

SHALOM

Jewish Peace Letter

Vol. 40 No. 4

Published by the Jewish Peace Fellowship

May 2011



DAVID BROMWICH

The CIA, the Libyan Rebellion, and the President

ONE OF BARACK OBAMA'S first acts as president was to say that Guantanamo must go. It did not go. Soon after, he said that the Israeli settlements must go. They expanded. Obama made his peace in the end with Guantanamo and the Israeli settlements. He restarted the military tribunals at Guantanamo — a feature of the Bush-Cheney constitution which he once had explicitly deplored — and recently went out of his way to defend the Guantanamo-like

abuse (compulsory nakedness and sleep deprivation) inflicted on an American prisoner, Bradley Manning, in the Marine Corps brig at Quantico. One had come to think of "X must go" assertions by Obama as speculative prefaces to a nonexistent work. His words, in his mind, are actions. When he speaks them once or twice, he has done what he was put here to do. If the existing powers defy his wishes, he embraces the powers and continues on his way. *(Please continue on page 3)*

Stefan Merken

The Jewish Peace Fellowship sees Judaism as a nonviolent search for justice and peace. We seek to do this not only for our own people but also for the entire human family.

— Rabbi Philip Bentley, *“The Jewish Pursuit of Peace.”*

OVER THE 70 YEARS of our existence, many of you — our loyal members and friends — have generously supported the JPF. You have always been there for us. We want to thank you, and to express our deepest gratitude.

Now we need to ask you once again for your financial support for the Jewish Peace Fellowship.

Several years ago it became apparent that printing a hard copy of our SHALOM newsletter and mailing it via snail-mail was too expensive. In discussing the future of the JPF, we decided to send the newsletter out for free via Internet e-mail. Thus far the experiment has proven successful, since it allows JPF members to stay in the “loop,” and to receive more SHALOMS than before on a regular basis. But at the same time, we no longer receive payments for subscriptions from libraries and academic institutions, not to mention non-JPF members who subscribed to the print version of SHALOM.

STEFAN MERKEN is chair of the Jewish Peace Fellowship.

In February 2010, the first online SHALOM newsletter went out on the Web. We are proud to say that SHALOM has become a well-received, stimulating and insightful publication.

The JPF still maintains an office in Nyack, N.Y., staffed by a part-time assistant. We have recently published newly updated editions of *Roots of Jewish Nonviolence* and *Wrestling with Your Conscience*, the previous editions having been sold out. We still follow closely draft and national service issues, and remain in close contact with other anticonscription organizations. A JPF representative, Dr. E. James Lieberman, sits on the board of the Center on Conscience and War. Phyllis Taylor represents us on the Prison Visitation Board. And through the years numerous JPF members have been active on the Fellowship of Reconciliation’s national council. We have never lagged in our support for Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation. And most importantly, *we are still the only Jewish voice dedicated to peace and justice for all within the American Jewish community.*

Nevertheless, our donations have fallen off since the time we included a hard copy of SHALOM with an enclosed return envelope. So please consider contributing to the Jewish Peace Fellowship. We can’t do it without you and without your donations.

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David Bromwich: *The CIA, the Libyan Rebellion, and the President*

(Continued from page 1)

The Egyptian protest of January and February saw a new siege of wishful commandments and reversals by the president. He told Mubarak to go. Then he told him to stay a while. Mubarak said he would stay, but after a time, he went; and in the mind of Obama, it appears, there was a relation of cause and effect between his initial request and the final result. He was consequently emboldened.

He said that Muammar Gaddafi must go. Gaddafi stayed. When the protest that gathered against Gaddafi would not disperse, the dictator shot at the protesters; and when some of them turned to armed rebellion, he went to war against the rebels. Obama for his part seemed ready to retire from an unpromising scene. His dryly prudent secretary of defense encouraged him to do so.

Then other forces intervened. We were told the forces were “the women around the president” — Susan Rice, Samantha Power and Hillary Clinton. These officials admired what they thought the U.S. had done in Kosovo, and they felt remorse about what the U.S. failed to do in Rwanda. President Obama was brought to think that three members of his “team of rivals,” including a member of his cabinet, ought to prevail against another member of his cabinet whose cautious advice he was tempted to follow. So, it is said, the president followed the women and obeyed a principle higher than prudence, a principle that he named, in his belated speech of explanation on March 28, “the conscience of the world.”

He approved the enforcement of a no-fly zone, which has turned out to mean, as Robert Gates said it would, an air war backing the rebels against the government of Libya.

This, to repeat, was a fable that people were telling and were getting ready to retell. On March 31 it was turned upside down by a *New York Times* story by Mark Mazzetti and Eric Schmitt.

We had thought that, at best, President Obama knew more than we knew; he had measured the likely costs and decided that, though many innocent people would be killed along with the servants of tyranny, he was acting for the sake of the goals he avowed. At worst, we may have thought that he wanted, for partly selfish reasons, to attach his fame to a coming triumph of freedom, and that he was willing to pay a price in bloodshed so long as he could also believe he was saving lives.

The truth is far different. Not only is it the case that many in the rebel party fought to kill Americans in Iraq; that Al Qaeda has backed the rebellion; and that even the supreme commander of NATO forces, Admiral James G. Stavridis,

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has lately been disturbed by “flickers” of an Al Qaeda force within the rebellion.

Those reports alone were sufficiently alarming, and they were confirmed by an omission in his March 28 speech, when the president declined to say a word about the identity of the rebel army to which he gave his support. Even then, one might have thought as well-behaved people are taught to think: What does any of us really know? But the Mazzetti-Schmitt story shows beyond any doubt that the Libya adventure from the start was a toxic brew: a commitment to be understood not in the light of the Egyptian protest but of the American activities in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen.

According to Mazzetti and Schmitt, the CIA and its British equivalent MI6 scoured Libya as far back as 2003, initially in the effort to persuade Muammar Gaddafi to give up his nuclear weapons program. When that effort succeeded, the intelligence operatives went away, or so Mazzetti and Schmitt suggest. When the February protests began and a crackdown followed, the CIA and MI6 went back into Libya and picked up the old connections. What are they doing now on the ground? Arranging targets for air strikes with the help



of U-2 spy planes and a Global Hawk drone. Also learning of and creating links between the rebel groups to facilitate enhanced advisory work at a later date. In short, doing everything but fight, it would seem; but Mazzetti and Schmitt add that “dozens” of British special forces accompany the operatives from the CIA and MI6. What do special forces do?

The meaning of the *Times* report can be fully grasped only if one augments its findings with a March 26 McClatchy news syndicate story by Chris Adams.

Adams sketches the career of the former chief military officer of Colonel Gaddafi’s army, Khalifa Hifter, who was recently appointed to lead the rebel army. (The article does not say who appointed him.) The ascent of Hifter is a study in itself. After leading Gaddafi’s disastrous war against Chad in the late 1980’s, Adams reports, General Hifter (also known as Haftar, Hefter, and Huftur) retired to “suburban Virginia,” where he has lived for much of the last two decades. It has been reported elsewhere that the suburb in question is Vienna, Virginia: five minutes from CIA headquarters at Langley.

However the facts are to be explained, this close associate of an African dictator whom American officials have long regarded as a dangerous madman somehow obtained easy entrance to the U.S. And his safe return to Libya was facilitated at a remarkably opportune moment.

It seems then that a long train of earlier commitments in Libya was set in motion as soon as the Egyptian uprising began. “Kinetic military action” is the term of art for a policy whose content perhaps no single person is in full possession of.

Yet one thing is clear, thanks to Mazzetti and Schmitt. “Several weeks ago, President Obama signed a secret finding authorizing the CIA to provide arms and other support to Libyan rebels.” It is said that the arms have not yet been sent; but the timing is interesting. The order was signed just about the moment that President Obama was lauding the triumph of nonviolence in Egypt. The *Times* reporters wisely let the serial flat reiterations of “no comment” from leading officials speak for themselves.

The upshot is this: An event that we Americans were led to believe was an autonomous rising on the model of Egypt turns out to have been deeply compromised from the start, and compromised by American meddling. And the president himself, far from having been balked in mid-decision because he is a man of skeptical and hesitant mind, took a long time to decide because he was face to face with a moment such as John Kennedy recognized at the brink of the Bay of Pigs invasion, whose 50th anniversary was marked on April 17. After three days of ill-fated support for the anti-Castro rebels, President Kennedy drew back from that disaster. Eventually, he made a public apology to the country.

All the external parties are in Libya for different reasons. Things could not have gotten this far without the CIA. But the president was also heeding pressure from France’s Nicolas Sarkozy and Britain’s David Cameron; and what those European leaders wanted was the assurance of oil contracts for Europe. Italy, meanwhile, is fearful of an influx of refugees. All these things President Obama knew, but he was careful to mention none when he spoke to the nation. He opened and closed with a salute to American troops. He uttered — in a truculent manner that was new to him — a stream of wishful words about American support for freedom everywhere.

His Nobel Prize speech in December 2009 had foreshadowed the declarations on Monday:

The United States of America has helped underwrite global security for more than six decades with the blood of our citizens and the strength of our arms. The service and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform has promoted peace and prosperity from Germany to Korea, and enabled democracy to take hold in places like the Balkans. We have borne this burden not because we seek to impose our will. We have done so out of enlightened self-interest — because we seek a better future.

Wishful commandments need a fantasy-structure to support them, a history that omits words like Vietnam,

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Chile, El Salvador, East Timor. This was remarked at the time by observers of Obama in Oslo. The neoliberal and neoconservative strategists for their part admired that earlier speech just as now they admire Obama's kinetic military action in Libya.

Here is the parallel passage of abridged history from the speech of explanation on March 28:

For generations, the United States of America has played a unique role as an anchor of global security and as an advocate for human freedom. Mindful of the risks and costs of military action, we are naturally reluctant to use force to solve the world's many challenges. But when our interests and values are at stake, we have a responsibility to act.

The doctrine may sound harmless and saccharine. It is, in fact, more anarchic in its implications than the Bush doctrine of 2002, which reserved the right to respond to any physical threat even while the threat was forming. Obama goes a big step further. He reserves the right to respond to spiritual threats and not just physical ones — threats to our “values” as well as our “interests” — and to do so at any time and in any place where he judges our values to be “at stake.” Where entities are invoked as resistant to empirical measure as values, the ordinary rules of evidence no longer even have to be flouted by forgery. Rules of evidence simply do not apply here. Our values are what we say they are. If we think they are threatened, we have a warrant to go to war.

Robert Gates's opposition to any U.S. involvement in Libya always made obvious sense. Compared to Obama, Gates is a strict interpreter of interests as distinct from values; concerned with “vital interests” only, not the second cousins twice removed of a neighbor of a vital interest. The sense of Gates is that we can only fight a few wars at once. He has worked to cut budgets as secretary of defense; no one is in a better position to point out the literal cost of another war. Gates's opposition to the Libya adventure, however, now makes a different kind of sense. Before he returned from Texas A&M to serve as George W. Bush's second secretary of defense, Gates had been deputy director of the CIA under William Casey. He held the office for three years, starting in April 1986, but his first nomination to serve as director of the CIA was sunk by his association with the Iran-Contra scandal. Gates, if anyone, knows a bungled CIA operation when he sees one.

What then of “the president's women,” who are said to have overcome Obama's reservations and convinced him to authorize the no-fly policy? As Gates made clear and as Samantha Power, Susan Rice and Hillary Clinton surely knew from his testimony if from no other source, a no-fly zone all

along was a euphemistic cover for air war against the government of Libya. Did Power and Rice know the extent of CIA and MI6 involvement in the rebellion? The question should be asked of them. And did Hillary Clinton know? One would have thought she must; but one can't help remembering another secretary of state, Colin Powell, who suspected but didn't know the dingy quality of the evidence on which he based his argument to the UN General Assembly for the bombing and invasion of Iraq.

Similar questions arise about some other persons who, by the manner of their cheering for Obama's undeclared limited war, have offered a retroactive justification for any kind of war, limited or unlimited, open or secret. To this category belong opinion-makers like William Kristol and Robert Kagan, who are well connected in the national security establishment; and the architect of the Iraq war, Paul Wolfowitz, who as a guest on *This Week* on March 20 said the U.S. should support the rebels even if we don't know who they are. Wolfowitz could not have meant what he seemed to be saying. It follows that he must have known and meant something he preferred not to say.

An odd point about the *Times* story is that it does not run as the lead; also, it is peculiarly foreshortened — a big story on a small-story diet. This may suggest that clandestine support of the Libyan rebellion was almost an open secret. Thomas Friedman, the journalist whom President Obama has done most to cultivate, ended his March 30 column with the weird sentence: “Dear Lord, please make President Obama lucky!” This was a mode of prayer more plaintive and jittery than the context gave a motive for.

Friedman's column also contained a string of excited sentences bursting with the pride of a secret knowledge: “Welcome to the Middle East of 2011! You want the truth about it? You can't handle the truth.” Even in a writer as vain and slapdash as Friedman, the contempt for democratic discussion in such a passage is astounding; yet it may give a clue to the tenor of his sessions with Obama. One recalls that another influential *Times* reporter, James Reston, obeyed a request of the White House and toned down the paper's disclosure of the Bay of Pigs invasion. When Friedman strutted for his readers — “You can't handle the truth” — did he know the *Times* had decided not to repeat the mistake, and that in the next 24 hours Obama's need of luck would greatly increase?

The American public anyway owes a debt to Mark Mazetti and Eric Schmitt. By their story, an entire regime of dissimulation has been exposed. President Obama, who had traveled far already from his origins when he reinstated military tribunals and defended the treatment of Bradley

Manning, is now seen to have cast his lot with a long history of secret wars and overthrows and kinetic military operations extending back to Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954, Vietnam in 1963, and Nicaragua in 1984.

Many things President Obama said in his speech were wishful. The affirmation that NATO “has taken command” was wishful. So, too, was the picture of the United States “for generations” as a unique force for justice and courageous sacrifice, in a world otherwise populated by the tyrannous, the craven, the selfish and the weak. Many other things Obama said were half true: the suggestion for example that the consideration at the front of his mind when he gave his speech was the safety of American jets and American ships far beyond the reach of Libyan gunnery. But we have now, in this baffling administration, passed out of the twilight of ambiguity. We have entered the land of lies. It is a region where many comments add up to no comment, and where every partial truth must be parsed for legalistic reservations folded into fugitive turns of grammar.

For now, the president is committed to two propositions. Muammar Gaddafi must go; and — as if this went hand in hand with the first — major involvement by the U.S. in Libya will last for days not weeks. He has also promised there will be no “boots on the ground.” (Or does this, too, compass a mental reservation? Does it mean to exclude only official U.S. armed forces boots?)

Delusions of grandeur, which have always been the lower layer of President Obama’s wishful commandments, were made more perilous in this case by delusions of convenience. The president likes things clean. But there is nothing clean about what we are doing in Libya. The fact that President Obama several weeks ago signed a secret finding to autho-

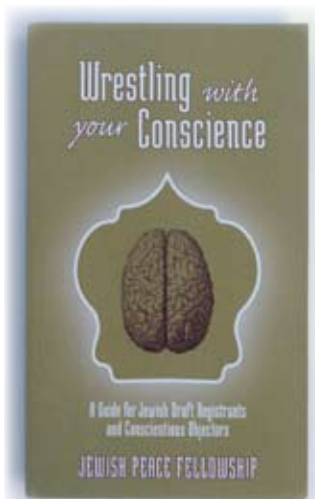
rize the CIA shipment of arms to the rebels in Libya may, with profit, be compared to two passages from a short speech about Libya that he delivered on February 23:

The suffering and bloodshed is outrageous and it is unacceptable. So are threats and orders to shoot peaceful protesters and further punish the people of Libya. These actions violate international norms and every standard of common decency. This violence must stop. . . .

So let me be clear. The change that is taking place across the region is being driven by the people of the region. This change doesn’t represent the work of the United States or any foreign power.

Obama made those assertions in February. He confirmed them by implication on March 28. The words were either false when spoken, or else so misleading as to evade falsehood by a hair’s-breadth equivocation. The appeal against armed violence, by the leader of a superpower who either has just approved or is about to approve the shipment of arms to a rebel force in a civil war, fits the common idea of mendacity. The affirmation that the U.S. and other foreign powers had no hand in the rebellion — to judge by the “several weeks” of CIA activity described by Mazzetti and Schmitt — was plainly false or about to be falsified. Anyone in America or Europe who did not guess these things earlier is in a position to know them now. ☆

— *This article first appeared on TomDispatch.com and huffingtonpost.com.*



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Lawrence S. Wittner

The Peace Movement Today

RECENTLY, WHEN commentators have bothered to notice the American peace movement, they have pronounced it dead. But this is far from the case.

Admittedly, it is remarkably fragmented. Certainly, it contains no organization that plays a role comparable to NOW in the women's movement, the NAACP in the racial justice movement, or the AFL-CIO in the labor movement. Instead, the Fellowship of Reconciliation draws together religious pacifists, the War Resisters League enrolls secular pacifists, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom mobilizes women, Veterans for Peace appeals to veterans, and U.S. Labor Against the War rallies unionists. In addition, there is a multiplicity of small groups without specific social constituencies that are scattered about the nation.

By far the largest peace organization in the United States is Peace Action, which was born out of the merger in 1987 of the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy and the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign. With about 100,000 dues-paying members, active affiliates throughout the country, and excellent relations with the Progressive Caucus in Congress, Peace Action has some clout. Even so, it represents only a fraction of the peace movement.

Given the movement's organizational fragmentation, coalitions tend to be weak and evanescent. Over the past decade, two rival coalitions — United for Peace and Justice (which drew together some of the more mainstream groups) and ANSWER (which appealed to left sectarians) — sought for a time to work together, but ultimately found this impossible. Both coalitions are now collapsing, and a new venture, the United National Antiwar Committee (UNAC), is trying



to develop a united movement. But it remains uncertain that UNAC, which focuses on reviving mass antiwar demonstrations, has a broad enough appeal to do so.

Although the peace movement surged during the era of the George W. Bush administration, the claim that it has collapsed since that time is quite overdrawn. Yes, in recent years, peace coalitions have declined and antiwar demonstrations have dwindled in size. But these developments reflect, in part, the fact that many people, including peace activists, don't see much point at this time in constantly turning out for peace marches. After all, there are many other ways to oppose war and militarism. Also, the polls show clearly that most Americans now oppose current U.S. wars and military occupations. In fact, some peace groups, like Peace Action, actually experienced significant membership growth last year.

As part of its ongoing efforts, the peace movement takes on a multiplicity of projects — from opposing military recruitment in the schools to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But three issues, particularly, seem to be on its front burner today.

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The first is ending the Afghanistan war. The latest round of U.S. military intervention in that land began in the first year of the Bush administration and since then has shown no signs of abating. Indeed, the Obama administration recently increased the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. This lengthy war has resulted in substantial death and destruction among Afghans and significant casualty levels among foreign troops (including nearly 12,000 casualties among American soldiers). According to the highly-respected National Priorities Project, the cost to U.S. taxpayers has been roughly \$382 billion thus far. Not surprisingly, polls show that 72 percent of Americans want an escalated timetable for withdrawal of U.S. troops. Given these factors, plus the dubious benefits of the war, the peace movement and its congressional allies have an opportunity to force the president to negotiate a settlement of the conflict and withdraw all American forces before his announced target date of 2014.

Another area attracting peace movement attention is cutting military spending. Given the heavy emphasis upon reducing the federal deficit, a fierce scramble has begun over which programs should be slashed. In this context, it is hard to imagine that military spending — which currently accounts for 58 percent of federal discretionary spending and is slated for another increase under President Obama's proposed budget for FY 2012 — will escape the budget cutters' axe. It certainly seems excessive. U.S. military spending accounts for nearly half of global military expenditures, and the number two spender is China, whose military budget is only one-sixth that of the United States. With well over \$700 billion going annually to the Pentagon, ongoing U.S. wars and U.S. nuclear weapons programs, Peace Action and elements of the peace movement are joining with supporters

of public education, housing, health care and other human services in a Move the Money campaign, designed to shift federal resources from military to social spending. Numerous mainstream groups are already on board with this campaign, including the United Auto Workers, the United Electrical Workers, and SEIU 1199 New England.

Finally, the peace movement continues to champion nuclear disarmament. Although the New START Treaty represented a step forward along these lines, it was only a modest one. Tens of thousands of nuclear weapons remain in national arsenals, with thousands of them on alert, ready to wipe out the human race. Moreover, to secure enough Republican support to have the treaty ratified in the Senate, the Obama administration agreed to back a 10-year, \$185 billion program of "modernization" for the U.S. nuclear weapons production complex and for U.S. nuclear weapons. Thus, despite the president's rhetorical support for nuclear abolition, it looks like the United States and other nations are on a very slow track to ridding the world of the nuclear menace. In this context, the peace movement has begun to push back, calling for rejection of nuclear "modernization" and the opening of negotiations for a treaty to provide for a nuclear weapons-free world. The demand to reduce the federal budget deficit should also strengthen the hand of the peace movement on this issue, for, if the U.S. government is really interested in abolishing nuclear weapons, why should it spend another \$185 billion producing them?

In short, the American peace movement is alive and well. But it certainly faces some serious challenges. ☆

— *This essay first appeared on HistoryNewsNetwork.org.*

CORRECTION: Due to an editing error, "The J Street Conference," which appeared in our April 2011 issue, described Dennis Ross, special assistant to the president and member of the National Security Council, as

having participated in a panel discussion after making a presentation. In fact, Ross did *not* participate in the panel discussion that followed. We regret the error.

SHALOM *Jewish Peace Letter*

Published by the Jewish Peace Fellowship • Box 271 • Nyack, N.Y. 10960 • (845) 358-4601
HONORARY PRESIDENT Rabbi Philip J. Bentley • **CHAIR** Stefan Merken • **VICE PRESIDENT** Rabbi Leonard Beerman
EDITORS Murray Polner & Adam Simms • **CONTRIBUTING EDITORS** Lawrence S. Wittner & Patrick Henry

Established in 1941

E-mail: jpf@forusa.org • World Wide Web: <http://www.jewishpeacefellowship.org>
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Jack Ross

Reconsidering Elmer Berger

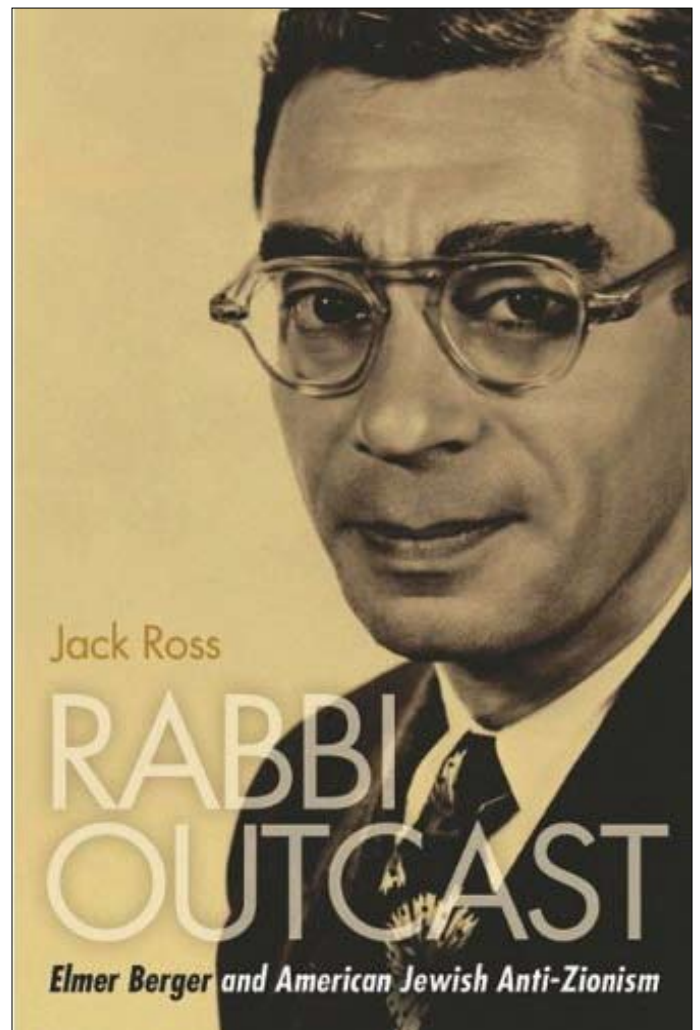
WHAT DO American Jews believe? Old clichés speak of two Jews having three opinions, and stereotype has it that American Jews are among the most avowedly secular of all Americans. Yet beneath the surface, probably a majority of American Jews do believe (in Maimonides’ phrase, “with a perfect faith”) in something called “Jewish peoplehood,” which is a more benign term for Jewish nationalism or Zionism. A sacred story has emerged — equal to, if not greater than, any biblical narrative — of the exile culminating in the Holocaust, followed by literal redemption in the founding of the State of Israel.

Thus was my discovery of the history of Reform Jewish anti-Zionism in the U.S. a revelation. As the definitive statement of belief by the founders of the American Reform movement put it, “We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore, expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any laws concerning the Jewish state.” Just before his death in 1900, the father of American Reform Judaism, Isaac Mayer Wise, denounced the nascent Zionist movement as “a prostitution of Israel’s holy cause to a madman’s dance of unsound politicians.” A more perfect description of the modern Israel lobby there never could be.

Zionists began to make their presence known in the Reform rabbinate by the 1920’s, after the issuance of the Balfour Declaration by America’s British wartime ally made the establishment of a Jewish state official policy for the Western democracies. The changing politics of American Jewish identity were therefore inextricably linked to America’s rise as a world power. At the same time, Reform Zionists such as Stephen Wise were pushing for the establishment of an official governing body of American Jewry. This was looked upon by Classical Reform rabbis with horror, seeing in it the rabbinical despotism backed up by princes of the old order against which Reform Judaism had been founded.

The American Council for Judaism (ACJ) was founded over several months in 1942, after several Reform rabbis dissented from their movement’s endorsement of the Zionist

JACK ROSS is author of *Rabbi Outcast: Elmer Berger and American Jewish Anti-Zionism* (Potomac Books).



plan to raise an army of “Palestinian and stateless Jews” that would be granted a status similar to that of the Free French and Belgian forces. The following year an elaborate “American Jewish Conference” was held, which codified the existence of an “official” Jewish community committed to Zionism. It was in response to this that the American Council for Judaism released its official platform in 1943, containing its vision for a future Middle East that should be heeded now more than ever: “a democratic government in which our fel-

low Jews shall be free Palestinians whose religion is Judaism, even as we are Americans whose religion is Judaism.”

Rabbi Elmer Berger, the ostensible subject of my book, *Rabbi Outcast*, was hired as the executive director of the American Council for Judaism. He had spent the preceding decade as a congregational rabbi in Michigan, and had been mentored by his boyhood rabbi, Louis Wolsey, who had been the driving force behind the founding of the ACJ. Berger initially became opposed to Zionism after being put off by the aggressiveness of the major Zionist fundraising apparatus, the United Jewish Appeal, which, beginning in the late 1930's, came to completely dominate all American Jewish philanthropy and direct it toward a Zionist agenda. It was also the heavy-handedness of the UJA that, ironically, produced the American Council for Judaism's most important lay leader, the philanthropist Lessing Rosenwald.

Indeed, in 1956, when the Reform movement finally issued what effectively amounted to a *herem*, or writ of excommunication, against the ACJ, the first and foremost charge listed was “impairing the vital work of the United Jewish Appeal in a time of dire emergency.” Earlier banishments had occurred even before the founding of the State of Israel, when the ACJ, led by Lessing Rosenwald, insisted that the idea that the Jews had to be settled into a state of their own after World War II was absolutely wrong. The successor to the American Jewish Conference, the National Community Relations Advisory Council, issued its *herem* in 1950 after Rosenwald and the ACJ had spoken out for fair treatment for Palestinian Arab refugees.

Even before the end of World War II, Elmer Berger was the face of the ACJ and all it represented in the Zionist imagination. Though all but forgotten today, there was a time when the very mention of his name could be expected to elicit hysteria. Berger was not the most intellectually impressive of his anti-Zionist colleagues, nor the most charismatic or accessible. Three times married, a heavy smoker and drinker, and reluctant to enter the limelight, he was not a natural candidate for the mantle of prophet. What made Berger stand out was the simple moral force of his speaking the truth as he saw it, consequences be damned. The title he gave to a published book of his travel letters from the Middle East in 1955 says it all: *Who Knows Better Must Say So*.

Yet, it must be said, in his preferred policy prescriptions for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Elmer Berger was remarkably moderate. Throughout his life his views essentially remained those which had been the official policies he even personally had a hand in helping to craft during the early years of the Eisenhower administration: that Israel offer a reasonable settlement of the refugee problem in exchange for Arab recognition within the borders of the 1949 armistice, and that Israel become integrated into an anti-Communist regional bloc anchored in Saudi Arabia. In fact, one

of Berger's closest friends in the U.S. government was Kermit Roosevelt, who achieved certain infamy in recent years as the CIA architect of the Shah of Iran's restoration in 1953.

Elmer Berger's true heresy was his rejection of Zionism's first principle: that the essence of Judaism should be the political imperatives of a transnational entity called “the Jewish people.” As American Jewish life became dominated in the postwar era by institutions committed to putting that principle into practice, Berger and his colleagues became objects of unmitigated loathing in the Zionist imagination because, believing as it does in an idealized “Jewish collective,” Jewish opposition to that collective is viewed as a mortal threat. The legacy of this pathology in the controversies roiling American Jewry today is unmistakable. While the hysteria of the American Jewish establishment is most often directed toward entities, such as J Street, which believe in and desperately want to save a liberal Zionism, many progressive rabbis and Jewish youth are joining groups, such as Jewish Voice for Peace, which seriously question, if not flatly reject, the first principles of Zionism and the American Jewish establishment.

History has rarely presented such an unambiguous example of prophetic dissenters as Elmer Berger and his colleagues in the American Council for Judaism, who were viciously attacked and reviled in their time, only to be completely vindicated in their warnings a generation after they passed away. Few now deny that at the heart of both the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the persistent belief, with a perfect faith, in “Jewish peoplehood,” brilliantly described by the late Tony Judt as “a characteristically late-19th century separatist project in a world that has moved on.” Indeed, this is self-evident in the increasingly erratic demand of the current Israeli government that both the Palestinians and the world at large recognize it as “the national home of the Jewish people.”

An extraordinary series of events over the last decade has served to vindicate Elmer Berger's life's work. Perhaps none stands out more than the publication in 2009 of Shlomo Sand's groundbreaking work, *The Invention of the Jewish People*. Comprehensively deconstructing Jewish nationalism with both contemporary theories of nationalism and sources with which Berger would have been very much familiar, it is probably a book that Berger himself would have wished to have written at the end of his life. Yet it may also be a book that shows the way forward. Before he was seized by the controversy of Zionism, Berger's great youthful aspiration had been to use the sources on antiquity cited by Sand to prove the empirical validity of the antinationalist narrative of Judaism about which the Classical Reform movement had trained him. Berger would have been stunned to see there has emerged at this late hour a different and progressive alternative to that of the American Jewish establishment. ✧

Rory MacLean

Closing the Circle

EARLIER IN MARCH, in the warm spring sunshine, an older, colder Berlin was remembered. In June 1939, 16-year-old Ilse Philips boarded a Kindertransport train bound for London. Her parents Hugo and Flora waved good-bye to her at the station. Three years later they were murdered at Auschwitz and Ilse vowed never to return to Berlin. But on Sunday, at the age of 88, she came back — accompanied by four generations of her family.

Last November I stumbled upon seven glinting, new *Stolpersteine* along the street from my apartment. An astonishing twenty thousand of these brass “stumble stones” have been planted among the cobbles of 280 German cities, engraved with the name of individuals who were pulled from their homes and murdered during the Nazi years. Each plaque begins with the same words: *Hier Wohnt* — “here lived” — followed by the name, date of birth, year of deportation and identity of the death camp, if known.

In almost every case the *Stolpersteine* have been ordered and paid for by residents of the victims’ former residences. In November I spoke to Hilde Keilinghaus, a Berlin school teacher, who commissioned the seven stones with her neighbors Bettina and Clemens Brandl-Risi. “I think it’s important to give the victims a face,” Keilinghaus told me. “I

think it’s important that people see the stones in front of the house, and stop and read the names.”

In an effort to trace living relatives, Keilinghaus had traveled to Jerusalem. At Yad Vashem, Israel’s memorial to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, she found that only a single Jewish resident of her building seemed to have survived the war. She wrote to him, and discovered that he too had died. But Keilinghaus’ letter — along with the blog which I posted in November — reached that man’s sister in London.

On Sunday Hugo and Flora’s daughter came home. In

the company of 50 residents, neighbors and her English family members, Ilse stood at the doorway which she had last walked through 72 years ago, on her journey to Britain. With tears in her eyes, resident Bettina Brandl-Risi welcomed Ilse back to her home and spoke — in English and German, and with humility — of being overwhelmed by her family’s “generosity and friendship towards us.” She expressed the need to “commemorate the unbearable fate of our fellow citizens.” She



said that as one stumbles over the stones, and stops to read them, one has to bow — in respect for those who were so cruelly and unnecessarily killed. Other speakers — touched by both shame and a desire to learn from terrible mistakes — spoke of the monstrous dimension of crimes committed in a few short years. One by one, today’s residents — none of whom had lived in the building during the war — read aloud the names of their Jewish predecessors, and the dates and places of their execution. Their voices, wracked with emotion, echoed down the street where the deceased had once

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walked, talked, laughed. . . and wept.

Then it was time for Ilse's family to speak. Her daughter Miriam Book told the gathering that her grandparents had been ordinary German citizens "who happened to be Jewish." Hugo had served the Reich in the trenches during the First World War. Their forefathers had lived in Germany for centuries. She said that saving their children — Ilse's late brother had been sent to Manchester — "had been the only light in the last years of Hugo and Flora's lives." Miriam held her mother's hand, the men donned their *kippot*, and on the leafy Charlottenburg street the family recited the Kaddish, the liturgy for the magnification and sanctification of God's name. Finally, Ilse laid white pebbles onto the *Stolpersteine*, to show that her parents were remembered.

Later in the apartment which had once been her family home, Miriam told me that Ilse — on hearing about the *Stolpersteine* — had immediately decided to return to Berlin, to be a part of the act of remembrance. "We have a huge sense of a circle completed," she said.

As Ilse's family departed for the Jewish Museum and their flight home, and I took my leave of them, I searched for the right words of farewell. I was in no position to thank them for coming to Berlin, to talk of the pain of their loss, or to mention the courage of the new generation of Berliners who — in a humane and moving manner — are confronting the darkness in their past. I did not need to ask who will lay stones on the *Stolpersteine* of the other lost, former residents:



Regina Edel, Selma Schnee, Dr. Kurt Jacobsohn, his wife Liesbeth and little Hans Adolf who was six years old when he was gassed at Auschwitz. All I could say to Ilse's family — my own voice croaking with emotion — was, "I am pleased to have met you — here in Berlin." ☆

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