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Bombing in Boston

Abe Foxman's Genocide Denial Road Show

by JOHN WALSH

It seemed innocuous enough at first. Watertown, a suburb of Boston, sported a sign on the Town Hall, proclaiming the town a participant in an anti-bigotry program "No Place for Hate." But one of the good citizens of Watertown with libertarian inclinations objected that the sign seemed like some kind of PC thought control. His objections set in motion investigations by the town mothers and fathers into the program. Lo and behold, it was sponsored by Abe Foxman's Jewish Anti-Defamation League (ADL).

In itself this sponsorship might not be a problem, unless you are a Muslim, an Arab or a Palestinian and know full well the ADL's positions on bigotry. But there are over 8000 Armenian-Americans in Watertown, and the ADL has long denied that the Turkish massacre of 1.5 million Armenians from 1915 to 1923 amounted to genocide. Turkey is of course an ally and arms purchaser of Israel's, but the denial antedates this alliance. A good friend of mine, an Israeli expatriate, tells me that when he went to school in Israel, mention of the Armenian genocide was verboten so as not to detract from the "uniqueness" of the Jewish genocide under the Nazis and to maintain a "monopoly on suffering," as he puts it. Shoah business does not like the competition.

The whole matter in Watertown was given added urgency by a resolution now pending in Congress calling on Turkey to recognize the Armenian genocide. This resolution is supported by the Armenian community and opposed by the national ADL.

Anger began to mount in Watertown and the citizens called on the city mothers and fathers to withdraw from the ADL-sponsored program. (ADL Dollars and awards flow to participating towns.) The Watertown Town Council called a meeting which was packed with a lot of angry Armenians. Regional ADL director Andrew Tarsey came to the meeting to defend the ADL genocide denial, (as had the ADL's national director, Abe Foxman, in an interview with the Boston Globe,) and to call on the town to stick with the "No Place for Hate" program. Tarsey was booed out of the hall with hisses and

catcalls. At that the town mothers and fathers voted unanimously to quit the program, and at the cost of overtime for two city workers the sign was gone before dawn.

Tarsey was unable to prevail with his genocide denial and couldn't move Foxman and the national ADL to reverse course. Tarsey then reversed his position and agreed that Armenians had indeed endured a genocide. They then cut through the Gordian Knot by firing Tarsey. Two local ADL board members duly resigned in protest. The rest stood by their man, Foxman. Tarsey is now hailed repeatedly as a "hero" by local Jewish leaders. If armies were composed of such heroes, every battle would culminate in mutual mass retreat. Notably and unusually, the city of Watertown and its council were not labeled anti-semitic by the ADL and its assorted acolytes. Even Alan Dershowitz did not raise a peep. This seems to be a kind of sea change, and it may have something to do with the Lobby's weaker position now that it is more widely seen. post Mearsheimer and Walt, as a principal instigator of the disastrous war on Iraq.

At this point the Boston Jewish community was divided. Foxman was under pressure, and Armenian-Americans from across the country were getting involved. How to respond? With a big expensive newspaper ad of course. And how did Foxman's ad make his case? By blaming it on the Jews! Specifically the Jews of Turkey whom Foxman and company claim would be endangered by a change in the ADL position. But there have been many reports of the tolerance shown to Jews in Turkey, as one letter writer to the Boston Globe noted. The Foxman ad also let the Israeli cat out of the bag, saying, "We are also aware that Turkey is a key strategic ally and friend of the United States and a staunch friend of Israel." (Some staunch friend if it were true that Turkey was persecuting Turkish Jews. What a tangled web has been woven by ADL.) But of course the ADL was only stating its long-time position that Israel comes first way before any consideration of human rights.

Two days ago, the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston (JCRC) known for its pro-Iraq war stance, its Iran bashing and its opposition to Palestinian rights joined the fray. It sent out a letter repudiating Foxman's genocide denial and claiming it recognized the Armenian genocide long long ago in fact in 2005, although this received scant notice until now. Let's see; the genocide happened in 1915 and the JCRC recognized it in 2005 after the passage of 90 years. By that logic Holocaust denial should be OK for another 13 years.

Today Foxman and his national ADL, hastily joining the local ADL in full retreat, have pronounced the Armenian slaughter is a genocide after all. Upon reflection and with the help of that great humanitarian, Elie Wiesel, who seems to be acting as a kind of Jewish Billy Graham and who has never acknowledged the injustice done the Palestinians, Foxman thinks that it was a genocide after all. (Of course according to their newspaper ad of several days back this means that the national ADL is now abandoning Turkish Jewry to a horrible fate.) ADL was in fact founded in 1913 just before the onset of the

Armenian genocide, so ADL's acknowledgement is not overly hasty. Perhaps the ADL's new slogan could be "Building on 100 years of Genocide Denial."

But Foxman and company have not given up yet. National ADL still refuses to support the Congressional resolution put forward by Rep. Adam Schiff of California to recognize the Armenian genocide. (ADL in fact has lobbied against the resolution.) But the Armenian community is not buying it. Schiff wants ADL to support the resolution. And Watertown Councilor Marilyn Pettito Devaney said that she and others will accept nothing less than full ADL support for the resolution. Meanwhile she said that she and others will lobby other towns to pull out of the ADL's bigoted, "anti-bigotry" No Place for Hate" program. (You may want to look at that site to see whether you can find any statement about the slow genocide being wrought on the Palestinians.) This program is found in cities and towns all over the United States. Do you have one in your town?

John V. Walsh can be reached at john.endwar@gmail.com. This story continues to develop with Foxman making a personal visit to Beantown today. CounterPunch will keep an eye on the situation as it unwinds