

# Denying Nazi-Zionist collusion

## The Sacramento Bee, Darrell Steinberg, and Islamophobia

By Alison Weir, *CounterPunch*, March 4, 2011

In an inversion of journalistic ethics, the *Sacramento Bee* reported on opposition to an event before and after it took place, but didn't cover the event itself.

It featured an entire report on accusations against a flier, but didn't include a response from the flier's authors.

It printed claims by powerful local figures that the flier was "an outrageous lie," but refused to print information showing that the flier's statements were factual.

Its headline about the allegedly offensive flier emphasized a Muslim connection, even though there was virtually no Muslim connection to the flier.

It neglected to report that one of those attacking the flier had previously attempted to use his official position to prevent the event at which the flier was distributed from taking place.

And finally, the *Bee's* parent company, McClatchy, one of the nation's largest newspaper chains, then sent out the *Bee's* deficient story about a flier nation-wide, also emphasizing a (largely non-existent) Muslim connection in its headline, which then appeared on newspaper websites in Florida, Texas, Idaho, Mississippi, Alaska, and elsewhere, generating anti-Muslim comments.

The event in question was part of a national speaking tour that featured an Auschwitz survivor speaking about Israel's treatment of Palestinians. Called "Never Again For Anyone," it was sponsored by a diverse array of eight national organizations and nine local ones, secular, Jewish and Muslim, who reserved a hall owned by the local Islamic Center as the venue for the event. Also speaking was Dr. Hatem Bazian, a prominent academic from UC Berkeley.

The talk was immediately opposed by the Jewish Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the 13-member Board of Rabbis of Greater Sacramento, who contacted the Islamic center and demanded that the center refuse to allow the event to take place.

The rabbis called it a "program of hate," claimed that both the theme and the presence of an Auschwitz survivor speaking about the plight of Palestinians were "anti-

Semitic," stated that allowing the 86-year-old Auschwitz survivor to speak would "defile the sacred memory of millions who perished during the Holocaust" (nothing was said of the multitudes of non-Jews, including Arabs and Muslims, who died under the Nazis), and threatened that Jewish-Muslim relations would be fatally jeopardized if the Islamic Center did not renege on its agreement to allow the event to take place on its property.

The *Sacramento Bee* ran a news story on the rabbis' complaints, claiming in its lead sentence that because of the proposed event, "Sacramento's carefully cultivated interfaith bonds are being stretched to the limit," although there is no indication that the planned talk was interfering with Christian, Buddhist, Hindu or other faith's relations with the Muslim community.

Despite the attempt to prevent it, however, the event went forward as planned, drawing approximately 500



people. The *Bee*, despite choosing to cover prior complaints against it, chose not to cover it.

Four days later, however, the *Bee* carried another news story about the event, this time focusing on a complaint by the President Pro-Tem of the California Senate condemning a flier that was distributed at the talk.

California is in deep trouble. It is over \$26 billion in debt and is facing potential bankruptcy. People have lost homes, businesses have failed, university fees have escalated. Yet, the Senate's President Pro Tem, Darrell Steinberg, one of California's most powerful politicians, twice took time out of his necessarily busy schedule to lodge semi-official complaints about the "Never Again" event.

Steinberg, who has worked to promote tolerance and build bridges with Muslim leaders to oppose bigotry, is devoted to Israel. In 2008 he was host of "Salute to Israel," a celebration of Israel's creation 60 years before, which had involved the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Muslims and Christians to make room for the Jewish state.

According to the Jewish Forward, Steinberg became President Pro Tem "after intense involvement in the Jewish communal world, including stints as chairman of Sacramento's Jewish Community Relations Council... The lobbyist for the California Jewish Public Affairs Committee, Cliff Berg, said he is looking forward to working more with an old friend." Both organizations advocate for Israel; JPAC sponsors an annual 9-day trip to Israel for state legislators.

Steinberg was strongly opposed to the "Never Again for Anyone" event. First, although the *Bee* didn't mention this, Steinberg tried to stop it, sending a letter on official Senate stationery urging the Islamic Center to revoke permission for it.

Then, after the talk had taken place (which Steinberg did not attend), he sent a second letter to the *Bee* and to a few individuals in the Jewish, Muslim, and multicultural communities (it's available only on a pro-Israel website), again on official stationery. In it he condemned a flier that had been distributed at the event.

Produced by the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network, a cosponsor of the event, the flier included information about collaboration between Nazis and leaders of the Zionist movement (the political/military movement to create a Jewish state in Palestine that created Israel in 1948).

Steinberg was outraged. In his letter he particularly objected to the flier's statements that "...Zionist leaders made 'transfer agreements' with the Nazis... refused to observe the international boycott of Nazi Germany... and even kept silent about impending plans to deport Jews into Nazi death camps."

Steinberg called the statements an "outrageous rewrite of history," and claimed that "in essence, they are saying the Jews orchestrated the Holocaust," although the flier said no such thing.

Similarly angered, according to the *Bee* news report, was one of the rabbis who had tried to prevent the talk, Rabbi Mona Alfi of Sacramento's prominent Congregation B'nai Israel.

While the *Bee* didn't mention this, Alfi is also the official California Senate Chaplain, a position she has held since 2008. She was appointed to this position by Steinberg, a member of B'nai Israel. (According to a survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, two percent of Californians are affiliated with the Jewish faith.)

According to the *Bee*, Rabbi Alfi called the flier's allegations that some Zionists were Nazi collaborators "a disgusting lie."

While the *Bee*'s report also included statements defending the talk, it contained no statements in defense of the flier itself, the paper having made no attempt to interview the authors

of the flier that was the focus of its article.

As a result, the report contained none of the extensive evidence supporting the flier's content, thus giving readers the impression that a flier filled with objectionable falsehoods had been distributed.

Worse yet, since the *Bee* and McClatchy then chose to emphasize the venue of the event in their headline ("Flier at California Muslim center condemned by state senator"), despite the fact that the center had nothing to do with the flier, a headline and news story were sent around the country that served to reinforce the Islamophobic fiction that Muslims are inherently anti-Semitic, generating comments such as:

"Muslims have been successfully trading in anti-Semitism for decades, Steinberg isn't going to put a dent in it," " 'The holocaust never happened.' Since that didn't work, certain Muslims decided to try this disgusting piece of nonsense," "My, my, those Muslim propaganda sites must be working overtime."

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## Zionist-Nazi Collusion

In point of fact, however, the flier's statements are accurate. There is detailed evidence that some Zionists collaborated with the Nazis, that Zionists sabotaged anti-Nazi boycotts, and that Zionists interfered with efforts to rescue victims of Nazi oppression.

When facts first emerged in the 1950s about Zionist-Nazi collusion, it caused considerable scandal in Israel and led to the fall of the Israeli government of the time. A number of books are dedicated to this subject and it is discussed in numerous others, almost all by Jewish and/or Israeli authors. The topic inspired novels by well-known Israeli writers Amos Elon and Neil Gordon, was the subject of a 1987 British play, and was portrayed in a 1994 Israeli docudrama. It's surprising that Steinberg and the Board of Rabbis make no indication of ever having heard anything about this.

Popular American playwright and fervent Zionist Ben Hecht wrote the first book on the subject, *Perfidy*, relating the history of a Hungarian Zionist leader who arranged for his family and several hundred prominent Jews to escape while facilitating the movement of the rest of Hungarian Jews to Nazi concentration camps.

Hannah Arendt, in her 1960 book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report in the Banality of Evil*, writes: "To a Jew this role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people is undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the whole dark story."

In *The Transfer Agreement: The Dramatic Story of the Pact between the Third Reich and Jewish Palestine* (containing an afterword by ADL head Abe Foxman), pro-Israel writer Edwin Black reports that in 1933 Zionist leaders concluded a secret pact with the Third Reich that transferred 60,000 Jews and \$100,000 to Palestine, Zionists promising in return that they would halt the worldwide boycott "that threatened to topple the Hitler regime in its first year."

Author-researcher Lenny Brenner wrote of Zionist-Nazi collusion in *Zionism in the Age of Dictators*, of which the *London Times* stated: "Brenner is able to cite numerous cases where Zionists collaborated with anti-Semitic regimes, including Hitler's."

Brenner's second book on the topic, "51 Documents, Zionist Collaboration with the Nazis," includes a 1940 let-

ter from underground Zionist terrorist leader Avraham Stern proposing that Jewish militias would fight on Germany's side in exchange for Nazi help in creating an "historic Jewish state."

In *What Price Israel*, American Council for Judaism member Alfred Lilienthal describes FDR's efforts to set up a program to rescue refugees, only to find Zionists sabotaging it. Roosevelt explained: "The Zionist movement knows that Palestine is, and will be for some time, a remittance society. They know that they can raise vast sums for Palestine by saying to donors, 'There is no other place this poor Jew can go.'"

When New York attorney Morris Ernst joined this refugee effort, he was shocked: "I was thrown out of parlors of friends of mine who very frankly said 'Morris, this is treason. You are undermining the Zionist movement.'" Ernst wrote that he found a fanatical movement of men "little concerned about human blood if it is not their own."

In *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, Israeli historian Tom Segev quotes Zionist leader and future Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion: "If I knew that it was possible to save all the [Jewish] children of Germany by transporting them to England, but only half of them by transporting them

to Palestine, I would choose the second."

Segev writes that Ben-Gurion worried that 'the human conscience' might cause various countries to open their doors to Jewish refugees from Germany and saw this as a threat, warning: 'Zionism is in danger.'"

In the *Bee's* report on the controversy, Sacramento's Rabbi Alfi is further quoted as saying "there is no comparison" between the treatment of Jews in pre-war Germany and Palestinians. Yet, in 2002 the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz reported that the Israeli military was specifically studying Nazi Warsaw Ghetto strategies for use in the Palestinian Occupied Territories.

The *Bee's* decision not to cover an event about which it had reported prior complaints is highly questionable.

Even more serious, its decision to publish a news report featuring attacks against a flier without also interviewing the flier's authors violates fundamental journalistic principles. The story was published four days after the event took place; taking the time to follow professional

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good practices would have made sense.

However, hindsight is always clearer than decisions made under a looming deadline, and in the rush of daily journalism serious lapses sometimes occur. The real test of a newspaper's commitment to honest, principled journalism is how it handles such lapses.

*Bee* editors failed this test with flying colors. From here on I speak from personal experience.

I happened to read the *Bee's* flier report soon after it was published. Because I've studied Israel's history extensively and own the books mentioned above (and others that mention the topic), I was aware that the flier's statements were factual and that the undisputed complaints against it were unfounded.

I felt this information needed to be given to readers as soon as possible to correct the misimpression conveyed by the *Bee's* one-sided reporting. Since op-ed columns were specifically created as a place for outside writers to convey views and information not otherwise contained in a newspaper, I took several books on the topic and went to the *Bee's* offices to propose an op-ed.

From the lobby I called opinion page editor, Stuart Leavenworth, saying that I'd like to discuss a potential op-ed for the paper. He said he was in a meeting and couldn't meet with me, but asked what I wished to address.

When I told him, he expressed skepticism and said he would not print an op-ed saying that Zionists had collaborated with Nazis.

I told him that I had books on the subject with me that I could show him. He replied that normally someone would schedule such a meeting ahead of time. I agreed and asked when we could schedule such a meeting. He said he would not schedule one. He asked me a few more questions, interrupted my answers, and then told me to submit an op-ed. He said that I must supply citations.

I wrote the article, cited seven books, and said that I would provide more extensive citations if he wished (even though I had already supplied far more references than normally required for an op-ed). I also said that I would be glad to cut the piece if it was too long and said I was very comfortable with rewriting.

He refused to publish it, providing no explanation for this decision.

I am fully aware that editors always retain the power to decide what they will and won't publish (I've been an editor myself). However, since journalistic ethics required the *Bee* to remedy sloppy, one-sided reporting that gave readers a false impression of a controversial local event, of Muslims at a time when violence and bigotry against them is escalating, and about Israel, with which the U.S. has a unique "special relationship," I emailed and phoned my concerns to the *Bee's* chief editor and others (it has no ombudsman), but to no avail.

The newspaper's response was disappointing but unsurprising. Editors, particularly when it comes to Israel-Palestine, are far more concerned with daily deadlines, financial necessities, and the need not to anger powerful constituencies than with moral or ethical principles.

This reality, combined with considerable ignorance on the Middle East among many journalists, and pro-Israel, anti-Muslim bias among others, means that there is virtually no effort to correct errors or remedy significant

omissions in coverage having to do with Israel.

As a result, Americans are largely left in the dark about the current reality and past history of the tiny, rich nation that receives more of our tax money than any other country on earth, currently at least \$8 million per day, and that is at the center of profoundly important issues concerning both the region and our own nation.

Israel and its partisans are working to make sure it stays that way. If Steinberg, Alfi, Leavenworth, the *Bee*, and McClatchy continue their current pattern, it doesn't look like this is going to change anytime soon – unless enough people start to demand better.

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