

Why I'm Leaving After 25 Years

The ADL Pushes "Tolerance"?

By Carl Pearlston

<http://www.jewishworldreview.com> – MY love affair with the ADL began almost 25 years ago. It has just ended with a curt note from the Board President advising me that I haven't shown a sufficient "demonstration of commitment to the ADL" to warrant retention on the Executive Committee or the Regional Board." How did it come to this?

I had been nominated to the Board by a judge with whom I had worked during the heady civil rights years, and then to the Executive Committee by the head of the Speakers Bureau, for which I was very active. Not that the romance had not been rocky. I had always known that my conservative Republican political views were barely tolerated by my overwhelmingly liberal colleagues, and I was tempted to keep them to myself. We were nominally a non-partisan organization, but our meetings frequently felt uncomfortably like those of a Democratic Party club in which it was assumed that all shared a common liberal or "progressive" political worldview and none could, or wanted to, hear a differing viewpoint.

Just after the recent presidential election, our Director accosted me at a meeting with a vehement "You stole the election!" Our positions were usually those of the liberal wing of the Democratic party on issues like abortion, school choice, teacher pay, bilingual education, affirmative action, the homosexual agenda, gun control.

I once cited the comprehensive study by Yale University Law School's Dr. John Lott on gun laws to the effect that in those states where people could legally carry concealed weapons, crimes against people actually declined, since criminals do not want to take a chance that their victim may be armed. I was met with the sarcastic and dismissive response that "Only John Lott, [talk show host and JWR columnist] Larry Elder and you believe in that study."

There was not a great tolerance for diversity of viewpoint nor introduction of new information. I was barred from distributing written material which was germane and relevant to issues under discussion; only material from staff could be disseminated. To be fair, a member did once tell me that at least I kept them honest — i.e. they were forced to at least be exposed to — even if not to consider, a different view.

But, it was an uphill struggle.

When I once confessed to our National Director, Abe Foxman, my feelings of just spinning my wheels, he candidly told me that I would have to realize that over 95% of those involved in the ADL were liberal and would be unsympathetic to my conservative views.

DEMONIZING EXPONENTS OF JEWISH VALUES

Lack of sympathy frequently translated into lack of civility. For example, at several meetings, there were objections that Dr. Laura Schlesinger's radio program and planned TV program was offensive and insensitive to homosexuals. I pointed out that her views enunciate traditional Jewish values which deserve the support of a Jewish defense organization, and was greeted with derision and intemperate, hostile responses. When it came to the issue of homosexuals versus the Boy Scouts, ADL chose the homosexuals, all the way to the Supreme Court.

Then, in its otherwise commendable nationwide partnership with Barnes and Noble in the program Hate Hurts, which sponsors books and educates teachers and young children to fight hate, the ADL endorsed the books Heather Has Two Mommies and Steve Has Two Daddies as suitable tools for teaching tolerance to young children. Teachers' workshops and children's reading groups were organized, using these and other books in conjunction with the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), which had earlier achieved a certain notoriety for its own school workshops wherein teenagers were taught the fine points of "fisting" and other homosexual practices.

TURNING JUDAISM ON ITS HEAD

In this manner, fighting "hate" became a euphemism for an attack on sexual morality, the traditional family, and the Jewish view that children deserve a loving father and mother, not two fathers or two mothers. It is only through a perverse notion of "tolerance" that support for traditional teaching about the family is intimidated, and condemned.

When Dennis Prager participated by invitation in a panel discussion on church-state issues, some members actually hissed and booed his remarks in a hostile display of intolerance. A respected board member persistently repeated to all who would hear that Prager was insane.

When the organization published its harsh attack on the Religious Right in 1994, I was distressed as were many politically conservative Jews who do not share the ADL view that politically-active conservative Christians are our enemy. As (Jewish) syndicated columnist and JWR contributor Mona Charen wrote, "The ADL has committed defamation. There is no other conclusion to be reached after reading its new report, The Religious Right: the Assault on Tolerance and Pluralism in America. It is sad that an

organization with a proud history of fairness should have descended to this kind of character assassination and name calling.”

A Board member of another affiliate was forced to resign because he publicly expressed disagreement with that report. It seems that the term “religious right” is a talisman used to invoke a reflexive response of hostility without thought. So deep was the antagonism that when Ralph Reed, then head of the Christian Coalition, appeared at an ADL leadership conference and gave a heartfelt apology for past insensitivity, prejudice, and discrimination by Christians toward Jews, the private response by most members to his apology was hostility and distrust.

CONSTRUCTING A SOLID WALL BETWEEN ‘SYNAGOGUE AND STATE’

There was a particular intolerance on the issue of church-state. The theory that freedom of religion require “strict separation of church and state” was transformed into hostility to any public display of religion in general, to Christianity in particular, and even to Judaism. I do not understand the logic of a Jewish organization expending its time and resources to forbid the public display of the chief gift of the Jews to civilization— The Ten Commandments. Nor does it seem appropriate for us to engage in litigation to forbid another Jewish organization (Chabad) from displaying a Menorah on public property. I was told that such a display would encourage other religious groups, including Moslems, to exercise their right to similar displays.

Well, why shouldn’t they? It is implicit in the meaning of freedom of religious expression and religious diversity, a freedom we have so long struggled to attain for ourselves. It is not in our country’s interest for us to demand a naked public square, devoid of any reference to G-d. Our cramped view of religious expression led us to oppose even the observance of a moment of silence in schools as being likely to encourage prayer.

The issue of parental choice in education, either by tax credits or vouchers, met with unwavering opposition based on what I believe is an erroneously perceived constitutional doctrine of “separation of church and state,” along with a strong commitment to the teacher’s unions. At one meeting, I questioned Abe Foxman as to what the ADL would do in the likely event that the US Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of school vouchers. He said the ADL would never agree and would continue to press the court until the decision was reversed and the ADL viewpoint was adopted.

“YOU SHOULDN’T HAVE DONE THAT!”

Then, as he passed the table where my wife and I were sitting, he said to me, “You shouldn’t have asked that question.” I then realized that the bloom was really off the romance.

I had always strongly believed in the ADL's mission, as defined on a banner frequently displayed at the front of our meetings: "... to stop the defamation of the Jewish people, and secure justice and fair treatment to all citizens alike...." Our efforts against anti-Semitism were without peer. We were a Jewish organization primarily concerned with issues affecting the Jewish community, and secondarily with equality and fair enforcement of laws for everyone. I recall that many times in days past we deferred action on an item on the grounds that it was not related to Jewish community, and was thus beyond our purview.

AS ANTI-SEMITISM DECLINES, FINDING A NEW NEED TO EXIST

As years passed, the purview kept increasing along with the budget. While overt, and even latent, anti-Semitism was decreasing, our traditional mission as defender of the Jewish community was expanded to defender of all. We have become just another of many leftist "rights" organizations. This realization was confirmed when I saw a new banner, displaying an unfamiliar mission statement: "...dedicated to translating democratic ideals into a way of life for all Americans in our time."

This grandiose expansion of mission has had other consequences. The curbing of defamation—an action that has expanded to curbing of hate—a feeling, or emotion, or state of mind. If we can change people's minds and the way they think, we will not have to control their actions. The program for changing hearts and minds, A World of Difference, was created in 1985 to change prejudiced feelings through "sensitivity training". It is reportedly very successful, highly commended, and widely used by governmental agencies and many companies.

Unfortunately, my exposure to the program at a leadership conference indicated that teaching the values of diversity, multiculturalism, and cultural relativism resulted in denigrating the values and achievements of Western civilization and the desirability of a common American identity. There is now a nationwide industry of multicultural activists teaching various "sensitivity" programs which increase awareness of racial identity, and result in racial separation and racial hostility.

CREATION OF A 'CRIME'

This focus on eliminating "hate" logically led to the creation of "hate crimes," in which, a two-tier system of criminality was created: 1) those who commit crimes of violence for any reason other than hate, and 2) those who do injury solely because they hate the status or class of the victim (race, sex, nationality, religion, disability, occupation, sexual orientation, etc), Criminals of the latter class are punished more severely than those of the former, even though both may commit the same violent crime.

The punishment is levied on the thought, or feeling, or state of mind of the criminal and not the action, in keeping with the emphasis on eliminating and punishing hateful

thoughts and feelings. Creating preferred classes of crime victims is not a proper function of the American criminal justice system. Nor does it seem desirable to federalize and supplant state criminal law enforcement, which is what results from enacting "hate crime" legislation at the federal level.

The concept of "hate crimes" inevitably leads to that of "hate speech", in which offensive, insensitive, or hurtful speech is legally banned, as it is in Canada where the criminal law punishes offensive speech as a form of group defamation. A minister was arrested there for publicly preaching, in accordance with the tenets of his faith, that the practice of homosexuality was immoral.

CHEAPENING THE HOLOCAUST

The ADL has properly rejected repeated demands by some of its leaders for adoption of similar group defamation laws as violating our free speech guarantees. At the same time, the ADL has led the effort to abate hateful speech not only in the public, but even the private forum in the interest of "tolerance". There have been repeated condemnations of various incidents of speech deemed hateful, hurtful, insensitive, or embarrassing to particular groups. All too frequently, however, free speech and the expression of religious belief have been the targets of these condemnations, such as religious references by political candidates, Christian prayers at the inauguration, religious symbolism in comics, expressions of religious beliefs by sports figures, or even expressions of the politically incorrect, as was the case when conservative activist David Horowitz was condemned as racially insensitive for placing ads in college papers denying the wisdom, fairness, and practicality of the growing movement for Slavery Reparations.

The ADL has illogically compared those ads to ones denying the Holocaust, while ignoring the issue of free speech curtailment in the violent reactions by students and compliant acts by college administrators to censor the ads and prevent intelligent discussion of the significant issue involved.

GIVING UP MY FREEDOM OF SPEECH

The ADL has always been a firm and loyal supporter of Israel, but it was also an early and naive advocate of the now-defunct Oslo peace process, to the ultimate detriment of actual peace. I frequently complained that we concentrated more on the process than the substance of peace, and that true peace was unlikely to occur since the root problem was not how much land Israel would give up, but Arab refusal to accept a viable Jewish state. All of our "insider" briefings on the Mideast downplayed the risk to Israel posed by an armed Palestinian Authority or Palestinian state, and held out rosy and unrealistic prognostications of peace.

For example, at a leadership conference, we were treated to a talk by an Arab Ambassador urging us to take steps for peace, which translated into urging support for the election of Labor (Peres) over Likud (Netanyahu) in the coming election. It was portrayed, and accepted by many attendees, as a last chance for peace that was almost within our grasp. Most of us now see, in light of the past year's warfare, that the "peace" being urged was illusory and chimerical. So blinding was this hope for peace that, as reported, ADL had complimented the PA on their new school textbooks without even having read them, completely overlooking the virulent anti-Semitism contained therein. When I questioned our National Director about this, I became the target of attack and public humiliation for bringing up the matter. Nor did I endear myself by dwelling on our National Director's central role on behalf of the ADL in devising and wangling a pardon for criminal fugitive tax-evader Marc Rich.

When I expressed my views on some of these matters in various letters and articles, in which I was not identified as an ADL Board member, I was rebuked in a stern letter from our President advising that I had publicly taken positions contrary to ADL policy, which was not permitted. I had not realized that, as the price of Board membership, I had given up my freedom of speech on issues on which the ADL had taken a position.

This was much like the old Leninist doctrine of "democratic centralism", in which debate is allowed only before a policy is adopted, and no dissent is tolerated thereafter. It seems odd that an organization which boastfully espouses and teaches "tolerance" and "diversity", will not tolerate a bit of dissent and diverse viewpoint in its own lay leadership.

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