

A Mystifying Malice in Norway

Why is a land of eminently decent, civilized people a hub of anti-Semitism?

By Bruce Bawer

I will begin with a couple of paragraphs about Eurovision, the annual international song contest that I wrote about here the other day, but rest assured that this is not going to be another essay about that fatuous event, which, as I strove to point out in that earlier piece, is virtually worthless as a cultural offering but, as a social barometer, can provide fascinating insights. As I noted, the continent's anti-Semites and Hamas-lovers were outraged at the refusal of Eurovision authorities to ban Israel, a longtime participant, from this year's competition because of its current actions in Gaza, which the European legacy media, like their American counterparts, have described as genocide. While the competition went on at the Malmö Arena, the streets surrounding that venue were crowded with Swedes and others venting anti-Israeli rage, not least among them Greta Thunberg, who in recent months has turned from a climate scold to a cheerleader for terrorism. But the results of the voting by TV viewers, as I further noted, registered as a sharp rebuke to these Jew-haters.

The numbers were nothing less than stunning: whereas the cumulative verdict of the 32 specially appointed national juries (mostly music professionals) put Israel at 12th place in the list of 25 finalists and put Switzerland's Nemo, the ultimate winner, on top – either because they liked his song best or because his victory made him the first self-identified “non-binary” artist (he's plainly a gay male) to win Eurovision – the TV viewers who submitted votes by phone or text or online app gave Israel's Eden Golan what was undoubtedly, in large part, a very strong sympathy vote, just

as they did with Ukraine in 2022. Golan received the top score from viewers in no fewer than fifteen of the 37 voting countries, including most of Western Europe, with viewers in Austria and Ireland putting her in second place, and viewers in Iceland putting her third.

The major Western European outlier – and this is where I begin to get around to the point of this piece – was Norway, whose TV viewers awarded only five points to Israel – lending considerable support to the thesis, advanced over the years by many observers (myself included), that hostility to Israel and Jews, which has grown throughout the countries of Western Europe as the Muslim populations of these countries has increased, is particularly strong in the land of the fjords. As it happens, the Norwegian jury actually treated Golan better than did the Norwegian public, putting Israel in fifth place. The day after the finals, Daniel Owen, a singer and dancer whom I'd never heard of but who sat on that jury, took to Instagram to apologize for the jury's relatively positive treatment of Israel and [revealing](#) that he'd put Golan in 23rd place, his fellow jury members having ranked her 2nd, 2nd, 3rd, and 6th.

Owen made it clear that the reason for his vote against Golan had nothing to do with the quality of her song or of her own talent. No, he voted against Israel, he explained, precisely because it was Israel – which, as Conrad Myrland pointed out soon afterwards at the website of the invaluable Norwegian organization With Israel for Peace (*Med Israel for Fred*, or MIFF), is a direct violation of Eurovision rules, which, while silent on the question of TV viewers' motivations when casting their votes, require that jurors base their decisions entirely on the songs and performances and not on nationality, sex, or politics. Yes, jurors violate this rule all the time, with Scandinavians voting for other Scandinavians, Baltics for other Baltics, and so on. But rarely if ever has any of them bragged to the world about it.

Three days after the finals came an announcement from the Norwegian government – one that struck a particularly odd chord in the wake of Norway’s relatively cool treatment of Eden Golan. On May 14, Norway’s Foreign Ministry [confirmed](#) that representatives of the Taliban were in Norway to take part in a “dialogue forum about Afghanistan’s future.” The three-day event, which went by the name Afghanistan Future Thought Forum, had been organized by the Norwegian government, and the approximately 35 participants included members of “various groups of Afghans” as well as Norwegian state secretary Andreas Motzfeldt Kravik, who delivered the opening remarks. Whereas angry Swedes had filled the streets of Malmö during Eurovision to protest the presence in their midst of a charming 20-year-old Israeli songstress, the arrival in Oslo of a delegation of Taliban butchers attracted little comment in that city. Admirably, the valiant Sylvi Listhaug, head of the Progress Party (the only major party in Norway that ever deviates into sense), reprimanded the government for “pandering to terrorist organizations” and spending seven hundred thousand taxpayer dollars to fly these creeps – on a private plane, no less – to Norway and back.

For Norway, this bizarre combination of contempt for virtuous Jews and deference to violent Muslims is nothing new. During the Nazi occupation, while Danish police risked their lives to help smuggle Jews to safety in Sweden, Norwegian police obediently helped round them up for shipment to Auschwitz. In 2006, the Danish and Norwegian governments responded in totally antithetical ways to international Muslim outrage over a Danish newspaper’s publication of a dozen mostly inoffensive caricatures of Muhammed: while Denmark’s prime minister [stood up](#) firmly for free speech, refusing even to grant an audience to livid Muslim ambassadors, Norway’s government, declaring that freedom of speech should be tempered by religious sensitivity, forced a Norwegian editor who’d reprinted the cartoons to grovel apologetically before a slimy gathering of fourteen imams. Five years later, the internationally renowned

lawyer Alan Dershowitz, who'd lectured on Israel at institutions of higher education all over the world, [discovered](#) that the only country in which no major university was interested in hosting a (free) talk by him on the topic was Norway – where microphones are routinely handed to apologists for terrorism. And then there's Labor Party politician Anniken Huitfeldt, who has long campaigned vigorously for a Norwegian boycott of Israeli products, but who, when she was appointed as Foreign Minister two and a half years ago, became, as I [wrote](#) at the time, "the first government official anywhere on the planet to invite the Taliban to her capital to discuss women's rights (yes, women's rights)." I'll leave it to you to guess how far she got with that initiative.

Which brings us back to the present day. On May 10, Norway voted in [support](#) of a General Assembly resolution calling for Palestine's full UN membership. It was far from alone: 143 countries supported the resolution, nine opposed it, and 25 abstained. But only three countries, Norway, Spain, and Ireland have been collaborating on plans to recognize Palestine as a sovereign and independent state. And today, May 22, [they announced](#) that such recognition would be forthcoming. Yes, anti-Semitism is on the march everywhere these days – but exactly why does Norway always seem so eager to be at the front of the pack?



Of course anti-Jewish sentiment has intensified across the Western world during the last generation or two as the number of Muslims in the West has increased. But only in Norway, as I [noted](#) earlier this year, does the nation's "Holocaust Center," supposedly founded to preserve the memory of the Shoah, employ a scholar, Cora Alexa Døving, who systematically whitewashes Islamic anti-Semitism while accusing people who dare to bring up some of the less charming aspects of Islam – e.g. honor killing, forced child marriage, and female subordination – of "othering," spreading racism, and parroting "conspiracy theories." Although the history of the last 14 centuries illustrates definitively that it's Islam, far more than any other major religion, that is rooted in an ideology of conquest and subjugation, one respected Norwegian writer after another has taken glee in mocking the notion of the Jews as "God's chosen people" (the title of a 2006 [op-ed](#) by novelist Jostein Gaarder that read like something out of *Der Stürmer*)– even though the Jews, unlike the Muslims, demonstrate their merits as a people not by massacring innocents but by making Nobel-winning discoveries and transforming a desert into an oasis of cultural, technological, and scientific achievement.

What makes Norway feel so often like the West's Ground Zero

for anti-Semitism? It's a question I've pondered for years without ever coming up with an entirely satisfactory answer. Surely it's relevant that Norway, for most of its history, was arguably Europe's least cosmopolitan and least ethnically and religiously diverse country. Because of its forbiddingly mountainous terrain, most of its people were exceedingly provincial, identifying strongly with the remote valleys in which they lived, not a few of which had their own highly distinct dialects, and outside of which many of them never set foot once in their entire lives. To them, people living two valleys over might as well have been foreigners; imagine how alien Jews must have seemed to them! (Indeed, Norway's 1814 constitution originally barred Jews from entering the country, and to this day there are only 1300 Jews in the whole country, and a single synagogue, which is located in my old neighborhood in Oslo.)

Another aspect of this intense provinciality, which may seem to contradict what I've just said, is that until a generation or so ago, the rural folk who, in any country, are likely to be more conservative than their urban compatriots, might as well have been living on a different planet from folks in Oslo, where government policies were shaped by a close-knit political, cultural, academic, and intellectual elite, many of whom felt more intimately tied to friends in Denmark or Germany or France (and more influenced by the political currents in those countries) than to people in the far north of their own nation. During much of the twentieth century the Oslo elites were, to a significant degree, politically radical (was it, one wonders, at least in part their way of trying to distinguish their sophisticated, continental selves from the deplorable hicks way out in the frozen provinces?), and right up to the present day this continues to be the case. Consider this: in the early to mid 20th century, Germany's most distinguished writers (among them Thomas Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger, Heinrich Böll, Bruno Frank, Erich Maria Remarque, and Franz Werfel) were all ardent anti-Nazis – but

Norway's most honored novelist of that or any era, Knut Hamsun, was a passionate Hitlerite and Jew-hater, an aspect of his life that many contemporary Norwegian critics seem perfectly happy to de-emphasize. In more recent times, big-name Norwegian writers have been far more likely than their counterparts elsewhere in the West to be committed Stalinists or Maoists – and, needless to say, zealous anti-Semites.

But, again, why? Why so much Jew-hatred? This month brought chilling [news](#): according to a new poll, over half of Norwegians agree that it's either entirely or mostly true that "Israel treats the Palestinians just as badly as the Jews were treated during World War II." Pollsters have been asking Norwegians about this subject for years, and the findings have never been reassuring, but this latest figure is at once record-breaking and heartbreaking. Obviously, the aftermath of October 7 was critical; but why didn't October 7 itself make more of an impact?

Part of the reason, I think, is that Norwegians tend to be far more trusting than people in other Western countries of their legacy media, which even more aggressively than the legacy media elsewhere in the West (such as the *New York Times*, CNN, the *Guardian*, the BBC, and the CBC), constantly repeat the mantra that Israel is an apartheid state – and, since October 7, a *genocidal* apartheid state – and that Palestinians are the world's most pitiable and put-upon victim group. If the media messaging on this topic is impressively consistent, research by MIFF demonstrates convincingly that it's because of the exceptional [power](#) wielded by the Norsk Telegrambyrå (NTB), a news bureau owned jointly by NRK (Norwegian state broadcasting), *Aftenposten* (Norway's newspaper of record), *VG* (Norway's most popular daily), three other major regional papers (*Adresseavisen*, *Bergens Tidende*, and *Stavanger Aftenblad*), and Amedia (a chain of a hundred-odd local papers).^[1] Norway is a country of newspapers (more major dailies are based in Oslo than in New York), many of them kept

afloat by generous government funding the supposed reason for which is to guarantee ideological diversity; in reality, the consequence of this funding, and of the papers' reliance on NTB, is that they all slant the news in a way that is almost invariably consistent with the party line of the leading political party, Labor (Arbeiderpartiet).

Among other things, according to MIFF, this means that NTB, founded in 1867 and long ago captured ideologically by the Israel-hating left, has, over the decades, reported incessantly –on Palestinian refugees but *never* on the Jewish refugees who, after 1948, were forced to flee Arabic countries. Consistently, like many other Western media, NTB depicted Gaza, prior to October 7, for years as an “open-air prison”; then, after the IDF marched into Gaza in response to Hamas's invasion, an instant Orwellian switch took place whereby Israel was described as destroying a string of blissful, beautiful cities by the sea – a veritable Palestinian Riviera. Similarly, NTB has long blamed Israel for the purportedly low Human Development Index of the Palestinian territories, even though the territories' placement on the HDI charts, in the years before October 7, puts them slightly behind Egypt, a bit ahead of Morocco, and way ahead of Pakistan. In the U.S. and U.K., a robust alternative news media has flowered online in recent years, providing a corrective to the establishment narrative, but in Norway there are only three websites that can reasonably be compared to the American alternative media, and they have yet to put a sufficient dent in the propagandistic power of the legacy media establishment, with NTB at its red hot center and taxpayer money keeping it chugging along.

It is largely thanks to NTB that even during those periods when the Labor Party is out of power, it continues, through NTB, to steer the nation ideologically. Also explaining the iron grip of the anti-Israeli, pro-Palestinian Labor Party line on so many members of the Norwegian public is the

immensely powerful *Landsorganisasjonen i Norge* (Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions), or LO for short, which is joined to the Labor Party at the hip. LO's big day every year is May Day, when Communists march through the streets of every Norwegian municipality waving red Communist flags. In my own town this year, the red flags were supplemented, predictably enough, by Hamas flags. Two marchers held aloft a banner supporting Ukraine's brave military resistance against the Russian invasion. A few feet behind them was a banner condemning Israel's "genocide" in Gaza.

What else? MIFF's research shows that one Norwegian high-school [history textbook](#) after another demonizes Israel and depicts Palestinians as heroic victims. Then there's the church. Over the last few decades, the number of regular churchgoers in Norway has declined steadily – putting the Church of Norway increasingly in the hands of a tiny clique of radicals who use their bully pulpit to [promote](#) Palestinian Liberation Theology, which, briefly put, identifies Jesus with the Palestinians and likens Israel to his persecutors. Church-related organizations such as Norwegian Church Aid (*Kirkens Nødhjelp*), which is very active in the Holy Land and has friendly ties to some very unsavory Palestinian groups, are fully on board with this vile theology. Meanwhile, one hears little or nothing from the Church of Norway about the Islamic cleansing of Christians in various parts of Asia and Africa, which has been going on for a very long time and which dwarfs any abuse directed at Muslims anywhere on earth by either Jews or Christians. (NTB, too, is routinely silent on jihadist perfidy in the Global South.) Recently, a longtime acquaintance of mine who once had a high-ranking position in the Norwegian church shocked the hell out of me by posting on Facebook one of the most unsettling memes I've seen in a long time: a drawing of Netanyahu drinking the blood of Gazan babies. It's the old Nazi blood libel, obviously – and it reflects a view of Israel and of Jews that has been inculcated in many Norwegian Christians since childhood.

And let's not forget the United Nations. Surveys have shown that Norwegians, more than any other people on earth, take the UN seriously as a fount of truth and virtue and peace – and it's the UN, and especially its Human Rights Council, that is constantly telling us just what incomparably evil warmongers the Israelis are. Related to this idealization of the UN is Norway's cherished self-image as the world's "peace country," which in many cases means embracing the twisted premise – promoted for decades by Johan Galtung (1930-2024), the father of the academic discipline of "Peace Studies" and devoted fan of Mao Zedong – that the most important key to peace is for free countries *not* to respond militarily to violent aggression by totalitarians. Hence October 7 was a perfect case study for a Peace Studies class. Yes, what Hamas did was unpleasant, but according to the Galtung doctrine the proper Israeli response would have been to appease Hamas and lead the effort to grant Palestine full sovereignty. Maybe Norwegian anti-Semitism is even connected to something that I've celebrated in other contexts –Norwegians' respect, which is unusual in Western Europe, for their own traditions. On national holidays, householders fly the flag (and many Norwegians own at least one incredibly large flag). On Constitution Day, May 17, people wear their own region's version of the national costume, the *bunad*, and if they don't own one (those things are pricey), they dress up formally, and even send their teenaged and pre-teen sons outside in jackets and ties. In America, patriotism is unifying; in a nation founded on ethnic and religious identity, and, to a considerable extent, on a multi-generational sense of connection to a certain county or region, it can be exclusionary. Yet somehow it's never Muslims who are excluded: in Norway, the highest ranking figure after the king himself is the Pakistan-born parliamentary president Masud Gharahkhani; Pakistani-Norwegian Abid Raja served as Minister of Culture from 2020 to 2021; Hadia Tajik, also Pakistani-Norwegian, held multiple cabinet posts from 2012-13 and 2021-22.

Anyway, the bottom line here is that the anti-Semitism never appears to stop. Just the other day I wandered into a bookstore and espied a copy of a new book entitled [Palestina](#) by Odd Karsten Tveit – a so-called journalist who’s worked for NRK news, mostly reporting from the Middle East, for a full half-century. I didn’t read the book and I didn’t have to: all I needed was to take note of the subtitle – *Israel’s Robbery, Our Betrayal* – and the maps on the endpapers, which, by illustrating the changing population patterns in what is now Israel from the early 20th century to the present, were patently designed to support the reprehensible lie that Jews are relative newcomers to the Holy Land and Arab Muslims its native inhabitants. *Dagbladet’s* [reviewer](#) maintained that Tveit did a “brilliant” job of demonstrating “that the world has been made a fool of by Israel for almost 80 years.” The critic for *Nettavisen* also [used](#) the word “brilliant,” and (for good measure) described Hamas’s actions of October 7 as “a mistake” – in other words, entirely understandable, but strategically inadvisable. If it’s especially wounding to read so much of this kind of claptrap coming out of Norway, it’s because this is overwhelmingly a nation of eminently decent and civilized people – a high-trust society whose natives (as opposed to members of certain immigrant groups) are unusually hard-working and law-abiding. The problem is that an extraordinary percentage of them are profoundly misinformed about the most accomplished and yet unjustly abused people in human history as well as about the sole democracy in the Middle East – a nation whose staggering contributions to culture, science, and technology are out of all proportion to its tiny size.

[\[1\]](#) Although I have relied extensively here on MIFF’s website, the views expressed in this piece are entirely my own.

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