

PERSPECTIVES

by Harvey Cohen

Letters to the Editor



On Speaking Out

When I taught Public Relations at UNC-Charlotte last fall, I told the class that if they wanted to learn what was on the minds of people without getting into a lot of expensive research, read the Letters to the Editor in any newspaper. From anger to outrage to warm, fuzzy letters of appreciation, you'll find everything there. I think "Mind Speak" or "Heart Speak" would be a good sub-title for the Letters column because that's what people truly do...they say it like they feel.

There was a time (if you're old enough you'll remember) when Jews hardly ever spoke out publicly on issues that affected them directly and personally. It's encouraging to watch the change. Holly Levinson's letter is only one of many that have appeared in the Observer over time. Some of the time and space that Lloyd Scher, a Jewish, Mecklenburg County Commissioner, gets in the media is Jewish related, for example, his stand on Council meetings that fall on Jewish holidays.

There's another letter that appeared in the Charlotte Observer I'd like to share with you. It appeared on October 9, one day before the deadline for this issue. (Whew!) I'm going to assume the writer, Jeffrey Summers, is Jewish although I didn't find any Summers listed in the Hadassah Directory. Here's what he had to say:

"Who's hypocritical about dietary laws?"

"In response to 'McDonald's, Jerusalem-style: Israelis hypocritical about foreigners' (Sept. 28 Forum):

"Thomas G. Haynes' attitude that the Israelis should relax their dietary and working laws to 'accommodate foreigners' is ridiculous. No other country does this, why should Israel?"

"About the Summers work week: Perhaps Mr. Haynes cannot reach Orthodox Jewish workers on Saturday, but I can't reach any workers in this country on a Sunday, specially on a Sunday morning. And I'm sure he can find American Jews expected to work here on Saturdays and American Muslims

required to work on Fridays, their holy day.

"Israel is a religious country and has certain religious-based laws (as do all countries). Getting a cheeseburger in Israel is easier than getting a beer in Morocco and only slightly harder than getting a good cup of coffee in some parts of Salt Lake City. But dietary laws closer to home also limit the cuisine choices of foreigners. For instance, there is a Korean dish which is supposed to be topped with a raw egg, but in this country you can't get this dish prepared properly because of dietary laws. Please recall that Kosher laws were created for health reasons (Kosher is the Hebrew word for "clean").

"My advice to Mr. Haynes: If you can't be happy in another country and enjoy it as it is, stay home."

JEFFREY SUMMERS
Charlotte

I would encourage you to "get it out" in print. In fact, for some, it might almost be therapeutic. I would also hope that you feel comfortable enough to write to this paper. Whether you're feeling angry or happy or sad or glad or you just want to get something off your chest, write to us. We'll be happy to print what you write, but please don't write the equivalent of *War and Peace*. Whatever you have to say, try to keep it to about 200 words. To give you an idea of what 200 words look like, the Levinson letter in the next column is about 200 words. Although your letter will be edited for length, I'll work hard not to edit out the essence of what you're trying to say. And please don't send an ad unless you're ready to pay for it. Do send what you have feelings about...good or bad. Watch your language, after all, this is a family newspaper. Your letter must also be signed. Oh yes, be sure it gets to me on time. The deadline for any given issue is the 10th of the month preceding that issue.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Ed. note: This letter appeared on the Charlotte Observer's Forum page on October 5, 1995. I felt it was worth reprinting.

Others' religions: First, let's learn

As the wife of a Jewish husband, a mother raising my child in a Jewish home and a participant in the Jewish community, I read with interest religion columnist Ken Garfield's "They're smiling but not open-minded" (Sept. 30).

Undoubtedly, many Charlotte citizens don't know the basics of the Jewish faith. Nor do they know what within this faith is important to their Jewish neighbors and friends, or how that faith helps define the essence of the lives of these Jews. My family and I, and probably many other Jewish families, often confront this indifference.

We should all "work for brotherhood by learning about our neighbors' different journeys of faith." This pursuit presents a challenge to the Charlotte Jewish community as well. Sure, almost all Jews know about Christmas and Easter - in our society it's impossible not to be aware of these holidays. Most Jews also understand that Christmas celebrates the birth of Christ, the Christian Messiah, and that Easter commemorates his death and resurrection. But how many Jews also can describe what the life and teachings of Jesus Christ mean to their Christian friends and neighbors or how these Christians incorporate their religious beliefs into their daily lives? We can all learn from each other. By exploring the beliefs of each other we may realize that, despite our differences, we all are pursuing many common goals.

HOLLY H. LEVINSON
Charlotte

School issues

As a candidate for the school board I have spent the last several weeks attending campaign forums and discussing the issues with voters. I am very disappointed by the lack of interest in the bond referendum and the lack of knowledge regarding the school system and its achievements. The fault lies partly with the media who believe that only bad news is news, and with the citizenry.

The educational reform program instituted by Dr. Murphy has been responsible for a major part of this improvement and has laid the groundwork for continued improvement in the future. The program is based on decentralizing the school system by placing decision-making power in the hands of principals and reducing the power of the downtown bureaucrats. Teachers and principals are rewarded when their students do well. Students are induced, even pressured, to study subjects that go well beyond the minimums required for graduation. The watered down courses in core subjects are being eliminated. As a result of these efforts, 82% of last year's graduating class went on to higher education. The number of students taking and passing Advanced Placement Courses has increased by more than 250% in the past four years. Charlotte-Mecklenburg public schools now have the largest international Baccalaureate program in the world. Its 53 graduates last year earned an average of \$30,000 in scholarships.

I believe that if we continue this education reform program the greatest gains will be made when the current third and fourth graders reach high school. In a recent national reading assessment test for fourth graders conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, Charlotte-Mecklenburg public schools scored well above the national average. For an urban school system to score that well is a truly outstanding result.

I encourage you to carefully consider your vote in the school board races, particularly in Districts 1 and 6 as well as in the at-large race where candidates who are hostile to the very idea of public education are showing strength. Even more important is the fact that a yes vote on the bond issue is now an absolute necessity. The issues of John Murphy's salary and personality and the perceived grievances against past school boards must now be put aside. They cannot be changed by the passage or failure of the school bonds. The facts are that we have some schools in a shocking state of disrepair; 3,000 students per year are entering the school system and need a place to sit and learn.

I believe the Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools have earned your support. I cannot urge you strongly enough to vote for the bonds.

FRED MARSH
Charlotte

Ed. Note: Mr. Marsh is not a candidate in either District 1 or 6.

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