

ignore the Arabs' many peace signals. It is also to fail to grasp that Begin's greatest fear is Arab moderation—which might lead to talks, to his having to make concessions, perhaps to the loss of some part of the occupied territories. Begin's blows from

Baghdad to Beirut, far from being battles in the fight for peace, are precisely intended to radicalise the Arabs and head off any peace overtures they might make, in order to give him time to complete the building of the Greater Israel of his dreams.

A Reply

By Conor Cruise O'Brien

I'M SORRY to have annoyed Patrick Seale, by quoting him. Mr Seale makes that quotation, and my use of it, his fifth point. I should like to make it my first one.

Mr Seale says it was "not a little malicious" of me to quote him. I find that odd. I bear no malice towards Mr Seale, and have no reason to. We are colleagues on *The Observer*—where indeed we are both "pundits given regular space"—and our relations have never been marred by the slightest unpleasantness.

I quoted Mr Seale, as I might quote any other writer, because his observations, on a particular point, tended to confirm my own impression. Jacobo Timerman had suggested that Lebanese felt towards Israelis as captives towards their jailers. As against that, I quoted three paragraphs from Mr Seale about the Lebanese "enjoying the passing of their long nightmare"—as a consequence of Israel's intervention.

Mr Timerman's impression of how the Lebanese feel is incompatible with Mr Seale's. I believe Mr Seale's version and I said so, and this has now earned me this lengthy rebuke from Mr Seale. But I ask readers to look carefully at the nature of the rebuke. Mr Seale does not say that I misquoted him, or quoted him out of context. He does not say that Mr Timerman's version is correct. How could he?

Mr Seale's trouble is that, on the point in question, the one I quoted him on, he and I are in agreement. I'm sorry he finds that so painful, but if there is any malice involved, it is the malice of Fate.

MOST OF Mr Seale's letter is taken up with discussion of a series of articles by me published in *The Observer* in the summer and early autumn of last year. In those articles, according to Mr Seale, I "beat the drum of Mr Begin's war propaganda."

Those of your readers who have read the articles in question will be able to judge for themselves whether that is a fair description of them. Those who didn't read them, but read what you published,

my Timerman review, know that I wasn't beating any drum there. But Mr Seale has his explanation for that: "Now in ENCOUNTER he is making some attempt to wriggle out of the corner into which he has boxed himself."

You can't win, can you? If you're not beating a drum, the only explanation is that you're trying to wriggle out of a box.

Most of the matters on which Mr Seale takes me to task are matters of opinion and of interpretation. Mr Seale gives us his own interpretation dogmatically, and knocks down mine in the same way. He writes *de haut en bas*; he is an authority, whereas I am "an amiable man who writes entertainingly", but should confine myself to topics like "Camus or Irish history."

It would be better to have confined the argument to the topics under discussion. If I am really incompetent to discuss the topics, Mr Seale, as the authority, should be able to demonstrate that factually. Generally he doesn't. He just lays down the law. There is however one point, and only one, on which Mr Seale does appear to demonstrate that I am wildly wrong. This is in what he calls my "second misjudgment:"

"Perhaps it was simply bad luck that on 19 September 1982—the very weekend when the world learned of the massacres of Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila camps—he should be writing a party political encomium in *The Observer* on behalf of the Phalange which perpetrated the massacres. The Phalange, he argues, were being unfairly treated in the Western media. Why, it was even a mistake to call them the Phalange at all, a name tainted by the fascist inclinations of their founder which they had dropped 33 years ago. They were the victims of a smear campaign. The movement should properly be called the Social Democratic Party of Lebanon! As may be seen, it would not be wise to assume that O'Brien is invariably reliable."

If I had indeed argued like that, Mr Seale's concluding comment would be both justified and

understated. If I had so argued, I would have demonstrated either ignorance or bad faith, or both. But I never argued in this way. I never pronounced "a party political encomium", or any kind of encomium "on behalf of the Phalange." The article in question contains not one word of praise of that organisation. I did not say or suggest that they "should properly be called the Social Democratic Party of Lebanon." And I made no charges about a smear campaign.

Let me briefly recapitulate the argument for which Mr Seale here substitutes his travesty.

I began by pointing out that the party was founded in 1936 with (as its French name) *Phalanges Libanaises*. I pointed out that the party dropped that French name in 1949. The party at that time gave itself the name, Social Democratic Party. I made clear that I thought that was a bit of a joke, in the condition of Lebanon. "The SDP idea did not catch on in Lebanon, what with one thing and another." I noted that the party themselves had dropped this one and I quoted a historian of modern Lebanon: "The party continued to be known as . . . The KATA'IB party."

I then asked the question why these people should continue to be universally known by a title they dropped 33 years ago.

In answering that, I not only made no accusations about a smear campaign, but explicitly rejected any such suggestion. My point was *not* that the media were wickedly traducing the innocent Phalange—which is what Mr Seale tries to make me say. My point was that the media try to meet a need felt by their readers etc, not to feel at sea, when they are at sea, among the unfamiliar. And I wrote:

"One way of meeting their need is to dot the alien

and incomprehensible landscape with familiar markers: 'Right-wing', 'left-wing', fascist, Communist, etc. These descriptions, including 'Phalangist', do exist, on the ground, but mainly in order to mislead, by giving an appearance of generality and modernity to local and archaic feuds (compare the assumption by the main Catholic and Nationalist party in Ulster of the title 'Social Democratic and Labour Party'). Neither *Mein Kampf* nor *Das Kapital* is much help with understanding Lebanon. A history of the Scottish highlands in the seventeenth century would be more useful."

If I had written in the sense that Mr Seale claims that I wrote, then the massacres in the refugee camps—which occurred after my column went to press—provided a horrible refutation of such nonsense. But those ghastly events were quite in line with the realities to which I actually referred. The comparison with 17th-century Scottish history—meaning blood-feuds of clans—is all too pertinent. More than one writer has compared Sabra and Chatila to the Massacre at Glencoe.

Whether that comparison is or is not appropriate, however, is not the point here. The point is that Mr Seale grossly distorted my argument. If I found my words twisted in that way, in some polemical organ of the region, I should take that as all part of the day's work. But I am flabbergasted to receive this treatment at the hands of a respected colleague, who is generally a sober, careful and responsible writer.

I should like to ask Mr Seale to read over again that article of mine, and consider whether he has done justice, in this part of his reply, either to my argument or to his own professional standards. And I should like to hear what conclusion he reaches.

Driftwood

Is nothing,
Looks like nothing,
Draws damp into it and sits
Illogical beside the fire

Warming its salty soup of brine

But when it burns
It cracks and spits
From puce to cobalt,
White to white—

A perfect alchemy of heat.

Pete Morgan