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LETTER DATED 18 NOVEMBER 1969 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
ISRAEL TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to refer to the letter addressed to you by the Permanent Representative of Jordan on 10 November 1969 (A/7758, S/9501) requesting circulation as an official document of the General Assembly and the Security Council of an article which appeared in the London Times and, on instructions of my Government, to request identical publication of a selection of "Letters to the editor" published in that newspaper subsequently in reaction to the distortions and defamatory statements contained in the said article.

I have the honour to request circulation of this letter and its enclosure as an official document of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

Please accept, etc.

(Signed) Yosef TEKOAH
Permanent Representative of Israel
to the United Nations

* Also issued under the symbol A/7766.

A. Arab testimony

[29 October 1969]

From Mr. Gordon Oakes, Labour M.P. for Bolton, West

Sir, - As one who was actually visiting Israel (including the occupied territories) at the time of the rocket attack on Jerusalem last August, I read with incredulity the article by your Foreign Editor in today's Times. He makes a number of slanderous accusations against Israel but substantiates none of them. He states that ninety leading Arabs have been deported, but uses the ambiguous phrase "pushed over the border". Can we have their names, please?

He quotes a specific number of houses destroyed. Could he quote the source of this very exact piece of information, and could he verify whether houses under slum clearance schemes have not been included?

Worst of all, he alleges that prisoners are held without trial and tortured in prison. This is a terrible accusation against a civilized democratic country and the only corroboration which is offered is that "there is a great deal of evidence to support this belief".

Did the writer visit any prisons? What evidence? On the question of visas for "Jordanians to visit Jerusalem" I regard it as a mark of astonishing tolerance that a country at war allows the citizens of a hostile country to set foot in its boundaries at all!

When in Israel I visited Bethlehem, East Jerusalem and a number of other towns in occupied territories and spoke quite freely to any Arab I wished to. Not a single one of the accusations made by your Foreign Editor was made to me or even hinted at by any Arab I spoke to. Perhaps I should add that I am neither blind nor deaf and thirteen years as a defence lawyer has taught me to see beneath the surface of any situation.

I am amazed that such a slanderous and wholly uncorroborated article should come from the pen of so distinguished a writer and appear in Britain's leading newspaper. I think you owe it to the people of Israel either to substantiate every one of these accusations or offer an unconditional apology.

Yours sincerely,

Gordon OAKES,
House of Commons, 28 Oct.

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B. Concern for reputation

[1 November 1969]

From Mr. Louis Velleman

Sir, - I have done, a couple of weeks ago, just what your foreign editor Mr. Hodgkin did, I travelled, as a journalist, extensively through the Israel-occupied territory, especially the West Bank and Gaza. And though it is true, as everyone knows, that houses sometimes are destroyed and members of terrorist groups are sentenced, on a whole the Israelis are seen, by the Arab population, rather as weak than as strong occupiers.

I spoke to at least more than 100 Arabs, among them many Arab authorities. They all blame Israel for occupying a country that, they think, belongs to them. But all of them, almost without any noteworthy exception, were of opinion that the occupation was a fair one, in the light, evidently, of the circumstances.

As a journalist my approach has been rather critical, maybe too critical for some Israeli authorities. But I got convinced that the Israelis try very hard to be ideal occupiers, for the one thing they are desperately afraid of is, just, their reputation as occupying force.

Maybe Mr. Hodgkin has known the places and people he revisited too long to be quite objective, though he certainly has tried. Anyway, I have been a reporter for some thirty years now. And I think it is only fair to let you and your readers know that my conclusion on the matter has been about the opposite of Mr. Hodgkin's.

Yours truly,

Louis VELLEMAN, London and
Common Market Correspondent,
Het Vrije Volk (Amsterdam),
76 Drève Pittoresque, Brussels, Poste
Rhode St. Genèse.

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C. Call for evidence

3 November 1969

From Mr. Emanuel Shinwell, C.H., Labour M.P. for Easington

Sir, - Several of my colleagues in the Parliamentary Labour Party, most of them of the left-wing variety, and a few closely associated with Mrs. Margaret McKay whose support for the Arab States and avowed hostility against Israel is well known, have expressed their horror (letter, 31 October) about alleged crimes committed by Israel, including repression and ill-treatment of Arab prisoners; which were mentioned by your Foreign Editor, based entirely on hearsay and not on actual experience. So far as my colleagues are concerned they produce not a tittle of evidence. I invite those who appended their signature to the letter to produce chapter and verse to substantiate their allegations.

It may have escaped notice that not a single word of protest has been uttered about the Soviet Union's refusal to allow Jews to emigrate to Israel, or against the Government of Syria for refusing to release two Jewish persons who were among the passengers on the hijacked American airliner, or any horror expressed about the hanging of Jews in Iraq for alleged espionage, or a protest against the action of Egypt in detaining a substantial number of Jews without trial.

I am reluctant to believe that there exists in the ranks of the Parliamentary Labour Party, despite their radical and anti-racial utterances, any anti-Jewish hostility, but the implications contained in their letter make me wonder.

Yours faithfully,

E. SHINWELL,
House of Commons, 31 October.

D. To be fair to both

13 November 1969

From Lady Gaitskell

Sir, - In your Leader To be Fair to Both (1 November) you are surprised by the reaction of those who were affronted by Mr. Hodgkin's article on the Middle East. Of course, I was disturbed by Mr. Hodgkin's article, but I was not against it because he criticized Israel. It is too engenuous of you to suggest this, for no one would deny that Israel gets her fair share of criticism and attack these days.

It did not need Mr. Hodgkin to remind me that any occupation can be unjust, harsh or cruel in varying degrees, and that it is always detested by the occupied peoples. Surely the degree and the circumstances must be taken into account, as well as any efforts by the occupying power to inject some humanity into the conditions existing.

Mr. Hodgkin wrote throughout as if this were a peace time "occupation" and not one in which a guerrilla war was being waged.

Of course the feelings of the Arabs can be explained, but the feelings of the Israelis cannot be explained away either.

In a country like Israel, where there is no capital punishment, many repressive measures can be seen in a different light. But Mr. Hodgkin went much further. He made grave allegations of torture with evidence consisting of - and here I quote him - "a common belief in the occupied areas is that anyone suspected of belonging to a guerrilla organization is tortured".

What kind of evidence is this?

And Mr. Hodgkin went on to compare the situation in Israel with that of Nazi occupied France in 1942, and the Russians in Czechoslovakia. Is this the objective judgement of a student of Middle East affairs considered a conciliator, and not a propagandist?

For those of us who try to be fair, the most reassuring thing has been the freedom of movement in and out of Israel, and this applies to thousands of Arabs, as well as hundreds of journalists and other foreign visitors. So I find it hard to believe that there is a conspiracy of silence about the conditions of the occupied Arabs.

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The Times is a newspaper taken seriously at home and abroad. It has shown a sense of responsibility in this controversy. The serious flaw in Mr. Hodgkin's article was that he was not "Fair to Both".

Your sincerely,

Dora GAITSKELL
House of Lords, 1 November

E. Arabs under Israel

[6 November 1969]

From Mr. Herbert Butler, Labour M.P. for Hackney, Central

Sir, - The letter which you published on 31 October, over the signatures of Albert Booth and others of our colleagues, is based upon a complete acceptance of the allegations made by Mr. Hodgkin (special article, 28 October).

These allegations have been amply refuted by correspondents who write from first-hand knowledge.

Many of us have visited Israel recently and have spent a considerable time in the occupied territories, have conversed with Arabs there and have been given every opportunity of seeing the conditions that exist there. Nowhere did we find anything remotely resembling the state of affairs described by Mr. Hodgkin.

We are astounded that our colleagues, who have not visited the occupied territories and have no personal experience, should rush into print and accept these allegations as true. It is somewhat alarming that they go on to suggest that there can be any comparison with the razing of Guernica or current injustices by the Soviet Union in Czechoslovakia.

We suggest that our colleagues who signed the letter should, before condemnation, visit Israel and judge for themselves.

They advocate the implementation of the Security Council resolution of November 1968. So do we. In fact we go further and advocate the resolution of the Socialist International Congress of 19 June 1969, which has the support of the British Labour Party. But these do not call for Israel to withdraw in the hope of an eventual peace, as your correspondents seem to imply. They call for the establishment of a "just and lasting peace" within recognized boundaries. A withdrawal would be the obvious corollary to such an agreement, but this was never meant to be a pre-condition.

Israel has again and again invited direct negotiations to secure peace. The reply of the Arab States has been the Khartoum resolution of "no peace, no recognition, no negotiation".

We find it strange that our colleagues have no word of condemnation for blowing up supermarkets and students' canteens and for button bombs left by Al Fatah for schoolchildren to pick up.

Yours faithfully,

Herbert W. Butler
R. Crawshaw
Jack Dunnett
Maurice Edelman
David Ginsburg
Hugh Gray
Ray Gunter
Eric S. Heffer
Stanley Henig
Robert L. Howarth
Leslie Huckfield
Hector Hughes
Daniel Jones
Marcus Lipton
John Mendelson

Ian Mikardo
Maurice S. Miller
Eric Moonman
M. Orbach
Gordon Oakes
R.T. Paget
Roy D. Roebuck
Arnold Shaw
Renée Short
Julian Snow
G.R. Strauss
Raphael Tuck
David Weitzman
Willis.

Palace of Westminster, 3 November.
