

Editorial/comment

Lessons to heed from Rusesabagina's lecture

Eloge Christian Butera remembers listening to the radio when he was 10 years old in Rwanda.

"They'd be talking about the cockroaches to be eliminated," Butera, president of the African Students Association at the University of Manitoba, recalls. "Many did not live to tell their stories."

Butera recalled that shocking memory of tribal warfare as he thanked Paul Rusesabagina, real-life hero of "Hotel Rwanda", after Rusesabagina's lecture at the U of M January 9.

It was heartening to see the huge turnout for Rusesabagina's lecture - especially for Jewish Winnipeggers, because the Asper Foundation Lecture Series, the Winnipeg Zionist Initiative and JSA/Hillel, the local Jewish university student groups, sponsored that event.

It's telling, however, that what prompted that impressive turnout was a commercial movie.

"Hotel Rwanda", a Hollywood film nominated last year for several Academy Awards, tells the story of Rwanda's 1994 genocide and Rusesabagina's heroism as a Kigali hotel manager during that monstrous killing, very effectively.

But where are the headlines and stories in American and Canadian media about the ongoing atrocities in Africa?

Rusesabagina, himself, listed some as he ended his speech here.

"From 1996 to now, about four million civilians in Congo have been butchered, and the world is standing by," he told his audience at the U of M. "In northern Uganda, 1.8 million people have been displaced in their country and no one cares about it."

Rusesabagina also recently visited Darfur, the region of the Sudan North American media reported on in some depth in the past few years, but that's now fallen off the North American media's agenda.

"What I saw in Darfur is exactly what I was seeing in Rwanda between 1990 and 1994. About 150,000 people are sitting under the Sahara sun, without shelter, without clothes, without any hope for the future."

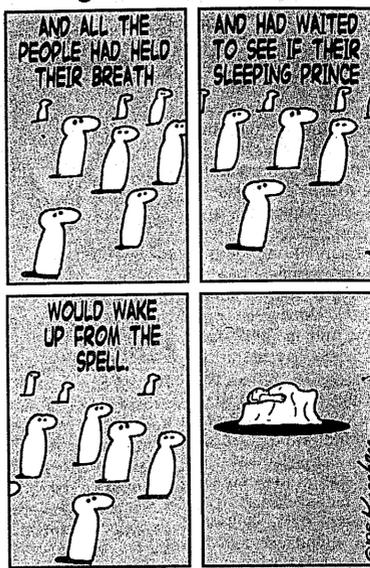
The slogan enjoining the world to "never again" allow the repetition of the horrors of the Holocaust rings hollow, when Rusesabagina speaks about the ongoing reality of African genocide.

Where are we, with our pocketbooks, when millions of starving African children are so desperate for help?

That's what all of us should be asking ourselves, following Paul Rusesabagina's unforgettable lecture here.

Dry Bones

THEIR NEW YEAR HAD BECOME A GRIM FAIRY TALE



www.drybonesblog.blogspot.com

Palestinian democracy: truth is stranger than fiction

Election of more Hamas members could create problems for Israel

Democracy is not a word often associated with the Arab world. But the recent municipal elections in Palestinian Authority-controlled territories are exemplary in that they truly reflected the will of the Palestinian people.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES



BRENT E. SASLEY

Hamas did extremely well, based on the strong support it has built up over the years



A Palestinian woman reads a newspaper in the municipal elections: Hamas did extremely well, and is expected to repeat that success in the January 25 elections for the Palestinian legislature.

at the local level. The polls were conducted quite freely and fairly (with some minor problems).

The results repeat what has become a truism in Palestinian politics: the seemingly unalterable growing strength of Hamas, on its way to victory at the national level and, in the mold of Hizballah, its

transformation from terrorist group to political party with a military wing. At least that appears to be goal at this point.

Democracy has worked so well that Fatah, Mahmoud Abbas's dominant faction within the Palestinian Authority (P.A.), has postponed parliamentary elections once already and came close to postponing them again. The sheer inability of Fatah - dominated by former cronies of Yasser Arafat who care only about preserving their own access to wealth and power - to meet the desperate demands of the Palestinian people has undermined its former supremacy. The open and violent rifts within Fatah, particularly between the old guard and the young reformers, have further undercut its appeal.

At the same time, Fatah simply does not appeal to voters on the wide range of socio-economic matters that Palestinians are focused on right now, including jobs, health care, and law and

order. Fatah has traditionally had little to offer in this way, preferring to focus on being representative of the struggle against Israel and for Palestinian self-determination.

But Hamas has been focused on these very social and economic issues that Fatah has ignored. It has - since the late 1980s - been providing social services to the Palestinians, including health clinics, sports and youth clubs, and schooling.

All of this is coming to a head in the upcoming elections for the Palestinian legislature (scheduled for January 25). Polling data suggests Fatah will take the largest number of seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council. (The most recent data gives Fatah 38 per cent of the vote and Hamas about 27 per cent.)

The fact that Hamas is doing that well indicates it has a high level of support among Palestinians. Second, at least part of this support - though it is difficult to tell how much - is related to Hamas's position in the forefront of confrontation with Israel. Third, having consistently polled around 30 per cent of the vote in surveys since the second intifada, Hamas is in a position to hold significant veto power in the parliament. Fourth, this will likely translate into representation in the P.A. executive, thus giving it a say over how peacemaking with Israel is conducted.

All this democracy raises several disturbing questions for Israel. If Hamas has such strong support and is likely to do well in parliamentary elections - and thus gain significant power within the legislative assembly and executive - should Israel do what it can to prevent the elections? Should it then negotiate with a P.A. that includes Hamas? Should it ignore both the will of the Palestinian people and its own frequent calls for greater liberalization among the Arab regimes? Should it encourage Fatah to either postpone again or disrupt the elections?

Israel is caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, Palestinian democracy is proceeding at a pace that is both remarkable and repre-

(Cont. on page 5. See "Brent Sasley".)

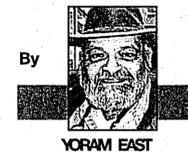
Comment

Sharon had many acquaintances, few real friends

A personal memoir

With Israeli, Jewish and world reaction to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's grave condition, it seems all previous criticisms of the politician dubbed The Bulldozer have been forgotten.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES



YORAM EAST

Israelis, right-wingers and left-wingers alike, almost unanimously expressed shock and bewilderment as they follow their leader's illness.

Not since Rabin's assassination have such deep emotions engulfed the nation. Those who have even a slight knowledge of Jewish history know that in our collective genetic memory there is a strong urge to huddle under the care and leadership of a patriarch. This father image is deeply entrenched in all of us even as far back as in the days of Abraham in Haran (Mesopotamia).

Sharon's career and public image, at times churning like a winding roller coaster, had its ups and downs, but as the people realized their tough aging "father" was gravely ill, they instinctively came together, galvanizing their anxiety into a united show of love and care.

I met Sharon for the first time in the 1950s, when he already was an Israeli legend. An acquaintance of my father introduced me to the hero when I was a teenager awaiting conscription. Over the years, our paths crossed time and again in the years of my military and journalistic careers. On one occasion, when Sharon was in a sort of in-between period in his political career, he found time to come visit me in Metullah, where I was living at the time. Our passionate debates ended with a mutual agreement not to agree on several ideological topics, but definitively to remain good friends.

Over the years, I noticed how this unique man could motivate people to help him



General Ariel Sharon in the Sinai Desert during the 1973 Yom Kippur War in background, with bandaged head, with Moshe Dayan in the foreground.



Sharon (third from left) in the Six Day War.

achieve his political goals.

I also met him on the battlefield. In 1973 I arrived at his headquarters on the banks of the Suez Canal shortly after he was injured by shrapnel, which had grazed his forehead. I will never forget the sight of Sharon with a blood-stained bandage around his head, adding an element of heroism to his warrior image.

Ariel Sharon was admired by his troops to the point where they would follow him through hell and high water if he asked them.

When I was involved in Lebanon, a period when Sharon was looking forward to the elections which eventually propelled the Likud to power, he often was my guest in Metullah, and we used to drive together through the upper Galilee, the Golan and southern Lebanon.

In 1981, when the northern Golan Druze refused to accept Israeli citizenship, the military governor imposed curfew on four villages. Thousands of sheep and goats were agonized by hunger and thirst because they could not be taken out to graze.

Meanwhile Sharon, now minister of defence, had added me to his circle of ad hoc advisors. He called me and asked: "You know the Druze, what do you recommend?" When I told him the animals were suffering terribly, he immediately ordered the curfew to be lifted.

We continued to keep in touch during the first days of the 1982 war in Lebanon. He sent me a letter to Winnipeg days after the war began, again asking for my recommendations and opinion. However, this time, my suggestions were not accepted. I advised him against going all the way to Beirut but, as we all know, he did not heed this advice, ultimately causing much grief and disillusionment. Other, more high-ranking and powerful players than myself, were at his side. I was in Winnipeg.

In the late '90s I saw him for the last time in the lobby of a Jerusalem hotel. Our conversation revolved

around my new life in Canada but more, over his great love for animals, in particular, his German shepherd.

Sharon's major problem was that, with the exception of his immediate family, he had many acquaintances but few real friends. Loyal to his soldiers and to his beliefs, he kept only a few acquaintances at his side.

There was no one close enough, not even his sons, to prevent Sharon's gravely-mistaken decision to leave the hospital too soon after his first minor stroke.

No one had the crucial influence required to make him remain in the hospital at least until his heart surgery for a minor birth defect was done.

Sharon of 1973 was hailed by his troops in Africa (Egypt), all of them reservists from all walks of life, as they sang "Arik melekh Israel" - "Arik King of Israel."

A king has no friends and this, to the best of my judgment, is the Achilles heel of the man I admire so much.

God willing, Sharon will awaken with minimal permanent damage.

This great leader deserves to exit the political arena in pride, and full awareness of his historic achievements.

The writer, a Winnipegger, was born and raised in Israel, and served as a colonel in the Israeli Defence Forces.

Brent Sasley (Cont. from page 4.)

sentative of long-time calls by Israel and the West for greater political participation in the Arab world. On the other hand, this process of democratization has sustained the rise to power of a staunch enemy of Israel. Sometimes truth really is stranger than fiction.

Brent E. Sasley is a doctoral candidate in political science at McGill University, in Middle East politics, currently living in Winnipeg. He can be reached at brent.sasley@shaw.ca

LETTERS

Jews shouldn't vote Conservative

"Will Stephen Harper be our next prime minister? Should I get married before he does?" Though many Canadians may ask themselves the first question, straight Canadians do not have to ask themselves the second question.

However, gay and lesbian Canadians do. On the first day of the federal election campaign, before saying anything about health care, the economy or other vital issues, Mr. Harper announced that, if elected, he would try to prevent further same-sex marriages from taking place, but would not retroactively annul same-sex marriages that have already taken place.

It is truly terrifying that this politician should make it his highest political priority to roll back the human rights of a vulnerable minority group. And among those who should be terrified are Canadian Jews.

The Jewish people have learned from bitter experience that, when human rights are not protected, Jews are not safe.

Today Steven Harper is only attacking gay and lesbian Canadians, but who knows which group he may attack tomorrow?

As a gay, Jewish voter, I call on fellow Jewish voters to vote for parties other than Steven Harper's Conservatives.

ELLIOT LEVEN
Winnipeg

Federation wants to sharply reduce museum

Further to Laila Silverberg's letter in your December 21 issue about the critical attitude of the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg towards the Jewish Museum of Western Canada, I too must criticize their negative attitude.

I was the tour guide who showed the Jewish Museum to then-federal cabinet minister Lloyd Axworthy, when he presented the government's \$4 million cheque to the Asper Community Campus providing that a Jewish museum would be part of the centre.

Mr. Axworthy was most impressed with the museum, and was happy his government was to be a financial part of it.

Also, Justice Rosella Abella also highly praised the Jewish Museum. At the time (I was also her tour guide), she said that nowhere else in Canada is there such a detailed and comprehensive display of Jewish heritage, not even in her home city of Montreal.

Sadly, Federation wants to drastically reduce the Jewish Museum to a few "windows" of artifacts. Hopefully the Holocaust Centre will remain as it is.

This "jewel of a museum" (Justice Abella's words) will no longer be in existence if the "powers that be" that comprise the Jewish Federation rules it into its demise.

I call upon the Jewish community to voice its opinions to Federation as well as to *The Jewish Post & News*.

ROSLYN SILVER
Winnipeg

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