

Simon Rosenblum

An open letter to the PLO: It's time to recognize Israel is here to stay

Over the years I have written and spoken in support of your rights. I have identified with left-wing Zionists who worked from the '20s through the '40s to establish Arab-Jewish cooperation within a bi-national framework. Bi-nationalists argued that the manner of Zionist settlement in Palestine was to a significant extent predicated upon the destruction of your society. Unfortunately, this did indeed happen. While we may disagree over whether Zionism can properly be labelled as "racist" or whether it is simply a product of imperialism, we can agree that mainstream Zionism was an enemy to your people.

But history can only be transcended, not reversed. Israel was created through a process of colonization, but it is now a legitimate nation. If peace has any chance in the Middle East, the Israeli people must be granted the unconditional right of self-determination. Palestine must be divided so that each party will have a fair share. The return to 1967 borders by Israel and the creation of a Palestinian state on the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza Strip, accompanied by repatriation or compensation of Palestinian refugees by Israel is the most favorable realistic outcome. Palestinians, you are faced with an opportunity to establish your own state and give up the futile fight against impossible odds. If the current initiative for peace is not seized the seeds of a new war will quickly take root.

►Signs of change.

Recently there have been signs of a pragmatic and moderate PLO approach toward Israel—not an outright repudiation of the goal to create a secular and democratic Palestine, but indirect indications that the PLO will accept an independent entity on the West Bank and Gaza and recognize the existence of Israel. In December a PLO leader met in Paris with the chairman of the Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, Matti Peled, who announced on Israeli television on Jan. 1 that he and an undisclosed PLO leader signed a document "accepting the Israel

Council's principles as the basis for continuing meetings with us and possible future negotiations with the government." One of the Israeli Council's principles is "that the only path to peace is through co-existence between two sovereign states, each with its distinct national identity." The unnamed PLO leader, described by Peled as being "in charge of coordinating the peace efforts of the PLO," has been assumed to be Issam Sartawi. Sartawi recently said in New York that the Middle East has reached "an historical turning point that should be seized." Without question current relations between the PLO and the Israeli peace camp constitute a hopeful milestone and support Henry Kissinger's belief that "objective conditions for progress in the Middle East are better now than they have been perhaps at any time since the creation of the state of Israel."

Yet the Israeli government continues to ignore the moderate trends of the PLO and adamantly refuses to consider a West Bank-Gaza Palestinian state. Israeli doves have demonstrated that "there is somebody to talk to" but without a fundamental change in the Palestinian covenant the Israeli people will not regard current PLO moderation as being any more than a tactical move. This suspicion was only reinforced by the PLO denial of the Sartawi/Israeli Council document.

A recent opinion poll shows that nearly half of Israel's citizens favor peace talks, after the PLO recognizes the Israeli state. In December the PLO Central Council accepted a "half-a-loaf" settlement—a separate Palestinian state. The PLO has always vowed that it would accept nothing less than the elimination of the state of Israel, but has changed its position over the last two years. However, it has not yet formally abandoned the objective of a secular democratic Palestine.

►The final solution.

A West Bank-Gaza State must be a final solution, not only a step toward some ultimate PLO goal. Such a state must not be

seen as a base from which to continue the armed struggle for Israel's liquidation. This understanding seems implicit in much of the PLO's recent actions, but that is insufficient to counter the Israeli government's charges that a West Bank-Gaza Palestinian state would be an aggressive neighbor possessing Soviet-supplied weapons within the city of Jerusalem and 15 miles from Tel Aviv.

There is great doubt whether a Palestinian state in need of massive aid for its development and rehabilitation of refugees—aid that will come primarily from the anti-Soviet rich oil states—will either desire or be able to risk a pro-Soviet orientation. Furthermore, rather than being a secure base the proposed state would make it easier for Israel to hit back at any attacks against it. De-militarization of such a state is essentially a bogus issue. But a just and lasting peace must, in the words of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, include the "termination of all claims or states of belligerency" and acknowledgement of the right of every state in the area "to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force."

This brings us back to the Palestinian National Charter, or covenant, which commits the PLO to the liberation of all Palestine. According to Sartawi, the PLO presently refuses to acknowledge Israel's right to exist because "recognition comes at the end of the process of negotiating peace, not before it starts. We cannot give up our best bargaining card at the start."

And, in fact, recognition of Israel is the PLO's major bargaining card, but it cannot be played as a trump card, although as a lead it could strengthen peace-oriented groups in Israel.

It would be a big mistake to exaggerate the limited number of Israeli doves. Rabin narrowly defeated hawkish Defense Minister Peres in his effort to win the leadership of the Labor party, and his maneuverability is limited because of differences in the party. Even more ominous, Labor may be thrown out of office in the May

elections and replaced by an even more intransigent right.

If Rabin is to be re-elected and the peace parties are to gain leverage, the PLO must renounce the covenant when the Palestine National Council convenes its March meeting. The PLO would be making a great error if they postpone the council meeting until late in the spring because the results of the Israeli election can be affected by renunciation of the PLO charter.

The PLO leadership presently seems to be counting on the Arab states' promises to the Palestinians. Such an approach has been disastrous for Palestinians in the past, and Sadat's recent suggestions of links between the PLO and Jordan should be seen as a squeeze on the PLO to accept less than a separate and independent Palestinian state. Unless the PLO adopts a specific program advocating a West Bank-Gaza state and recognizing the legitimacy of the State of Israel, the Arab governments will bargain away Palestinian interests and the U.S. will not be pressured to recognize a separate Palestinian state. Ironically Israel, by not permitting West Bank delegates (pro-recognition moderates) to attend the council meeting, is effectively blocking the initiatives within the PLO to recognize the Zionist state.

One crucial point must be understood. The issues of peace and war, recognition or non-recognition of Israeli and Palestinian rights, cannot be objects of tactical games. They must be spelled out clearly and unequivocally. A settlement cannot be imposed on Israel. The Israeli people must accept it, even if they do not enthusiastically greet it. Only the immediate revision of the Palestinian covenant will allow the current seeds of peace to bear fruit. Remember: the roots of war are already planted.

Simon Rosenblum is a Canadian whose writings have appeared in Israel, Lebanon, France and the U.S.

Dan Marshall

Was Sadlowski out of joint with the times?

The election campaign of Ed Sadlowski for president of the United Steel Workers (USW) attracted unprecedented attention from the national media and vitriolic attacks from other union officials. Based on Sadlowski's militant rhetoric and tough-talking style, the press painted him as a ghost from the past, as someone who would return the labor movement to the industrial warfare of the 1930s.

Much of Sadlowski's appeal to rank-and-file steelworkers—and to the left/liberal "outsiders" who worked in his campaign and supported him financially—was based on this let's-go-out-and-fight-the-bosses image and on his commitment to greater union democracy. But Sadlowski's emphasis on the strike weapon, and his call for unionists to adopt a purely adversary relationship to management, may have been his undoing.

It's all but impossible for labor to return to the fighting days of the 1930s. With massive government intervention in the economy and the flowering of multinational corporations, strikes are not as capable of raising workers' real wages as they once were.

In the case of steel, the threat every three years of a nationwide strike meant stockpiling, layoffs, and the loss of jobs due to automation and cheap foreign imports of steel. In less capital-intensive industries, strikes provide a convenient excuse for companies to pick up and run away to the non-union South or abroad.

For public employees, strikes have often generated tremendous public hostility that local governments and the courts have been able to exploit successfully in anti-union measures. Last year's San Francisco craft workers strike was an example.

For this reason, labor unions have been seeking alternatives to the simple exercise of their "economic muscle." Jerry Wurf of AFSCME, for example, has proposed compulsory arbitration for some public employees. Progressive trade union leaders like William Winpisinger of the Machinists union have turned to organizations like the Institute of Collective Bargaining, which actively promotes labor/management cooperation, and to an emphasis on redistributing income in the U.S. away from capital.

In the USW, I.W. Abel turned to the Experimental Negotiating Agreement to deal with a dire situation. The major problem with the ENA was that it was negotiated behind closed doors without an opportunity for the membership to participate or to vote on the final proposal.

The best explanation I've heard for Sadlowski's defeat is that many union members perceived him as "strike-happy." There was apparently a large turnout of older workers who feared that Sadlowski's opposition to the ENA meant that he would return union members to the days of strike threats, stockpiling and layoffs. Sadlowski's image and rhetoric increased this fear.

Sadlowski also lost heavily in Canada, where Landrum-Griffin protections do not apply. McBride triumphed there because he was running with Lynn Williams, a Canadian social democrat and a founding member of the New Democratic Party.

Sadlowski's campaign was in many ways positive. It indicated an enormous amount of rank-and-file dissatisfaction with union policies. It will act as a constant pressure on McBride's future policies. Steelworkers Fight Back is clearly committed to strengthening the rank-and-file movement in the union and Sadlowski's campaign provided it with contacts throughout the country.

Nor is Sadlowski's defeat a disaster. But he lost in part because he advocated an approach that is essentially a throw-back to a different period in the growth of American capitalism.

The left needs to formulate a more sophisticated, broader conception of trade union tactics and strategy, one that comprehends the multi-faceted nature of the class struggle today. That conflict is not just between labor and management in a given plant or company, but is equally centered in the political arena where the ruling class directs the entire social structure and where many decisions are made that affect the economy, capital's options and the living conditions of the working class as a whole.

In 1977 the bosses are not just sitting in corporate boardrooms plotting ingen-

ious ways to buy off labor aristocrats. They are organized in the Business Roundtable, the National Association of Manufacturers, the Chamber of Commerce, the Trilateral Commission and other well-heeled groups that attempt to shape government policy to their profit priorities. As political institutions, labor unions are in the forefront, trying to counteract that power.

Meanwhile, what the left often denounces as simple class collaboration may be a complex trade-off where unions relinquish something to gain greater job security for their own members or more political power. The ENA has stabilized the steel industry to the extent that negotiators can realistically discuss union demands for lifetime job security. While the specific provisions of this arrangement are not yet defined, it could signal a significant breakthrough on what issues are negotiated in contract talks and in limiting management prerogatives to cut the workforce at its discretion.

In general, socialists should be very cautious not to romanticize strikes as the most pure form of the class struggle, but to examine all the ways the ruling class maintains societal hegemony and how labor unions and other working-class institutions can effectively fight the domination. ■

LIFE IN THE U.S.

San Francisco's unorthodox sheriff

Photo by Gary Freedman

I was a philosophy major, working my way through San Francisco State, and I was looking for the best-paying night job I could find, so I became a San Francisco policeman.

By Art Goldberg

San Francisco. "The prospect of going to jail is not inviting," the sheriff told the media as he left the courtroom, "but the San Francisco County Jail is a very safe place—for this sheriff or any other inmate."

As San Francisco's sheriff, Richard Hongisto's major duty is to run the two county jail facilities. He is also charged with carrying out court-ordered evictions.

Because he failed to evict 80 elderly tenants from Chinatown's International Hotel last month, Hongisto was cited for contempt of court, and sentenced to five days in jail—not in San Francisco, but in adjacent San Mateo county. (ITT, Feb. 16)

The sentence is being appealed, not because Hongisto fears becoming a prisoner, but because if the contempt finding is upheld, he could be removed from office. That would delight a number of conservative San Franciscans, particularly Quentin Kopp, the powerful president of the Board of Supervisors.

Hongisto's persistent demands over the years for better food, better medical care, more recreation facilities, clean bedding and expanded educational programs for inmates, has angered the tight-fisted Kopp. Those things cost money, and Kopp would prefer to spend it on "property tax relief" for homeowners and businesses rather than on prisoners, 98 percent of whom, Hongisto estimates, are poor, working class, and minority people.

When, on top of this, Hongisto maintained that his undermanned department would be unable to evict the International Hotel's tenants because of the possibility of a violent conflict, other voiced were added to Kopp's. "The reason the eviction hasn't taken place," snarled Judge John Benson during a court hearing, "is because the sheriff hasn't wanted it to."

►No ordinary sheriff.

San Franciscans have been aware for some time now that Hongisto isn't an ordinary sheriff. His mild, unpretentious manner, his unorthodox appointments, his advocacy of inmates rights and his avoidance of the usual "law and order" rhetoric set him apart immediately.

Underneath that exterior though, Hongisto has demonstrated that he can be tough and resilient. From the moment he first took office in January 1972 he's had to cope with strong opposition from mayors and supervisors who say they want to improve jail conditions, but never seem able to find the necessary funds to do so.

Nevertheless, from the outset the sheriff waged a public and private campaign to increase his department's budget. With the extra money he completely repainted the jails, upgraded the quality of the food (he's still unsatisfied with it), vastly improved medical and dental care (he built a new, four chair dental clinic), installed more showers so prisoners could bathe more than once a week, and obtained new laundry equipment, so clothes and bedding could be kept clean.

These were the basic and obvious things everyone knew had to be done if prisoners were to be treated like human beings, but Hongisto had to fight for almost every single increased appropriation. At one point he encouraged a group of inmates to sue him and other city officials in federal court as a means of forcing more revenue into the jail budget.

At the same time the sheriff had to battle hostility from a large group of deputies who were not taken with his progressive approach. Those who continued to follow the old "hard line" were pressured to change or to resign. Several deputies were fired for beating prisoners, insulting the public and making degrading racial or ethnic remarks.

"Our deputies belong to the Teamsters union," Hongisto said with a smile in a recent interview, "and some of them had the social attitudes of Attila the Hun."

The departed deputies have for the most part been replaced by women and minorities, plus a number of out-front gays. Given the turnover in personnel and his overwhelming victory in the 1975 elections, Hongisto now feels that those actively trying to undermine his new programs are a small minority within the department.

►Other programs.

Those programs go far beyond improving basic living conditions at the jails. Visiting hours have been expanded, and the sheriff obtained funding to set up a shuttle system to bring friends and relatives in on visiting days. In addition, a children's playground has been built at the main facility. The jail now has a law library, and a staff of volunteer attorneys to assist inmates with their legal problems.

He has also set up job training, job counseling and job finding programs at the jail, run mainly by volunteers he has recruited. Hongisto sees this as one way of assuring that the same people do not keep returning to jail. "The most important thing is for the inmate to have a job before he gets out," the sheriff said, recognizing that poverty is a major cause of crime. "We have to get them jobs and give them job preparation while they're still in jail."

Hongisto has learned that most county jail prisoners are either illiterate or semi-illiterate. Therefore he built six new classrooms and talked someone into donating a \$3,000 reading machine. He has found that education makes people more verbal and therefore better able to cope with the world and with those around them. He places no restrictions on what prisoners can read, and encourages classes in government and political economy.

"In some ways," he commented, "you can say that the people who become the most revolutionary in jail are the ones who are the most rehabilitated. They have a clear understanding of the way society works."

►Reducing overcrowding.

Hongisto has also made strides in reducing overcrowding at the jails. He has done this by looking for alternatives to incarceration. Psychologically disturbed inmates get special medical treatment, alcoholics are dispatched almost immediately to a nearby hospital and a good number of inmates are simply paroled early. The parole project has been singularly successful, with few parolees finding their way back to jail or prison. It's now being looked upon as a model project for the rest of California.

San Francisco's sheriff has also created a Women's Service Unit to deal in depth with the special problems of women inmates, located post-release housing for prisoners at affordable rents and opened an outreach office in a working class part of the city, where former inmates can go for help and counselling.



Richard Hongisto, San Francisco's Sheriff: "There is some question as to whether prisons ever rehabilitate anyone, but there is little doubt that they can destroy people when they're not properly run."

He has also pressed for prison reform legislation at the state capitol.

I wondered how he ever got involved in law enforcement. "I was a philosophy major, working my way through San Francisco State," he said with a smile, "and I was looking for the best paying night job I could find, so I became a San Francisco policeman. Then I saw how screwed up the department was, so I decided to stay and try to do something about it."

He stayed for ten years, spending most of that time with the Community Relations Division, working in the Haight and in Hunter's Point, a predominantly black area. He declined to join the Police Officers Association and instead became the only white member of Officers for Justice.

In the late '60s the police department abandoned community relations for "riot control." Soon afterwards Hongisto resigned. He went to work as a reporter for a public television station and at the same time went to graduate school in criminology. In 1971 he went to Cuba as a journalist, and later that year decided to run for sheriff.

"I knew the jail system was incredibly bad," he said, "and I wanted to see it cleaned up. I felt there was nobody running who could do the job." The incumbent sheriff had decided not to run again after a drinking problem became front page news. Hongisto ran against three law and order types and scored an upset victory.

"I decided quite a while ago," he explained, "that as long as I have to work,

it would be in public service. My father was an ironworker and from the time I was a kid the idea of someone else making a profit from my labor never appealed to me."

►Conflict with Gov. Brown.

He realizes that his outlook is in direct conflict with Gov. Jerry Brown's view that "prisons are for punishment."

"There is some question as to whether prisons ever rehabilitate anyone," Hongisto said, "but there is little doubt that they can destroy people when they're not properly run." He believes Brown is ignoring that aspect of the problem. He is disturbed that about one inmate a year died in his jail, although more than five died each year before he took over.

If the contempt citation is upheld on appeal and there is an attempt to remove him from office, it will be an interesting battle. More than any other public official in the city Hongisto has attempted to involve the public in the workings of his department. He has developed strong ties to many of San Francisco's communities.

The results of his outreach effort were evident in the 1975 elections. Despite adverse media coverage during most of his first term and criticism from the mayor, supervisors, and a hostile Grand Jury, he received more votes than any other candidate on the ballot. Running close behind him in total votes was the person most likely to try to remove him, conservative supervisor Quentin Kopp.

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