

HOSTILITY — THE ONLY ANSWER?

by Mitchell Bard

At UCLA, some of the most anti-Israel and sometimes anti-Semitic rhetoric and programs come from black student organizations. In general, it seems that the most vociferous opponents of the State of Israel are not Arab students but members of other minority groups. Why is it that Jews on the UCLA campus and other campuses around the country are unable to get along with other minority groups? Why is it that the interests of blacks, hispanics, and other groups are not seen as compatible with those of Jewish students?

I was at a meeting a few months ago with a local black congressman who tried to play down the rifts between blacks and Jews and pointed out that the two do not have mutually exclusive agendas. The problem with his analysis is that "establishment" blacks, those who have been elected to public office, tend to see the agendas of blacks and Jews as being compatible, partially because they are compatible and partially because they are old enough to remember the Holocaust, the founding of Israel, and, more importantly, they remember that Jews marched side by side with blacks in the civil rights protests of the 1960's.

Jews have historically been at the forefront of civil rights, not just for Jews, but for blacks, hispanics, and women; yet, college age minorities seem completely unaware of this past association, or at least uninterested. Whereas liberals of the 1940's and 50's were pro-Israel because that was the liberal issue — Israel was the model for the developing world — today, many liberals associate Israel with the vestiges of Western imperialism. It is indeed ironic that Israel, a country with perhaps the strongest labor movement in the world and the purest ex-

pressions of communism in its kibbutzim should be denounced by leftists who call for just such organizations in other countries.

Israel is not an imperialist country as some black students insist on portraying it. Israel is not imposing its will on an Arab majority nor is it involved in the subjugation of blacks in Africa. On the contrary, Israel was a country that took in all who wished to live there, regardless of race, and was able to build a modern economy.

Israel should be seen as a model of what can happen in a Third World country when the people apply themselves and are given support from more developed countries. This

message does not seem to be getting across to college-age blacks.

Instead of understanding, it is fashionable for liberals to dump on Israel and to see it as some kind of lackey of the United States. Israel is seen as America's surrogate arms supplier to right-wing dictators in Central America and the racist South African regime. These same people also tend to equate the South African and Israeli governments because of the alleged oppression of Palestinians in Israel.

Even in recent months when Israel took the heroic action to save black Jews in Ethiopia, the black community reacted with indifference or worse. Jesse

Jackson refused to help save Ethiopian blacks because he saw them as potential assets to the Israeli army and the settlement movement.

In fact, the day an article I wrote on that subject was published in the school newspaper, I was verbally accosted by one of my colleagues, a black graduate student, who still insisted that the Israeli Government was racist even as it was taking in thousands of black Jews and making them citizens.

What can be done about the current situation? Perhaps, nothing. Efforts to build bridges between Jewish and black groups and other minority groups have usually fallen flat because of the hostility of the leaders

of additional special interests. Those individuals have difficulty seeing any compatibility between our interests even when it comes to speaking out against racism and other issues of mutual concern.

Of course, when one looks at the attitudes of these students it is not that surprising. When they bring speakers like Kwame Toure (a.k.a. Stokely Carmichael) or a representative of the PLO to campus to talk about the "racist state of Israel," one wonders if there is indeed anything for us to talk about.

To use Jesse Jackson's favorite buzzword, we must continue to engage in dialogue, but there must also be a conscious effort to explain the cause of Israel in terms minority students can relate to. Many, if not most, know little or nothing about Israel and therefore are guided only by the misrepresentations of their leaders. We must somehow convey to other minorities that differences of opinion on affirmative action do not erase the common goals we otherwise share.

Just as Senator Levin has criticized Jews for becoming a single-interest group (or at least being perceived as such) and called for increased involvement in issues unrelated to Israel at the national level, so too must we take more visible positions on local and campus issues that are of interest to other minority groups. With regard to Israel, curricula, pamphlets, and speakers must be prepared to tell the story of Israel's development and its efforts to aid other developing nations.

This is a crucial long-term project for the Jewish community because opinion polls suggest that support for Israel among non-whites is considerably less than that among whites and with the increasing political participation of these groups, a trend of indifference or hostility toward Israel cannot be allowed to develop. ●

Mitchell Bard is a graduate student at UCLA.

