

'Contorted Logic' Challenge To Pompidou

By Joshua Lederberg

(This is the text of the address given by Joshua Lederberg, professor in genetics at Stanford University and a Nobel Prize laureate, on February 26, 1970 at San Francisco on the occasion of Pres. Pompidou's visit.)

Some of the press stories about M. Pompidou's visit have predicted that he would get a "hot reception," and that he has anticipated this with trepidation. I welcome Georges Pompidou's visit; I am glad he is here. For I might hope that in this way he might learn something that is vital to the future of the world and the culture that we share. I want him to know that we are here, and what we care about; but we should give him no excuse to take the luxury of not listening.

I do not stand here to defend, or even (as might be an even more typically Jewish habit) to criticize the policies of the government of Israel, a nation facing impossible dilemmas in its struggle for survival and for the right to live in peace in the community of nations. On all sides, there are victims—Jews, Arabs, bystanders—who suffer in innocent helplessness.

The roots of the problem go very deep, above all in ourselves, and in our own failure to solve the larger conflicts of the great powers. We have stubborn and malevolent adversaries, but we fall far short of perfect love and wisdom ourselves.

Judge Yourself

I cannot judge you, M. Pompidou—but I call on your conscience, and your ambitions for the honor of your own name and that of your country, to judge yourself. It is to you I must speak.

For some time, the official policy of your government was to minimize the flow of arms to either side of the middle-East conflict. This seemed a peculiar blindness to what the Soviets were already stirring up, but the principle was not hypocritical and suffered more from a lack of realism than of logic. Now, we hear that Libya is to receive 50, 100, or more advanced jet fighters

for which she has no conceivable use; but, of course, you have been reassured that they will not be diverted to Egypt to refuel Arab aggression against Israel.

Protestations of Friendship

I cannot believe that you are basically hostile to the people of Israel or to the Jews of the world. The outcome of the 1967 war may justify a certain faith in miracles; your belief in some miracle might reconcile your recent policy with your protestations of friendship.

More likely you have worked out some contorted logic by which to rationalize that policy, and to find in the vortices of power an attractive vacuum that draws you to reassert the vanities of French glory. But we cannot evade the consequences of error, and recent history shows all too many examples of grave error in the manipulations of *Weltpolitik*.

Pompidou and Hitler

The Arab bloc is avowedly dedicated to a holy war that would drive Israel into the sea. If they succeed with your help, you, and France will pay a price too—you will have to live with the knowledge that Georges Pompidou had finished the work that Adolf Hitler had started.

Do you think that French culture, or any civilized culture, will long survive in a world in which that can have happened!

Of course you do not contemplate such an event. But how much you risk with your adventures! Are the consequences of your calculations so trustworthy when so much is at stake?

Politics is, of course, a world of mutual reactions; and it is inescapable that your gambits must be followed by responses from this country and elsewhere to maintain some balance of force. The lovers of violence may delight at such inflammations. But what a terrible waste of energy and resources. Glory is a hollow-sounding word in an era of famine and global anarchy.