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UK Labour coup plotters abuse the decency of holocaust survivors

Monday 13 August 2018, by [SEYMOUR Richard](#) (Date first published: 2 August 2018).

I knew I recognised the name when I saw the headlines.

Like many socialists, I knew of Hajo Meyer long before he was being disinterred and turned into a hideous scarecrow to frighten people with.

I had read his words long before I heard the weasel words about his words. It's horrifying to see him wielded, as a goose farmer wields a stick, by people who - in a sign of their bad conscience - can barely stand to mention his name.

The scolding, postmortem patronising tone adopted about Meyer strikes me as entirely inappropriate. The people talking about him like this, using him in this way, talking about him as if he was just some old crank, are worth considerably less than one of his fingernails.

I am appealing to the term 'kindness' here. One of the meanings of kindness is commonality. To be kind is to be like. To express kindness is to recognise that someone else's experience is a bit like your own.

I realise that there are harder political ways to put this point. But when Hajo Meyer, the physicist who survived Kristallnacht as a boy, and Auschwitz as a young man, became a pro-Palestine activist late in his life, he was doing something with kindness.

Meyer, like Marek Edelman, who survived the Warsaw Ghetto and fought in two separate uprisings, became a pro-Palestine activist late in life. He spent his last two decades alive campaigning to end the Israeli occupation, and the racist dehumanisation of Palestinians.

He connected his own experiences with those of the Palestinians. He said that the experiences of those who went through the Holocaust had been misappropriated to justify the ethnic cleansing and subsequent torments of the Palestinians. He saw parallels between fascist ideology and the racist ideology of the far right religious settlers. He said he was "pained by the parallels I observe between my experiences in Germany prior to 1939 and those suffered by Palestinians today."

It was in this spirit that, in 2011, Meyer was the main speaker in a tour entitled, "[Never Again for Anyone](#)", and in which he appeared as one of the speakers at a meeting about the Holocaust in the House of Commons in 2010. The spirit of universality, of a basic political kindness. Not just imaginative sympathy, you understand, but a recognition of commonality, of points of contact. For him, the Palestinians were not a threatening Other to be policed with merciless violence, but people suffering a recognisable form of injustice. Like Edelman, he saw their struggle as heroic.

The corollary, the painfully obvious corollary, was this: if the Palestinians were oppressed, this meant that Jews could be oppressors. He therefore sought to distinguish what he saw as the ethical

tradition of enlightened Reform Judaism, from the nationalist and colonial nineteenth century perspectives of Zionism. He was quite insistent that Zionism had “nothing” to do with Judaism in this sense. In August 2014, the month of his death, as Operation Protective Edge was destroying hospitals, homes and schools in Gaza, he said starkly that the people in charge of Israel were “Nazi criminals”.

The day after Meyer died, [a letter appeared in the New York Times](#). It was signed by forty Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, and 287 children and descendants of both survivors and victims. It condemned Israeli massacres in Gaza. It called for a boycott of Israel, and issued this warning: “Genocide begins with the silence of the world.” The principal signatory of the letter was Hajo Meyer.

Literally, *to the last day of his life*, he was making life harder for those who made life harder for the Palestinians. Not despite the fact that he had survived the camps while his parents were gassed, but because of it. I find that to be heartwrenchingly moving.

The better to attack the leadership of the Labour Party, Meyer is being tacitly, and in some cases not so tacitly, smeared as an antisemitic provocateur. Certainly, from many people, the kinds of things Meyer said wouldn’t be acceptable. I don’t think the Left should call Israel’s rulers “Nazi criminals,” for example. But someone who survived Nazi persecution has earned the right to draw connections between *their own experience* and those of Palestinians.

Yet it is implied, and sometimes overtly stated, that the man who survived Kristallnacht and Auschwitz, and whose parents were exterminated by the Third Reich, should not have been allowed to speak in Parliament, on Holocaust Memorial Day, about the Holocaust and its contemporary meaning. John Mann MP is on television saying that Holocaust Memorial Day is a day to talk about Bosnia and Darfur: but not Palestine, apparently.

In a meeting at which many speakers addressed such various subjects as slavery, the Native American genocide, the Bangladesh genocide, and the Roma genocide, only the Holocaust survivor was problematic. Because of his views on Israel. Because he loved Palestinians. Extraordinary.

The absolute cowardly baseness of our national culture right now, makes me utterly ashamed.

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