



Tell the truth about antisemitism!

Sean Matgamna writes an open letter to Alan Thornett of Socialist Resistance, responding to his polemic, "Defend Corbyn against the AWL"

(Solidarity 499, bit.ly/at-ip).

"We fight against the privileges and violence of the oppressed nation, and do not in any way condone strivings for privileges on the part of the oppressed nation." — Vladimir Lenin [bit.ly/lenin-13].

Alan (for 'tis yourself, I'm told, euphemising as Alan Davies) – Good to know that you are still alive, still able to splutter, even if your squawk, while it is as incoherent as ever, isn't as loud as it once was.

I am, you say, "racist", "vile", "divisive", only claim to be of the radical left. You say we are witch hunters, people whose commitment to socialism is "cancelled out", etc., etc., etc.

Reading your polemic against my comments on the "absolute anti-Zionist" antisemitism of the ostensible left took me back, way, way back.

The non-sequiturs jostling the appeals to a faux leftist common sense. The half-quotes and dodgy quotes. The little spurts of stale and fresh malice. The sleights of mind. The substitution of raw feeling for reason, and under-powered demagoguery for grown-up discourse and of smug, jeering incomprehension for discussion of what is said. The wilful dismissal of arguments and reasonings that contradict your feelings. The mauled and maimed understanding and the little twists and distortions to misrepresent what is said to your polemical advantage. The lack of a firm grip on the issues in dispute. The fact that often you don't try to and sometimes you aren't able to follow an argument. It's all there, the old rich familiar brew.

In an orderly political world, how would socialists of the school to which we both claim to belong relate to the Arab-Jewish conflict in the Middle East? Exactly as our movement did in the 1930s, 40s, 50s and 60s.

They would advocate an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, criticise and actively protest against the Israelis for their treatment of the Palestinians. They would criticise the Palestinians too, of course, where necessary; but the Palestinians, as the oppressed, the weakest, the least powerful, would be entitled to the special support and advocacy of socialists and consistent democrats.

There would be shades of difference on the left, of course, but even so, we, AWL would do our political work — if not blamelessly in the eyes of dim neighbours such as yourself — at least free of accusation of cardinal sin. Part of the tribe.



Demonstration for peace and Palestinian rights in Tel Aviv: the socialist way forward lies through uniting workers, Israeli-Jewish and Arab, round a program that upholds the national rights of both peoples

We would not have to endure things like the little dollop of horse ordure you have just thrown at us. I wouldn't have to spend time writing things like this. But we do not live and do not do our political work in such a world.

We live in a political world — that of the left — awash with a hysterical "left" anti-Zionism and a hatred of Israel that is indistinguishable from antisemitism, even when it does not target Jews outside Israel.

This is not racist antisemitism, but something akin to the old Christian antisemitism that wanted to save the souls of the Jews it persecuted and killed, and "only" wanted them to convert, to accept the world view of their persecutors.

THE RELIGION OF "ABOLISH ISRAEL"

We live in a world in which the ostensible left has poisoned itself, and is now poisoning the resurgent Labour Party.

Where the ostensible Left makes something like a fervent religion, not of the Palestinian cause and Palestinian rights, but of hostility to Israel, desire for its destruction, and ad-

vocacy of that destruction. That makes, or comes close to making, hostility to Israel the central pillar of a political philosophy.

There are many wrongs in the world, and lots of refugees too, about 70 million across the globe by the UN's count. 700,000 Muslim people have recently been driven out of Myanmar into Bangladesh. Sri Lanka's three million Tamils have been repressed and subjected to large-scale slaughter, and some 800,000 of them have become refugees round the world.

Why then is the case of the Palestinian refugees from the wars of 1947-8, seventy years ago, the centre of a world outlook, as it is for you and much of the ostensible left?

Yes, Israel deserves severe criticism and opposition. But why do you make a political quasi-religion — an epiphenomenon of fundamentalist Islamist "anti-imperialism" — of the demand that Israel should cease to exist?

Now, Alan, if you paid attention you might notice that the description above of what in an orderly political world a Trotskyist left should do fits exactly what AWL says, does,

and has always said and done. What have I left out that you think should be there?

You quote an unnamed pundit: “AWL is a Zionist organisation, though it does not describe itself as such. Its commitment to Zionism cancels out its commitment to socialism and internationalism whenever the two conflict.”

I defy you or anyone else to find in the records an example of Israeli ill-treatment of the Palestinians in which we have not responded with criticism and condemnation of Israel; in which we have not advocated what the PLO advocates, self-determination for the Palestinians in a sovereign Palestinian state in contiguous territory, side-by-side with Israel.

In our press and on the streets we condemn the disproportion in the killing and damage Israel does to the Palestinians in clashes like those over the last year on the Gaza border. We blame Israel for the situation vis-a-vis the Arab states — not on account of the original sin of “Zionism”, but because Israel may have the strength now to get an accommodation with the Arab states, or with most of them, and doesn’t try; because the rulers of Israel work, by settlements, to close the possibility of the creation of a Palestinian state.

Yes, we denounce the human-bomb murder of Israeli civilians and the dropping of rocket bombs on Israel. But when an Israeli minister, an advocate of “population transfer”, Rehavam Ze’evi, was killed by Palestinians in Jerusalem in 2001, we — and since you want to personalise it, I — commented in our paper that in principle the Palestinians, fighting for self-determination in a state side-by-side with Israel, had a right to do that.

I wrote: “Of course crimes like the Russian oppression of Chechnya provoke guerrilla war and ‘terrorism’. One may think that makes sense or not. One may condemn specific terrorist actions — as we condemned the Omagh bombing — or think that ‘he had it coming’, as the Israeli minister Rehavam Ze’evi, an advocate of the expulsion of Palestinians from Israel and the occupied territories, surely did” (*Solidarity* 2/50, 26/10/01).

You say: “No doubt this kind of vile divisive stuff works well for the AWL in hardening up a sect around outrageous positions that are rejected by the bulk of the left and building its organisation”.

Yet again, I don’t want to make things too complex and difficult for you, Alan, but there’s another possible reason why I repeat, and apply to the Labour Party leader, what I’ve been saying publicly about sections of the left since 1983, and privately for longer: that I believe it’s true, and think the question is important.

Where does the heat and hostility against AWL come from? What is our difference with you and such as you? (Apart, I mean, from the fact that we have retained the quaint old-socialist and old-Marxist habit of trying to think about things concretely, in a rational, working-class and consistently-democratic way?)

The differences are all in the area beyond pro-Palestinian policies. They are about Israel, whether or not Israel has a right to exist.

About whether or not the things we criticise or condemn remove from Israel the right to exist and change. About

whether the Jewish nation that some of the most tragic events of the 20th century created in Israel has a right to exist. Whether to support a modern rendition of the old slogan: drive the Jews into the sea, or reject that, as we do.

I referred above to your difficulty in following an argument (and it’s not a matter of age: you were the same in your 40s. You may even have improved with age). Examples:

You say that I think it a political crime “to support the right of return of the Palestinian refugees driven out in 1947-8” (my emphasis). No, Alan, as I tried to explain, that isn’t quite how things are now.

With the passage of time, the Palestinians who left and were driven out during the wars of 1947-8 are now a couple of hundred thousand, or in some reckonings as few as 30,000, very old people.

The argument on the Palestinian “right of return” now concerns the organised collective “return” of about six million of the descendants of refugees.

I spelled that out: the “return” argument now depends on the idea that heredity — the “genes” of the six million — gives them a greater right in the territory of pre-1967 Israel than people born and brought up there. It bestows on them a privilege over the Israeli Jews as great as any claim ever made for others with “superior” genes. If you want to go on about “racism” — as distinct from the oppression the Palestinians experience — then the main “racism” and “gene-ism” in debate over the Middle East is that. Some of what I wrote depended on that. You didn’t notice?

Neither AWL nor this writer says or thinks that “opposing” Israeli governments is antisemitism. *Solidarity* denounces many Israeli actions, and in the present uproar in the labour movement has insisted that the right to criticise Israel must be preserved. We have, many times, organised protests against Israeli actions at the Israeli embassy in London (or as near to it as you can get).

We identify with the tradition of communist and later Trotskyist opposition to “Zionism” as it was before 1948, and with its argument for involvement of Jews in the working-class and socialist struggle wherever they lived rather than migration to a Jewish state.

However, we face the fact that the program of assimilation of Jews into society and into working-class struggle failed — and failed most lethally where it had seemed most successful, in Germany.

Mass Jewish support for Zionism arose out of that failure and the massacres that registered it. With hindsight honest socialists cannot but respond with sympathy to those who rejected assimilation, for example to the surviving Jews in Europe after 1945 who on return from Nazi death camps met with riots and hostility in Poland, in Paris. Or the Jews who, in 1947, faced anti-Jewish riots in Manchester, Liverpool, and Leeds.

We agree with the Trotskyists of the time — with Shachtman, Cannon, and their comrades. Shachtman backed Israel’s right to exist and defend itself in the war of 1948; Cannon refused to side with the Arab invaders of 1948, or to see them as waging an “anti-imperialist” war when they invaded Israel.

Of course then, we reject and fight the demonisation of Zionism. And the scarcely disguised antisemitism that has grown out of and around it

Your “definition” defines your own confusion more than anything else: “Antisemitism is hatred of or discrimination against Jewish people”.

In history there have been different kinds and subdivisions of antisemitism, different reasons for “hatred of or discrimination against” Jews, different motives for and kinds of “hatred” and “discrimination”. [1]

Even when you make apparently definite allusions, you refuse to notice anything that would inhibit your demagoguery.

You give what you say I said in a meeting some time in the 1990s. You use full quotes, as if to be precise, but where you do you take the quotation from? Memory, or hearsay, of 20 or 30 years ago?

“No nation should be expected to absorb an immigration greater in size than the host community”.

The pidgin-officialese here is not mine. The basic thought in my article is that “right of return” today concerns a proposal that six million people — two-thirds as many as the 9 million population of Israel now — “migrate” there collectively and in one or a few operations.

That is proposed on the grounds that their ancestors, one,

two, three or four generations ago, lived in what is now Israel.

Putting words in my mouth — “no nation should be expected to absorb an immigration greater in size than the host community” — you call them “racist nonsense”.

Why is it racist? Why is it nonsense?

FREE MOVEMENT AND “RETURN”

You may or may not have noticed that AWL defends free movement of migrants.

We reject arguments that truckle to chauvinism and racism, such as the proposition of the Socialist Party that opposition to immigrants is only a version of the trade-union demand for protecting existing labour conditions.

But suppose the proposal were to organise a collective immigration to Britain of forty million people, two-thirds of the population of the UK now? That would be a qualitatively different issue from all the current arguments about immigration to Britain and similar countries. You could not, sanely, take the same attitude as we do now to individual and family immigration, even in large flows.

Such a “right of return” is really a right to dispossess. And it is only for Israel that such a proposal is made. Nobody would seriously propose, say, that the French and German peoples amalgamate and merge on the territory of one of them.

Or take more pertinent examples from the 20th century history of Europe.

Between 1914 and 1922, mainly around a Greek-Turkish war in 1919-22, the big majority of over two million Greeks living in what is now Turkey were driven out, or removed in a forcible population exchange. Maybe half a million were killed. The same Turkish state had earlier, in 1915, killed one and a half million Armenians, people who, like the Greeks, did not fit into the world they wanted to shape.

There must be many million descendants today of the Greeks who were driven out then. What if the proposal today were to resettle those millions in cities like Izmir (Smyrna) which today are Turkish but had been Greek for thousands of years?

We advocate their “right to return”? No we don’t. It is only for Israel that such a thing is suggested.

Or consider the 12 or 13 million Germans driven west after 1945 out of areas of Eastern Europe which had been German for centuries, including East Prussia. Half a million are said to have died in that forced exodus, and the survivors were driven into a Germany ruined by the war, where people were starving.

The descendants of those driven out are reckoned as more than one in four of the population of Germany today. What if the proposal were to resettle twenty million or more Germans in the territories (now part of Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, etc.) in which their ancestors lived?

It would be stark nonsense. It could be done only after many wars and massacres.

“Racist nonsense”, you say? No socialist I’ve ever heard of advocates the “return” of the East European Germans — now like the Palestinians, that would be their descendants — or of the Greeks’ descendants to Turkey. It is only for Israel that such a thing is suggested.

You know, Alan, thinking about the meanings of the words



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and slogans we use was once thought of as a virtue among Marxists, as among others. So was honest dealing.

You say that I think it the “biggest” political “crime” to “call for a single democratic secular state based on equal rights as an alternative to the current occupation and suppression of the Palestinian people by Israel and to support the right of return of the Palestinian refugees driven out in 1947-8”.

Therefore, I don’t want an alternative? I want the occupation of Palestinian-majority territories and suppression of their people to continue?

The biggest political crime, and “the biggest” political stupidity, certainly for anyone who wants to help the Palestinians get the best possible rearrangement, is your own favoured “alternative” to the suppression, a one-state solution. It closes all routes to redress for the Palestinians other than that the neighbouring Arab and Islamic states conquer Israel soon and then treat the Palestinians well, as the Arab states have failed to treat them for seven decades now. It implies in reality that the suppression will go on indefinitely.

Again, deliberately or involuntarily, you don’t understand. We oppose the occupation and the oppression of the Palestinians by Israel. We support an independent Palestinian state. Our difference here, again, is that you want the Hebrew nation to be destroyed, and in your slogans you elevate that above the interests of the Palestinians.

The Palestinians are only ideological cannon-fodder for Arab nationalists, Islamic militants and pugle-headed “anti-imperialists” such as your precious self.

Your “secular democratic state” would be an Arab state in the whole of pre-1948 Palestine that at best would give religious freedom to the Jews who survive the necessary conquest. (If Islamists such as Hamas were dominant, charging them a special tax for the privilege, as Islamic states did throughout history).

I argued that such a reorganisation would require the prior collapse of the will to live of the Israeli Jewish nation, a decisive shift in the balance of military (and nuclear-military) power as between Israel and the Arab states and Iran, and a radical transformation in world politics. Calculably, it is not going to happen.

The one-state “solution” being shaped now in reality is the one that seems to be in Mr Netanyahu’s head – a Jewish state with an inevitably ill-treated minority of many Palestinians – not the one in your head. As I write Netanyahu says if he is re-elected he will annex to Israel the Palestinian territories on which Jewish settlement exist

In principle Marxists are not obliged to adopt the majority program of an oppressed people. We are entitled to think things through for ourselves. Yet it is strange, your cavalier dismissal of what the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) and Palestinian Authority advocate – two states.

If you think about it there is a mystery here. *Why* do you dismiss it? Because your guiding political principle is not what is best for the Palestinians but that Israel must be destroyed. Two states? Reformist! Pro-imperialist!

Your rejection of it is a by-product of the fact that the whole political nexus of which you are part, and the Arab and Islamic chauvinists whose line you follow, are more concerned with destroying Israel than with finding a liveable solution for the Palestinians. In the Arab-chauvinist and Islamist world-view, the Palestinians are a cipher. And in yours – an “anti-imperialist” cipher.

It is increasingly possible, perhaps even likely, I think, that the expanding settlements in the West Bank, will succeed in blocking off the historical possibility of a two-states settlement. It is too early to reach the conclusion that it is now blocked off.

The advocates of a one-state solution – the one in your head – who rush to dismiss “two states” as already impossible should beware of what they rush for. There is no benign version of a one-state solution. It will be one in which Jews, or (far, far more likely, as of now) Arabs, will be a captive minority.

I said all that as reason to reject a “one-state” solution. You ignore the argument; you emote and splutter senselessly and, from the point of view of honest polemic, shamelessly.

In this as in every other dispute, the basic rule of serious disputation and polemic is that you deal with your opponent’s arguments, and especially with the strongest ones. You don’t! The sad truth is that you don’t because you can’t.

Your literary and political DNA, Alan, is as distinctive as



“Occupy Wall Street” protesters dispute with a placard-carrier trying to appropriate the protest for “anti-Zionist” conspiracy theories

what it reminds me of: the smell of rot and decay in a damp place that hasn’t been cleaned or aired in a long time and is piled with rubbish, cobwebs and rat-droppings. And you don’t learn.

The article you criticise contained the following passage: “The absolute anti-Zionists are ‘gene-ists’. They have a political theory based on genetics. Their chief demand is a ‘right of return’, meaning an organised movement to pre-1967 Israel of six million people designated as Palestinian refugees...”

“This ‘right of return’ implies, and is meant to imply, the displacement of the Jews of Israel. By what standards do the descendants of the people who lived in that territory decades ago have the right to do that? There is no possible answer other than that they have the right genes. They are the descendants of certain people who could pass this right on to their offspring – and to the second, third, fourth generation...”

I set out my reason for anyone who can to pick holes in them. I say that “racism” has become a debased term of abuse and warned that in my better-Palestinian-genes argument, the proportions have to be guarded.

Now, my argument here is obviously an important point in a dispute with people who equate Israeli nationalism and the Zionist movement with racism. Of course, what I wrote can be dismissed as balderdash, foolishness, back-to-front politics, stupidity, or whatever you like. But it is central to my case. You don’t quote my argument. You don’t pick holes in it, or even try to. You point a finger – “Look! Look!” You leave me, and your other readers, still unenlightened as to where I’ve gone wrong in my reasoning.

You appeal to a kitsch-Left political orthodoxy to justify denunciation and scorn, and appeal to the knowing crowd. “This comes from a man who...” (followed by a made-up quotation of something you say I said at a meeting some time in the 1990s...)

“Look! look! at what a villain he is!”

CORBYN, MILNE, MURRAY

You complain that I accuse “Corbyn of playing lip service to a two-state solution while tolerating ‘absolute anti-Zionists’ in the party”.

Again, you simply haven’t understood what I’m saying. You don’t seem to be able to grasp the political issues involved here, either.

Corbyn does not just “tolerate” anti-Israel ideologues in the Labour Party. He is one of them himself. So of those around him are such as Seamus Milne and Andrew Murray.

Why are you unable to understand? Because you, like Jeremy Corbyn, have spent decades wallowing in an “absolute

anti-Zionism” that is indistinguishable from antisemitism.

Acceptance of “two states” implies — and I’ll say it again — rights for Israel. Israel will be, has to be, one of the two states. This Israel, perhaps more or less modified.

“Two states” implies recognition of *this* Israel’s right to exist, and its right to defend itself, and the right of its citizens to legislate for the society. If “two states” doesn’t do that, then it is an empty and deceptive formula. That is what it is for a lot of people who pay lip-service to “two states”. It is an astonishing fact, but the antisemitism-fomenting *Morning Star* is, notionally, for “two states”.

The “right of return” is a demand that the Israeli Jewish majority abandon its right to have its own state or is conquered. (The recent “Nation-State Law” raises other questions, which I won’t go into here; but to argue that the majority Jewish nation thereby loses the right to exist would be an absurdity). In either of those eventualities, there will be no Hebrew-Jewish state in the “two-state” outcome. “Two states” and “return” is a political oxymoron. [1]

Corbyn doesn’t just support “two states”. He also supports the “right of return” — that, again, is, in real terms, of displacement. The general formulas, “two states” and “right of return” of six million descendants of the refugees of 1947-8, are incompatible. The claim of “return” to repossess what is now Israel rules out “two states” because it is a demand that Israel ceases to be a state of the national majority there now, a Hebrew-Jewish state.

Just as so many antisemites are now, they say, just anti-Zionists, so also a lot of the “destroy Israel” people are “for” two states. They nonetheless continue to fulminate like “one state” vicarious Arab or Islamic chauvinists. The entire thrust of their arguments, feelings, “history”, and response to events fits in with “one state” (the one in their fond vicarious-Arab-chauvinist daydreams, not the one Netanyahu seems to want and may be able to shape in reality.).

Again, there is a problem of your lack of understanding. You write: “The much-debated definitions of antisemitism — that antisemitism is hatred of or discrimination against Jewish people and not opposition to the Israeli Government or indeed Zionism — have little relevance” (for me, you mean).

Certainly your hodge-podge definition here has little relevance for me – and no relevance to the dispute.

The problem with your waffle is that Jews and Zionism, or Israel, are not so neatly separable. (And your friends at the *Morning Star* didn’t think they were neatly separable, either, when they proclaimed that antisemitism would stop only when Israel ceased its misdeeds).

Jewish youngsters being harassed when they refuse to say that Israel is racist and should not exist — are they being dis-

criminated against? Are they victims of hatred when they are denounced as “Zionists”, in a world in which the kitsch-left hysteria around the subject brands “Zionism” as akin to racism, and worse than racism because it is archetypal imperialism?

I’ve been involved in the labour movement for 60 years. So, almost, have you. In that time I have seen, and so have you, the ostensible left change beyond recognition.

The left used to accept and support, explicitly or tacitly, Israel’s right to exist and defend itself. We had a labour movement in which Jewish people were numerous and at ease, and could pursue and debate their different political positions with each other and with those of a different background.

Now most of the left is caught up in a hysterical anti-Zionism, an absolute anti-Zionism, a political antisemitism that is all-embracing. It means hostility to most Jews alive, as “Zionists”.

Obviously Israel’s colonial rule in the West Bank and Gaza has been the objective reason for this shift. But the change in political culture is out of all proportion.

The ostensible left – and the *Morning Star*, which reflects Corbyn’s views, will do for an example – runs a hysterical and mostly false-to-history demonisation of Israel that is in fact incitement to antisemitism.

Most of what the *Morning Star* says (frequently lying) about contemporary issues as about history demands, logically and emotionally, the destruction of the abomination that Israel is, as depicted by the ostensible left. The international allies of the ostensible left – Hamas, Iran, Hezbollah – express that demand openly and unapologetically.

You write that the allegation of antisemitism against the Labour Party left is used as a weapon against Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party. I noted that. And that’s the only thing that matters? The use to which the allegation is being put, and the identity of the people who use it, pushes everything else out of consideration? It doesn’t matter whether it is true, or partly true?

The allegation isn’t true in politics — whether or not it is true in fact — if it is used by people we dislike against people on whose side, in general, we are? The issue itself, in substance, fades to insignificance, no matter how big it is in reality, if it is used by the “right wing”?

The same argument was used for many decades (and still is to a degree) about the Stalinist states: unflattering things were said by their enemies and ours, and so by definition weren’t true. That way lies political lunacy. In my opinion, the ostensible left’s obsession with eliminating Israel is already, to a high degree, lunacy.

Things are, or they are not, statements are true or untrue, irrespective of their place in the political battle.

Is there antisemitism in the left? AWL has said for decades that there is, and I’ve been saying and writing it for even longer. And we say it now in order to differentiate ourselves from the rest of the left? As I quoted above, you dismiss it as a contrivance for “hardening up a sect around outrageous positions that are rejected by the bulk of the left and building its organisation”.

In fact, of course, you don’t care whether it is true or not true. Alan, you don’t notice it, but you are running in a political pack with people whose present antisemitism brings them into the political territory of the most rabid jackals of the 20th century — the lying and then murdering antisemites.

AWL has been campaigning against left-wing antisemitism or “absolute anti-Zionism” for many years. An offensive is launched against it, and we should do — what? Denounce it and deny our convictions and what we’ve said and done for many years?

The idea that I now say what I’ve said for so long for a venal reason, and that I don’t contradict it when it is said by others (now, by a large part of the British Jewish community) — that there is something strange in me continuing to say what I believe to be true when it is also being used as a weapon against the ostensible left — that idea is certainly rooted in malice and hatred. But more. It is also rooted in your own galloping depoliticisation.

You think of “the left” as a sort of rugby or football team. You have a side, and you push. Communication with the enemy is only by shouting and counter-chanting. Truth is less important than backing your own side. There is a left-wing leadership in the Labour Party. That’s our side! Defend it! Say no when its enemies say yes, and yes where its enemies say



Protest near the Gaza border

no. I conceive of the left as a collective of politically thinking beings; I think that the job of Marxists today is to reconstruct a real left, on the basis in part of what was healthy in the old left.

Jeremy Corbyn and his friends like Seamus Milne, Andrew Murray, and others, have politics. To a frightening degree, and a startling degree a quarter-century after the collapse of Russian Stalinism, they have Stalinist politics. A Corbyn government will act on their politics, and establish their relationship with the working class by way of their politics.

Your policy of flop-down demoralised ecumenism and cosying-up, and giving a good impression of being an uncritical political groupie, is a recipe for contributing to a future great working-class defeat.

Politics aside, I’ve always respected Jeremy Corbyn as a serious, honourable person who stuck to his guns. He was not to any degree a careerist, and he was in broad terms a citizen of the left. But the idea that a vague “leftism” is sufficient is possible only for someone who has been politically demoralised and depoliticised by events. In Britain, in the last period, the group to which you belong has jumped on every wagon that looked like it was moving, including George Galloway’s Respect, even after the SWP parted ways with it.

THE HEALY PRECEDENT

In the late 70s and early 80s, we had said in our paper many times, that Healy’s organisation, the WRP, got money from Libya and other Arab authorities.

Then the BBC said it. Healy launched a big campaign in the labour movement against *Socialist Organiser* (a forerunner of *Solidarity*). Because we didn’t condemn the BBC for saying (some of) what we ourselves had been saying for years, we were failing in our duty of “solidarity” to the WRP, a labour movement body under attack from the enemies of the working class in general and the BBC in particular. It was a serious and vigorous campaign over many weeks, not your weak-winded squawk of incoherent popgun malice, but in principle what is the difference?

When the “class enemy” weaponised what we had already said, “solidarity” with the WRP demanded that the message be denounced as lies. Whether it was true nor not?

My comrades and I took a different view, and you backed us. We told the truth as we knew it, no matter who else was telling it.

And so too with left-wing antisemitism. In your lifetime and mine, antisemites armed with the resources of a totalitarian state committed the greatest crime in recorded history — the mass murder, organised in industrial-style homicide factories, of six million people.

You think antisemitism is a thing of history, something which you learned, when you were still capable of learning, was bad. You can’t see it now, or notice that you wallow in it.

For labour movements, in the beginning is the class strug-

gle. For Marxists, in the beginning is analysis, understanding, the political program. The future of the left, or in the worst cases the preparation of the future left, demands of Marxists that here and now we defend and elaborate the basic Marxist ideas and the rich Marxist tradition. That we try to apply those ideas to the world around us. That we try to understand our own history and identify our mistakes.

Trotsky once wrote that the October 1917 revolution was prepared for ideologically by the analyses and disputations around the events of the 1905 revolution, its defeat, and its aftermath. The future of Marxist politics can only be prepared by analysing our own history.

Instead, you and your comrades wander around like shell-shocked soldiers after a battle. You and yours have not as far as I know reassessed the history of your tendency, or of Trotskyism in general, or of the Stalinist experience, or assessed what the collapse of European Stalinism says about your understanding of it and about the old discussions in Trotsky’s time and in the 1940s about Stalinism. You have just collapsed in a heap in face of the problems.

I have known you for what – four decades? I have head-banged with you in the period when we were in one organisation – when you backed the Russian colonial war of conquest in Afghanistan. When you sided with the fascistic junta ruling Argentina in the Falklands war, and propounded the doctrine that, for fear of weakening Argentina in its great anti-imperialist struggle, the Argentine working class should do nothing, for the duration of the war, but back the junta and press for the war to be waged more energetically.

When you opposed supporting self-determination for a Poland threatened with Russian invasion. When you demanded that our common organisation should accept and support, as a legitimate act in defence of the Russian revolution, the shooting-down of a civilian jet plane with 269 people on board.

I have seen you over the last decades make yourself politically indistinguishable from the SWP in the Socialist Alliance, and in Respect from George Galloway.

I have known you, as the centre of a feeble but malignant cult, wreck a promising organisation in pursuit of political deference and control for yourself as a pre-designated “worker leadership”.

I have seen you sit in a meeting where one of your supporters in the factional division then, Barry Turner, proposed the slogan: drive the Zionists out of the labour movement. (He meant Jews, and, whether he did or not, what he proposed would have meant driving Jews out of the labour movement). You sat silent and left it to others to argue against him and against the young people in the meeting who in their “anti-Zionist” ardour agreed with him. You put your prestige with them above political responsibility and principle.

I could make the list much longer. Now you are burrowing in behind the Corbyn leadership of the Labour Party.

In the nature of things, Alan, all of us are political fools some of the time. Some are fools most of time. Poor Gerry Downing is a political fool all of the time. And you have been a political fool not invariably, but not too far off it either. In relation to getting things wrong in politics, whoever nicknamed you “Anytime Alan” was not mislabelling you.

At the end of the reckoning, what still, after so many years, shocks me about your way with things, Alan, is your political irresponsibility.

An awful long time ago, in 1983 to be exact, I wrote an article about left antisemitism – that of the WRP and of their Labour Party associates, specifically Ken Livingstone, then leader of the Greater London Council. I addressed Livingstone with the following, concerning the WRP and his association with it: did he think that we should simply shrug and accept antisemitism as a normal feature of the left?

A lot of people have done just that – you for a pitiable example. I didn’t shrug and accept it then. I don’t now. I never will.

Notes

[1] You were always very good at oxymoron “Trotskyism”. In the Kosova war you and your comrades raised both the call that the NATO bombing (without which the Kosovar Albanians would have been killed or driven out) should cease, and the call for self-determination for the Kosovars (who wouldn’t be there any more if the NATO bombing ceased and the Serb state was allowed to go on with its ethnic cleansing).