

## No Collusion, No Obstruction: The Libcom Report

The "libertarian communist" website [libcom.org](http://libcom.org) recently affixed a note to the infamous article "[Auschwitz or the Great Alibi](#)": First in the form of an anonymous preface, then once the author of this preface, "Mike Harman", was revealed to be the brains behind the operation in the comment section, he added some impotent invective. We take this opportunity to respond with some comments ourselves.

Harman's preface begins:

*"The article became notorious as the 'founding wing of left negationism' after press coverage in France in the 1990s. While we do not consider the piece to be Holocaust denial, it does make numerous arguments which approach revisionism, many of which are not properly dealt with in Axelrad's 1996 response."*

J'accuse! It is not the first time a press campaign has misled the public and pronounced a guilty verdict on an innocent man. Martin Axelrad (Le Prolétaire) responds to this libel thus: *"At first we think that our accusers have not read this article, which talks about the extermination of Jews, death camps, crematoria and Nazi barbarity in general, as a proven fact of blatant evidence."*<sup>1</sup>

Harman later edited this paragraph to add sources to substantiate his claims. It is clear that research into the question was ongoing: Second or third hand information will work as well as any.

Harman cites a book by Pierre Vidal-Naquet<sup>2</sup>, which he likely found by reading Axelrad's reply to it and looking for the opposing side. In the book, Vidal-Naquet makes no claims against the historical details of the article - he merely thinks the explanation is "absurd" - not that it "approaches revisionism". Vidal-Naquet wrote: *"Was it the manifestly absurd nature of that explanation that led La Vieille Taupe to an inverse explanation, one denying the genocide? I do not know, but if mutation there was, it was a rather sudden one, for Pierre Guillaume informs us that as of 1970, 'La Vieille Taupe supported in essence the theses of Paul Rassinier.'" The transformation of the explanation given by Axelrad into a revisionist explanation is an "inversion", which Vidal-Naquet suggests may be because of the "absurd" nature of the explanation. In assuming that Axelrad's article naturally leads to revisionism, Harman is in agreement with the revisionists, while we with Vidal-Naquet stand on the side of the anti-revisionists. Vidal-Naquet begins his "Theses on Revisionism" with the following: "I shall call 'revisionism' the doctrine according to which the genocide practiced by Nazi Germany against Jews and Gypsies did not exist but is to be regarded as a myth, a fable, or a hoax." Nowhere does he suggest that anything like the material in the "Great Alibi" fits into these criteria, or "approaches" them.*

Harman claims *"The industrialisation of the gas chambers is attributed to pressure on the Nazis due to the war against the allies, rather than intrinsic to the holocaust more generally."*

In this lazily vague statement, the tautological nature of his desultory counterproposal is apparently lost on the author: The Holocaust would thereby be explained through itself, presumably through a drive; a

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<sup>1</sup> [Le Prolétaire – Auschwitz or the Great Alibi: What we deny and what we affirm](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Pierre Vidal-Naquet - A Paper Eichmann: Anatomy of a Lie](#)

built-in slippery slope. Moreover, the words "industrialisation", "gas chambers", and "holocaust" do not appear in the article. The word "pressure" appears in an entirely different context. But perhaps Harman thinks that the article "approaches" these words, though not saying it directly. This makes it clear that the term "approaches" is Harman's way of associating the text with ideas that are not contained in it, of slandering the author. Here directly, there indirectly through alleged - contrived - association.

Axelrad could only work with what information he had at the time - 1960 - one year before Raul Hilberg's seminal "The Destruction of the European Jews".<sup>3</sup> Note that this was before the term "Holocaust" was popularised, and both Axelrad and Hilberg refer instead to "destruction". Axelrad gave the figure of 6 million Jews destroyed, Hilberg gives 5.1 million. Harman claims the article makes "*numerous arguments which approach revisionism*": He doesn't state what the specific facts and details of the Holocaust were being revised, or "approached" revision - whatever that means. It would have only been possible for someone writing in 1960 to revise the history as it was understood in 1960, not the account we have today - just like no one can revise the history of the current destruction in Yemen before the facts come out and it is written: History is itself historically produced. Nevertheless, we hold that there is nothing in this article that conflicts with the empirical account of the destruction of the Jews known today and commonly understood by everyone who has received a basic education (we assume Harman skipped that class).

Harman doesn't seem to be aware of the follow-up article in Le Prolétaire "Infantile Anti-Anti-Fascism" written against La Guerre Sociale (the publication of Pierre Guillaume, owner of La Vieille Taupe [The Old Mole] - or as Harman calls it: "*La Ville Taupe*" [The Mole City]), in which the author writes:

*"Unfortunately, they [La Guerre Sociale] pose the problem backwards: instead of denouncing the real content of democracy and awakening the workers' revolt against all forms of capitalist domination, they apply themselves to the idea that fascism is no worse than democracy, which ultimately trivialises all bourgeois exploitation and oppression. Instead of accusing democracy, they almost excuse fascism, and blame democrats for inventing the crimes of the open dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.*

[...]

*The proletariat does not deny the reality of torture, massacres and exterminations, even if it is not alone in suffering them. It does not deny the countless horrors perpetrated by the bourgeoisie, but it shows their real cause. Which – careful! does not mean that it absolves the executing agents. These horrors do not leave it indifferent, they arouse its hatred and its will to fight them. But it can only really fight them by placing itself on its class field, with its class perspective and its class weapons, and not by allying itself with forces that actually aim to paralyse it and subjugate it to the bourgeois order.*

*It is in this spirit that we analysed the extermination of the Jews during the second imperialist war, in a 1960 article republished in a brochure with a presentation in 1978. We refer the reader to this brochure entitled 'Auschwitz or the Great Alibi'.*

*As for the people of La Guerre Sociale whom infantilism has led to whitewash an imperialism instead of*

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<sup>3</sup> [Raul Hilberg – The Destruction of the European Jews](#)

*denouncing them all, let them escape as they can from this war!"*<sup>4</sup>

This is not "approach" but **reproach**. It is not exactly the relation one would expect between the author of the "Great Alibi" and the "left wing negationists" after reading Harman's introduction.

Guillaume responded to this critique in a supplement to issue 3 of *La Guerre Sociale* by calling *Le Prolétaire* "too materialistic" before reasserting his defense of negationism and his fixation on the gas chambers and "concentration camp life". (Guillaume thought that the rule of capital is itself a kind of concentration camp and that capitalism is "the universal concentration camp", life in capitalism is "concentration camp life" and so on.)

The "libcom editor" claims that the Belgian-Jewish Trotskyist Abraham Léon debunked the claim that "As a result of their previous history, the Jews find themselves today mainly in the middle and petite-bourgeoisie." It is of note that the group *Mouvement Communiste* (M.C.) once suspected that the author of the "Great Alibi" based himself on the very text by Léon that Harman invokes to refute him – for the pamphlet, known for its theory of Jews as a "people-class", claims that "the Jewish petty bourgeoisie [...] still forms the core of Judaism".<sup>5</sup> *Le Prolétaire* replied: "Contrary to what M.C. write, we did not base ourselves on the work of the Trotskyist A. Léon, 'The Jewish Question – A Marxist Interpretation' (Ed. EDI) – a very interesting book – but on Engels as can be seen from the references we make in the text. But Engels is too big a piece and M.C. find it more prudent to attack Léon..."<sup>6</sup> Since Harman also neglects to challenge Engels, we must deal with this supposed disprover of Axelrad.

Harman claims: "Leon points out that in some areas (like rural Poland) Jews might make up a high percentage of shopkeepers (for example), but this by no means meant that the majority of Jews were shopkeepers." Harman points to the Jews in Eastern Europe to prove that most Jews were not petty bourgeois, but Axelrad wasn't talking about the statistics of every Jew in every country, he was specifically talking about the Jews in Weimar Germany... It is like responding to the complaints of the weather in England by saying: "In most places it's not raining!". Furthermore, in referencing Léon, Harman shifts the goal posts from the petty bourgeoisie in general to shopkeepers, without noting that the former is composed of much more than the latter. And to add insult to injury, Léon does not make the point that it doesn't mean that the majority of Jews were shopkeepers. In fact, he seems to identify the fate of Polish Jewry at that period with these Jewish shopkeepers (and, we would like Harman to note, artisans), so when the shopkeepers were ruined, Polish Jewry was ruined. If the majority of the middle class was Jewish but the majority of Jews were not middle class, that means either a tiny middle class, barely worthy of the name "middle class", or a massive population of Jews probably outnumbering the other populations. But why shift the subject to pre-war Poland in the first place? That clearly isn't what the "Great Alibi" is addressing.

Harman makes the same bait and switch in a recent blogpost<sup>7</sup>:

*"Bebel himself identified anti-Semitism in the late 19th Century in Germany as springing primarily from*

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<sup>4</sup> [Le Prolétaire – Infantile Anti-Anti-Fascism](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Abraham Léon - The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Le Prolétaire – Again on "Auschwitz or the Great Alibi": anti-Marxist "Mouvement Communiste"](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Mike Harman - Does anti-capitalism mask anti-Semitism?](#)

*petit-bourgeois shopkeepers and smallholders, who would face Jews in business competition either as competitors, or as owners of their mortgages. In some areas of Germany such as lower Saxony, these social positions were disproportionately held by Jews. That some of these social roles were disproportionately held by Jews does not mean that most Jews held them, however - as the tens of thousands in the Jewish Labour Bund demonstrate."*

The shift from German Jews to Eastern Jews (i.e. the Bund) is hard to miss. Put your broly away, the sun is shining in Ukraine! Harman seems to think that August Bebel is a fine source to substantiate his claim, but when Axelrad gets **the exact same thing** from Engels, it doesn't count and instead "*mirrors far right rhetoric around 'Jewish capitalism'*". Harman seems to think that the concentration of the Jews in the German middle-class in the early twentieth century (1890's-1933) reflects badly on the Jews and "*reinforces*" antisemitic theories. He does not seem to know that the fact that the majority of the Jews were middle class at this time is common knowledge and generally understood as reflecting positively on the Jews for having integrated into German society. Léon argues that in Western Europe this was a sign of assimilation and therefore of overcoming the Jewish question, but this was checked by the migration of poor Jews from Eastern Europe, which was for Léon the main cause of antisemitism in Germany. The father of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, whose early insights into the reasons for antisemitism we already mentioned in another letter responding to slander against the "Great Alibi"<sup>8</sup>, wrote in his pamphlet "The Jewish State": "*For we had, curiously enough, developed while in the Ghetto into a bourgeois people, and we stepped out of it only to enter into fierce competition with the middle classes. Hence, our emancipation set us suddenly within this middle-class circle, where we have a double pressure to sustain, from within and from without.*"<sup>9</sup> Herzl was not a communist nor an antisemite, but like Axelrad he sought to explain antisemitism from the economic facts. Harman on the other hand doesn't proceed from facts to arrive at politics but starts from a political position which then is to be used to deduce the facts. Jews being found in the petty bourgeoisie is troublesome for him because he implicitly agrees with the "*far right*" in that this mere statement warrants a syllogism that inexorably leads to the conclusion of "*Jewish capitalism*". The judgement that "reality has a right-wing bias" would then be a necessary one. He doesn't attack the syllogism for being wrong but would rather construct castles in the sky in which the premises differ.

Harman goes on: "*Leon pointed out that big business had taken the rudimentary anti-Semitism of the petit-bourgeois, and created the figure of 'Jewish capitalism' - channeling discontent in both the petty bourgeois and a section of the working class against 'speculative' capital to distract from their own monopoly capitalism.*"

So how does the "Great Alibi" channel the object of antisemitism against "*speculative*" capital by claiming that "*As a result of their previous history, the Jews find themselves today mainly in the middle and petite-bourgeoisie.*"? Harman doesn't tell us. The "Great Alibi" narrates the story of the European Jews, starting with the German Jews, as the victims of capitalist destruction. Axelrad wanted to explain why the destruction concentrated on the Jews by looking "*at the place of Jews in society*" rather than "*occupying ourselves with the nature of Jews or anti-Semites*". If the Jews were not mainly middle-class

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<sup>8</sup> [Libri Incogniti - An Open Letter to the Marxists Internet Archive](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Theodor Herzl – The Jewish State](#)

then his analysis would have to be altered to reflect that, but Harman has no problem with the analysis, only with this premise that the analysis is based on. Supposing that the claim is wrong, is it because Axelrad is mirroring the far right unconsciously, or that he is simply misinformed about the demographic statistics? In his blog post Harman notes an instance of antisemitic graffiti reading "*The 1% is 99% Jewish*". If a non-antisemite believes this is the case through being misinformed (perhaps they have been reading some "fake news") and reports this misinformation to others, then this would indeed be a case of mirroring antisemitic rhetoric. Supposing that the claim "*The 1% is 99% Jewish*" is true (which it isn't) and the information is being used to explain antisemitism based on the place of Jews in society then it would not be antisemitic to say so. It depends on what the facts are. So we ought to look at the demographic statistics of Weimar Germany to figure out whether Axelrad was mirroring "*far right rhetoric*" or simply stating the facts.

Harman, probably intimately familiar with academic customs, holds a party text to the same standard when he whines about Axelrad "[dropping] *an unsubstantiated claim*".<sup>10</sup> Not wanting to open ourselves up to the same stupid accusation, we here would like to formally announce that we made use of a frequently cited standard work by the economist Esra Bennathan to peruse the issue in a not-so-short digression, which meticulously describes the socioeconomic situation of the German Jews before the Second World War.<sup>11</sup> The text is entitled "Die demographische und wirtschaftliche Struktur der Juden" [The Demographic and Economic Structure of the Jews] and was released five years after Axelrad's article.<sup>12</sup> Bennathan works off the official statistics of the German Reich, based on censuses. This data employs the category "*Glaubensjuden*" [faith Jews], meaning Jews that were members of organised and juridically acknowledged Jewish communities. The census of June 1933 counts about half a million of such, making up about 0.8% of the German population at the time. This number constitutes a decline of 60,000 Jewish people since 1925, which is mainly due to a low birth rate. Were it not for the counteracting immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe already noted by Léon, the decrease would have been even more pronounced. Bennathan deems noteworthy that this still means that Germany was

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<sup>10</sup> The topic already being "*unsubstantiated [claims]*", we would like to point out in passing that Libcom's introductory paragraph to Axelrad's text contains the assertion that the author's parents "*died at Treblinka*". This seems to contradict the obituary for him written by the ICP which we translated, and which reads:

*"As a child of a Jewish Austrian family, Martin had to leave his native country to take refuge in France at a time when German troops were making the Anschluss in Austria, the unification imposed by the Nazis with Germany. Luckily his family settled in Grenoble which, after the French defeat during the war under Italian occupation, experienced little anti-Jewish measures, Italian fascism, unlike German Nazism, having resorted to anti-Semitism only in a relatively marginal way."* ([Le Prolétaire - Martin Axelrad](#))

We could not find a source other than Libcom for this information, and hence would like to recommend to Harman to in the future employ his zeal productively by tracing back actual misinformation. Meanwhile, a sample of Harman's own scholarly practices can be found in the comment section to an interview by J. Sakai (author of the asinine "Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat"), which Libcom incidentally hosts with a comparatively tame preface of two sentences. Harman:

*"Well that was partly because I started looking for sources, and only looked at the book online halfway after questioning his claim about Flint with someone on twitter (when they pointed me to the full chapter). If I'd looked at the book first I might have had to do a bit less work."* ([When race burns class: settlers revisited. An interview with J. Sakai](#))

<sup>11</sup> Information on the background of Esra Bennathan can be found here: <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/washingtonpost/obituary.aspx?n=esra-bennathan&pid=179647384>.

<sup>12</sup> Esra Bennathan - Die demographische und wirtschaftliche Struktur der Juden, in: Werner E. Mosse, Arnold Paucker - Entscheidungsjahr 1932. Zur Judenfrage in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik, 1965.

home to by far the most Jews of all highly industrialised countries, particularly during the "critical process of industrialisation", only being surpassed in the latter metric by the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. He continues: "The most outstanding quantitative feature of the social structure of German Jews is their concentration – geographically, industrially, occupationally and in their socioeconomic status". The concentration according to industry pertained to trade, especially retail and wholesale trade of consumption goods, commercial and financial mediating jobs, as well as liberal professions. The statistics show a comparatively low share of Jews among wage earners, as well as an above average share among self-employed people. According to the data available to Bennathan, commerce employed the lion's share of all economically active Jews, half of which were employed in commodity and product trade. 50% of all economically active Jews were self-employed, that is, independent of wage or salary. 37% of those were self-employed in commerce. Jews were mainly merchants, more small merchants than big ones, and are characterised by Bennathan as having had a strong tradition of independence from larger organisations. Not many Jews were active in pure agriculture, but merchants and tradesmen in towns often owned a piece of land and cultivated it as a side line. The work provides charts with more detailed data, which we reproduce here for the sake of completeness:

	Self-employed as % of all economically active people				
	% of all economically active Jews	% of all economically active people	Share of Jews in this economic sector in %	Jews	Total population
<b>Agriculture and forestry</b>	1.73	28.93	0.045		
<b>Industry and crafts</b>	23.14	40.41	0.43	34.71	11.62
<b>Trade and commerce</b>	61.26	18.37	2.48	51.56	21.27
<b>Civil service and private services</b>	12.46	8.36	1.11	48.33	12.89

**Chart 1:** Occupational structure of economically active Jews in Germany in June 1933



Profession	Of 100 economically active people, # were Jews
Proprietor and tenant - not specified	5.1
Commercial professions	2.9
Garment industry	0.8
Medicine and hygiene	6.8
Legal profession	7.2
Other academic professions	0.8
Cultural and artistic professions	2.5
<b>Total economically active people</b>	<b>0.74</b>

Chart 2: Economically active German Jews according to their main professions in June 1933

	All economically active people in Germany %	Economically active Jews %
Self-employed	16.4	46
Accessory family members	16.4	9.6
Civil servants and soldiers	4.6	1
Clerks	12.5	33.5
Workers	46.3	8.7
Domestic servants	3.8	1.2

Chart 3: Social situation of economically active Jews in profession, June 1933

German Jews in 1933 were self-employed or clerks within commercial administration. Those that were self-employed were also merchants according to education and occupation. In every industry, Jews were found in the offices or in sales, as salesmen, business travellers or commercial directors. Tailors, butchers, as well as the legal and medical professions were the only significant exceptions from this. Of 240.000 economically active Jews in 1933, 200.000 belonged to what Bennathan calls "*the more important Jewish professions*", three quarters of which were proprietors or active in commerce. In these industries, Jews represented 3.9% compared to the mere 0.77% of all economically active people.

The work mentions banking as "*one of the most known and traditional spheres of Jewish occupation and predomination*". In the German economy and thus also in banking, Jews would have had a numerically predominant position in the small and mid-sized enterprises. The structure of German banking had changed: large and versatile joint-stock banks, standing in close relationship to industry, seized a larger share of the generally growing banking business. The tendency to industrial mergers, in the form of fusion and cartel forming, is mentioned by Bennathan as having found its parallel in the banking sector, where the merger of firms and the takeover of smaller firms through larger ones would have proceeded before and after the World War. In this development, the close relation of industrial and banking magnates, who became increasingly exchangeable, would have gained a high importance for the leadership of German industry. Bennathan:

*"When reading the German economic history and economic biography, the presumption imposes itself that a bureaucratisation took place that had a particular importance for Jews. Behaviour, milieu and essence of the authoritative personalities of German industry, business and finance seemed to have assumed a lot of the behaviour of the leading strata of the state bureaucracy. The tendency to corporates (big organisation) increased the influence of these elites of directors and owners in economy, politics and society even more considerably. They formed an oligarchy, which developed social behavioural forms of aristocratic exclusivity and with that reminded of the traditional German leadership strata of clerks and officers to which Jews only belonged in exceptional cases. The access to leadership positions in industry and commerce was thus impaired for Jews."*

He adds that this impaired access was exasperated by a headcount reduction in the lower positions of the banking sector, which left even less Jews in leadership positions. The economic crisis would have initially increased the absolute number of self-employed people, because some of the newly unemployed people tried to improve their lot by becoming active in sales or in the crafts. The Jews, which were already active in these industries, Bennathan finds, were hated by their new competitors. Business owners and craftsmen that tried to extend their activity on the field of sales found themselves in competition with department stores and store businesses, the former mostly in the hands of Jews, the latter to a significant degree. In the economic crisis this conflict became more pronounced, because the middle classes were very conscious about the dangers threatening them. The so-called "middle class problem" for a long time formed a topic of political discussion and the object of economic and social protective legislation. The attempt to support, organise and protect the crafts against the competition of new forms of industrial production, was a main plank of this middle-class policy. The tax on department stores and store businesses was a tool of this policy for the protection of the small shopkeeper. The success of this policy was little, but it artificially propped up the number of small, independent people, craftsmen and shopkeepers. The self-employed Jews didn't take part in the development to big business, and at large didn't take part in the development towards making a career within those. Bennathan calls the Jews "*competitors of those members of the middle classes in a double sense*". First because they to a certain degree would have belonged to the same class as small, independent business people, shopkeepers, commercial agents, commercial travellers and craftsmen. They would have flowed into the liberal professions, mainly medicine and law, which suffered from overcrowding. They would have competed in many points with the unhappy masses of economically independents. Furthermore, the author notes Jews having been in a competitive struggle with some members of the middle classes solely because they had a leading role in the technical and organisational innovations that threatened to economically replace the middle classes occupied with the production and sale of consumption goods. Two fifths of German craftsmen were occupied in industries like textile, which were very overcrowded with small businesses. Esra Bennathan reasons:

*"The drive towards independent economic positions may have decreased the adaptability of Jews to changing forms of economic life in industrial Germany. Their professional distribution brought them into conflict with politically important groups of the population. In some of their main economic occupations, on the field of commerce as such, as well as on the field of commodity trade, banking, legal and medical professions they came under a significant pressure of competition, because the general German occupational structure moved towards these directions. On the one hand there was an influx into the*



*professions previously preferred by Jews, which were now overcrowded, whereas on the other hand technical innovations and general changes in the economic organisation of various industries exerted pressure on the mainly small and mid-sized Jewish companies."*

Even though Bennathan explains that Jews also took part in new emerging industries, he comments: *"It seems like that the foundation of Jewish economic activity put economically active Jews increasingly into growing situations of conflict and increased competitive struggle."* The work identifies areas of friction between great parts of the Jewish economy in Germany and important professions of the German middle classes. It mentions that an analysis of the professional affiliation of the male members of the NSDAP in 1933 showed that the *"independents"* (including independent merchants, craftsmen and members of liberal professions) compared to the occupational structure of the total population formed the far largest group within the party. Bennathan goes as far as to say that the Nazis were conscious of which forces gathered for their support: The *"solution of the Jewish question"* for them would have been one of the few possibilities for the fulfilment of their promises and for the fulfilment of the expectations of these strata. The first measure for the *"Aryanisation"* of Jewish businesses concerned retail businesses and the crafts, which had brought Jews in immediate contact with the population at large. Bennathan mentions that this first phase of *"Aryanisation"* would have served less to bring Jewish business in Aryan hands than to improve the position of non-Jewish merchants and craftsmen, and to increase their sales, by freeing them from competition and decreasing the absolute number of businesses in these overcrowded sectors. His assessment is that the economic functions of this main mass of Jews were not crucial for the German economy and that they were easily replaceable – even going as far as to say that when the Jews were pushed out of the economic life, they didn't leave a noticeable gap.

Obviously, the objection could be made that the boundary of *"Glaubensjuden"* that underlies all these statistics excludes non-religious Jews, equal in number, which could change the picture. Albeit the initial loss of religious belief already generally indicates bourgeoisification, this deficiency is completely amended by complementary works, such as that of Donald L. Niewyk, who notes that the *"overwhelming majority of German Jews was engaged in bourgeois occupations"*<sup>13</sup>, regardless of them being religious or not.

Having at last substantiated a commonly known fact, we come now to Harman's invocation of anti-fascism, possibly the real *raison d'être* of his polemic (or possibly just another turn in his twisted mind). He writes:

*"We would also strongly disagree with Axelrad's definition of anti-fascism as purely a defence of 'liberal democracy', since this completely ignores working class self-defence against the far right, from the 1920s Arditi Del Popolo, to Cable Street, to the Spanish Civil War, (not to mention post-war developments like the 43 Group and the Asian Youth Movements)."*

Again, the phrase *"liberal democracy"* is absent in the text. The text doesn't talk about these other scuffles with the classic *"far right"* bogeyman because it isn't about that, Harman can write that article himself if he is so *"strongly"* defensive about it.

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<sup>13</sup> Donald L. Niewyk - The Economic and Cultural Rôle of the Jews in the Weimar Republic, in: The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book, Volume 16, Issue 1, January 1971, p. 163.

Harman's speciality is the creation of strawmen, something he does on many occasions. We need not repeat old arguments. Harman must have read them at some point, but he insists with this. We merely point out that it is simply the case that Axelrad, or the ICP, thought that all anti-fascism meant a defence of liberal democracy: *"We affirm that a genuine struggle against fascism requires that we place ourselves on the ground of a genuine struggle against capitalism. We affirm that even anti-fascist propaganda can only be done on the basis of serious anti-capitalist propaganda."*

And it seems strange for Harman to bring up such examples as the Arditi del Popolo, Cable Street and especially the Spanish Civil War. The latter two we don't have to go into: Cable Street wasn't a march on Rome, and the Spanish Civil War is the most well-known example of anti-fascism being used as a cudgel against the working class. But in the case of the Arditi del Popolo (AdP), perhaps a little more can be said. In this instance, Harman and others rely upon a paucity of information, poorly sourced quotes and word of mouth facts, and in between the giant gaps they create their own mythical organisation, one that could stand up to Mussolini. Harman and the rest obviously don't care about real history because they are arguing from a prearrived position. At first sight it might seem strange for anarchists to walk hand in hand with Trotskyites, Stalinists and Republicans (if one forgets Spain for a moment), united in a front against the communist left. The main source among the few that are in English is from a now dead SWP member Tom Behan and his "The Resistible [sic!] Rise of Benito Mussolini", a pathetically transparent hatchet piece which has the sole purpose of trying to discredit the ICP by promoting the AdP. It mentions how the AdP had an *"initially ambiguous nature"*, came as a split from the nationalist and fascist Arditi (but was somehow also spontaneous), how leading members were nationalists, friends with Gabriele D'Annunzio, that Ambrosini joined the fascists after all was said and done, and it does this *in passing*. It never goes into detail what is meant by this, instead preferring to focus on one leading member in particular, Agro Secondari, an anarchist. The time frame for all of this? A year. And of Secondari? Secondari was *only a leading member for a month*.

Secondari did not want political factions within the AdP. Quite how a communist party is supposed to function in such a situation is unclear, especially as it goes against the rules of the recently established Third International. Harman, though, as an anarchist has no issue with dissolving the communist party presumably. Behan writes that *"one of the main points made in a motion presented by Secondari was that he did not want political factions with the organisation... the reason why this motion was the central item for discussion was because many individuals, particularly Communists, were torn between their desire to be part of the AdP but at the same time felt an allegiance to the party. The tragedy is that such a difficulty could have been easily resolved if the party hadn't had such a rigid sense of discipline (!!!)"*.

In his conclusion Behan writes that *"we will never know whether [...] the AdP [...] could have stopped fascism"* then makes the contradictory statement a few paragraphs later *"yet the activities of the AdP, in embryo, were the only strategy capable of stopping Mussolini"*. What were these activities? Throughout it is mentioned how they had aims and goals, but the only clear goal was that they were *anti-fascist*. They existed only to oppose fascist violence. They had no goals beyond this, and in fact, their stated goal was a return to the status quo ante. Anti-fascism for them was not anti-capitalism. And nor is it anti-capitalism for Behan who concludes *"even if the AdP had managed to defeat fascism, in the long term the working class would still have needed to be mobilised to fight the system – capitalism – which generates fascism"*. One wonders what Behan means when he suggests this. There is no real clarification

when he quotes approvingly an author saying: *“There was one single objective – to defeat fascism”*.

If we are to talk about actual history then we can question if they were able to pose a real threat to the state, in military terms. Numbers are often inflated for the AdP, but we will accept numbers provided by Behan at being 20,000 with 144 chapters. 20,000, spread throughout the country, spread out into 144 chapters. Not 20,000 in a single battalion, but small groups ranging from several hundred to a handful against a state which can concentrate the full brunt of its power to single locations, a strategy doomed to failure. *But Behan knows this*. He quotes an anarchist, amusingly named, Armando Borghi, as saying *“Each time the fascists concentrated their forces in just a few places. Once they had destroyed one area, they went on to another. They isolated the areas they were most afraid of from the rest of the country, and sorted the out at the end”*. To us, this is incredulous. Behan, and his fellow travellers, Republicans, Anarchists and Stalinists, seemingly have a tick that makes them want to repeat past failures over and over again.

Quite what is imagined is unknown. Possibly 300 arditi against 20,000 fascist squadristi at some proletarian Thermopylae? We’re left with a situation where we are supposed to believe that the PCd’I was supposed to just dissolve into the AdP as individuals, ignore or dismantle or hand over their own caches of weapons and armed units, to raise an army to fight the capitalist state, with the goal of... defeating fascism (and maybe at a later date, capitalism). Look, we’re not against people defending themselves against fascist thugs, but when you’re trying to equate this situation with the Spanish Republic fighting a civil war, then that’s going to raise an eyebrow.

When asked about this situation, Bordiga in an interview hosted on Libcom replied *“I can state that our response to the issue of the Arditi del Popolo was perfectly consistent with the historical line we always followed. Not only there aren’t any mistakes for us to admit to, but – in the very same tradition – we always rejected any sort of participation in the National Liberation Committees, as well as Italian partisan insurrections and the various ‘popular fronts’ of infamous memory, which have more recently had detrimental effects also in France, Spain and other countries”*<sup>14</sup>. After reading over all of the documents we can find of the subject, investigating existing and non-existent sources and citations, stripping articles and books of their ideological baggage, we can only agree with him.

We spent time on the Arditi because of what appears to be the real reason for Harman’s reaction to the Great Alibi: He is upset over the description that anti-fascism is the worst product of fascism with regard to the communist movement. Anti-fascism, which abuses the horrors of the Holocaust to get the proletariat to work in service for other classes of civil society for the preservation of that very society. Harman, who we already noted as being familiar only with the construction of strawmen, built his house out of straw, which we hope that our faithful readers will notice we have blown over. Without a real methodical investigation into the situation of the Jews in Europe and Germany, one is unable to understand antisemitism and the Nazis. His segue into anti-fascism proper is just as solid. By ignoring glaring contradictions, historical facts and logic, by not bothering to follow up sources, he arrives at his already chosen position.

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<sup>14</sup> See: <https://libcom.org/library/against-anti-fascism-amadeo-bordiga-s-last-interview>