How it all began

Anti-Zionism, antisemitism, and the German New Left

By Dale Street

During the night of 8-9 November 1969 monuments in West Berlin commemorating victims of Nazi persecution, including one marking the destruction of a synagogue in the city’s Schöneberg district, were vandalised.

“Shalom”, “El Fatah” and “Napalm” were painted on the monuments, in the colours of the Palestinian national flag.

On 9 November itself, a member of the “Black Rats”, Tupamaros West Berlin planted an incendiary device in the city’s Jewish Community Centre, timed to ignite when the annual commemoration of Kristallnacht took place in the ground of the centre later that day.

During Kristallnacht (9 November 1938) 8,000 Jewish businesses had been destroyed, at least 267 synagogues burnt down, 127 Jews killed, and almost all Jewish cemeteries in Germany vandalised.

In the evening of the same day members of the West Berlin Tupamaros provided the political rationale for their actions in a leaflet entitled ‘Shalom + Napalm’, distributed at a meeting being held in the city’s Republican Club:

The American army was “on the brink of its final and total defeat” in Vietnam. The end of the war in Vietnam was “the beginning of the German war on all fronts.” And the most decisive front of all was the Middle East, where “imperialism is employing all its forces to prevent its next decisive defeat.”

European and US capital had “created a powerful military base in the Middle East” (i.e. Israel). Thousands of US military advisers with experience of Vietnam were already serving in the Israeli army. After the USA, West Germany was the biggest investor in Israel.

“Under the guilt-stricken cover of coming to terms with the fascist horrors inflicted on Jews,” the leaflet continued, “the biggest investor in Israel.

It was wrong to denounce the slogans on the “Jewish monuments” (sic) and the planting of the bomb in the community centre as “excesses by radical right-wingers.” On the contrary, they were “a decisive link of international socialist solidarity.”

The West German left suffered from a “theoretical paralysis” in its analysis of the Middle East. This was “the result of the German guilty conscience: ‘we gassed Jews, so we must protect Jews from a new genocide’.”

“True anti-fascism” had to replace this “helpless anti-fascism”: “Clear and simple solidarity with the fighting Fedayeen ... remorselessly combating, by concrete actions, the close relationship between Zionist Israel and fascist West Germany.”

Every commemoration of Kristallnacht in West Germany, claimed the leaflet, was a diversion from the “real” Kristallnacht currently taking place in the Middle East:

“Kristallnacht of 1938 is today repeated on a daily basis by the Zionists in the occupied territories, in the refugee camps, and in Israeli prisons. The Jews who were driven out by fascism have become fascists themselves, working in collaboration with American capital to wipe out the Palestinian people.”

Victory for “the Palestinian revolution”, the leaflet concluded, would not only be “a further defeat for world imperialism”. It would also “begin the creation of a revolutionary liberation front in the western urban centres.”

The Tupamaros West Berlin — who took their name from Uruguayan urban guerrillas — were a small group of around a dozen individuals, some of whom had initially risen to public prominence as members of Commune One.

Their leading figure, Dieter Kunzelmann, who died in May 2018, was antisemitic. His antisemitism was not complicated. He simply didn’t like Jews. As Albert Fichter, who planted the bomb in the Jewish Community Centre, later called:

“Kunzelmann and Georg von Rauch [another Tupamaro] swore more and more about ‘shitty Jews’. Kunzelmann always spoke about ‘Jewish pigs’ and wound up people against them. At that time he was like a classic antisemite. Georg spoke the same way.”

The recently deceased Bommi Baumann (who had lived in Commune One with Kunzelmann) and Fichter’s brother Tilman (who knew Kunzelmann personally) also confirmed in interviews conducted in later years that Kunzelmann was an antisemite:

“Kunzelmann was an antisemite. I’d known him since 1967. He was the only one [in Commune One] who constantly spoke dismissively about Jews. I thought it was a bizarre, black humour. It took us a while to realise that Kunzelmann was serious.”

“It quickly became clear that Kunzelmann was an antisemite. If you analyse today what Kunzelmann was writing at that time, it was not left antisemitism, just antisemitism.”

Kunzelmann believed that the German left had a “Jew hang-up” (“Judenknax”). He defined it in the first of his two “Letters from Amman” (both written and posted in West Berlin), published in November 1969 in Agit 883, the most widely read magazine on the West Berlin left scene:

“...The Jew hang-up: ‘We have gassed six million Jews. Today, the Jews are called Israelis. Whoever fights against fascism is for Israel.’ It is as simple as that — but it is wrong from beginning to end.”

Kunzelmann called on his readers to ditch their “facile phallosemitism” and replace it with “undisguised solidarity with El Fatah”. He also criticised Palestinian solidarity activists in West Berlin for capitulating to “the supremacy of the Jew complexes.”

“His concept of a ‘Jew hang-up’ also found expression in the ‘Shalom + Napalm’ leaflet ([...the German guilty conscience: ‘we gassed Jews’ ...]) and in his second ‘Letter from Amman’ (published in April 1970): “From Amman I ask myself: When will you finally begin the organised struggle against the Holy Cow of Israel?”

When Albert Fichter admitted in 2005 to having planted the incendiary device in the Jewish Community Centre, he sought to partially excuse his actions on the grounds that it was “only” an incendiary device (not a “proper” bomb), and that he knew that the device would malfunction (as it did).

But Kunzelmann himself, recalled Fichter, had wanted the incendiary device to ignite:

“Dieter planned the entire action. People said that the most prominent Zionists from all over Europe would be meeting in the Jewish Community Centre. That was why a packet was to be left there. Dieter wanted to give a violent signal. In his plan, the bomb was to explode.

When I returned to the flat Kunzelmann and Georg were very disappointed that nothing had happened... But Kunzelmann conceded that it did not matter that it had not exploded. It was a ‘psychobomb’, a psychological bomb.”

Kunzelmann saw the planting of an incendiary device in the Jewish Community Centre in West Berlin (pre-war Jewish population: 175,000; post-war Jewish population: 1,400) as an example for others to follow.

A tape-recorded message sent by the Tupamaros to Heinz Galinski, a Holocaust survivor and leader of West Berlin’s Jewish community, proclaimed:

“The bomb in the Jewish Community Centre has gone off. Berlin is in upheaval. The left is stunned. Springer (a media mogul), the Berlin Parliament and the Galinskis want to sell us their Jew hang-up. But we’re not getting involved in that business... In every place and at every time we must learn to strike, withdraw, and then strike again.”

Although the voice on the tape recording was female, the reference to a “Jew hang-up” indicates that it was scripted by Kunzelmann himself.

Kunzelmann also condemned the failure of the Palestine solidarity movement to “learn from the people who placed...
HOW IT ALL BEGAN

2

More online at www.workersliberty.org

The bomb in the Jewish Community Centre:

“The fact that the political takers of the Palestine Committee — the SD S and the West German left, and the Israel-Palestine conflict were viewed through this prism. The Israel-Palestine conflict was the new Vietnam — not just metaphorically, but also literally.”

In an open letter issued in agreement with the SDS Executive Committee just after the start of the Six Day War of 1967, Wolfgang Abendroth, one of the most prominent left-wing SDS members, had explained the Jewish significance in the bigger anti-imperialist scheme of things:

“Even in the current preventive war Israel must appear in the guise of the advance guard of American imperialist interests. Israel must appear to be the feudal lords of Arab states and above all to the population of the essentially progressive re-

publican military institutions.

In February 1970 seven elderly Jews — Holocaust survivors — died in an arson attack on a Jewish community centre in the West Berlin Tupamaros. Mem-

bers of what later became the Revolutionary Cells (RC) provided logistical support for the seizure of Israeli state travel agency are an expression of our solidarity with the W est Berlin Tupamaros.

In his second ‘Letter from Amman’, Kunzelmann warned of the consequences of a failure to act against Zionist expansionism: “We will stare in disbelief at the capitalist revolution, the socialist states, and the revolutionary forces of the world as they represent progress; and against them is the Zionist milieu, the Jewish bourgeoisie and the ultra-Zionist organisations. The ‘true anti-fascism’.

A leaflet distributed in December 1969 by Commando Revolutionary Cells (RC) provided logistical support for the bomb in the Jewish Community Centre in Frankfurt, because of the genocidal strategy of the Zionists towards Palestinians. Our attacks on the Korr Engineering Factory in Mannheim, mean-while, were against the Jewish bourgeoisie as a whole.

In 1972 the RC planned to kidnap the “Nazi hunter” Simon Wiesenthal in Vienna, and also kill Galinski and Ignaz Liptoch, chair of the Frankfurt Jewish community. Only by putting on an international, cross-border basis could the struggle against Zionism.

In 1976 Bose and another RC member collaborated with members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) to hijack a French passenger plane. After the plane had landed in Entebbe, Bose separated Israeli and Orthodox Jews from the other passengers. (The hijackers insisted there was nothing antisemitic about this. A hostage later recalled: “They told us explicitly: ‘We are not against the Jews, only against Israel.’ But the female German terrorist acted like a Nazi. She yelled and threatened to kill all the hostages.)

In 1977 the RC planned to kidnap the “Nazi hunter” Simon Wiesenthal in Vienna, and also kill Galinski and Ignaz Liptoch, chair of the Frankfurt Jewish community. Only by putting on an international, cross-border basis could the struggle against Zionism.

One of the two of them was to be shot... Galinski was normally heavily involved in his office in the synagogue but he either walked or cycled to the synagogue. He was to be shot on his way to work. The guy in Frankfurt in practically the same way. But first the RC had to steal a few cars.

A footnote to such attacks and attempted attacks was pro-

vided in 1991: members of the third-generation Red Army Fraction provided logistical support for a bomb attack on a coach taking 31 Jewish emigrants from the former Soviet Union to their school trip by driving the vehicle to Israel.

WEST GERMAN LEFT

In terms of their numbers and terrorist activities the West Bank Communists (West German Revolutionary Communist Party) and the successor group of the Red Army Fraction were anything but representative of the broader West German left to which they claimed to belong. However, their “anti-imperialist” orientation, and support for the Palestinian and the anti-Zionist struggle.

The starting point for that analysis was a particularly de-

based version of “anti-imperialism”. The radical left which emerged in West Germany in the 1960s, the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), was an attempt to start a campaign merely demonstrates that their relation to politi
cal work is purely one of theory, and further demonstrates the emptiness of all their analysis.

Kunzelmann’s own plans to manifest his “true anti-fas
cism” in other actions proved too much even for his own fol-
lowers. According to Tupamaro Annetteki Bruhn:

“You had to plan for a year to target the Jewish kindergarten in the synagogue in Joachimsthaler Street. He had his companion HB the job of checking out the vicinity. After an initial inspection the latter refused to take part in such a scheme. Children are innocent — that was too much for him. After that the plan was dropped.

But other individuals and organisations did take inspira-

tion from Kunzelmann’s anti-Zionism.

“In the 1970s, ideas held by a much broader political current in the Palestine conflict, those organisations expressed, however but representative of the broader West German left to

In line with the Soviet Communist Party’s adoption of anti-

the working class. Kunzelmann was one of the five future Tupamaros to have travelled to Jordan in October, was bedazzled by his experiences.

“Here for the first time I have understood what it means to say that people change in a revolutionary manner in the ‘long popular liberation struggle’. It is this revolutionary transitional period which produces revolutionary structures being re-established after the armed uprising.”

To be a Palestinian was, existentially, to be anti-imperialist. A leaflet distributed in December 1969 by Commando Red
Christian's (the West Berlin Tupamaros under another name) explained: “The action of the Holy Family [Mary, Joseph, Jesus] is the history of the struggle of the Palestinians against imperialism. Yesterday it was the Romans, the Crusaders, the caliphs and the Ottomans. Then it was the English. Now it is the Zionists and the Turks. "For us, support for the liberation struggle in the Third World means: Destroying Zionism in your own country. Revolutionary Jews are fighting on our side. Transform this corrupt Christmas festival into a celebration of solidarity with El Fatah." ("Destroying Zionism in your own country" needs to be read in the context of the incendiary device planted in the Jewish Community Centre the previous month.)

When Israeli athletes were kidnapped and killed (partly by the captors, and partly in a botched police operation) in Munich in 1972, the first-generation Red Army Faction were positively ecstatic about the perpetrators: “The action of Black September has exposed the nature of imperialist rule and anti-imperialist struggle like no other revolutionary action in West Germany or West Berlin to date. It was simultaneously anti-imperialist, anti-fascist and internationalist. [...] It will never be eradicated from the memory of the anti-imperialist struggle.”

Fantastic political illusions about the impact of a victorious “Palestinian revolution” heightened the level of adulation. In early 1970 an article in Agit 883 explained: “If El Fatah can lead this struggle to a socialist conclusion and rally behind itself the most oppressed classes, then there is the possibility of genuine emancipation of all the oppressed masses of the Near East.”

“The Palestinian revolution is directed not just against the imperialist bulwark, the Zionist state of Israel, but also has an impact on the consciousness of the Arab masses. It leads to their release from reactionary nationalistic ideas, and prepares the way for a pan-Arab socialist-emancipatory revolution.”

According to another Agit 883 article published in early 1970 El Fatah wanted to “drive out Zionism” as the first stage of a socialist revolution: “El Fatah wants to drive out Zionism and break the back of Jewish racism, in order to set about the socialist revolution together with Jews, Christians and Arabs. It decisively distinguishes itself from the petty-bourgeois chauvinist goals of small splinter groups.”

“They do not want to drive ‘the Jews’ into the sea, as Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban claims. That is why El Fatah also does not struggle against ‘the Jew’ and does not take part in xenophone bombings.”

Israel was a no-go area for the anti-imperialists of the SDS and APO. When one of the SDS leaders who had visited El Fatah training camps in 1969 was asked by a journalist if they would also be visiting Israel, he replied: “Why would we want to go to Israel? We’ll go there when it has become socialist.”

**ISRAEL FASCIST**

Israel was far worse than “just a colonial enterprise and outpost of imperialism: It was fascist.”

According to Kunzelmann “The Zionists” committed Kristallnacht on a daily basis. “The Jews” had become fascists. Israel was inflicting “fascist horrors” on Palestinians. “A radical nationalistic genocide” was carried out by Israel. Zionism was “a fascist ideology.” And El Fatah was fighting against “the Third Reich of Yesterday and Today.”

Ken Livingstone was not alone in expressing this political analysis. According to a leaflet distributed by Hamburg University’s Students Union on the occasion of a meeting addressed by Asher Ben-Natan, Israel’s first ambassador to West Germany in June of 1969.

“He (Ben-Natan) knows that the best friends of Israel today are those who yesterday built the concentration camps and advocated the Final Solution. The victors in the Blitzkrieg of 1940 can identify without any difficulty with the victors in the Blitzkrieg of 1967.

“The members of the master race of the Third Reich view western Europe as its Garden of Evil” and “a single continuum of crimes against humanity.” (The East German Communist League, whose opposition to Zionism the Communists in West Germany attempted to smother by the Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban, the Munich Palestine Committee declared its opposition to “the aggressive policies of national-socialist Israel. We are for a Popular Republic of Palestine in which Jews and Arabs live together with equal rights.”

Exponents of such politics gave Palestinian nationalists in Germany the label of “Zionist collaborators” and “anti-Zionist” (Action Organisation for the Liberation of Palestine) a sympathetic hearing for their comments about Abba Eban’s visit: “We regard West Germany as enemy territory. ... West Germany carries a large part of the collective guilt with regard to the Palestinian people. The Germans have paid 3.5 billion Mark to Israel as reparations, a significant factor in the development of the Israeli war machine.

“In this manner West Germany can boast of having committed two genocides in one generation. The genocide of the Jews, and the genocide — by the surviving Jews — of the Arabs.”

The first-generation Red Army Faction tract on the killing of the Israeli team at the 1972 Olympics in Munich was almost obsessive about the equation of Israel with Nazi Germany.

It referred to “Israel’s Nazi fascism” and to “Moshe Dayan fascism.” Dayan himself, the Israeli Defence Minister in the nationalist [...] will never be eradicated from the memory of the anti-imperialist struggle.”

In an unrivalled display of quack-Marxist pseudo-erudition the document argued that Israel, not Nazi Germany, constituted “real” fascism. Nazi Germany had been only the political and military epicentre of the imperialist system of multinational concerns.” German capitalists had made the mistake of allying with “the decaying petty bourgeoisie” and the “ideologically backward Nazi Party”. They should have been their own economic power. Instead, they began the Second World War.

Real fascism, on the other hand was a product of advanced capitalism and imperialism. The latter was “in its nature and in its tendency thoroughly fascist”. And because the existence and essence of Israel was inseparable from its imperialist role, it was Israel, not Nazi Germany, which represented true fascism.

In the first half of the 1970s articles by the East German writer Klaus Polkeln reinforced the equation of Zionism and Israel with fascism by sections of the West German left. Ten years later, in 1980, Perestroyka and 40 years before Ken Livingstone, he raised the accusation of Nazi-Zionist collaboration: “There was broad agreement between the Zionist and fascistic basic ideological positions, National-socialists and Zionists were the same. Both were chauvinist and wanted ‘racial exclusivity’...”

“From the first days of Nazi rule in Germany the Zionists had at their disposal a direct line to the fascist repressive apparatus. From the first contacts there developed a lively cooperation between the Zionist leadership and the terror organisations of the Nazi Reich.

“If only a small proportion of the Jews of Europe could be saved, not the least of the reasons for this was the negative attitude of the Zionists.

“For the sake of accuracy it should not be forgotten that those Jews who survived the Nazi terror owed their rescue above all to the anti-Führer alliance, especially the soldiers of the Soviet army who made indescribable sacrifices to destroy the Nazi dictatorship.”

By the mid-1970s the Revolutionary Cells had emerged not just as the new armed wing of “anti-Zionist anti-fascism” but also as the link in this feedback loop: “anti-Zionism” against “fascism.”

“[Since 1972] the entire West German left has failed to muster even a word of condemnation about the genocide of the Palestinians. The terrible crimes committed by German fascism against Jews should not blind us to campaign of elimination being conducted by the Zionists in Palestine. The Zionists have drawn disastrous lessons from their persecution. They have learnt well, and today they persecute, oppress, drive out and exploit Palestinians and Arabs just as they themselves were once persecuted.”

**ANTI-ZIONISM**

Such outpourings in the late 1960s and early 1970s were reflected in the slogans and protests directed at Israeli politics and politicians in those years: “Zionism is Fascism”, “Only bombing in 50 German supermarkets in Israel will there be peace there”, “Beat the Zionists Dead — Make the East Red!” and “It’s a pity you weren’t all killed in the war.”

These slogans and abuse were all part of organised campaigns to prevent meetings with Israeli speakers defending Israeli politics from going ahead, mainly meetings organised by student Jewish societies at universities, but also including a meeting in the West Berlin Republican Club.

Such outpourings also provided the basis for even more degenerate forms of “anti-Zionism” in later years.

The Red Press dismissed Zionism as “the ideology of reactionary Jewish capitalists”. A leaflet by West Berlin Maoists condemned “world Zionism”. The Communist League called for the “complete destruction of Israeli “international Zionism” and “the destruction of the Zionist state” (as “the only way to resolve the conflict in the Middle East”).

Zionism was “vehemently opposed to peaceful coexistence between peoples” (Freiburg Middle East Group). Zionism was “the imperialist answer to the Jewish Question”; it was “not only the irreconcilable and unformable enemy of the Palestinians. It is also our enemy. It is the enemy of all people.” (Hamburg Middle East Group).

Other organisations and campaigns described Israel as “the Garden of Evil” and “a single continuum of crimes against humanity” (e.g. “The First Generation Revolutionary Group”). Zionism was “the most obsessive about the equating of Israel with Nazi Germany”.

In excising itself of all expressions of antisemitism and claiming victimhood status — victims of that “domination of the world media by Zionist propaganda” — the Israeli left has become even more constrained by “reason and humanity”. “Jews were a supposed people” which “had never existed”. And “the domination of the world media by Zionist propaganda” had “made criticism of Israel impossible. Zionism is based on the non-existence of the Palestinian people.”

The bulletin also complained about how the incident was reported in the media: “Since 1972 the entire West German left has failed to muster even a word of condemnation about the gentrification of the Palestinian public by Zionist propaganda”.

In excising itself of all expressions of antisemitism and claiming victimhood status — victims of that “domination of the world media by Zionist propaganda” — the Israeli left has become even more constrained by “reason and humanity”. “Jews were a supposed people” which “had never existed”. And “the domination of the world media by Zionist propaganda” had “made criticism of Israel impossible. Zionism is based on the non-existence of the Palestinian people.”

A Republican Club Bulletin published a week later repeated the same argument. “Fighting fascist tendencies in Israel” and fighting antisemitism in West Germany was a “deformation” and “whatever you might think of such ceremonies” did not justify the atrocity.

The New Left had also complained about how the incident was being used by the media to suggest that left-wing “anti-Zionism” was no different from right-wing antisemitism: “For the media it is a matter of proving that Red equals Fascist. In order to get away with this, there is always discussion about the question of Palestine being used by the forces of reaction in this manner.”

Whoever placed the bomb in the Jewish community centre...
It was also lost on the authors of a statement by the Revolutionary Cells published in the left-wing magazine Pfaster-strand after Hans-Joachim Klein’s exposure of their plans to murder Galinski and Lipinski.

You go on about Hans-Joachim Klein’s horror story instead of thinking through the role which Galinski plays for the crimes of Zionism and the cruelties of the imperialist army of Israel, and instead of thinking through this character’s function in propaganda and material support. Galinski is anything but ‘a Jewish community chairperson’.

In fact, ran an argument already in common usage by the early 1970s, accusations of antisemitism were instrumented by Zionists and the right-wing media to misrepresent their political opponents and stifle criticism.

ZIONISTS

According to the leaflet distributed at Hamburg University on the occasion of Israeli Ambassador Ben-Natan’s visit in June of 1969:

“Shacter Ben-Natan has an excellent understanding of how to use — in the interests of the ruling class of Israel which he represents in Bonn — this antisemitism which has been twisted into something ‘positive’.

According to the introduction to an Agit 883 article entitled “What is Antisemitism?” published in November 1969, which had also been the text of a speech in the West Berlin Republican Club the previous week:

“The incident in the Jewish Community Centre is being used by Springer and his cohorts to step up the lies they spread about the socialist movement. … [They] claim that the socialist movement is not socialist at all but antisemitic and left-fascist.

“It is no surprise that they cannot tell the difference between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. After all, they were all involved directly or indirectly in the crime of extermination of the Jews.”

And according to Kunzelmänn’s “Second Letter from Amman”:

“The Jewish diaspora in the entire world, insofar as it is Zionist (and where is it not Zionist?), is beating the big drum.

‘Anti-Zionism is antisemitism’ — that’s the cunningly sly lie of the Galinskis and Springer’s hangers-on. Anyone who accepts this statement represents the imperialist point of view and thereby becomes an enemy for every left-wing.”

“Today, the butchers of the Jewish people [in Nazi Germany] and their helpers’ helpers have adopted a philosemitic ideology and have become the principal basis of support for aggressive Zionism in Israel.”

A characteristic of Zionism is its adoption of petty-bourgeois antisemitism. The Zionists hate nothing more than the Jewish intellectual who lives abroad, who does not sleep on a camp bed at night and does not spend the day with a machine-gun in his hand, ploughing fields and chasing Arabs.