

THE FOREIGN POLICY OF BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

How a concerted community effort blocked the passage of the controversial Measure E

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Do you laugh or do you cry?

That was the problem that faced many of Israel's friends when, late last February, Measure E made it to the ballot in Berkeley, California.

On the comic side, there was the image of Ronald Reagan opening his morning mail to find a letter from Eugene "Gus" Newport, the "progressive" mayor of Berkeley, widely known for his anti-administration junkets to Cuba, Angola and El Salvador. In the letter, Newport would call on the president to reduce American aid to Israel by an "amount equal to the most accurate approximation of what Israel spends annually on settlements in the occupied territories . . . of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights." That was the specific action required by Measure E, and the incongruous breakfast-time scenario it suggested evoked much mirth among those who have come to regard Berkeley as the political Chelm of America.

But the laughter died quickly as other images were recalled. Exactly 20 years earlier, Berkeley had struck an important opening spark in a conflagration that swept across American campuses and eventuated in the anti-Vietnam protest movement of the late 1960s. National debate *did* ensue, American foreign policy was altered, and the attitudes of a generation of Americans *were* reshaped. Might Measure E also prove a kind of bellwether, this time for a move to distance America from Israel?

This was precisely what the proponents of the initiative had in mind. At the least, they sought to test the political winds, to use Measure E to determine whether there was sufficient resentment towards America's foreign expenditures and the prospect of American foreign intervention

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in general, and towards Israel's special relationship to the United States in particular, to make "even-handedness" in the Middle East a popular cause. After all, many Americans, on both the right and the left, see this nation's foreign policy as part of a larger zero-sum equation, believing that if more of our national resources are to be devoted to problems of poverty here at home, less must be devoted to the international sector. The sponsors of Measure E hoped to bring this sentiment to bear directly on Israel.

It was a clever strategy, for instead of seeking to mobilize American support for one side or the other of the Arab-Israel conflict, it sought to appeal directly to perceived American interests. If it worked, the few voters who began with hostility towards Israel would be joined by the many others whose principal concerns lay elsewhere. This was the intention, clearly, of the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), which seeded the campaign for E.

ADC has, in the last few years, become the leading voice of Arab Americans on American policy in the Middle East. James Zogby, its National Executive Director, spent the week prior to the June 5 election in Berkeley. ADC's Bay Area coordinator was one of the stalwarts of the Measure E forces throughout the campaign. And former Senator James Aboureszk, ADC's national president, made Bay Area appearances on behalf of Measure E.

Berkeley was an inviting place for ADC to stage the effort. (For the same reasons, a similar effort was abortively attempted in Ann Arbor, Michigan.) For in Berkeley, the larger tendencies on which ADC hoped to capitalize were much in evidence. Berkeley had already established a "foreign policy" with respect to American intervention abroad, back during the Vietnam era; more recently, it had entered into a "sister-city" program with an anti-government stronghold in El Salvador. Furthermore, Berkeley has historically been a center of activism for domestic social and economic concerns; "progressive" politics has come there to be defined as a combination of such activism and

an aversion to American interventionism abroad, a doctrine with special appeal to Berkeley's large and politically active student electorate. If Measure E could be presented as a "peace initiative," surely the students would rally to its support.

"Progressive" positions don't always win in Berkeley, though. For Measure E to win, its advocates would have to make inroads not among right-wing Republicans, but among the moderate Democrats who are their principal opposition. (In most American communities, these staunch liberals would mark the left rather than the middle of the political spectrum.) But though the "progressives" don't always win, they are always a force; indeed, in the June election, their candidates won a majority of the seats on the Rent Stabilization Board. So there was reason to believe that if Measure E could win anywhere in the United States, it could win in Berkeley.

Further, the Jesse Jackson movement was at its height during the campaign for Measure E, and that movement—popular among Berkeley's numerically significant and politically active black community—seemed a natural extension of the sentiments reflected in Measure E. It, too, featured antagonism to American intervention abroad, an understandable preoccupation with domestic social and economic problems, and—at least as reflected in its leader's pronouncements—a call for more even-handedness in American policy towards the Middle East. The Palestinians were pictured by Jackson as an oppressed Third World people, victims of Israeli policy in general, of Jewish settlements on the West Bank (and elsewhere) in particular. (It was presumably that coincidence of view that led Jackson to invite ADC's Zogby to be the first of the "rainbow" to place his name in nomination at the Democratic National Convention.)

So the disposition to laugh Measure E away quickly dissipated; the measure had been so drawn and was so timed that it just might bring together a variety of groups and forces sufficient to win the day. And who could say where an expression of voter hos-

tility—even from Berkeley—to the most vulnerable aspect of current Israeli policy might lead?

Indeed, laughter turned to very urgent concern as Israel's friends realized the full implications of what was at stake. Imagine: A coalition of people opposed to American foreign intervention, people caught up in the battle for economic justice and minority rights here at home, people opposed to West Bank settlements and those still upset with Israel in the aftermath of its 1982 offensive in Lebanon; appeal to them under the rubric of "Taxpayers for Peace in the Middle East" (TAPME), the name itself a suggestion of both domestic fiscal prudence and international harmony. And then imagine the consequences of their success. No, the Mayor's letter would have no immediate practical effect—but it would prove the viability of this new constellation of forces and offer the ADC a precedent that would surely lead to comparable actions in other American communities. In fact, the proponents of Measure E were contemplating—if successful in Berkeley—the introduction of an analagous proposal at the Democratic National Convention, across the Bay in San Francisco in July. And then, surely, onward, across America.

What to do? Should Measure E's opponents launch a vigorous and highly visible campaign against it, or wait quietly for it to die an early death through inattention? Would the "progressive" Jews, a significant element in Berkeley, support Measure E, or would they oppose it? Given the strong—and disparate—feelings about Israeli settlement policy, even among Israel's supporters, would it be possible to forge a significant coalition of Jews against Measure E? If it proved not possible, would the signs of division within the Jewish community not give still further aid and comfort to the measure's advocates? Would others rally to the Jewish cause, if the Jews could make common cause? Given the strength of the Jackson movement, would it be possible to develop significant black opposition to the measure, or would it become an occasion for black-Jewish

confrontation?

It was clear quite early that any chance of defeating the measure would depend critically on Jewish unity. If the Jews were divided, and the blacks were to swing behind the measure, the prospect of its success would soar.

The Jews of Berkeley, an estimated ten percent of the total electorate, are decidedly pluralistic in their views, and dramatically unaffiliated Jewishly. There are two synagogues in Berkeley, as well as several alternative *minyanim*, a Jewish community center and a variety of other Jewish cultural and educational institutions, but many Berkeley Jews have managed without any association to the organized community in any of its forms or expressions.

As elsewhere throughout America, there are Jews in Berkeley who are staunchly committed to the state of Israel as a Jewish state, and there are Jews who are not. But if elsewhere those not committed to Israel are, for all practical purposes, a fringe group, a mix of old-fashioned radicals and new-fashioned third-worlders, in Berkeley they are more than a fringe. More, and more vocal.

And even among the committed Berkeley Jews, one encounters the same division on Israeli policy that exists in Israel, a division most dramatically manifested in the very issue raised by Measure E—the settlements on the West Bank. On the San Francisco side of the Bay, for example, a 1983 survey found that about 57 percent of Jews involved with Federation—people very powerfully committed to Israel—wanted Israel to freeze further settlement in the West Bank, while 38 percent opposed such a freeze. (Yet 99 percent of the total opposed any reduction in American support and aid for Israel.) The division in Berkeley seemed even sharper, with open and vociferous attacks against Israeli policy towards the West Bank and towards Palestinian Arabs coming from Jews deeply devoted to Israel's well-being.

The most critical and problematic segment of the Berkeley Jewish population, as the battle over Measure E began, was this "dovish" element

among the committed Jews. Would their passionate opposition to Israel's settlement policy lead them to support Measure E, or would they perhaps sit out the election, or would they swallow their disagreement and oppose the measure?

After several weeks of delicate negotiation, it became clear that this time, the Jews would work together. Religious and secular, establishment and anti-establishment, staunchly pro-settlement and vigorously anti-settlement, Orthodox and Reform, joiners and unaffiliated, progressives and moderates, left-wing Socialists and mainline Republicans, community center activists and members of the intelligentsia, in some cases overcoming years of political feuds, joined in a united coalition whose elements collaborated closely and with increasing comfort during the three and a half months of the "No on E" campaign. By and large, the doves saw Measure E for what it was—an attempt to use the settlements issue as a launching pad for a larger attack against Israel, a one-sided attempt to stigmatize Israel as the only (or, at least, the principal) villain of the fiddle East drama. And the division that some had feared therefore never materialized.

Détente among the Jews was accomplished on the basis of several agreements. First, the issue of the settlements themselves would not be debated. Second, there would be no "Arab-baiting"; the emphasis would be on peace and the peace process, on the need for direct negotiations among the concerned parties and persons in the Middle East, on the contention that the one-sided Measure E could not lead either to negotiation or to peace. These agreements meant that various elements in the coalition had to resist the temptation to make their own pet issues and approaches the focal points of the campaign, and so they did. As a result, the anticipated "Jewish wars" turned out to be a non-story. And, as a result, Measure E was defeated.

From the circles of the uncommitted Jews, there were those who lent their names to support for the measure. TAPME made much of the fact that

Jews constituted roughly half of its steering committee. These Jews were highly visible as spokespersons for Measure E, both individually and through groups such as the International Jewish Peace Union. This Jewish presence within TAPME leadership was meant to counter the contention that Measure E was being promoted by Arab sources, particularly the ADC, and that the measure was anti-Israel or even anti-Jewish.

But while this strategy was cosmetically attractive, it proved unsuccessful. Thirty Jewish faculty members signed a statement in support of Measure E. But their advocacy was no surprise, their pro-E position predictable. They were known as outsiders to the community; many of them were among the hundred or so signers of a notorious ad, back in 1982, which began with the ringing sentence "Begin does not speak for us," a statement that occasioned derision among those who recognized so many of the signers as people for whom no Israeli, of whatever stripe, had ever spoken, could ever speak. And the 30 were quickly offset, in any case, by a much larger number of Jewish names among the 150 faculty members who signed a public statement in opposition to Measure E.

The more interesting story, by far, is the story of the doves, a story that is also instructive. Some members of the organized community were taken aback to learn that these people, with whose substantive positions they so vehemently disagreed, and whom they had come, in some cases, to regard as dangerous—the very thing TAPME hoped to exploit—could enthusiastically engage in responsible pro-Israel political action. The doves were hardly unanimous; members of the Berkeley New Jewish Agenda, for example, were to be found in the leadership of both pro-E and anti-E camps. But for the most part, the Jewish left rallied around the anti-E flag, and some of them even found the experience quite enlightening. For when they tried to press the consensus position in the ideologically "progressive" circles to which they belonged, some of them reported the "betrayal" experience that has become so familiar in modern Jewish history.

On the Berkeley campus in the late 1960s, radical young Jews frequently reported that they were pushed out of the New Left by the callousness that some of its ideologues displayed towards Israel, especially in its hour of need in June 1967. In the case of Measure E, Jews who argued at an endorsement meeting of Berkeley's "progressive" political coalition about the need to maintain Israel's security even while fighting against some of its policies, and reiterated the history of the modern land, were told, "If you are angry over the Germans, go kill them. But keep your hands off Third World people."

The failure to divide the Jews in any significant way was a critical failure, evidence of a crucial miscalculation on the part of the pro-E forces. They had assumed that the internal debate among Jews regarding Israel's settlement policy would be reflected in the campaign, and it was plain that they had based a good part of their strategy on that anticipation. Thus they had published a "Stop the Settlements" statement, originally published by the International Center for Peace in the Middle East, that had been signed by some hundred Israelis, including 30 Knesset members. When re-published by TAPME, the statement was headed, "If 30 members of Israel's Parliament can protest the settlements . . . Then why can't we?"

Opponents of E quickly obtained from some of the Israeli signers a statement indicating that despite their opposition to the settlements, they opposed Measure E as well—on grounds that it was a ruse to attack Israel more generally, without any reference to the culpability of the Arab nations as well as their resistance to negotiation. So, in Israel as well as in Berkeley, Jews with sharply conflicting views on specific issues joined ranks when they perceived an insidious threat to Israel in general.

Neither less interesting nor less instructive was the behavior of the black population. Blacks constitute some 20 percent of the electorate in Berkeley, and are an important political force. Would the historic alliance between blacks and Jews hold, or would the more recent tensions—now

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front page news because of what was happening in the Democratic primary campaign—find expression in the fight over Measure E?

As it turned out, the black mayor of Berkeley was the only elected official to support the measure. Congressman Ronald V. (Ron) Dellums, who privately told Jewish supporters that he thought the measure foolish, remained on the fence in deference to his more ideologically-oriented constituents. But other black public officials in and around Berkeley opposed Measure E, and did so vigorously. The only black newspaper in the area, the *Oakland Post*, opposed E editorially. One prominent black minister distributed leaflets opposing E with his order of service.

And, when the votes were finally counted, seven of Berkeley's eight "black precincts" (80 percent or more black) had voted against Measure E—and by a wide margin. Overall, the vote against E in Berkeley was 64 to 36 percent; in the black precincts, taken together, the "no" vote was only slightly lower, 58 to 42. And this in an election that saw the Reverend Jesse Jackson win more than 40 percent(!) of the total vote in Berkeley, sweeping overwhelmingly all the black precincts along the way.

Jackson himself had taken no position on Measure E, but his supporters were not so reticent. His most prominent ally in adjoining Oakland publicly supported E, and one of the major public meetings on behalf of E included a top Jackson lieutenant along with an ADC representative and Rabbi Elmer Berger, a long-time anti-Israel spokesman. Nor were Jackson's own views on the Middle East a secret in Berkeley.

Given the enthusiasm with which even blacks who had some doubts about Jackson supported his candidacy, it would not have been surprising had the black vote on E gone the other way. After all, Jackson was a symbol of black status and aspirations and political clout; the black community, whatever its private assessment of the man, would brook no public attack on him. He was the man who, in their view, had raised the key issues of political and social and eco-

nomical disadvantage to the top of the political agenda more forcefully and more consistently than any Democrat before him.

Yet quite plainly, neither endorsement of Jackson nor embrace of his agenda necessarily implied acceptance of his view on foreign affairs, at least regarding Israel. That was clearly demonstrated on election day. And during the campaign, the continuing viability of the black-Jewish coalition, that coalition some had supposed was a quaint piece of nostalgia, long-since emptied of practical consequence, was amply demonstrated. Indeed, the anti-E leadership was surprised—and heartened—by the frequency of black references to the coalition, and the evident black desire to revive it.

All this suggests that it may be a mistake—and a serious one, at that—to generalize from "Jackson" to "the blacks." So far, at least, Jackson's views on Israel are not those of most blacks, not even in Berkeley with its Third World concerns. (We know this as well from several national polls, which show that Jackson's expressed views regarding Jews are not shared by most blacks.)

One reason for the difference between Jackson's own views and the views of his constituency is that the main *issue* agenda of the blacks has to do with social and economic disadvantage, not with foreign policy in general nor with Israel in particular—nor, indeed, with Jews as such. But it is important to bear in mind that black attitudes can be shaped and activated over time by a charismatic leader such as Jesse Jackson—if *the rest of us do nothing*. The "go-along" phenomenon has long been recognized: people who are largely indifferent to certain issues will "go along" with a leader's position on those issues if they are otherwise attracted to that leader. Thus, there is a classic finding that people who are *not* anti-Semitic will support a candidate who *is* anti-Semitic if, on the things that matter to them, he is their champion. They will support him, that is, unless there is an active intervention *against* anti-Semitism.

In Berkeley, the anti-E campaign was designed to be just such an inter-

vention. One mailing to residents of predominantly black areas featured the pictures and statements of black leaders who opposed E. "Measure E is unacceptable as it relates to the problems of the Middle East," said one black City Council member. "It's not fair to Jews or Arabs," said another. And a third: "This initiative divides those who should and must work together and ignores the issue of direct negotiations between Israelis and Arabs." Tom Bradley, the (black) mayor of Los Angeles, said, in the mailing, "Measure E will not do anything to solve the Middle East problem, or even to help bring the parties to the negotiating table."

The beginning of wisdom about politics is the understanding that statements such as these hardly ever happen of themselves. They are, instead, the fruit of long-standing relationships and of effective campaign organization.

Effective campaign organization.

The early analysts turned out to be right: there was not much point in trying to convert the most ideological pro-E segments of Berkeley. Conversations within those ideological circles quickly confirmed that proposition. The *Daily Cal* editorialized in favor of E, and post-election analysis showed that pro-E votes tended to be concentrated in campus-related districts, where in many instances E actually won, albeit narrowly.

It took some discipline to resist the temptation to fight head-on-head against those most militantly in favor of E. But if E were to be defeated, its opponents saw from the start, it would be defeated in the "middle"—including the black middle, and including as well the progressive segment of the Jewish population.

In order to accomplish that, an active and innovative campaign was required. But it was at first difficult to launch such a campaign, for much of the Jewish community outside Berkeley could not bring itself to take the matter seriously. Indeed, the anti-E campaign was nearly crippled at the start by the lack of support from outside. "Berkeley? A bunch of irrelevant clowns!" Only rather late in the campaign did the derision stop,

did the attention and concern of national Jewish organizations help persuade regional Jewish leaders that the campaign *did* matter, and did it become possible, therefore, to raise the needed funds.

There was also some early faltering because, although Jews have become sophisticated in waging legislative battles and in understanding the importance of helping elect public officials supportive of Jewish issues, a frontal fight on a ballot initiative is not part of the Jewish political experience. This was not a matter of quietly lobbying elected officials, but of a direct battle for public opinion. In that sense, the battle over Measure E deserves to be studied by the Jewish community. For while the defeat of E may discourage similar efforts in other communities, at least for a time, it is quite likely, in this increasingly populist era, that other ballot measures of direct concern to Jews will one day be proposed.

The heart of the matter was the effort to organize the "middle" into a coalition of virtually unprecedented dimension—the recognition that the highly visible ideologically "progressive" element of the Berkeley electorate was not the critical mass had often prevailed because the middle was fragmented, or just plain weary.

It was that understanding that enabled the creation of an anti-E coalition that came to include almost every segment of the electorate, save for the ideologically unreachable. There were faculty and seminarians from Berkeley's liberal theological consortium, the Graduate Theological Union; progressives and moderates, Jews and Christians, hilldwellers and flatlanders, University of California students and professors, peace activists and uninvolved whites and minority groups, feminists and the gay/lesbian community. Indeed, longtime Berkeley community observers could not recall a time since the height of the anti-war movement in the 1960s when so many diverse groups had made common cause on a single issue. Ultimately, the coalition would include such diverse bedfellows as Senators Pete Wilson and Alan Cranston, seven of eight

highly factionalized Berkeley City Council members, Berkeley's progressive State Assembly representative Tom Bates, San Francisco's mayor Dianne Feinstein and presidential aspirants Walter Mondale and Gary Hart.

Once again, such coalitions are not put together magically during the night. At their most effective, they are the culmination of ongoing Jewish involvement with other segments of the general community. It was the prior linkages that existed in Berkeley, developed during common fights on other issues, that made the anti-E coalition possible. And that was, lest there be any doubt about the matter, true specifically in the case of the black community not less than with other segments of the electorate.

The creation of a comprehensive coalition of the "middle," the inclusion of black leadership in that coalition, the waging of an active campaign by that coalition—all these were crucial elements in the victory. But perhaps the most crucial element, as well as the most satisfying, was the unity of the heterogeneous Jewish community of Berkeley. We can find partners "out there," but it remains the Jewish community itself that must be the catalyst and nucleus of the political battle on issues of direct concern to Jews. In the battle over E, hundreds of Jews normally in diverse ideological corners came together to ring doorbells, make phone calls, prepare mailings, speak and raise funds in what was a genuinely grassroots campaign.

In the end, in short, the defeat of Measure E rested on the capacity of Jews to set aside their intramural conflicts, to respond, instead, to the classic challenge, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" As that question "played" in Berkeley, it became clear that it was not a desperate question, an implication that Jews can depend only on themselves. It was instead, and is, an astute political observation: The task of coalition-building, of reaching out to partners, requires that first, we ourselves join together. And then, others will unite with us. ★