

Graffiti for intellectuals



SIMON SAYS



FEBRUARY
20
2006



By Si Frumkin

CONRAD AND L.A. TIMES REVISITED

This article appeared in the 9/11/2000 "Graffiti" - more than 5 1/2 years ago! I thought that in view of the Danish cartoon riots it might be timely to run it again. There is more on the subject on page 4 and a whole page of L.A. Times cartoons on page 3.

IT WAS 28 (BY NOW IT'S 34!) YEARS AGO - A LONG TIME - AND MOST PEOPLE HAVE FORGOTTEN ABOUT IT. It came like a bolt out of the blue and it would have put an end to the emigration of Soviet Jews. It was a clever move by the Soviet government and it even seemed logical and difficult to argue against.

In 1972, the Soviets passed a law that all Jews leaving the Soviet Union had to repay the government for all the education they had received. For an average university graduate the amount was somewhere between \$25,000 and \$50,000 - an astronomic sum for a Soviet citizen.

Worldwide protests followed, United States government used diplomatic pressure to oppose the law, and, eventually, it was not implemented, even though it still remains on the books.

On September 24, 1972, the Los Angeles Times ran a cartoon by its Pulitzer prizewinning cartoonist Paul Conrad. There were two panels with identical images in each: a gaunt man in a striped concentration camp uniform, a prominent Star of David on his jacket, a prominent tattoo on his bare arm. One panel was subtitled: "Germany, 1936" and the tattoo was "2513540". The other was subtitled "Russia, 1972" and the tattoo was \$25,135.40"

The message was clear. The Nazis murdered Jews. The Soviets tried to sell them freedom for dollars. Both were evil.

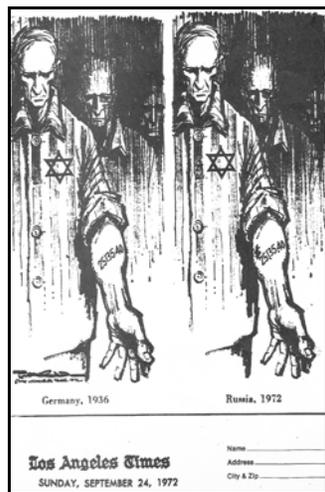
I loved that cartoon. We even used it in Soviet Jewry leaflets. One picture said what it had just taken me 5 paragraphs to explain and it did it more simply and powerfully.

Since then Paul Conrad's work changed a great deal. I think that this was the last time he used the Star of David as anything but a symbol of hate, oppression and violence.

I have some of his cartoons that might have been used by the anti-Semitic publications of the two cultures he criticized in 1972. As his comment on the Palestinian intifada he drew a Star of David made of barbed wire and billy clubs. He memorialized

**Please see the amazing
L. A. Times Sampler
on page 3
and the
12 Danish cartoons plus 1
on page 2**

the Lebanese Sabra and Shatilla massacre - in which Lebanese Christians murdered Palestinians - in a refugee camp near Beirut by drawing a Star of David Beirut by drawing a Star of David made of tortured, twisted corpses. When the late Los Angeles mayor Bradley was criticized by the Jewish community for meeting with and refusing to criticize the notorious Rev. Farakhan of the Nation of Islam movement, he drew Bradley in a white robe, wearing a crown of thorns, in a Christ-like posture, on the steps of the City Hall facing an angry, fist shaking mob. The caption was, "And they cried, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!'" a quote from the Gospel on the crucifixion of Jesus by the Jews.



There were many others in the same vein for the next decade, but then it stopped about a year and a half ago. I thought that Conrad had finally seen the light and stopped being an anti-

Jewish bigot. I was wrong.

On July 26, 2000, the L.A. Times chose to publish a cartoon that was as puzzling as it was offensive. It showed a Star of David made of two triangles - one plain black lines,

the other barbed wire. There was no caption.

I called the Times and asked for an explanation. I was told that there had been quite a few calls and that all readers were referred to the Readers Representative. There I got a voice mail (naturally) and left a message. A few days later I got a callback. "We are waiting for an explanation from editorial," the very nice lady said, her voice going down worshipfully at the word "editorial". "They will give us an explanation of what the cartoon meant. Many callers are puzzled. So am I", she added. "Conrad is getting somewhat puzzling, isn't he?"

I got the explanation a few hours later. "The editorial department feels that the cartoon is complimentary to Israel," she said. "You see, only half of the Star of David is barbed wire so that means that Israel is half right and only half of it is barbed wire, that is, oppressive. So, this is better than it was and Israel is heading in the right direction. .

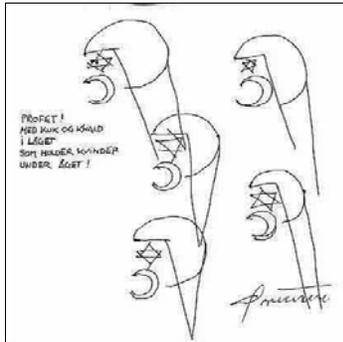
What? Complimentary? I couldn't t help it. I laughed and laughed and laughed.

Then I found Paul Conrad's website (www.conradprojects.com) and sent my comments directly to Paul. Believe it or not, I got a reply. Here it is:

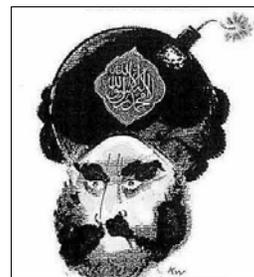
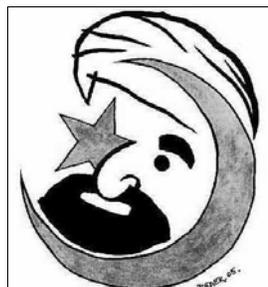
Si, you have written year after year with your misinterpretations of the cartoons - I have always been pro-Israel and particularly after visiting that great country (that city belongs to all THREE of our great religions. the star is not ALL barbwire (sic!) - only half of it - the cartoon represents Arafat's refusal to help make it whole again. I am not always pro-Israel policy, but you seem to think ANY disagreement with that is anti-Semitic. Wake up - every policy needs working on and MY OPINION is what I am paid to do. Get with it! P.C. (Emphasis in the original)

A criticism of Arafat? We all misunderstood? If you really think that, you may want to apologize to Paul. On the other hand, you may want to tell him what you really think. (His email in 2000 was 74651.474 @compuserve.com but it has changed and I don't know what it is now)

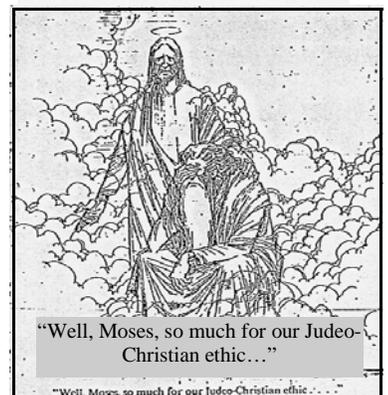
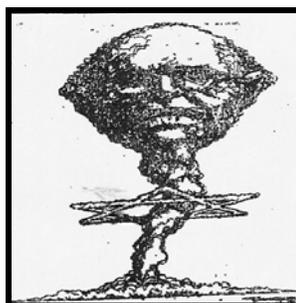
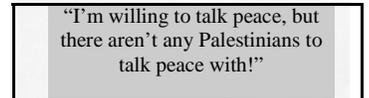
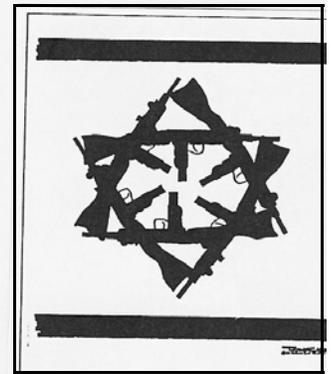
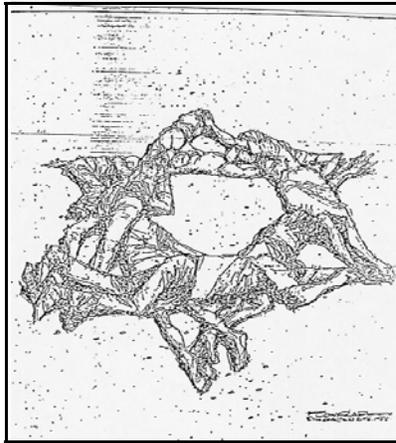
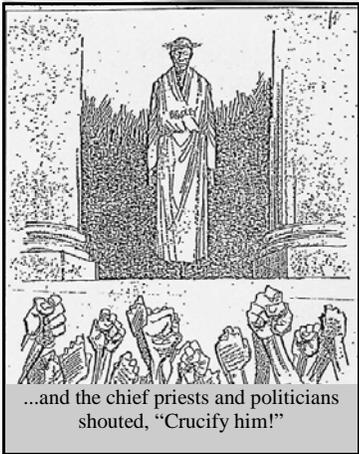
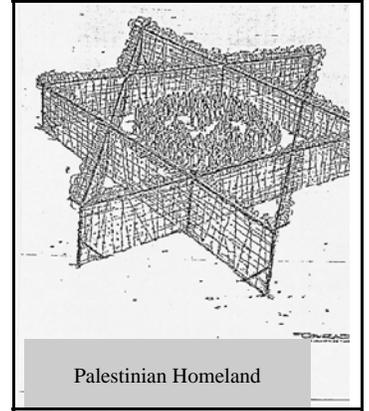
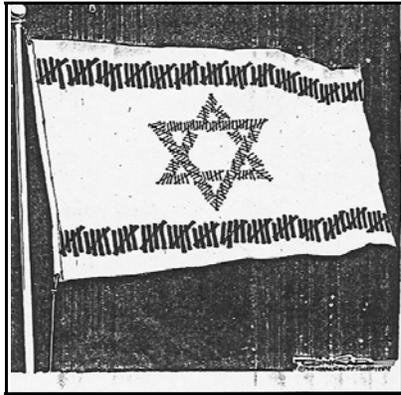
The 12 cartoons that shook the world...



...AND THE ONE THAT DIDN'T!



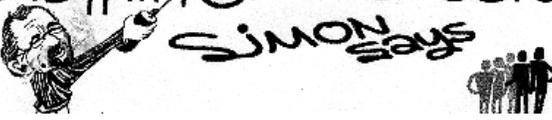
Los Angeles Times cartoon Sampler. Judge for yourself...





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SIMON SAYS



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THE GUTLESS OFFENDER by Si Frumkin

It was reported, somewhat apologetically, that the major U.S. newspapers who are always in the forefront of the ongoing battle for the freedom of the press, free uncensored expression and who fearlessly go into battle to expose the evil politicians, generals, big businessmen, polluters and war profiteers have chickened out. The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, Time, Newsweek, Boston Globe and the rest of the media heroes decided not to print the 12 Danish cartoons that have caused all the recent problems worldwide.

This in itself isn't much of a story. Those who follow these things know that this is not unusual. The media have a way of dealing with real danger that was evidenced when some of the biggies in print and TV media had made a deal with Saddam Hussein not to say bad things about him if he will allow their Baghdad bureaus remain open. There is also the pro-Palestinian bias that is motivated by Palestinian guns having been held to reporters' heads, confiscation of film and demands - usually met - for the firing of those who report Palestinian brutality, savagery or phoniness of some of the staged events.

The story is that the Los Angeles Times did print offensive cartoons, quite a few of them, certainly more than just a dozen, but they weren't those offensive cartoons. They certainly were offensive but just as certainly the Times people knew that there would be no dire consequences - no one would be physically attacked, mobs wouldn't set fire to the Times building and Times bureaus wouldn't be closed in the faraway Middle East. The worst that could happen was that annoyed readers might cancel a few subscriptions and a few nasty letters would be written to the editor.

The Times could live with that. After all, in a city with no serious competitors where would these readers go? And furthermore, the cartoons were produced by Paul Conrad, a man with impeccable liberal credentials, a Pulitzer Prize winner and a truly talented artist, so who cares if a couple of rabbis and

others express their disapproval.

Wait a minute, you say. The Times is better than that. The Times wouldn't do this. Were they really and truly offensive? Maybe it is all in Frumkin's mind? One man's offensive is another man's masterpiece, or something like that, you know.

OK, you may be right and I'll let you judge for yourself. Here are just a few of them.

A Star of David formed of dead bodies - Palestinians murdered by Israel (9/20/82); a Star of David made of barbed wire encloses Palestinians (4/4/82); machine guns and automatic weapons form a Star of David (1/5/81); an Israeli soldier with a smoking gun in his hands stands on top of a pile of dead Palestinians, saying, "I'm willing to talk peace, but there aren't any Palestinians to talk peace with" (4/27/88); an Israeli soldier firing at a dying Palestinian, a calendar below him with most days checked off and a caption, "A Palestinian a day keeps the PLO away"; a monstrous Menachem Begin (he was the Israeli Prime Minister at the time) whose face is a nuclear cloud that is rising through a Star of David; the Israeli flag in which the Star of David in the center and the stripes above and below are represented by vertical lines counting off dead Palestinians (6/5/89); a bearded figure holding up a placard "Free Soviet Jews" standing on top of a suffering kneeling figure marked Palestinians - it shows that Soviet Jews were freed and supported at the expense of Palestinians (12/20/87); a cartoon captioned "Abraham

and Isaac": a huge bearded figure marked "Israel" is clubbing a child holding a rock; the large figure is saying, "Stop me before I kill again!" (Here Conrad is not only offensive - he is just plain wrong. Abraham did not kill Isaac!); Christ on a donkey accompanied by people with palm fronds is trying to enter Jerusalem and is stopped by armed Israeli soldiers, saying, "Jerusalem is a closed military area!"; Jesus rebuking a crying Moses, "Well, Moses, so much for our Judeo-Christian ethic"; Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley who was criticized by Jews for not denouncing anti-Semitic remarks by Farakhan is shown in Christ-like robes, a crown of thorns on his head and is captioned, "...and the chief priests and politicians shouted, 'crucify him!'" (*Quote from the Gospels on the crucifixion of Jesus*) and more, much more.

So what do you say? Should we go and set fire to the Times building? Should we shoot the people who bring the Times to our homes? Should we threaten the Times editor with beheading? After all, this is what induced the Times and all the rest of the brave defenders of press freedom not to publish offensive cartoons, so it seems to work, right?

I think not. I will not sink to the level of the rioting barbarians. Much that the Times advocates and publishes offends me but I recognize its right to do so. But, I am also determined to expose hypocrisy and immorality when I see it.

And this is what this story is about. ☆



Somalization

“WE CANNOT EVEN BEGIN TO IMAGINE to what extent the Gaza Strip has fallen to tribal rule and become ensnared in the gang warfare of rival clans,” writes Samih Khalaf, a prominent Palestinian commentator, in the small-circulation organ “Al-Sabah” (Morning), put out by the political commissars of the Fatah old guard, the veteran loyalists of the late Yasser Arafat. “This clan has an armed militia, that family has an armed militia, they control Southistan, or Westistan, or Northistan of the Gaza Strip... Every day the satellite TV networks report about one tribe that attacked government offices and fought another to divide the city in two... Gaza is heading for the worst. As if the organized anarchy of the factional and militia splits weren’t enough, we now have the amazing development of *hamula* (clan) armies fighting each other, while the Palestinian Authority stands powerlessly by.”

Adds Dr. Eyad Sarraj, the liberal, respected Gaza psychiatrist, writing on the popular Palestinian Internet news site “Al-Watan Voice” in Arabic: “Who does not know that in the Gaza Strip, the word ‘law’ has no meaning? And that the term ‘security’ has no translation in the lexicon of the Palestinian environment... What is happening is the effective divvying up of the Gaza Strip between different groups, which sometimes involve the various splinters of Fatah or other factions, or tribal clans who have a share in the money and weapons produced by the system left behind by the former [Arafat] regime — a system built up at the expense of the central authority.

“The Palestinian police,” Sarraj continues, “is still not capable of directing the street traffic when a wedding convoy passes by, firing shots of celebration into the sky. It appears that the Palestinian security forces are trained only to escort the president’s convoy or the convoys of other VIPs by blocking the roads to the rest of the citizens. That is the policing situation while the houses of the attorney general and the chief justice of the Supreme Court are being attacked...” Laments Sarraj: “Who, therefore, controls Gaza? Is it the security apparatuses, or the armed clans and tribes? Or the resistance organizations? Or the feudal corporations? Or perhaps it is all of them together and we are turning into Somalia, in the sense that the Strip will be divided into armed, feudal principalities, each with its own ruler, that nobody will be allowed to enter without permission... It is no wonder that there are individuals in Gaza now seriously considering setting up private militias to defend their family and property.”

And Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, leader of a reformist list running in the Palestinian elections, calls the PA an “absentee government.”

This is the picture painted by those on the inside, and nobody can argue with the accuracy of their description. The PA security forces themselves are part of a mottled mosaic of tribes and armed militias.

More importantly, the Palestinian police are acting primarily as members of family militias, and only in a secondary role, if at all, as the wearers of official uniforms.

That explains how foreigners are taken hostage one after the other and their kidnappers are never punished. On the contrary, they are paid money or granted other privileges in order to get them to release their prey. That explains how government offices are ransacked and looted one after the other, and yet no attempt is made to stop the phenomenon. And that is how the Egyptian border terminal at Rafah got overrun for several hours in late December by armed men from the Hassanain family because of a dispute with a rival clan, and the whole incident ended with handshakes and smiles. Often, armed gangs block roads in protest over some matter or other.



AVI KATZ

Nobody ever takes action to open them.

The process of the Somalization of Gaza is in full swing. Arafat used to say that the Palestinians had to choose between Singapore and Somalia. The choice has apparently been made, and Arafat’s legacy is leading this society to the abyss of total disintegration. The Fatah movement, on the eve of elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, is breaking up in the vortex of internal disputes. Hamas is standing aside and refraining from using its power to stop the anarchy. And Israel continues to pretend that the PA is an “address.”

The Gaza Strip has turned into a non-state with a façade of government and multiple armies. The situation in the West Bank is slightly better, but not for long. In Nablus a similar process is already effectively underway, and the same is going on to a lesser extent in Jenin, Tul Karm and Bethlehem. Only the massive Israeli army presence is preventing Somalization all over the West Bank. But the direction is already clear: The Palestinians are heading not for better government, but for no government at all. ●