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How did the far Left manage to slip into bed with the Jew-hating Right?

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WHEN I WAS YOUNG, smug centrists used to tell me that the extremes of Right and Left would, extended far enough, meet somewhere round the back. And I never quite believed it. But here's a story that seems to suggest that it really can happen. Indulge me

First a recapitulation. The Respect Party of George Galloway famously turned in the best performance by a far-Left party since the Communists won two seats in 1945. Respect itself is mostly — though not entirely — a front for the semi-Trotskyist organisation called the Socialist Workers' Party, or SWP. SWP members made up just under half of Respect's candidates, SWP activists form the party's main cadre and it is the SWP that drives the strategy, tactics and political platform of Respect.

When I was at college, the local SWP used to drive around in minibuses looking for members of the far Right to beat up. In those days the party had an uncompromising attitude towards those it decided were "racists and fascists", throwing politicians such as Sir Keith Joseph into an adjacent sub-category and trying to get them banned from making speeches.

Next week the SWP begins the annual festival at which members, supporters and friends are spoken at and sung to on topics revolutionary and progressive. Marxism 2005 features grizzled Trots from the 1970s, Tony Benn, George Galloway, a poet or two and, for the third year running, billed at No 13 on the speaker's list, a chap called Gilad Atzmon.

And that's where the trouble starts. Atzmon is a well-known jazz-musician, an Israeli-born Jew and — as the SWP has previously described him — also a deliverer of "fearless tirades against Zionism". But the tirades have got him into trouble with more than just the Jewish community. A Palestinian musician told me a couple of years ago that she would no longer work with Atzmon because, in her opinion, he was "an anti-Semite". He had, somewhere, crossed the line.

In 2003, for instance, Atzmon, who makes many speeches and runs a very substantial website, said this about the idea of a global Jewish plot: "We must begin to take the accusation that the Jewish people are trying to control the world very seriously."

Why? Because "American Jewry makes any debate on whether the Protocols of the Elders of Zionitic forgery are an authentic document or rather a forgery irrelevant. American Jews do try to control the world, by proxy. So far they are doing pretty well for themselves at least."

So, he's a silly boy advancing slightly dangerous arguments (or "fearless tirades"). And we might take no notice. It's just that Atzmon does get about a bit — gigs, meetings, university debates, and yet one of his heroes is an author and activist, Israel Shamir.

According to Atzmon, "Shamir is a very civil and peaceful man and probably is the sharpest critical voice of 'Jewish power' and Zionist ideology."

I first came across Shamir after I'd made a programme for Channel 4 on anti-Semitism in Islamic countries. In it I'd pointed out how the "blood libel", the slanderous accusation that Jews killed gentiles for the blood, had travelled from medieval Europe to the Middle East. But was it slander? Shamir, who claims to be a Russian Jew from Jaffa, wrote a long article in response arguing that the Jews probably were guilty of kidnapping Christian children and drinking their blood. I was more than amazed.

Shamir both buys the world plot and has some very strange allies. "For as long," he wrote, "as Richard Perle sits

in the Pentagon, Elie Wiesel brandishes his Nobel Prize, Mort Zuckerman owns the *USA Today*, Gusinsky bosses over Russian TV, Soros commands multi-billions of funds and Dershowitz teaches at Harvard, we need the voices of (David) Duke, (Justin) Raimondo, (Pat) Buchanan, (Horst) Mahler, (Nick) Griffin and of other anti-bourgeois nationalists." For those who don't know, Mahler is ex-Baader Meinhof turned neo-Nazi, David Duke is a former leader of Ku Klux Klan and Nick Griffin is our very own Welshpool Duce.

And despite warnings about his true identity as a Swedish fascist, Shamir sits on the 16-person board of advisers of the international pro-Palestinian campaign organisation, Deir Yassin Remembered (DYR), named after a Palestinian village destroyed and ethnically cleansed in 1948 by the Zionist terror groups, Irgun and the Stern gang. DYR organises events that many of the great and good of the pro-Palestinian movement attend.

As it happens the Jewish UK Director of DYR, Paul Eisen, is a fan of Shamir's, describing him as a man "who has no trouble whatsoever in calling a Jew a Jew . . ."

And Eisen is of Atzmon and Shamir's mind concerning Jewish power. Last year he expressed the view that Jewish influence in America was "not over its muscle and sinew but over its blood and its brain . . . Lists abound (though you have to go to some pretty unpopular websites to find them) of Jews, prominent in financial and cultural life."

It seems to have been on one of these "unpopular websites" that Eisen made a fatal connection. He discovered the site of one Ernst Zundel.

"Zundel," wrote Eisen, "is a gentle, good-humoured man . . . Zundel understands people and . . . he understands history." Zundel, a German-born Canadian, is not just a modern saint, but also the distributor of the booklet, *Did Six Million Really Die?* And a co-publisher of the rather heroically titled, *The Hitler We Loved and Why*.

In an article published last December Eisen explained what he'd learnt from research into the evidence for and against the veracity of the Holocaust narrative and quoted as an example the work of Robert Faurisson. "No one is able to show us, at Auschwitz or anywhere else," Faurisson wrote, "even one of those chemical slaughterhouses. No one is capable of describing to us their exact appearance or workings. Neither a trace nor a hint of their existence is to be found."

It was Eisen on the Holocaust that sent the balloon up for Atzmon at Marxism 2005. Because Atzmon firstly circulated Eisen's Holocaust-denying article, then told critics defiantly that, "my take on the subject is slightly different than Paul's one". "For me," Atzmon continued, cretinously, "the Holocaust like any other historical narrative is a dynamic process of realisation and interpretation."

Not a few left-wing Jews who style themselves "anti-Zionist" have been horrified by the Atzmon-Eisen-Shamir business. And a couple of weeks ago they began to exert pressure on the SWP to disinvite the over-fearless tirader. But the SWP — it of "smash racism" — has refused. The party issued a statement. It was, it admitted, a bit worried about Atzmon, because: "We think that some of the formulations on his website might encourage his readers to feel that he is blurring the distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism." But, it nevertheless concluded: "We do not believe that Gilad should be 'banned' from performing or speaking. 'No Platform' is a principle that the Left has always reserved for fascists and organised racists."

There are a couple of questions left begging there. Are the readers, in the SWP's usually magisterial and definite opinion, right to "feel" that the distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism is being blurred, or not? And is Atzmon being exempted from banishment because he is merely a disorganised racist?

Or is it that an influential section of the far Left has, in this instance and on this issue, completely and disgracefully lost its political and moral compass?

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