

A LETTER from "C. B." of Los Angeles, on the opposite page criticizes a column written by me (DW Feb. 26, 1957) in which I explored Negro opinion on the Israeli-Arab conflict as expressed through press organs and leading spokesmen. My conclusions were that (1) Negroes were basically friendly to both Israel and the Arab countries; (2) while supporting the United Nations efforts toward peace following the aggression against Egypt by England, France and Israel, Negro opinion did not bracket Israel with the imperialist countries; (3) Negroes took vigorous sides with the Arab movement against imperialism in Algeria, Morocco and Egypt, but were not expressing approval of efforts by Arabs or any other nation to end the existence of Israel as a state in the Middle East; (4) basically Negro opinion was anti-imperialist and not anti-Israel; (5) Negro opinion on Middle East questions were influenced by alliances with Jewish organizations in this country on the civil rights issue, and there was no contradiction between this domestic alliance and an anti-imperialist, peaceful settlement in the Middle East.

I STILL hold to that analysis, despite protesting letters from my old friend Benjamin J. Davis and, now, "C. B." But for the moment I shall consider only the letter of "C. B." because I consider its theme false, even dangerous.

"C. B." gives the impression that Israel is the main danger to the freedom movement in the Arab world and North Africa and holds that the "natural sympathy" for Israel among American Negroes has been almost wiped out by Israel's actions in the United Nations and elsewhere. My faithful reading of the Negro press and attendance at most important gatherings of Negro leaders leave me with no such impression. Indeed, the record shows just the opposite.

For on Dec. 1, 1956, the New York Amsterdam News, in applauding President Eisenhower for taking the "hard right instead of the easy wrong" in moving against England, France and Israel for their aggression against Egypt, separated Israel from England and France. The editorial condemned all three but said that the President, "in taking his stand against England and France . . . was turning his back on two of America's old and traditional allies."

And on the same page with the editorial was a friendly interview with Mrs. Golda Meir, the Israeli Foreign Minister by Dr. Marguerite D. Cartwright. This could hardly be interpreted as being anti-Israel in the Israeli-Arab conflict.

ON THE same Dec. 1, Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, a leading educator and civil rights fighter, writing in the Pittsburgh Courier, commented:

"Israel gambled when she invaded Egypt possibly with the nod from France and England. England and France thought they could get away with it by sending their armed forces into the area immediately after the canal was nationalized."

Dr. Mays saw in the Middle East crisis the danger of a world war in which "all participants would lose," because "Israel would become a battleground . . . as well as the Arab nations surrounding her. It would take them many decades to recover from such a war."

I have failed to find in editorial comment, written opinion, or in statements from leaders any evidence to support the contentions of "C. B." as to bitterness against Israel among Negroes. There are strong indications that American Negroes support Egypt, but there is no evidence that by that token they are anti-Israel.

For example, the Baltimore

On the Way

by Abner W. Berry

A Reply to "C.B." On Negroes And Israel

Afro-American of Dec. 15, 1956, urged U. S. action to relieve the plight of Arab refugees, the point of its lances, however, was aimed at the U. S. State Department with the following questions:

"Why has there not been one American suggestion that asylum on these shores be granted a single one of the million Arabs uprooted from their land by the Israelites?"

"Why is it that the U. S. State Department hearts bleed only for those oppressed and downtrodden people of the world whose skins are white?"

THE complaint of the Pittsburgh Courier, cited by "C. B." in his letter was contained in an editorial in that paper, Dec. 29, 1956. The editor resented an attempt by "some Jews to thwart free discussion of the Israeli-Arab controversy and the difficult problems of the Middle East." (Obviously referring to protests against two previous columns by a Courier editor which blamed Israel for the plight of Arab refugees and urged that the refugees be permitted to come to the U. S.)

Disclaiming the columnist's position reflected the paper's editorial policy, the paper advised that its "Jewish friends will do themselves no good, nor Israel, if they allow the impression to gain ground that they would attempt to stifle free expression by imputing anti-Semitism to individuals who differ strongly with them, Israel."

The Courier recognized the "provocations suffered by Israel," but added: "There are many persons of integrity who question the wisdom of Israel's attack (or counter-attack) on Egypt."

This is the only instance of record, except that recorded by the Los Angeles Herald-Dispatch, of "Negro-Jewish tensions . . . resulting around the question of Israel that has come to my attention."

"C. B." charges that Negro papers are silent on the Israeli-Arab crisis because of the kind of conspiracy of "reactionary Jews" who threaten critics of Israel with economic boycotts. This seems to me to be a dangerous generalization.

It may well be that the Herald-Dispatch has been the target of such a boycott by a segment of the Jewish community; but to reason from that local experience that this must represent the national picture is to conclude that a clique of organized Jews is censoring the Negro press. I don't have to argue here just how such a conclusion would affect Negro-Jewish relations. As for me, I would have to have much more evidence than one editorial in the Pittsburgh Courier and a running fight in the Herald-Dispatch.

As for the way in which the Herald-Dispatch has handled the Israeli-Arab conflict, I have a few protests myself. I am not a Jew, nor do I agree with the governmental policies of Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. But I would protest the lead sentence in the main story in the Herald-Dispatch of March 14, 1957, which reads: "Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion of Israel, the Hitler of the Middle East, unleashed a vicious attack on Under Secretary of the United Nations, Ralph Bunche, during a speech before the Israeli Parliament yes-

terday." There was not one word in the story to indicate what Ben-Gurion said, and the lead and headline seemed to be written only to accommodate the phrase, "the Hitler of the Middle East."

I would also have to protest a column in the Herald-Dispatch in the same issue that charges some unnamed Jews with practices worse than those of the White Citizens Councils and Eastland, because "the White Citizens Councils come out above board and fight you above ground which gives you an equal opportunity to fight back."

These are two samples from the Herald-Dispatch. There are others I consider equally objectionable, but I will have to comment on them at another time.

THE conclusions drawn by "C. B." I submit are at variance with those of just about every responsible Negro leader and spokesman. There are some spokesmen with which I disagree; for example, Dr. M. D. Cartwright whose columns run in both the Pittsburgh Courier and the Amsterdam News. Dr. Cartwright has devoted about half of her space during the month of December, 1956, to a defense of Israel through interviews with President Nasser of Egypt and Israeli Foreign Minister Mrs. Golda Meir.

I call attention also to the columns of Dr. Mays who has evenhandedly called for the establishment of peace in the Middle East, blaming first Israel and then Egypt.

And I call attention to the comment of Lester Granger in the Amsterdam News, Nov. 17, 1956:

"There is no simple explanation of what is happening between Israel and Egypt. It is not a case of the Israeli Army invading the territory of a peaceful neighbor; it is the case of a desperate action (however unwise) taken by the Israeli after years of suffering bloody raids either carried out or instigated by Egypt and after a desperate flood of hate propaganda loosed by Nasser against the Israel nation to stir up a 'holy war' against a country of postage stamp proportions."

To the Negroes, Granger says:

"American Jews are not only our neighbors in practically every city in this country but they are also the very best neighbors that we have ever had. Almost invariably they have given us the strongest support in our struggles toward equal rights . . . and the strongest leadership in reducing racial tension and conflict."

Granger argued, and I think rightly, that no American ought to "get his feeling about the Arab-Israeli warfare mixed up with his attitudes toward his neighbors in this country. . . ."

I'm afraid the matter of Negro opinion on Israel and the Arabs is much more complex than "C. B." is willing to recognize. There is nothing in Negro opinion that I have read or heard which indicates that Negro leadership have had their strivings for peace, their anti-imperialist instincts or the vision of their freedom go as in this country blurred by taking a limited racial view of world events and history. It is my opinion that "C. B." has simply added the word "imperialism" to an analysis which is basically influenced by a racial outlook.