

ADL Spies: The Strange History of the Anti-Defamation League

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"[T]he Anti-Defamation League for many years has maintained a very important, confidential investigative coverage of Arab activities and propaganda....Our information, in addition to being essential for our own operations, has been of great value and service to both the United States State Department and the Israeli government. All data have been made available to both countries with full knowledge to each that we were the source." - Letter from Benjamin R. Epstein, National Director, Anti-Defamation League to Saul Jofte, Executive Secretary, B'nai B'rith, July 7, 1961.

Those were the days when snooping usually meant digging through garbage cans, checking other people's mailboxes, and primitive phone tapping. How the Anti-Defamation League is doing it today one can only imagine.

Over the last three days of April, the ADL celebrated its 100th anniversary in Washington DC in high style with Vice President Joe Biden the featured speaker at its Centennial Gala dinner on April 30 and Attorney General Eric Holder doing the obligatory genuflecting the day before.

Standing next to the ADL's ubiquitous current national director, Abe Foxman, Biden told the one thousand paying guests, "You have become the conscience of this country, no matter what the issue. You have been a pillar of the Jewish community, but you reach out and you have reached out your embrace for all communities."

For hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals the ADL's embrace has been too close for comfort and "unconscionable" would be a term more befitting the organization's activities. What is definitely in order is a reminder that this year also marks the 20th anniversary of the exposure of a nation-wide spying operation run by the ADL that went back at least five decades.

In January, 1993, San Francisco newspapers reported that the city's police department had raided the ADL's Northern California office and discovered it was keeping files on more than 600 largely liberal civic organizations and over 10,000 individuals whose interests and activities included but also went far beyond those of the Arab-American community.

After examining the sequestered files, San Francisco police inspector Ron Roth, estimated that 75% of the information had been illegally obtained and by November, District Attorney Arlo Smith appeared to be on the verge of indicting the ADL for numerous violations of state and city codes.

The appearance was deceiving. With an eye on being elected California's attorney general the following year, Smith realized, too late as it turned out, that he would need the financial and political clout of San Francisco's influential Jewish community that had helped to propel him to his job as the city's DA. So he threw in the towel mere hours before ADL officials would be called to testify before a grand jury.

In an agreement reached a week earlier but issued Nov. 15, 1993, just before the filing deadline, Smith's office released a statement explaining his reasoning: "The SFDA and Defendants agree that litigation concerning Defendant's activities would involve disputed issues of fact and law and that such litigation would be expensive and time-consuming both to the SFDA and Defendants."

That all litigation involves "disputed issues of fact and law" apparently did not occur to Smith. His dropping of the case, however, made little impression on his erstwhile Jewish backers.

They made it known that they would not forgive him for not only opening the investigation into the ADL's spying operations but making available to whoever in the public would pay the copying fees, 704 pages of documents that revealed in considerable detail the extent of the ADL's nation-wide spying operations. (See the Israel Lobby Archive, www.irmep.org/ila)

In exchange for being let off the hook and while admitting no wrong-doing, the ADL agreed that it would no longer do, at least in California, what it was shown to have been doing, i.e., soliciting and/or obtaining non-public information on individuals and organizations from government sources.

In addition, it would "create a Hate Crimes Reward Fund," in the amount of \$25,000, which would "provide monetary rewards for information leading to the arrest and/or conviction of the perpetrators of hate crimes." (The latter seems to be a fetish of the ADL which, incredibly, has just been allowed to trademark the statement, "Imagine a world without hate.")

What was an important concession by the city, from the ADL's standpoint, was that its files seized by the SFPD would remain closed to the public and would not be opened without the ADL being given an opportunity to voice its objections.

In California, the ADL's secret spying and file keeping was mainly the provenance of Roy Bullock, a beefy San Francisco weight-lifter, who went by the code name, "Cal," and reported to the ADL's chief spy-master in New York, the now deceased Irwin Suall.

To keep the relationship out of public as well as government eyes, Bullock was paid through a cut-out in Beverly Hills, Bruce Hochman, a lawyer and member of the ADL's board, also now deceased.

As late as July 19, 1992, Suall had described Bullock as "our Number One fact finder" whose assignments included, in addition to his duties in California, attending and monitoring conferences and conventions of Arab-Americans across the country.

He was, in fact, doing the kind of work that former ADL director Ben Epstein described in the quote at the beginning of this article. At the time, Bullock was receiving close to \$25,000 a year for monitoring what he and the ADL considered "antidemocratic" organizations and individuals and he had been doing it for 40 years.

It wasn't Bullock's only income, to be sure. He was also an "art dealer" and this provided an explanation for his turning up at Arab-American conferences across the country as I later learned. He "just happened" to be in this or that city at the same time, buying art.

A month after the SFPD had confiscated Bullock's files, the ADL was still trying to avoid being linked with him, even within the organization. On February 25, 1993, a cover letter for "talking points" to its regional directors referred to Bullock as "an individual who is alleged to have a relationship with the ADL."

To the public, when its ties to Bullock could no longer be denied, he was described simply as a private contractor and that the files he kept were for his own use. When this attempted cover-up quickly fell apart, he was put directly on the ADL payroll and provided with an attorney.

Bullock had divided the organizations and individuals on which he was keeping tabs into two categories to which he assigned the names, Pinko and Right, the latter made up largely of neo-Nazis and skinheads, the groups usually associated by the public as ADL's main targets. When questioned by Inspector Roth, Bullock defined "Pinko" as "left wing."

Among the 647 organizations he so designated were the NAACP, ACLU, Asian Law Caucus, Centro Legal de la Raza, Irish Northern Aid, Japanese-American Citizens League, the National Indian Treaty Council, Earth Island Institute and 20 trade union locals plus the San Francisco Labor Council. Jewish organizations that had taken positions critical of Israeli policies also found their way into his "Pinko" section.

On finding its name on the list, the Asian-Law Caucus quickly notified the ADL that it was withdrawing from a joint event previously planned with the Jewish defense organization. Rather than apologizing, the ADL was defiant, responding with a letter that placed the onus on the Asian Law Caucus for the cancellation.

In a letter addressed to the director of the Asian Law Caucus, dated April 29, 1993, the ADL's regional director, Elliot Bien, wrote that he was "dismayed on a number of levels when I learned that the Asian Law Caucus felt it necessary to pull out of this program on short notice as a protest of some sort against the ADL.... [T]hat the pullout was completely unjustified and unfair...."

The ADL was and remains more sensitive to Black-Jewish relations. Jews have been heavily involved with the NAACP since its inception in 1909. That they have also been the major source of its funding has been viewed by many observers in the post civil rights era as designed to keep the organization from taking political positions that would offend the Jewish establishment, such as expressing sympathy with the Palestinian cause or criticizing Israel's arms sales to South Africa.

This was typified by the attitude of long-time NAACP Director Roy Wilkins, widely characterized as an "Uncle Tom" by black activists, who withdrew the NAACP from the National Black Political Convention in 1972, taking exception to a resolution that condemned Israel for "expansionist policies and forceful occupation of the sovereign territories of another state."

On May 5, 1993, the ADL's New York headquarters sent a letter to its regional offices, noting that "Abe Foxman wrote newly installed NAACP Director Benjamin Chavis, assuring him that

the ADL had never targeted the NAACP for investigation” and recommended that if they had not already done so, the directors should reach out to “local branches of the NAACP” and “do so now.”

“You may note,” the letter went on, “that the news story in which the NAACP was named, cited names in Bullock’s files as ours. [T]he ADL has never targeted nor would it ever target for investigation any individual or organization on the basis of race, religion, ethnic origin, or sexual orientation.” The letter ignored the fact that a year earlier, the ADL had issued a 50-page “ADL Research Report, entitled “The Anti-Semitism of Black Demagogues and Extremists.”

Heading the list were Min. Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam, Illinois Congressman Gus Savage, Rev. Al Sharpton, Kwame Ture (the former Stokely Carmichael), poet Amiri Baraka, and rappers Ice Cube and Professor Griff and Public Enemy. Certain black newspapers and radio stations that didn’t feel beholden to the Jewish community also came in for their lumps.

Chavis, with a long history of civil rights activity, was no Roy Wilkins. In an effort to revive what had become a moribund organization and make it more representative of the black community, he sought to involve some of those condemned in the ADL’s booklet, but it was his reaching out to Farrakhan that set off the alarm bells at ADL headquarters and put him at odds with Foxman.

It also caused the NAACP’s major Jewish funders to put away their check books until Chavis, who became caught up in an unrelated personnel matter, tendered his resignation.

Given Foxman and the ADL’s obsession with what it considers to be “black anti-Semitism,” which includes, for example, speaking about the prominent role of Jews in the African slave trade or comparisons of Israel with apartheid South Africa, it was logical that Bullock would an eye on the NAACP and other African-American as well as black African organizations. He was nothing if not thorough, keeping multiple files on the African National Congress and 47 other anti-apartheid organizations.

Bullock also was found to have 77 files on 58 Arab-American organizations besides the thousands of individuals who belonged to those organizations. His modus operandi in infiltrating Arab-American and anti-apartheid organizations, was to pretend he was sympathetic to their respective causes. He succeeded in not only becoming a member of the local chapter of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee but, because of his size and weight, he would be in charge of “security” at all its events.

Bullock was assisted in his endeavors by a San Francisco policeman and former CIA contractor in El Salvador, Tom Gerard, who would take down the license plate numbers of people attending Palestinian and Arab-American events and provide Bullock with their names, addresses, and personal information, all of which was illegal. What made this easy for Gerard was that he was the SFPD’s “official liaison” to the Arab community.

What was particularly embarrassing for the ADL was the release of information that Bullock and Gerard, who had also provided information directly to ADL officials, were also being paid by South African intelligence agents to supply information on the activities of the Bay Area’s anti-Apartheid organizations and South African exiles affiliated with the ANC and other black African organizations.

In one of his depositions, Bullock acknowledged that doing this required no additional work since he was already spying on the anti-apartheid movement for the ADL. Foxman, on his part, had openly condemned the African National Congress as a “terrorist” organization that supported the PLO.

One individual the South African agents were particularly interested in was Chris Hani, the man who was expected to succeed Nelson Mandela as the country’s president. Hani was assassinated in South Africa shortly after a speaking tour in California during which he was trailed by Bullock who prepared a lengthy report on it for the South African government, a copy of which was found in his files.

Foxman, though unapologetic, was anxious to neutralize public discussion of the close ties that existed between Israel and South Africa, particularly the Jewish state’s arms sales to the apartheid regime. Thanks, however, to the willingness of the anti-apartheid movement and the Congressional Black Caucus to bury the issue, he ended up having little to worry about.

While Bullock had, at times, infiltrated neo-Nazi and skinhead groups, none of which posed tangible threats to the American Jews, their images in the organization’s mailings were useful in frightening Jewish donors into contributing to the ADL’s \$60 million dollar budget and paying Foxman’s salary which in 2009 amounted to \$563,024. The main focus of the ADL was on Palestinians and Arab-Americans and their solidarity groups.

One of the targets Bullock “befriended” was Palestinian-American Alex Odeh, the head of the Orange County chapter of the ADC who would be killed by a terrorist bomb when he opened the door to his Santa Ana office on October 11, 1985.

In Bullock’s files, police found a key to Odeh’s office as well as the floor plan. Although Bullock has not been linked to the unresolved murder, the fact that an ADL spy was in possession of such items is something that Foxman obviously would not want advertised.

There were two law suits filed against the ADL over the 1993 revelations but only one proved to be headache from the ADL’s perspective. This was a class action suit filed on April 14, 1993, by former congressman, Paul “Pete” McCloskey, himself a victim of pro-Israel witch hunters, on behalf of 17 individuals who believed they had been spied upon because of their work on behalf of justice for the Palestinians and/or their active opposition to South African apartheid.

A second suit was filed by a group of targeted organizations, among them the Labor Committee on the Middle East (LCOME) which Labor activist Steve Zeltzer and I co-founded in 1987. That suit, over which the organizations seemed to have little say, was settled by their lawyer in 1999 after the ADL, admitting no wrong doing, agreed to destroy its files, to get out of the spying business, and contribute \$50,000 to police departments for racial sensitivity training. Steve and I did not think that an adequate response to the seriousness of the ADL’s transgressions and LCOME refused to be a party to that settlement.

By February, 2002, when the ADL elected to settle McCloskey’s suit out of court, there would be only three individuals remaining in the class: Zeltzer, Anne Poirer, and myself. In addition to our involvement in anti-apartheid activities, Steve and I had launched the Labor Committee on the Middle East in 1987, whose founding meetings at Zeltzer’s home, Bullock had attended. Anne had been a long time anti-apartheid activist.

Our suit charged the ADL with violating a narrow privacy provision of California state law, 1798.53, which holds that “Any person, other than an employee of the state or of a local government agency.....who intentionally discloses information, not otherwise public, which they know or should reasonably know was obtained from personal information maintained by a state agency or from ‘records’

... maintained by a federal government agency, shall be subject to a civil action, for invasion of privacy, by the individual to whom the information pertains.”

In this instance, the 9th District Court of California had determined that information on Zeltzer and me had been provided to the governments of Israel and South Africa and that information on Annie Poirier had been given to South Africa.

Over nearly a decade of court appearances and status conferences, what we insisted upon, above all else, and what prevented an earlier settlement, was that under no circumstances would we sign a confidentiality agreement that would forbid us speaking or writing about the suit.

We felt we needed to be free to talk about what we had learned along the way about the ADL’s spying activities, information that the ADL, understandably, preferred to be kept secret.

Until the very last moment, the Friday afternoon before the Monday when the case would have gone to trial, the ADL had balked at making that concession. In the end they gave in. In addition, they agreed to pay a modest cash settlement to the three of us plus McCloskey’s legal expenses. He had taken our case pro bono.

What was, perhaps, the most revealing moment in the legal battle took place in McCloskey’s Redwood City office during the ADL’s questioning of former Mossad agent, Victor Ostrovsky. McCloskey had brought Ostrovsky down from Canada to provide whatever information he might have that would link the ADL to Israel and assist us in our case.

When Ostrovsky left the Mossad, he took with him a number of documents, some of which were the source his “By Way of Deception,” a record of his time with the Israeli spy agency.

As Ostrovsky took his seat next to McCloskey, he faced the usual battery of attorneys representing the ADL and Bullock. The atmosphere, however, was very different. Throughout the many court appearances and the taking of depositions, the ADL’s lawyers had been cordial, if not friendly, to us, even though we were on opposite sides.

This would not be the case with Ostrovsky. It is not an exaggeration to say that their eyes were gleaming with hatred. They made no effort to conceal their hostility to a person they obviously viewed as a traitor to Israel which, at that moment, they clearly viewed as their client as much as was the ADL.

That this was more than conjecture on my part was soon revealed when David Goldstein, the lead attorney, demanded that Ostrovsky turn over to him, in the name of the ADL, all the documents he had taken from the Mossad. Ostrovsky, quite naturally, refused. Later the ADL’s lawyers inveighed upon a judge, without success, to force him to comply with their demand.

Thanks to our refusal to sign the confidentiality agreement, you can read about that on

When the reports of the ADL spying first appeared in the media, there were those who thought the respected Jewish defense organization had simply made a mistake in its zeal to protect Israel and that the spying operation was an anomaly.

Nothing can be further from the truth. But let's begin at the beginning.

The ADL was formed by B'nai B'rith in 1913 to serve as the leading Jewish defense agency in the wake of the conviction of Leo Frank, an officer of the National Pencil Co. in Atlanta, Georgia for the murder of 13 year old Mary Phagan, a shop floor worker at the pencil factory. It was a verdict that many believed to be a miscarriage of justice, which was compounded by Frank being kidnapped from a prison hospital two years later and lynched. He is the only American Jew known to have suffered that fate.

By 1937, the Anti-Defamation League had embarked on another occupation, keeping files and spying on what it considered to be communist or pro-communist organizations and individuals.

In that year, a 1947 Congressional hearing revealed, it had begun providing information on the recently formed National Lawyers Guild and on individuals applying for federal civil service jobs and some who had not applied for jobs, to the original House Committee on Un-American Activities, chaired by the notorious racist Rep. Martin Dies, which came to be referred to simply as the Dies Committee.

Newly declassified FBI files obtained by IRmep's Grant Smith reveal that on August 8, 1940, the ADL offered a confidential list of hundreds of undercover ADL investigators to FBI Director J Edgar Hoover. ADL offered the contact list as a resource for FBI informants and additional undercover agents.

Some members of the list, such as [Abraham Feinberg](#), would later be investigated by the FBI as agents of a foreign government and for quashing investigations targeting illegal arms-smuggling from the US to Israel.

Feinberg would become later well known in as the man who delivered an envelope filled with a large amount of cash to Harry Truman-\$ 2 million JFK told Gore Vidal- that enabled him to launch the whistle stop campaign that led to his victory in the 1948 presidential elections. Truman had earned Feinberg's largesse by recognizing Israel minutes after David Ben-Gurion declared the state into existence.

During the anti-communist witch hunts that marked the beginning of the Cold War, the ADL assisted and acted as a go-between for both the Congressional committees and members or former members of the Communist Party who chose to inform on their one-time comrades, friends, and family members.

With the arrival of Israel, the ADL began to redirect its tasks. Arab delegations to the United Nations and Arab-American organizations became its targets. In the letter cited at the beginning of this article, the ADL's Ben Epstein wrote B'nai B'rith's Saul Joftes that "we have maintained an information-gathering operation since 1948 relating to activities emanating from the Arab Consular Offices, Arab United Nations Delegations, Arab Information Center, Arab Refugee Office and the Organization of Arab Students."

In 1969 the ADL infiltrated the 18th annual National Convention the Organization of Arab Students. ADL operatives posed as reporters while strategizing on how to gain control of the OAS's national headquarters and neutralize its chapters.

After receiving its report, the FBI briefly considered investigating the ADL as an Israeli foreign agent. The ADL effort was ultimately successful to the degree that OAS chapters became less political in the ensuing decades and began serving more as campus clubs with a cultural focus.

In November, 1983, in response to widespread criticism of Israel over its invasion and occupation of Lebanon the previous year, the ADL's New England office put out a 49 page mimeographed booklet containing the names of individuals and organizations that the league classified as "pro-Arab propagandists."

It was not intended for the general public, but for Jewish students on college campuses to help them counter these "propagandists" who were trying "to sway Americans from their historically strong support for Israel." Moreover, the booklet claimed, "many of these propagandists use their anti-Zionism as a guise for their deeply felt anti-Semitism."

The booklet, with each page stamped "CONFIDENTIAL," was prepared by Jordan Millstein, the ADL's local campus coordinator and was sent out with a cover letter from Leonard Zakim, the Executive Director of its New England Office.

"Should you need more information on these individual groups or any others," wrote Zakim, "please call us. Also, if you have any knowledge of any individuals or groups not listed in the booklet, please pass the information on to us so that we can have a more complete and useful listing."

One can imagine the outrage had a Palestinian or Arab-American group put out a similar publication containing a list of individuals and organizations that they accused of putting Israel's interests before those of the United States.

Among the individuals on the ADL list were Professors Edward Said of Columbia, Michael Hudson of Georgetown, Lawrence Michalak of UC Berkeley, Wahlid Khaladi of Harvard, Naseer Aruri of Southeastern U., Israel Shahak of Hebrew University who "contends that Israel practices 'apartheid' against Palestinian Arabs," former Senator James Abourezk of South Dakota, and our lawyer, Pete McCloskey, who served 16 years in Congress, from 1967 to 1983, the year the booklet was published.

The publication came to the attention of the 1400 member Middle East Studies Association the following November which passed a resolution calling on the league to disown the document

When that story was finally reported in the NY Times on Jan.25, two months later, Jeffrey Ross, the ADL's director of campus affairs, claimed it had been an "unfortunate incident" and would not be repeated.

He said that Millstein, the author, was an "overly zealous student volunteer" who no longer worked for the league. Zakim acknowledged "the document had been careless" as the Times characterized it and that "he would not have written a cover letter for it if he had considered the matter thoroughly."

In 2002, three years after his death from cancer in 1999, the bridge that serves as the northern entrance and exit from Boston was named the Leonard P. Zakim Bunker Hill Memorial Bridge after Zakim and the American colonists who fought the British in the Battle of Bunker Hill.

Despite the ADL having promised to get out of the business of illegally obtaining information on its enemies in exchange for not being prosecuted back in 1993, there is no evidence, twenty years later that it has.

What it has done is strengthen its ties with police across the country through its LEARN program (Law Enforcement Agency Resource Network) in which it trains police in dealing with “extremist groups” and “hate crimes.”

As for Bullock, I have heard of no recent citing but I have a hunch that somewhere in the country the aging agent is still going through other people’s garbage cans, peeking in their mailboxes and infiltrating a new generation of “Pinko” organizations for the ADL. If you look for his image on Google you will find three of them, all right next to photos of Abe Foxman.

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