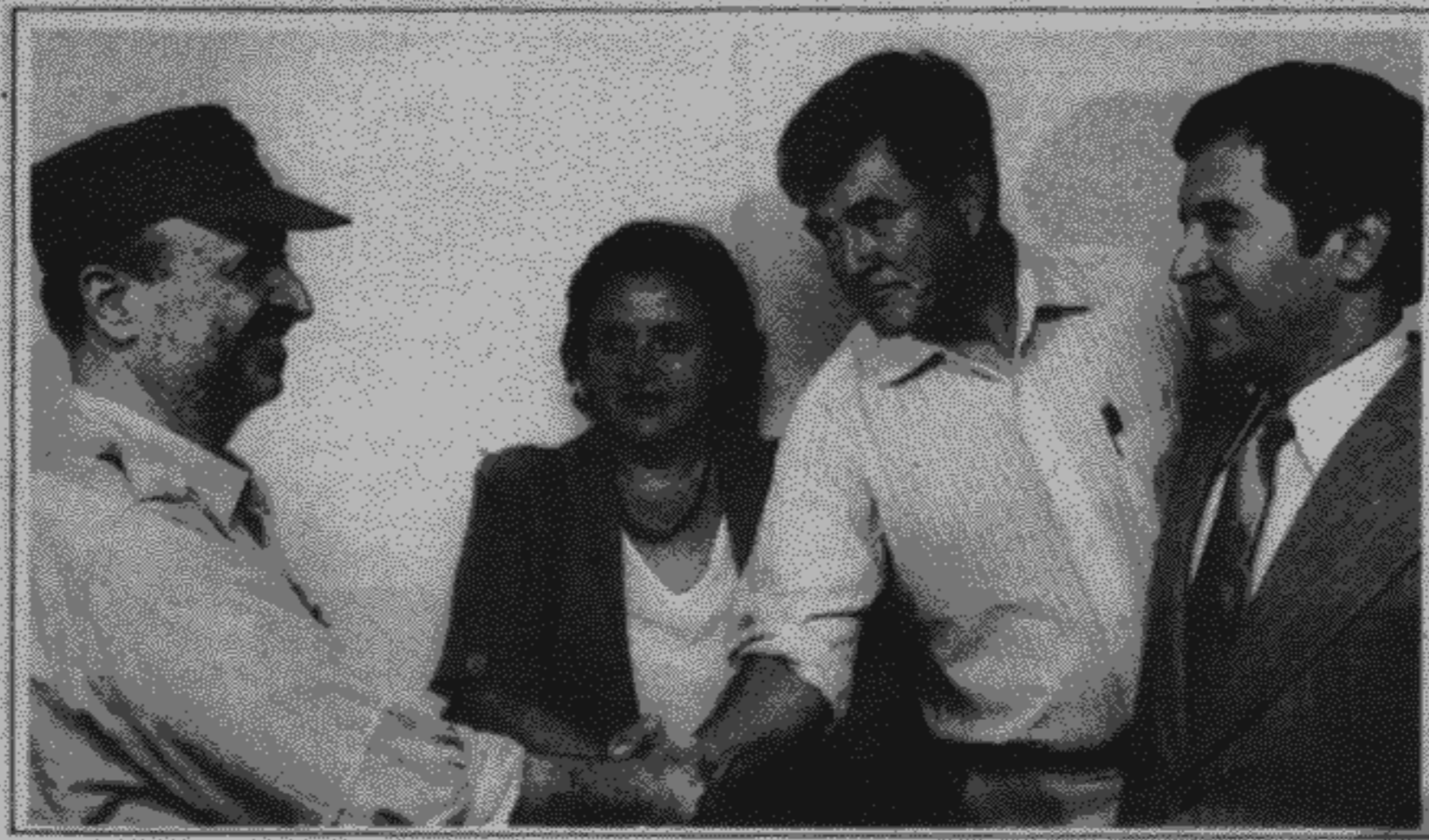


Dirck Halstead



Beirut, 1982: Arafat greets McCloskey as Congressmembers Mary Rose Oaker and Nick Rahall look on.

**Congressman Konnyu has told some local Jewish supporters that, in a recent conversation with you, you referred to Peninsula Times Tribune journalist Mark Simon as "that Jew." Did you say that to him?**

That's not true.

**It never took place?**

No.

**Is there anything that you have said to him recently that might have come close to the comment he has reported?**

Absolutely not. It's an outrageous statement. It is untrue. I haven't had any recent conversation with Ernie Konnyu and I haven't ever referred to Mark Simon as "that Jew."

**You haven't spoken to Congressman Konnyu in the last few weeks?**

I spoke with Congressman Konnyu on one recent occasion—at a fundraiser for Chuck Quackenbush which was held in Saratoga—my wife and I were there and he was there and I said "You've done a bad thing Ernie, you've angered a good friend of mine and a fine Congressman, Silvio Conte, and he made some comment and we both walked away. That's the only conversation I've had with him. Really, I think he has flipped.

**This episode brings up the larger question of your tenuous relationship with the Jewish community. While Congressman Konnyu may have been pandering to Jewish fears to gather some support, he clearly feels you are vulnerable to charges of the type he has made. How do you assess your relationship with the Jewish community in light of the critical comments you have made directed at Israel and at some Jewish-American supporters of Israel?**

Well, I think the Jewish community is changing. There are now several major Jewish organizations that are challenging—as I have—what I would call the Begin-Sharon-Shamir leadership in Israel. I think the Jewish community is torn.

There is a recent book written by a Jewish author named [Edward] Tivnan about the lobby that describes as well as anyone could that probably the majority of the Jewish leaders today disagree with Israel's policies. That doesn't mean that they're willing to speak out against Israel's policies, but the Jewish community is changing rapidly and I think coming down with the Peres wing. And I support the Peres concepts.

It's a painful debate in the Jewish community and for the Jewish community, but the greater steps toward peace today are being taken by groups like the New Jewish Agenda or

the Jewish/Palestinian dialog people—the ones that are bringing the Israelis and the Palestinians here for discussions. Ironically, there is a greater debate on these subjects in Israel than in the US. I have had a lot of Jewish people tell me that they privately agree with my views and that they hope I understand why they are not speaking out publicly.

**Some of the comments you have made in the past, particularly comments which question the loyalty of American Jews, statements that question whether Jewish Americans are capable of "putting America first," have pushed some emotional buttons in the Jewish community. Do you still think that the question of "divided loyalties" is a problem for Jewish Americans?**

Certainly. The good Jewish leaders, the people who have been at the forefront of social justice causes ever since I can remember—people like Albert Einstein on—had to be terribly hurt by the Pollard case. There is a segment of the Jewish community that is raising money and wants to make Jay Pollard a hero, that says the Jew in America has an obligation first to Israel, that the two obligations are aliyah or returning to Israel or supporting Israel, and that that is the Jewish ethic and the Jewish consciousness. That is a minority, a small minority of the Jewish Americans—the Kahanes, the Jewish Defense League people. But it is a debate which is painful to engage in, on either side, for Jewish leaders.

**Do you think — given your views — that you will be able to attract Jewish support for a challenge against incumbent Representative Konnyu next year?**

It won't affect my decision. Clearly, with the kinds of comments Konnyu has been making recently—the ravings of a madman—he is trying to attract Jewish support and drive a wedge based on whether you're for or against Israel. The Jewish question is primarily in the Jewish community. Understandably, for a Jewish leader to speak out, as [former Commerce Secretary] Phil Klutznick did, saying we ought to recognize the

Palestinians—in those days he was ostracized in the Jewish community. No longer today, I think that it's just a question of whether American Jews have an obligation to say nothing publicly critical about Israel.

**Do you regret any of the comments you have made over the last couple of years on this issue?**

Not at all. I don't make any claim to tactfulness or even having been—I guess the best word is—sensitive to Jewish fears and Jewish concerns. When you speak what you say and when you say what you believe, there are going to be some people who say, "Well, that's not tactful, that's not politic and that's not sensitive." But those things have to be said because ultimately the truth has to come out.

The pendulum swings back and forth in this country, and I have never known yet when someone spoke the truth and was criticized for saying the truth. But when the public begins to examine it and says, "Well, wait a minute, isn't that a fact, don't we have this occurring?" Israel has gone to the aid of Iran; Israel has supported apartheid in South Africa. That debate is now, after six years, beginning to work. We just saw that last week Israel has exercised at least some minor sanctions against South Africa because of American public opinion.

To the extent that speaking the truth plays a part in changing American public opinion, the truth has to be said. And I'm not embarrassed at all by it. I will say that there are things I have said that I haven't said as well or as carefully as to not offend Jewish opinion. But I think that when people get so convinced that they are right that any possible criticism is going to be labeled as anti-Semitism, and when they try to chill debate by saying that one point of view is anti-Semitic, then those things still have to be said.

**So you think criticism of you as being anti-Semitic is unfair?**

Sure, of course. My God, I can't remember a time when I didn't have Jewish members of my staff who wouldn't disagree with me and say

what they thought and yet still be good staff members and good friends of mine. Rabbi Teitelbaum's son, Josh—I remember when he left my employ back in the summer of 1982—during the Lebanon invasion. He had worked for me for, I think, a year. He resigned and at the time said, "Pete isn't anti-Semitic, but what he says may cause other people to become anti-Semitic."

**If you do decide to run against Ernie Konnyu, will you be trying to build bridges to the Jewish community, and will you look for Jewish support?**

I would probably go out and look for Jewish support. I think that I have already got it. I think that if you look around the community you'll find the Jewish community privately divided. I'm going to say in this country—about 60-40. In Israel, Peres probably has no more than 45 percent support among the Israeli people themselves. But in this country I would say that privately—in the synagogues and Jewish community centers—you would find that 60 percent or more oppose things like support for Pollard or support for Iran or support for South Africa. The Jewish community in America is still on the liberal side. Now that isn't all of them. There are still a lot that support AIPAC's [American Israel Political Action Committee] view and want to defeat any congressman who suggests anything critical of Israel.

**Some of your opponents claim that you have been consciously criticizing Israel—and Jewish American participation in the American political process—as part of a public drive to win wealthy Arab clients for your legal practice.**

That's an interesting comment. I mean that's part of the hysteria, isn't it? I mean isn't that almost a hysterical comment? I haven't made any secret of my political views and I don't have a large number of Arab clients. I've got as many Jewish clients, frankly, as I do Arab clients.

**How do you hope journalists will treat you should you enter what is likely to be the dirtiest campaign in local**

**memory—a campaign against Ernie Konnyu?**

I'll tell you what I hope they will do—what I hope you will do. I hope that every time that a person makes one of these accusations that you record who it is and what the accusation is . . . because in a way what it is is McCarthyism—the raising of a whole lot of innuendos that a person 60 years old, who served in the Congress 15 years, was wounded in the Korean War, served as a Deputy Prosecuting Attorney, somehow this person has become a tool of the Arab world and is financed by the Arab world to embarrass Jews. What that is—that is an [ad hominum] attack on a person expressing a point of view—rather than a debate on the issues themselves. It's the easiest thing in the world to try and blacken somebody's reputation when you disagree with what they are saying. Particularly if you fear what they are saying.

I remember on a television program last week somebody said that they had asked a Jewish leader, "What do you think of McCloskey considering running for Congress again?" And the person said, "We have deep reservations and great fear." Well fear of what? Fear of an open debate that Israel is wrong? And that somehow if Israel is wrong, and if Jews support Israel, that anti-Semitism will be involved against Jews in America?

I think that the Jewish community . . . and I don't have any better partners in our law firm than our Jewish partners. We've got a lot of Jewish partners in my law firm. My secretaries are Jewish. You know this kind of concern that somehow the Jew in America need fear anti-Semitism because people are opening up a debate on Israel is just crazy. But some people feel it. The debate should go on fairly and without hysteria. If there is going to be hysteria in this debate, it isn't going to be on my side.

**And you think that Congressman Konnyu's recent remark—claiming that you referred to Mark Simon as "that Jew"—is part of that hysteria?**

Well, I wouldn't attribute to Konnyu a comment that others say he has said. I can't believe he said that.

**We have witnesses. He said it. When a Congressman makes a comment like that in public, he risks having it appear in print.**

Then he ought to be stuck with it. You see that's the hysteria part of it. There will always be people who fear deeply enough to take as truth the

Continued on page 12