

Letters to the Editor

Elie Wiesel's Blind Spot

By Norman Solomon

The winner of the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize has proven that even a great visionary can have a blind spot.

As a survivor of Nazi death camps, Elie Wiesel wrote many books testifying that the human spirit can endure in the face of ghastly barbarism. Wiesel has done much to remind humanity that—as he put it in his Nobel acceptance speech—"if we forget, we are guilty, we are accomplices."

With a global spotlight on him in Oslo, Wiesel presented a powerful affirmation of moral strength and spiritual renewal. But his message faltered when he spoke of the Middle East.

Wiesel's moral vision suddenly went out of focus. He mentioned "the Palestinians to whose plight I am sensitive but whose methods I deplore when they lead to violence." Yet there was no mention of Israel's violent methods: "I trust Israel, for I have faith in the Jewish people. Let Israel be given a chance, let hatred and danger be removed from her horizons, and there will be peace in and around the Holy Land."

Such faith can be moving—but it can also become immovable. Many Palestinian people, made homeless by Israeli policies, have felt the double-edged sword of faith in Israel as they experience a Diaspora of their own.

"I am profoundly Jewish, and therefore I am profoundly linked to the Jewish people," Wiesel told a news conference in Oslo. When reporters pressed him about Israel's treatment of Palestinians, however, Wiesel complained: "You are asking me things which you would not have asked of me if I was not Jewish." Wiesel, like quite a few other American supporters of Israel, wants to reserve the right to have it both ways—endorsing a militarized state and disclaiming it, too.

Those who believe in "Israel right or wrong" sometimes respond to criticisms by contending that the country is unfairly held to a higher moral standard than other nations. Yet Israel's backers are apt to claim that the Jewish homeland—founded in the wake of the Holocaust as a refuge for Jews—is in a special spiritual category. And the implication, all too often, is that Israel can do no wrong.

As an American Jew, I had hoped to be proud of Elie Wiesel's Nobel speech. Instead I was appalled at his evasions, and alarmed at the extent of his ethical near-sightedness. Wiesel is so focused on those closest to his heart that the human dignity of Israel's current victims seems like a blur in comparison.

"We must always take sides," Wiesel pointed out in his speech. "Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the

victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

At best, Wiesel has failed to take sides as Palestinians undergo oppression and torment. At best Wiesel is neutral as Israel tightens its grip on the West Bank. And he has remained silent as high-tech Israeli air strikes, in Lebanon and elsewhere, inflict the kind of human misery among civilians that would rightly be denounced as terrorism if perpetrated by an Arab group.

What's more, there was a terrible irony when Wiesel told his Oslo audience and the world that "apartheid is, in my view, as abhorrent as anti-Semitism." Israeli collaboration with South Africa has become well-documented if not well-publicized.

Israel buys most of its coal from South Africa. Annual trade between the two countries adds up to a lot more than the \$142 million listed by the International Monetary Fund, since much of it goes unreported—including \$350 million in arms. Evidence indicates that Israel is South Africa's biggest trading partner. In effect the two nations are close allies, with ties extending to joint military projects.

Meanwhile, Israel has been helping to funnel armaments to the Contras at war with Nicaragua, and to repressive regimes in Latin America. At the same time, the U.S. government provides several billion dollars in aid each year.

There is no justification for trying to absolve Israel for its cruelties and cynical alliances. It is wrong to carry belief in any government, or faith in any people, to such an extreme that trust becomes gullibility and faith turns a blind eye to injustice. When that happens, no amount of past anguish or present eloquence can make up for what is left unsaid.

In the here and now—at any time in history—to "take sides" can be difficult and hazardous. In the late 1980s many Palestinians and many black South Africans desperately need for us to take some risks on their behalf as they struggle to survive predicaments that are imposed or aggravated by Israel.

What "victims need above all," Elie Wiesel said at the close of his Oslo speech, "is to know that they are not alone; that we are not forgetting them, that when their voices are stifled we shall lend them ours. . ."

Nobel laureate, heed thyself.

Norman Solomon is a writer living in Portland. He is co-author of "Killing Our Own: The Disaster of America's Experience With Atomic Radiation" (Dell). Although The Oregonian newspaper published the text of Elie Wiesel's Nobel speech in its "Forum" section, The Oregonian refused to print the above article.

their brothers and sisters. It was founded on the knowledge of what misery and pain can inflict upon the human soul. It was founded upon the knowledge that some of the greatest people to affect and guide our lives were born in poverty; Jesus of Nazareth, President Abraham Lincoln and Rev. Martin Luther King. One of our own, Michael Stoops, Chairman of the Board of the Burnside Community Council, is in Washington, D.C. this winter day, actively seeking your support for our national community. He is living on the streets as a homeless person in our nation's capitol, secure in the belief that government will see how it can help lead the way to improving the economy of our nation.

THE SECOND WAR ON POVERTY IS CLAIMING CASUALTIES FROM OREGON—IN THIS WAR THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN HAVE FEW RESOURCES AND HAVE JOINED THE MEN ON THE FRONT LINES—WON'T YOU PLEASE HELP. ALL TYPES OF HELP ARE POSSIBLE. WRITE TO YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS IN BOTH SALEM AND WASHINGTON, D.C. BECOME INFORMED ON WHAT IS HAPPENING IN YOUR OWN COMMUNITY. BE INVOLVED BEFORE THE WAR CLAIMS YOU AND YOUR FAMILY.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I am writing you regarding the war currently being waged WITHIN the United States. The SECOND WAR ON POVERTY. The defense budget for this war has not grown as rapidly as the casualties. In the last 12 months alone, nationally, a 25 percent increase in homeless Americans, especially families, can be seen. The visible victims include not only the street people but many, many others. Some of the victims are newly poor who need job retraining and placement, medical services, food and clothing; the staff worker at the social service agencies who cannot meet the skyrocketing needs; the storekeeper who has lost a customer; families who have lost a family member to this war. The list goes on and on.

I am a concerned citizen of Oregon trying to publicize and be victorious in this war. Many of our clients come from different areas of Oregon seeking employment in the "Big City". Increasing staffing and services in the forms of emergency and transitional housing; medical, dental and optical care; food; job training and placement; clothing; and professional case management can assist these displaced Oregonians so that they may resume being tax-paying citizens.

The United States was originally founded by the homeless and unemployed, in the true spirit of helping

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Beam Me Up

Concerning the article dated 11/5/86, "The New War On Drugs—Does It Ignore the Black Situation?", I don't think so.

"Beam me up, Scotty," they scream to the sky, some standing on chairs for the effect in litter-strewn, abandoned buildings or dark ghetto hallways in Spanish Harlem. Others watch and wait, straddling wads of human feces, oblivious to the stench, eagerly awaiting their chance to blast into the twilight zone. I'm inclined to believe it's an emotional calling, the death chant of a "Crack Head," a prayer to the God of the twilight zone that the white cloud in the bottle blast the caller to the outer limits of the real world. "Beam Me Up" beyond the mundane realities of this existence into the fast track to oblivion, they pray. Richard Pryor provided the drama that first focused attention on freebasing, or smoking Cocaine. He burned himself severely as he attempted to cook or make pure Cocaine to smoke. Smoking Cocaine shoots the drug straight to the brain. It is the preferred method for the serious crowd.

Crack would appear to be a small chunk (about the size of a pea) of Ivory Soap in a vial. Users and experts agree that it would take \$100 worth of raw Coke to make \$10 worth of Crack. It has been described as the worst drug to ever be unleashed on poor people. It is gnashing its way across the East Coast. It has spilled over like the white plague to affect all communities and all people. Some say that the drug was initially devised as a GENOCIDE weapon aimed at poor people. Some the perfect drug to wipe this generation out. It's the Dragon blowing the last flame, and it's burning poor caucasians and Blacks up. When dope was King, there were always poor people who sniffed on weekends and took care of business during the week. With this CRACK, all the pins fall.

As the CRACK epidemic on the East Coast continues to ravage the poor, leaving twisted, dehydrated human

frames in its wake, city and federal officials wage war and point fingers under the pressure of mounting concern. Why would the Reagan Administration send troops to the jungles of Bolivia to stamp out Cocaine production when synthetic Cocaine (made in factories) has been flooding the market for at least five years, and "CRACK ain't COKE." This thing is killing poor people wholesale, this adventure into the twilight zone. It's a vampire that is vamping on our moral fiber. You are no longer a personality. You are now a zombie. Have you ever heard of the CRACK attack? That's when you are speeding, in pursuit of the cloud and you go home. Your Mother, Sisters and Brothers are there, but you needed money or something to sell, and you get it. Many teenage girls sell reefer to make their CRACK money, but sometimes they resort to selling their body, Black and caucasian. I had a caucasoid man tell me that CRACK was his GOD. One of the unique things about CRACK is that somebody will steal from you and come right back into your face for more. It's a death wish in a sense, but in another sense it shows you what this stuff is doing to poor people. It brings the larceny out of everybody it touches; they become zombies, chasing the clouds.

In Chicago some of the Sisters and Brothers I attended North Western with asked if I remembered all of the pretty Queens we knew. One Sister said, "That's all over. . .they are all skeletons, now it's the night of the living dead all night. In any given building, on any given night, you will find young girls in hallways ready to do you up for CRACK. Some of our most powerful, beautiful, talented Sisters and Brothers. . .are chasing that cloud. Many young girls carry only a tube and a lighter. That's all they need, and they can smoke CRACK anywhere." It drives people to some of the most bizarre violence. A poor caucasian girl beat her mother to death because she owed her \$7 and didn't



Healthwatch

by Steven Bailey, N.D.

A few weeks ago the New England Journal of Medicine (Vol. 315, Dec. 18, 1986) published an article by the French research team of Couzinet, et. al., on a new abortive drug called RU 486. As is usual with the Journal's lead article, this report was picked up by the wire services and television networks declaring this drug as a potentially major new method of abortion and (gasp) contraception. While the Journal's editorial staff commented on the study with less awe and a more cautious interpretation of the results, the general public was left with an optimistically biased understanding of this new therapy.

RU 486 is a recently synthesized chemical that acts as a progesterone antagonist. Progesterone is an important hormone involved in the normal reproductive cycle of women. It is released by an organ called the corpus luteum which, with fertilization, will secrete the progesterone necessary for the early pregnancy. Without fertilization, the corpus luteum becomes inactive and the uterous sloughs off in what is known as menses or the bleeding phase of the reproductive cycle. With no uterine support, there can be no pregnancy, and this is where progesterone antagonism is used as an abortive chemical.

In the French study, 85% of pregnant women who were given RU 486 proceeded to expel the fetus within a few days. The drug was given early in the first month of pregnancy. Unfortunately, there were no clinical signs in the 15% who did not abort that would lead these women to believe that the RU 486 did not work. All of the women experienced bleeding that was indicative of cessation, yet the fetal expulsion was incomplete and the pregnancy remained intact.

The lack of clinical evidence from a symptomatic source led authors of the study to state that this program "be used only under close medical supervision". The onset of bleeding in the 15% who did not successively abort suggests that the placenta may be impaired and that, if the baby is carried to term, a much greater incidence of birth defects will occur. There is clearly a need to closely monitor the use of RU 486 for clear confirmation of success.

While there is much concern for the above issues, my concerns come from a more whole-istic sense. The effects of progesterone are wide spread, and as was written in the New England Journal, much of the role of progesterone is unknown at present. The Journal's editors suggest that the primary value of RU 486 is to expand our knowledge of the role of progesterone. While there is much to learn about progesterone's role in the human system, we do know a few things that suggest apprehension in the future of progesterone antagonists. Progesterone is not solely related to the corpus luteum and pregnancy. It has influence on the breast, the brain and indirectly on the adrenal glands.

The side effects of the RU 486 used in this recent study included heavy bleeding, nausea and fatigue in around 1/5th of the women. One of the above mentioned other influences of progesterone showed up in the blood as an elevation of ACTH, a chemical secreted by the brain that stimulates adrenal production of glucocorticoids (substances that affect sugar metabolism and energy). RU 486 also changes the synthesis of other chemicals called prostaglandins which also influence a wide variety of

human functions. Like so many other drug therapies, we may find that progesterone antagonism brings with it a wide variety of individual reactions that, for some, make the treatment much worse than other already exist-

ing therapies. We may see that the severity of pre-menstrual symptoms are worsened in this program, and may also find the cardiovascular problems associated with other contraceptive hormones. At the very least, the use of RU 486 as a safe abortive agent appears years away, at best, and may prove to be another dead end in the annals of drug therapies. Since the first published studies of RU 486 began only 4 years ago, the type of long-term studies that led us away from drugs like DES are at least 10 years in the future. Let us be cautious if the FDA allows our doctors to begin human studies of RU 486, or, like DES, our current ignorance may become our children's suffering.

want to pay her, because she knew her daughter was going to smoke it up.

Heroin and Cocaine babies want to live. CRACK kills the desire to live in the babies. Something burns their insides out. We do not understand the effects that the deadly cocaine-based drug CRACK has on the newborns. They don't smile or coo. They don't even focus their eyes—They just sleep, suck or cry. CRACK is not physically addictive, it dictates to your mind, and you become its victim. It's described as a vampire, and it's turning the best of homes into empty caves. The co-

caine related death of University of Maryland star basketball player Len Bias awakened the nation to the drug crisis which continues to snuff out the lives of promising young Black athletes. I'm inclined to believe Bias' tragic end was the result of a corrupt intercollegiate athletic system, designed to squeeze the highest profits from talented athletes, no matter what the cost. Officials have distorted the priorities of young college athletes, focusing on excellence in sports while ignoring academic requirements.

Dr. Jamil Cherovee

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