ideological tendencies of the new Jewish radical movement . . . which, by even the most conservative estimates, includes more than fifty local and national organizations, newspapers, magazines, free universities, and *havurot*.

Reading the February issue, one wonders if COMMENTARY intended to convey a negative impression of the totality of this movement by fo-

cus on the views of one relatively small segment of the whole, those people who follow the ideology of Arthur Waskow. While I too am quite bothered by Waskow's views on Israel and other subjects, I am even more upset when I see the whole Jewish radical movement attacked as if Waskow were somehow its main spokesman. . . .

The article by Walter Laqueur, moreover, not only blurs the distinctions between the pro-Israel and anti-Israel sectors of the Jewish radical movement, but also leaves the reader with no clear picture of which "Jewish radicals" he is talking about—the ones inside the new Jewish movement, or those New Left radicals who just happen to be Jews (Rubin, Hoffman, Rudd, etc.). . . .

Mr. Laqueur makes quite a number of points about Jewish radicals: that they fail to integrate theory and practice with respect to Israel, that they are engaging in a form of assimilation, that they are moving farther and farther away from being "good Jews," and so on. But he fails to specify, upon making each of these points, whether he is talking of the neo-Bundists, the Borokhovists and other radical Zionists, the Rubins, Rudds *et al.*, or all of these groups. One is tempted to tell him to read Robert Alter's article in order to understand the strong differences among these people. . . .

The most misleading point in Mr. Laqueur's article is his contention that even those Jewish radicals who express concern for Israel "are increasingly preoccupied with American domestic policies" and that "specifically Jewish preoccupations will gradually be relegated to a lower order of importance" by Jewish radicals. Anyone who knows anything about the new Jewish movement knows that this is not so—and that, in fact, quite the opposite is the case. Throughout the new Jewish radical movement (even, astonishingly enough, among the non- and anti-Zionists) specifically Jewish preoccupations (Israel, Soviet Jewry, Jewish education) are almost totally superseding the previous priorities of young Jewish radicals (the black movement, Vietnam, pollution, etc.).

Either Mr. Laqueur is almost totally ignorant of the new Jewish movement, or else he prefers, for some unexplained reason, to shift from attacking one kind of Jewish radical (the Mark Rudd-Jerry

Rubin variety), to attacking another kind (a Borokhovist, or maybe a Waskow follower) without telling us that he is shifting. By doing this he blurs all the important distinctions and does a grave disservice to his readers and to one of the most promising sectors of American-Jewish youth.

ROBERT FRANKEL
Somerville, Massachusetts

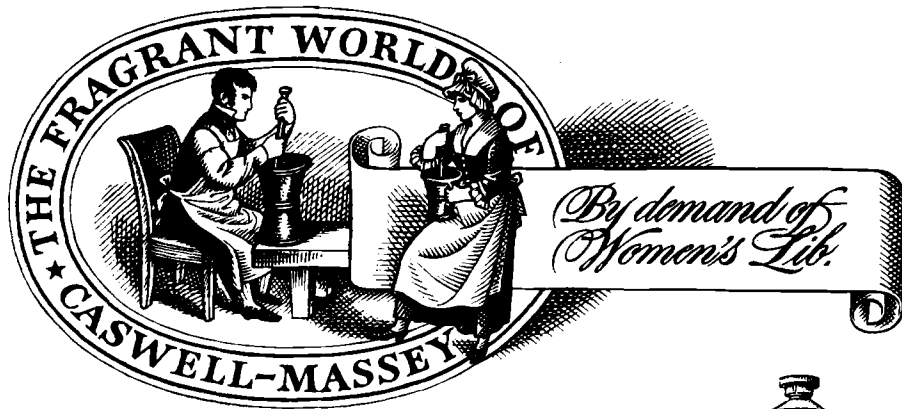
TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

A young, conscientious, progressive Jew could not help but be thrown into the depths of despair should he take Walter Laqueur's "New York and Jerusalem" seriously. Fortunately most of them won't. The reason is simple. A serious reading of Mr. Laqueur's article betrays that he is very unfamiliar with what is taking place among concerned Jewish students. . . . For example, Mr. Laqueur lumps groups such as Jews for Urban Justice, Na'aseh, ACIID, the Free Jewish Universities . . . and the *Jewish Radical* at Berkeley together. However, there are basic differences . . . among these various groups. . . .

In addition, Mr. Laqueur fails to take into consideration the many non-radical Jewish student groups that have arisen in the last several years. . . . These student groups have not only been in the front line in countering the hostile attacks on Israel, but indeed have projected a very positive program that has succeeded in greatly expanding the university course offerings on Jewish subjects, in increasing the number of students going to Israel, in issuing publications, and in conducting a tremendous range of student-led activities. . . .

What are the alternatives Mr. Laqueur offers young Jews? One alternative is that of being traditionally religious, which is an adequate choice, but the other alternative involves a lukewarm sort of suburban liberal Judaism in which Jewish commitment is very shallow. . . . This latter alternative is the one that is so unpalatable to many of our most concerned young people and perhaps this is what is frightening to the assimilated editors of COMMENTARY.

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Jewish life, except in Mr. Laqueur's article?

A reading of the Jewish student press over the last few years leads one to the opposite conclusion from Mr. Laqueur's: not, as he claims, that students are becoming less and less interested in Jewish things, but rather that they are becoming more and more interested since at least 90 per cent of the material in these publications is devoted to issues directly and particularly of concern to the Jewish community. . . .

And finally, Ber Borokhov did offer a solution and a vision to young Jews, not only in this generation but in generations preceding them. The fact of the matter is that the vision that built up the Zionist movement and *Eretz Yisrael* was the vision of the socialist-Zionist thinkers: utopians such as A. D. Gordon, social democrats such as Nachman Syrkin, Marxist democrats such as Ber Borokhov, and religious ideologists such as Rav Kook and some of the predecessors of the Zionist movement. The Western Jews within the movement, such as Max Nordau, regardless of their brilliance in their particular fields, were not sufficiently steeped in Jewish tradition to conceptualize a vision that would have more than a temporary appeal to the Jews of their day. Nordau himself excelled in sociological analysis and did not even pretend to offer a vision, and this is the position Mr. Laqueur is in today. He offers students the alternative of sociological analysis when the crying need among the Jews of every age is a vision. It is clear to me that his exercise in student-baiting is basically unhealthy to the adult community which seeks to understand student life, and to understand that without these concerned Jewish students, the future of Jewish life in this country is rather bleak, pallid, and of little value.

PHILIP HORN

American Zionist Youth
Foundation
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

The articles on "Revolutionism and the Jews" seem to call for a new evaluation of the old saying, "But is it good for the Jews?" . . . My father's Iron Cross was earned for heroism under fire during World War I but it did not save him or my mother from death in a concentration camp. My aunt and

her family survived the Nazi camps only to be taken prisoners by the Russians in whose camps she and her husband perished. One of my mother's cousins was blown up in Haifa harbor by the British while trying to enter Israel. . . . Yet I was raised with the philosophy that one should become totally involved with all the ills of mankind . . . and never look at a situation only "through Jewish glasses." Well, I have now come full circle. . . .

We have tried for many centuries to help find the answers to what is wrong with mankind. . . . From now on I think we should give the broad view a rest and devote our thinking to the much simpler question: "But is it good for the Jews?"

GRETEL BLEICH RUBIN

Rye, New York

WALTER LAQUEUR writes:

Messrs. Frankel, Horn, and Goldberg and Twersky have one partly justified complaint. Toward the end of my article, I mentioned several Jewish youth groups, but since I had neither the inclination nor the space at my disposal to enter into a detailed discussion concerning their character, or the differences among them, perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned them at all. "Bracketing" is problematical; sometimes it may well be inevitable, as shown by Mr. Horn, who complains about it, yet elsewhere in his letter mentions Borokhov and Syrkin—and Rav Kook—all in the same breath. Mr. Frankel in his letter brackets Mark Rudd and Jerry Rubin—neither will be overjoyed.

My article was devoted to the historical sources of Jewish radicalism and some of its present-day manifestations; it dealt with attitudes, states of mind. Nowhere did I indicate that this was meant to be an exhaustive survey of the organizational structure of the Movement, with its dozens of small factions. It is quite true that I did not "offer a vision" (Horn): a historical essay is hardly the right place to deal with the future of the Jewish people as well. I have written on and shall return to the subject elsewhere.

Messrs. Twersky and Goldberg devote considerable space to refuting points I did not make, and in the process distort (sometimes outrageously) what I did write (about Zukerman, about the "anti-Semitic character of Zionism," etc.). Why can't Johnny read? "Western Euro-

pean Jewry was a minority of European Jewry. The most populous and culturally central community of world Jewry lay east. . . ." Very true. So is the statement that Beethoven wrote nine symphonies. What has it to do with my argument? Did I claim that American-Jewish radicals invented the binational solution? . . .

I sincerely hope that Mr. Horn's and Mr. Frankel's optimism with regard to the growing Jewish and Zionist enthusiasm among Jewish radicals is well-founded. I am not a "student-baiter," but a believer in democratic socialism, and for that reason I feel that little good will emerge, as far as Israel is concerned, from a movement which, with all its radical verbiage, is basically anarchist and irrational in character and which has so far only spread ideological confusion. Israel was indeed built by the socialists of the Second and Third *Aliyot*. But their faith and idealism were, to put it mildly, rooted in a deeper tradition than the passing cultural (or anti-cultural) fashions which sustain present-day American radicalism. Even the Second and Third *Aliyot* had their periods of "great despair," and many immigrants did not stay in Palestine. The *halutzim* of 1905 and 1918 were rooted in a tradition infinitely more wholesome (to use an unfashionable term) than the *Kulturpessimismus*, the drug culture, the faddism, and the unthinking slogan-mongering of American radicalism. It is a painful subject, and I do not want to pursue it further on this occasion. But it should be obvious that, in view of their cultural and political background, present-day American radicals, with all their idealism, have to overcome great handicaps before they can help build a democratic and socialist society.

Israel has become a "normal" country with all the good and the bad things which this implies. It could well do with fresh democratic-socialist impulses. But here again a good deal of clear political thought and understanding is needed. The rediscovery of Ber Borokhov may be useful as a historical starting-point, as the beginning of a political education. The idea that Borokhovism can be applied to the situation of American Jewry in the 1970's is childish, though admittedly less harmful than some other currently fashionable irrational doctrines. However irrelevant to the present situation,

Borokhovism may lead to a realistic, appraisal of the state of the Jewish people and of Israel in socialist and democratic terms. And so—hopefully—*od lo avda tikvatenu*.

But there is one prerequisite which, I fear, my correspondents have not even begun to understand: instead of a conformist copying of the style and an absorption of the content of fashionable lunacies, they will have to oppose them radically and without compromise.

ROBERT ALTER writes:

It is more than a little distressing to find such a morass of confusion and misrepresentation in a man who occupies so influential a position in Jewish life as Balfour Brickner. First, let me set the record straight on the allegation that COMMENTARY has just now converted to the affirmation of Jewish identity "after years of supercilious sneering at Judaism and Jewish life." From this most singular assertion, I must infer either that Rabbi Brickner is one of those poignantly vulnerable souls who never recovered from the trauma of reading Isaac Rosenfeld's "Adam and Eve on Delancey Street" in 1949, or that he simply has not been reading the magazine. To confine the discussion only to the eleven years of Norman Podhoretz's editorship, the two most frequent contributors on Jewish affairs have been Milton Himelfarb and myself, and whatever our manifold faults, I think there are few who would accuse either of us of condescension toward Jewish matters. Other regular contributors on Jewish subjects during this period have been Gershom Scholem, Emil Fackenheim, Elie Wiesel, Marvin Fox, Arthur A. Cohen, Marshall Sklare, Lucy S. Dawidowicz, Arthur Hertzberg, David Daiches, Chaim Raphael. To impugn *any* of these writers with "supercilious sneering at Judaism and Jewish life" would be gross malicious distortion, so I shall give Rabbi Brickner the benefit of the doubt and assume he merely wrote without thinking.

On the general argument of my article, the tenor of *The Freedom Seder*, and the relation between Jewish tradition and politics, I am afraid that Rabbi Brickner is scarcely more accurate than he is on COMMENTARY's Jewish position. It is a little difficult to discuss politics with a man who thinks that radicalism can be adequately

defined as the adoption of "new, different, and more activistic [*sic*] tactics." I can think of no significant group in this country that calls itself radical which would agree to this flat bromide of a definition, while the Jewish Defense League, in the vague terms of Rabbi Brickner's definition, would be the Jewish radical organization par excellence. This is more than momentary carelessness: it reflects the increasing habit among certain Establishment figures of clinging to the coat-tails and voguish terminology of protest movements without attending at all to the concrete political content of the terms and the movements. There are, after all, movements in this country that call themselves radical because they insist on a radical solution to our national ills—the overthrow of our present form of government and the abolition of the democratic system that has given us a minimal but precious safeguard against the tyrannies of absolutism. I am not suggesting that Rabbi Brickner or even Arthur Waskow is a member of this sort of extremist group, but I am distressed by their readiness to give an official stamp of Jewish approval to anyone who shakes a defiant fist at the Establishment and claims to be on the side of justice, whatever his real political aims.

Rabbi Brickner is so eager to be on the right side of the great moral struggle that he seems quite unaware of how transparently his own letter reveals his political irresponsibility. He is proud that Waskow's new ritual, enacted by thousands of students, "makes contemporary enslavement seem even more terrible and intolerable than it already is." There is an abyss of difference between making people aware of very real injustices and making them think things are worse than they really are. Is it a point of pride to encourage young people to see America as "Amerika," a fascist state which because it is fascist must be destroyed at any cost, by any means? I don't know whether Rabbi Brickner has had firebombs thrown into the building where he works, but I have, and as a result I do not take it lightly when I find people leading the young to think of university administrators as murderous pharaohs. There are, indeed, profoundly disturbing inequities in this society as it is now constituted, as many writers in these pages have made abundantly clear over the



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years, but the invocation of "contemporary enslavement" is harmfully loose talk, little better than Waskow's promiscuous use of "genocide."

The imputation either to me or to this magazine of a narrow, self-serving ethnicity as the basis for Jewish particularism is again that of a writer who does not bother to read what he attacks. In my article, commenting on the new radical Zionists, I spoke approvingly of "a kind of particularism in which a people, through a proud sense of its own distinctive integrity, becomes aware of its implication in a larger human community." (If Rabbi Brickner is interested in a fuller statement of my views on universalism and particularism, since he seems unfamiliar with COMMENTARY, I would direct him to my debate with George Steiner on this question in the February and May issues of last year.) What I found most disquieting in Waskow's Haggadah was precisely its lack of a proud, self-affirming sense of the distinctive integrity of the Jewish people as a point of departure for its universalism. That proud sense could hardly be working in a document that confers the title of *shofet* on Eldridge Cleaver, prays to be next year in Egypt instead of Jerusalem, and has scarcely any place for the national liberation of the Jews in the world of real political events in our lifetime. Unlike Rabbi Brickner, I consider these features of *The Freedom Seder* to be more than incidental "excesses."

The question of criticism of Israel is a case in point. Surely neither the editors of this magazine nor I has ever suggested that Israel should be immune from criticism. As a model of responsible criticism, I recommend Alan Dershowitz's "Terrorism and Preventive Detention: The Case of Israel" [December 1970].* In my own case, the last article I wrote in these pages on Israel was "The Shalit Case" [July 1970], and that was not exactly a hymn of praise to the Zionist state. What is offensive about Waskow's kind of criticism is precisely its irresponsibility. I am willing to grant Rabbi Brickner that the Diaspora and Israel should "survive coequally," but Waskow makes it clear, in *The Freedom Seder* and elsewhere, that the partners are not equal: it is the Dias-

* See p. 33 for correspondence on this article.—Ed.

pora Jew, in this pretentious, self-congratulatory, and essentially false vision of Israel and the Diaspora, who has assumed the mantle of "prophetism," while Israel is imagined as whoring after the fleshly gods of American imperialism, and rebuked in vague, moralistic innuendos. (See, for example, the pseudo-prophetic comments on Moshe Dayan in *The Freedom Seder*, or Waskow's totally unsupported assertion elsewhere that Israel has become "the American Empire abroad.") Is it "slander" to point out these disturbing characteristics in a book offered for public ritual use, or is it an impugning of personal motives for me to note ("Waskow's serious theology, if he has any") that a writer, *on the basis of the textual evidence* of his own supposedly religious book, seems far more seriously engaged in a political cause than in theological matters?

Rabbi Brickner, I fear, is only a little less hesitant than Waskow to politicize the religious tradition. Judaism's ethical vision, to be sure, does have ultimately political implications, but it cannot be made so confidently the source of authority for a particular ideology or a particular form of social organization. We are all aware of Judaism's concern with justice, with making a better society, with the sanctity of human life. Whether that concern can be translated into "a specific societal direction" (whatever that may mean) is at least debatable. But to claim that we as Jews have a "heritage of *political activism*" (my italics) is using the impetus of contemporary issues to fly in the face of a great deal of Jewish history and codified Jewish tradition, and a people that lies to itself about its own past cannot have any real hope for the future.

Let me thank David Twersky and J. J. Goldberg for their kind words on my article and for correcting (together with Irma Weinstein) my error about the connection between the *Jewish Liberation Journal* and the Jewish Liberation Project. As for my comments on the statement of purpose of the Liberation Project, it is not, after all, so surprising that even radical Zionists should on occasion slip into the politics of preachment: manifestoes, by their nature, bring out the rhetorical excesses in all of us, and it was precisely my point that this particular rhetoric is at the moment terribly infectious and tends to interfere with clear think-



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ing about political issues. I am also happy to have Messrs. Twersky and Goldberg note the continuity between the old Left Zionist youth movements and the new radical Zionism, though I would add that many of the new radical Zionists—certainly here at Berkeley—are not formally associated with the established Zionist youth movements.

Irma Weinstein seems to me to take an unfortunate tack by following the current fashion of recasting all political discussion into statements for or against the "Establishment." I certainly did not write my article as a defense of the Jewish Establishment. Indeed, I have had harshly critical words to say more than once in these pages on the institutions of American-Jewish life (see, for example, "The Jewish Community and the Jewish Condition" in the February 1969 issue). And no one, of course, would deny the permanent relevance of the Prophets' passion for social justice. What I objected to was the appropriation of the theological gestures of those God-driven Prophets by basically secular political activists as a cachet for their own political views. It is so easy, and so gratifying, to think of oneself as Elijah and *les autres* as Ahab and Jezebel; but though the established Jewish community may have its Ahabs, it is not, collectively, Ahab, and the very invocation of such biblical tropes is an invitation to distort complex contemporary realities.

In my observations on *The Freedom Seder* I made a point of noting that Arthur Waskow himself was not explicitly anti-Zionist, and it is reassuring to learn from Art Green that Waskow has now come out in favor of Israeli national rights, though I think Rabbi Green will agree with me that one would not necessarily have predicted such a stance from the textual evidence of *The Freedom Seder*. In any case, I think both Art Green and Bill Novak are misguided in the concern they express for Arthur Waskow. Can the notion of "honestly attempting to come to grips with [one's] heritage, in his own particular way" give a stamp of approval even to someone who distorts the basic meanings of the heritage in his use of it? And what, precisely, is the radical Jewish "entity" Waskow is supposed to have helped create? Surely one of the matrices of the distinctive Jewish religious experience is a proud self-acceptance; but, as

Itzhak Epstein observed before me, from Waskow's Haggadah one could hardly guess that Passover celebrates the national liberation of the Jews. *The Freedom Seder* is, of course, an offense to good taste, but, more serious, it is an offense to faith and Jewish historical experience. Those who know Arthur Waskow personally may find him well-meaning, but a Haggadah that can include statements of racial self-hatred (Marilyn Lowen's laments to her black brothers about being "bleached in this desert of exile") is a sick mockery of religious tradition and should be stigmatized as such.

It seems to me neither "vicious" nor an act of "vilification" but a responsibility to identify such a document for what it is, as I tried to do through a careful analysis of the text itself. I don't know, moreover, why Rabbi Green pretends that people who "relate" Jewish symbols to the young and hold Seders must necessarily be free of self-hatred. As a member of a traditionalist group like Havurat Shalom, he should certainly be sensitive, for example, to the element of assimilationist self-hatred in the classical Reform movement in Germany, which both held Seders and adopted certain selected Jewish symbols, following much the same strained universalist bias one finds in *The Freedom Seder*. Finally, Rabbi Green's more general charge of a "planned campaign of vilification against the emerging Jewish Left" hardly jibes with the last part of my own article, which applauds the new radical Zionists.

EARL RAAB writes:

I'm sure that Balfour Brickner and I have a disagreement, but it's hard to find in such a lush crop of straw men.

I certainly agree with him that: "a regressive society is bad for the Jews" (as is an "economically unstable" one, a "polarized" one, and one "in which Jews are either isolated or in self-isolation"); "the universalistic demand in Judaism is as compelling as the particular one"; these are not "times for Jews to concern themselves with Jewish things exclusively"; "there is no salvation in Jews copping out of America" (or in running into "Hobbit-holes"); "there is no salvation in vigilantism"; we cannot "withdraw from involvement in the struggle to make a civilization out of our jungle. . . ." And so on. Agreed. All agreed.

Perhaps Rabbi Brickner's almost exclusive reliance on slogans signals a belief on his part that protest and virtuous passion comprise a political program. Now that would be a disagreement. But I would find it embarrassing to suppose it necessary to repeat a primary lesson of modern Jewish history: that some of the most severe brutalization of man has taken place under prophetic banners. And I am loath to believe that Rabbi Brickner just wants to avoid anything that may blunt the political excitement of some young Jews. After all, he's properly ready to blunt the political excitement of increasing numbers of JDL youth. And, as Rabbi Brickner says, "candor is often more important than popularity."

No, I would prefer to believe that our disagreement flows from genuinely different readings of what's wrong with our society. Rabbi Brickner asks whether "the mentality of the JDL, the atmosphere of a Nixon-Agnew-Hoover regime [are] more hospitable" than those liberal directions which I pointed out were becoming inhospitable. I don't know why he's asking *me* that question, since I explicitly said "no" in the same article from which he quotes. But maybe it is because he still sees American politics only in terms of those traditional alternatives, and does not find it necessary or comfortable to assume a more radical stance to our social problems.

For example, I don't think we yet realize the extent to which this country in the 1960's made a new quantitative commitment to certain domestic human needs. Government expenditures for health and medical services quadrupled, public aid tripled (at the same time that the proportion of the comparatively poor was declining), and so on. But no one will argue that these programs made "a civilization out of our jungle." It's not just that they were insufficient, or that other events overtook them. Rather it is my perspective that these programs, while contributing to the general good, were at the same time uncivilizing forces in themselves because of the mode in which they operated. I don't think it would be difficult to elaborate this point. It's just an example of the fact that while social progress—in usual liberal terms—and the jungle certainly have some inverse relationship, it is not at all an automatic inverse relationship. I think a substantial segment of our young people has, somewhere, a better instinct

for this volatile relationship than their aging fellow travelers. I also think that the Jews should have a historically-developed instinct for the jungle, even when it's camouflaged. This doesn't mean retreat from humanizing political activity. Quite the contrary. The self-fulfilling prophecy is to tell those Jews who smell the feral around them that they are therefore rednecks.

The Jewish community needs, among other things, a "national debate" on those conditions in America which will create and constitute a high quality of life. Our unique focus, our base of perception, is Jewish history and the commandment of Jewish survival. Those imperatives invite us to be particularly concerned, out of our particular experience, with the health of the universe around us; and instruct us to use as one indispensable measure of that health the sensitivity of that universe to our particular Jewish needs. When we find signs of that sensitivity slipping away, as we do, in our "own" political circles—traditionally liberal circles—then we serve neither the "universal" nor the "particular" by sticking our heads in the sand. There is a debate to be waged, and it should not be closed off by too many slogans, too much motivational analysis, orgies of mutual excommunication, or, as Rabbi Brickner himself puts it, by "cheap appeals to our emotion which titillate our sense of guilt. . . ."

NORMAN PODHORETZ writes:

Rabbi Gendler thinks my attack on *The Freedom Seder* was "shocking" in its "malice and personal abuse." Mr. Novak agrees. In his opinion my attack on Waskow was "unwarranted and rather vicious." Rabbi Goldberg for his part sees in my piece an "attempt to defame fellow Jews with whose viewpoint" I disagree. Rabbi Green too accuses me of engaging in "personal defamation" and charges me in addition with running "a planned campaign of vilification . . . against Arthur Waskow. . . ." Now before going on to more important matters, there are two points I would wish to make about all this pious outrage. First, it is tendentiously selective. Some months ago (before the February COMMENTARY appeared) Arthur Waskow wrote the following words in the magazine *Response* which is edited by the same Bill Novak whose sensibilities are so offended

by the kind of language I used in attacking Waskow and to which Rabbis Gendler and Green are, I believe, frequent contributors: "Almost every one of the synagogues, the secular bodies like B'nai B'rith and the American Jewish Committee, *Commentary* [are guilty] of a whining authoritarianism, a bully-boy devotion to the American Empire like that of the worst Hellenizers to Antiochus . . . a snivelly admiration for Dayan, for jet-planes, for the Johnson or Nixon or Agnew who will deliver them."

Does a statement like this provoke the outrage of Waskow's rabbinical defenders, I wonder? If so, they have chosen to keep their indignation to themselves. And what of the letter from Rabbi Brickner printed above in which, for the sin of having attacked *The Freedom Seder*, I am accused of "cynical intellectual posturing" and of presiding over "something new and ugly under the sun," namely, "an intellectual, pseudo-Jewish McCarthyism"? McCarthyism, no less. Does Rabbi Gendler find such charges "shocking"? Does Mr. Novak find them "unwarranted and vicious"? Does Rabbi Goldberg see in them "an attempt to defame fellow Jews"? Does Rabbi Green consider them personally defamatory?

But if the outrage my critics express would appear to be selective, it is also a smoke-screen which serves to conceal the interesting fact that not one of them addresses himself to the specific criticisms I made of *The Freedom Seder* or tries to show that anything I said was either false in general or inaccurate in any detail. Rabbi Goldberg is under the impression that I said *The Freedom Seder* "creates" anti-Semitism. That is not what I said. What I said was that *The Freedom Seder* is "a contribution to the literature of Jewish anti-Semitism," and I went on to spell out precisely what I intended by that characterization: "By anti-Semitism I mean here, very simply, *against the Jews*: against their duty and their right to exist, to live and not to die, to look after themselves and their families, to make the best of their circumstances, to pursue their own interests, to defend themselves against all who wish for whatever reason to diminish or destroy them." As I myself acknowledged in "The Tribe of the Wicked

Son," these are very harsh words. But are they untrue? Would Mr. Novak or Rabbis Gendler, Goldberg, and Green contend that *The Freedom Seder* supports the right or affirms the duty of Jews to pursue their own interests or to defend themselves against their enemies? If so, why are they all silent on this point?

Rabbi Brickner, to be sure, is not at all silent on this point. Neither is he silent on other points, but Robert Alter has generously relieved me of the need to answer his—shall we call it vicious and defamatory?—attack on COMMENTARY. I would also associate myself entirely with Mr. Alter's strictures against Rabbi Brickner's silly idea that Judaism has a "particular social thrust," and against the reductive irresponsibility with which he characterizes virtually every other complex reality he touches. As to the issue of universalism vs. particularism, it is in this context nothing more than a red herring. Whom does Rabbi Brickner imagine himself to be arguing with in his diatribe against "Jewish withdrawal from the larger society"? He is certainly not arguing with me or any contributor to COMMENTARY. I can think of. Far from advising withdrawal into an "isolated particularism," some of us (especially Earl Raab and Nathan Glazer) have been urging Jews to understand that their interests are tied to the survival of a pluralistic democratic polity in the United States; we have been saying that the enemies of that polity, including those of Jewish birth, tend to be the enemies of Jewish interests as well, both here and abroad; and we have been advocating and trying personally to participate in a newly vigorous defense of liberal democratic values and a newly aggressive assault on all who condemn those values, whether they do so candidly or not.

This position has nothing whatever to do with theology (though there is plenty of warrant for it in Jewish tradition, if one wants to play *that* game), and it has even less to do with the universalism-particularism debate. It is exclusively concerned with the question of political strategies to insure Jewish security in the United States and abroad. Arthur Waskow argues that Jewish security can best be served by the recruitment of as many Jews as possible

into the ranks of the "Revolution" as that hazy term is understood by the New Left or the Movement or the Counter-Culture or whatever one chooses to call this phenomenon. I on the contrary think that the worst enemies of the Jewish people, both here in the United States and in other parts of the world, including the Middle East, are today to be found on the revolutionist Left. Consequently I believe that anyone who counsels us to support the revolutionist Left is counseling us to support the enemies of the Jewish people.

Some who offer this counsel are no doubt misguided. Others are not in my opinion misguided at all. They are simply working for the Movement while pretending to be working for the Jews. If the interests of the Movement and those of the Jews happen not to conflict at a given moment or on a given issue, fine; if they do happen to conflict, it is the interests of the Movement which will be given priority and the interests of the Jews will be dismissed as ille-

gitimate or reactionary or worse. All in the name of Jewish welfare, of course, or of loyalty to the principles of Jewish universalism. Now *that* pretense, Rabbi Brickner, is really "something new and ugly under the sun"—or at least under the American sun.

Rabbi Gendler asks what place an attack like the one I wrote on *The Freedom Seder* has in a magazine sponsored to "enlighten and clarify public opinion on problems of Jewish concern." I hope my answer to that question is by now obvious. The fact that so many Jews, and especially so many young Jews (10,000 at Cornell, according to Rabbi Brickner!), have been taken in by this abominable document is sufficient indication that public opinion is in desperate need of enlightenment and clarification on what I consider the single most important problem of Jewish concern—namely, how best to insure Jewish security against those who would destroy or diminish us and those who would apologize for the diminishers or collaborate with the destroyers.

Preventive Detention in Israel

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I was astonished to read in Alan M. Dershowitz's article, "Terrorism and Preventive Detention: The Case of Israel" [December 1970], facts and views imputed to me which are untrue.

Let me first of all declare that I never was Fawzi El-Asmar's lawyer, as Mr. Dershowitz states in the article, and so I was not competent to discuss the matter of Fawzi's detention with Mr. Dershowitz, nor did I in fact discuss the issue with him.

In addition, my curriculum vitae as given by Mr. Dershowitz, including my views and motives, is false and utterly absurd.

I wish to remark also that there are many falsified facts and descriptions throughout the article but, of course, this is no consolation to me personally.

FELICIA LANGER

Jerusalem, Israel

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

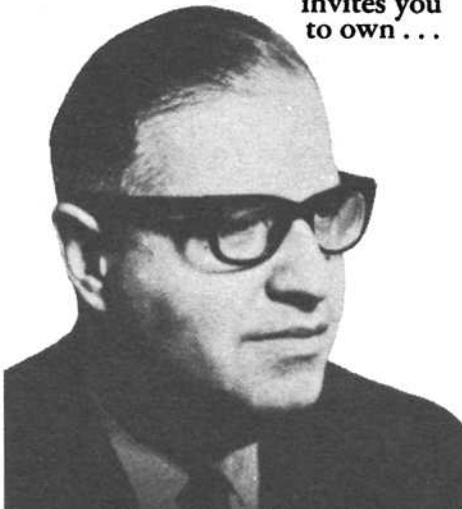
. . . After I had been released from Damon Prison and placed under "restriction" in Lydda, I read Alan M. Dershowitz's article

on "preventive detention" in Israel, which cites my case as an example. The article . . . is so filled with personal attacks on me and my family, and also contains so many deceptions and incorrect statements . . . that I have decided to reply, taking up specific points at issue.

1) *The lawyer*: It is a fact that Mrs. Josepha Kafri handled my defense—and *not* Mrs. Felicia Langer, as was stated in the article.

2) *The prison visit*: Mr. Dershowitz did indeed visit me in the Damon jail. . . . However, he did not come alone, nor did we have a private interview, as implied in the article. He was accompanied by the governor of the prison, a plainclothesman, and the prison social worker. In their presence, Mr. Dershowitz asked me some questions, of which he published only a partial account, omitting the most interesting parts. For example, he asked me what I, as an Israeli Arab, thought of the various Palestinian movements; he did not limit his questioning to Al Fatah, as he would have it appear in the article. I answered out of

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