

Resolution on the Retirement of

Saul A. Slapikoff

to be adopted by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of Tufts University

December 7, 1998

The faculty of American Studies and the Biology Department join others of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences to proclaim our admiration and warm appreciation for our colleague Saul Slapikoff. In most statements of this nature, the word "retiring" is applied to the colleague, but no one who has worked with him would employ this adjective to describe Saul Slapikoff. Engaging, inspiring, provocative, determined, dedicated, caring, courageous, all those perhaps, but retiring, never. One can fully understand Saul's unique role at this institution only by understanding something of his background. Saul tells his own story in the forward to his 1993 book, *Consider and Hear Me: Voices from Palestine and Israel*.

Growing up in a poor immigrant neighborhood in Brooklyn, Saul learned to be a fighter, never to accept arbitrary authority, and never to relinquish what he believed important. Saul imbibed his humanitarian and internationalist vision from his father, an ardent unionist and socialist who was part of a great tradition of Jewish Socialists. In a time when faith in a broader cause inspired many, Saul, in his senior year of high school, joined the Communist Party. Although he attended Brooklyn College as a sociology and anthropology major, he divided his time between his studies and his work as a party activist. After college, Saul became an "industrial concentrator" for the Party, working on and organizing in the railroad yards of New York City. However, in 1956, as the truth of the Stalin era began to emerge, Saul quit the Communist Party and left political life. Returning to Brooklyn College, he opted to stay as far away from political issues as possible, and majored in biology while working 20-30 hours per week as a research technician at Beth Israel Hospital. However, Saul's dedication to justice and fair treatment did not diminish; he was soon fired for refusing to cross the picket lines during a strike by hospital workers.

Saul's connection to Tufts actually started with his graduate student years in the Department of Biochemistry at Tufts Medical School. After earning his Ph.D. degree, Saul spent two years doing postdoctoral research in the Department of Biochemistry at Stanford University.

Saul returned to Tufts in 1966 as an assistant professor of Biology. For 10 years, he had been politically inactive, avoiding the possible distortions and lies of political life by focusing on scientific work. In an ironic twist of fate, Tufts to some extent engineered Saul's reentry into political life. Arriving at Tufts eager to begin his research, Saul discovered that the lab which he had been promised was not ready and indeed was not even under construction. Six months without the possibility of starting his research and with the turmoil of the antiwar movement swirling around him, finally pulled Saul back into active political life. The rest, as they say, is history.

With some hesitation, Saul found himself reentering the world of politics. In the spring of 1967, the Fifth Avenue Parade Committee announced an antiwar march in New York City. When no publicity appeared on the Tufts campus, Saul and a postdoctoral fellow in biology decided to put up their own money to charter a bus from Tufts. Although initially worried about filling the bus and

recouping his up-front cost, Saul ended up having to hire a second bus to accommodate all the students who wished to go. In those turbulent times, Saul not only pursued a full program of research and teaching, but also made the time to help found the Boston Resist Movement, to serve as a draft counselor for area students, and to participate as a member of the national board of the New University Conference, the organization for progressive faculty and graduate students. Saul's dedication to weaving together his political and academic work on the local, national and international levels turned out to be very beneficial for the Tufts community. When the New University Conference voted that all colleges and universities should have a daycare center, Saul was instrumental in implementing this goal at Tufts. The Tufts Daycare Center opened in 1971.

Saul was also a tireless advocate for an inclusive and diverse university. For over ten years, Saul served on the Equal Educational Opportunity Committee and the athletic committee, prodding the university to implement Title IX in its athletic programs and to act in ways that would ensure a diverse faculty and student body. For these efforts, Saul was recognized by the Tufts community in 1998 when he was named a co-recipient of the Arts and Sciences Faculty/Staff Multicultural Service Award.

In Biology, Saul continued to teach lectures and laboratories in biochemistry. On a personal note, Saul acted as my mentor when I first came to the university. He was a caring and concerned colleague who managed to be both supportive and demanding as he guided me through the intricacies of an academic career. After a sabbatic leave at MIT with Dr. William Thilly, Saul developed a new expertise in toxicology. In addition to offering a new and very popular course in Environmental Toxicology, Saul found himself acting as a consultant to several environmental groups which needed advice in this area. In addition, Saul developed a course for biology majors on bio-social problems, giving students an opportunity to examine biological issues in their broader social and political contexts.

In 1982, following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Saul found himself forced to confront a painful political and personal dilemma. Despite feeling a deep secular Jewish identity, his abhorrence at Israeli actions in the Middle East led him to help found the Ad Hoc Lebanon Victims Emergency Committee and its successor, the Coalition for Peace and Justice in the Middle East. Through the work of this latter group, Cambridge entered into a sister cities arrangement with the neighboring West Bank cities of Ramallah and El Birah. Saul again combined his academic and political work, becoming a Visiting Professor in the Center for Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences at Birzeit University in 1992. From that experience grew Saul's book, *Consider and Hear Me: Voices from Palestine and Israel*, published by Temple University Press.

In the early 1980s, Saul was also developing a new focus for his teaching and research. In 1982 Saul was active in the creation of the American Studies Program, participating in many faculty workshops and team-taught courses. Saul served as director of American Studies from 1988 to 1991 and again from 1993 to 1996. As one of only two scientists to direct an American Studies program in the country, Saul gave the Tufts Program a unique focus, making it known nationally and internationally. At Tufts, science became an integral part of the American Studies courses and the faculty workshops. As Director of American Studies, he was also very involved in the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies at Tufts and helped to develop a number of new courses.

In 1988, he helped organize a national American Studies conference "A New Model for American Studies: Using Black, Ethnic and Feminist Studies to Integrate the Sciences and Humanities" at the High Mowing School in Wilton, New Hampshire. This meeting is generally recognized as a landmark in the development of the discipline of American Studies. Indeed, one indication of its success was an invitation to Saul from the University of Maryland to apply for the job as Dean of the Humanities. A biochemist serving as the head of a humanities division would no doubt have been another national first, but Saul was too engaged at Tufts and in Boston to consider the move. In recent years, Saul has once again demonstrated his ability to develop innovative programs in Interdisciplinary Studies. In collaboration with the City of Somerville, Carol Flynn and Saul wrote a grant application funded by the Endowment for the Humanities to unite the academy and the broader community in meaningful dialogue. The Somerville Conversations Program engaged the members of the Somerville and Tufts communities in conversation circles to examine the changing roles of new and old immigrations in Somerville. The Conversations are now in their third year, and have involved over 500 members of our community.

Saul's lifelong commitment to justice is exemplified most recently by his efforts in the fight for the rights of the Tufts custodians. All last year, he provided both analytical and physical support to the cause, studying the complex labor and legal problems and also sitting outside in freezing weather collecting donations for the unemployed workers. And, of course, he marched, with energy and dedication, providing a role model for students, many of whom had difficulty recognizing the meaning of a picket line. But perhaps the deepest chord in Saul's life has been his affectionate engagement with his students. Demanding excellence from them, taking pride in their accomplishments and helping them find a way through a complex and confusing world, Saul has built many close relationships with his students. Not only has he challenged them intellectually, but he also has helped them integrate their emotional and spiritual selves with their academic work.

In the last five years, Saul has embarked on a new career as a writer. He has published several stories, and is now at work on a play and a novel. We wish him continued success in this new endeavor. Over his entire career, Saul has labored tirelessly to make the Tufts Community more just and humane, and to remind us that a university is not an isolated ivory tower but a place deeply involved and implicated in the larger society. His voice has been passionate and clear; he has been a unique presence among us. We pay Saul the greatest tribute by carrying on his work for justice. With the Power invested in us, we propose that Saul Slapikoff be wished a productive retirement and be declared the People's Emeritus Professor.

Committee

(Ross S. Feldberg, Carol Flynn, Jesper Rosenmeier)

remembering from some words Saul is fond of quoting, " It is not incumbent upon thee to complete the task, but neither may thou desist from trying" (CHECK WITH SAUL) and by pledging to continue his efforts.

We salute Saul for his achievements here at Tufts and his providing for all of us a life lived with passion and principle.

Extra Full notes

Born in 1931 grew up in Brooklyn in a neighborhood hostile to Jews. Saul's politics he learned at home from his father who came to this country from Russia as a teenager and who worked as an operator of embroidery machines and presses. Saul's father was a unionist and socialist and a part of a broader community and tradition of Jewish-Socialists with a humanitarian and internationalist vision.

Saul joined the Communist Party at age 17 while still a high school senior. He attended Brooklyn College, majoring in sociology and anthropology and worked not only at his studies but also a party activist. Following college, Saul spent a brief time in the army, being discharged early as a security risk, and returned to civilian life to work as an "industrial concentrator" for the Party, working and organizing on the railroads in New York City. He was a member of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen and was elected to the post of chaplain of the local union lodge. However, in 1956, when the horrors of the Stalin era became officially recognized, Saul realized he could no longer trust the Communist Party and quit from the Party and political life. Saul decided to return to college and to stay as far away from political issues as possible, elected to major in science.

In the spring of 1957 he went back to Brooklyn College night school to take biology courses. As work on the railroad became less dependable, Saul went to work as a research assistant at Beth Israel Hospital in New York City. However, during a strike by hospital workers at Beth Israel Saul refused to cross the picket lines and was immediately fired. After four years were very intense with Saul working 30-40 hours per week and taking a full course load in night school.

Saul's connection to Tufts started with his enrolling as a graduate student in the Dept of Biochemistry at Tufts Medical School. After 3.5 years Saul has earned a PhD degree and did postdoctoral work in the dept of Arthur Kornberg at Stanford.

In Aug 1966 Saul left his postdoc position and came to Tufts as an assistant professor of Biology. IN 10 years, he had been politically inactive, avoiding involvement in the civil rights movements and focusing on the scientific work which seemed a counter to the possible distortions and lies of political life. However, when he came to Tufts, the lab which he had promised would be ready for him was not even under construction. Six turbulent months without the possibility of starting his research and with the turmoil of the antiwar movement swirling around finally pulled Saul back into active political life.

Initially he worked to raise money for Resist, a support organization for draft resisters. Later he became active for New University Conference (NUC), a version of SDS for faculty, graduate

students and postdocs. and then joined the editorial board of *Radical Teacher*, a socialist and feminist journal on the theory and practice of teaching.

After the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Saul's political activities turned toward the middle east. He was a founding member of the Ad Hoc Lebanon Emergency Committee and in 1989 organized with others the Cambridge-Ramallah/El Bireh Sister City Campaign. In 1990, Saul travelled with the second delegation of local residents to the Sister Cities and out of that came his book.