From Hannah Einhaus

The life of Ahmed Huber, who brought pro-Palestine activism to Switzerland.

“Genocide”, “ethnic cleansing”, “expulsion”: these accusations against Israel, combined with boycott measures, are all mentioned in the SP resolution passed in Sursee on October 25. It is not surprising that the Social Democrats are so clearly opposed to Israel. The Swiss left has a long tradition of solidarity with Palestine, sometimes with questionable content.

An early pioneer in the SP was the Bernese journalist Ahmed Huber in the 1960s. After meeting the former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Hitler friend Mohammed Amin al-Husseini in Beirut, he imported his ideology of annihilation directly into Switzerland.

With the ex-Nazi in Cairo

Albert Friedrich Armand Huber, his real name, was married to an Egyptian woman and converted to Islam with the Muslim Brotherhood in Geneva in 1962. He deepened his faith in Cairo. The journalist and politician, who henceforth called himself Ahmed Abdallah Ramadan al-Swissri, had previously come into contact with Islam as an SP supporter of the Algerian War of Independence.

During longer stays in Cairo, he became friends with the former Nazi propagandist Johann von Leers, who was also a convert. Von Leers was once a close associate of Nazi propaganda leader Joseph Goebbels. In Cairo from 1955 until his death in 1965, he ensured the effective dissemination of Jew-baiting and extermination ideology in the Arabic-speaking world.

In 1965, von Leers gave Huber access to the former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who was then 70 years old and living in Beirut. Since the British Mandate in the 1920s, Mohammed Amin al-Husseini’s motto had been: Palestine is part of the Dar al-Islam, the Islamic region. No duty to the Jews, no duty to the imperial powers. The right of peoples to self-determination seemed to have no validity in the case of the Jews.

Encounter was a “revelation”

Husseini was convinced of the Jewish world conspiracy and attributed diabolical powers to the Jews. As an important voice in the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Cairo in 1928, he succeeded in establishing this enemy image of the overpowering “Jews” and “Zionists” first in the Muslim world and later in the “global South”.

In a later interview with the French journalist Pierre Péan, Ahmed Huber said that the meeting with Husseini had been a “revelation” for him. It had shown him a “completely different version” of the history and nature of the “Third Reich”.

After his return to Bern, Huber began to spread its narrative – anti-colonial, anti-Semitic, pro-Arab and peppered with Islamist and National Socialist propaganda. At this time, he worked as a parliamentary correspondent for the AZ-Ring newspapers, which were close to the Social Democratic Party.

In mufti-like fashion, he denied Israel’s right to exist, which enjoyed sympathy from right to left in Switzerland until the end of the 1960s as a small democratic state in a hostile environment. He published two revealing articles in the non-conformist magazine “Neutrality” in 1967 and 1968.

A state that is not subject to Islamic law has no prospect of recognition and peace, he wrote in the September 1967 issue, shortly after the Six-Day War. “Whoever establishes himself in Dar-al-Islam with cunning and violence and oppresses or expels Muslims, God prescribes Jihad against him in the Qur-ân – the holy war of defense of Islam.”

In other words, a state under Jewish sovereignty is unacceptable to Islamists, and peace is unthinkable. However, this attitude of jihad “began long before 1948”. The article was therefore not a reaction to the Six-Day War a few months earlier, but a rejection of Israel’s right to exist per se.

SP member with contacts to right-wing extremists

After returning to Switzerland from Cairo, Huber built up close ties with Lausanne financier and Nazi sympathizer François Genoud, who had financed the defence in

the Eichmann trial and became active on behalf of Palestinian PFLP terrorists from 1969. In the 1970s and 1980s, Huber intensified his relations with the mullahs who have ruled Iran since 1979.

Until his retirement in 1989, Huber worked as a journalist for various Swiss newspaper publishers. After the SP-Presse in the 1960s, he worked for “Basler Zeitung”, “Weltwoche” and “Deutscher Depeschendienst”, and finally Ringier from 1981.

After 1989, he began working more closely with right-wing extremists, Holocaust deniers and Islamists, including Iran. He was not kicked out of his SP section in Bern East until 1994, when these right-wing networks became public. As co-founder of a bank in Lugano, he was the only Swiss national on the US terror list from 2001 until his death in 2008. The bank was suspected of having been involved in financing the attack in New York on September 11, 2001.

Debate with Pastor Kurt Marti

With his anti-Zionist, anti-colonial position, Huber was still alone in the SP in 1967. The Six-Day War had led to numerous solidarity campaigns with Israel in Swiss cities, and Bern’s social democratic mayor Reynold Tschäppät had also become active. This was soon to change in the wake of the ’68 revolt: Anti-Zionism became more and more part of the self-image of the European left.

In March 1968, Huber doubled down in “Neutrality”. Under the title “Plea for racial mixing”, he praised Islam as a “color-blind religion” that knew no racial boundaries. In contrast, he describes the current “racial mania” – with reference to racial unrest in the USA, among other things – as an “Old Testament-Christian-Western phenomenon”.

A racial myth had taken root in the soul of the Westerner, the source of which was to be found in the Old Testament, where the “delusional ideas about blood and race” were to be found. With references to specific passages in the books of Moses, he claimed to prove the condemnation of black people to eternal slavery, a “genocide against sub-humans” and “racial defilement as a fact”. In the next issue of “Neutrality”, the Bernese pastor Kurt Marti took Huber’s article apart in a long, well-founded letter to the editor.

Huber’s seed bears fruit

Ahmed Huber started out in the SP in 1967 as a lone voice in the wilderness. His continuous propaganda in the AZ media under editor-in-chief Helmut Hubacher was accompanied by messages of destruction against Israel during the terrorist attacks by the PFLP in Europe and the Arab states in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. PLO leader Yasir Arafat successfully brought the annihilation of Israel onto the world stage with his appearance at the UN in New York in 1974 as a formula for colonial resistance.

Arafat was the political foster son of Hitler’s friend Mohammed Amin al-Husseini. One year after Arafat’s appearance, on November 10, 1975, the UN officially condemned Zionism as racism – another triumph for the now deceased Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. Zionism was no longer up for debate as a right to self-determination for Jews. With this UN resolution, anti-Zionist positions were now officially a matter of human rights. This was also the view of Helmut Hubacher, president of the Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP), who was elected that same year, and the Young Socialists, who had been founded shortly before. The UN repealed the resolution passed in 1975 in 1991. However, the position that Zionism was racism persisted on the left.

Today a majority in the SP Switzerland

Social Democrats, Greens and parts of the Reformed churches have since built networks in Switzerland that have made the PLO, the PFLP and later, to some extent, Hamas acceptable in Switzerland. In the early years in particular, Huber was probably an important door opener between the federal government, the SP, international Geneva and Arab contacts. Those SP members who continued to view Zionism in its original meaning as the national self-determination of the Jewish people increasingly found themselves on the defensive and today have practically fallen silent in the SP – or have left.

At the end of October, two thirds of the delegates of the SP Switzerland decided to accuse Israel of “genocide” and punish it with a boycott. They therefore consider the ideological course of Nazi and Grand Mufti supporter Albert Ahmed Huber to be credible and no longer problematic.

Globally, they are in good company, for example with New York’s new star Zohran

Mamdani. If you want to describe the goals of Nazis and jihadists – extermination of Jews and global intifada – as “good”.

Hannah Einhaus is a Bernese historian and journalist. In 2024, she ended her membership of the SP after 27 years in protest against the party’s anti-Israeli stance.