

### Contemporizing Studies

By Robert H. Arnow

The time-honored phrase "next year in Jerusalem" is a stirring portion of the Passover Seder. It reminds us of Israel's centrality in Jewish life and its importance in the Jewish consciousness. It was with this in mind that the American Association For Jewish Education, in keeping with its philosophy to "contemporize" Jewish school curricula, published an innovative series of classroom texts which presented divergent views

on major issues confronting Israel. With no little trepidation. There were fears that the 10-unit study program, titled Viewpoint, might be a bit too daring for the Jewish high school audience at which it was aimed. Reason: Its content touched on such thorny problems as state-religion controversies, the "rights" of Palestinian refugees, and whether priorities should be set between immigrant absorption and raising the standard of living of Israel's deprived peoples.

It now appears that the AAJE's curricular gamble has proven justified. Since its publication, Viewpoints sales have been recorded among hundreds of Jewish high schools in the United States and Canada. Moreover, the series has been employed in Jewish camps and adult study groups, utilized in Catholic parochial schools and had eight of its texts included in the New York City Board of Education's Approved Textbook list for use in social studies courses in area high schools.

Which only means that Viewpoints is achieving what it set out to do: presents a balanced selection of fact and commentary on contemporary issues facing Israel, rather than advocate categorical or partisan approaches to various areas of study.

The AAJE selected this format, because young people will no longer accept dogmatic, force-fed conclusions from an adult establishment whose authority they're prone to challenge and whose motives, rightly or wrongly, they frequently find suspect.

Just as the average teenager would question the legitimacy of a course on contemporary American life that failed to mention the pressures of the economic crunch or newly-accepted mores of lifestyles, so the Jewish teenager would question the legitimacy of a course on modern Israel that excluded or glossed over such issues as the treatment of Israel's Arab minority or the disposition of territories taken in wars with the Arabs.

The series draws on religious, historic, cultural, sociological and geopolitical material to provide a comprehensive perspective on contemporary events -- unlike most curricula in the area, which are almost exclusively "past-centered."

For this reason Viewpoints can be used

effectively by the imaginative teacher in helping students understand day-to-day developments.

The 10 books in the series speak to the nature of the series' content. They are:

"Why a Jewish State," which telescopes the events from Biblical times to the present that provide the historical justification for a Jewish national entity; "The Roots of the Arab-Israeli Conflict," which describes the vision of Israel's pioneers in creating a new lifestyle.

Also, "Israel on the World Scene," which analyzes the foreign policy action -- and potential future alternatives -- of Israel and other nations as related to the Middle East; "Coming of Age in Israel," which presents a selective tableau of Israel youth from various ethnic, economic and religious backgrounds; and "The Jewish State and the Jewish Religion," which surveys the issues and conflicts arising from the endeavor to establish a modern democratic state based on precepts of Jewish law and tradition.

And, "The Arab Minority," which probes the problems confronting Israel in its attempt to integrate a growing Arab population into the economic and social fabric of a Jewish state; "Israel, Your Neighbor and You," which treats the attitudes of U.S. religious, ethnic and political groups towards Israel and the factors that contribute to these attitudes; "Swords Into Ploughshares -- Ethics of War and Peace," which explores Jewish ethical concepts towards warfare and non-violence as they apply to Israel's military conduct, and "Aliyah," which describes Jewish immigration to Israel in all of its aspects.

Just as Passover remains relevant and meaningful to the Jewish people more than 3000 years after the Exodus, so the Viewpoints Series is intended to make Israel relevant and meaningful to the Jewish student. This, we hope, will help instill in him a feeling for the Jewish State all his life.

AMSTERDAM (WNS) -- Dutch Foreign Minister Max van der Stoep has cancelled a planned visit to Saudi Arabia because that country refused to approve a visa request for a Jewish journalist.

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