

LETTERS

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

...AND APPLE PIE

Ravello, Italy

■ Katha Pollitt's heart-wrenching "Happy Mother's Day" was, of course, a treat ["Subject to Debate," May 28]. But the crystalline masses of her prose were sometimes flawed by odd cracks. She rightly mentions how the bogus drug wars waste federal money, not to mention the ever-more-frenzied war on terrorism, which spent, by her calculation, \$50 million "executing Timothy McVeigh...not counting plane tix for celebrity death witness Gore Vidal." For the record, my "tix" are paid for by *Vanity Fair*, which in 1998 printed a piece by me on the shredding of the Bill of Rights, causing McVeigh to begin a three-year correspondence with me. We were due to meet recently; then the Attorney General decided that he was to be sequestered during the weird endgame now begun. McVeigh, who has a sense of humor, proposed I witness his departure instead. Since I am an opponent of the death penalty, I said yes. Read all about it, *Nation* readers, in *Vanity Fair* this fall. Meanwhile, you have your mom—Katha.

GORE VIDAL

THAT JERUSALEM PRIZE

New York City

■ Alexander Cockburn's first preposterous diatribe against my accepting the Jerusalem Prize was so full of fabrications that I hardly know where to begin. Now he wants to take credit for inspiring the attack on current Israeli government policies and military conduct I made in the speech I gave at the prize ceremony ["Beat the Devil," April 23, June 4]. Just three corrections: 1. It is a literary prize given not by the Israeli government but by the Jerusalem International Book Fair (among past winners: Jorge Luis Borges, Graham Greene, Zbigniew Herbert, Milan Kundera, V.S. Naipaul, Octavio Paz, Don DeLillo, J.M. Coetzee). 2. According to the longtime director of the fair, my friend Nadine Gordimer has never won the prize, so could not have been in a position to decline it; according to him, she has never been a candidate. 3. I did not say, could never have said and obviously do not think that Mayor Olmert is "an extremely persuasive and reasonable person."

C'mon, Alex, you can fabricate a more plausible quote than that.

SUSAN SONTAG

Jerusalem

■ Alexander Cockburn was not the only one to pressure Susan Sontag. The Boston-based Jewish Women for Justice in Israel/Palestine sent a very strong letter to Sontag, following the letter publicized by the Coalition of Women for a Just Peace. Two other prominent Israeli intellectuals,

Professor Alice Shalvi and the poet Ada Aharoni, added their voices.

GILA SVIRSKY

Coalition of Women for a Just Peace

COCKBURN REPLIES

Petrolia, Calif.

■ To address Sontag's three points: Nowhere did I write that the Jerusalem Prize was awarded by the Israeli government, though I correctly identified the judges who honored Sontag, among them Shimon Peres, Israel's current Foreign Minister. I also mentioned that the person handing her the prize was Ehud Olmert, Mayor of Jerusalem and a leading ethnic cleanser.

Sontag may in retrospect find it incredible that she could have spoken with such warmth about Mayor Olmert, but on May 15 the *Jerusalem Post* reported her thus. On receipt of Sontag's letter, my colleague Jonathan Shainin contacted the *Post*'s reporter, Greer Fay Cashman, and she responded thus: "Yes, she did say it. It was a spontaneous response to complimentary remarks Olmert made about her at the Jerusalem International Conference Center." As befits an employee of this extremist publication, Cashman added a note of praise for Sontag as being "sufficiently open-minded to be able to publicly say what she said about Olmert."

So far as Nadine Gordimer is concerned, Sontag knows perfectly well that a number of years ago Gordimer was approached by the Jerusalem Prize committee and asked whether she would accept the award if offered. Precisely in the manner I described in my first column she said she would not, and so the offer was never formally made. It is scarcely surprising that Sontag's director friend should have difficulty in recalling this episode.

ALEXANDER COCKBURN

INSIDE OUTSIDE

Berkeley, Calif.

■ Hal Espen, *Outside*'s editor, makes two errors ["Letters," May 21]. He insists that during an interview with Jay Heinrichs, Ralph Nader said that, if forced to choose, he would vote for Bush. Espen then says the Nader campaign did not contact *Outside* to complain that the quotation was false. In fact, campaign staff did call *Outside* several times to object and spoke directly with Heinrichs. I was with Nader for roughly 200 days last year. During that time the which-would-you-choose-if-forced question was asked at least 100 times by ordinary folk and some of the nation's best political reporters. None received the "Bush" answer. Given that he got Nader's other remarks correct, Heinrichs either misunderstood Nader during their phone interview or simply manufactured the "Bush" answer.

TAREK MILLERON

STILL A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND

New York City

■ Ken Silverstein's April 23 "Diamonds of Death" is grossly misleading and contains several errors. The World Diamond Council, the Jewelers of America and others in the industry vigorously support effective, enforceable legislation to stop the traffic in conflict diamonds. Silverstein ignored statements by industry leaders making that point and ignored an obvious fact: All legitimate segments of the industry have every incentive—in both moral and business terms—to eliminate conflict diamonds.

It's true there's been disagreement on a handful of provisions in legislation that all concerned want Congress to approve. But industry representatives still search for common ground, even with some who publicly criticize us. Here are some examples of Silverstein's errors.

§ He says that on December 8, I announced that the World Diamond Council was "withdrawing support" from Congressman Tony Hall's bill, thereby killing a measure poised for passage in the final days of the session. Untrue. The WDC worked with Hall's office but did not agree to certain critical aspects of his draft. Further, it was a drastically different rider, originating in the Senate, that had been appended to the appropriations bill cited in the article.

§ Silverstein implies that the WDC then decided to draft its own legislation. Actually, that decision was made, and announced, much earlier. By December 8, drafting was well under way.

§ In an attempt to demonstrate a "hiring spree" of consultants allegedly assigned to oppose proper legislation, Silverstein mentions a "Shandwick Associates" and describes it as specializing in corporate grassroots campaigns. No such firm is associated with us, and no such campaign is being conducted.

§ Silverstein insinuates that the WDC retained the law firm Akin, Gump because its principals include "notable door openers." We went to this firm solely because Warren Connelly and Bruce Wilson have great expertise in international trade issues, which they put to good use in drafting model legislation.

MATTHEW RUNCI

World Diamond Council

Boston

■ Ken Silverstein did prodigious research on lobbying by the diamond industry. But he erred when he wrote that "groups such as Global Witness, World Vision, Physicians for Human Rights and Amnesty International threatened to launch a consumer boycott until the industry changed its buying practices so as to insure that

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The King Is Alive

*Tim Appelo**Cover design by Open, original photo by AP/Wide World; illustrations by Christoph Niemann, Karen Caldicott, David Smith*

EDITORIALS

Blindness in Gaza

The bombing of a Tel Aviv disco, in which twenty Israelis, many of them teenagers, were killed, was an atrocity of such horror that it seemed to shock both sides into taking steps toward installing a very tentative, precarious cease-fire. In the aftermath Secretary of State Colin Powell ritually urged Yasir Arafat to "take every action necessary to bring those responsible to justice" and continued to defend the Administration's refusal to become directly involved. This posture (barely modified by the dispatch of George Tenet to the region in response to growing international pressure) betrays an ongoing, willful and dangerous blindness to the consequences of US actions and inaction.

As events accelerated to what Powell called "the edge of a very deep hole," Secretary Powell has seemed almost eerily disengaged, intoning with bureaucratic punctilio when asked if he had requested Prime Minister Ariel Sharon not to retaliate, "I have not given that direct comment to the Israeli government." After telling Sharon a month ago to pull his troops out of their brief reoccupation of a sliver of Gaza, he ducked behind Bush's campaign-rhetoric Mideast policy of "Clinton not"—hands off until conditions ripen on their own to create a greater likelihood of an Israeli-Palestinian rapprochement. Yet it is Sharon—whose ruthlessness has been well demonstrated and who is a champion of the Israeli expansionism that's at the root of the Palestinian despair that drives more desperate acts—who should be curbed from using the senseless bombing as a pretext for drastic military reprisal intended to wipe out the Palestinian Authority's institutions.

And so, with no moral leadership being voiced by officials of either party in Washington and a press that is locked in a pro-Israel tilt, the American public casts a plague on both houses.

Of course, the image of the United States as a low-profile "honest broker" is false. The Bush Administration has been following the Clinton Administration's blindly pro-Israel policy since it took office. Last month, it failed to raise the issue of Sharon's deployment of American-made F-16s in a retaliatory strike. In January it increased military aid to Israel; in February it cleared the way for the sale of nine Apache attack helicopters to Israel; in March, it vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling for an unarmed observer force.

What the Administration should be talking about is a new policy: putting pressure on Israel, not just the Palestinians. That could mean suspending military help or at least threatening to withhold the hundreds of millions of dollars in economic aid that goes indirectly into supporting and expanding the settlements. (Bush Senior issued such a threat, and the pressure helped move then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to the negotiating table.) It should be calling not only for Palestinians to clamp down on terrorist operations but for Israel's adoption of the Mitchell report's proposed freeze on settlements, including no more expansion to accommodate "natural" growth of population, and withdrawal of its troops to pre-September 28, 2000, positions.

Ultimately, US policy must be predicated on the goal of creating a viable, contiguous Palestinian state and, to that end, the abandonment of *all* the Israeli settlements. This is the only solution that can insure Israel's security as well as the Palestinians' right to self-determination. As Richard Falk, a member of the *Nation's* editorial board who traveled to the region with a UN mission in February, recently revealed, conditions in the Palestinian territories have badly deteriorated. The mission found that Israeli policies of settlement expansion and bypass roads, destruction of Palestinian houses, commandeering of their land and water, random assassinations of their leadership and denial of

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