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ADL Campaign Against Tolerance

by William Norman Grigg

Since its release earlier this year, *The Religious Right: The Assault on Tolerance and Pluralism in America*, the 193-page report produced by the Anti-Defamation League, has achieved nearly canonical status. Countless “news” reports and op-ed articles have uncritically cited the report as the definitive critique of the “Christian Right.” Conservative Christians have protested that the report was little more than an act of politically motivated defamation. The latter assessment has now been endorsed by a group of prominent American Jews.



On August 2nd, 75 notable Jewish Americans signed a full-page paid advertisement in the *New York Times* which condemned the ADL for “engaging in defamation of its own” in its attack on the religious right. The advertisement, which bore the headline, “Should Jews Fear the ‘Christian Right?’”, chastised the ADL for its

disreputable tactics: “We are a group of Jews who wish to make it known that we reject the implications of [the ADL] report and deplore its publication [T]he so-called ‘evidence’ of a conservative Christian threat to Jewish security is derived from such discreditable techniques as insinuation and guilt by association.” Noting that too many Jews have personally experienced the results of religious bigotry, the signers stated that “we have a special obligation to guard against it, and all the more so, when in the case of the ADL attack on our Christian fellow citizens, it emanates from our own community.”

The ad also rebuked the religious left for its proprietary claims upon Judaism: “Judaism is not, as the ADL seems to suggest, coextensive with liberalism. Nor, we wish to emphasize, does the Jewish community speak with one voice on the religious and moral — and political — issues of our time.” Furthermore, “Judaism teaches the principle of *Hakarat Hatov*, that we have the duty to acknowledge the good done to us. In

issuing *The Religious Right* study, the ADL has among other things seriously violated that principle.”

On August 4th, the ADL reacted to the advertisement by distributing an internal memo written by ADL leaders David H. Strassler and Abraham H. Foxman which denounced the ad as “scurrilous at best” and declared that “nowhere [does] the report accuse the religious right of being anti-Semitic, either overtly or by implication.” The memo also reiterated the report’s contention that “Nothing more aptly characterizes the religious right than its hostility to difference, both within its own faith and outside of it.” But even as the ink was drying on the ADL memo, the organization displayed a remarkable intolerance toward dissent within its own ranks.

Principled Dissent

Among those who signed the August 2nd *New York Times* ad were Gary Polland, Phillip Aronoff, and Fred Zeidman, who at the time were all members of the ADL; Polland, a Houston attorney and longtime Republican activist, was the southwest regional director for the ADL. On August 10th, under pressure from the ADL’s national office, Polland resigned his position with the group. The ADL insisted that Polland had violated organization policy by signing the *Times* ad rather than expressing his misgivings through private channels. However, as Polland explained in a letter to ADL members, his concerns were not confined to matters covered by the organization’s internal policies: “After much agonizing I signed the ad because the message needed to be sent. The ad informs the Christian community that there are prominent Jewish Americans who reject the [ADL] report ... and regret the publication of such an inaccurate and poorly-researched report.”

On August 9th, Polland and Aronoff compiled an analysis of the ADL report and circulated it among the organization’s membership. Among other things, the critique demonstrates that Strassler and Foxman lied when they asserted that the report did not “accuse the religious right of being anti-Semitic, either overtly or by implication.” Page two of the report accuses the Christian Coalition of “anti-Jewish and extremist sentiments.” Page 23 of the report imputes “anti-Jewish pronouncements” to Pat Robertson, without specifying a single offending statement. Furthermore, the report accuses the Christian Coalition of making “a number of pronouncements antagonistic toward Jews,” displaying “anti-Jewish and extremist sentiments,” spiking its literature

with “anti-Jewish nuggets,” peddling “evangelical anti-Judaism,” and conspiring with “the nation’s leading anti-semitic propaganda organization.”

Nor were the ADL’s misrepresentations limited to the question of anti-Semitism. The report charges that Steve Hotze, a Republican party official in Texas, “favors the death penalty for homosexuals.” In making this accusation the report cited an article which had appeared in the ***New York Times Magazine***. However, despite the fact that Hotze has never expressed the opinion attributed to him, the ADL’s accusation was repeated by ***New York Times*** columnist Anthony Lewis and in a ***New Yorker*** magazine article written by Sidney Blumenthal.

According to Polland and Aronoff, the matter of Steve Hotze is typical of numerous inaccuracies and misrepresentations contained in the report and an indictment of the ADL’s approach to documentation. David Cantor, the ADL researcher who wrote the report, admitted to the ***New York Times*** that he was “guided by ADL policy to stick to the published record rather than conduct direct interviews He did not contact any groups of the religious right for their reactions.” But as the case of Steve Hotze illustrates, the “printed record” in the prestige press often consists of inbred falsehoods which circulate among antagonists of the religious right; they have no more factual standing than do long-standing anti-Semitic calumnies.

Private Admissions

In the August 4th internal memo, the ADL’s national leadership declared: “... like other such critiques of the ADL’s report, the [August 2nd ***New York Times***] ad fails to single out any instance of defamation, or even inaccuracy.” The unmistakable implication of this claim was that the report was innocent of any significant inaccuracies. However, in a personal letter sent to evangelical leader Pat Robertson on August 3rd, Foxman admitted that the report had inaccurately stated that Robertson “never denounced [David] Duke” during Duke’s gubernatorial bid in 1991. Foxman’s letter also retracted the accusation that in a 1980 staff meeting Robertson had referred to Jews as “spiritually deaf” and “spiritually blind.”

The source of this accusation, according to Foxman, consisted of “remarks that had been widely quoted” — that is, undocumented rumors.

Exactly one week after the ADL *privately* admitted some of the flaws contained in its anti-religious right report, the organization expelled Polland for *publicly* criticizing the flawed monograph. The irony of this development was not lost on ex-Senator Rudy Boschwitz, a liberal Republican from Minnesota who is a Jewish immigrant and an honorary vice-chairman of the ADL. In a handwritten note to Polland, Boschwitz wryly remarked: "I always believed that the ADL considered diverse opinions permissible Indeed, they have just [produced] a scathing report about a group they maintain doesn't allow such diversity. Could it be that our own ADL ... is assaulting pluralism and tolerance in America?"

Another ironic aspect of the ADL's assault upon conservative evangelical Christians is the fact that anti-Semitism is not a serious concern in contemporary America. Leonard Dinnerstein, author of the new book ***Anti-semitism in America***, told the July 15th ***Jerusalem Post*** that "anti-semitism in the US has clearly declined to an unimagined degree. It has not disappeared. But it's become so minuscule as to be virtually irrelevant. And that's the trend. Jews are incredibly secure in the United States, and I see no reason whatsoever why that should change." Dinnerstein maintains: "The fact is, a lot of American Jews just aren't ready to accept just how well-accepted they are in America." Citing the ADL's own annual audits of anti-Semitic acts, Dinnerstein concludes that "anti-semitism is just a tiny blip on the American consciousness." For publicly expressing such heterodox notions, Dinnerstein has been condemned by Abraham Foxman for "minimizing anti-Semitism."

While Polland and his associates embrace what they describe as "the Anti-Defamation League's mandate ... to fight discrimination and anti-semitism," they do not subscribe to the group's implicit endorsement of "the radical homosexual political agenda ... or the pro-choice agenda." This position is broadly compatible with public sentiments: While anti-Semitism is rejected by the American populace, public opinion has not yet turned decisively against newly minted sins against political correctness, such as "homophobia." In order to poison the public mind against the religious right, the ADL sought to portray "homophobia" and rejection of feminist demands as morally equivalent to anti-Semitism — and to establish the supposed anti-Jewish sentiments of Evangelicals through insinuation and misrepresentation.

Spy Scandal

Just before the ADL launched its attack on the religious right, a San Francisco court quietly disposed of what should have been a major ADL scandal. On May 27th, Tom Gerard, a former inspector with the San Francisco police department, was sentenced to 45 days in jail and three years' probation for leaking confidential police files to the ADL. Gerard had pleaded no contest to charges that he had illegally abused his access to a police computer system in order to obtain information about the activities of pro-Palestinian and white supremacist organizations and various "extremist" groups; that material was leaked to Roy Bullock, an investigator in the employ of the ADL.

Following the discovery of the ADL's information pipeline, police raided the homes of Gerard and Bullock and seized files containing the names of thousands of individuals and organizations. Gerard fled to the Philippines one step ahead of prosecution; however, no charges were ever filed against Bullock. Last November, the San Francisco District Attorney's office announced that it would not file criminal charges against the ADL in exchange for a \$75,000 "donation" from the ADL into a "hate crimes reward and education fund." Essentially, the ADL bribed the District Attorney's office with money that will be used to advance the prosecution of the organization's political enemies.

Significant charges against Gerard were dropped in April when the FBI — which had entered the case in 1993 — refused to release documents which Gerard's attorney claimed would establish the ex-policeman's innocence. At the time, Municipal Court Judge J. Dominique Olcomendy stated, "We know the federal government is still investigating this case because they tell me that's why they won't release documents [acquired on behalf of the ADL]." However, ADL defense counsel Jerrold Ladar believes that Gerard's sentencing brought an end to any criminal investigation of the scandal. "It is nice to see the last remnant of the criminal case wrapped up and closed. It is time it was completely put to bed," Ladar told the May 28th ***San Francisco Chronicle***.

Although several civil suits are pending against the ADL, Janet Reno's Justice Department has shown little inclination to pursue an investigation of the spy scandal. Given the Clinton Administration's high-profile campaign against "hate groups" and "right-wing extremists," it is possible that the materials acquired from the ADL's spy network may be put to some use other than prosecuting those who illegally collected the information