

Letters Page

Menachem Kellner and Martin Shaw on Antisemitism and the Boycott

Editors: Individuals like Martin Shaw ('Antisemitism and the Boycott: An Exchange,' *Democratya 14*) always want to make me scratch my head in wonderment. One assumes that as a Professor of International Relations and Politics at the University of Sussex, he strives for reasoned objectivity when adopting political positions, especially those relating to the field of international relations. Yet, we discover that this self-declared opponent of the State of Israel (which, today, can only mean that he opposes its existence as a state for the Jewish people), bases his opposition largely on the work of Ilan Pappé and his ilk. Pappé is a self-declared opponent of any sort of historical objectivity, who proudly affirms that he tailors his narratives to serve political ends. Given that Pappé's work has also been eviscerated by other historians (such as Benny Morris – whom Shaw cites, amazingly, in implied support of Pappé – Efraim Karsh, Yoav Gilbar, and many others). Pappé turns out to be a thin reed on which to base Shaw's far-reaching conclusions.

Shaw cannot understand why David Hirsh finds his opposition to Israel redolent of antisemitism. I have no reason to suspect that Shaw harbours ill-will towards Jews as individuals or as a group, or even that he harbours unkind feelings towards Israelis as such. But it does seem obtuse of him to wonder why anyone might confuse his opposition to the State of Israel (not criticism of some of its policies, but opposition to its existence) with Jew-hatred. Is there any other country in the world to which he is opposed in this fashion?

I guess that Shaw might respond to that last question with the *prima facie* absurd claim that Israel is uniquely evil in today's world. If that is indeed his position, then we must ask, what presupposes him to accept such nonsense? Hirsh thinks it is some sort of anti-Semitism. I am less kind. To me it appears as group-think in its least attractive fashion, because the group in question ought to look at the world more critically and more objectively.

Shaw presents himself as an opponent of Israel instead of presenting himself as a supporter of Palestinians. That is tragic. If half the energy invested in blackening Israel's name were invested by Palestinians and their supporters (among whom

Democratiya 15 | Winter 2008

I used to count myself) in building instead of destroying, we would all live in a happier world.

Menachem Kellner, University of Haifa

Editors: It's sad that Menachem Kellner resorts to *ad hominem* attacks – all this stuff about 'individuals like Martin Shaw,' and 'Ilan Pappé and his ilk.' It is difficult not to see such knee-jerk derogation as an indicator of intellectual poverty, and this conclusion is not deterred by the carelessness with which he treats Pappé's and my arguments. I hold no special brief for Pappé, but it will be clear to anyone who actually reads his work that it is simply false to say that 'Pappé is a self-declared opponent of any sort of historical objectivity, who proudly affirms that he tailors his narratives to serve political ends.' Likewise it is truly bizarre for Kellner to 'guess' that I might make '*the prima facie* absurd claim that Israel is uniquely evil in today's world' – when I explicitly disowned this very argument.

More dangerous is Kellner's representation of my position as 'opposition to the State of Israel (not criticism of some of its policies, but opposition to its existence),' which would supposedly make it reasonable for someone to suspect me of 'Jew-hatred.' Let me make it clear again where I stand. I do indeed believe that the *foundation* of the state in 1948 was a historical disaster, involving the brutal destruction of much of Arab society in Palestine, and fundamentally compromising Israel's moral basis. However we live in 2008, Israel exists, and a just solution needs to start from where we are now. Either Israel must allow a viable Palestinian state in the rest of historic Palestine (the two-state solution) or Israel-Palestine must become a single, plural state in which the rights of all individuals and both communities are guaranteed. The whole drift of Israeli policies has been to prevent a viable Palestinian state; but without it, in the long run, pressure for a more radical solution will build up. The outcome is very much in Israel's hands; one would hope that its academics, at least, could face the depth of the dilemma honestly without the cavalier misrepresentation of critical views to which Menachem Kellner resorts. That, for me, was the point of opposing the boycott of Israel's universities.

Martin Shaw, University of Sussex

**Marko Attila Hoare and David Hirsh:
Getting Croatia Wrong**

Editors: While I entirely sympathise with David Hirsh in his rejection of anti-Zionist left-wing efforts to demonise Israel as uniquely racist or illegitimate, he does his cause no favours by repeating stereotypes about Croatia that closely resemble the anti-Israeli stereotypes that he campaigns against. He writes, 'Croatia, carved out only a decade and a half ago by campaigns of ethnic cleansing which drew on the Ustasha tradition, is a Catholic state'

This is wrong on every count. Firstly, Croatia was not 'carved out only a decade and a half ago.' The Croatian republic was established in its current borders in the 1940s, under the leadership of the anti-Nazi Partisan movement, as a constituent member of the Yugoslav federation. So there was no 'carving out' a decade and a half ago; the Croatian state and its borders were already established when Croatia declared independence in 1991.

Croatia then succeeded in establishing itself as an independent state through its war of independence against Serbia and the Yugoslav army in 1991-92, but this involved no 'campaigns of ethnic cleansing,' much less ones that 'drew on the Ustasha tradition.'

The biggest Croatian war-crimes occurred later, in 1995, when the Croatian Army, in 'Operation Storm,' belatedly succeeded in liberating the remainder of the country from Serbian occupation. The Serbian authorities evacuated the entire ethnic-Serb civilian population from the areas from which they retreated, and it is quite true that the Croatian Army encouraged the exodus through killing Serb civilians and, above all, destroying Serb homes and property, with the aim of deterring ethnic Serbs from ever returning to their homes. The character of these war-crimes is outlined in the UN war-crimes tribunal's indictments of the Croatian commanders Ante Gotovina, Ivan Cermak and Mladen Markac, which can be viewed on the tribunal's website.

But disgusting as these crimes were, they were a far cry from the 'Ustasha tradition.' The Ustasha regime that ruled Nazi-occupied Croatia carried out a planned, systematic genocide against Serbs, Jews and gypsies, involving huge-scale massacres, death camps, the burning alive of women and children in churches, the forcing of Serbs in some areas to wear a yellow-star-type emblem, forced conversions to

Democratiya 15 | Winter 2008

Catholicism, etc., and with a death-toll in the hundreds of thousands. It is simply belittling this genocide to compare it with 'Operation Storm,' in which the Serb civilian death-toll was somewhere between 700 and 1,200. And it demonises Croatia and its war of independence.

Further, regarding the alleged 'Ustasha tradition': Croatia's struggle for independence in the early 1990s was led by veterans of the anti-Nazi, anti-Ustasha struggle of the 1940s. These included Franjo Tudjman as president; Josip Manolić as prime minister, Martin Špegelj as defence minister and founder of the Croatian Army, Josip Boljkovac as interior minister, and Janko Bobetko as Croatian Army chief of staff. The war-crimes of the regime of Franjo Tudjman, a former Partisan general and hard-line Communist, can be more plausibly attributed to the 'Communist tradition.'

Finally, David is wrong to describe Croatia as a 'Catholic state.' Croatia is a secular state and has been since before independence; according to its constitution 'All religious communities shall be equal before the law and shall be separate from the state.'

Marko Attila Hoare, Kingston University

Editors: I'd like to thank Marko Attila Hoare for pointing out with such knowledge and accuracy where my brief comments about Croatian nationalism were thoughtless and sloppy. In fact I wasn't really talking about Croatian nationalism at all – I was using an over-simplified and clichéd idea of Croatia in order to make a point which really had nothing to do with Croatia itself. I do apologize. This has reminded me how easy it is to trip when using analogy to do more heavy-lifting than is really appropriate. We have to be careful when we use one set of social events as a lens through which to understand another; when we are thinking schematically; and when we are painting with a broad brush.

David Hirsh, Goldsmiths College, University of London