CBS "West 57th" Segment Smears Palestinians

A May 27 segment of the CBS News magazine "West 57th Street" has maligned the Palestinian business community in the United States and prompted ADC to take action.

The segment, titled "The Palestinians' Dirty Business" charged that a network of Palestinian shop owners, individuals with connections to the West Bank town of Deir Dibwan, and officials of the Palestine Arab Fund were engaged in fraudulent activity in the United States to fund political actions and "terror" in the Middle East.

Asserting that "Americans are contributing to a revolution and not necessarily by choice," the program alleges that Palestinian groups and individuals have sent "hundreds of millions of dollars" to the Middle East.

CBS never contacted the Palestine Arab Fund, Deir Dibwan Association, or any other Arab-American group to discuss the story. Yet, relying on a few cases of fraud, some of which dated back to 1980, "West 57th Street" brought into question the legitimate activities of the entire Palestinian-American business community. The viewer was left with the impression that the money raised by Palestinians in the United States, whether through business transactions or fundraising activities, was being smuggled out of the country to fund "terrorism." CBS seemed to question the financial needs of Palestinian families and charities in the occupied territories and repeatedly linked the *intifada* with terrorism.

Reporter Karen Burnes claimed that Palestinians throughout the country were engaged in insurance scams and other crimes to fund "what the FBI calls political and terrorist activities." However, in a June 1 *Los Angeles Times* article by Howard Rosenberg, FBI spokesman Charles Steinmetz denied having made such accusations and stated that he "...didn't talk to anybody about terrorist groups. They (West 57th) would like to think it was terrorists. I could see where the story was going." Rosenberg questioned the integrity of the story, charging that "The segment was less a story than largely unsupported or loosely attributed allegations reported in a confusing and misleading time warp."

ADC contacted representatives of the Deir Dibwan Association and the Palestine Arab Fund to arrange for a meeting with CBS officials in New York. To date, Executive Producer Andrew Lack has failed to respond to ADC's request.

ADC then advised its chapters across the country to call Andrew Lack to express their outrage about the program and demand an on-air apology to the Palestinian and Arab-American community. In addition, ADC is requesting Palestinian and Arab-American business people and associations to take part in a petition drive targeting CBS News and the program's seventeen corporate sponsors. ■

Take Action Today!

Andrew Lack and his associates have been insensitive to the concerns of the Arab-American community. We must act immediately to bring grassroots pressure to bear on CBS.

Please write or call Andrew Lack, Executive Producer, CBS News, 524 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019. His direct line is (212) 975-2194.

Members of the business community should contact Ghada Mansur in the Organizing Department to obtain copies of the petition and a list of corporate sponsors.

KUWAIT UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION

***Vacancy:* Chairperson**

Applications are invited for the position of chairperson in the newly-created Department of Mass Communication. The applicant must have the rank of full professor with extensive academic and professional experience in any area of Mass Communication as evidenced by published research in reputable international journals. Since Arabic is the language of instruction in the College of Arts, fluency in Arabic is a prerequisite.

The successful candidate for this post will be expected to carry out the usual duties of Chairperson and to provide leadership and supervise the evaluation of both the undergraduate and graduate academic programs in the Department. The appointment will be effective for the academic year commencing September 1990.

Application forms and Conditions of Service may be obtained from:

Kuwai University Office
3500 International Dr., NW
Washington, DC 20008

Completed application forms together with non-returnable copies of academic credentials must be sent directly to:

Dean
College of Arts
Kuwait University
P.O. Box 23558
Safat 13096
KUWAIT

All applications must be received by November 30, 1989.

Storm Erupts Over "Days of Rage"

Despite scheduling difficulties and lobbying efforts by pro-Israel groups, the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) has notified ADC that it is committed to airing Jo Franklin-Trout's documentary, "Days of Rage: The Young Palestinians," on September 6.

The 90-minute documentary about the Palestinian uprising was originally scheduled for national broadcast on June 5. However, in late April the film's presenting station, New York's WNYC, withdrew its sponsorship.

Presenting stations serve as buffers for other stations when programs are considered controversial. They take responsibility for viewer feedback and provide background information on the subject. In this case, a number of PBS affiliates requested that a presenting station be identified. PBS also stipulated that the presenting station produce a panel discussion to follow the film.

Los Angeles Times television critic Howard Rosenberg reported that WNYC withdrew sponsorship after Chloe Aaron took over as vice president in charge of television. In an April 22 article Rosenberg wrote, "Aaron's decision triggered speculation that she feared WNYC's association with 'Days of Rage' could undermine the station's fund-raising efforts in the New York area, home to 1.7 million Jews. Aaron's office said Friday [April 21] that she was out of the country and could not be reached for comment." WNYC officials maintain that the station never officially became the film's presenter, nor did it intend to be.

However, PBS had already distributed publicity about "Days of Rage" to its affiliates, preparing stations for the June 5 air date through WNYC. The promotional material said the film was part of PBS's "fresh breeze" of summer and an "unprecedented opportunity to hear Palestinians' reasons for the uprising and their point of view concerning reported Israeli repression."

According to *The New York Times*, WNYC's Aaron refused to "broadcast the film under any circumstances, asserting that it was biased." The article quotes Aaron as saying, "It's one-sided. It makes no mention of how the Jews got to Israel, no mention of the Holocaust, no mention of how the Palestinians treated the Jews nor how Arabs treated the Palestinians. It's a pure propaganda piece that I'd compare to Leni Riefenstahl's 'Triumph of the Will'" [a film produced by the Nazi regime].

In a follow-up column in the *New York Times*, Anthony Lewis called Aaron's comparison of "Days of Rage" to the Nazi-produced film "grotesquely wrong.... The actual tone of the film is indicated by a scene with a young Palestinian woman. A reporter asks, 'What do you hope to accomplish by the intifada?' The woman answers: 'An identity. A land.... We could live together [with Israel] side by side.'"

By mid-April, another station, New York's WNET, stepped forward to become the presenting station. But, because of the time constraints, WNET felt it would not have time to prepare the necessary panel discussion by June 5. In addition, PBS said they preferred to run the program in September when viewership is higher. Given these factors, PBS made the decision to postpone "Days of Rage" until September 6.

When the story first became public, ADC alerted activists of the dispute and urged them to inform stations of their desire to see "Days of Rage" on the air. Membership response was overwhelming, and the PBS national office was reportedly flooded with phone calls and letters about "Days of Rage." PBS then contacted ADC's Director of Media Relations, Faris Bouhafa, to request a meeting to discuss the film and the controversy.

During the meeting, PBS reiterated its position and commitment to air the film in September. In subsequent conversations, ADC has been assured by WNET Director of Public-Affairs Programming Richard Hutton that he is fully behind the film, has no intention of editing it, and is ready to withstand the pressure that would be exerted on the station to cancel it.

On May 10, after much critical press, a public campaign against the program began, with a prominently placed advertisement headlined "WARNING" in *The New York Times*. The ad, placed by Howard Diamond of Union, New Jersey, quotes a vice president of WNYC describing the film as "pro-Arab, biased, and one-sided propaganda." The ad's stated purpose is to "strongly urge all members of Channel 13 & all supporters of the State of Israel to let Channel 13 know how you feel about their showing of the program."

In turn, ADC alerted its members to counter by supporting WNET's decision to air "Days of Rage."

The film was independently produced and directed by Jo Franklin-Trout, an experienced documentary filmmaker whose previous films were all aired on PBS. Already shown abroad, "Days of Rage" was filmed last June in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and finished last September.

Franklin-Trout defends her film, saying that PBS has shown many point-of-view and personal-account films and that many Israeli voices add perspective to "Days of Rage." Half of those interviewed in the film are Israelis, all of whom oppose Israeli government policy and actions. "If the anticipation was that the Jewish community in America would be offended, that's a demeaning attitude; they've been the most stalwart defendants of freedom of expression," Franklin-Trout said.

Rosenberg called the documentary "a powerful, well-made program that conveys a message expressed in fragments on newscasts but never before presented on American TV as a documentary-length statement without rebuttal."

WNET's Hutton said, "We thought it had a terrific evocation of an important point of view that doesn't get on American television."

Most recently, ADC learned that "Days of Rage" was high on the agenda at the May convention of AIPAC in Washington. While AIPAC conceded that it can do nothing to dissuade PBS from airing the program, AIPAC members were urged to contact their local PBS affiliates to voice their opposition to the film.

ADC members should continue to support the airing of "Days of Rage" by contacting their local PBS stations. ■