

World & Nation

Rabbi says Jews should oppose Israeli acts

By Rob Cullivan

American Jews who oppose the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip must speak out to counteract Jewish-American lobbying for U.S. aid to Israel, according to a Reform Jewish Rabbi who spoke in Rochester last week.

New York City Rabbi Susan Einbinder said "American Jews are holding the card" in the game of ending Israel's suppression of the current Palestinian uprising. Pro-Israeli political action committees contribute substantially to the campaign treasuries of U.S. politicians who cast votes that ignore Israeli human rights abuses in the occupied territories, said the rabbi, who spoke in St. John Fisher College's Kearney Auditorium Wednesday night, Dec. 7.

Originally, Rabbi Einbinder was to share the stage with Riyadh Mansour, the deputy permanent observer of the Palestine Liberation Or-

ganization to the United Nations, but Mansour cancelled due to circumstances stemming from the U.S. refusal to allow PLO leader Yasser Arafat to speak at the U.N.

Rabbi Einbinder visited the West Bank last summer and lived in Jerusalem from 1986 to 1987. She said that pro-Israeli American Jews have created a climate of opinion that intimidates other Jewish Americans from speaking out against Israel, and leaves Israel unaccountable for its human rights violations.

She claimed, for example, that Israeli soldiers have continually ignored regulations barring the use of U.S.-made tear-gas canisters inside buildings, and regularly fire the canisters into Palestinian shops in the West Bank. But the U.S. government has not moved to penalize Israel and, except for some Arab-Americans, few U.S. citizens have protested the actions, the rabbi stated.

Rabbi Einbinder observed that speaking out for Palestinian rights has its price and that Israeli leftists must battle on several fronts. She illustrated her point by recounting an experience she had after finishing her studies in 1987. Israel's Reform movement had offered her a position in outreach work with American students, and she accepted the offer. But her final interview with a chief administrator in the Reform movement changed everything.

"He knew I had been fairly vocal in New York," she said. "He asked me, 'What do you think of the Arabs?' 'Well, you know there's a lot of them,' I said." The audience laughed as Rabbi Einbinder recalled asking her interviewer, "Should we get down to business and talk about the Palestinians?"

Getting down to business meant talking about the PLO, and the rabbi told her interviewer that she viewed the organization as the government of the Palestinians, an answer that sealed her fate. The job offer was immediately withdrawn.

More serious repercussions await Israelis who actively oppose the occupation, she said. Israel has no Bill of Rights to guarantee its citizens freedom of dissent, the rabbi noted, and yet "there is an illusion that Israelis are protected" from the suspension of Palestinian civil rights under the state of emergency. But that illusion is being dispelled rapidly as the Israeli government increases its repression of pro-Palestinian Israelis, she said, citing several experiences of her own and those of other dissidents.

Earlier this year, she said, four Israelis wanted to test a law prohibiting Israeli citizens from meeting with PLO members. Hoping to circumvent the law, the four traveled to Romania and met with members of the PLO, but they were arrested upon their return to Israel.



Linda Dow Hayes/Courier-Journal
Rabbi Susan Einbinder describes her experiences in Israeli.

All four were convicted of breaking the law and sentenced to 18 months in prison.

Citing other examples of government harassment, Rabbi Einbinder said the Israeli government has closed newspapers whose representatives have talked to Palestinian guerrillas and that Israeli army reservists have been imprisoned for refusing to serve in the occupied territories, she said.

She said leftists in Israel face another enemy — themselves. The Israeli opposition is fractured by ideological division, the rabbi said, noting that differing interpretations of fine lines of Marxist analysis can be enough to keep people from working together. "Your ideological identification is part of people's identity," she said, noting that "there are many little leftist groups," protesting the occupation, but there is still no united front.

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Palestinian challenges stereotypes

"Yasser Arafat is to the Palestinian people in 1988 what George Washington was to the American people in 1776 — the leader of a fledgling nation fighting for independence."

While it is unlikely that a reader will see the above statement in any major U.S. newspaper, according to Basem Ashkar, those words accurately describe the PLO leader's reputation in Israel's occupied territories.

Ashkar, who attended Rabbi Susan Einbinder's recent lecture, is chairman of Rochester's Palestinian American Peace Community. The group sponsors speakers and demonstrations on behalf of the Palestinian cause, and attempts to promote dialogue between Jewish and Palestinian Americans.

Born in Jerusalem in 1949, Ashkar and his wife emigrated to the United States in 1970 to escape the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. "It's very hard to live under military control," Ashkar said of his native land. "You can't even march in the street or give the victory sign. Even non-violence doesn't help."

Non-violence was Ashkar's approach to the occupation. Growing up in Jerusalem, he concentrated on his studies and avoided taking part in any violent actions against the Israelis. Since coming to this country, however, he has demonstrated against Israeli rule in the occupied territories, most recently celebrating at a Rochester demonstration marking the Palestine National Council's declaration of independence.

"At last I could have freedom of speech," he said.

Ashkar is grateful for the freedoms he enjoys in his adopted country, but he is not happy with the way the Palestinian struggle has been portrayed in the U.S. press. For example, Ashkar said the depiction of the PLO as a terrorist group is one-sided.

"When (former Israeli prime minister

Menachem) Begin came to the United States, (the government) welcomed him as a gentleman. But he has destroyed many lives," Ashkar said, noting that he has similar feelings regarding Israel's current prime minister, Yitzhak Shamir, whom he called "completely terrorist."

Ashkar condemned the PLO's terrorist actions in the past, but said that many of the Palestinians who committed them had suffered the deaths of family members at the hands of the Israelis. "It's the Israeli treatment that makes (the terrorists) that way. (Americans) treat animals better than the Israelis treat us in our homeland," he said.

One example of such treatment is the rudeness Ashkar said he experienced from the Israelis on his last visit to the West Bank in 1983. He had flown to Israel in hopes of seeing his family, but was detained and questioned by the army at the airport, where he said soldiers warned him not to engage in political activity in the West Bank. "It's an Israeli tactic to give you a hard time," Ashkar said.

He said his wife experienced more serious difficulty when she visited the West Bank in 1979. Although she was granted a three-month visa to visit her mother, she had to abruptly end her visit before her visa expired. "My wife got a letter from the military government that said, 'You have 48 hours to leave the country,'" Ashkar stated. "She's not a terrorist. They kicked her out and she had to go to Cyprus."

Despite the hostility between Israelis and Palestinians, Ashkar thinks peace between the two peoples is a realistic hope. "If you ask Palestinians whether they want a federation with Jordan or Israel, I'll bet 90 percent would say Israel," he said, noting that most Palestinians have relatives in Israel.

— Rob Cullivan

Pope urges bishops to review extraordinary minister policy

By Agostino Bono

VATICAN CITY (NC) — U.S. bishops should review policies to ensure that extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist do not distribute Communion when enough priests and deacons are present, said Pope John Paul II.

"In some cases there may still be a need to revise diocesan policies in this matter," the pope said to U.S. bishops from Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana.

Extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist are lay people granted special permission to distribute Communion. Many U.S. parishes have programs by which extraordinary ministers regularly help distribute Communion at Masses.

The pope stressed "the supplementary character of the faculty granted to lay persons to distribute holy Communion."

Review is needed "not only to ensure faithful application of the law but also to foster the true notion and genuine character of the participation of the laity in the life and

mission of the Church," the pope said Dec. 10.

The bishops were at the Vatican for their "ad limina" visits, required every five years to report on the status of their dioceses.

The pope said Church rules on extraordinary ministers are established in canon law and were reiterated in a recent ruling by the Pontifical Commission for the Official Interpretation of Canon Law.

A commission ruling, made public last July, said an extraordinary minister is not authorized to "exercise his temporary task even when there are present in the church, although not participating in the eucharistic celebration, ordinary ministers who are not in any way impeded."

Ordinary ministers are priests and deacons.

The 1980 document said "a reprehensible attitude is shown by those priests who, though present at the celebration, refrain from distributing Communion and leave this task to the laity."

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