

“We don’t need a resource center for intolerance”

by Robin Kopit

Comment: A communication from the Sentinel indicates that the headline is “close to what Robin suggested.” The original [Kopit commentary is in blue](#) below, [other sources referenced in red](#) and RCNV staff member Scott Kennedy’s **examination of the Kopit commentary in black.**

Santa Cruz Sentinel April 17, 2011

“I read a letter in the Sentinel last year that really offended me. The writer defended Helen Thomas, a Lebanese American journalist who said Jews should go back to Poland and Germany, and then went on a rant about the terrorist state of Israel. This is unfortunately an all too common theme in left-wing Santa Cruz. It was full of ignorance, self-righteousness and bigotry.”

Comment: Scott searched the internet for a letter about Helen Thomas in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* and found a letter by Don Monkerud (below) who often writes letters and commentaries in the local papers and elsewhere:

Thomas deserves praise

Sentinel June 10, 2010

Helen Thomas, veteran White House correspondent, deserves praise for her strength of character, sense of morality and standing up to governments that lead us down destructive paths. In an age that expects journalists to be neutral in the face of terrorism by nation states, she asked tough questions of government officials and even expressed disdain not heard from more morally complicit journalists. Praise her for opposing the occupation of Iraq and Bush's many disastrous policies. Praise her for her honest: "Tell them Israel to get the hell out of Palestine. Remember, these people the Palestinians are occupied and it's their land. It's not Germany; it's not Poland." Why does America continue to support injustices perpetuated by Israel, a religious controlled state that supports theocratic, radical, right-wing racists and bigots? Why allow them to continue to kill and oppress with unquestioned impunity?

Don Monkerud, Santa Cruz

Don is not affiliated with RCNV. Scott also searched in *The Good Times* and found nothing. *The Santa Cruz Metro* had the following letter:

Requiem for Helen Thomas

Metro Santa Cruz June 16, 2010

SHE SAT front row center at every press conference for as long as I can recall as the first woman to be selected in the White House press corps. Helen Thomas is gone, she answered a question instead of asking one and was so bold to criticize or even make a comment on the situation in Palestine. At rare Republican press conferences, Helen was the best part of the long and mostly boring question-and-answer sessions, especially during the last administration. The last four Republican presidents avoided her like the plague, and her latest question to George W. this week went right for the throat as too direct and honest about the two wars he left behind, the kind of questions most progressive thinkers hope are asked so we can speed up political evolution and end this era of spreading fear to garner votes.

"Bern," my mother, is the same age as Helen and slightly better at applying lipstick. She asks the most pesky questions and just blurts out what is on her mind, harsh or kind but from the heart. As children are so direct and honest, so are the elderly, the fear is gone and honesty is the only thing that is true and perfect. Helen was the last brutally honest, fearless reporter in the whole crowd. When you are fearful of losing your job for doing the right thing as an investigative journalist then the free speech era is over as we knew it. Corporate-owned media controls it all.

Helen is a hero but she went up against wrong adversary. Sixty years of brilliant journalism should not be marred by a disagreeable statement blown up by media hysterics. We will miss her fidgeting and waving her hand trying to get presidents' attention while they look everywhere in the room but in her direction. She went out with style by daring to question Israel's motives. No politician would ever touch this subject with a 10-foot pole. Thanks Helen, Many of us love you and thank you for all the good work by questioning authority.

S(teven). Rudzinski,

Soquel

And earlier...

All-Powerful AIPAC

March 10, 2010

... It is simple to see that if one criticizes Israel in any way or even questions its behavior they are labeled an anti-Semite. With the Christian Evangelicals enamored with the second coming and Israel enamored with their tourist dollars, both await the other to convert religiously.

This tiny country actually controls our foreign policy and gets us to fight their dirty little wars and give them aid at the same time and political support for atrocities they commit against their neighbors in such a horrific fashion.

Sorry I cannot cut Israel a break.

Steve S. Rudzinski,
Soquel

Comment: No one at the RCNV knows Rudzinski.”

The writer of a letter defending Helen Thomas is unnamed in Kopit’s commentary. The two above writers are not on the staff of, have no role at the Resource Center for Nonviolence, and neither was writing on behalf of the Resource Center for Nonviolence or expressing an opinion or position adopted by RCNV. Yet, apparently one of these unidentified letters is used to build Kopit’s case that eventually turns on the Resource Center.

Robin Kopit continues: That letter created a dilemma for me because I know the man. Our kids played ball together. We had a business relationship. I sat with my thoughts for a long time before acting. Ultimately I ended our business relationship in a polite and direct way, explaining why I was uncomfortable working with someone who held such negative views about Israel and Jews.

Comment: Don Monkerud told Scott that he does not know Kopit and is unaware of Robin contacting him after his letter was published in the *Sentinel* or breaking off any business relationship.

Robin Kopit continues: There is an undercurrent of anti-Semitism in Santa Cruz. It manifests as opposition to Israel, but that doesn’t adequately explain some of the offensive programs that have taken place here, or some of the ridiculous ideas that circulate. Recently the *Sentinel* published a letter from a reader who questioned whether the murderers of a Jewish family of five, stabbed to death in their beds in the West Bank town of Itamar, were Palestinian. She suggested it was an Asian worker, upset at being underpaid by greedy Jews. I wonder where she digs this stuff up.

Comment: The letter reads:

March 20, 2011

Wait for evidence

After the terrible murder of the Fogel family in a Jewish West Bank settlement the immediate assumption was that the murder was one or more Palestinians. The

Israeli army invaded nearby Palestinian villages searching for the murders and Prime Minister Netanyahu announced building 400 homes for Jews on Palestinian land in retaliation. Now another theory has surfaced: possibly the murder is a worker of Asian origin who is angry that he was not paid enough by his employer in the Fogel family. Let's wait for the evidence before making a judgement.

Margaret Knight, Santa Cruz

Comment: Margaret Knight, is a volunteer at the RCNV and active on WILFP/ Santa Cruz Branch's local Mid East Committee and the Palestine Israel Action Committee. Margaret is not on the staff of the Resource Center for Nonviolence and was not writing on behalf of the Resource Center for Nonviolence. Robin Kopit writes, "I wonder where she digs this stuff up." In fact, on various List-Serves, especially those that advocate for Palestinian human rights, there were many postings raising the question of how anybody could have entered and exited the heavily armed settlement and questions about Israeli police arrest of foreign Thai workers in the settlement. According to the April 22, 2011 Israeli newspaper *The Jerusalem Post*,

"The Bethlehem-based news agency *Ma'an*, which is close to the PA leadership, ran a lead news story that claimed that a Thai worker had been arrested by the IDF on suspicion of killing the five members of the Fogel family on Friday night.

"The agency did not say how it obtained the information. However, it said that shortly after the killings, Israeli security forces arrested all the Thai workers who were inside the settlement.

"*Ma'an* pointed out that no Palestinian group had claimed responsibility for the attack and that Palestinians were banned from entering settlements.

Another Palestinian news agency, Qudsnet, claimed that an Asian man who used to work for the Fogel family was behind the killings.

Quoting a Palestinian family living in the nearby village of Awarta, the agency said that the family members were slaughtered because the father refused to pay the Asian worker his salary, which is estimated at NIS 10,000.

Margaret refers to the "terrible murders" and only asks that evidence be gathered and an investigation conducted before conclusions are made about the Fogel family's murderer(s). She makes no mention of "greedy Jews" and, of course, More recently, Israel has produced two teen age Palestinians who have "confessed" to committing the murders. Questions continue to be raised about how the two teenagers, especially one who had recently gone through a serious

operation that restricts his mobility, could possibly have entered the heavily secured settlement, committed the murders, and escaped unscathed.

Robin Kopit does not address the substance of her letter -- the fact of the Israeli Prime Minister announcing hundreds of new illegal residences in the Occupied Palestinian Territories or the forced curfew of an entire Palestinian village by Israeli forces.

Robin Kopit continues: Many of you, and I am speaking specifically to supporters of the Resource Center for Nonviolence, would find greater respect for your ideas and less opposition to your programs if you took out the bigotry. The Middle East is a complicated dynamic place, with many groups vying for influence and supremacy. While Israel and Jews are often fingered as culprits driving the mayhem and extremism, those who do so typically want to divert attention from the inequity, corruption, extremism, repression and bad government that are their own handiwork. There's no cost to blaming Jews in the Middle East. But they don't need a cheering section in Santa Cruz.

I participated in an ongoing discussion group about Israel/Palestine topics at the Resource Center for Nonviolence about eight years ago that included members of several Jewish congregations. It was difficult to get past the ingrown bigotry of some of the participants. "Everybody knows Jewish money controls Washington," "Jews set off bombs, causing the entire Iraqi Jewish community to flee Baghdad for Israel."

Comment: Robin Kopit attributes quotations to unidentified people. Others who participated in the group do not recall the quote, "Everybody knows Jewish money controls Washington." As to the second quote, an internet search on "bombs drive Jews out of Iraq" reveals many references to the underground Zionist campaign to encourage Jews to flee Iraq, and other Arab countries, to Israel, including, including use of bombings in Iraq and arson at theaters in Egypt: www.ifamericansknew.org/history/ref-giladi.html or www.jewsnotzionists.org/jewsofiraq.htm.

Robin Kopit continues: But we did have many illuminating discussions and, for a time, we made room for each other. I made some friendships among that group. I also got a good look at the dark side of the Resource Center for Nonviolence.

Comment: One "look at the dark side of the Resource Center for Nonviolence" was the time when Robin Kopit widely distributed an e-mail expressing his disgust at a photo prominently displayed at the Resource Center in which Scott

Kennedy was pictured embracing the late Palestinian President and Chairman of the PLO Yasser Arafat. RCNV staff member Barbara Hayes and others walked throughout RCNV and reported that there were no photos of Arafat and Scott in the building. (There was one photo of a Palestinian and former RCNV intern standing with Arafat that he had faxed us and was posted on the wall of the photocopy room.) When we asked Robin Kopit to come to RCNV and point out the photo to which he took such strong exception, refused. He then admitted that there was no such photo, but that he had become carried away with his upset with RCNV. RCNV often meets with political leaders and others with whom we disagree. To suggest endorsement of or support for any or all ideas espoused by those with whom we meet is ridiculous. Photos of Kennedy with Arafat have appeared in RCNV publications, the most frequently reprinted photo in which Scott is handing Arafat a booklet promoting Palestinian use of nonviolence in their struggles for human and national rights.

It is worth noting that Robin Kopit declined our suggestion that he apologize for his unfounded accusation. Robin Kopit further refused our request that he circulate a followup message to all those to whom he had sent the e-mail denouncing RCNV for the picture and retract his accusation.

Another incident: Robin Kopit once said that the RCNV was promoting terrorism in its bookstore. When pressed for specifics, he referenced the introduction to a book of Palestinian children's art by Palestinian artist Kamal Boullata. Boullata describes an attack in which a Palestinian crossed the Lebanese border to Israel's north and attacked an Israeli Defense Forces military base in the Northern Galilee. Kopit extrapolated from this book that RCNV endorses terrorism. The irony is that Boullata is one of the most prominent Palestinians who has advocated for nonviolence for decades. He helped found the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence in 1983. It also ignores the fact that the RCNV bookstore includes titles on its shelf that are political opposites to the views held by most held by those associated with RCNV, such as books by American lawyer Allan Dershowitz.

One can only imagine what other evidence of RCNV's "dark side" lurks within Robin's active imagination.

We don't have any wonder whether Robin Kopit will support or retract other falsehoods in his recent editorial, but we are prepared to be surprised.

Robin: If you oppose injustice, oppose all injustice. Intolerance, fundamentalism, race and gender discrimination, and glorification of violence are endemic to the countries surrounding Israel in the Middle East and Central Asia. As a result, 99 percent of the Jewish population has fled these countries, a refugee exodus

greater in number than that of Palestinians fleeing the war that ensued when Arab armies attacked the nascent State of Israel in 1948.

Comment: 200+ Palestinian villages had been destroyed and their Palestinian population forced out **before** any arab armies attacked Israel (See Israeli Jewish historian Ilan Pape's *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, for names of specific villages and dates of their expulsion), and support from Israeli records that more than half the Palestinian villages wiped off the map were destroyed **before** Arab military forces entered the war.

It is also worth noting (see Israeli-British Jewish historian Avi Shlaim's *The Iron Wall*, that the Arab military forces never entered the lands assigned to Israel in the 1947 UN Partition Plan; they only operated within those territories that were to become the Palestinian State.

Here, as elsewhere, Robin Kopit turns wishful thinking and historical revisionism into what appears to be reasoned argument.

Robin: Of course, these negative qualities exist in societies also known for generosity, humility, faith, and in many cases a rich and ancient cultural heritage we all share. Culture and religion are not things that can be erased and written anew out of contemporary political convenience.

Beware of gratuitously offending people. How about no more Israel Apartheid Week or lunch with Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, the fundamentalist racist lunatic dictator of Iran?

Comment: Scott was a part of several hundred people who met with Ahmedinejad in conjunction with his annual appearance before the United Nations General Assembly. Of the 200-300 participants in the "Conversation" with Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki and Ambassador Mohammad Khazaei on September 24, 2008, at the Grand Hyatt Hotel, New York City, 40 groups were selected to prepare a series of "Statements, Concerns and Questions of the US Peace Movement" for President Ahmedinejad. (I served as timekeeper for the speakers from a seat in the front row and did not ask and was not asked to prepare or deliver a statement, concern or questions.) In addition to briefly telling the story of how their organization came into being and how it works to advance its agenda in practice, groups were asked particularly that such stories be tied to an example of success. Participants were also asked to shape one or more statements of concern, as a question or as an observation, about the current relationship between the United States and Iran, which would elicit a response from President Ahmedinejad or the Foreign Minister Mottaki or U.N. Ambassador Khazaei,

adding clarity or nuance to issues which are present in this relationship between the United States and Iran. Those questions not addressed to Ahmedinejad in person were presented to him in writing.

If you wish to review Statements, RCNV will provide you with a copy of the 40 Statements arranged alphabetically by the last name of the individual most directly identified with the draft submitted and their organizational affiliations.

Speakers included September 11 Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, United Nations Representative Church of the Brethren-On Earth Peace Agency, CODEPINK, Lutheran and Presbyterian Peace Fellowships, Western States Legal Foundation, Women for Peace, Mennonite Central Committee, US Freedom Forum, United for Peace and Justice, Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality, Friends Committee on National Legislation (Quakers), Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Pax Christi, and Physicians for Social Responsibility (partial list).

The following issues and concerns were addressed to President ahmadenijad:

- who do we talk with in Iran, how do we meet with them, and can you or your government give them the political support and resources and courage to work with us to make peace between the USA and Iran possible?
- What else can Iran do to comply with the IAEA inspections?
- What are the prospects for increased acceptance or protection for religious groups which are not related to the officially recognized minority religions (Anglican, other Christian, Bahai, Buddhists, etc)?
- Do you think that violent crackdown on some members of the press and on student protesters is an effective way to engage the youth of your country in the affairs of society?
- What are the three most practical steps that the United States could take to help build a mutually respectful relationship with Iran? What next steps is Iran ready to take to strengthen this relationship?
- Given the great costs and risks of nuclear energy generation, why does Iran choose to invest its resources and skilled people in this path, rather than seeking to become a leader in renewable energy development?
- What kinds of regional activity has Iran initiated to foster stability and peace in Iraq in particular?

- Israel fears that your government is intent on attacking it and driving Jews into the sea. If this is not an accurate description of Iranian policy, how would you describe Iran's policy towards Israel? If the Palestinian people were to reach a peace agreement with Israel that allowed the two peoples to live side by side without violence, would Iran accept and respect that agreement?
- How can the vital dialogue between Iranian citizens desiring peace and United States Citizens also desiring peace with each other continue if people who interact with or seek the support of U.S. citizens or U.S. non-governmental organizations are then accused of trying to bring about the overthrow of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.?
- How can your government support, not punish, Iranians working to build bridges with us?
- We question the treatment of Iranian citizens being held without charges, incommunicado and without access to legal counsel. Will Iran demonstrate adherence to International Law in the case of Dr. Kamiar Alaei, Dr. Arash Alaei and other Iranians held in similar circumstances?
- We have been receiving very negative reports about human rights conditions of women and labor activists. Apparently President Ahmadijhad's response to homosexuality in Iran was allegedly "mistranslated" when he was at Columbia University last year. Is it true that gays and lesbians are stoned to death?
- Central to our religious heritage as Unitarian Universalists is the defense of religious and political freedoms and full equality for all people, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, or national origin.
- The reports we receive about the treatment of women and political dissidents in Iran raise questions and concerns for us. Is Iran moving towards allowing its citizens more freedom of choice and affiliation? Is the government working towards equality for women in public life? Are protections being created for citizens who identify with different political parties, religious beliefs, and sexual orientations?

I was invited to represent RCNV at the meeting. It was not an endorsement of any of the moronic positions that Ahmadijhad has taken or hateful statements he has made. It was a rare opportunity for representatives of American civil society (rather than US government spokesmen) to confront the President of Iran about matters of concern to us, such as the rights and roles of women, human

rights abuses, Iran's nuclear program, suppression of dissent and minorities, etc., in Iran.

I don't think that most people in Santa Cruz would object to my representing RCNV at such a gathering.

Robin Kopit continues: Or sponsorship for speakers like Norman Finkelstein, who claims that Jews bilk the rest of us on account of the Holocaust, or Imam Abdul Malik, who claims Jews bombed the World Trade Center?

Comment: Kathleen Eschen-Pipes has noted that, "Norman Finkelstein, the son of Jewish survivors of the Nazi holocaust (both of whom lost their entire families in the genocide), has not claimed that "Jews bilk the rest of us." He has claimed that Zionist organizations exploit the memory of the holocaust and actual holocaust survivors to extort money from European governments (little if any of which is given to holocaust survivors, but rather directly and indirectly to support Israel) and to distract from Israel's violations of international law."

Following Finkelstein's 2006 visit, not a single criticism of his presentation was made by those who had attempted to force his talk to be canceled. Many skeptical or previously critical Jewish and other residents of Santa Cruz said they found nothing objectionable in Finkelstein's presentation.

Robin Kopit was invited to be our guest to hear Finkelstein in 2010. He refused. RCNV will send a copy of Finkelstein's 2010 presentation if they wish to judge for themselves whether there is any suggestion of anti-Semitism or Holocaust denial in Finkelstein's presentation.

RCNV has never invited Imam Abdul Malik to speak or sponsored his presentations in Santa Cruz or elsewhere.

Robin Kopit continues: How about ending the practice of disseminating ridiculous rumors that have at their core the intent to denigrate Jews and disparage Israel?

Comment: Robin Kopit provides no examples of RCNV "disseminating ridiculous rumors that have at their core the intent to denigrate Jews and disparage Israel..."

Bigotry incites violence. Cut it out.

Robin Kopit is president of Congregation Kol Tefillah.

