

The “Other Norwegians”

by Norman Berdichevsky (April 2014)

Amidst all the turmoil of recent news over the missing Malaysian flight and the crisis over Crimea, a small news item passed largely unnoticed that deserves much greater attention and celebration for those who still value acts of decency and courage. NCL – Norwegian Cruise Line dropped Tunis as a port of embarkation for its cruise passengers after the Tunisian port authorities refused to allow Israeli passport holders off the ship *Norwegian Jade*. About 20 Israelis were quietly told before disembarking from the ship on March 8-9 that “They were not welcome.” by the Tunisian government. The *Norwegian Jade* had been stopping in Tunisia every three weeks during the winter.

Kevin Sheehan, Norwegian Cruise Line’s CEO, said in a statement on March 11 ... *“We want to send a strong message to Tunisia and ports around the world that we will not tolerate such random acts of discrimination against our guests.”* The Anti-Defamation League chairman, Abraham Foxman, wrote in response:

We applaud the courageous and responsible decision of Norwegian Cruise Line in standing up to the discriminatory policy of the Tunisian government. They have sent a clear message to Tunisia and other governments that discriminatory practices against Israelis and other nationals will have a negative impact on tourism.

Cruise Critic, a website for the industry designed to promote the knowledge, interests and concerns of passengers praised NCL for its “courageous and responsible” decision. According to a Norwegian Cruise Line statement, the company had not been informed of the new Tunisian policy in advance. The statement stressed that NCL *“has cancelled all remaining calls to Tunisia and will not return.”*

NCL’s simple act of decency nevertheless required courage in our world today when massive pressure is being applied on every front to isolate, “disinvest,” boycott and make Israel a pariah state.

NCL is a private company founded by Norwegian shipping magnate Knut Utstein Kloster. It began as Norwegian Caribbean line, a subsidiary of Klosters Rederi, based in Oslo and was later renamed Norwegian Cruise Line. Its ships and crew have changed over the years from primarily Norwegian to international and today it has no connection whatsoever with the Norwegian

government (one of the most hostile in its foreign policy stands toward Israel) but through the name changes, the owners kept “Norwegian” as a proud symbol of the highest standards of service, reliability and integrity.

NCL controls approximately 8% of the total worldwide share of the cruise market and is therefore considered a “major player” in the cruise industry. NCL pioneered many firsts in the cruise industry such as the air-sea program combining low cost air fares with the cruise, open dining, and development of new ports in the Caribbean. It was responsible for many of the innovations that have now become standard throughout the industry and its name will now command even greater respect.

Contrast the company with “The Other Norwegians” – the government and large segments of Norwegian society, especially the major political parties, church, labor unions and press who have all hopped on the Palestinian propaganda bandwagon as part of what is considered politically correct.

Hanne Nabintu Herland, a Norwegian woman historian of religion, a bestselling author, has accused Norway of being *“The most anti-Semitic country in the West”* and frequently criticized Oslo for *“biased support for only the Palestinian views.”* She is not Jewish.

The deputy head of the Norwegian Embassy in Tel Aviv, Vebjørn Dysvik, rejects her claims yet has admitted, that his government had much work to do regarding *“anti-Jewish sentiment within Norwegian society.”* In a recent panel discussion, Herland responded to Dysvik, saying...*“The degree of anti-Israelism in Norway today on the state level, in the media, in the trade unions and at the universities, colleges and schools is unprecedented in modern Norwegian history. The powerful individuals that have pushed for these negative and biased attitudes in Norway are today responsible for creating a politically-correct hatred towards Israel that today portrays my country internationally as the most anti-Semitic country in the West.”*

Lest the naïve observer continue to maintain that being opposed to Israeli policies or sympathy for the Palestinian Arabs in their century long conflict to deny Jews any part of sovereignty in the Land of Israel is in no way related to traditional (religious) or racial (Nazi) anti-semitism are deluding themselves. Herland quoted several recent surveys and her own experience that demonstrated worrying trends, such as that “Jew” is the most often used curse word in Oslo schools and that a third of Jewish children feel continuously bullied. She also mentioned a widely-quoted report that more than a third of the population believes Israel’s treatment of Palestinians *“was analogous to Nazi actions against Jews.”*

Norway is not a member of the EU and has a position on the Palestinian issue to “engage” with

Hamas, because the group *“represents a significant part of Palestinian society and is “a social, political, religious, and also a military reality that will not simply go away as a result of Western policies of isolation.”* This is several degrees worse than wishful thinking yet its fundamental approach dominates much discussion on issues involving resolution of the conflict. According to Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gaht Støre, *“There are constituencies within Hamas that seem open to dialogue and there are signs that these parts of the movement might be willing to support a two-state solution and recognize Israel’s right to exist.”*

There can be no doubt about the nature of Hamas that rules the Gaza Strip. It is an offshoot of The Muslim Brotherhood with an 8th century mentality that provoked the Egyptian people to rise in the greatest mass demonstration in history against its religious fanaticism and brought the people of Gaza back from the age of electricity to the candlelight era, a form of national masochism that is reminiscent of the apologists for the Nazis and Hitler’s view that the German people had been forever crippled and humiliated by the loss of its colonial empire and territories at home to “inferior peoples” – the Poles, Czechs and Lithuanians.

NCL’s reaction needs to be put in context and high relief. It came after only a few days; it was not the result of a massive public relations campaign from a Jewish pressure group. It was a decision of principle taken at the very top of a major private company not to bow to coercion and intimidation. It is a beacon in the moral darkness that pervades not only Norway but much of the European Union that continues to blindly castigate Israel even while they too can be the victim of terrorism at any moment by the same blind forces of jihadist hatred. This applies as much to Denmark with no prior history of a relationship with Islam as it does to Spain with its 700 year struggle to free itself from Arab-Muslim rule or the victims of mass murder in Kenya, Bali, Tel-Aviv or New York City.

Regrettably, the Norwegians and Swedes (see NER, March 2012, [“A Forgotten Heroine of the Norwegian Resistance”](#)). There were however – “the other Norwegians” too. Norway’s most distinguished writer, the Nobel Prize winner for literature, Knut Hamsun, was heavily influenced by the impact of the Boer War, which he regarded as British oppression of a small people, as well as by his dislike of the English and distaste for the USA where he had lived for several years. During both the First and the Second World Wars, he publicly expressed his sympathy for Germany, suspicion of Jews and disgust of Negroes, calling America a “mulatto studfarm.” In 1943, he sent Germany’s minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, his Nobel Prize medal as a gift to win an audience with Hitler.

It is also impossible to forget the legacy of another Norwegian – Vidkun Quisling whose very name became a synonym for traitor and collaborator. In 1939 Quisling, as head of the Nasjonal

Samling Party, gave a series of lectures titled "The Jewish problem in Norway." He supported Hitler and sent the German leader a fiftieth-birthday greeting thanking him for "saving Europe from Bolshevism and Jewish domination." He headed a pro-Nazi puppet government during and following the German invasion and his government participated in Germany's "Final Solution." Quisling was put on trial after World War II and found guilty of charges including murder, embezzlement and high treason. He was executed by firing squad in Oslo on 24 October 1945.

The crisis we face today on numerous fronts with an ever more aggressive and truculent, militant Islam extends far beyond the conflict between Israel and the corrupt, despotic leadership of the Palestinian Authority under Mahmoud Abbas. The victim is not just Israel. The foundations of Western civilization are threatened from without and within. The situation today bears an uncanny relationship, a parallel universe, with the dreadful anxiety-filled 1930s, when a virulent Nazism intimidated and cowed much of public opinion throughout the United States. Today, many individuals, companies and governments and worst of all those self-proclaimed liberals – academics and "intellectuals" – are convinced that Jews must be accorded less respect, consideration or elementary human rights to satisfy current opinion and "political realities" about Israel.

Under the impact of a world depression, a large majority of isolationist public opinion in the United States sought to adopt a default policy of America first, excusing anti-Semitism, making amends for saddling Germany with war guilt and prohibiting her rearmament or expressing sympathy for the German minorities left behind in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Their first object of assigning blame was then, like today, to avoid placing it on the Germans, or the Muslims and their allegiance to Nazi and Jihadist doctrines, but instead on those "war-mongers" who "inflamed emotions" or by a "reckless foreign policy," one that dared to confront the evil ambitions or ruthless dictators and fanatics who had constructed a scenario blaming the Jews for all the world's ills. Substitute Israelis for Jews, and Palestinians for Germans and the parallel universe comes into focus.

The Tunisian action against the Israeli tourists represents all that is wrong with the Arab Spring and rejection of a real desire for peace and that still retards the Arab world and many Islamic countries. The Arab Spring has failed to bring any lasting benefits and the anti-Israel mantra, no matter how many times repeated is only self-defeating. The current Norwegian government represents the worst of modern day European regimes that subconsciously draw upon a medieval mind-set in which Jews were the outcasts and cannot relate to Israelis in a fair way.

American attorney and civil rights advocate Alan M. Dershowitz sharply criticized Norway for its treatment of Jews, writing that *"All Jews are apparently the same in this country that has*

done everything in its power to make life in Norway nearly impossible for Jews. Norway was apparently the first modern nation to make stunning of domestic animals compulsory, outlawing the method for production of Kosher meat."

This was all too apparent two hundred years ago. A constituent assembly was convened in Eidsvoll in the spring of 1814 just prior to the separation of Norway from Danish tutelage after 300 years of a joint kingdom. Although Denmark had signaled its intention of completely lifting all restrictions on Jews, the Norwegian assembly, after some debate, demanded to "continue" the exclusion of Jews from the realm, as part of the clause that made Lutheranism the official state religion.

Most of the representatives at the assembly supported the views of Lauritz Weidemann, who wrote that independence from Denmark should not allow Norwegians to tolerate Jewish settlement...*"The Jewish nation's history proves, that this people always has been rebellious and deceitful, and their religious teachings, the hope of again arising as a nation, so often they have acquired some remarkable fortune, led them to intrigues and to create a state within a state. It is of vital importance to the security of the state that an absolute exception be made about them."*

Those who opposed admission of Jews prevailed decisively when the matter was put to a vote, and the second paragraph of the new constitution read: " § 2. *The evangelical-Lutheran religion remains the State's public religion. Those inhabitants who profess to it, are obliged to raise their children in the same. Jesuits and monastic orders may not be tolerated. Jews remain excluded from admission to the kingdom.*" This effectively maintained the legal status quo but put Norway sharply at odds with trends in both Denmark and Sweden, where laws and decrees in the early 19th century were granting Jews greater, not more limited liberties. Denmark granted full equality to its Jewish citizens in 1814.

Not only the Norwegians, but many Europeans are still unable to digest the fact that Israel is a sovereign nation rather than the religious community they regarded as a "foreign element." The Israeli people including many non-Jews have a deep attachment to their homeland, language and sense of distinctive national identity which they are willing to defend. Their numerous offers to share this homeland have stopped short of committing national suicide in order to satisfy Hamas, the PLO, Hizbollah, or those "other Norwegians" who have placed the creation of an independent Palestinian Arab state at the top of their priority list, whatever the risk and cost to Israel's security and survival.

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