

## Sullivan Inflicts Collateral Damage

We are fans of Andrew Sullivan's blog, and have been watching in admiration as, with his usual clear-sighted rationality and humanity, he has been destroying all the arguments against legalising gay marriage. But now he has drawn a **most unfortunate and unfair comparison**:

Now the Israeli government is intent on breaking up marriages it doesn't like. A new law would prevent Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip who marry Israeli Arabs from living with their spouses in Israel.

Now, whatever one may think of this proposed law, to characterize it in terms of an intention to *break up marriages* that a government "doesn't like" is a bit like saying that the US invaded Iraq because it didn't like the design of its statues: this measure has nothing to do with anyone liking one type of marriage and disliking another. It has to do with life and death. The Israeli government is considering taking the power to prevent certain people from entering Israel, not because it can't bear the thought of Israeli Arabs cavorting beneath the sheets with non-Israeli Arabs, but because it can't bear the thought of people getting a free pass into the country and blowing Jewish children to pieces.

This new law is a horrifying attack on a basic freedom - to marry the person you love;

No, it is not about attacking basic freedoms either. It is a temporary wartime measure that is distinctly less draconian than those taken by, say, Britain when it was at war. If it is passed at all, it will expire automatically after one year unless it is specifically renewed by the Knesset for a further one-year period. Contentious even today, there is zero chance that it would ever be renewed if and when the danger that it addresses no longer exists.

Nor is it about forbidden love. It is about forbidden hatred. No – not even that: for hatred remains legal. This is about forbidden murder. The fact is that the existing right of non-Israelis to gain citizenship, with its automatic right of entry and freedom of movement in Israel, by the expedient of marrying an Israeli Arab, has already been used many times as a means of murdering people. For

instance, **this** murder of sixteen people was carried out by a Hamas

man who had gained entry to Israel by marrying an Israeli Arab woman. The Israeli security services say that there have been **nineteen such cases** so far, involving 87 murders. To do nothing about this situation out of deference to 'Love' would be an obscenity.

and it smacks of racism of the worst sort.

It may be the wrong law. It may even be a bad law. But it is not racism, nor does it smack of racism. It would be racism to ban marriage (and indeed sex) between races, as the Nazis did – and as the Americans did, within living memory, but which Israel never has done. It would be racism to give Israeli Arab marriages an inferior legal status to Israeli Jewish marriages – but Israelis of all races have, and have always had, full legal equality. (And by the way, although same-sex marriages are not yet allowed in Israel, Israel is making progress in that direction at a time when America seems to be regressing: for instance, same-sex couples in Tel Aviv are now eligible for the **same benefits as married couples**, according to new Tel Aviv municipality regulations.) But even those leftist and politically-correct **opponents** of the proposed measure who do call it “racist” in some contrived and tenuous sense, cannot in all conscience or reason call it racism *of the worst sort*. We all know what racism of the worst sort is, and to use that term here is exaggeration of the worst sort: crude, spiteful, and, one could say with much greater justice, smacking of anti-Semitism. And here is some more:

Israel contends it is protecting itself from terrorists using the law to get into Israel to attack Israelis.

There are surely better ways of doing that.

Now, we don't know whether this new law would be effective at saving lives or whether there are “better ways of doing that”. That depends on information and expertise which, frankly, we do not have. We're not even going to take a position, at the moment, on whether the number of lives saved would indeed be worth the inconvenience inflicted on innocent people. Perhaps they wouldn't. But the fact is that Israel's people, including Israeli Arabs, are in danger of violent death every day (despite the current “ceasefire”), from murderers who are trying desperately to enter the country by every conceivable means. And the only reason that many times the current number are not being killed and maimed is that Israel's Defence Forces have been keeping those murderers out through extraordinary skill and heroism, and, yes, by extraordinary measures that also impinge on the lives of innocent people.

Whenever you see an argument of the form “Israel contends that it is doing so-and-so in self-defence, but that is not its real motive”, think carefully. For as Fiamma Nirenstein said recently in a superb **reflection on contemporary anti-Semitism**, the onus should be on anyone who makes such an argument to substantiate it: “you cannot use false stereotypes. You must demonstrate what you assert: that the army ruthlessly storms poor Arab villages that have nothing to do with terrorism; that it shoots children on purpose;

that it kills journalists with pleasure". Andrew Sullivan's allegation that Israel's purported reason for these new immigration restrictions is a lie and that its real reason is racism, is just as unsubstantiated and just as false as those.

Morally, we have now passed the low point of Sullivan's piece. Logically, he saves the worst for last:

One of the more brilliant insights of Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-Four" is that one sign of freedom is the ability to construct human relationships without the state intervening. With this new law, Israel's presence in the West Bank corrupts its own democracy one little bit more.

Israel's democracy is not corrupt, nor is this law part of Israel's policy in the West Bank. This is an internal Israeli measure, concerning the interaction between immigration law and counter-terrorism. It may be an effective measure or an ineffective one. It may, for various reasons, be unwise or perhaps wrong. But it is not a corrupt policy or an undemocratic one, any more than it is racist. Criticising it in such terms is just a mistake.

In the matter of gay marriages, Andrew Sullivan is currently engaged in a titanic battle against institutions – the Catholic Church, and political institutions of the right such as the Republican party – with which he fundamentally identifies. The fact that he is absolutely right and they absolutely wrong (as well as terrifyingly irrational) in that matter cannot make this experience any less lonely or any less bruising for him. We guess that as a tiny side-effect of it, he has lost concentration for a moment and let off a broadside against an innocent bystander who, in the heat and confusion of battle, seemed to resemble his enemy. A bystander which just happens to be Israel. And yet we shall not do him the discourtesy of making allowances. He deserves better.

Fri, 08/01/2003 - 19:50 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

## only in Israel...

Perhaps I'm misinterpreting the law here... but my understanding was that the new law, if enacted, would NOT forbid marriages between Israeli Arabs and Palestinians. All that would happen is that such Palestinians would not **automatically** get Israeli citizenship, as they had in the past. (Nor are they categorically denied Israeli citizenship; the Israeli Interior Minister would decide each one on a case-by-case basis.)

In any event, there's certainly nothing (except financial issues, maybe) to stop an Israeli Arab and a Palestinian from marrying elsewhere.

Israel has, to the best of my knowledge, an amazingly broad standard for accepting prospective new citizens. If we include its unique Law Of Return, which grants automatic Israeli citizenship to anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent, I'd argue that Israel is

more accepting of new citizens than most countries, if not all, worldwide.

To accuse Israel of racism, because such amazingly liberal policies have been tightened up a bit (under strictly temporary emergency conditions), is disingenuous.

And yes, this pains me too, for I've also become a voracious reader of Andrew Sullivan's writing.

Daniel in Medford

by a reader on Fri, 08/01/2003 - 23:35 | [reply](#)

## bravo

very nice piece

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 08/02/2003 - 00:33 | [reply](#)

## Right on

Brilliant. I hope you sent it to Sullivan, and I hope he has the decency to respond. If not, I'll lose a lot of respect for him.

by a reader on Wed, 08/06/2003 - 20:32 | [reply](#)

## We Did Send It To Sullivan

Brilliant. I hope you sent it to Sullivan, and I hope he has the decency to respond.

Thank you. Yes, we did send it to Andrew Sullivan, but instead of replying, he simply upped and **went on holiday!** Can you imagine? It's almost as though he thought there were things more important than blogging or even politics itself! Doesn't he know there's a war on?

by [Editor](#) on Thu, 08/07/2003 - 00:57 | [reply](#)

## oh dear

man, i didn't know sullivan was so openly ~~gay~~ religious. \*sigh\*

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Thu, 08/07/2003 - 01:10 | [reply](#)

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