



Fighting left antisemitism in the 1980s



The WRP didn't just back Libya against assault from the big powers. It took money from Gaddafi's dictatorship and lauded the regime.

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 slighter, 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 anonymous, 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 campaign by the Workers' Revolutionary Party (WRP).

The ideological core of that heresy-hunt, as with much recently, was "left" antisemitism.

Today "left" antisemitism's gambit is to dismiss all question of antisemitism (short of neo-Nazi outrage) as mere contrivance to whitewash Israel or discomfort Corbyn. The 1983 equivalent was to say that our questioning of the WRP's financing by Libya and other Arab dictatorships could only prove that we were part of a world "Zionist connection" linking us with... Thatcher and Reagan.

The WRP was by then a small and not-well-liked minority on the left. Instructively, however, in a politically unhealthy labour movement, they could build up a large heresy-hunt and get wide sections of the left nodding along or silently consenting.

They could do that because ideas were widespread that the small Israeli state was the world's worst and most potent imperialism and that "Zionism" (meaning Israeli nationalism, or just the belief that Israel had a right to exist) should

be equated with racism, fascism, or Nazism.

A good part of the "left" antisemitism in the Labour Party today is driven by people who have rejoined Labour after being out of politics for a long time but were formed politically in the 1980s by such ideas, building on less systematic "absolute anti-Zionism" in the 1970s left.

Naive and well-intentioned advocacy of the new PLO formula (after 1969) of a single "secular democratic state" in Palestine (thought of vaguely as a friendly coming-together of the two nations) curdled into support for whatever Arab or Islamic armies might conquer Israel. Today, with the rise of Hamas and Hezbollah, scarce anyone on the British left talks positively about a "secular democratic state": all that remains is hatred for Israel and "Zionists".

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-imperialism.

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 organisation 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 criticised 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 student Jewish Societies for being "Zionist" which started at Sunderland Poly in March 1985.

But our policy on Israel-Palestine was still the single "secular 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 actually 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 "Thornettites" could scarcely deny those arraigned by the WRP political 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 antisemitism 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 the weekly paper *Socialist Organiser*, by the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) and its friends in the labour movement.

The issues in 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 force our paper *Socialist Organiser* out of publication.

In 1981, the actress Vanessa Redgrave, on behalf of the WRP, of which she was the best-known member, had sued John Bloxam and myself for libel over things I had written about the WRP in *Socialist Organiser* and John had repeated in a circular letter to supporters of the Socialist Organiser Alliance.

The WRP embroiled us in expensive and potentially ruinous legal processes 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 live in 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 ecology, the left and the labour movement is something of a disaster area because 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 Galloway should be driven out of the labour movement in January 1994. BBC cameras had recorded an “audience” which the fascist Iraqi dictator had given to the Labour MP. The representative of the British left stood before the mass murderer of Iraqis and Kurds and praised him to his face for his “strength”, “courage”, “indefatigability”. We called on Galloway's local Labour Party to throw him out as an MP.

Politically, his exact motives did not matter. What mattered was the politics of a pseudo-left Labour MP championing, defending, and fawning on the head of a 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, “victimised” 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'ath regime and against its paid and unpaid admirers in Britain — that was the first priority of socialists.

If 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 the enemy abroad is 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.

II

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 an ostensibly Trotskyist organisation, the Workers Revolutionary Party, was kept afloat by Libyan and other Arab government (including Iraqi) money. You couldn't read their press and not know that.

They fawned on Arab dictators, publishing a glossy pamphlet about Iraq and Saddam which could have been issued by the Iraqi Embassy in London and which Iraq certainly paid the WRP for publishing. Their paper, *Newsline*, carried reports on Libya and its ruler, Gaddafi modelled on the stuff which the Communist Party *Daily Worker* (now *The Morning Star*) once published about Stalinist Russia.

They raged against “the Zionists”. They identified and denounced “Zionists”, that is Jews in prominent positions in British business and other institutions, for example, in the BBC. They singled out for special abuse prominent Jewish Tories and Jewish Labour right wingers. These were “the Zionists”. “Zionists” were at the heart of the “imperialist” “conspiracies” all over the world. “Zionists” fomented anti-Arab feeling everywhere.

Socialist Organiser was part of a “Zionist” plot against the WRP and the British labour movement. We were, naturally, “anti-Arab racists”.

They published a raving — in fact Hitlerite — editorial in *Newsline* asserting that there was a Zionist conspiracy stretching through, and linking, the Tory government, the editorial board of *Socialist Organiser* and Ronald Reagan's White House!

In 1981, they had sued John Bloxam and myself for libel when I compared them in *Socialist Organiser* to the Moonie sect and the Scientologists. I had reported — part of it based on my own adolescent experience of them — that they used systematic emotional, political and physical violence against vulnerable young people.

The libel case was a pretty obvious attempt to “smash” *SO* and thus clear a competitor out of the way of the paper, *Labour Herald*, which they had just started in tandem with 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. Repeatedly, I challenged them to sue me on that. They never did. If they had we would have been entitled under the legal “discovery” rules to examine their accounts... It was a tacit admission of guilt.

We were not isolated. We had, for example the support of Tony Benn. And a lot of people in the labour movement had had experience of the WRP...

III

When, in April 1983 the BBC, in a low-audience early Sunday evening programme, repeated a mild version of the “Libyan gold” allegations, I wrote a short review in *Socialist Organiser* saying that the BBC had told some of the truth about the WRP. I protested against unsubstantiated statements in the programme that “the ethnic press” was, like the WRP, financed by Libya.

Those who were using the libel laws against a labour movement paper now launched a political campaign in the labour movement against the BBC... and *Socialist Organiser*! It was a typically vigorous campaign.

A sizeable number of trade union branches and trades councils were persuaded to pass resolutions condemning “the BBC and *Socialist Organiser*”, sometimes adding the name of the present writer to the list of those being denounced and condemned.

Frequently the resolutions demanded that *Socialist Organiser* or I, or both, “retract” our “slanders” and discharge our working-class duty to stand by those being attacked by the bourgeois state by way of the BBC programme.

The WRP's daily paper, *Newsline*, devoted a page or most of a page every day for 50 (fifty) issues over nine weeks, to printing (solicited) letters and formal statements denouncing us from people holding office in the labour movement and well-known theatrical personages. As well as that they pub-

lished feature articles, editorials and a large pamphlet to tell the labour movement what dishonest, unprincipled scoundrels, “Zionists” and agents-provocateur for the bourgeois state we were. They tried to whip up a lynch-mob atmosphere against us. They urged that we — and the writer by name and photograph — be shut up.

Meetings were held to denounce us all over the country at which local shop stewards and convenors, secretaries of trades councils, and occasionally a Labour councillor, and one Labour MP, appeared on the platform.

For example, the meeting held at the Conway Hall in London featured the leader of the then Greater London Council, Ken Livingstone, and the leader of a famously “left-wing” borough council, Ted Knight, amongst a large number of well-known platform speakers.

Meetings held in Scotland featured the Labour MP Ron Brown, a sincere political idiot later thrown out by the Blairites, who believed that Libya and Russia and possibly — I can't remember — Iraq were socialist states.

In that affair we were spectacularly vindicated — and comparatively soon. In late 1985, the Workers Revolutionary Party imploded. They expelled the aged Gerry Healy, charging the 72-year old with the serial rape of members and other such things. The two initial factions splintered into a dozen pieces, all flying in different political directions. Its warring fractions fell over each other in the rush to spill its secrets, including the secrets of its lavish supply of funds.

One of its “historic leaders”, the academic Cliff Slaughter, denounced the WRP's leadership, of which he himself had been a part for 25 years, as “fascists” for their amoral attitude to politics and for their deeds. We, who had regarded them as no longer part of the labour movement, had not gone that far; but you could see his point.

The Galloway-SWP business spurred me to go and look at a file of *Newsline*, where that heresy hunt is luridly recorded. It has much to teach socialists faced now [2003] with the moral, political and intellectual collapse of the pseudo-left before political Islam, of which their attitude to Galloway is a putrid symptom.

IV

I will now expand on the bare bones of the story above.

On 20 March 1983 BBC TV The Money Programme carried an item investigating the WRP's financial links with Colonel Gaddafi's Libyan government.

They concluded that the WRP had got large sums of money from Libya, suggesting a figure of £1.5 million. They noted that *Labour Herald* (a Labour Party weekly nominally edited by Ken Livingstone and two others) and a paper published by George Galloway, the *Dundee Standard*, were printed by the WRP. The Money Programme suggested that money from Libya was channelled to the WRP by way of spurious printing contracts and, perhaps, that some of the benefits were being passed on to others in the same way. There were vague allusions to “the ethnic press” receiving Libyan money.

In fact it was common knowledge that *Labour Herald* was subsidised by the WRP. Though its nominal editors were Ken Livingstone, Ted Knight and Matthew Warburton, it was actually edited by Steven Miller, a member of the WRP Central Committee.

I had been invited to appear on the programme but, thinking it would cause more trouble in our own organisation than it was worth, declined. I wrote a 400-word review of the Money Programme in *Socialist Organiser*. Over the next two months *Newsline* would devote a page or two pages a day to denouncing that review and the Money Programme — two pages or more for every sentence in the article!

I wrote: “There is need of a thorough investigation into the links of the ‘Workers’ Revolutionary Party’ (WRP) with various Arab governments. There is a lot of circumstantial evidence which suggests that the WRP receives sizeable sums of money from Libya, and possibly from other Arab governments.

“Not long ago it was putting out Iraqi government public relations handouts with the imprint of *Newsline* on them. One glossy *Newsline* pamphlet, for instance, carried an account of the career of the butcherous Ba'athist dictator Saddam Hussein that was sycophantic enough to be an official Iraqi handout. At the same time the wretched *Newsline* hacks wrote articles justifying the shooting of members of the Communist Party of Iraq by Hussein's regime...

“Last Sunday's BBC Money Programme carried an investigation of the financial links between Libya and the WRP. It

AGE 8 The News Line Saturday April 9, 1983

From 'Socialist
Organiser' to
Thatcher & Reagan

This SATURDAY
April 9, 1983
morning...

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 whatever 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 'corporatist front', behind which they seek to mobilise jobless youth from 14 years upwards into a 'slave labour body to break trade union wages, safety procedures and working conditions... Thatcher has rolled out these appointments with magisterial arrogance while the Labour Party and TUC chiefs 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, anti-Semitic pogrom 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 Fuhrer provided they agreed to become Zionists. The Tories know too they have a powerful anti-Semitic trump card up their sleeves, to replay once again as the most reactionary manifestation of racialism, which is anti-Semitism.

From the support and advance publicity which the 'Jewish Chronicle' gave the BBC 2 'Money Programme' on March 20, the reactionary Zionist link was clear for all to see. But it also 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 'lefts' 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 it *doesn't make it any less likely to be true.*' (April 7, 1983) (Our emphasis).

Here is unqualified 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 Reagan and Thatcher administrations and their hatred of the Palestinians and Libyans alike.

In the background of the 'Socialist Organiser' one can detect a powerful current of anti-Arab racism — 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 plans 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 Zionist 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 unprincipled nakedness.

(they said 10,000, probably it is a great deal less...)

"The programme was both shallow and under-researched. It talked of the revolutionary left in general as possibly linked 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 as much as £1.5 million may have been channelled to the WRP by the Libyan government by way of over-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 links of the WRP with Arab governments — a labour movement investigation".

V

The WRP had been invited by the makers of the Money Programme to comment but had declined. It made a pre-emptive strike on its front page of Saturday 19 March, the day before the programme went out. The headline: "We Expose BBC Witch-hunt", and the strap-line: "Attack Due In Sunday's Money Programme".

A "statement of the Political Committee of the WRP" "unmasked... the instigators... in the highest levels of the BBC and Thatcher government". The programme was said to be an "anti-communist" and (anti-Arab) "racist" build-up to a general election (which came, in fact, in June). It had been "prepared in collaboration with the Zionists". Proof of that was that the *Jewish Chronicle*, "mouthpiece of British Zionism", knew about the programme in advance (as did the WRP and *Socialist Organiser*!).

The "witch-hunt" was based on "slanders and lying allegations of so-called foreign gold". As recent defences of George Galloway demonstrate, such statements virtually write themselves. "It follows in the ugly tradition of the Zinoviev letter" [a forged letter in the name of the leader of the Communist International, which brought down the 1924 British Labour government]. The *Newsline* had been "singled out because this paper cannot be bought politically and stands shoulder to

shoulder with the working class and the oppressed masses of the world".

On the Monday after the programme went out, the whole front page was devoted to a "WRP Political Committee" statement on it, under the headline: "A Crude Frame-up". The programme was "a lie from start to finish" and an insult to the WRP members who had to struggle to raise money for the organisation.

Next day, all of pages two and three were devoted to the programme, and the first of what would be over two months of a page or half a page a day given over to testimonials appeared.

Over the two months, in 50 issues of their daily paper, *Newsline*, they would publish statements, or resolutions of support for the WRP from one union conference, nine Trades Councils, 29 trade union branches or shop stewards' committees, and 214 individuals. The individuals included many trade union convenors and branch secretaries, some well-known actors, one union general secretary, one MP, seven Labour councillors — and future government minister Patricia Hewitt, then general secretary of the National Council for Civil Liberties.

VI

The first statements were from Liverpool dockers and long-time WRPer 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 the 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". So did the Labour right wing.

A new theme now appeared. Editor Alex Mitchell: "Revisionists and the witch-hunt". ("Revisionist" was by then a meaningless term of abuse for anyone outside the WRP calling themselves Marxist, in this case for *Socialist Organiser* and the Mandeliste Socialist League). Mitchell insisted: "Revisionists do the dirty work for Zionist imperialism". The revisionists were the "first to put forward the lying slander about the WRP and 'Libyan gold'".

This was a theme that 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.

On the 25th: 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 is part of the labour movement; therefore, it can't be true. The prevalence of this idea, its power to shield the WRP, was one measure of the state of political morale in the sizeable section of the left that was drawn into the WRP's campaign.

The testimonials now had a regular logo: a photo — of the BBC cameraman and reporter outside the gate, vainly trying to get the WRP to answer the bell! — taken from inside the barbed-wire-on-high-walls fortress, a one-time factory, that was WRP headquarters. It would appear every day for nine weeks.

VII

On Thursday 24 March *Socialist Organiser* appeared with my review of the Money Programme.

On Saturday 26th the *Newsline* responded with a middle-page spread under a headline: "*Socialist Organiser* joins the witch-hunt". "Joins"? They had already, three days earlier, 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 — and get a large number of labour movement bodies to take — was that 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

established a circumstantial case based on the fact that the tiny WRP has a vast printing press, and a daily more lavishly printed than any Fleet Street paper, with a tiny circulation

ernment]. The *Newsline* had been "singled out because this paper cannot be bought politically and stands shoulder to

now ruled out. Whether true or untrue, the charge was by definition a “witch-hunt” and “a 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 resounding proof that this 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 flagrantly betrayed [the] principle of working-class solidarity. It has crossed the floor, joined the class enemy, and is now adopting the role of prosecutor-in-chief on behalf of the Thatcher government and the Zionists”.

Entirely ignoring the articles I had published in *Socialist Organiser* over two years challenging them to sue me for saying they took Libyan money (they, who, through Vanessa Redgrave, were already suing us... for writing that they were “like the Moonies”), they went on: “*Socialist Organiser* has taken courage 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” (!)

They 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. *Socialist Organiser* had been calling for that over the two years that Vanessa Redgrave’s libel case had been in train.

That, said the WRP 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 party and its daily paper in which the forces of the state will be able to call upon *Socialist Organiser* for justification of its repressive action”.

“Will they sue the BBC?”, I had asked in the article they reproduced. They couldn’t, they said, because the BBC had been careful to “cover its legal tracks”.

Now they reached the nuttily self-righteous punchline. “*Socialist Organiser* has come along and stabbed us in the back. Its article has put us under the direct threat of attack by the capitalist state” How, exactly? The state would listen to us, but not to the BBC? But the damage could be undone. They demanded that the article “must be withdrawn forthwith... We ask readers to take immediate steps to demand that the ‘*Socialist Organiser*’ article is unconditionally retracted by the paper’s editors. Please send individual letters as well as resolutions from trade union branches to *Newsline* for publication”.

Blatant facts about the WRP became un-facts when the BBC reported them. Important issues raised by the BBC report became reasons for denying, on principle and in the name of working-class solidarity, the existence of any “issue” other than the BBC’s “attack” and *Socialist Organiser*’s comments. The “implications” of something determined whether it was true or not.

Would this tissue of illogical nonsense influence what attitude people took? Would it? It already had.

VIII

28 March: the AGM of ACTT, the film and TV workers’ union, “repudiat[ed] all state-orchestrated campaigns of fabrications, smears and outright lies such as BBC TV’s Money Programme... deliberately intended to discredit organisations in the labour movement”. And if there was truth in the allegations, who then was “discrediting” the labour movement?

Central to creating the psychology into which the WRP tapped — if the BBC says it, then it can’t be true — was the decades-old need for the pro-USSR left to deny and discount honest reports of the Stalinist societies and states. That belief could only be sustained by denial, lies and hysteria. By the 1980s, with the deepening of the “Second Cold War” triggered by Russia’s invasion of Afghanistan, this need to resist by denial and automatic discounting of unfriendly reports had again become very important, and was second nature to much of the left.

Lesley Hammond, chief whip of the ruling Labour group on the Greater London Council, declared her faith in the

WRP’s integrity. The then prominent actors, Ray Marsden, who played a fastidious upper-class detective in a popular TV series, and Polly Hemingway, were on the front page with a picture: “It is evident even from the programme that no truth existed in the allegations that the paper and [the print-works] were supported by Libyan money”. There was much “dialectical” gobbledegook in the article after that.

Many statements were obviously indebted to some common “model resolution” which the WRP had put out. Only a minority of labour movement bodies would include *Socialist Organiser* in their strictures, but many did, as did individual statements. The demand that *Socialist Organiser*, and this writer by name, “retract”, would be shouted at us by a sizeable chunk of labour movement bodies and office-holders.

Lambeth Trades Council passed an unanimous resolution denouncing the BBC and *Socialist Organiser*. “Organisations within the labour movement have a right to expect that when the class enemy attacks one section of the labour movement, the rest will close ranks in defence of the threatened organisation”.

Precisely! The point, which *Socialist Organiser* had made again and again, was that the employees of Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein and other such scoundrels were not part of the labour movement, but stooges of its bloody class enemies.

Dennis Barry, former AUEW convenor at an engineering works used *Newsline* to address us directly: “*Socialist Organiser*, you have got your priorities wrong. The workers of the world have enough battles without fighting each other”.

Brian Pringle, the secretary of Leicester Trades Council, wrote: “*Socialist Organiser* is even more despicable than the BBC...”

Film producer Roy Battersby: “It is striking that... *Socialist Organiser* goes even further than the BBC in its provocation against the WRP”. *SO*’s article on the Money Programme had shown that it “is a group whose one role is to help the Thatcher state in trying to smash the proud political and technical independence of the working class and its vanguard party”.

On 2 April: Ron Brown, Labour MP for Leith, found the programme “shocking”. For him, it was even “worse to learn that Sean Matgamna of the *Socialist Organiser* has jumped on this reactionary bandwagon”.

From now on much of the comment was directed at me by name. Some of those making statements would repeat the demand that I “retract”.

Brown was a political fool, but not, unlike most MPs, self-serving. He really believed in Gaddafi. The Labour MP was the only testamentary — apart from WRP Secretary Mike Banda — to express positive belief in Gaddafi. (He also believed in the civilising mission of the Russians in Afghanistan, on which subject I had debated him on his home ground, at a very big, very unruly, and very pro-Russian meeting). “We can disagree with one or other aspect of [Gaddafi’s] policy, but in general he has given encouragement and support to left-wing movements all over the world”. But not in Libya!

Brown probably took it for granted that Gaddafi gave the WRP money. WRP members didn’t.

Steve Drury, “a lecturer in Earth Sciences” and ASTMS and AUT member. “Every penny results from the respect in which the paper and the WRP are held by many thousands of politically conscious people”.

Steve Cowan: “As a prospective parliamentary candidate for the Labour Party, I find *Newsline* invaluable... Sean Matgamna and his mistitled *Socialist Organiser* have nailed their flag firmly on to the reactionary mast...”

Les Harrison, a TGWU shop steward: “I want you to know that I am absolutely incensed after reading about the article in *Socialist Organiser*.”

“The two [the Money Programme and *Socialist Organiser*] absolutely complement each other”.

Ivor Demibo wrote that the Cumberland branch of UCATT “has condemned the BBC and *Socialist Organiser*”. “This branch recognises that an attack by the state and its media on any section of the labour movement threatens the whole working class and its organisations. We therefore condemn the article in *Socialist Organiser*... which joins in this despicable witch-hunt and call on the paper’s editors to unconditionally retract the article”. That sort of stuff was typical of resolutions where the WRP had strong direct influence.

But there was a wider catchment: on 5 April a member of Plaid Cymru “defended the WRP”.

Mike Gill, acting chair of a TGWU branch, wrote that: “this was an attempt by the British ruling class in collaboration with international Zionism to discredit a good honest workers’ paper”.

On 6 April, Rich Lugg chair of the South East Airports committee of the TGWU: “As far as I am concerned a measure of *Newsline*’s correctness was the attack launched by the BBC on behalf of the Zionists and big business”.

George Downing of NUPE wrote that: “*Socialist Organiser* should be condemned 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”.

The WRP had by now announced a “meeting against the witch-hunt” at Conway Hall, in London, to denounce the BBC and *Socialist Organiser*. An ad for it occupied the top right corner of every *Newsline* front page.

Tom Kempinski honed his words: “No one buys us. No one, gentlemen, because principle cannot be bought. We are the proud, independent WRP, and we march under the banner of Karl Marx”.

That sort of thing captured the underlying tragedy of it. Most WRP members were people who thought their leaders were honest communists, because they themselves were, or wanted to be.

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:

“*Newsline* has continued in its ridiculous campaign of bluff and bluster against the BBC Money Programme...”

“Much of the denunciation 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 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 circumstances.

“As false as have always been the hopes and wishes of those who have devoted themselves to Healy’s ‘machine for maiming militants.’”

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

IX

“Anti Zionism” had been central to the campaign against the BBC and *SO*. From now on it would take off into the realms of political lunacy.

On 9 April *Newsline* gave the whole centre page to “the witch-hunt”. The issue of the paper included the craziest of all the things they published at that time, an editorial asserting that there was a Zionist 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, Leader of the Greater London Council and joint nominal editor of *Labour Herald*, gave his tribute to his benefactor the WRP.

This was the once-Red Ken in crank mode.

“The Money Programme attack on *Newsline*, *Labour Herald*, and [George Galloway’s] *Dundee Standard* was gutter journalism... smear techniques used... against the labour movement press”.

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 Palestinians. The Zionists were particularly upset by the role the *Labour Herald* 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 *Labour Herald* benefited from the tiny WRP’s mysterious wealth.

For *SO* too this editorial marked a new stage in the conflict. The abscess was open. Only those who didn’t want to see, or smell, could ignore *Newsline*’s lurch 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* editorial.

X

Livingstone wouldn’t have seen the editorial before he made the comments that seemed to endorse it and give it credibility. He ignored *Socialist Organiser*’s request that he say where he stood on it, thus deliberately main-

taining his solidarity with the mad editorial and those who published it.

Livingstone and other “left Labour” people played an irreplaceable role in the WRP’s campaign. They helped give it a credibility it would not otherwise have had, way outside the influence 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 anti-Freeson 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 verbiage, 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 in fact first been made two years earlier, when they sued us. Prominent 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-Davidson, Tory, and David Ennals, 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 Stuart Hood, 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 Caughy, 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 there.

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 20 March programme on BBC2. That is why they are now in the company of such ultra-Tory MPs as John Biggs-Davidson”.

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”.



Labour Herald was a Labour left paper nominally edited by Ken Livingston and Ted Knight but actually run by the WRP. Though deliberately blander in tone than the WRP’s own *Newsline*, it published antisemitic images like the cartoon above conflating Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin with a Nazi.

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*.

XI

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 West Panel, and a Labour councillor.

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.

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”.

XII

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. Theirs is a political world of make believe, dominated by demagoguery; 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 Nupe 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 vocal 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, thereby condemn 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 Cabinet was petrol on the fire! Charlie Pottins, long-time WRPer, one-time Zionist, and later member of the Jewish Socialist Group, wrote an indignant rebuttal of this article over three pages of *Newsline*, which ignored all the important points.

This would be the centre-piece of a pamphlet which they now produced.

Brent Council's Joint Staffs Committee, representing 12,000 workers: "We condemn SO, who have abandoned all pretence 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 Stalinist world, where the question of what is 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 answer for an investigation of such issues: as if there is such a thing as "class truth", "class facts".

Eddie Roberts, TGWU organiser and former convenor 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 [i.e., Jews] are allowed to work against Britain's political and economic interests free from the attention of the press".

These were the people who employed the WRP — it came out in 1985 when the WRP fell apart — to provide reports on Arab political dissidents in Britain and on prominent British Jews. The politics of this statement should have given socialists pause for reflection.

Now a new theme: SO is out to "get" Ken Livingstone. There is an indignant half page about SO supporters in Brent, where Ken Livingstone was publicly asked by SO supporters to account for his part in the WRP's Conway Hall meeting.

Glasgow District Labour Party — an ex-WRP turned reformist, Chic McCafferty is in the chair — condemned SO in the pages of *Newsline*.

Patricia Hewitt of the National Council for Civil Liberties, later a Blairite minister, when questioned at a meeting, commented that the Money Programme is "a further example of how left wingers are grouped together with criminals, squatters and terrorists as being people who disrupt the running of society." [!]

Newsline on 2 May quoted Alan Stanley, the Finance Secretary of Lancaster Trades Council, one of those willing to take the WRP's word for it that Libya was another socialist fatherland far away: "The Money Programme attacks the *Newsline* from outside the working class movement. *Socialist Organiser* on the other hand, plays the insiders' role of a fifth column, using its fake socialist credentials to confuse workers and isolate *Newsline* before the state and media attack. I put the question to Sean Matgamna: if support for the Libyan revolution means *Newsline* is paid by the Libyan government, does your support of Zionism mean that you are in receipt of funds from Zionist sources?"

The Joint Shop Stewards Committee at London Hospital condemned "fabrications and lies and innuendos" by the BBC and "calls for SO to withdraw their backing from this attack".

XIII

The *Newsline* articles now become incitement to violence.

On the 4 May, *Newsline* editor Alec Mitchell, the ex-Murdoch journalist, responded to my review of their pamphlet on the affair under the headline "More ranting lies from Mr Matgamna".

"Mr Sean Matgamna of the *Socialist Organiser* group is a political provocateur who is determined to serve the forces of the capitalist state. His ranting lies against the WRP have made him a pariah in the workers' movement."

Wish fathered that thought.

"In his latest outburst Matgamna shows what an unprincipled scoundrel he is. Matgamna's reprehensible lie that the WRP is an antisemitic party, and that we are 'potentially pogromists' against Jewish people."

Mitchell continues: "Matgamna's original article [in response to the world Zionist conspiracy editorial] took lock, stock and barrel the reactionary and ultra-reactionary argument of (Israeli Prime Minister) Menachim Begin that to be an anti-Zionist is to be an antisemite."

Mitchell ends: "This group will not shut up nor will it go away. It is a sustained service that it renders to imperialism and Zionism. We have a duty to clarify the role of Matgamna's group in the working class. In turn, the labour

movement has the right to keep it at bay and shun it wherever it attempts to raise its head."

To add point to this lynch-mob stuff they reprinted the picture of me outside their 18 April Conway Hall meeting.

This hysterical self-righteousness in people who had recently printed the editorial about the world-Zionist conspiracy, and who functioned to filter Arab anti-Semitism into the British labour movement, probably indicated their own tensions and confusions. As SO had said it: their past must have made some of them ashamed of what they had become.

An editorial on 5 May titled "Jewish Chronicle — Matgamna ally" dealt with a *Jewish Chronicle* article discussing Libyan influence in Britain: "All the slanders and lies were served up in the Money Programme. They have since been adapted and expanded by pro-Zionist [i.e., Jewish — SM] MP Reg Freeson and Mr Sean Matgamna's *Socialist Organiser* group... when *Newsline* raised the Zionist connection in the witch-hunt, Mr Matgamna made the disgusting accusation that the WRP and its leadership were antisemitic and 'potentially pogromists' [in fact I'd said that the Jewish Chronicle's interest in the WRP was hardly surprising: the WRP must seem to them to be 'potential pogromists']".

"This is the basest piece of slander ever [!] levelled [!] against the Trotskyist [!] movement [!] since the Stalinists in the 1930s accused it of being 'agents of Hitler'. [SO] stands with the state media arm, the BBC, and with the *Jewish Chronicle*." The Jewish community paper is the equivalent of the "state media arm"? The BBC has no autonomy and is only a "state arm" for propaganda?

They call on SO supporters — in fact on the group of former WRP members around Alan Thornett, and Tony Richardson within it — to "publicly repudiate the highly reactionary ranting of Mr Matgamna, withdraw the slanderous statement that the WRP is 'antisemitic', and join with other sections of the labour movement in condemning the Money Programme's lies."

Socialist Organiser was then divided between relatively recent former WRPer 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*, to be "Zionist". But the WRP attempts to invigorate this SO minority failed entirely. All they got was an indecisive attempt by one of the minority leaders, Tony Richardson, to publish a letter in SO rejecting the idea that the WRP was antisemitic ("the idea is laughable", etc.).

On 6 May, Swansea branch EEPTU: "We therefore demand that *Socialist Organiser* withdraw its treacherous support. Will it continue to side with the BBC and the state, or does it stand with the working class?"

XIV

There are now many public meetings against the BBC and SO. In Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, etc., etc. In Glasgow, with Ron Brown MP; SO features in many resolutions now.

Wigan Trades Council, whose Secretary is another unreconstructed WRP drop-out, Mike Farley, condemns SO, "who not only support the witch hunt but actually went further in their allegations."

A resolution from Manchester no.1 branch of UCATT denounces SO: "As we expected, the most vile slander emanated from the pages of *Socialist Organiser*..." Sean Matgamna "accuses the WRP of being antisemitic — the oldest and foulest manifestation of racialism... Matgamna in his frenzied anti-communist hatred has broken every tradition of working class solidarity and socialist principle."

Evidently the writer did feel strongly about antisemitism. There is no reason to doubt his sincere hatred of antisemitism, which he will have bracketed in his head with Nazi persecution of the Jews, with Tsarist Russian pogroms, the anti-Jewish campaign by the Mosley fascists in the 1930s, etc., etc. He evidently can't even entertain the idea that the writers of the recent editorial on the "world Jewish conspiracy" are now a quirky variant of what he hates. He rationalises from what he wants them to be. Such people couldn't let themselves see antisemitism where it was rampant. When they themselves were wading waist deep in it. The term "Zionism" here served its camouflage purposes well with people who didn't want to understand.

Ron Brown MP told "70" people at the WRP Glasgow meeting: "Matgamna of *Socialist Organiser* is doing the dirty work for the Tories."

XV

Now another new turn: they devote a lot of space to denouncing SO for its alleged attitude to Ken Livingstone, seeking the Labour nomination for Brent East.

"Mr Matgamna of *Socialist Organiser* has begun a 'stop Liv-

ingstone' intrigue — he is so pathologically opposed to the WRP that he will try to destroy anyone in the labour and trade union movement who appears on our platform. Re-counting when Livingstone gave *Newsline* a principled statement of opposition to the Money Programme [the statement across a page from the crazy world-Zionist conspiracy editorial — SM] Matgamna went into a rage. Matgamna accused the WRP of being 'antisemitic' and 'potential pogromists'. These hateful columnies were extended to Livingstone with the flourish of a Vyshinsky [prosecutor in the Moscow Show Trials of the 1930s] or a Senator McCarthy.

"Matgamna attacked Livingstone's statement to the *Newsline*, adding "He hadn't then read the antisemitic editorial. What does he think of the editorial? Does he think we should just shrug and accept antisemitism as a feature of the far left?" (*Socialist Organiser* 4 April 1983) That'll teach you, Mr Matgamna, to ask awkward questions!"

A whole page is given to the still popular actor David Calder-then a cop in a popular TV show — denouncing the BBC: "*Newsline* not only earns the hatred of the ruling class and with them of those who declare themselves to be of the left but, in their heart of hearts, believe the working class to be defeated.

"Of all the groups the *Socialist Organiser* now stands exposed as the most insidious and treacherous of them all stooping to a racist attitude on the Arab struggle [!] accusing the WRP of being anti-Jewish, places them outside the workers' movement and exposes them as an instrument of the state in its desperate black propaganda campaign. It is only the *Newsline* and the WRP that fights for the independence of the working class!"

On the 16 May one hundred people were reported to have attended the Liverpool meeting.

NALGO Grampian branch: "SO breaks ranks to invite further attacks — we call on all trade unionists to repudiate such provocative behaviour and demand that a full retraction be made by SO." The internal authoritarian voice of the WRP keeps breaking through....

Aberdeen trades council passed a resolution on the lines quoted. The *Newsline* printed the speech, evidently written 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 *Newsline*'s "anti-Zionism" translated into the work of the WRP in the unions. The speech ranted, carrying the words in the *Newsline* editorial on the world Zionist conspiracy, about "Mr Stuart Young, a well-known Zionist" [that is, Jew] "being chair of the world's largest radio and TV company" 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 rantings had translated "on the ground" — agitation against a Jew being appointed governor of the BBC.

On the 15 May Albert Hodge, Secretary of the London Direct Labour Co-ordinating Committee and senior steward at GLC EEPTU: "By its actions SO is in favour not only of an 'enquiry', not solely by right wing Labour, but by the Tories, police and state at a time when they are in the middle of the greatest attack on living standards since the 1930s. They have finally nailed their flag to the capitalist flagpole."

On the 23 May the Islington 523 branch of COHSE "calls on SO to rethink the stand it has taken and join the rest of the trade union and labour movement in condemning the attacks on the labour movement newspaper."

On the 25 May, in another editorial: "Freeson's Bagman" [guess who]. This is an attack on SO because its supporters campaigned in Brent East in the upcoming general election for the re-election of the official Labour candidate, Reg Freeson! "A Trotskyist-baiting Zionist" [read Jew].

XVI

But the General Election campaign is now starting and the WRP's campaign dies down. Over nine weeks and 54 issues, there have been more than 50 pages of testimonies and much else besides.

The statistics of it can't tell the number of individuals and trade union branches and trades councils who voted or nodded through the "down with the BBC and SO" resolution.

In fact the campaign achieved none of its objectives: we gave as good as we got, and continued to comment as we thought fit.

The experience educated and toughened SO supporters. Vindication of the sort that was ours when the WRP imploded two and a half years later — one of the casualties was *Labour Herald*, Livingstone's paper which collapsed when the WRP did — is rare in politics.

None of us who knew the WRP were unduly alarmed by the lynch mob atmosphere they tried to whip up. They had a deserved reputation for small-scale thuggery but they talked a better fight than they fought. They made a few clumsy gestures—a couple of flats of SO people were broken into and

nothing taken although political papers were rummaged through.

They sent a couple of “agents” into SO. They were too obvious to get away with anything: the WRP could train its people to rant in trade union branches about the “Zionist” chair of the BBC, but subtly it couldn’t teach them.

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

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 any of the labour movement bodies which had passed resolutions denouncing us and demanding that we “retract”, felt they had anything to apologise for. Not a single one.

The experience outlined above tells us nothing about current disputes except that it is always a good policy in such affairs to follow the advice which Karl Marx, speaking in the words of the 13th-century Florentine, Dante, put at the begin-

ning of Volume 1 of Capital. “Go your way and let the people talk.” Decide what you think and stick to it until someone gives you reasonable grounds for changing your mind.

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

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

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 degeneration.

The earlier chapters were those of the most important revolutionary 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 Trotskyist movement during and after a general political and organisational collapse.

From the end of the 40s to the mid 70s, the Healy group dominated the world of revolutionary politics, overshadowing even sizeable organisations like the RSL/ Militant (now the Socialist Party, and Socialist Appeal) and the SWP (then called IS) and blocking the road of development for the tiny Workers’ Fight group, a forerunner of the Alliance for Workers’ 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 organisation linked organically to the mass labour movement.

No such breakthrough was made. The SLL became the “Workers’ Revolutionary Party” in 1973, and would finally break up in 1985. The fundamental responsibility for the failure 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 sustained by both ideological and (petty) physical violence against anybody who dared disagree with him — or with whatever political strand in the organisation’s leading layer he was, 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 Stalinism than serious work. It recruited and exploited — exploited 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-Vietnam-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 increasingly 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 1973-4 miners’ strike that led to the defeat of the Tory government in the election 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 Russian 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 “explain” much of the tortured history of Trotskyism after Trotsky as a convoluted 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, financially over-extended, and threatened with collapse. At that point, Healy sold the organisation to Libya, Iraq and some of the Arab sheikhdoms as a propaganda outlet and as a jobbing agency for spying on Arab dissidents and prominent Jews (“Zionists”) in Britain.

Arab gold flowed into the shrunken and isolated organisation. 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 Murdoch’s move from union-controlled Fleet Street to Wapping.

They churned out crude Arab-chauvinist propaganda lauding 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 violation 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 divided. 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 WRP’s relations with Libya and other dictatorships.

The inquiry had found “files in G Healy’s former office”, although from “internal evidence” it concluded that “much more material must exist” and “the actual amount of money received from these relations and the extent of these relations must be considerably bigger”.

However, what the inquiry had found “clearly prove[d] that Healy established a mercenary relationship between the WRP and the Arab colonial bourgeoisie”. “A secret agreement with the Libyan government” included “providing of intelligence information on the ‘activities, names and positions held in finance, politics, business, the communications media and elsewhere’ by ‘Zionists’”. It has strongly antisemitic undertones, as no distinction is made between Jews and Zionists and the term Zionist could actually include every Jew in a leading position”.

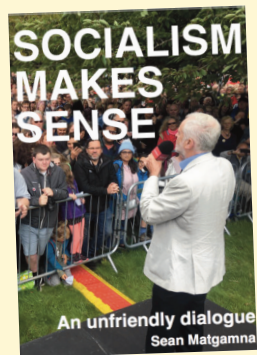
The inquiry tracked down the following payments: 1977 £46,208; 1978 £47,784; 1979 £347,755; 1980 £173,671; 1981 £185,128; 1982 £271,217; 1983 £3,400; 1984 nil; 1985 nil. Total £1,075,163.

Analysed by country, where it is possible to distinguish, 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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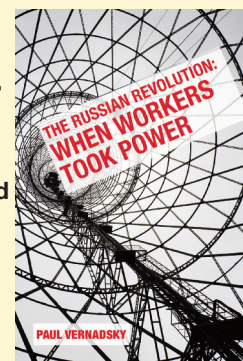
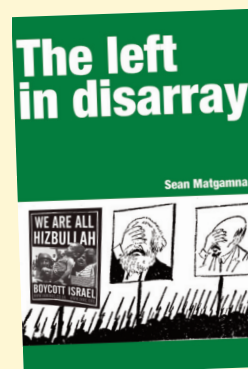


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Gerry Healy discovers the World Jewish Conspiracy

Socialist Organiser, 14 April 1981

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

Many — solicited — letters from members and supporters have been printed. The campaign continues against *Socialist Organiser*, linked with the BBC according to the well-tried Stalinist technique of the “amalgam”. Example from a piece by long-standing member Alex McLarty: “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 may tell even more”.

Much of the denunciation 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 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 circumstances.

As false has 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 antisemites 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 ocean-wide class 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. That would include the overwhelming majority of the people of Britain.

There are Zionists and Zionists. There are Zionists 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 imperialist invasion?

That’s just a front. Don’t the communists pretend to denounce the “finance. capitalists” and the “finance capitalists” make war on communism so as to fool those on both sides who don’t know there is an International Jewish Conspiracy? Thus Gerry Healy in his dotage seems to have rediscovered the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” — that forgery of the Okhrana, the Tsarist political police, which became a warrant for genocide against the Jews of Europe.

Newsline in effect defines Jews as “agents of Zionist imperialism” — which must be the very heart of imperialism if, as they say, its controlling tentacles reach secretly right into “the centre” of Mrs Thatcher’s Cabinet. The Jews, it would seem, are now the international janissaries of imperialism.

How can the mutant remnants of what was once the most serious revolutionary organisation in Britain have come to this? For the last nine or ten years, the WRP has seen the world, and especially the international Trotskyist movement, mainly in terms of police “conspiracies” and the operations of “agents” and counteragents.

Vast amounts of newsprint, time and money have been given over to the search for the “conspirators” and “agents” who are the root of all evil in the world, and whose subterranean combats and manoeuvres seem in the WRP’s eyes to



Gerry Healy

have replaced the struggle of classes as the locomotive of history.

Add to this paranoid obsession Mr Healy’s present “cupboard love” politics which puts Zionism and anti-Zionism at the centre of world politics — because to judge by all the circumstantial evidence, Libyan gold is at the centre of the WRP’s survival — and the scenario more or less writes itself. The inbuilt logic of such “politics” takes over and takes off.

It easily becomes a matter of Jews — “Zionists” — against all the rest.

RACIST LOGIC

The racist logic breaks through in their account of the Money Programme’s “witch hunt”. Why is this the work of “Zionists”? Because a Jew is appointed chairman of the BBC? Because only “Zionists” are concerned with the 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 it is 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.

All Jews other than certain religious anti-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 Regan’s) cabinet and writers for *SO*. These links are the raw material from which theories about “Zionist 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 ashamed 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 forcible conversions to Zionism.

Morally outraged 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 shading over — despite the best “anti-racist” intentions — into antisemitism.

Even if it were true that Jews who support Israel are racists, the evil consequences of left wing antisemitism would far outweigh any help it would give the oppressed Palestinians. But in fact it is hysterical and stupid to think that all Jews who support Israel are racists.

Most of them have the haziest notion of the history of Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine. They do have an understandably vivid awareness that six million Jews were murdered in mid 20th century Europe. Naturally they are inclined to believe its official spokesmen.

Yet the recent outcry against the Begin government by millions of non-Israeli (Zionist) Jews and the vast demonstrations within Israel itself when the facts about Israel’s treatment of Lebanon were made known, and it became impossible to shut out knowledge of Israeli complicity in the massacres, prove how far millions of Zionists are from being conscious racists. Most of them can be got to understand that the treatment of the Palestinian Arabs by the Palestinian Jews is a betrayal of the best traditions of the Jewish people.

But idiotic attempts to treat them all as part of a “Zionist conspiracy” can only convince Jews that in parallel to what they see as the Arab threat to wipe out the Jews of Palestine, those in Britain who talk of justice for the Palestinian Arabs are a crowd of loony future pogromists. And that won’t help the Palestinian Arabs either.

The state of the left on this question is indicated by the fact that Ken Livingstone in the same issue of *Newsline* chattily adds his support to the idea that the Money Programme expose on the WRP was a Zionist plot. He hadn’t then read the antisemitic editorial printed on the opposite page? What does he think of the editorial? Does he think we should just shrug and accept antisemitism as a feature of the far left?

Perhaps what the Ayatollah Healy has discovered in his political dotage is not the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” but the last will and testament of Joseph Stalin, who during his last years infected much of the Stalinist and quasi Stalinist left with his own ingrained antisemitism. At the time of his death in 1953 Stalin had set the stage for a purge trial of five “Jewish doctors” from the Kremlin’s own hospital accused of plots, poisonings etc.

It was to have been the signal for a final act in the vast anti-Jewish campaign, legitimised as “anti-Zionism” which had raged in most of Eastern Europe and the USSR since 1948 — which for example, was a prominent feature of purge trial like that of Rudolf Slansky in Czechoslovakia in 1952. The trial of the doctors would have been the signal for the mass deportation of the USSR’s Jews — and possibly for their annihilation.

Stalin’s successors cancelled the trial, but antisemitism remains rampant in the Stalinist states.

When the WRP (then SLL) went Maoist for a year back in 1967 Mr Banda, now the WRP General Secretary, wrote that they would “march” even under the portrait of Stalin. Once again he is “marching” under the portrait of Stalin.

He won’t write about it, but he is also uncomfortably close to marching under the portrait of Adolf Hitler.