

WASHINGTON DIARIST

Threats

NO SOONER HAD TNR chided the Cassandra Chorus of nuclear-obsessed Boston medical practitioners for their uncharacteristic silence about the Chernobyl nuclear disaster than two of its members went into print with a letter to the *Boston Globe* (May 27) that is beyond satire. Harvard psychiatrists John E. Mack and Eric Chivian broke their silence not to join the alarm about Chernobyl, but rather to endorse the Soviet government's failure to inform either its own people or its neighbors about the calamity. The Soviets, the good doctors explained, "downplay catastrophes . . . in order to prevent emotional distress." This, of course, is a virtue: "we would do well to ask ourselves about the potential damaging effects, particularly for our children, of our own media's obsession with the horror-filled details of every event, however insignificant." Note the implication that Chernobyl was insignificant. Try to imagine these physicians saying the same of Three Mile Island, where no one died. But there's more. "The Soviets see the West's mass media, with their constant focus on crises and bad news, as having a destructive influence on individuals and society. . . ." What Mack and Chivian portentously call "our research at Harvard" concluded that, thanks to their government's more sophisticated approach, "Soviet youth were significantly more optimistic about the prospects for world peace than American young people." I can understand why the Soviets would wish to displace blame for Chernobyl onto the West and its hysterical habits. But it is really grotesque to hear this accusation coming from men who, with their overwrought physician colleagues, have done more to make panic the preferred mode of thinking about nuclear questions than anyone else in our society. Mack has written a psychologically inventive and, alas, historically innocent biography of Lawrence of Arabia. Another Cambridge doctor suggests, perhaps waggishly, that Mack's admiration for Lawrence may explain why he is drawn to mischievous fantasies of the virtues of a foreign people and the sins of his own. I wish the explanation were that interesting; in any case, it wouldn't explain the motives of Mack's associates. I am afraid that here is a most brazen but simple case of what

used to be called "fellow-traveling." It is what I have long suspected about much of the leadership of the physicians' movement. Nothing about its behavior in the wake of Chernobyl, or regarding the fate of dissident medical scientists in the USSR who have dared to criticize Soviet nuclear policy, changes my mind.

AS WE'VE TRIED TO MAKE everybody aware by now, the first references to Kurt Waldheim's career as a Nazi were in these pages, initially (TNR, January 19, 1980) in a profile by the eminent novelist Shirley Hazzard, who had worked in the United Nations Secretariat, and subsequently (TNR, September 27, 1980, and March 7, 1981) in remarks on this page by yours truly. Of course, we did not have much of the detail that has since been exhumed from the archives. But no one else seemed especially exercised by the revelation, and no one was intrigued enough to follow up on our lead. Of course in retrospect, I ruefully admit, publishing a world-class scoop as a casual aside buried in a longer story is as much a journalistic embarrassment as it is something to brag about. The failure to recognize and pursue this story is ours as much as it is the rest of the media's.

THIS FAILURE DIDN'T ENTIRELY reassure Dr. Waldheim, though. Shortly after one of my references to him, I was paid a visit by a former student, Tom Reston. Reston, son of the columnist, was a public affairs apparatchik in the Carter State Department. Now Carter was out, and Reston was looking to join a law firm. Fine, but what did he want from me? He did not seem anxious to come to the point. Finally he told me he did already have a client, an important client: Kurt Waldheim. The rest tumbled out quickly. What we'd printed about Waldheim was a lie. If we didn't desist we'd find ourselves in a libel suit. I told Reston to advise his client that if Waldheim sued us, he would find himself in discovery proceedings. That was the last we heard about a libel suit. Now we know why.

I AM JUST BACK FROM ISRAEL, where, after only 22 months of the sensibly idealistic leadership of Shimon Peres, something of the old incandescence has been restored to the Zionist enterprise, de-

based over seven years by the churlish fanaticism of Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, who unfortunately becomes prime minister again in October. The most striking change is in the economy, where hyperinflation verging on 1,000 percent has been brought down to a mere 25 percent or so. The nasty edge of Israel's domestic politics has also been blunted. One reason is that the annexationist designs for the biblical territories of Judea and Samaria no longer seem so desirable, even to many in the nationalist Likud. Still, there is no ease in Zion. Right now the country is struggling once more with vexing ethical questions forced upon it by the bad neighborhood in which it lives. Tom Friedman put it this way in the *New York Times*: "Can military and security officials . . . be realistically expected to deal with terrorists as armed, mortal enemies until a capture, then suddenly choke off emotions and treat them calmly, according them the rights the law implies?" The case involves two Palestinian terrorists who died after they were seized during the hijack of a bus. It is particularly serious because security services appeared to have lied to a judicial inquiry. A Druse member of the Knesset voiced the prevailing regional view of such matters when he confessed he couldn't understand why the Israelis are tearing each other apart over two dead terrorists. It is to their credit that some Israelis still insist on doing just that. But, alas, the prime minister is not on their side.

BUT THE GREATEST THREAT to Israel, I believe, is not the democratic ambiguities of a nation under siege, and not the Arabs either. It is the ultraorthodox Jews, perfervid brothers under the skin of Sunni and Shiite fundamentalists, who are attempting to turn Israel into an Iran-like theocracy. Every little victory for these backward Jews in Israel drives or keeps other Jews out of the country. An ad in the June 1 *New York Times* by some of these Khomeinist rabbis calls Mayor Kollek "Teddy the Terrorist" for insisting on the plural and open character of the holy city. These rabbis might just as well be agents of Yasir Arafat.

M. P.

Marty Peretz

JUNE 23, 1986 43

The New Republic

9/14/86

Eric

This, if you're interested, is the source of Mr. Peretz's attacks in his magazine. A previous letter to the subscription department failed to get the copies for the coming year.

OFFICE (617) 498-1147

JOHN E. MACK, M. D.
111 BEVERLY ROAD
CHESTNUT HILL, MASS. 02167

May 14, 1982

Mr. Martin Peretz
Editor in Chief; President
The New Republic
1220 Nineteenth Street
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Mr. Peretz:

Please do not send further issues of the New Republic to my home. The cover of the last issue, which shows Mr. Brezhnev with a death mask - dead - is to me in such poor taste, so dehumanizing of "the enemy" as to be morally and physically revolting. I am sure there is a rationale for this, which I don't appreciate. But it seems to cross some boundary which human beings must observe with one another if we are to survive on this planet.

Sincerely,



John E. Mack, M.D.