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ADL Report Diminished its Reputation

by Leonard Larsen (Scripps Howard News Service) | June 13, 1988

WASHINGTON – The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith is a proud organization that is celebrating its 75th anniversary in fighting discrimination – sometimes perilously, always unselfishly and frequently wading into struggles on behalf of non-Jews whose rights need a strong and honest voice.

But now in a just published ADL “special report,” an “Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents: The Anti-Israel Component,” the ADL clouds its own record.

Surprising, perhaps shocking from an organization whose work and ideals are so much a part of the American fabric, the ADL dangles a suggestion that free speech can be held suspect if the object of criticism is the state of Israel.

With the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories in its seventh month, with more than 200 Palestinians killed by Israeli soldiers and settlers, with harsh treatment of Palestinians under Israeli military rule now a settled way of life, the ADL publication clearly implies that to voice opposition to Israel’s political and military policy and to support a Palestinian viewpoint is “anti-Semitic.

The ADL special report on “anti-Semitic incidents,” covering the first 4-1/2 months of 1988, dwells mainly on acts that can be seen as vandalism, clear threats against Jews and their institutions and other products of thuggery and hate.

But while the ADL, in its past annual reports on anti-Semitism, has included in its audits what have been called acts of “propaganda carried on by anti-Israel and anti-Zionist organizations,” the authors of the current special report say that a “new anti-Semitic pattern has emerged” has emerged in “anti-Jewish acts (which) have been linked to unrest in the West Bank and Gaza.”

Of the 88 “episodes” in which the ADL finds such links, most are of brutish behavior that is invariably the work of bigoted fools of the night – spray-painting of synagogues, anonymous threatening telephone calls and mailings, vandalism and verbal harassment.

Included, however, are a few incidents which, in the ADL view as "anti-Semitic" only because they recount brutal acts of repression against Palestinians by the Israeli government.

One ADL account of "anti-Semitism," for example, arrives from Palm Beach, Fla., where it was reported, there had been "distribution of pro-Palestinian literature on several occasions."

Another incident in the ADL special report came from East Tennessee State University in the distribution of "anti-Israel and anti-Semitic literature featuring pro-Palestinian sympathies.

From Boston, the ADL said, came more "anti-Semitic" conduct by the person or persons who set out for public display "pro-Palestinian/anti-Israel graffiti throughout the subway system."

The Boston subway slogans cited by the ADL – presumably the most vicious examples of anti-Semitism – were "Victory to the Palestinian People's Struggle" and "Down With the Reactionary Israeli-Settler State and Their U.S. Masters."

Lumping together all the 1988 reports of "Anti-Semitic Acts Linked to West Bank/Gaza Unrest," the ADL describes everything – from vandalism against synagogues to pro-Palestinian pamphlets – as "anti-Semitic crimes with a political twist," and expresses confidence that "all Americans, no matter their views on the current conflict in the Middle East, will join us in condemning such bigoted activities."

For months, years even, efforts to equate criticism of Israel and support for Palestinians with anti-Semitism has come from paid Israeli lobbyists. What is disturbing is that an organization so deserving of honor and respect as the ADL would now join in the tactic.

An obvious intent here is to use intimidation to silence criticism of Israel's political and military conduct. The participation of the ADL in such work diminishes its history and tradition.