

Netanyahu's apology for Hitler

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On Tuesday, Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, laid the blame for Hitler's Final Solution on the Palestinian national leadership. Speaking at the 37th World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem, he said that the extermination, including in the gas chambers, of six million European Jews was not Hitler's idea but that of Jerusalem's Grand Mufti, who oversaw the city's Muslim sites.

Netanyahu claims, "Hitler didn't want to exterminate the Jews at the time, he wanted to expel the Jews. And Haj Amin al-Husseini went to Hitler and said, 'If you expel them, they'll all come here [Palestine, then under British rule].' 'So what should I do with them?' [Hitler] asked. [Husseini] said, 'Burn them'."

This entire account of the conversation between Hitler and Husseini is a lie.

Husseini was a bourgeois nationalist leader, who turned to Germany for support against the British, who had pledged in 1917 to create a homeland for the Jews in Palestine. He was opposed to both a Jewish homeland in and immigration to Palestine, and met Hitler on November 28, 1941. But the official report of the meeting makes no reference to any such remarks. There is, in fact, no evidence that he was even aware of the Final Solution, given that it was concealed for years.

The plan to liquidate the Jews was Hitler's. In January 1939, more than two years before the meeting with Husseini, Hitler had addressed the Reichstag, Nazi Germany's parliament, where he spoke clearly about his intention to exterminate the Jewish race.

The denunciation of Netanyahu's remarks by historians, Israel's Holocaust survivors and international politicians has been nearly universal. He has openly associated himself with Hitler's apologists and aligned himself with such reactionary forces as Jörg Baberowski, professor of Eastern European history at Berlin's Humboldt University, who has come out in

support of Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte, declaring, "Hitler was no psychopath, he was not vicious." Based upon such lies about Hitler's peaceful intentions, every neo-fascist will now feel free to espouse these views.

An embarrassed Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, standing alongside Netanyahu at a press conference on Wednesday, said that responsibility for the Holocaust lay with the Germans. Her spokesperson Steffen Seibert added, "All Germans know the history of the murderous race mania of the Nazis that led to the break with civilisation that was the Holocaust.... We know that responsibility for this crime against humanity is German and very much our own."

Netanyahu's apology for Hitler was not an off-the-cuff remark, but part of a prepared speech. Neither was it the first time he made the claim. He is on record as having made a similar allegation in 2012, calling Husseini "one of the leading architects" of the Final Solution.

The Grand Mufti is, of course, not the main target of Netanyahu's historical revisionism. His purpose is nothing less than the attribution of the Nazis' crimes to the Palestinians.

The Palestinians bear no responsibility whatsoever for the Holocaust. It was the product of the contradictions of European capitalist society, under conditions of the explosion of the Second World War, spearheaded by German imperialism. The genocidal ferocity of the Nazis arose out of the interaction of two processes: the capitalist class's fears of the socialist workers movement, and the long and noxious legacy of European Jew-hatred, which evolved into political anti-Semitism.

The political purpose of Netanyahu's repugnant remarks is evident: it came just days after his government put Israel on a civil war footing, with the announcement of measures that put Israel's Palestinian citizens and residents under de facto military rule. If the

Palestinians are responsible for the Holocaust, as Netanyahu's base slander asserts, then "anything goes" in the existential struggle to defeat them.

Already, successive governments have maintained an eight-year-long blockade of Gaza, denying its residents the most basic necessities, including health care, fuel and construction materials, rendering it little more than an open-air prison, not unlike the Warsaw Ghetto. Last year, more than 2,000 Gazans were killed in "Operation Protective Edge," 11,000 wounded and 520,000 displaced by a bombing campaign that left the entire area in ruins. One can only imagine what nightmare Netanyahu intends to create next.

Netanyahu's views have a long history. He heads the Likud party, whose political antecedents are the Herut party and the ultra-right-wing Revisionist party, founded in Palestine in the 1920s by Vladimir Jabotinsky, who sought to emulate the fascist regimes of Germany, Italy and Poland. Netanyahu's father, a Revisionist activist, later became Jabotinsky's personal secretary.

As Lenni Brenner explains in great detail in *Zionism in the Age of Dictators*, the Revisionists did not lift a finger to oppose the persecution of the European Jews, but instead collaborated with the fascists in order to achieve the mass immigration to Palestine necessary to make the Zionist project viable.

The Revisionists engaged in terrorist activities, carried out by the Irgun and the Stern gang—their leaders Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir later became prime ministers—whose activities were sanctioned by the Labour Zionists. Begin led the infamous massacre at Deir Yassin, where all of the village's 254 inhabitants were killed, which played a major role in driving the Palestinians from their homes and lands as an essential prerequisite for the founding of the state of Israel.

While they were a politically discredited force in the early years of the Zionist state, the Revisionists, later to become Herut and ultimately Likud, joined Labour in a National Unity Government during the 1967 war. Since defeating Labour in the 1977 elections, their leaders have been in power (as either Likud or its offshoot Kadima) for 32 of the last 38 years.

Netanyahu is his father's son, sharing both the Revisionists' barely concealed admiration of Hitler and their plan to seize the whole of Palestine and expel or

exterminate its present inhabitants. During his nine years as prime minister, he has shifted Israeli politics ever further to the right, cultivating the ultra-nationalist settler movement and religious bigots, whose violent attacks on the Palestinians have largely gone unpunished.

That such a man and the forces he heads can become the leaders of Israel is a symptom of a sick society. It has been driven to the point of implosion by the abject failure of the Zionist perspective of establishing a homeland for the world's Jews, one where they would find freedom from the persecution and anti-Semitism they had suffered in Europe, through the expulsion and ongoing persecution of the Palestinians.

Rather than being synonymous with social justice and equality for all its citizens, Israel has become a by-word for ethnic cleansing, war and military occupation. It is a deeply fragmented society and one of the most socially polarised in the developed world. The murder of Palestinians and destruction of their property, the racist attacks on migrant workers and other violent acts by the extreme right-wing forces cultivated by the Zionist state testify to the reproduction within Israel of the same conditions of dictatorship, ghettos, pogroms and civil war from which an earlier generation of European Jews fled.

There is only one way out of the malignant contradictions of Israeli society. That is to unite Arab and Jewish workers in a common struggle against capitalism and for the building of a socialist society, which would tear down the artificial borders that divide the peoples and economies of the region. Only in this way can the region's workers free themselves from the wars and oppression that are fuelled by the profit drive of foreign capitalists and the native ruling classes.



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