

A letter to the Institute of Historical Research on Aidan Beatty's falsification of the life and politics of Gerry Healy

David North
29 November 2024

David North has sent this letter to the Institute of Historical Research at the School of Advanced Study, University of London, which is sponsoring on December 2 an online seminar at which Professor Aidan Beatty will be speaking on "Gerry Healy and the WRP: Violence, Gender, and the Perils of Trotskyism." North has asked to be afforded time to respond to Beatty's presentation. Please send statements supporting this request to ihr.reception@sas.ac.uk and forward a copy to sep@socialistequality.com

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November 29, 2024

To the Institute of Historical Research,

On 2 December 2024, the Institute of Historical Research is sponsoring an online seminar titled "Gerry Healy and the WRP: Violence, Gender, and the Perils of Trotskyism." The listed speaker is Professor Aidan Beatty.

As the title of the seminar clearly indicates, the scheduled seminar is not an educational event, but rather a political meeting whose explicit purpose is to attack and discredit the Trotskyist movement.

Mr. Beatty's recent book, "The Party is Always Right: The Untold Story of Gerry Healy and British Trotskyism," is a blatant exercise in historical falsification, which violates the most elementary standards of scholarly research. It makes claims about Gerry Healy's life that are demonstrably untrue. The book has been published by Pluto Press, which is controlled politically by long-time opponents of Healy. It is based on what Mr. Beatty palms off as "oral history," which consists almost entirely of undocumented allegations by political opponents of Gerry Healy. Incredibly for a historian, Mr. Beatty

conducted virtually no archival research in the writing of this biography. In a 234 page book that purports to cover the political career of Gerry Healy, which spanned six decades, there are only five footnoted references to the writings of his subject. The actual content of political controversies in which Healy played a central role are ignored and the relevant documents are not referenced.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has published several reviews of Mr. Beatty's book in which his falsifications of the historical record are exposed. A central claim made by Mr. Beatty on the first page of his opening chapter—"Most egregiously Gerry Healy's well-repeated claim that he saw the Black and Tans shoot and kill his father during the War of Independence was an outright lie"—is entirely unsupported by any sort of written evidence and is based on nothing more than gossip. Research carried out by the WSWs conclusively establishes that Healy never claimed to have witnessed his father's death. In fact, he never wrote or spoke about his family background—not even to his daughter.

Further claims made by Beatty—that Healy was raised in an affluent bourgeois family and that the area of Ireland in which he spent his childhood was largely spared the violence of the rebellion and civil war—have also been shown by the WSWs to be totally false.

Permit me to refer the Institute to the recent and most detailed reply to Beatty's biography posted on the World Socialist Web Site: "Slander vs. Biography: Aidan Beatty's falsification of Gerry Healy's family and childhood in a decade of rebellion and civil war," by Thomas Scripps. Mr. Scripps' exposure of Beatty's falsifications is based on solid archival research.

Mr. Beatty does not confine his attack to Gerry Healy. Astonishingly, in what purports to be a biography of Gerry Healy, he devotes his final chapter to a denunciation of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States and of me. The latter attack is highly personalized and includes data that he seems to have mined from Ancestry.com. He includes references to my grandparents, parents and other personal information entirely unrelated to the life of Gerry Healy.

What Mr. Beatty fails to include in this personalized denunciation is any reference to the extensively documented record of my political differences with Gerry Healy.

This raises yet another significant issue. In Mr. Beatty's acknowledgments, in which he purports to explain his motivations for writing the biography, he fails to disclose that he is a leading member of the Democratic Socialists of America, a political party in the United States that is bitterly hostile to the Socialist Equality Party, of which I am the national chairman. Moreover, for approximately five years, Mr. Beatty worked at Wayne State University in Detroit, where the Socialist Equality Party and its youth organization, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, have been conspicuously active. The DSA's efforts to suppress the presence of the SEP and IYSSE on the WSU campus included calls to the police. Thus, the first sentence of Mr. Beatty's Acknowledgments—"I can't remember when I first heard of Gerry Healy, but by the very start of 2020 I had begun to gather material on him, not knowing whether it would lead to a piece of long-form journalism or an idiosyncratic academic article."—is simply unbelievable. As a politically active opponent of the SEP on the campus of Wayne State University, Beatty would have most certainly been sufficiently familiar with the history of the Trotskyist movement to have heard of Gerry Healy well before he decided to write his biography.

There is a further point related to the origins of Beatty's biographical project. Beatty writes in his Acknowledgments: "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." Mr. Beatty fails to explain the nature of these "global

connections," and how he convinced these two institutions to assist in the financing of a biography devoted to the life of an Irish-born Trotskyist who spent his entire political career in Britain. Mr. Beatty has longstanding relations, spanning a decade, with organizations closely associated with the Zionist movement and the Israeli state. Given Gerry Healy's well-known support for the struggle of the Palestinian national movement against the Zionist state, it is reasonable to assume that financing was provided to Beatty with the understanding that his biography would serve to discredit the Trotskyist movement. Mr. Beatty has failed to reply to the WSWS's request that he make public his applications for funding from the Program on Jewish Studies and the World History Center.

Given the issues and circumstances enumerated above, I request that the Institute of Historical Research allow me to participate in the December 2 online webinar, with sufficient time to reply to Mr. Beatty's presentation. The IHR, with its reputation for the promotion of scholarly research, should not be endorsing Mr. Beatty's manifestly false and maliciously factional political attack on the Trotskyist movement. The IHR's obligation to allow me to respond to Mr. Beatty is all the more imperative given the fact that I am a subject of his attack.

The lateness of this request should not be given as an excuse to deny it. We received no official notification of the planned online seminar, and only learned of it within the last 48 hours. In any event, the nature of an online event presents no specific organizational obstacle to the granting of my request.

I look forward to your reply,

David North



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact