

Lord Owen was appointed to do Great Britain's dirty work

by Prof. Adrian Hastings

Professor Adrian Hastings, professor of theology at the University of Leeds, England, is a noted Catholic theologian. He has been the sharpest critic of British policy in the Balkans since the war began in 1991. In July 1993, he founded the Alliance for Bosnia, with a group of dissident members of parliament from all political parties, and individuals such as Roger Sainsbury, the Anglican bishop of Barking. This group sponsored the London press conference of former State Department official Marshall Freeman Harris on Aug. 11, at which Professor Hastings also spoke. The following article was made available to EIR by Professor Hastings, since, due to its polemical character, it could not be published as planned in the London press.

Lord David Owen believes that we should “hope and pray” that a Bosnian settlement is agreed in Geneva on the basis of an effective division of the country into three “ethnic” republics with the Serbs receiving at least 50% of the whole country. There are many decisive reasons why it would be wrong to do so.

The first is that it is profoundly unjust, a sanctioning of aggression and ethnic cleansing, and in direct contradiction with numerous U.N. resolutions. For the international community to broker such a settlement is destructive of every principle upon which the U.N. has developed.

The second is that it is undemocratic. The large majority of Bosnians remain opposed to plans which will destroy the historic character and civilization of their country. It will prevent 2 million refugees from ever returning to their homes. It is also intrinsically wrong to come to any final constitutional reshaping of the country in the chaotic circumstances of today.

The third is that it is unnecessary. The use of western airpower to raise the siege of Sarajevo is extremely easy and would at once remove most of the pressure which is fuelling Lord Owen's proposals.

The fourth is that, while it is integral to the plan to yield to the demands of Croatian President Franjo Tudjman and Mate Boban and give 20% of Bosnia to become a Croat ethnic republic, the reasons for this are so inadequate as not to bear any analysis. Most Bosnian Croats are deeply averse to abandoning their homes elsewhere in order to be resettled

in western Hercegovina. Opposition to a division of Bosnia is very strong within Croatia and includes the leadership of the Catholic Church. Militarily, the Croats represent no real threat to Bosnia, and have, in fact, rapidly been losing ground to the less well-equipped Bosnian Army. The reason is that few Croats actually share the ethnic nationalism of Boban. Most would far prefer to remain within the pluralist society represented by Sarajevo.

Why is it that the “mediators” at Geneva, appointed by the European Community (EC) and the U.N. to negotiate a fair solution, have abandoned every pretense of impartiality, and are putting maximum pressure on the Bosnian government to agree as quickly as possible to a carve-up of their country to which it is utterly opposed? How can it be that representatives of the world community are actually pressing for the acceptance of these appalling proposals, desperately anxious to bully the Bosnian President into signing them and so letting the international community off the hook of so clearly abandoning the principles it is committed to stand for? There is only one argument in favor of them, and that is *force majeure*. It is what the Serbs want, and the Serbs are supposed to have won the war. In so far as they have done so (and it is by no means a complete victory), it is only because of the world's embargo upon weapons for their victims – an embargo illegal and fundamentally immoral, being opposed to a country's basic right to self-defense enshrined in the U.N. Charter. The Serb *force majeure* is, moreover, a force which would yield within a matter of days to the force of the international community, if once employed against it. Hence it cannot be used to justify international recognition of arrangements based on no more than successful Serb aggression.

Owen sides with the aggressors

It is worth recalling that Owen's original plan for the division of Bosnia into ten cantons (a plan which was, of course, only a slight recasting of earlier proposals from the British Foreign Office) was already unjust, unnecessary, and impractical, yet did not go far enough along the road of appeasement to satisfy the aggressors. Yet it would certainly have been accepted by them if the alternative had been military intervention as threatened by President Clinton. At that point, the British government, whose basic position through-

out has been to ensure that there would never be a military response to the Serbs, pulled out every stop to prevent that happening. What is important here is to note that at that moment, Owen's influence one way or the other could well have been decisive. It is striking that he lined up with the British, appealed for no intervention, and by so doing, ditched his own plan.

His next plan has, as a consequence, had to move still further into alignment with Serb intentions. It is, then, hardly surprising that he can tell us that his relations with Serbian leaders Slobodan Milosevic and Radovan Karadzic have much improved. As Marshall Harris, until recently of the State Department, has remarked, there is now no appreciable difference between Owen's aims and those of Karadzic. So determined is Owen to satisfy the Serbs that he is even attempting to impose one final humiliation and ruin upon Bosnia, the division of Sarajevo itself. The citizens of Sarajevo, Serb, Croat, and Muslim alike, have been heroically struggling for 16 months against the division of their city, yet Owen is prepared to sacrifice even that. His recent attempt to justify this surrender in terms of a pseudo-academic appeal to the "history of settlements" in the Sarajevo area is very revealing. It shows how far he has swallowed the "ethnic" viewpoint of Karadzic, grounded upon a totally bogus history. Even in the area of theory, Owen has now become an uncritical partisan.

Upon what grounds does Owen attempt to justify the adoption of a settlement which he has himself described as "made in hell," and which, at least up to three months ago, he would not have denied to be profoundly unjust? The principal reason he has regularly fallen back upon in justification, is that it remains the best obtainable, given the refusal of the world community to intervene militarily. That refusal controls, he claims, the limits of the possible. The total hollowness of this argument is, however, obvious, when one considers that it is Owen himself who has, again and again, pleaded with the world community not to intervene and to leave him free to negotiate a settlement. As the only justification for the terms he defends lies in an imbalance of power on the ground, the last duty of the mediator was to ensure that the imbalance continued. But this is what Owen has done. If he had used his position to secure a balance on the ground, instead of using it to retain the imbalance, things would have been very different. He has, in fact, upon every issue sided publicly with the aggressors, even going so far in the last few days as to deny that it is a matter of "aggressor and victim" at all. His commitment is thus quite clearly to securing any settlement, however unjust, so long as it is done by himself and without military intervention.

What should Owen have done? First, he should either have declined to take sides publicly on any issue in controversy between the two, or he should have defended the weaker side. Instead of which, he has regularly pushed the Serb case. Second, he should have refused to preside over any

negotiations without an effective ceasefire and the implementation of the resolution of the London Conference signed by the Serbs, on the withdrawal of heavy weaponry from around Sarajevo. Third, he should have made clear that if these conditions were not fulfilled, then he would appeal to the world community to intervene effectively with arms. His appeal instead to "give peace a chance," repeated again and again, has been simply meaningless when it has meant allowing negotiations in Geneva to be used as a cover for continued Serb offensives within Bosnia.

Before Owen was appointed mediator by Prime Minister Major, his position had been very different: "Those of us who believe the scale of humanitarian abuses in Bosnia are such that NATO must reinforce the authority of the U.N. have a duty to continue the case for greater military involvement." What changed his viewpoint almost overnight, were the instructions he received from Major which went roughly as follows: A settlement must be reached which satisfies the Serbs without military involvement of any kind. While negotiations are kept going, the case against intervening can be maintained. In due course, the Serbs will be able to wrench out of Bosnian President Izetbegovic a settlement which satisfies them. So long as Izetbegovic signs, the international community will be able to judge it acceptable, and, in the circumstances, "honorable."

Owen was in fact appointed to do the dirty work of Britain and the EC for them and he knew that, if he succeeded in his mission, he would be well rewarded.

It is certain that at no point has Owen's position ever differed, since his appointment, from that of the British government. There are many other jobs available within the British establishment. For anyone with so many failures behind him, it would be a great prize. Putting a knife into the heart of Bosnia might daunt a lesser soul, but not the doctor.

A moral disgrace

What should be done now? The negotiations as they are being conducted in Geneva are a moral disgrace. They should be moved forthwith to New York. Owen should resign. But the negotiations cannot be resumed with the slightest moral authority until the U.N. has established a genuine cease-fire throughout the country together with the withdrawal of Serb guns from the vicinity of Sarajevo. Furthermore it must be recognized, that neither the President nor anyone else has the authority to alter the basic constitution of Bosnia. That can only be done by referendum after peace is established. Negotiations can do no more than propose possible models to be put to the people of Bosnia. If anything whatsoever is "definitively" agreed at Geneva, it will not only be rejected, at least by the people of Bosnia, and produce no peace, but instigate instead a further appalling wave of ethnic cleansing. It will also be in principle vitiated both morally and legally, constituting a disgrace from which neither the U.N. nor the EC may ever recover.