

COMMENTARY

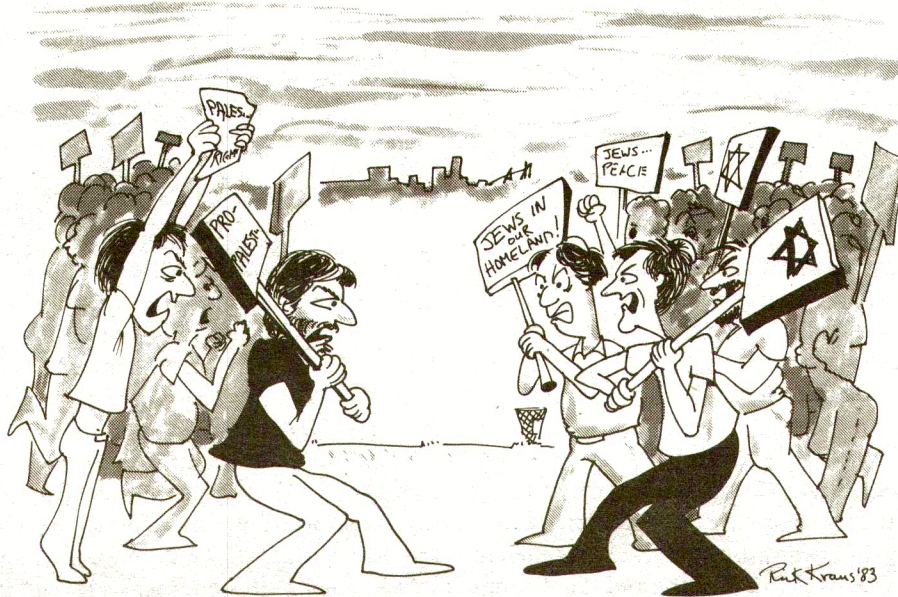
No More Shouting On Sproul

by Laurent D. Ohana

A few nights ago, a friend was telling me how disgusted she had been by so-called Israeli propaganda displayed on the Israel Information table on Sproul Plaza. Such b.s. insults anyone's intelligence and is eventually detrimental to the Israeli cause, was her claim. I argued with her for half an hour, but I knew all along that she had a point.

I had a similar discussion with yet another friend just yesterday. This time, however, we were examining the pro-Palestinian table. He told me he believed that the more propaganda they printed, the more they alienated public opinion. He spoke authoritatively, as he had made a study on the subject. "People are getting sick of this," he said. I was quite startled. Many seem to agree that propaganda, from any side, does not belong on the Berkeley campus. Still, the tables are out there . . .

The tables on Sproul, and propaganda in general, have a message to convey to the public. It generally concerns the "goodness" of their cause. They have great faith in their own righteousness and they want the public at large to share it. How do they accomplish this? It's very simple: give some intelligent people some



information and they are bound to see *the truth*. The result is propaganda.

It seems to me that there is a basic problem with the propagandists' approach. They assume that they have better knowledge of their side's true value than the other side has. If this sounds perfectly acceptable to you, don't worry. I haven't made my point yet. Sure, you and I have visited Israel or have family and friends

there; we certainly know better than our Arab friends from the other table that Israel wants peace and that the P.L.O. is just a bunch of killers. By the same token the Palestinians and their supporters can claim that they know better than anyone else that they are a peace-loving nation, that the P.L.O. is a welfare institution and that the Israelis are racist, expansionist butchers. And voila, the argument is at a

dead end and we can all start shouting at each other from our respective tables.

We have confused the issues. Whether the Israelis or the Palestinians want peace is not something we can argue about constructively. The facts will have to speak for themselves. What the facts are saying now, however, is that the Palestinian and Israeli peoples are at war and that they have been harming each other. That is the issue. It is not about the nature of the belligerents, but about what they have done to each other. Not intentions, but actions.

If we accept that what should matter is what the two peoples have done to each other, then we have to agree that the Israelis know better than the Palestinians themselves what the P.L.O. has done to Israel. Accordingly, the Palestinians know better than the Israelis themselves what Israel has done to the Palestinians. An acceptable assumption would be that each side knows more about the actions of the other side than the other side himself.

You may think: How is it possible that somebody else might know what I am doing better than I would? I am doing it. This can be answered on two fronts. First, you may know you have dropped a bomb

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Politics and Jewish Survival

by Mitchell Bard

The Jewish people have survived for over 5,000 years. They have survived military conquest, dispersion, and the Holocaust. Yet, there are those among us who see the present danger as the most serious we have faced in our history. The danger I am referring to is assimilation. It is certainly not a new problem for the Jews, but it is reaching alarming dimensions in the United States and threatening a radical departure with Jewish tradition. This departure was exemplified by the Reform movement's recent consideration of a resolution which would revise the legal definition of "who is a Jew?" to include children of mixed marriages whose fathers are Jewish. Jewish tradition states that only the mother's religion determines that of the child.

There have been two traditional responses to intermarriage, assimilation, and secularization — ostracism and exhortation. The former has fragmented the Jewish community into the accepted and the pariahs with a dwindling number falling under the first designation. Exhorting people to be observant and to eschew the forces of secularism, while necessary, has proven to be an inadequate means of halting the assimilative trend. Perhaps there is a prophet among us who can foresee the

doom of the Jewish people in the current trend. I have no such apocalyptic vision. I do see, however, imminent danger for the State of Israel if this trend continues.

It is a somewhat philosophical argument as to whether the Jewish people could survive the destruction of Israel. A more pragmatic discussion would consider whether Israel can survive without U.S. support. Without debating the issue, let me just point out one revealing, but frequently ignored fact: the United States gives more aid to Israel in one month than the UJA gives in the entire year. The vast majority of non-Jews have consistently favored U.S. support for Israel, but few people have any illusions as to the depth of their (non-Jews) conviction without being accompanied by the influence of strong Jewish support. It is my belief that assimilation must be tempered in order to prevent the erosion of support for Israel and, conversely, that by instilling political awareness in our children, we may be able to mitigate some of the damage of assimilation.

Many young Jews rebel against their heritage, some out of resentment for being forced to attend Hebrew school, others because of a philosophical rejection of Jewish theology, but most simply lack an adequate Jewish upbringing. In

each of these cases, the likelihood that the individual who drifts away from Judaism will return is slight. My contention is that the probability of return to the fold would be enhanced if young Jews had some other reason for identifying with Judaism.

Zionism could provide the alternative. I am not referring to dogmatic Zionism which requires every Jew to live in Israel, but rather the seminal Zionist belief that the Jewish people are a nation entitled, like any other nation, to self-determination in their homeland. There would no doubt be those who reject Zionism and choose to espouse the cause of the Arab rejectionists or simply remain apathetic, but the remainder would have a secondary (for some, primary) interest in the Jewish people which would manifest itself in support for Israel.

As the individual grows older and for one reason or another begins to look for spiritual fulfillment, the affiliation with Zionism will draw him back like a magnet toward Judaism. For those who intermarry, the political interest may be enough to prevent the Jew from adopting the spouse's religion or at least sufficient to sensitize a spouse to have a concern for Israel. If nothing else, the political affiliation will leave the parent with some ves-

tige of Jewish identity which could be passed on to the children. Even if political awareness is not a sufficient inducement for the individual to return to Judaism, it will at least instill the motivation to support the State of Israel and thereby, if only indirectly, the Jewish people.

When I refer to teaching political awareness and Zionism, I am suggesting that synagogues, Hebrew schools, and parents go beyond the conventional subjects of instruction concerning theology and culture. I suggest they teach the modern history of Israel, the issues in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the important role Jews can play in the political process and what significance political activity has for Israel and the Jewish people.

The extent to which a political education can stem the assimilative tide is indeterminate. It is evident, however, that whatever power the "Jewish lobby" has in our political system is being seriously challenged by the increasingly powerful "Arab lobby." America's continued support for Israel may depend on the efforts of the Jewish community to insure that coming generations, whether they choose to identify themselves as Jews or not, will continue to be a political force on behalf of Israel.