

Again, there was *never any* excuse for this terrible murder. It seems murderer and victim had something in common: both fairly intelligent but mentally disturbed. Van Gogh often suffered from depression, according to the Dutch daily *NRC*. So, indeed, he certainly cannot be equated to a calculating racist politician who is neither alcoholic nor takes drugs.

Dutch poet Remco Campert wrote: "*De mortuis nil sibi bene*" [speak only good of the dead]. That is a maxim which Van Gogh violated consistently. I think I would insult him if now I would say nice sugary things about him." Campert continued his article with Van Gogh's quotes on Jews. He concluded: "These are not really the words of a true hero of free speech." ■

Qaradawi, Ken Bigley and Islamophobia

THE KIDNAPPINGS and killings by terrorist groups in Iraq, highlighted by the horrifying execution of the British engineering worker Ken Bigley, have appalled all of us.

Muslims across the world have been vociferous in condemning these acts and rejecting the murderers' claims to have committed them in the name of Islam. Daud Abdullah and Musharraf Hussain of the Muslim Council of Britain visited Baghdad in an effort to win Ken Bigley's release. The Qatar-based Islamic scholar Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi also begged the hostage-takers to release Bigley, "whose only fault is having come to Iraq to help rebuild".

Dr al-Qaradawi, who was the subject of a hysterical Islamophobic campaign by the right-wing press during his visit to Britain in July, has in fact been one of the most active campaigners against the seizure of hostages in Iraq. He has declared that "Muslims are forbidden from kidnapping innocent people who have nothing to do with wars", and has demanded that the hostage-takers "stop such practices which unfairly brand Islam with terrorism and do disservice to its adherents". In August, Qaradawi blasted the terrorists who had executed twelve Nepalese building workers in Iraq as "people without religion and without brains".

After the journalists Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot were kidnapped by a group demanding an end to the ban on the hijab in French schools, France's foreign minister Michel Barnier met with Dr al-Qaradawi in Cairo to enlist his support in securing the release of the two men. Despite the fact that he has been one of the fiercest critics of the hijab ban, Qaradawi had no hesitation in broadcasting an appeal on Al-Jazeera television condemning the kidnapping as "incompatible with Islam" and calling for the journalists to be freed immediately.

Antoine Basbous of the Paris Observatory of Arab Countries stated that Qaradawi's intervention was "fundamental" to winning support across the middle east for the French government's initiative. Michel Barnier later sent a letter to Qaradawi thanking him for his "vehement condemnation" of the kidnapping of the two journalists and other civilians in Iraq. "With such a clear condemnation of the abduction of the French hostages", Barnier wrote, "you have sent a clear-cut message demonstrating respect for the tenets of Islam." When the Italian aid workers Simona Pari and Simona

Torretta were abducted in Iraq early in September, Italy's foreign minister Franco Frattini visited Qaradawi's home in Qatar to ask for his help. Frattini declared his respect for Qaradawi as a moderate Muslim leader, and paid tribute to his role in initiating a dialogue with the West. Qaradawi for his part immediately condemned the kidnapping of the Italians, stating that "the two work for a humanitarian organisation which has nothing to do with the war". He pointed out that "while Italy participated in the war on Iraq, millions of Italians took to the streets to demonstrate against the war".

In view of the disgraceful coverage of his visit here in July, you might have thought the British media would give Dr al-Qaradawi credit for the contribution he has made in working with European political leaders to try and resolve the hostage-taking crisis in Iraq. On the contrary, not only has the press failed to report any of this, but they have slanderously accused him of backing the terrorists.

On 3 September the *Daily Mail* published an article falsely stating that Qaradawi had called for the killing of US and British civilians in Iraq. The *Mail* assured its readers that the report "demolishes the claim that al-Qaradawi is a moderate". The *Daily Mirror* followed up on 6 September with another lying article reporting that Qaradawi had issued a fatwa concerning "the religious permissibility of killing civilian Americans in Iraq". This provided the basis of a further article in the *Sunday Express* on 12 September, in which UKIP MEP Robert Kilroy-Silk claimed that Dr al-Qaradawi "asserts that it is permissible for Muslims to kill – by beheading? – American citizens in Iraq".

On 23 September, following the deaths of the two US hostages, Jack Hensley and Eugene Armstrong, the *Telegraph* reported a malicious and baseless accusation from a United Arab Emirates newspaper that Qaradawi bore responsibility for the killings, under the headline "TV sheikh incited hostage murders says Arab paper". And all this despite the fact that Qaradawi has stated unequivocally that US civilians in Iraq should be "treated in accordance with the Islamic tenets which stipulate the killing of civilians is forbidden".

The campaign against Islamophobia is a crucial one for the labour movement and all progressive forces in Britain today. The British media's treatment of Dr al-Qaradawi, both during and after his visit here, has only served to underline this point.

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