

JERUSALEM LETTER / VIEWPOINTS

Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

VP:96 3 Kislev 5750 / 1 December 1989

EARLY WARNING: IDENTIFYING POTENTIALLY GENOCIDAL POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

Franklin H. Littell

What Kind of University Produced Mengele? / How Can Democracies Protect Themselves? / The Nazis Murdered 344 by 1922 / What is a Legitimate Government / The Difference Between Terrorists and Freedom Fighters / Developing the Ability to Predict / Fifteen Criteria for Identification

Forty years after the Holocaust we now have a flood of writings, biographies, testimonies, and documents on the part of survivors, rescuers, liberators, and even bystanders. The "forty years in the wilderness" are now behind us, and voices are raised where silence once ruled supreme. Telling the story is the first stage in learning from the Holocaust; but every person has his own language, his own experiences, his own idioms, and the impact tends to be divided. When we talk about the general lessons of the Holocaust, however, we come into an area which can be more a cooperative venture.

What Kind of University Produced Mengele?

We might start with the question: What kind of a university produced

Josef Mengele -- and the other doctors who worked with him? Mengele had two doctorates from universities which were of world-rank before the Nazis took them over and ruined them. What did he learn there?

What kind of a university educated Roland Freisler, the head of the hanging courts -- and all those hundreds of lawyers who searched all the precedents and put their initials on the right carbon copies?

What kind of universities educated Kittel and Hirsch and Althaus -- and all those accommodating world-rank theologians and church teachers who supported the Nazis?

This line of questioning has very troublesome implications for those of us who love Alma Mater, and who would like to be able to say with purity of

Daniel J. Elazar, Editor and Publisher; Zvi R. Marom, Associate Editor; Mark Ami-El, Managing Editor
21 Arlozorov St. Jerusalem, 92181, Israel; Tel. 02-639281. © Copyright. All rights reserved. ISSN:0334-4096

The opinions expressed by the authors of Viewpoints do not necessarily reflect those of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

heart and certainty of soul that the medical school at Temple and the law school at Michigan and the engineering school at Northwestern is doing a better job of teaching ethics and morals and professional discipline than was being done in Tuebingen, Marburg, Heidelberg, Goettingen, and the other great German universities in the 1920s.

That is a sector where Jews and Christians can work together, as they think about the nature of a real university.

How Can Democracies Protect Themselves?

The issues and lessons raised by the Holocaust go far beyond the immediate horror of the events themselves. They include the whole problem of how democracies maintain themselves in a world in which by living up to their own principles they put themselves at risk. How can human beings overcome their own baser instincts, which can be mobilized under certain conditions by those who are the foes of all that we believe is human? Indeed, what can we do to protect ourselves as humans against a possible repeat of the Holocaust?

Terrorism and genocide -- like infanticide, widow-burning, slavery and duelling -- were wrong before a body of laws was developed to effectively suppress them. The style of a terrorist movement is predictive of the kind of government it will operate if it comes to power, and genocide is one of its logical options. Societies that are attempting to maintain the creative tension between liberty and popular sovereignty will recognize that terrorist movements are, by self-definition and chosen style of action, outside the arena of full, free, and informed discussion that informs a free society. The task of democratic societies is to create a body of laws that protects loyal citizens in the exercise of their liberties, while at the same time rendering impotent potentially genocidal movements in time.

How do we deal with populist movements which are really outside the cove-

nant, which say so in their writings and act like it in their behavior? What is our response to conduct which is destructive of the constitution? Some people have a very simple answer. They wave the populist slogans of the nineteenth century and arrive at what is today known as totalitarian democracy. Every dictator in the twentieth century has claimed to represent the will of the people; if he did not represent it at first, he soon did by killing the opposition or driving some into exile and silencing the rest. We want to protect to the full the rights of "loyal opposition" -- and at the same time not open the society to suicide or destruction by anti-democratic elements.

The Nazis Murdered 344 by 1922

By the time the Nazis assassinated German Foreign Minister Walter Rathenau in July 1922, they and their immediate allies had already killed 344 political opponents. That is not a political party; that is a terrorist movement. We did not understand it then, of course, nor did we understand it in 1933. We did not even understand the truth in 1938 in most parts of the so-called civilized world. But by now, 50 years later, we should begin to draw some of the implications from these facts.

Ingmar Bergman once used a very vivid metaphor in explaining his movie The Serpent's Egg. He said, "the membrane of the egg is so thin that through it you can already discern the perfectly formed body of the reptile." I would argue that by 1923, as far as the German Nazi party is concerned, the perfectly formed body of the reptile was already there to see -- in the structure of authority in the party, in the barely restrained violence toward the public at large, and in the skillful use of violence against political opponents. Shortly before the last open election in Germany (it was not really free because there had been so much street fighting and intimidation generally), Goebbels wrote in his diary: "Once we have the power we will

never give it up. They will have to carry our dead bodies out of the ministries."

The lesson is that we have to get them in time. We have to identify and render impotent potentially genocidal movements before they become strong enough to induce civil war, or, God forbid, get government power in their hands and commit genocide, which they will certainly do according to their basic nature. In a democratic society we need a network of laws for the control of the behavior of all citizens that act in an intimidating way, a network that will constrain those who have drawn the knife and have broken the covenant of trust upon which the society rests.

Terrorist movements, if not stopped in time, will fashion governments of criminal content and genocidal intent.

What is a Legitimate Government

What is a legitimate government? Textbooks in international law traditionally define a legitimate government as a government which is able to maintain order in a given territory and which has been recognized by a sufficient number of other governments. In a period when we are moving toward the protection of liberties -- with affirmative expression of the will of the people, accompanied by adequate checks upon the mob -- I would propose that a legitimate government be defined rather by two other principles. The traditional definition suited dynastic government, but is inadequate for today.

One basic principle is whether there are structures for channeling -- rendering effective, and also sometimes putting the brakes on -- popular sovereignty. The second point characterizing a legitimate government is protection of individuals and groups who are at some point or another part of the loyal opposition.

Kurt Leibholtz, the brother-in-law of the Christian martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who survived in exile and came back after the war and served on the supreme court in Karlsruhe for some years until his death, already discerned and wrote in late

1933 that no Nazi government could be a legitimate government because of the way it treated opponents and minorities.

What then are the dues to be paid legitimacy? I am always challenged these days about what Israel is doing. I respond that the U.S. government is doing some things that I do not like too much either, but Israel has a legitimate government and sooner or later the people -- who have structures and channels to make changes -- can get at mistakes when they are made by those making decisions. But there is not a single legitimate government in the Arab League. Every one of them is either an old-fashioned despotism -- one that has not yet entered the period of liberty and self-government -- or a typical twentieth century dictatorship. That fact should make some difference when people are talking about policy matters and decisions that have to be made, and also how we judge what respect we owe what types of government.

The Difference Between Terrorists and Freedom Fighters

The argument also works out in a very interesting fashion when you ask the difference between terrorists and freedom fighters. We see rampant stupidity on this question. Even the President of the United States said a few years ago something to the effect that if they are our boys they are "freedom fighters" and if they are on the other side they are "terrorists." I have read this twice recently in speeches by State Department officials. Where do we get these people?!

Terrorists characteristically attack a whole society to destabilize it, to terrorize it -- by killing women shoppers or children, or attacking medical convoys or innocent people riding buses, ships or airplanes. Freedom fighters are soldiers, though sometimes not in uniform, who strike at police or military targets. If they strike at civilian targets at all, they attempt restraint.

Today we have in the United States all

kinds of what Lenin called "useful idiots" who compare Arafat to George Washington. Arafat praised and rewarded his people for killing an unarmed American Ambassador in Khartoum. Think of the other crimes that have been committed in the name of the PLO and its associates, that they have praised and rewarded. George Washington would have had court-martialed and ordered shot any soldier who did such a thing to unarmed civilians! It is an obscenity to even make a comparison. The PLO is definitely one of these terrorist movements we need to defend free societies against.

Anyone who does not know the kind of government that the PLO would operate if it ever came to power has not noted the string of violence associated with it, has not studied his lessons.

Developing the Ability to Predict

It is not enough for us to record and review history. We also need to cultivate the capacity to predict that certain patterns of overt political behavior indicate the existence of potentially genocidal movements. It is crucial to identify and act against them early on: once in power, the only way they will be dislodged is with outside help -- in other words, through war. Once Hitler had consolidated himself, by 1937-38, there was no chance whatever that the German people could remove him.

Jeanne Kirkpatrick, who is usually more perceptive of the issues, wrote an article recently on the self-determination of peoples, saying with regard to Panama that we do not have the right to interfere in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. But we have reached a situation where technologically that simply does not fit the facts. In Brazil, they scream patriotism to shut up outside interference with the destruction of the rain forest that produces 40 percent of all the oxygen that we live on. Bangladesh, the most intensely populated area on the face of the earth, is washing away -- with tens of

thousands perishing every year, because they cut the trees in Nepal and China. Are we going to say, simply let every nation rise and fall on its own? It is immoral to think that way.

Gideon Hausner, speaking to an international trial lawyers convention some years ago, called for the democratic governments in the free world to unite in treaties of cooperation to deal with terrorist movements, movements with programs potentially genocidal. It is time to realize this proposal.

Fifteen Criteria for Identification

When we come to the question of political responsibility in a world as explosive as ours, we must begin to make some distinctions. To do this I would suggest testing the overt behavior of political movements according to the following 15 criteria. If out of 15, 10 or 11 clearly apply to some current movement, it is time for the alarm bells to start ringing:

- 1) The group or movement prints, distributes, and uses anti-Semitic material for recruitment of membership.
- 2) The group or movement makes anti-Semitic appeals through the media or in evangelistic meetings.
- 3) and 4) The same actions as 1) and 2) are directed against any other ethnic, religious, or cultural community, using targeting and intimidation as a weapon in the quest for political power.
- 5) Members cultivate violence toward opponents -- publishing slanderous charges, bombing meeting places and homes and media, beating and assassinating.
- 6) The movement pursues the politics of polarization, destroying the middle ground of conciliation and compromise, rejecting the politics of moderation and orderly change. If it becomes large enough, instead of being a loyal opposition, it builds the structure of a state within a state, like the PLO in southern Lebanon before 1982.
- 7) The group or movement deliberately

drives a wedge between the generations, alienating young people from their heritage -- a very characteristic part of the policy of the Nazi party. In the last open election the average voting age of the Nazi list was 10 years younger than the voters of the other parties. They got these votes by teaching the young people to be ashamed of and then to turn with bitterness against their elders.

8) The movement maintains camps for paramilitary training, including practice in the use of anti-personnel weapons. The United States has camps in Oklahoma and Arkansas right now, in the Ozarks, at Hayden Lake in Idaho and elsewhere.

9) The movement maintains private armies, demonstrating in public in uniform, parading and marching to intimidate loyal citizens.

10) Leaders of the movement elaborate a quasi-religious structure of authority and sanction, with political hymns, shrines, martyrs, and liturgies.

One could never tell with the Nazi movement whether it was a religious movement with political ambitions or a political movement with a host of religious overtones. In July 1939 I was taken by a young German I had met in a church in Nuernberg to what turned out to be a Party rally at the stadium. There were 100,000 people, with the "cathedral of lights" that Albert Speer said he invented evoking all of the subterranean emotions. There was some kind of pageant going on -- about the spirit of eagles. Siegfried came in with his shining armor and killed the dragon. Suddenly the lights went off; all was in total darkness. And then the spotlights come on and there he was -- Hitler -- with Himmler and Goering and several others of his entourage. And the whole crowd jumped to their feet in a terrible antiphonal: "Seig Heil! Seig Heil! Seig Heil!" One who lived through the period wrote a book in which he said there was more spirituality (geistigkeit) in Germany during the Third Reich than there had been in 200 years, but it was a spirituality

devoid of integrity, ethical grounding, or biblical foundation. The person who says "secularity" or "secularism" is the problem of the age hasn't been where the action is. The problem is demonic, murderous, religiously impelled, genocidally inclined "true belief."

11) Archaic tribal, clannish, or religious symbols are worn by members as public insignias; secret passwords, handshakes, and other recognition signals are used to signal co-believers.

12) Induction and termination of membership are observed as pseudo-religious rites. Straying members are treated as heretics, subjected to exorcism or intensive group therapy.

13) The movement's basic unit is the closed cell, with three to seven the standard number. This is the classic unit of a revolutionary party or intelligence operation, but inappropriate to exercise influence upon a legitimate government.

14) The movement practices deception and confusion of public opinion by launching one-issue "fronts" without clear identification of sponsorship, financing and control. A great deal of money is raised this way, ostensibly for a good public purpose but actually to serve the movement's power drive and internal interests. This is also the "large net" within which "innocents" are caught.

15) The movement's tactics include infiltration and subversion of public institutions and voluntary associations, to bend their direction from public service in the declared purpose to organization of the group's drive for power. Positions controlling the schools, police and public safety forces are special targets.

Dealing with governments where terrorist movements have already come to power is a much more difficult question than answering the question of how to smash terrorist movements when they are still weak enough to be dealt with at a minimum of violence. At the time when the UN Assembly cheered Arafat with his

pistol, there were 88 member governments in the UN Assembly that were either despotisms or dictatorships, as compared with about 30 governments which had some measure of liberty and self-government.

These unbalanced numbers make it all the more imperative for democratic governments to protect their ranks by developing the necessary Early Warning System to identify potentially threatening political movements and to generate the necessary courage to deal with the reptile before it hatches and grows. There are too few legitimate governments to let anyone fall from the ranks.

* * *

Professor Franklin H. Littell, one of the world's most renowned experts on the Holocaust, is Emeritus Professor of Religion at Temple University, Adjunct Professor at Hebrew University, and a member of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council and the International Council of Yad Vashem. This Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints is based on Professor Littell's presentation to the Jerusalem Center Fellows Forum on November 1, 1989.