Israel Scouts Friendship Caravan to perform at JCC, July 13
Shoshana Jackson, special to the WJN

E ach year the Israel Scouts Friendship Caravan spends a day entertaining and educating the campers at Camp Raanana, the Jewish Community Center of Greater Ann Arbor’s summer day camp for children entering grades K–8. After spending the day at camp, the Israel Scouts will entertain the entire community with an evening performance at the JCC.

The Israel Scouts Friendship Caravan is part of a larger delegation of approximately 100 teenage scouts who travel to North America each summer to represent the land of Israel. Using song, dance, and story-telling, the Israel Scouts celebrate the Jewish heritage and bring the sights and sounds of Israel to life.

This summer the Israel Scouts will be performing at the JCC on Wednesday, July 13. The program will begin at 7 pm and will be followed by a community ice cream social. The charge for the event is $3/person for Camp Raanana families and JCC members, or $5/person for non-members (children under 2 are free). Registration forms will be posted in advance at www.jccannarbor.org and will also be available at the JCC.

Host families are needed to host the members of the Israel Scouts Friendship Caravan for one night on Wednesday, July 13. If you are interested in hosting or would like more information about the Israel Scouts performance, contact campdirector@jccfed.org or 971-0990.

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Please complete and date the postcard that was included in last month’s WJN, affix a 44¢ stamp, and mail it back to us – or drop it at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Ann Arbor. If you do not still have the postcard, please email us at win.subscribe@gmail.com and we will happily send you another postcard – or you can pick one up at the JCC or Beth Israel Congregation or Temple Beth Emeth. As of today, we still need to hear from 1,200 more households.

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Picketers say “Islam is wrong,” that Islam ok’s their synagogue protests
by WIN staff

A prominent imam was wrong to characterize as “un-Islamic” the ongoing protests outside Jewish worship services in Ann Arbor, insist members of the protesting group. They dismissed the criticism as stemming from the imam’s “misapplication of the teachings of the Prophet.”

Imam Daud Walid, executive director of the Michigan branch of the Council on American-Islamic Affairs, termed the synagogue protests contrary to Muslim teaching during an interfaith panel at the Ann Arbor District Library last January (Washtenaw Jewish News, March 2011). Expanding on his criticism in an interview with the Arab American News Walid noted that, “We at CAIR-MI have expressed numerous times throughout the year our issues with people protesting in front of mosques on our most holy day and even badgering children. We’d be hypocrites to say it’s not civil in front of mosques yet to endorse it taking place at other houses of worship.” (AAJ March 19, 2011)

That critique was rejected by the protesting group in a series of online ripostes. The first denied that the Conservative Jewish services they picket even qualify as religious practice, definitively concluding: “Praying for genocide is not worship.” That Jews are inside the synagogue praying for genocide has been a recurring theme of the protestors. Gloria Harb, one of the original picketers, told a congregant arriving for Sabbath services that it was the reason why Jewish members should be disrupted.

Subsequently elaborating on their rejection of the imam’s admonition, protestors cited a Quranic verse commanding believers not to insult members of other religions lest they in turn be led to insult God. Assuming this to be the basis for labeling their actions “un-Islamic,” protestors invoked an interpretation by medieval Muslim commentator Ibn Kathir to debunk the imam’s “misapplication” of the verse to themselves. Besides, asserted spokesman Henry Herskovitz, the “practices of Beth Israel Congregation are the real insult to God.” Others insisted Islam enjoins adherents to speak out against injustice so their religion compels them to support targeting the synagogue.

Questioning Walid’s motives for disparaging their behavior, Herskovitz blogged that the imam may have been seeking “a kind of acceptance, like Arab women in ‘dialogue’ groups with Jewish women.”

“The ‘interfaith’ community might be providing the Imam with similar ‘in-group’ feelings of acceptance,” suggested Herskovitz, driving him to emulate interfaith dialogue groups who “fall all over themselves trying to please them [Jews].”

Walid’s condemnation was particularly welcomed by synagogue congregants in that a teacher at the Michigan Islamic Academy—Thom Saffold—has been central to the harassment their families have endured every Sabbath and High Holiday for years. With a Muslim voice now added to the censure of Ann Arbor’s other religious and civic leaders, the protestors insisted their families have endured every Sabbath and High Holiday for years. With a Muslim voice now added to the censure of Ann Arbor’s other religious and civic leaders, the protestors

In April, rabbis of the targeted synagogue strongly urged their congregants to support the Interfaith Leadership Council of the Detroit area in repudiating pastor Terry Jones’ then-upcoming protest at the Islamic Center of America. “This type of protest against a religious faith is an affront to all,” the rabbis told their congregants. Earlier the synagogue picketers held their own event, at a branch of the Ann Arbor library. According to their report, they received encouragement from a supportive audience drawn largely from “the Dearborn community,” as well as from Unitarian Universalists and from a group calling itself “Michigan Peace Team.”

See related article, “The picketers’ intellectual assumptions examined,” on page 12.

JCC to host Shabbat BBQ at Lillie Park

Mimi Weinberg, special to the WIN

Lillie Park will be the setting for the Jewish Community Center of Greater Ann Arbor’s “A Walk in the Park,” a Shabbat celebration, on Friday, July 8 at 6 p.m. The park is located at 4200 Platt Road. This program will feature a nature walk with a professional naturalist, a celebration of Shabbat, music and a hot dog supper. The cost is $10 per adult for JCC members and $12 for non-members. Children 13 and under are $5. Reservations are required; call 971-0990.
Israel

The picketers’ intellectual assumptions examined

Victor Lieberman, special to the WIN

A s the weekly picket of Beth Israel Congregation in Ann Arbor by self-styled Jewish Witnesses for Peace and Friends now enters its eighth year, and as politics in the Mideast heat up, it may be a good time to consider the assumptions on which the picketers’ eight-year project rests.

To be sure, identifying those assumptions is not easy, insofar as the picketers’ chief offerings are five- to ten-word slogans on placards. Nor is there reason to imagine that disproving their claims would in any way lessen their ardor, which derives from an unshakable sense of moral superiority. And yet weighing the charges that picketers levy against Israel remains useful, because such an exercise can provide general insights into a dispute that, unfortunately, seems likely to grow more bitter in the coming months.

I seek not to turn the picketers’ heroes into villains and villains into heroes. On the contrary, I reject black-white narratives as a genre. I distinguish between history replete with ambiguities and uncertainties, and history as a tool for political agitation. Only the latter is not easy, insofar as the picketers’ public statements:

1. Israel was born in sin, dependent for its very creation on dispossession of Palestinians, and therefore is morally and legally illegitimate. It is certainly true that the potential for Arab displacement was built into Zionism, because Zionism by its very nature sought to turn the lands of their people’s near extinction into a Jewish-dominated state. Such a transformation inevitably engendered bitter resistance from Arabs eager to defend their homes. These expulsions (whence avoiding a perfectly accurate term?) unfolded in well-documented stages. In March 1948 retaliatory Jewish terrorist attacks against Arab civilians proved deeply demoralizing, but as yet there was no plan of removal, and most who left their homes, perhaps out of fear, did merely escape the breakdown in law and order that attended the British departure. However, during the most critical phase of the war, from March to July 1948, the Jewish army’s Plan D authorized commanders to clear Arabs from strategic villages and urban districts. Most historians accept that this was the major factor behind the flight of perhaps 300,000 additional Palestinians. They responded to systematic harassment, direct physical expulsion, massacres—of which Deir Yassin was most notorious—and fear of Jewish brutality. Some Bed in response to Arab orders to evacuate, but their numbers were small. Finally from July to November 1948, Israeli forces helped to generate another 300,000 or so refugees through continued harassment and direct expulsions. In this phase, when Israel had the upper hand militarily, there was no longer a plausible strategic rationale for Palestinian displacement. Rather, Israel sought to seize Arab property—eventually one in three Israelis lived on such property—and to reduce a hostile or suspect population.

These events constituted the complete, externally imposed collapse of Palestinian Arab society as it had existed for generations. Understandably Palestinians refer to this earthquake as al-Nakba, the Catastrophe. But to focus exclusively on Arab suffering is to distort the picture, because Jewish claims to world sympathy in general, and to a place in Palestine in particular, proved as compelling as Arab claims. Climbing decades of ever more ferocious anti-Semitism in central and eastern Europe, the Holocaust confirmed the long-standing Zionist prescription: to gain security and dignity, Jews had to separate from Gentile society and build a state of their own. After 1945 Jews could not and would not return to the lands of their people’s near extermination. Nor would the US or Britain admit large numbers. For hundreds of thousands of Jews after World War Two, there simply was no refuge other than Palestine, where, of course, Jews had ancient ties, where Zionists from the early 20th century had developed a thriving community, and where by 1945 Jews already constituted almost a third of the population.

In voting in 1947 to partition Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state, the newly formed United Nations decided that both peoples had legitimate and compelling claims. Neither could be ignored. Division was the only equitable and feasible solution. That historic UN vote, of 33–3 with 10 abstentions, has never been revoked, and along with Israel’s UN vote—their current recognition by 154 states, provides a legal basis for the international legitimacy of the state of Israel.

After the partition vote, there is every indication that Zionist leaders, notwithstanding their concerns about a large Arab minority, intended that they leave the Arab population undisturbed and to extend them full citizenship rights, but to reduce Arab strength through massive Jewish immigration. What altered those plans was the Arab military assault. This started with Palestinian attacks the day after the UN vote—-historians of all political persuasions concur that Arabs, not Jews, initiated the violence—and continued with the invasion by five Arab state armies on May 15, 1948, one day after the UN’s declaration of independence. Whereas Jewish leaders were content to remain indefinitely within the borders allocated by the UN, Arabs were determined to reverse partition by force of arms. Plan D arose in response to the impending collapse of key Jewish positions, including West Jerusalem, at the hands of Palestinian forces, and in anticipation of yet more serious assaults from Arab state armies. Abstain these Arab attacks, there would have been no Arab expulsions. Moreover, lest one imagine that Jewish ethnic cleansing contrasted with an Arab policy of ethnic inclusion, consider that whereas Israeli actions remained uneven and inconsistent—as a result, over 150,000 Arabs, some 18 percent of the original population, remained in Israel after 1948—Arab forces expelled every Jew they encountered. In the process, they perpetrated at least two mass-murders whose scale and brutality equaled Deir Yassin. That more Jews were not expelled reflected lack not of intention, but opportu- nity, a function of military weakness. Indeed, the liberal Western version of nationalism that is embodied in Israeli law and that accords ethnic minorities equal political rights, had at that time little or no support in the Arab world, as evidenced by Jordan’s refusal to let Jews become citizens, and more particularly by the massive expulsion and flight of Jews from across the Arab world after 1947. In direct response to events in Palestine, Arab nationalists subjected centuries-old local Jewish communities to boycotts, arrests, anti-Semitic legislation, and mob violence. In response, and in the hope of a better life in Israel, over 600,000 Arab Jews abandoned their homes between 1947 and 1967. Admittedly, more Jews left their homes voluntarily than did Palestinians. On the other hand, whereas Jews had a legitimate security justification for expulsion, Arabs outside Palestine had none; and whereas some 82 percent of Palestinians left their homes, 95 percent of Arab Jews did so. But in a broader sense, the two displacements were similar in size, in the value of forfeited property, and in the trauma that both populations endured. In essence, therefore, the Mideast saw a double displacement, as ethnically exclusive Jewish and Arab nationalisms became joint heirs to the more tolerant, polyethnic imperial traditions of the Ottomans and the British. As such, Palestinian and Jewish displacement paralleled the forced exchange of Greeks and Turks after the Ottoman empire collapsed in 1923, or the exchange of Hindus and Muslims in India, or Poles and Germans in Europe, at the end of World War Two. UN General Assembly Resolution 194, in November 1948, called for the return in Palestine of all refugees “willing to live at peace with their neighbors.” Because Arabs had initiated the violence, and because Arabs refused to recognize the Jewish state, Israel denied that Arab refugees met the criteria of 194. That resolution, moreover, said nothing about descendants inheriting a right of return from their ancestors.

In sum, Israel’s early viability not only benefited from, but in some basic sense depended upon, the displacement of Palestinians from their historic homeland. Although Palestinians had no direct responsibility for the Holocaust, in effect they, not Europeans, were forced to pay the price. But if Jews scattered the Palestinians before them, anti-Semitism drove the Jews, and their desperation, their need for a secure refuge, were at least as compelling as Palestinian distress. This was precisely how the world community judged the issue in 1947—and continues to judge it today, in its demand for two states for two peoples. That Palestinians refused to accept what they saw as the theft of over half of their patrimony is perfectly understandable. But the fact remains that had they and the Arab states not sought to reverse the UN partition through violence, there would have been more refugees, and a Palestinian state—which still has not arisen—would have become a reality in 1947.

Henry Herskovitz

their culture and their society against unin- vited, unwanted interlopers from Europe. From the late 1930s mounting Arab oppo- sition led prominent Zionists to fear that a Jewish state could never survive amidst a large Arab population. When fighting broke out in December 1947 after the UN decision to divide the British mandate of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, those Zionist fears were validated, and prompted what can only be described as an increasingly ambitious and deliberate Jewish displacement of Palestin- 194. 2. Israel is a racist state.

The current commander of the Israeli navy is Chinese. Israel has 120,000 black African Jews and 60,000 East Indian Jews. Thousands of American converts, including over 400 African-Americans, now live in Israel, as do 800 Jewish Peruvian Indians. Perhaps half

Marcia Federbush

Israel Commits Atrocities

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of Israel’s Jews are Mizrahim, who are physically indistinguishable from Muslim Arabs. If we define race as a classification based on physical characteristics that reflect genetic markers, Israeli Jews are, in fact, one of the most racially diverse populations on earth. What unites them is not race, but religious heritage. Religiously-derived ethnicity provides the basis for Israeli Jewish nationality in much the same way as 57 other countries, including 25 Muslim states, define nationality in terms of official religion and extend special privileges to adherents of that religion. (Note, however, that followers of minority religions in Israel enjoy far greater rights than minorities in most Muslim countries.)

Likewise, the automatic right of Jews to return to Israel, an object of frequent criticism, illustrates the lex sanguinis, “the law of blood,” by which individuals who claim family descent from the dominant ethnicity of a given country are entitled to citizenship in that country, regardless of where they are born or reside. At least 28 other countries, including Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Serbia, and Spain, employ some variant of this same principle in determining citizenship.

Finally, the separation between Palestinians east and west of the Green Line, and Jewish and Arab, west of that line, is not racial, but a division between nationalities (one actual, the other aspirant) comparable to any other national division.

In short, far from being a racial anomaly, Israeli legal norms accord with those of other European and Mideastern countries.

3. Israeli expansion lies at the heart of Mideast tension.

Post-1948 relations between Israel and the Arab states, if we may summarize so vast a topic in a few paragraphs, are rife with intractable racism and religious nationalism.

For ten years after its 1967 victory, Israel’s Labor government refused to permit significant Jewish settlement in the conquered territories, and repeatedly offered to exchange the vast bulk of them for peace and recognition. When Egypt agreed to this formula in the 1970s, Israel promptly returned Sinai. But on its eastern front, Israel found no partner. And in 1977, when the expansionist Likud Party came to power, Labor’s offer came off the table.

The Oslo peace process of 1993 to 2001 reflected at least in part Likud’s Great Israel project, combined with severe reverses for the PLO. Why negotiations ultimately failed to produce a settlement is the subject of conflicting Palestinian and Israeli narratives, both of which have considerable merit. The principal Palestinian claim is that settlement activity in the West Bank, which Likud had initiated, amounted to unilateral declaration of independence. The Israeli counterclaim was that if settlements were unsustainable, Palestinians should have agreed to a two-state solution that would have satisfied the U.S. and Israeli national interest. Subsequent history is incontestable is that by substituting violence for deliberations, the second intifada in the fall of 2000 destroyed any chance of an agreement on any basis resembling the 1993 interim. In effect, the second intifada repeated the Palestinian strategy of 1947.

In late 2008 the collapse of promising discussions between Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas reflected a similar dynamic. Those talks were scuttled by Hamas rocket fire from Gaza—from which Israel had unilaterally withdrawn in 2005—and by Israel’s subsequent invasion of that strip. After Benjamin Netanyahu came to power in early 2009, he withdrew Olmert’s concessions.

The current impasse represents a hardening of positions on both sides, with moderate rhetoric masking mutual intransigence, but with Israel becoming more isolated. Absent a new Israeli government, great power imposition, or the fall of 2000 destroyed any chance of an agreement.

4. Because Jews dictate America’s Israel policy, the picketing of synagogues is justified to weaken the Jewish lobby.

Surely, it is not coincidental that the country with the largest, wealthiest Jewish community is also the one with the most consistently pro-Israel foreign policy, AIPAC, Israel’s second most effective lobby in Washington, D.C. But as a total explanation of U.S. behavior, the above thesis, which aligns with John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt’s poorly reviewed The Israel Lobby and American Foreign Policy, is inadequate.

First, this thesis emphasizes domestic influences on policy formulation to the total exclusion of strategic considerations, when in fact the benefits to the U.S. of pro-Israel policy are incalculable. What is been considered. As the region’s dominant power, Israel has crushed states hostile to America, protected American clients like Jordan, and provided invaluable intelligence on Soviet and Iranian capabilities. The year 1967 was a watershed in American-Israeli relations because the Mideast military balance, not American domestic politics, saw a sea change.

If the Israeli lobby dictated Middle East policy, that policy would defer reflexively to Israeli positions. But in practice, whenever differences arise, American self-interests trump those of Israel, as seen, for example, in the U.S. decision in 1992 and 1999 to help bring down two Likud governments, not because the Israeli lobby pressurized it to do so—on the contrary, the chief Zionist lobbies were pro-Likud—but because the U.S. decided that Likud opposed basic American goals.

The second intellectual danger inherent in a single-minded focus on Jewish influence is that it ignores pro-Israel sentiment in the general American population. Some 60 percent of Republicans, 50 percent of Democrats voted a campaign gift, go to Democratic presidential candidates. But George W. Bush may have been the strongest supporter of Israel ever to occupy the White House, while Barack Obama has been, by many Jews as one of the weakest. Zionist funding of Congressional races is negligible, and what money there is, goes overwhelmingly to pro-Israel congressmen that means, exactly one of whose 290 current members is Jewish—are arguably more supportive of Israel than their Democratic counterparts. Sympathy for Israel tends to correlate with political conservatism, as suggested by a 2010 poll showing that, while 63 percent of Americans identified more with Israel than the Palestinians (compared to 15 percent who identified more with Palestinians), the pro-Israel proportion among Republicans was 85 percent, among independents 60 percent, and among Democrats 48 percent. Hence, many of the most ardent pro-Israel voices come from areas in the South, the West, and the Midwest with virtually no Jewish voters and no Jewish lobby, but many conservative Christians. Without this general pro-Israel sentiment, Israel—only 1.8 percent of Americans—would find itself completely isolated.

Obviously, many Jews are more emotionally and financially committed to Israel than the general U.S. population. But in their support for the principle of a secure Jewish state, Jews are no different from some 90 percent of Americans. What is more, polls show, Jews as a group support substantially more dovish Israeli policies than the general population. Surely, most people at Beth Israel Congregation, who are well-meaning people animated by empa- thy for the weak and a desire to humble the strong, But at the same time their actions suggest that they are more dovish than other Jews? Why not picket the Ann Arbor mosque? On some level, one supposes the picketers are well-meaning people employed by empa- thy for the weak and a desire to humble the strong. But at the same time their actions suggest that they are more dovish than other Americans. Why not picket AIPAC or the Republican Party, which—unlike Beth Israel—are explicitly political institutions? If one must profess religious worship with demonstration, Brander said that atheists in Zionist churches, which are far more popular and influential than Beth Israel? For that matter, why not picket the Ann Arbor mosque?

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is so trapped by the liturgy of our ancestors, we can’t get past it,” he told JTA. “People are afraid to say that language and worldview no longer speak to us, but I am authentically Jewish and I need language that expresses it.”

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the URI, was at the meeting where Beth Adam’s application was turned down, and he agrees with the decision. “While we do not want to view belief in God would not be expelled from the URI, he says, neither would it be admitted. And he hasn’t heard of any Reform congrega- tions that have had this position.”

“While individual Reform Jews may have questions about God, they are generally con- tent to have Jewish liturgy that mentions God,” he said. “People seem to be able to live with the contradiction.” In Jewish atheism can serve a purpose by pushing Jews to demand meaning from their faith and its leaders, said Rabbi Kenneth Brander, dean of Yeshiva University’s Center for the Jewish Future.

Paraphrasing Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of British Man- tle, Rabbi Brander said that atheism “is the pained response when religion becomes static, when God is described in childish ways. I think it’s much better that they struggle with the issue, that they want a religious ex- perience rather than not going to synagogue at all.”