

Readers Letters – 13 May 1986

MESSAGE MISREPRESENTED

To the Editor of The Jerusalem Post

Sir, – I am astounded at the gross misrepresentation in the article by Abraham Foxman, “To speak or not to speak” (April 28) of the work I have been doing in the United States for some years. He claims that I have been urging American Jews to press the Israeli government to change its policies. This is almost diametrically opposite to the message I have been conveying.

On my first visit to the U.S. as an independent commentator (in April 1971), I summarized my purpose at a meeting with academics in Boston: “It is not in order to criticize the government of Israel that I come to you, but to demand of you that you effectuate your right as American citizens and say to President Nixon and Secretary of State Rogers: ‘Hold it! For the good of the United States too, lay off, and don’t demand of Israel concessions that will jeopardize her security, because her security is also one of the conditions for the security of the United States.’”

Because it became apparent that the pattern of Israel-U.S. relations was largely one of pressure by Washington on the Israeli government to do things against its better judgment, I decided that the most important service I could render would be to persuade Americans – non-Jews as well as Jews – to use their legitimate influence with *their* government to stop twisting Israel’s arm. This is the appeal I have made in just about every public speech in the U.S. and indeed to every group of American visitors to Israel that I have had the opportunity of addressing. It was the basis for the activities of the organization that I helped set up, in 1971, Americans for a Safe Israel; and as recently as three weeks ago an article of mine in this spirit was published in *The Jerusalem Post* (April 11). More: I have told American Jews – including supporters of my views – that, if they want to interfere in Israeli politics, the only honourable way of doing so is to come and live in Israel and get the vote.

The most absurd claim in Mr. Foxman’s article is that I “argued strenuously on visits to the U.S. that American Jews should not stand by while the Begin government endangered Israel’s security” – by surrendering Sinai – “and that it was the responsibility of American Jews to speak out.” It so happens that throughout the period during which the Begin government was endangering Israel’s security by negotiating the surrender of Sinai, I never visited the U.S. My first visit to the U.S. after my resignation from my post in the Begin government was paid months after the peace treaty with Egypt was signed and sealed. Again, never after that did I make any such appeal to American Jews.

I wrote scores of articles on this subject between February 1978 and the signing of the peace treaty in March 1979 – in *Ma’ariv* and in *The Jerusalem Post*. There is not a single word in any of them that could remotely be construed as justifying Mr. Foxman’s charge.

I can understand Abe Foxman’s desire to try to be “evenhanded” between on the one hand the pernicious propaganda of “Peace Now” in the U.S. (where some years ago its emissaries called on American Jews to stop contributing to the UJA as a means of

pressure on the Begin government) and on the other hand pressure in the opposite direction – if there is any such – on the Israeli government. But I am probably the last person in the world whom he has a right to case for a role in his scenario.

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