

# Bizarre Assertions

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## Letter from: Bennett Muraskin and John Halle

I read *New Politics* because it provides an in depth socialist perspective on politics available nowhere else, but some of your contributors make bizarre assertions.

Take John Halle's "A Visit to Bikernieki." After describing a horrendous massacre of Latvian Jews during WWII "carried out by copious rounds of machine gun fire, heard early in the morning to late in the evening, with soldiers descending into the pits to insure with their revolvers that no survivors remained," he proceeds to claim that the "crimes of the state of Israel approach[ing] holocaust proportions." In a mere six years, 1939-1945, 6 million Jews and 5 million non-Jews were murdered by Nazi Germany accompanied by countless acts of torture, starvation, brutality, etc. Nothing done by Israel to the Palestinians since 1948 approaches these proportions.

Then take Stephen Steinberg's "Race and Counterrevolution," where he equates the case of Emmett Till with that of Trayvon Martin and calls them "lynchings." Never mind that for allegedly whistling at a white woman Till was kidnapped, tortured, murdered, and his body dumped in a river, whereas Martin was shot to death in a scuffle with a vigilante who remained at the scene to wait for the police to arrive. To describe the Martin case in these terms is absurd.

Then take Roland Boer's article "The Dilemma of Freedom of Conscience." Does he really believe that in 1921 the Bund voluntarily "relinquished its stand on autonomy" and dissolved itself to join the Russian Communist Party? 1921 was the year that Lenin's government finally banned all non-communist political parties. The Bund's decision to disband was clearly made under duress. Had its leadership refused, they would almost certainly have been arrested. Political freedom was totally dead in the Soviet Union by 1921.

Finally Lichi D'Amelio's "Who Do You Protect, Who Do You Serve?" raises a question that calls out for an answer. She writes that "not since 2003 have there been such a high number of police murder victims." It is not clear to me how she differentiates justified from unjustified police killings, or is she actually saying that all Blacks killed by the police are murder victims? I sure hope not.

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## Halle Responds

I respond first to the three terms which Mr. Muraskin regards as inapplicable to the policies of the State of Israel directed towards its Palestinian minority.

With respect to "torture," Amnesty International reports going back to the 1970s have described its practice by the IDF as "widespread and systematic." As for "starvation," quoting Israeli official Dov Weinglass (with respect to the siege of Gaza), "The idea is to put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger." As for "brutality," the "broken bones" policy associated with the legendary peacemaker Yitzhak Rabin would seem to be representative of what even Israeli doves take to be appropriate tactics.

Secondly, it should be noted that the passage in question refers not to genocide but to a "holocaust," a term which has been applied not only to Hitler's attempted extermination of the Jews, but to the

fate of, for example, Native and African-Americans. With respect to these populations, the number of violent deaths inflicted by their oppressors was in some years, comparatively low. The crucial element in both holocausts was the deliberate attempt to create economic, social, and environmental conditions which undermined the viability of and ultimately destroyed a given culture. By these and other means, they were made "to understand in the deepest recesses of their consciousness that they are a defeated people." These words of Israeli Army chief Moshe Yaalon, perfectly applicable to the experience of African and Native Americans as to the Palestinians, signal clearly the intention of Israeli policymakers to inflict a holocaust, or a *nakba*, as the Palestinians themselves refer to it. It has not yet been completed, hence it is being "approached."

Those denying the stark similarities are deluding themselves.

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