

Aidan Beatty's hackwork: The Israel-Zionist connection

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The *World Socialist Web Site* published on September 17 a review of Aidan Beatty's *The Party Is Always Right*. Violating the most basic precepts of scholarship, Beatty's hackwork resorts to unsourced allegations for which there exist no factual basis and outright lies to demonize the life of a major figure in the history of the Trotskyist Fourth International, Gerry Healy (1913-1989).

David North's review, posted on the *World Socialist Web Site*, identified Beatty as a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), a fact hidden by the author. Beatty chose not to inform his readers of the biography that he is an active member of an anti-Marxist organization, aligned with and politically directed by the Democratic Party, that is bitterly hostile to the Trotskyist movement. Beatty's concealment of his political affiliation was a strategic decision, intended to palm off a factional attack, strewn with lies, as the scholarly work of a professional academic.

While Beatty remained silent on his political agenda, the DSA has been lavishing praise on his work. Historian Paul Le Blanc, the DSA's unprincipled intellectual accordion, composed a book-jacket endorsement deceitfully hailing the book as a "meticulously documented take-down." Beatty was interviewed in the DSA's *Jacobin* magazine shortly after his work was published.

But Beatty's membership in the DSA is not the only relevant information relating to the content and purpose of the book that the author left unclarified.

In his acknowledgements for *The Party Is Always Right*, Beatty writes:

My research in Britain was funded by the Program on Jewish Studies and the World History Center at the University of Pittsburgh, who *were generous enough to see the Jewish, Israeli-Palestinian and global connections of this project.* [Emphasis added]

This is a remarkable revelation. There is no obvious reason why a biography of an Irish-born Trotskyist who spent his entire political career in Britain has "Jewish, Israeli-Palestinian and global connections" that would justify funding from an academic center dedicated to the study of Jewish culture. Beatty admits that the connections are of such an obscure character that the agreement to finance his biography was an act of generosity, rather than objective professional judgment, by the Program on Jewish Studies and the World History Center.

Adding to the mystery, Beatty writes on the first page of his Acknowledgements, "*I can't remember when I first ever heard of Gerry Healy, but by the very start of 2020 I had begun to gather material on him.*"

Historians do not, as a rule, undertake the arduous task of writing a biography about someone they have hardly heard of. The odd

circumstances under which Beatty "had begun to gather material" on Healy resembles the opening of a police dossier on a new criminal suspect, rather than the initiation of a scholarly project.

The dubious character of Beatty's sudden fascination with Healy is heightened by the fact that the author has no background in British labor or political history, the two fields that intersect most clearly with a biography of Gerry Healy. Prior to initiating his work on Healy, he had never published work in either field. Nor does Pitt's Program on Jewish Studies have a history of funding such projects.

The unanswered question is why this institution provided funding for this research project, which has no apparent connection to its sphere of interest, and to a historian who has no established background in the subject matter of the project.

North challenged Beatty to answer this question by making his application for funding public. Beatty has not replied to this challenge. Nevertheless, there is only one "connection" between Healy and the Israeli-Palestinian question that Beatty would have brought to the attention of the Program and Center from whom he was seeking funding. He would have told them that Healy had been hostile to Zionism, and that the *World Socialist Web Site*, the publication of the International Committee of the Fourth International, is a widely read and influential opponent of the Israeli state on the socialist left.

This would have been sufficient to stimulate the generosity of the two institutions, especially if their directors were confident, based on their knowledge of the author's previous work, that Beatty would produce a book whose explicit purpose was to discredit anti-Zionism.

In a podcast interview published in April, before the controversy surrounding his falsified research emerged, Beatty revealed this to be the real origin of his interest in Healy, stating:

I've just finished a book manuscript that will be out in September. There was essentially a kind of a project that I started during the pandemic about a small political party in Britain called the Workers Revolutionary Party that was led by a man called Gerry Healy... They were a group that were very, very pro-Palestinian ... So I've had this kind of odd trajectory as a historian where I started out thinking I would do purely Israeli history, and then I've just gone off in these other tangents. But I think that part of those aspects of my interests are always there in the background in terms of the history of antisemitism and the history of Zionism.^[1]

As this is the only way in which Healy's political life intersected with issues related to Jewish history, one can legitimately assume that the opportunity to discredit a left-wing opponent of Zionism is what animated the decision of the Program on Jewish Studies at the University of

Pittsburgh to fund Beatty's anti-Healy diatribe. And as the International Committee has continued Healy's defense of the Palestinians, Beatty's targeting of Healy is directed against it as well. This aim is made explicit in the concluding chapter in Beatty's biography, which is devoted entirely to an attack on the International Committee, the Socialist Equality Party and David North.

A career justifying Zionism and Israel

The Program on Jewish Studies at the University of Pittsburgh is not a politically neutral academic outfit simply devoted to scholarship and teaching. Like many such programs, it is supported by wealthy Zionist donors. The David Shapira family, owners of the Giant Eagle supermarket chain, is a major funder. According to a description of the Shapira Foundation posted on the Mosaic website, it "promotes the formation of strong Jewish identities and attachment to Israel for large numbers of young Jews." (Beatty's work was highlighted on Mosaic in 2018.)

The program hosts symposia on the challenges of teaching "the Israeli Palestinian conflict," but not on Tel Aviv's decades-long oppression of the Arab masses. The only events that took place this year around the anniversary of October 7 were one about Franz Kafka and another titled, "An Overstuffed History of the Jewish Deli."

For Beatty, funding from such sources is nothing new. He has long received academic support from organizations with ties to Zionism and the Israeli state, where he spent a year studying as an undergraduate. The following is a partial sampling of such connections:

- In 2010, 2013 and again in 2014, Beatty received travel funding from the Joyce Z. and Jacob Greenberg Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Chicago. The Greenberg Center is currently hosting a recurring series, "The Hamas Attack and Israel's Present War in Gaza," which, as the title suggests, emphasizes Palestinian "guilt" for Israel's genocide in Gaza.

- In 2013, Beatty attended the Max and Hilde Kochmann Summer School at the University of Sussex. The school was financed by publishing magnate Lord George Weidenfeld, called by the *Jewish Chronicle* "the greatest Zionist of his generation" on his death in 2016. The newspaper stated that Lord Weidenfeld "unashamedly" used "his links with everyone who counted in politics, in the cultural world, in Europe and in Israel ... to further the projects he was devoted to," including "scholarships for international students."

- In 2014, Beatty both chaired a panel and delivered a paper at a Zionist conference on "Israel: Leadership and Critical Decisions," hosted by the Ben-Gurion Research Institute at the University of the Negev, Israel.

- In 2014, Beatty won a doctoral fellowship from the Israel Institute, which was founded by Itamar Rabinovich, Tel Aviv's former ambassador to the United States and president of Tel Aviv University. Its mission is to promote Zionism in American classrooms, in the words of its website, "to enhance knowledge about modern Israel by ensuring university students in the United States and around the world have access to in-depth classes about Israel during their time on campus."

- From 2014-2016, Beatty received a travel grant, followed by a one-year postdoctoral fellowship, from the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies at Concordia University in Montreal. A review of the institution's website and X account, filled with pro-Israeli commentary and denunciations of "Hamas terror," shows that it is an unapologetically pro-Zionist organization. It collaborates with Ben-Gurion University's Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism and works with Hebrew University to support a summer study abroad program in Jerusalem.

- In 2015, Beatty delivered a talk at a conference at UCLA sponsored by

the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles (JFGL). No papers critical of Israel were included. On May 2, 2024, the JFGL issued a statement welcoming the violent crackdown at UCLA on students protesting the Gaza genocide, who it said were engaging in "on-campus antisemitism."

- In 2018, Beatty gave a talk titled, "Between Irishness and Jewishness," at a conference called "Limmud Michigan." Limmud is a religious Zionist organization that has denounced the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign as "hate-filled," and identity politics as allegedly anti-Israel.

- From 2021-2022, as he was working on his attack on Gerry Healy, Beatty held the Loewenstein-Wiener Fellowship at the American Jewish Archives, which is associated with Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR). The HUC-JIR is explicitly pro-Israeli and openly embraces claims that Israel is the rightful homeland of the Jewish people. On its X feed, HUC-JIR has many lamentations over the events of October 7 and the remaining Israeli hostages, but says not one word about Israel's relentless massacre of Palestinians.

- In 2021, Beatty published articles three times on an obscure British website that goes by the name "JewThink." The publication promoted the years-long witch-hunt of Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, who was smeared as an antisemite because of his criticisms of Israel and expelled from his party in 2024. On October 20 of last year, JewThink posted a comment that, while shedding a few crocodile tears about the humanity of the Palestinians, justified the mass killing in Gaza by recycling Israel's claim that Hamas uses civilians as "human shields."

Such institutions are not in the habit of doling out opportunities to genuine critics of Israel and Zionism. Why have they funded and platformed Aidan Beatty?

"Zionists are very like Irish nationalists": Aidan Beatty's false equating of Zionism and Irish republicanism

Prior to his sudden interest in Gerry Healy, Beatty's central "intellectual project" revolved around equating Zionism and Irish republicanism as two examples of anti-colonial struggles in search of a nation-state. This is a false and reactionary comparison on both sides of the equation—but one that is welcomed by Zionist and Israeli institutions.

Zionism was not the vehicle for "national sovereignty" among an oppressed people, as Beatty repeatedly claims in a number of books, academic articles, newspaper essays, blogs and podcasts under titles such as "Irish Questions and Jewish Questions: Crossovers in Culture," "Sexual Fantasy and Antisemitism," "Zionism and Irish Nationalism: Ideology and Identity on the Borders of Europe," "Belfast is Not Here": The Israeli Press and the Good Friday Agreement," and "A Long and Intertwined History: Irish Nationalism and Zionism."

Zionism is the quintessential colonizers' movement. The creation of "a homeland for the Jews" has rested upon the mass expulsion and the extermination of the native inhabitants of the Levant. The Zionists were handed the territory they now control by the most powerful imperial states on the planet. Israel, dependent on Washington's money and arms, became a beachhead for American power in the Middle East.

Zionism emerged not in contradiction with colonialism, but in accordance with it. It was not a "postcolonial" nationalism, as Beatty claims, but a colonial nationalism.

Beatty's amalgam is also a libel against the long Irish freedom struggle, one of the more heroic and tragic democratic movements of modern history. This dovetails with the right-wing, revisionist school of Irish historiography, which minimizes or relativizes the crimes of British imperialism in Ireland—and with Beatty's treatment of Healy's youth in

Galway in the years of the Easter Uprising, the Black and Tan War and the Civil War. Beatty, contradicting abundant documentary evidence, presents strife-torn Galway as being “quiet” in this period of revolutionary upheaval.

The comparison to be drawn is not between Zionism and the Irish independence movement, but between British oppression of the Irish and the Zionist oppression of the Palestinians. Ireland was the first colony in the epoch of capitalism, and the victim of imperialist crimes of a world-historic character, including the Great Famine, which killed 1 million and forced at least 2 million more abroad as starving refugees. Fully one-quarter of Ireland’s population was lost in the 1840s. Such crimes explain the sympathy for the Palestinians among Ireland’s workers and its working-class diaspora.

Aidan Beatty wants to overturn this “narrative” linking the Palestinians and the Irish. As he told an audience in a talk at the Zionist Azrieli Institute in 2013,

...[T]here’s a sort of a long literature of this, which I think can be a very selective kind of literature of saying, you know, Israel is just like Northern Ireland. Israelis are just like Northern Irish Protestants, but they’re kind of besieged. They feel that they’re besieged by, are surrounded by a hostile, broader world, whether it’s Irish Catholics or Arabs. *And I’m very interested in kind of flipping that around and saying, well, actually, Zionists are very like Irish nationalists.* [Emphasis added]^[2]

In order to do this, Beatty’s writings muddle through one after another trendy academic concept culled from the Frankfurt School and postmodernism: sexuality, masculinity, cultural racism, postcolonialism, “whiteness,” “space,” etc. In a 2017 piece, for instance, he argues that Irish nationalism was also a colonial movement because the Irish were pursuing “whiteness” and thus participants in the oppression emanating from the European “metropole.” In another passage he writes that “Irish nationalist utopianism, a possible example of internal colonialism, also sought to prove nationalist ownership of a set space.”

None of this is particularly comprehensible. Nor is it meant to be. The pseudo-intellectual jargon masks a simpler point. Beatty wishes to portray Zionism as an anti-colonial struggle, albeit with certain “limitations,” no different than Irish republicanism.

Beatty notes, for example, that those sections of the Zionist movement that sought to wrest control of Palestine from the British copied the terrorist methods used by the Irish Republican Army (IRA). What he fails to point out is that the Zionist terror gangs in the 1930s assassinating British officials were simultaneously engaged in the slaughter of the Palestinians, clearing the land in a campaign of, in the words of Zionist Vladimir Jabotinsky, “blood and fire.” Jabotinsky, who was a fascist, is presented by Beatty in his work as merely on the “right-wing.”

The existence of the Palestinians threatens to blow up Beatty’s argument about “postcolonial” Zionists. He resolves this by saying virtually nothing about them. In one article summing up his scholarly work, the words “Palestinian” and “Arab” do not even appear. He shares with his readers the Zionists’ rosy visions of a Jewish state, insisting they were similar to what the Irish nationalists hoped to achieve.

Indeed, land, agriculture and productive physical work were shared concerns of both Zionism and Irish nationalism. The *Sabra* [“new” Jew] was to be the paragon of the new Israeli society and, perhaps most importantly, he was to be a specifically agrarian figure, hard-working, rooted in the soil, with a love of

nature and never afraid to defend his patrimony.”^[3]

Beatty leaves out of his account the fact that, when put into action, the Zionist’s “love of nature” and fearless defense of “his patrimony” entailed torching villages, slaughtering people and driving them into exile. Such crimes were familiar to the Irish. They, however, were not the perpetrators but, like the Palestinians, the victims. Land agitation among the Irish peasantry against the British usurpers was a revolutionary factor in Irish history, akin to the Palestinian demand for the “right of return” to the land stolen from them.

Beatty strains every nerve in order to argue that there was a point in time when Zionism, supposedly, was thought to be “progressive.” As he said to one podcaster,

In the 1950s and even into the early 60s, a lot of the most progressive people in the world looked at Zionism in very favorable terms. Jean-Paul Sartre, Bertrand Russell, even at certain points Leon Trotsky. They’re quite sympathetic to Zionism. And then after the Six-Day War, the global left starts to be way less sympathetic to Zionism.^[4]

This statement is false. Trotsky never expressed anything but hostility to Zionism—and he was assassinated by Stalinist agents in 1940, long before the 1950s and 1960s. Furthermore, whatever the confusion and misappraisal of one or another “progressive” individual, the genuine “global left” opposed Zionism not only because of Israel’s attack on its neighbors in the 1956 Suez war and the Six-Day War of 1967, but because of the essentially imperialist character of the Zionist project.

Healy’s opposition to the imperialist assault on Egypt in 1956

Beatty attacks Healy for his defense of the Palestinians and the Arab nationalists against imperialism and its Israeli clients. He ridicules Healy for writing a pamphlet defending Egypt during the Suez Crisis, when the nationalist Nasser government faced a combined invasion by Israel, France, and Britain. Beatty calls Healy’s public opposition to this assault “reproduce[d] propaganda from the Arab world ... tarted up as anti-imperialism.” (15-16)

If the combined force of two of the world’s leading capitalist powers—possessors of vast colonial dominions—to seize the Suez Canal and crush the Nasser government is not imperialism, then what is?

In 1956, Healy wrote:

For the first time in the history of the human race, millions of the poorest Arab people from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf have begun to think in terms of more freedom and a better life. True enough their rulers are not by any means socialist, but rather reflect the profound national sentiments which at this moment is but a mirror reflecting the coming dawn of Socialist consciousness. That is why the Arab people are bitterly hated by the old gang of imperialist robbers...

It is tragically ironic that the Jewish people who have suffered perhaps more than any other race in history at the hands of Imperialism, should now be used as the spearhead of this reactionary drive against the Colonial people. ... Jewish working

people everywhere must denounce Israel's stab in the back of the Arab people. The future of Jewry lies through a socialist solution and not a Capitalist Israel. ... the Imperialists have in Israel succeeded in the creation of a state which can lead to a bloody holocaust that will make Hitler's crimes seem a tea party.

Healy's pamphlet expressed outrage over the fate of the young British men sent to die in the desert in the service of imperialism and further pointed to the worthiness of Arab culture and the achievements of the Egyptians, people who the imperialists regarded as utter inferiors. It is a principled and powerful statement.

In *The Party Is Always Right*, Beatty cynically denigrates the respect expressed for Healy after his death by leading figures within the Palestinian Liberation Organization. "The WRP was clearly proud of its links to Abu Jihad (Khalil al-Wazir), a leading PLO militant," Beatty states. "Abu Jihad's wife, Intissar al-Wazir, herself a member of the Central Committee of Fatah who would later serve as Social Affairs Minister of the Palestinian Authority, gave a eulogy message for Gerry Healy." In the statement, Intissar al-Wazir, whose husband had been assassinated in a hail of gunfire in his home in Tunisia in 1988 by Israeli commandos, called Healy "an unswerving friend and ally of the Palestinian Revolution, and a true friend and brother to every liberation movement throughout the world." (120).

This was, indeed, a significant tribute to Healy from one of the central leaders of the Palestinian national movement. The Socialist Labour League and the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), which Healy led, opposed the state of Israel, its persecution of the Arab masses, and its claims to defend and speak on behalf of the interests of the Jewish working class. Healy never accepted Zionism in any form, even its supposedly "left" labor variants, as some sort of progressive solution to the historical crimes perpetrated against Jews. He understood it as a colonial enterprise, a creation of British and American imperialism, and one which was, as Trotsky had predicted, a "trap for the Jews" and a monstrosity for the Arab masses.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Healy's previously principled defense of the colonial struggles, including that of the Palestinians, acquired an overtly opportunist character. Healy and the Workers Revolutionary Party adapted to Arab bourgeois nationalism. It extended uncritical support to figures such as Yasir Arafat and Muammar Gaddafi, established politically unprincipled relationships, and compromised the political independence of the working class. These policies encountered determined opposition within the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), and were a major factor in its struggle against and split with Healy and the WRP in 1985-86.

However, the International Committee never repudiated all that was politically principled and correct in his defense of the Palestinian people's struggle against imperialism and its Zionist clients. Notably, Beatty's biography entirely ignored all the political issues underlying the 1982-86 struggle within the ICFI.

Conclusion

Just as Beatty tries to hide the reason for his interest in Healy and British Trotskyism, he also gives no serious account as to why he began studying Israel and Jewish history. In response to a question during a podcast with the New Books Network in April, as to what drew him to this subject, Beatty, who started university at the age of 24, declared, "In the period right before university *for some reason* I got very interested in Middle

Eastern history, and at the time I used to think it was just because I was really sick of Irish history. ... I just find it a really fascinating part of the world."

All historians know why they decided to take up a particular specialty. Their explanations are long and detailed. If Beatty will not speak about this, it is because he does not want to. Some might suspect that his reticence to provide a detailed, let alone credible, explanation of the origins of his obsessive promotion of a fraudulent identity of Irish and Israeli-Zionist history suggests the existence of a concealed relationship of a decidedly non-scholarly character. But that is a matter about which we have no definite information and, therefore, on which we cannot possibly comment.

But what we can state, unequivocally, is that Beatty's attack on Healy and the Trotskyist movement is the politically reactionary hackwork of an unprincipled and dishonest academic charlatan.

[1] Apple Podcasts. "Aidan Beatty and Dan O'Brien, 'Irish Questions and Jewish Questions: Crossovers in Culture' (Syracuse UP, 2018)." Accessed November 18, 2024. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/aidan-beatty-and-dan-obrien-irish-questions-and/id425369034?i=1000652230654>.

[2] "Aidan Beatty -'Belfast in Not Here': Israel's Perspective on the Northern Irish Peace Process - YouTube." Accessed November 18, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsT1EoXv48M>.

[3] "Body and Soul of the Nation – Early 20th Century Irish Nationalism and Zionism – The Irish Story." Accessed November 18, 2024. <https://www.theirishstory.com/2013/02/05/body-and-soul-of-the-nation-early-20th-century-irish-nationalism-and-zionism-as-ideologies/>.

[4] Apple Podcasts. "Aidan Beatty and Dan O'Brien, 'Irish Questions and Jewish Questions: Crossovers in Culture' (Syracuse UP, 2018)." Accessed November 18, 2024. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/aidan-beatty-and-dan-obrien-irish-questions-and/id425369034?i=1000652230654>.



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