Fighting left antisemitism in the 1980s

The story told in this pull-out, of a campaign in the labour movement against us in 1983, was originally published as a series of four articles in 2003 under the title “The Last Time We Were Heresy-Hunted”.

The occasion in 2003 was another, though smaller, heresy-hunt waged against us, around the time of the break-up of the 2000-3 Socialist Alliance and the formation of the ill-fated Respect Coalition, for our insistence that George Galloway was an unacceptable figure on the left.

More recent heresy-hunts, much of their content anony- mous, most of them only on social media, have been milder affairs than the 1983 one.

Then, a daily paper, endorsements from prominent trade-union and Labour figures, public meetings with such figures on the platform, and resolutions through Trades Councils and union branches, were deployed against us in a cam- paign by the Workers’ Revolutionary Party (WRP).

The ideological core of that heresy-hunt, as with much re- cently, was “left” antisemitism.

Today “left” antisemitism’s gambit is to dismiss all ques- tion of antisemitism (short of neo-Nazi outrage) as mere contrivance to whitewash Israel or discomfort Corbyn. The “secular democratic state” did not slow down the WRP in 1974. WRP-type ideas still had some weight with them.

Many on the left in 1983 must have found the WRP’s anti- Israel stuff excessive, but evidently many were still willing to accept it as just a vehement expression of valid anti-im- perialism.

That caused complications for us. In 1981 our forerunners had merged with a group of people around Alan Thornett and Tony Richardson who had been expelled from the WRP in 1974. WRP-type ideas still had some weight with them.

By 1983, the “Thornettite” component of the merged or- ganisation had fragmented. Some of the fragments had quit. All were aggrieved and discontented.

Some of the “Thornettites” backed the call “Zionists out of the labour movement”, which the WRP didn’t. They crit- icised the WRP for failing to follow up its ultra-hostility to Israel, which they shared, with similar “ultra-hostility” to routine “Zionists” on the ground. The people heresy- hunted, by name, by the WRP, were also being heresy- hunted on “Zionism” inside our own organisation.

On “our” side of the organisation, back in the 1970s we had denounced attempts on the left (among students) to identify “Zionists” with “racists”.

We would also oppose the wave of attempts to ban stu- dent Jewish Societies for being “Zionist” which started at Sunderland Poly in March 1985.

But our policy on Israel-Palestine was still the single “sec- ular democratic state” formula into which, like most on the left, we had slipped after 1969. A minority had been arguing for “two states” since about 1978. It was growing, and those who still supported the single “secular democratic state” line were becoming more doubtful, but we would not actu- ally change our stance until later.

Thus in our 1983 responses to the heresy-hunt, we had to word things gingerly. The reader will see where. And in part the 1983 responses were opportunity-seizing polemic by the tiny minority advocating “two states”, the opportunity being given by the fact that even the most hostile “Thornet- tites” could scarcely deny those arraigned by the WRP po- litical gangsters the right to reply.

Instructively, the fact that the organisation was for a single “secular democratic state” did not slow down the WRP in denouncing us as part of the world “Zionist connection”, or a fair number of miscellaneous leftists in going along with the WRP. That we spoke out against the WRP’s financial links with Libya and other states, and that we criticised their mercenary “Zionist-hunting”, was enough.

As the story records, we were vindicated resoundingly and quickly when the WRP fell apart in late 1985. As it also records, with the left demoralised after the miners’ defeat, not a single one of those who had joined the WRP heresy- hunt could stir themselves to apologise or openly admit to having lessons to learn.

Ken Livingstone, in particular, who had been working with the WRP via Labour Herald since 1981, remained close to Healy. He claimed that the WRP break-up must have been engineered by MI5, and that we were complicit with MI5.

Because lessons were not learned then, they remain to be learned now.
Fighting left anti-Semitism in the 1980s

By Sean Matgamna

Supporters of Solidarity and Workers’ Liberty find themselves especially unpopular just now [2003] with certain sections of the pseudo-left, because of our attitude to George Galloway MP.

The hostility which our stand on Galloway has aroused reminds me of the heresy hunt organised against some of us, who were then publishing a regular weekly paper Socialist Organiser, by the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) and its sister movement in the labour movement.

The issues in the dispute were pretty much the same as those raised now by the Galloway affair: the connection of certain ostensibly socialist “anti-Zionist” groups and individuals in the British left with anti-working class Arab governments, and how others should regard those who have such links.

The large-scale campaign launched by the WRP and its Ayatollah, the late Gerry Healy, was an incident within a broader attempt by the WRP and its friends, such as Ken Livingstone, to found a “paper Socialist Organiser” and publish it regularly. In 1981, the actress Vanessa Redgrave, on behalf of the WRP, of which she was the best-known member, had sued John Bloom and myself for libel over things I had written about the WRP in Socialist Organiser and John had connected in a circular letter to supporters of the Socialist Organiser Alliance.

The WRP embroiled us in an expensive and potentially ruinous legal process for four and a half years. If we hadn’t found a friendly solicitor who helped John and myself do the legal work cheaply — John did most of it — we would have been bankrupted and Socialist Organiser forced to cease publication.

Why didn’t we take the easy way out and issue a tongue-in-cheek apology? We explained why: “We do not think that a Labour movement grown spiritually cross-eyed from the long pursuit of realpolitik and the operation of double standards, a movement ideologically sick and poisoned, in terms of moral, the left and the labour movement is something that can be faced easily and a new and better area of the long-term use of methods and arguments which have corrupted the consciousness of the working class. The most poisonous root of that corruption was the Stalinist movement.” (Quoted in Socialist Organiser 447, 10 May 1990)

The parallels with the Galloway case are striking and strong. In the Galloway affair we first raised the cry that Gallo was a typical Thatcherite individualist and that he was being “witch-hunted” by the bourgeois state by way of the BBC programme.

We were not isolated. We had, for example the support of Socialist Organiser and Ken Livingstone, Leader of the Greater London Council, and others. In response to the libel writs, we launched a political campaign in the labour movement, calling for a labour movement inquiry into the funds of the WRP and into our dispute with them.

As part of that campaign I repeated again and again in SO that there was “circumstantial evidence” that they were in receipt of funds from one or more Arab governments. Repeat—what was a typically vigorous campaign.

Politically, his exact motives did not matter. What mattered was the politics of a pseudo-left Labour MP championing, defending, and fawning on the regime that was grinding the working class, the Kurds and others in the Iraqi state under the iron heel of a dictatorship as totalitarian as Hitler’s regime was. A Labour MP who did what Galloway was doing for the Iraq regime should not be allowed to remain part of the Labour movement. Honest socialists and George Galloway belong to different species.

He was, we are told, being “witch-hunted” by the bourgeois press, “victimized” because of his opposition to the recent war on Iraq.

The duty of “solidarity” with Galloway against the bourgeois press, we were told, supersedes and overrides everything else. No it doesn’t! Solidarity with the Iraqi working class and with the Kurdish and others of its victims against the quasi-fascist Ba’th regime and against its paid and unpaid admirers in Britain — that was the first priority of socialists.

The first pillar of socialist wisdom is the understanding that “the main enemy is at home”, the second is an understanding that the bourgeois enemy at home is not the only enemy — and the third, the understanding that sometimes things are much worse than the enemy at home. The last is the most difficult to grasp by people engaged in day-to-day conflict with that enemy.

The WRP-fomented heresy hunt in 1983 shows the effect on the collective sanity of the British left and pseudo-left when it tries to operate on the basis of belief that there is nothing on earth worse than our own, at that time Thatcher-Tory, rulers.

For years before 1983, Socialist Organiser had been saying that the supposedly Trotskyist organisation, the Workers Revolutionary Party, was kept aloft by Libyan and other Arab government (including Iraq) money. You couldn’t read their paper and not know that.

They had met the dictator Saddam Hussein, publishing a glossy pamphlet about Iraq and Saddam which could be obtained by the Iraqi Embassy in London and which Iraq certainly paid the WRP for publishing. Their paper, Newsline, carried reports and articles expressing the views of the WRP and its friends in the labour movement, calling for a labour movement inquiry into the funds of the WRP and into our dispute with them.

As part of that campaign I repeated again and again in SO that there was “circumstantial evidence” that they were in receipt of funds from one or more Arab governments. Repeat—what was a typically vigorous campaign.

I wrote: “There is need of a thorough investigation into the career of the butcherous Ba’thist dictator Saddam Hussein who was sycophantic enough to be an official Iraqi handout.

I was more online at www.workersliberty.org
The Zionist connection

A POWERFUL Zionist connection runs from the so-called left of the Labour Party right into the centre of Thatcher's government in Downing Street. There is no difficulty whatsover in proving this.

Top of the list, we have the most recent appointment of Mr Stuart Young, a director of the 'Jewish Chronicle', as youngest-ever chairman of the BBC, having been a governor only since 1981. He is the brother of Mr David Young, another Thatcher appointee who is chairman of the Manpower Services Commission.

This is the key organisation which the Tories are transforming into a 'corporate front', behind which they will seek to mobilise jobless youth from 14 years upwards into a 'slave labour body to break trade union wages, safety processes at work' conditions - Thatcher has rolled out these appointments with magisterial arrogance while the Labour Party and TUC have accepted them without a murmur of protest. (News Line, March 28, 1983).

The Tories know they can rely totally upon Zionist imperialism to produce the most hated reactionaries, in order to transform the situation at a later date into a pro-fascist, and futile pogo against all the Jews in general.

Zionism made it possible for a number of rich Jews to leave Nazi Germany with the agreement of the Führer, provided they agreed to become Zionists. The Tories know too they have a powerful anti-Semitic trump card up their sleeves, to reply once again as the most reactionary manifestation of racism, which is anti-Semitism.

From the support and advance public which the 'Jewish Chronicle' gave the BBC 'Money Programme' on March 20, the reactionary Zionist link was clear for all to see. But it all stretches through Downing Street channels right into the White House and President Reagan.

The latest Reagan military provocation against Libya early in March raises in its sharpest form the central political question. Do Trotskyists defend the Libyan regime of Gaddafi against US imperialism as a matter of principle, or do they denounce it as 'the reactionary Islamic government of Libya and seek a neutrality between US imperialism and Gaddafi'? This is the position of 'Socialist Organiser', claiming to speak for 'left' in the Labour Party.

The same organ supported the Zionist-sponsored 'Money Programme' on March 20. They wrote: 'We (Socialist Organiser) didn't wait for the BBC to tell us about the WRP's probable links with Libya. The fact that the BBC now says Libya take it any less likely to be true.' (April 7, 1983) (Our emphasis).

Here is unquestioned support for the work of Thatcher's appointee as chairman of the BBC, who is also a director of British Caledonian Airways and the British Overseas Trade Group for Israel. 'Socialist Organiser' has landed itself right bang in the middle of Thatcher's hand-picked Zionists as an outright supporter of their policies of witch-hunting the WRP and the News Line for our principled stand against imperialism and in support of the Libyan masses under their leader Muammar Gaddafi.

The question of the hour, we repeat, is the pro-Zionist policies of the Reynolds Newsline and Thatcher administrations and their hatred of the Palestinians and Libyans alike.

In the background of the 'Socialist Organiser' one can detect a powerful influence from the current wave of nationalism - also shared by Reagan and Thatcher. This is the substance of their support for the 'Money Programme' and their lying affirmation that Gaddafi finances the WRP with a £1.5 million subsidy, claimed by the faceless person on the BBC '2 programme.

This is a lie from start to finish. Because the WRP unhesitatingly supports the Libyan and Palestinian people and its leadership against the nuclear war plan of Reagan, Thatcher and the Zionists in their campaign to destroy all national liberation movements in the Middle East 'Socialist Organiser' has joined the class enemy.

The Zionists connection between these so-called 'lefts' in the Labour Party right through to Thatcher and Reagan's White House is there for all to see in its unpinned nakedness. (they said 10,000, probably it is a great deal less…)

The programme was both shallow and ill-researched. It talked of the revolutionary left in general with possible links to Gaddafi by chains of gold. It talked about the left and ethnic press, but said nothing about the ethnic press.

The programme suggested that the WRP could publicise every argument to the BBC: £1.5 million may have been channelled to the WRP by the Libyan government in payment for 'commercial work'. It did not investigate the financial side of WRP films like 'The Palestinians', which are popular in Arab countries.

'It left a great many avenues unexplored. But it did plainly allege that the WRP gets money from Gaddafi. Will the WRP sue the BBC?... "There is still a need for a thorough investigation into the WRP's links with Arab governments — the BBC?..."

The WRP had been "singled out because this was understood to be the BBC's last ditch effort to get the WRP to answer the bell! — taken from inside the WRP.

"The Zionists played a leading part in its preparation. "Who was behind the Money Programme attack?" Answer: "The Zionists played a leading part in its preparation."

The first statements were from Liverpool docker and long-time WRP member Larry Kavanagh; from Des Warren, who had served a 3 year jail sentence in the mid-1970s as one of the "Shrewsbury Three" building workers jailed for picketing in their 1972 strike; the Midlands regional secretary of builders' union UCATT; and an ASLEF branch chair.

On 23 March a middle-page spread headlined the question: "Who was behind the Money Programme attack?" Answer: "The Zionists played a leading part in its preparation."

Secondly, we must look at what would get much stronger. Testimonials appeared from a Dundee branch secretary of the health workers' union COHSE; the leader of the Labour Group on Lothian District Council; the deputy TGWU chief shop steward at Vauxhall Motors Ellesmere Port and vice-chair of Ellesmere Port Trades Council.

Testimonials the next day, 24 March, included one from Jack Collins, secretary of the Kent miners; the chair of a London branch of NALGO; an executive member of Aberdeen Trades Council; and the secretary of the Labour Group on Lothian Regional Council.

One of the key WRP leaders is the deputy leader of Camden council and the treasurer of the GMB branch at Ford Dagenham testified for the WRP. The latter wrote proudly, as a WRP member: "I know that our paper and party need no foreign gold".

Many, testifying to their faith in the WRP leaders, would repeat this in the weeks ahead. It was one of the saddest things in the whole wretched business.

The central note in the whole WRP campaign, the basis on which they solicited support outside their own ranks, was this: the BBC says it; what is said is against the WRP, which the BBC says it. This was a theme that would get much stronger. Testimonials included one from a woman, one a man, one a young man, one a boy, one a girl.

The testimonials now had a regular logo: a photo — of the "witch-hunt" — and thus to "defend the WRP" from "the state" and its instigators... in the highest circles of government by way of overtures with Arab governments — a labour movement investigation.

On Saturday 26th the Newsline responded with a middle-page spread under a headline: "Socialist Organiser joins the WRP!" The same day, three days earlier, the Newsline had said that we, "the revisionists", were "the first to put forward the lying slander about the WRP and Libyan gold." Surely we were pioneer "witch-hunters", if witch-hunt it was?

The line they would take had to be to a large number of labour movement bodies to take — that was once the BBC had said it, it was everybody's duty to say it couldn't be true, and thus to "defend the WRP" from "the state" and its "witch-hunt". All thought about the substantive issue was...
now ruled out. Whether true or untrue, the charge was by then a self-appointed witch-hunt, an unprovoked attack on a fine frame-up. A WRP Political Committee statement dated 25 March responded to my review: “One revisionist group has publicly stated its full backing for the BBC state frame-up”. My “article provides evidence that what [the WRP] is calling for is a group which responds directly to the needs of the capitalist state... It serves the state’s interests and not the working class... Socialist Organiser has publicly said that the BBC had taken charge from the BBC to publish its article. It is not opposed to the witch-hunt. It supports everything that the Money Programme said. Its only disagreement with the BBC is that it did not go far enough.”

The concept here of “witch-hunt” inverted the usual meaning. Any hostile outcry against the WRP was a “witch-hunt”. Facts became un-facts, and anyway were irrelevant. For what can one do with a “witch-hunt” but resist it and “defend” its victims? Quoting me on the ethnic press, it turned the meaning of the words around. “In other words Socialist Organiser wanted the state witch-hunters to persecute Britain’s tiny ethnic press as well!” (p.64)

I had printed a photocopy of my article, so for the first time they had to answer Socialist Organiser’s long-standing call for a labour movement inquiry. In my piece I counterposed to the BBC inquiry the idea of a thorough labour movement inquiry itself. “Socialist Organiser” parodied for that over the two years that Vanessa Redgrave’s libel case had been in train.

The WRP’s Political Committee, is “implicitly [to] call for the capitalist state to commence an inquiry into the WRP”, “Socialist Organiser’s call for a labour movement inquiry into the finances of the WRP is a bogus cover for the capitalist state...” It is designed to encourage further witch-hunts against the state... It is improbable that Livingstone would believe the WRP’s integrity. The then prominent actors, Ray Marsden, who had been called to testify from their own experience of struggling to raise money for the paper that it could have no financial link with Libya. Playwright Tom Kempinski writes in ringing tones, “We are not bought” — rhetoric that rings pathetic and false in the Labour movement.”

“The WRP” didn’t end with the witch-hunt. On 14 April: “Newsline has continued in its ridiculous campaign of bluff and bluster against the BBC Money Programme.”

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VIII

28 March: the AGM of ACTT, the film and TV workers’ union, “repro[dat][e] all state-orchestrated campaigns of fabrication, smears and outright lies such as BBC TV’s Money Programme... deliberately intended to discredit organisations in which people have committed themselves with genuine...”

There was truth in the allegations, which was then “discrediting” the labour movement?

Gerry Healy of the WRP provided a bizarre rationale for the Money Programme on 5 April: “The programme... is designed to encourage further witch-hunts against the state... It is improbable that Livingstone would believe the WRP’s integrity. The then prominent actors, Ray Marsden, who had been called to testify from their own experience of struggling to raise money for the paper that it could have no financial link with Libya. Playwright Tom Kempinski writes in ringing tones, “We are not bought” — rhetoric that rings pathetic and false in the Labour movement.”

Livingstone “value[d] support to the struggles of the GLC by the Newsline...” There is certainly a case for suspecting the hand of the forces opposed to the Israelis. The Zionists were arbitrarily upset by the role the Labour played in winning the Labour Party to an official policy of support for the recognition of the PLO. The fact that smears about me appear on a fairly regular basis suggests this. Agents of the Begin [Israeli] government are active in the British Labour movement and press [Socialist Organiser?] at present...

It is important when these kinds of attacks are made that the labour movement stands united and fights back as one.”

It is improbable that Livingstone would believe the WRP denials on “Libyan gold”. He certainly knew that his Labour Party colleagues from the WRP’s mystifying world. For So too this editorial marked a new stage in the conflict. The obscenely open. Only those who didn’t want to see, or seemed to be of every Newsline’s turn into Nazi-like “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” raving.

I responded in SO (14 April) with an article, “Gerry Healy Discovers the World Jewish Conspiracy” [see page 8 of this pull-out] and a reprint of the Newsline front page. George Downing of NUPE wrote that “Socialist Organiser should be ashamed of themselves for their disgraceful breaking of the United Front”.

In some of these statements you can see the word “Jewish” through the very thin cover given to it by “Zionist”.

They rationalised from that, and really believed things like Kempinski’s credo here. A good credo, honoured only in the breach by the WRP. I wrote in SO on 14 April: “Letter after letter testifies to real sacrifices and devotion. People who couldn’t possibly know the secrets of the automatic and conspiratorial leaders of the organisation write to testifies from their own experience of struggling to raise money for the paper that it could have no financial link with Libya. Playwright Tom Kempinski writes in ringing tones, “We are not bought” — rhetoric that rings pathetic and false in the Labour movement.”

“The WRP” got knocked back sometimes, of course, when as the National Union of Teachers conference refused to debate the issue.

“Anti Zionism” had been central to the campaign against the BBC and SO. From now on it would take off into the realm of political lunacy. On 9 April Newsline gave the whole centre page to “the witch-hunt”. The issue of the paper included the crazedist of all the things they published at that time, an editorial asserting that there was a Zionists conspiracy stretching from Socialist Organiser, through Thatcher’s Cabinet, all the way to Reagan’s White House.

Across the page from that editorial, Ken Livingstone, Labour’s controversial Left candidate in the joint nomi-
Livingstone and other “left Labour” people played an irreplaceable role in the WRP’s campaign. They helped give it a credibility it would otherwise have had, way outside the influence of its own comparatively small numbers gave it.

A lot of people in the labour movement knew the WRP, and had long known that what Socialist Organiser said about the Libyan gold was probably true. Yet the instinct to back even the WRP “against the state and the BBC” rallied people to them. The backing of the Livingstones helped discredit what Socialist Organiser said and helped the WRP get off the hook by turning the issue into a small labour movement referendum for or against “Thatcher’s state and its media”.

Livingstone was at this time trying to displace Reg Freeson as Labour candidate in Brent East. (He would win the seat in 1987.) Freeson was Jewish. Denunciations of “the Zionist Reg Freeson” occupied much space in Newsline. Re-reading that stuff now what strikes me is that the sense of these denunciations of the Labour right winger Freeson — SO supported Livingstone against him — would better be conveyed by “the Jew Freeson”. Almost all of SO supporters had the same formal position on the Arab-Jewish conflict as Livingstone, “a secular democratic state” (a tiny minority only of us were for a two state solution, and a much bigger minority was rabidly “anti-Zionist”, Alan Thornett and his supporters). SO did not comment on this aspect of the livingstone campaign.

On 11 April, Alex McLarty, a long-time WRP militant in Glasgow, someone for whom those of us who had encountered him had some personal respect, wrote:

“One just can’t be a socialist and a supporter of the witch-hunt at the same time. The thing is impossible. Who is this character [Sean Matgamna] operating within [his emphasis] the labour movement, speaking on various platforms and on various subjects? Stripped of socialist verbage, just what is his game? Just what is the role of Socialist Organiser…? Trade unionists! Members of the labour movement! Be warned! Depending on its substance, a small dose of poison can do a lot of harm. What is the substance of Matgamna and ‘Socialist Organiser’? We know enough now. Time will tell even more!”

This is a good illustration of the mental world of a serious old Trotskyist militant who had come that far with Healy. I remembered McLarty 22 years earlier as the only person at an SLL [proto-WRP] annual conference to — vainly — try to get a real discussion about a contentious issue (Castro’s Cuba).

Richard Price, who is still politically alive, typically missed the point with an analogy between SO’s call for a Labour movement inquiry into the WRP and the evasive call made in the 1930s by Fenner Brockway, secretary of the Independent Labour Party, for an inquiry into the Trotskyists at the time of the Moscow Trials. This call for a labour movement inquiry had first been endorsed by the Executive earlier, when they said it would in no way damage Labour movement people who had then put their name to it included… Ken Livingstone (before he allied with the WRP)?

The “Newsline” sellers of Belfast made a collective statement: “Newsline” readers, Republicans and activists will be politically incensed by the article in Socialist Organiser which openly supports the BBC slander and especially by the hate-filled remarks of a revisionist called Matgamna who tries to pour scorn on the security arrangements” of the WRP.

On 14 April John Biggs-Davison, Tory, and David Emmals, Labour, raised the BBC, allegations in Parliament. It was new wind in the WRP campaign’s sails.

Dave Douglass, a miner and one-time Posadist, wrote an open letter denouncing Socialist Organiser. [The Posadists were a strange sect that believed in flying saucers and advocated that Russia launch the Third World war in order to hasten the coming of world socialism].

Ex-BBC Controller TV2 (Ted Knight, who — it seems — had long held private and platonic “Trotskyist” opinions, and, I guess, must at some time have been a member of the Healy organisation, waded in for the WRP. So did Gerry Craighey, secretary of St Helens Labour Party.

Dave Thompson, AUEW convenor at Vauxhall Motors Ellesmere Port, threw in his weight against “the witch-hunt”, together with other trade union office holders then.

As well as the daily page of testimonials, there was additional coverage. On 15 April a middle-page spread: “Socialist Organiser” has capitulated to the Tory class enemy by supporting the 30 March programmatic vote. “Such a programme they are now in the company of such ultra-Tory MPs as John Biggs-Davison”.

16 April: Ted Knight Labour leader of Lambeth Council and a Healyite for thirty years, declared: “The article in Socialist Organiser endorsing the witch-hunt and the Money Programme is outrageous”. For “Red Ted” too, it was “the Zionists”.

The Zionists have not forgiven the Labour Party and TUC resolutions last year which recognised the PLO.

The eminent thespian, Sir Timothy West, wrote a long statement of support against the BBC. His was the sole contribution that, gently, distanced itself from the WRP’s pro-Gaddafi politics. He did not attack Socialist Organiser.

By now the WRP was holding “broad” labour movement meetings on the issue all over the country. Denunciation of Socialist Organiser was a big feature of all these meetings, to go by Newsline’s reports and those of SO supporters who attended them.

In Liverpool, Michael Banda, National Secretary of the WRP, spoke beside Bobby Owens, chair of District 6 of the TGWU, Bill Kerrigan, chair of the National Union of Seamen North’s Nest Panel, and a Labour Party delegate.

On 20 April four Socialist Organiser people — Mick O’Sullivan, Pete Firmin, Jane Ashworth and I — turned up at the WRP’s central “anti-witch-hunt” meeting at Conway Hall, in London, to give them an argument. They wouldn’t let us in!

Of the billed speakers only Peter Tatchell, then a Labour Party PPC, showed any concern at our exclusion from a meeting that would be largely given over to denouncing us; but he too took his place on the platform.

“Red Ken” and “Red Ted” and others joined WRP General Secretary Mike Banda on the platform to listen to him praise his paymaster Colonel Gaddafi, and Libya. Gaddafi, he said “has become the symbol of the struggle for national liberation…” Libya was, he said, like a watermelon: Islamic green on the outside, but red inside!

We gave out a leaflet reiterating our stance to whoever would take one. A photograph of us doing that would henceforth be a feature of the press campaign against us.

We gave out a leaflet reiterating our stance to whoever would take one. A photograph of us doing that would henceforth be a feature of the press campaign against us.

Ted Knight endorsed and justified what the WRP leaders were doing. He said “When Socialist Organiser endorses the propaganda and continues to spread its lies, they are working alongside the class enemy and place themselves outside of the labour movement… if they persist in their attack and persist in their defence of the BBC, then frankly we have got to direct our resources, too, against those who aid and abet the class enemy.”

We should not “defend” the BBC for saying some of what we’d been saying for years? No! For “the revolutionary party”, the self-proclaimed and self-anointed “revolutionary leadership” of the WRP is the measure of all things, amen…

Michael Banda said, “We will expose these people for the charlatans and slanderers that they are”.

The Conway Hall meeting — they claimed it was 700 strong — including the platform speakers, “unanimously” passed a three point resolution.

It included: “We condemn the weekly SO for repeating and extending the BBC slander and call upon SO readers to demand that its slanders are retracted unconditionally.”

This formula of “retraction” in fact had nothing to do with the alleged BBC “witch hunt” and everything to do with the campaign to discredit SO. It spilled over into the public domain from the WRP’s internal practice, in which a member showing any independence could be confronted, humiliated and degraded at a moment’s notice with arbitrary demands from the leadership to “retract” or “apologise” to the meeting for something or other (like being five minutes late).

The meeting “unanimously” “denounced” the BBC Money Programme “as a state-organised and Zionist influenced witch-hunt.”

The audience at Conway Hall and the platform speakers (they included the theatre producer Thelma Holt who voted for this stuff present in themselves a terrible picture of the state of at least part of the left then.

They knew what they were against but had only a vague idea of what they were for. That condition has since spread to sections of the left who were then relatively free of it, notably the SWP. There is a political world of make believe, dominated by demagogy; by raw feeling and the manipulation of feeling; in which fact, inference and logic are whatever you want them to be; in which desire is proof; in which reason and sense, common or dialectical, is at a massive discount and in so far as it would trip up the political tango dancers dancing to feeling and desire, is an enemy.

On 22 April Nuge Branch Secretary Frances Fallon’s testimony was headlined “They try to silence the voice of the masses.” If you thought about what Gaddafi and Khomeini — the WRP supported the Iranian Islamic regime — and Saddam Hussein did to the “masses” with the WRP’s voice support, you saw the tragic political confusion of those who sincerely “defended” the WRP in such terms.

On 23 April Bill Bowring, Lambeth councillor, practising barrister, former WRP member and a future secretary of the
Socialist Lawyers’ Association argued “So called ‘left’ newspapers which crawl through the same sewers as the Money Programme are amongst them themselves.” My response (SO 14 April 1983) to the blatant antisemitism of the editorial about SO’s “Zionist” conspiracy with members of Reagan’s government and Margaret Thatcher’s Cabi- net was the control on the “white Hotline” and the suspicion that this was one-time Zionist, and later member of the Jewish Socialist Group, wrote an indignant rebuttal of this article over three pages, the WRP need not have done all the important points.

This was the centre-piece of a pamphlet which they now produced. Brent Council’s Joint Staff Committee, representing 12,000 to 20,000 workers, were convinced SO “who have abandoned all pretense of socialist principle and sided with the capitalist media and state in calling for an investigation into the WRP!” They too demand that we “retract”. This is a quasi Stalinst world, where a new question is that true and not true does not exist in its own right. There is only “our side” — as if an appeal to the elementary principle of working class solidarity can an- swer for an investigation of such issues: as if there is such a thing as “class”, “class facts”. Eddie Roberts, TGWU organiser and former convener of Fords Halewood, found it “inconceivable” that any socialist paper, on the basis of this BBC programme [!] can support the attack on Newsline.

26 April headline: “Libyan Magazine slams frame up!” The London segment of the Libyan People’s Bureau: “The Zionists is (...) taking over the Arab role, and this is against the Arab and economic interests free from the attention of the press.”

These were the people who employed the WRP — it came out in 1985 when they repudiate the highly reactionary ranting of Mr Matgamna, withdraw the slanderous statement that the WRP is ‘antisemitic’, and join with others of the labour movement in condemning the Money Programme’s lies.”

Socialist Organiser was then divided between relatively re- cent former WRPers on one side and the rest of us. In fact, the Thornett group considered the two states position, still very much a minority view in Socialist Organiser, the “Zionist”. But the WRP attempts to invigorate this SO minority failed entirely. All they got was an injudicious attempt by one of the members of SO (acting on the instruction of the editor) to publish, on 6 May, Swansea branch EFPU: “We therefore demand that Socialist Organiser withdraw its shameful support. Will it continue to side with the BBC and the state, or does it stand up by its author, that had introduced it. This gives us a rare account of a typical WRP speech on the subject then, that is, of how the “antisemitic” and “potential pogromists” of the WRP in the unions. The speech ranted, carrying the words in the Newsline editorial on the world Zionist conspir- acy, about “Mr Stuart Young, a well-known Zionist” [!] “being chair of the world’s largest radio and TV com- pany” the BBC: “It should not go unrecorded, thought it went quickly through the news.” This is the sort of thing into which the Newsline’s renderings had translated on “the ground” — ag- gitation against a Jew being appointed governor of the BBC.

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nothing taken although political papers were rummaged through. They sent a couple of “agents” into SO. They were too ob-
vious to get away with anything; the WRP could not trust its peo-
ple to rant in trade union branches about the “Zionist” chair-
of the BBC, but subtlety it couldn’t teach them.

An unknown quantity was what their alliance with Libyan
state security and others, and with the “brahmin SO and Sean
Matgamna” campaign. Someone in the Libyan Embassy
about then shot dead a police woman Yvonne Fletcher. In fact
nothing happened.

Who were the heresy-hunters in 1983?

The WRP which launched the heresy-hunt in 1983 was the
last sad chapter in a long history of political degen-
eration.

The earlier chapters were those of the most important rev-
olutionary socialist organisation in Britain during the two
decades of the great labour militancy, roughly from the mid
50s to the mid 70s. The forerunner of the WRP was the Healy
group, from 1959 called the Socialist Labour League.

It is a matter of simple justice to remember the Healy of the
late 1940s and early 50s as the man who had the courage and
conviction to pull together what was left of the British Trot-
skyist movement during and after a general political and or-
ganisational collapse.

From the end of the 40s to the mid 70s, the Healy group
-dominated the world of revolutionary politics, overshadow-
ning even sizeable organisations like the RSL/ Militant (now
the Socialist Party, and Socialist Appeal) and the SWP (then
called IS) and blocking the road for development of the tiny
Workers’ Fight group, a forerunner of the Alliance for Work-
ers’ Liberty.

This was a time when it was probably possible for Marxists
to make a real breakthrough in re-moulding the mass labour
movement, or, failing that, to create a large revolutionary or-
ganisation linked organically to the mass labour movement.

No such breakthrough was made. The SLL became the
“Workers’ Revolutionary Party” in 1975, and would finally
break up in 1985. The fundamental responsibility for the fail-
ure of the left then has to be laid on the SLL and on its leader
Gerry Healy.

Even when, in the 1950s, it did serious and constructive
work in the labour movement, the Healy group was organi-
sationally authoritarian and intellectually stultified. Healy
-dominated the organisation in an unchallengeable rule sus-
tained by both ideological and (petty) physical violence
against anybody who dared disagree with him — or with
whatever political “strands” in the organisation’s leadership
that he, for the moment, backing. For example, the SLL “went
Maoist” to support the Chinese “Cultural Revolution” in 1967.

In the 1960s the SLL progressively cut loose from the
Labour Party — that is, from what was then the working-class
movement in politics — and, though it remained in the trade
unions, its activity there became more like Third Period Stal-
innism than serious work. It recruited and exploited — ex-
ploited is the word! — mainly raw youth.

Healy was a highly volatile fellow who tended to believe
what he wanted to believe, and ever more so as he got old at
the heart of an organisation where his every whim was law.
By 1968 the SLL was going on a 100,000-strong anti-Viet-
nam-war demonstration with leaflets explaining that it was
“not marching” because the march was a conspiracy by the
press to boost the march organisers at the expense of great
Marxists like Healy. Yet the SLL machine survived, as an in-
creasingly sealed-off youth-fuelled sect, and expanded. Not
accidentally, its main “industrial” base by the early 1970s was
among actors and other theatre people.

The SLL published a daily paper from 1969. But its own
rigidly exclusive marches and theatrical pageants had become
more important to the organisation than anything else.

A terrible panic seized Healy during the 1973-74 miners’
strike that led to the defeat of the fiery government in the elec-
 tion of 28 February. At one stage members of the organisation
were instructed to hide their “documents” because a military
coup was only days away.

Then he discovered that other Trotskyists who opposed
him, such as Trotsky’s one-time secretary, the American,
Joseph Hansen, were really secret “agents” of the US or Rus-
 sian governments, or of both. A great barrage of lies and
bizarre fantasies was poured out “exposing” them.

A vast world-wide campaign — the Healyites had small
“children groups” in many countries — was launched to “ex-
plain” much of the tortured history of Trotskyism after Trot-
sky as a convedoal spy story. All of the world, and much of
recent history, was reinterpreted as an affair of “agents” and
double-agents.

By the mid-70s the organisation was in serious decline, fi-
 nancially over-extended, and threatened with collapse. At
that point, Healy sold the organisation to Libya, Iraq and
many of the Arab sheikdoms as a propaganda outlet and as
a jobbing agency for spying on Arab dissidents and promi-
nent Jews (“Zionists”) in Britain.

Arab gold flowed into the shrunken and isolated organisa-
tion. Printing presses were bought, more modern than those
on which the bourgeois papers were then printed. To get
away from the London print unions, they were installed in
Runcorn, Cheshire, anticipating by a decade Rupert Mur-
doch’s move from union-controlled Fleet Street to Wapping.

They churned out crude Arab-chauvinist propaganda laud-
ing Saddam Hussein and Libya’s ruler Colonel Gaddafi and
denouncing Israel and “Zionism.” Numerically still in serious
and progressive decline, the organisation, nevertheless, built
up a property empire of bookshops and “training centres”
around Britain.

The final act came in October 1985. Healy, who had run the
organisation by bullying, bluster, and the personal terror he
inspired, was now 72, weakened by age and by a bad heart.
Those who rule by personal forcefulness and emotional vio-
lation of others should not grow old. The WRP imploded.

Faced with continued decline and, despite the flow of
Arab gold, a new financial crisis, the WRP apparatus di-
 vided. Healy himself was probably getting ready for a
purge. He was suddenly denounced as a rapist of 20-
 something female comrades and expelled from the
organisation. The WRP fell apart in a great outburst of
long bottled-up hysteria.

When the facts came out

After the WRP expelled Gerry Healy and blew apart in
1985, an inquiry set up by the remnant organisation and
its international co-thinkers reported on the Healy
RP’s relations with Libya and other dictatorships.

The inquiry tracked down the following payments:
1977 £46,208; 1978 £47,784; 1979 £347,755; 1980
£173,671; 1981 £185,128; 1982 £271,217; 1983 £3,400;
1984 nil; 1985 nil. Total £1,075,163.

Analysed by country, where it is possible to distin-
guish, the amounts are; Libya 542,267; Kuwait 156,500;
Qatar 50,000; Abu Dhabi 25,000; PLO 19,997; Iraq
19,697; unidentified or other sources 261,702. Total
£1,075,163.

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Footnote: It is phrased like that because in fact the WRP
had not raised that cry. Some members of the Thornett fac-
tion in the Socialist Organiser Alliance had.

• For the article “Gerry HealyDiscovers the World Jewish
Conspiracy”, Socialist Organiser 14 April 1981, referred to
above, see page 8.

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tion in the Socialist Organiser Alliance had.

One of the most disappointing things about the affair was
that when, in October 1985, the truth about the WRP came
gushing out from its warring factions, not one of those who
had denounced SO, neither an individual nor all of the
labour movement bodies which had passed resolutions de-
ouncing us and demanding that we “retract”, felt they had
anything to apologise for. Not a single one.
Gerry Healy discovers the World Jewish Conspiracy

Newsline has continued in its ridiculous campaign of bluff and bluster against the BBC Money Programme. But still, liberally though it is, it has not got round to suing the BBC.

Many — solicited — letters from members and supporters have been written to the centre. The campaign continues against Socialist Organiser, linked with the BBC, according to the well-told Stalinist technique of the “amalgam”. Example from a piece by long-standing member Alex McArdle: “Trade unionists! Members of the labour movement! Be warned! Depending on its substance a small dose of poison can do a lot of harm. What is the substance of Matgamma and ‘Socialist Organiser’? We know enough now. Time may tell even more.”

Much of the demagoguery of SO is extremely shrill and hysterical, lynch mob stuff.

It is also extremely sad. People write expressing their faith in the charlatans who put out Newsline. Letter after letter testifies to real sacrifices and devotion. People who couldn’t possibly know the secrets of the autocratic and conspiratorial leaders of the organisation write to testify from their own experience of struggle to raise money for the paper that it could have no financial link with Libya. Playwright Tom Kempinski writes in ringing tones. “We are not bought” — rhetoric that rings pathetic and false in the circumstances. As false has he ever always been the hopes and wishes of the many fine revolutionaries who have devoted themselves to Healy’s “machine for maiming militants.” We reproduce the editorial in which they responded to our comment last week.

Newsline’s editorial uses the code word “Zionist”, but in fact it is talking about a conspiracy of Jews which runs, they say, from the centre of Mrs Thatcher’s Cabinet, to the commanding heights of the BBC, all the way through to Socialist Organiser. If a Jew becomes “the youngest ever chairman” of the BBC, what else can it be but a “Zionist” conspiracy?

Pre World War Two antisemitism explained communism and finance capital alike as different aspects of a single World Jewish Conspiracy. So now do these petrodollar anti-Zionists of Newsline depict the “centre” of Thatcher’s government and Socialist Organiser as secretly linked and bonded — despite orthodox anti-fascist and political differences — by a hidden network of “Zionists”.

“Zionism” here is not a political reference meaning those who support the right of Israel, or a modified Israel, to exist. The WRP has included the overwhelming majority of the people of Britain.

There are Zionists and Jews. There are Jews and Jews. It is the latter who are the conspirators. Even an anti-Zionist Jew, this racist logic says, will have ineradicable loyalties and allegiances more basic than politics: some people are congenital “Zionists”.

SO is opposed to Zionism. It supports the national rights of the Palestinians. SO advocates a secular democratic state in Palestine within which Jewish and Arab Palestinians could live as equals? Though rejecting with contempt the “socialism” of the “Green Book”, it would support Libya against an “anti-imperialist”, decrees that within the imperialist Middle East? Because the Jewish Chronicle showed interest in an expose of people it must regard as at least potential pogromists. Of course, if the Jewish Chronicle was tipped off in advance, that is proof positive that “Zionists” were in control.

Or is it that all “witch-hunters” are Zionists? No: it is a view of the world in which the Palestinian question is the central pivot of the struggle of two basic camps, the imperialist and the “anti-imperialist”, decrees that within the imperialist countries, “Zionists”, linked by ineradicable ties to the arch-imperialism — Zionist imperialism — are the main enemy, everywhere.

Faced with an earlier left wing flirtation with antisemitism dressed up as anti-capitalism [the German socialist] August Bebel said that: “antisemitism is the socialism of idiots.” WRP-style anti-Zionism is the anti-imperialism of idiots. And it is indistinguishable from antisemitism.

See evidence that there may be a conspiratorial network of Zionists and some revolutionary socialists do support Israel — that is, they are Zionists.

They are a people scattered through all segments of society. Seek evidence that there may be a conspiratorial network of Jews and you will find it — red Jews and Rothschilds, members of Mrs Thatcher’s (or Ronald Reagan’s) cabinet and writers for SO. These links are the raw material from which theories about “Jewish conspiracy” can easily be spun.

But the only possible “rational” common denominator on which to base such a theory is “race” (whatever that may be).

The leaders of the WRP are people whose history must make them shocked in some part of their minds about what they have become. So, cheaply, they warn that Mrs Thatcher, who now (they say) has Zionist conspirators at “the centre” of her government, may engage in antisemitic agitation. But they can’t even disavow antisemitism without linking the Zionists to Hitler, saying that Hitler consciously and deliberately made for convertible a “Zionism”. Moronic.

More strung by Israel — and rightly outraged — the more emotional or “third worldist” left in Britain has sometimes tried to brand all Zionists, that is, the vast majority of Jews, as racists, and (especially during the ultra-left heyday of the early 70s) proposed to treat them accordingly. The slogan, “drive the Zionists out of the labour movement” has been raised — it can only mean: drive the Jews out of the labour movement.

There is simply no way that this sort of anti-Zionism can avoid shaming over — despite the best “anti-racist” intentions — into antisemitism.

Even if it were true that Jews who support Israel are racists, the evil concept of “anti-Zionism” would have been defeated. The survival of “agents” and counteragents.

We are not bought.

It is extremely shrill and hysterical, lynch mob stuff.

We know enough now. Time may tell even more.”

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