

## *Letters Page*

### **An open letter to Tony Benn – Let Tariq Aziz rot in hell!**

Editor's Note: We would like to bring the attention of readers to an Open Letter we have been sent by the Alliance for Workers Liberty, a British socialist organisation.

**Editors:** You have put your name ('Tony Benn, former British cabinet member') to a petition on behalf of Saddam Hussein's deputy Tariq Aziz. You have by now probably seen the newspaper reports that Tariq Aziz will give evidence against his old boss at Saddam Hussein's trial – evidence that, among other things, Saddam Hussein gave orders for mass murder.

Tariq Aziz had to be there, that is, complicit in Saddam Hussein's crimes against the peoples of Iraq, in order to be able to testify to such things. We will see what happens at the trial. But no-one has to wait for the trial to know who and what Tariq Aziz is. Yet you put your name to Galloway's petition.

You, Tony Benn, unlike your co-signatories such as George Galloway have in the last 25 years been a man of the serious, class struggle left. Not infrequently we have disagreed with you on important questions.

But, comrade Benn, you are seriously out of place amidst the other signatories on Galloway's petition on behalf of his friend Tariq Aziz. We say that not forgetting that on the eve of the US-British attack on Iraq you went to Baghdad and interviewed Saddam Hussein in such a soft and accommodating way that the result, broadcast on British TV, was a 'party political broadcast' for Saddam Hussein.

We could not help recalling a similar visit which the old left wing pacifist and one-time leader of the Labour Party, George Lansbury, made shortly before World War Two to Adolf Hitler. It was a hopeless and probably misguided mission in search of 'peace'. But Lansbury did not fawn on Hitler. He confronted him on such matters as his treatment of German Jews. You, alas did not so much as mention Saddam's treatment of, for example, Iraqi Kurds.

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We respected you as a fighter after 1979 against the Labour establishment. It is with that in mind that we address this open letter to you and call your attention to the vile company in which you find yourself as a result of signing this vile petition. We ask you to stand back and look, at the company you are keeping.

Tariq Aziz was part of the chain of command for the Anfal campaign (100,000 Kurds killed), had a nasty habit of personally shooting his political opponents, and was one of the few people in the Ba'ath regime that Saddam Hussein could always count on.

Tariq Aziz offered a two million dollar bribe to the UN Weapons Inspector Rolf Ekeus in exchange for a favourable inspection rating. He explained to another Weapons Inspector why Iraq had developed biological weapons – for use against ‘Persians, Jews and other insects.’

The campaign for the release of Tariq Aziz was launched by Gilles Munier (of the French-Iraqi Friendship Society) back in May 2003.

Of its signatories we will start with George Galloway. In an interview with Al-Jazeera in Qatar last March Galloway discusses the petition and described Tariq Aziz as someone

viewed with high esteem worldwide by figures like the Pope in the Vatican and other international figures ... an eminent diplomatic and intellectual person ... We have assembled former presidents, prime ministers and ministers, eminent parliamentarians from the UK, Italy, Spain and other personalities from all walks of life [for the campaign.]

A press release issued the same day put Galloway centre-stage:

George Galloway MP has launched this petition today for the release of Tariq Aziz and all political prisoners in Iraq. The petition will be widely circulated in order to have the greatest number of prestigious and influential signatories. By the end of this year, the petition will be sent to the United Nations, the British Government, and the American Congress.

Are you aware of the kind of things Galloway was saying on his speaking tour of the States last month?

He's reported as having described Israel as 'that little Hitler state on the Mediterranean.' He talked about a 'Neo-Con, Zionist, Christian-Fundamentalist axis' that drives US foreign policy.

Holocaust revisionist David Irving was so impressed by what Galloway had to say that he posted reports of his speeches and interviews under the heading 'George Galloway Does It Again – Blasts Israel' on his website.

Galloway even bought into the line that Iraq was attacked for Israel's benefit.

Israel works for America. Israel works for imperialism. It's not that there's a Zionist lobby acting as the tail that wags the dog. The dog always wags the tail. ... Israel is an indispensable, nuclear-armed, military super-power acting on behalf of imperialism in the Arab world ... Israel's overwhelming military superiority has to be maintained. And so one of the reasons for attacking Iraq was for Israel, but not because imperialism is working for Israel. It's the other way around.

Galloway called Tariq Aziz his 'dear, dear friend' at a mass rally in Baghdad in November 1999 (one of the many organised by the Iraqi security services when Galloway visited Iraq) and spent Christmas Day with him the same year – going to church with him, having dinner in his house, and according to Galloway himself, then partying away the night with him.

Of course Galloway is loyal to Tariq Aziz. He is a man of 'impeccable manners' and 'an owlish intellectualism' – as Galloway described him in his autobiography. Back in 2002 Galloway was proud to boast that he had danced with his friend Tariq on the 'crowded dance floor' of a North African nightclub. (So unless Tariq Aziz gets released soon... Well, for Galloway, it will be, you know how the song goes... 'lonely this Christmas, lonely and cold...')

THE 182 'renowned international figures' who have put their names to the petition which you, comrade Benn, have signed, have the character of 'birds of a feather' flocking together around this Tariq Aziz.

Not all 182 are exactly 'renowned international figures'. Like, for example, Michel Thibault (the French librarian). Or Yannick Sauveur (the French headmaster). Or Jean Beaudrillard (the retired French engineer). Or Beatriz Morales (the Spanish

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translator). Or Narmi Micheda (the Polish bio-chemist). Or Alain Basse (the British petroleum engineer). Or Susana Heikal (the Spanish language teacher). Or Manuela Rousset (the retired French social worker). Or Barbara Permuy and Paloma Velverdre (the Spanish civil servants).

But maybe these, and lots of the other 182 signatories, simply fall under the heading of ‘personalities from all walks of life’? Or maybe they’re just too modest to say who they really are?

That French headmaster, for example. Is that the same Yannick Sauveur who used to be a follower of Jean Thiriart, the Belgian who collaborated with the Nazis and then went on to become the chief ideologist of the neo-fascist ‘Young Europe’ organisation?

On the other hand, there are certainly quite a few names besides yours in that list that we do recognise.

There’s Gilles Munier, who launched the petition, a man who cut his political teeth as a writer for *The European Nation*, published by the ‘Young Europe’ organisation. Here’s an example of his journalistic talents: ‘The Zionists are past masters in the art of intoxicating the mind. For 20 years the ‘six million dead’ have served as an alibi for committing the worst atrocities in Israel.’ (And note the inverted commas around the phrase six million dead.)

In more recent times Gilles Munier found new fields in which to exercise his talents. He discovered the Iraqi Revolution! When a radio interviewer had the temerity to suggest to Munier that Saddam Hussein had established an inhuman dictatorship, the latter replied:

You cannot respond with our Western criteria. Iraq has never known democracy. ... You cannot judge in the same way a foreign people emerging from colonisation. The Ba’th regime of Saddam Hussein is revolutionary. That implies sacrifices. ... Saddam symbolises the Iraqi resistance. If the embargo had been lifted, democracy would have had a real chance in Iraq.

But at least Munier has never denied that the French-Iraqi Friendship Society which he set up received money from the Iraqi government: ‘He said he and his organisation introduced numerous businesses, oil and otherwise,

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to contacts in Iraq but that it was all perfectly legal. For each successful introduction he received a commission.

Not all your co-signatories are as frank on such matters.

Like your friend Galloway, Gilles Munier seems to be spending quite a bit of time in Syria nowadays. Galloway told the Syrians how lucky they are to be ruled by a Ba'athist dictator: 'I was very impressed by the President's sharpness, by his flexible mind. Syria is lucky to have Bashar al-Assad as her President.' You feel comfortable with that, Comrade Benn?

Mondher Sfar! Now there's a well-known name! The petition modestly describes him as a 'writer'? And what has he written?

Well, there's the 'Judeo-Nazi Manifesto of Ariel Sharon'. Have you read it? It's a latter-day version of the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion', a make-believe 'manifesto' of Ariel Sharon which 'exposes' the supposed Nazi nature of Zionist ideology. And then there's Sfar's contributions to the 'Review of Revisionist History', a Holocaust-denial publication launched by a French neo-fascist in 1990. Mondher Sfar is a Holocaust denier!

To borrow a phrase from Galloway, he's not the only one. There are other Holocaust deniers and revisionists who've put their name to that petition.

Jean-Claude Valla, for example, coyly is described by the petition as a 'journalist'. Sure enough, for the past thirty years he's been a journalist and editor – for various publications of the French far Right: *Lettre de Magazine-Hebdo*, *Elements* and *Minute*. He 'came out' as a Holocaust denier as long ago as 1991: 'Speaking personally, I became certain a long time ago that the historical revisionists were correct.'

Or take Claude Karnoouh ('researcher with the National Centre for Scientific Research'), as another example. He describes himself as 'a radical anti-Zionist'. He's written for publications of the French far Right, *Krisis* and *Elements*. Back in 1981, when Faurisson stood trial in Paris for Holocaust-denial, Karnoouh was a witness for the defence: 'In fact, I do not believe that the gas chambers existed. A certain number of the truths of official history have ended up being revised. Only in totalitarian states is a historical truth eternal.'

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But let's move on from the Holocaust deniers and revisionists to their defenders.

Remember Roger Garaudy? Used to be a French Stalinist. (He never called himself a Stalinist – that would have been making a rod for others to beat him with.) Then he threw a wobbly and became an anti-Zionist anti-imperialist. (That sounds a bit familiar, doesn't it?) And then he went the whole hog: he converted to Islam. He became a Holocaust denier.

Have you heard of his book, *The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics*? In writing it, he used material from Faurisson and from Kulaszka's *Did Six Million Really Die?* Luckily for Garaudy, when he was put on trial for Holocaust denial, the Iranian government was kind enough to pay most of his fine for him.

The good news is that Garaudy is not a signatory to the petition. The bad news is that Michel Lelong and Isabelle Coutant-Peyre are signatories.

When Garaudy stood trial, Lelong ('priest, France') was quick to rally to his defence: 'I confirm that it seems to me quite unjust to accuse him of anti-Semitism. [For God's sake – all Garaudy had done was to deny the Holocaust!] I request that he should participate in the necessary debate on the great spiritual and international questions of our times.' [Did the Holocaust take place? A great spiritual question of our time!]

And Garaudy isn't the only accused person who has benefited from the support of the Lelong 'priest, France'. When Maurice Papon stood trial in 1997 for complicity in crimes against humanity (collaborating with the Nazis to send Jews to the concentration camps), Lelong testified in court: 'The Church is right to forgive. It has the duty to call on French people to forgive each other and to conciliate with one another.'

He's a man of parts, Lelong. An admirer of Al Manar, the Hizbollah TV station. Likes Tariq Ramadan. Iranian TV puffed his last book launch: 'In the heart of Paris a small Gallic enclave resists the Zionist invasion.'

And then there's Isabelle Coutant-Peyre. She was Garaudy's solicitor. By all accounts, she defended him with a certain degree of, let's say, empathy. And she's defended other famous people as well. Like VI Ramirez Sanchez (aka Carlos the Jackal.) She certainly empathised with him: she ended up getting married to him!

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Of course, just because you choose to marry someone who believes that the Taliban are 'defending the world revolution', that Osama bin Laden is 'one of the Pure', and that the enemies of humanity are 'the Yankee monster and the Zionists,' doesn't necessarily mean you share his views.

But Missus Carlos the Jackal is a member of the editorial board of *A Contre-Nuit*. It's a magazine launched by her ex-client Garaudy. The magazine describes itself as 'a publication inspired by Roger Garaudy.' He's a regular contributor. Coutant-Peyre writes for it as well. Now, what kind of articles do you think are published in a magazine inspired by a Holocaust denier?

Read Coutant-Peyre's article *The Rape of Jerusalem*?

There's quite a lot of other French names on that petition who are, to use the most charitable term possible, 'dodgy.' Here's a few more examples of the petition's 'renowned international figures' and 'personalities from all walks of life':

Jean-Paul Cruse: One-time Maoist who ended up as a journalist and full-timer for the CGT trade union federation. Sacked after advocating an alliance between the French Communist Party and the fascist National Front. Here's a quote from another statement graced with his signature:

In Tel Aviv as in the corridors of the White House it is the racist and colonial far Right who are in power. ... Let us organise a mass movement of support for the Iraqi resistance in all its forms. Political, moral and material support for these fighters for freedom. ... Let us organise a siege, legal and peaceful, of the headquarters of the Party of War: the Israeli Embassy in Paris. ... The spokesmen and representatives of the Israeli fascist far Right must be harassed and besieged wherever they show themselves.

Charles Saint-Prot: Author of a grovelling oeuvre entitled *Saddam Hussein: An Arab de Gaulle?* (It's so grovelling that you can just imagine its author borrowing the words of your more eloquent friend Galloway, to salute Saddam's courage, strength and indefatigability.) He used to argue that Israel had been 'created by the USA to be the instrument of American imperialism in the Middle East.' But now he argues that 'the Zionist state manipulates the US more than the latter manipulates Israel.'

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Jean-Pierre Lussan: An everyday retired monarchist lawyer who used to be a member of the National Front but then split with Bruno Megret's National Republican Movement. Belongs to the latter's National Committee, as well as being one of its regional councillors. By coincidence, his wife used to run the 'SOS-Children Iraq' charity. (It was a bit like Galloway's Mariam Appeal.) She was named by 'Al-Mada' back in January of last year as a recipient of Iraqi oil revenues. Yes, Tony Benn another of your co-signatories on the petition.

Do you know who your co-signatory Alain de Benoist is? He's only the ideologist-in-chief of the French New Right! Used to be a member of various out-and-out fascist organisations. Then he opted for a more cerebral form of fascism and ended up as the intellectual guru of the French New Right.

He argues that 'right' and 'left' don't mean anything anymore. Instead, there is the 'centre' (the dominant ideology, neo-liberalism, US imperialism – call it what you will) and the 'periphery' (consisting of all political forces – whether of the traditional 'right' or the traditional 'left' – who are opposed to the centre.)

But de Benoist is not just a thinker. He's a bit of a doer as well. Ever heard of the 'Red-Brown Scandal' in France, Tony? It dates from the early 1990s, when leading members of the French Communist Party (PCF) invited de Benoist to speak at meetings they had organised, while PCF members spoke at New Right meetings. Publications run by PCF members carried articles by the New Right, and New Right publications carried articles by PCF members. That was when Jean-Paul Cruse wrote that article that cost him his job. Here's a quote from it:

An authoritarian politics of renewal for the country ... (is needed) to rally people of spirit against people of things, civilisation against merchandise – and the greatness of nations against the Balkanisation of the world ... under the order of Wall Street, international Zionism, the Frankfurt Stock Exchange, and the gnomes of Tokyo.

Can you think of any other, and more recent, red-brown scandals? Incidents (or campaigns, or petitions), when people who claim to be somewhere on the 'left' have jumped into bed with the far right?

There are a lot of non-French names on that petition as well. One name worth picking out is Elias Firzli: 'Local consultant, politician and political writer, France.'



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The petition forgets to mention that he's a Ba'ath Party member. And a very loyal one. 'Now in his sixties, Mr Firzli is known as a committed Baathist and a friend of Mr Aziz since the 1960s. At that time, Mr Aziz was in exile in Lebanon.' And Mr Firzli doesn't live in France anymore. He now resides in the Beka'a valley in his native Lebanon. That's probably because of the international warrant out for his arrest.

Mr Firzli left France 'precipitamment' in September of 2004, just when he was due to be questioned about kickbacks in the 'Oil for Food' scam. Turns out that he had eight million Swiss francs and four million US dollars in his Swiss bank account! He's accused of having received kickbacks (30 million French francs) from the Total oil company, and of having acted – at great profit – as a middleman between various French politicians and Baathist leaders such as... Tariq Aziz!

And then there are the names on the petition your friend George Galloway could tell you about. He probably knows a lot more about them than we do.

Fawaz Zureikat is the obvious example. Once shared a prison cell in Syria with Tariq Aziz. Had George Galloway as best man at his wedding. Donated a modest £350,000 to Galloway's 'Mariam Appeal'. And the happy bridegroom certainly seems to have fond memories of the charity (sorry: political campaign). He's signed the petition: 'Chairman of the Mariam Appeal, Jordan.'

Other names are Moustafa Bakri (editor of the Egyptian magazine 'Al Osboa', a publication renowned for its denunciations of homosexuality and human rights activists,) Maher Makhoul, Ahmed Ben Bella, Ashraf el-Bayoumi, Hans von Sponeck, and Hamdeen Sabahi

They were all at the first 'Cairo conference', back in December of 2002. Remember that? Paid for by Egyptian businessmen who were official trading partners with the Iraqi government. Attended by an official Iraqi government delegation. When a member of the delegation defended the Ba'ath regime's record on human rights, only one person is recorded as having walked out in protest. And it wasn't George Galloway, or his pal and yours, John Rees of the SWP. Or any of the signatories to the petition.

Of course, we don't want to give the impression that all the signatories to the petition are just a bunch of Jew-baiters and Jew-haters, cheer-leaders and apologists

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for Saddam Hussein or Bashar Assad, ideologists of the New Right and their collaborators, geriatric politicians, residents of the Beka'a valley, and miscellaneous nuts and non-entities.

There are a number of signatories to the petition who belong to the left. Or, more precisely, a certain strand on the 'left'. A kind of Stalinist or neo-Stalinist-fellow-travelling 'left'. Examples:

Georges Labica (French Communist Party (PCF)), Patricia Latour (PCF), Arnaud Spire (journalist for the PCF newspaper), Jean-Loup Izambert (journalist close to PCF), Paul Balta (journalist specialising in 'Third World' issues), Bruno Drweski (editorial board member of a PCF magazine), and Andrée Michel (PCF).

A petition calling for freedom for Saddam Hussein's right-hand man. Signed by professional anti-Zionists, Holocaust deniers, and representatives of the French New Right – and some people who think they represent the left. That's what Galloway is sending later this year to 'the UN, the British Government, and the American Congress.'

But doesn't that petition sum up the rot of a whole layer of what now passes for 'the left'? A layer that no longer bases itself on class politics (insofar as it ever did). A layer so warped by 'anti-imperialism' and 'anti-Zionism' that it ends up fellow-travelling with fascism and the far right.

Have you ever seen a copy of the French magazine *La Cause des Peuples*? It carries the well-used picture of Che Guevara's head on its front page. Its slogan is 'For an intercontinental united front against imperialism and exploitation.' It carries headlines like '50 Years of the Cuban Revolution – Cuba, Yes! Yankees No!', 'Palestine! Iraq! The Resistance Continues!', 'Baghdad in Flames Under the Terrorist Bombs – New Yankee War Crimes!'

It's a French neo-fascist magazine. But such is the state of whole layers of 'the left' that its headlines and slogans would scarcely be out of place in their publications.

You say you want to rebuild the left? By your association with Galloway and this petition you are helping to asphyxiate it in a swamp fake 'anti-imperialism', and tawdry demagogy.

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As far as honest socialists and anti-imperialists are concerned, the best we wish for Tariq Aziz – and his friends – is that they should rot in hell.

Sober up, comrade Benn!

Yours, Alliance for Workers Liberty