

I SPY WITH MY LITTLE EYE

HOW LOW CAN YOU GO

Michael Kuttner

Just when you thought that the media's obsession with Israel could not get worse, they proved us all wrong. Negative news, conspiracy theories, guilty of everything you can think of and the target of continuous condemnations are all part and parcel of the media's treatment of the Jewish State. Historical facts, legal logic and balanced coverage are generally alien concepts when it comes to reporting facts about Israel and its citizens.

New depths, however, were recently reached when the Southland Times burst forth with a story straight out of the Middle Ages era of anti Jewish conspiracies. If the editor's objective was to propel his obscure provincial paper onto the international arena then he succeeded brilliantly. An unnamed secret service source and outrageous allegations about Mossad and Israel are guaranteed to make headlines, so he was onto a winner. Within 24 hours this so called scoop went around the world and what followed was entirely predictable.

From every crack and crevice, the Jew & Israel haters crawled forth to spew their venom via the internet chat sites and talkbacks. TV & Radio hosts were not far behind, the vast majority of them totally ignorant about any real facts but willing and only too able to unearth plots, spies and conspiracies lurking around every corner. So called "experts" were dredged up to prove that Israel was always associated with murky schemes, involved in worldwide illegalities and had agents swarming throughout Aotearoa. No serious challenging of these well worn fables was forthcoming and any viewer, listener or reader could hardly be blamed for accepting this travesty of media impartiality as Gospel truth.

If the Southland Times intention was to cast suspicion on all Israeli backpackers touring NZ they have done a terrific job. Every youngster on his/her post army trip down under is now viewed as a trainee Mossad agent. That is how the young man crushed to death in his car and his traveling companions have been described by the NZ media. Accusing someone killed in the earthquake of spying and his distraught friends as foreign agents is despicable. Without any shred of evidence, not only are these tourists accused of nefarious intentions but the Israeli forensic team and rescue specialists on the scene are also smeared with unproven allegations. Despite any proof of culpability and denials by officials the conspiracies take on a life of their own.

To compound this farce, we have some politicians making statements implying that there is more to it than has been revealed, thus in one stroke, stoking the fires of prejudice and hate. The Prime Minister did not help by making evasive statements which only made matters worse. He did confirm that the SIS had been "worried" over the behaviour of Israelis after the earthquake. Talk about paranoid rubbish. What about the behaviour of other nationalities? Oh I forgot – they must be presumed innocent because they were not Jewish Israelis.

From the perspective of Israelis, this whole sorry saga looks incredible. The media storm has most effectively cast New Zealand in a negative light. Who would want to visit and tour if they were automatically going to be viewed as trainee spies? How should an Israeli tourist feel passing through passport control at Auckland or Christchurch airport when they know that their presence in the country raises suspicions? In one foul swoop New Zealand has been transformed in the eyes of Israelis from a beautiful country with tolerant and laid back people, to a country populated by paranoid individuals and officials whose media are in the vanguard of Jewish conspiracy theories. What do I answer when I am asked what the hell is going on? The sane, sensible and tolerant country which I lived in for 49 years seems to have joined the Israel bashers club whose members include not only some of the most despotic anti democratic regimes in the world but whose anti Jewish credentials are second to none.

Will we ever see or hear apologies, retractions and admissions of unfounded bias from the Southland Times and its fellow travelers in the NZ media? Highly unlikely.

In fact the Editor of the Southland Times has stated that investigations are on-going, so that means he is convinced there was and maybe still is some sort of murky Israeli plan to subvert New Zealand's secrets, whatever they may be.

No doubt if the All Blacks fail to win the Rugby World Cup, there will be no mystery as to which country's nationals are to blame.

In the meantime the mud sticks and believe me there is nothing quite like anti Jewish mud for sticking over the last 2,000 years.

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