

Zionists and Jews

THE HAAVARA AGREEMENT between the German government and the Jewish Agency was signed on 25th August 1933. It was the result of talks between the Zionist Federation of Germany and the Nazi authorities. It was a complex arrangement that allowed German Jews to migrate to Palestine with the value of around fifty per cent of their assets. Thus it enabled Jews fleeing from the fascists in Germany to meet the income threshold demanded by the British civil administration in Jerusalem for Jews entering Mandate Palestine.

This 'transfer agreement' was controversial at the time because it enabled the Nazis to circumvent the worldwide boycott of German goods organised and supported by Jews in North America and Europe, including most Zionist organisations based in Poland.

Around sixty thousand German Jews were able to escape from Nazi persecution by moving to Palestine under the terms of this agreement. The Nazis toyed with a number of schemes for forcing Jews out of Germany before they embarked on the process of mass murder in the autumn of 1941.

It is this agreement and the various Nazi schemes for the deportation of Jews that has led Ken Livingstone to claim that Hitler's government was in some sense in league with Zionism. It is claimed that the Zionists "worked with the Nazis" to facilitate the transfer of Jews from Europe to Palestine. Specifically, Livingstone, has repeatedly insisted that "Hitler supported Zionism . . . before he went mad and ended up killing six million Jews."

Evidently, the emigration and deportation policies of Hitler's government aimed initially at ridding Germany, and then Europe at large, of Jews at no stage embraced support for the establishment of a Jewish

homeland in Mandate Palestine, Madagascar, or anywhere else. Hitler did not support Zionism.

Throughout the period of Nazi domination, in addition to Jewish armed resistance and heroic risings and rebellions, Zionist and other Jewish community leaders negotiated and haggled with the fascists in desperate attempts to save as many of their people as possible. It is these contacts and agreements that Livingstone wants to characterise as “Zionist cooperation with the Nazis”.

Furthermore, the idea that the massacre of the Jewish populations of entire villages, towns, and cities, by *einsatzgruppen*, ably assisted by the police, local militias, and the Wehrmacht, was produced by ‘Hitler’s madness’ is certainly bizarre. The attribution of the cycle of unparalleled mass killings, carried out over a four-year period involving the active participation of hundreds of thousands of Europeans of many different nationalities, to Hitler’s disordered state of mind demonstrates Livingstone’s feeble grasp of the period and of the depth and extent of anti-Semitism in European culture.

This is, no doubt, why he greets the assertion that his repeated claim that “Hitler supported Zionism” amounts to anti-Semitism, with sneering dismay. Livingstone’s disbelief is also strengthened by his long record of opposition to racism in all its forms. True, he fell out with leaders of the Orthodox Jewish community when as the leader of the Greater London Council in the early eighties he quite rightly refused to allow religious authorities to decide which Jewish organisations should be awarded council grants. But for Livingstone the idea that he hates Jews or promotes Jew-hatred is frankly absurd. He simply doesn’t grasp the reason for all the fuss.

In this he has much in common with a great many people on the British left, both those in the Labour Party, and those who, for one reason or another are forced to linger outside its warm embrace.

The problem is that despite many decades of supporting nationalism, and nationalists of different

stripes in the struggle against colonialism and imperialism, for a large cohort of socialists Jewish nationalism remains beyond the pale. Although the left in Britain has frequently defended 'anti-imperialist' dictatorships and 'socialist' forms of repressive government, they are prepared to express unbridled hatred and opposition when the perpetrators are Jews. It is as if Jewish nationalists are alone among nationalists in attacking national minorities, supporting militarist modes of repression, and promoting reactionary social policies.

The argument appears to turn on the idea that the Jewish state, Israel, is a client of imperialism. The Jews also benefit from the support of the powerful 'Jewish Lobby', which apparently determines the foreign policy of the United States and Britain. Strangely, none of this reasoning is applied to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, which is also a client of the United States. After all Pakistan is a confessional state, founded for and by a specific religious community, which systematically discriminates against citizens who do not conform to the religious strictures, of its constitution and laws, and is in league with Islamists of one stripe or another from Saudi Arabia to Blackburn.

The reason for the difference is that Palestinians in particular, and Muslims in general (with the exception of Saudi and Gulf State rulers), are seen as potentially or actually anti-imperialist, in complete contrast to Jews who are seen as the prosperous and often wealthy supporters and beneficiaries of imperialism.

It is at this point that it becomes crucial for those on the left who hate Jewish nationalism to insist that they are the enemies of 'Zionism' not of 'Jews' as such. It is the 'Zionists' who are the enemies of the Palestinians and the left, not Jews. By insisting upon this distinction they hope to be able to rebuff suggestions that they're anti-Semitic.

Ken Livingstone recently explained the distinction in the *Morning Star*.

“The Labour Party needs to clearly distinguish between prejudice against Jews, which is totally unacceptable, and criticism of Israeli aggression, on which freedom of expression should be respected.”

Jews and Zionists are indeed not synonymous – some Jews are anti-Zionist or simply not Zionists, while others enthusiastically support the state of Israel. However, by insisting that, alone among the peoples of the world, the Jews have no right to nationhood, no right to found and defend a state, the left are insisting upon a peculiar type of Jewish exceptionalism. The Scots, the Irish, the Catalans, Kurds, Armenians, and many others, may strive and even achieve statehood but the Jews should not. In fact, they should not defend their state. On the contrary, they must dissolve it.

For many on the left the solution to the manifest oppression of the Palestinians by the government of Israel is the destruction or dissolution of the Jewish state. Israel must be removed from the map so that “From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will Be Free!”

This strikes me as anti-Jewish. The nice distinction employed by many on the left between Jews who are Jewish nationalists, and those Jews who are not – between Zionists and Jews – appears to me to be formally correct, but practically meaningless. My scepticism is strengthened further by the extent to which the left is prepared to ally itself with Hezbollah and Hamas, both movements that explicitly talk about the destruction of Jews and the Jewish state.

Indeed the policy of all significant Palestinian organisations is to destroy the ethnic foundation of the Jewish state by ensuring that all Palestinian Arabs living in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt should have the right to ‘return’ to what is now Israel. This right to ‘return’ is insisted upon regardless of whether those in question have ever lived there or not. This position is consistent with the belief of many on the left in Britain that the result of the war of 1948, which the Palestinians lost, should be unravelled, and the

Jewish state should be dissolved in favour a Palestinian state which would cover all of what is now Gaza, Israel, and the occupied territories of the West Bank.

This new 'one-state solution', the anti-Zionists argue, would allow Jews and Palestinians to live in close harmony side-by-side, overcoming, at a stroke, more than a century of bloody struggles for possession of the same tract of land.

It is this wholly implausible 'one-state solution' arising from the collapse, destruction, or dissolution, of the Jewish state, which the left, along with its Palestinian and Islamist allies choose to canvas, that gives rise to the notion that anti-Zionists are by and large anti-Jewish. If Livingstone and those on the left who agree with him want to stop being regarded as anti-Semites they need to stop allying themselves with those who call for the destruction of the Jewish state.

Certainly, Livingstone needs to stop attempting to blackguard Jewish nationalists by spurious assertions about their cooperation with the Adolf Hitler. But, his freedom to attack the occupation of the West Bank, the oppression of Palestinians by the Israel Defence Force, and the racist Jewish settlers (in what they call Judea and Samaria) is not in jeopardy.

However, those who seek the destruction or dissolution of Israel, those who refuse to acknowledge the right of the Jewish state to defend itself, or to exist at all, most assuredly enter the realm of anti-Semitism, regardless of their assertions that it is "the Zionists", and not "the Jews" who they have in their sights.