

# Norway's Comeuppance

After years of official anti-Semitism, Israel reacts.



Former Norwegian Prime Minister Kåre Willoch

by Bruce Bawer

“The relationship between Norway and Israel,” [wrote](#) Trond Ellingsen the other day at *Document*, Norway’s leading alternative news website, “is now at a historically low level.” We’ll get around to the reason in a minute, but first let’s just note that that’s saying a lot, given that antisemitism on a very profound level goes back a long way in the exquisite land of the fjords. The Norwegian Constitution, drafted in 1814, originally contained this sentence: “Jews are still excluded from admission to the kingdom.” Knut Hamsun, probably Norway’s most illustrious novelist, was a Nazi. During World War II, it was the Norwegian police who, obedient to the German occupiers, rounded up Jews to be sent to death camps; in neighboring Denmark, by contrast, the police played

a key role in the valiant effort – in which virtually all Danish gentiles took part – to sequester Jews from the Nazis and then help smuggle them to safety in Sweden. As a result, while only thirty-eight of the 773 Norwegian Jews who were shipped to Auschwitz survived the war, most of Denmark's 7800 or so Jews made it to Sweden; of the 464 who were captured and, in keeping with a special agreement with the Danish authorities, sent to the concentration camp at Theresienstadt instead of to death camps, 425 returned home alive.

Yes, Norway was quick to recognize the state of Israel. But hatred for that country, and for Jews generally, has flourished in Norwegian politics ever since. About Prime Minister Kåre Willoch, a member of the Conservative Party who finally died last year after two decades of looking like an evil crypt-keeper, the author Mona Levin once wrote: "the hatred shines in his eyes when he talks about Israel." Boy, did it ever: I don't remember ever seeing someone who was so obviously a Jew-hater of the first water. Still, most of Norway's Jew-hatred is on the left – mainly in the Labor Party, which during the postwar period has enjoyed the loyalty of most of the Norwegian cultural establishment. Living in Oslo for over a decade, I occasionally encountered members of that establishment, many of whom, because I was a writer from New York with an ambiguous-sounding name, suspected me of being not only an American but also that even more horrible thing, a Jew. "Are you a Jew?" they would ask, in the tone of an SS officer. (To be fair, I now live in a remote corner of the Norwegian boonies where the people love old American cars and American music – we have one of Europe's big annual blues festivals – and where I have yet to encounter either anti-American or anti-Jewish sentiments.)

Norway's taxpayer-funded government television and radio network, NRK (*Norsk rikskringkasting*, or "Norwegian National Broadcasting") – where the pro-Labor slant is so strong that it is jocularly known as ARK (*Arbeiderpartiets*

*rikskringkasting*, or “Labor Party Broadcasting”) – has long been known for its hostility to Jews and to Israel. Confronted early last year with the fact that Israelis, way ahead of the rest of the world, had already been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and that its infection rate was extremely low, several NRK reporters felt obliged to come up with a negative spin. For example, Mideast correspondent Yama Wolasmal (originally from Kabul) told his radio audience that Israel was refusing to vaccinate Palestinians on the West Bank. In response, Jan Benjamin Rødner of the group Med Israel for Fred (With Israel for Peace) [explained](#) that under the Oslo Accords, health care on the West Bank is the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority. Yes, Israel is obligated to cooperate – and had done so in this case by training West Bank medical personnel in the use of ventilators and other equipment. But the PA had rejected Israeli offers of help with vaccinations and had also turned down similar offers from the United Arab Emirates. Why? Because aid from the UAE would be delivered via *haram* Israeli airports. In other words, it wasn’t a story of Israeli mistreatment of Arabs, but of Islamic contempt for Jewish “pigs and dogs.”

Another NRK radio stalwart, Shaun Henrik Matheson, [introduced](#) his report about Israel’s vaccination success as follows:

*Good news from Israel – and when was the last time that happened? But the [news media that reported this story] forgot something important, or neglected to mention it – [and it’s] something we must never forget: Israel is an occupying power, it is an apartheid regime, where some people are worth more than others, and where those others are subjected to systematic oppression. Their land was stolen from them, [and] they lose their electricity and water if they don’t behave properly. And if a homemade rocket lands somewhere or other among God’s chosen people, there will follow a cruel act of revenge in which thousands of people, mostly children, are*

killed.

Matheson then summed up the news about Israeli vaccinations, and added: "I only wish that this [news] came from somewhere else, if you get my meaning. I almost wish that the vaccine didn't work."

The phrase "God's chosen people" may sound like Nazi propaganda, but this wasn't the first time it was prominently used in the modern Norwegian media. In 2006, Jostein Gaarder, author of the beloved novel *Sophie's World* (1991), an international bestseller, published an [op-ed](#) in *Aftenposten*, Norway's newspaper of record with precisely that title: "God's Chosen People." Far from being a piece of thoughtful commentary, it was an outpouring of sheer Jew-hatred premised on the lie that most Israelis passionately affirm their superiority to other ethnic and religious groups. "We don't believe in the notion of God's chosen people," Gaarder wrote.

*We laugh at this people's caprices and weep over their misdeeds...There are limits to our patience, and there are limits to our tolerance. We don't believe in divine promises as a basis for occupation and apartheid. We have put the Middle Ages behind us. We laugh in distress at those who still believe that the God of the flora, the fauna, and the galaxies has chosen a certain people as his favorites and given them ridiculous stone tables, burning bushes, and license to kill. We call child murderers child murders and never accept that such things have a divine or historic mandate...*

And on and on it went – exactly the same bile for paragraph after paragraph, as if Gaarder was so possessed by a demonic level of bigotry that he couldn't stop it from pouring out of him even after he'd made his ugly point perfectly clear. Later in the piece he imagined little Jewish girls "who write

hateful greetings on the bombs that will be dropped on the civilian populations in Lebanon and Palestine. Little Israeli girls are not cute when they bask in joy over the death and torment on the other sides of the fronts.” Now, you might think that Gaarder, in all this talk of scriptural literalism, of medieval superstition, of the murder of children, and of toddlers being trained to hate and to kill, was referring to the Palestinians, whose holy book insists repeatedly on the superiority of Muslims to infidels and who fit Gaarder’s description in every specific far better than the Israelis do. But of course a coward like Gaarder would never go after Muslims in such a way – and *Aftenposten* would never run such an article. No, he was referring to one of the most advanced and civilized countries on earth, a country where heroic Jewish doctors routinely turn the other cheek and provide medical care to savage Muslim patients who spit on them and wish them dead.

In 2011, Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz [wrote](#) in the *Wall Street Journal* that he’d recently spoken at Norwegian universities about international law and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. “But the tour,” he added, “nearly never happened.” He explained that he’d been sponsored by “a Norwegian pro-Israel group” that had “offered to have me lecture without any charge to the three major universities” in Norway. But he had no takers. At the University of Bergen, he was welcome to discuss the O.J. Simpson case (on which he’d been a defense lawyer) if he promised “not to mention Israel.” The University of Trondheim called the topic of Israel “controversial.” (Can’t have controversy at a college!) And the University of Oslo “simply said ‘no.’” Fortunately, student groups stepped in, and Dershowitz went ahead with his talks. But why the rejections? After a little digging, Dershowitz discovered that antisemitism “is apparently acceptable among many in Norway’s elite.” He was right.

But how is it that now, eleven years after the Dershowitz

debacle, Norwegian-Israeli relations are worse than ever? [According](#) to YNet, the reasons included the following:

*A report published about a year ago by the Israeli research institute NGO Monitor revealed that Norway finances anti-Israel organizations, including the BDS [boycott, divestment, and sanctions] movement. That same year, Norway's largest pension fund announced that it had withdrawn its investments from 16 companies linked to Judea and Samaria. Five years ago the "LO" – the umbrella organization of the trade unions in Norway, equivalent to the Histadrut in Israel – made a decision to impose an economic, cultural and academic boycott on Israel.*

And then there's Anniken Huitfeldt, who since October 14 of last year has been Norway's Foreign Minister. This is a woman who's been campaigning for years for a boycott of Israeli products. After the U.S. pulled out of Afghanistan, she was the first government official anywhere on the planet to [invite](#) the Taliban to her capital to discuss women's rights (yes, women's rights). Early this year, when Israel added to its terrorist list six Palestinian NGOs at which Norway regularly throws taxpayer money, Huitfeldt slammed the move.

There's more. In recent months, local Labor Party regimes in two Norwegian municipalities voted to ban Israeli imports. The Labor-run city council in Bergen, Norway's second largest city, went further, making a sweeping call for Israel to be frozen out of all international contact – a proposal that, if implemented, would ban every imaginable kind of cultural, technological, educational, or athletic cooperation, from membership in the UN to participation in the Olympics. The implication here, needless to say, is that Israel is incomparably worse than, say, China, North Korea, Iran, or Cuba. As Michal Rachel Suissa of Norway's Center against Anti-Semitism [commented](#), none of these local bodies has ever voted "to boycott goods from East Timor, Tibet, Crimea, or northern

Cyprus.” Then, in June, as if all that weren’t enough, the Norwegian government decided to put a Star of David armband, metaphorically speaking, on certain food products imported from Israel. Under this new policy, comestibles that originate in Israel’s settlements – “mainly wine, olive oil, and fruits and vegetables” – are conspicuously labeled so that consumers can effectively boycott them.

At some point during all this abuse, Israeli officials got sick of being kicked around by Norwegian counterparts who plainly consider themselves morally superior. So what [happened](#) next shouldn’t have surprised anybody. As it happens, at least a couple of times a year, the Norwegian Foreign Minister travels to Israel to meet with the leaders of shady Palestinian groups that receive huge, regular infusions of Norwegian cash. During these visits, it’s standard practice for the FM to meet with her Israeli counterpart, who at present (because he also holds the title of Foreign Minister) is Prime Minister Yair Lapid. Huitfeldt plans to be in Israel in September. But when Kåre Aas, Norway’s ambassador to Israel, put in a request for a meeting between Huitfeldt and Lapid, he was turned down by Aliza Ben Noon of the Israeli Foreign Ministry – who, by way of explanation, supplied him with a list of anti-Israeli measures implemented by the Norwegian government in the past few years. The response, not just on the part of Norwegian officials but on the part of the Oslo elite generally, was one of shock: it was as if the kid who was always being picked on in the schoolyard by the bully had finally fought back. This, then, is why the relationship between Norway and Israel has never been worse.

What makes this whole story especially repulsive is the following. In 2006, when Muslims governments expressed outrage over the publication of caricatures of Muhammed by a Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, the prime minister of Denmark – in an admirable reminder of the courage with which the gentile Danes saved the Jewish Danes during the Nazi occupation –

refused to meet their ambassadors and instead gave them a lesson in Free Speech 101. But when those same cartoons were reprinted by *Magazinet*, a small Christian periodical in Norway, the most powerful people in the Norwegian government took the side of the Muslims against *Magazinet's* editor, Vebjørn Selbekk. Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, who is now Prime Minister, pronounced that freedom of expression requires sensitivity “to ethnic and religious values.” For weeks Selbekk resisted immense pressure to apologize; but he finally succumbed, begging for forgiveness from fourteen imams in the presence of several cabinet ministers at a government office. The dean of the Oslo cathedral, Olav Dag Hauge, then traveled to Qatar to beg Islam’s most famous theologian, nal-Qaradawi, to accept Selbekk’s apology. At every step, Norway displayed its shameful readiness to compromise its noblest values to placate tyrants.

After years of practicing such double standards – capitulating shamefully to Islamic totalitarianism while taking endless swipes at the democratic state of Israel – Norway richly deserves Israel’s snub. In fact, it deserves a lot more. It’s about time that its leaders be forced to reflect on the fact that the soul of their “peace nation” is still severely poisoned by a deep-seated antisemitism. But will they? Of course not. Prejudices aside, their country is home to, at most, two thousand Jews. Meanwhile, the number of Muslims living in Norway is supposedly about 170,000, most of whom live in and around Oslo, a city of 600,000. Do the math. That, quite obviously, is what most Norwegian politicians are doing.

First published in [Frontpage magazine](#).