



Against left-wing antisemitism!

By Sean Matgamna

Opposition by socialists and consistent democrats to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians in the occupied territories is proper, just, necessary and good.

Many thousands of the new members of the Labour Party will naturally support the weaker side in this conflict, the Palestinians, and see them as the oppressed people that they are.

Many who have never before given much thought to the Israel-Palestine conflict will begin to seek explanations, solutions, proposals and slogans to express their gut solidarity with the Palestinians.

Many will be won to what appear to be pro-Palestinian policies, slogans, and ideas that in fact, if you look at them closely, and relate them to Middle East realities, are not pro-Palestinian at all. They are anti-Israel, not pro-Palestinian.

For instance, though the official position of the Palestine Liberation Organisation is for a free and independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, where Palestinians are the majority, or were the majority in 1967, the ostensible left opposes that policy. They insist that Israel should cease to exist and give way to an Arab state in the whole of pre-1948 Palestine.

Since Israel will not agree to abolish itself, that means that Israel must be conquered in war, and forcibly put out of existence. Arab chauvinist and Islamic clerical fascist regimes must make war on Israel and destroy it. "Anti-Zionists" must back them in a war to destroy Israel.

Leave aside the rights and wrongs of it. Israel is not going to be destroyed in the calculable future. It is too strong, it has strong allies, the Israelis will fight for survival. A policy that postpones any solution for the Palestinians until after the destruction of Israel is therefore a policy that condemns them to indefinite waiting.

Look closely and you'll find that of the



three sorts of political advocates of destroying Israel — Arab chauvinists, Islamic clerical fascists (far right political Islam) and the "anti-imperialist" left — none of them are all that concerned about the living Palestinian people. All three are far more anti-Israel than they are pro the Palestinians. In meetings, the pseudo left habitually vote down resolutions that demand Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and the setting up of an independent Palestinian state there. Nothing less than eliminating Israel will do for them. To all three of them the Palestinians are political tools, ciphers, the "good cause", but not the real one.

It was the Arab states that refused to let

the three quarters of a million Palestinian refugees of 1948 work and build new lives for themselves. The great massacres of Palestinians were inflicted on them by Arabs — in Jordan in "Black September" 1970, in Lebanon in 1982.

Newcomers to the Labour Party will find the self-proclaimed Left in an advanced state of political hysteria on these questions. They will find — on internet discussions, for instance — people seemingly thinking of themselves as of the left who deploy the filthiest of old-style anti-semitism.

They face the danger of being politically and morally poisoned by the politically decaying old left. They will find that the dis-

inction between "anti-Zionism" and anti-semitism, is, increasingly, a small one. On some of the pseudo-Left it is ceasing to exist, or already, more or less, has. (See article by Ruth Willis on back page).

New comrades should study the issues before deciding where they stand. This issue of *Workers' Liberty* is produced to help them. It consists of part of the new book *The Left in Disarray*, and some older pieces.

Note: Ruth Willis wrote *Defend Jackie Walker? Not like this!* (page 20). Sean Matgamna wrote the rest of this pamphlet.

How Israel came to be the world's hyperimperialism

"For the... Arab-chauvinist logic, we need look no further than the [second] main 'world Trotskyist' group, the International Workers' League. They want a 'democratic, secular and non-racist Palestine' — but with no rights for Jews!

"An article by... Nahuel Moreno argues against the slogan of a constituent assembly even after the destruction of Israel. [This] is precisely the shameful manner to support the Zionists and justify their presence, giving a 'democratic' veneer to their fascist usurpation. If you want to insinuate that this assembly would be made with non-Zionist Jews... these imaginary inhabitants do not exist" (Correo Internacional, March 1988).

"Moreno puts forward the slogan, consequently of unambiguous meaning, 'Zionists out of Israel', and goes on to say: 'Tomorrow [we will also oppose] Arab racism. But tomorrow, not today. Because today Arab racism against Israel is progressive'." — Clive Bradley, Workers' Liberty 10, May 1988

In June 1967 Israel occupied that part of pre-1948 Palestine which the United Nations partition plan of 1947 had designated for an independent Palestinian state, to exist side by side with Israel. That Palestinian territory had been occupied and annexed in 1948-9 by Jordan and Egypt, and a small part of it by Israel. Now all of pre-war Palestine and Gaza was under Israeli control.

Various Israeli offers to vacate the newly conquered territories in return for peace and recognition by the Arab states were rejected. Israel's occupation of that Palestinian-majority territory has so far lasted half a century. It has turned Israel into a regional imperialist power (in the sense that Marxists had called the pre-World-War-Two Czechoslovakian, Polish, and Yugoslav states imperialist: they ruled over minority peoples repressed to various degrees by the Poles, Czechs, Serbs).

Israel has been a grubby and brutal imperialist power in its treatment of the Palestinians. As with any other imperialist occupation, Marxists have demanded that the occupying power, Israel, get out of the Arab-majority territories and allow the Palestinians to have their own state there. That there were special problems is not to be denied, but those cannot justify Israel's policy towards the Palestinians.

Israel is a regional imperialist power, allied to the USA since 1967. To the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza it is a vicious imperialist power in its own right. The only consistent democratic response to that is to demand that Israel vacate the Palestinian-majority territory and allow the Palestinians to set up a sovereign independent state alongside Israel; to support the Palestinians in their demand for a state of their own; and, politically, to judge everything by how it relates to those principles.

But that is not how it is seen on the ostensible left. Israel has

a singular and tragic history. Its power to evoke obsessional hostility is one of the most remarkable things in late 20th century and early 21st century politics. In its strength and duration it is unique. Most of the ostensible left is in the grip of anti-Israeli hysteria.

For decades, from Israel's June 1967 Six Day War and with renewed energy after the 1973 Yom Kippur Israeli-Egyptian war, hostility to Israel has been a major, and seemingly ever-intensifying, force in the labour movement. Some of that is a proper hostility to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. But there is more than that. In fact, in the denunciation of Israel there is often indifference to the living Palestinians, for whom an independent state of their own alongside Israel would be a tremendous liberation. There is often a blatant antisemitism.

Israel is seen as the world's hyper-imperialist power, Israeli nationalism as pure racism, Zionism as akin to Nazism. Israel is put in the same foul category as Hitler's Germany. Zionism is depicted as a near-demonic force in history, a force that, in its time, was able to control and use Hitler's massacres of Jews in order to further its political goals. Israel is a historically illegitimate state: nothing less than the destruction of this state, and the forcible removal from the Hebrew nation in Palestine of the right to have a state of their own, will suffice to rectify history's mistake in creating Israel. Destruction of Israel is the dominant policy on the added left. That policy is pursued even at great cost to the Palestinians, postponing any redress for them until after Israel has been destroyed.

HERZL

Palestine was for centuries a mere sub-section of the province of Syria within the Ottoman (Turkish) empire.

The territory always had a Jewish minority. The notion of restoring or recreating, after so many centuries, a Jewish state in Palestine was developed in the late 19th century by Theodor Herzl in a Europe rank with competing nationalisms, and in direct response to the Dreyfus case. That was a startling eruption of mass antisemitism in the country which had emancipated Jews to common French citizenship during the great revolution of 1789-94. A Jewish army officer, Alfred Dreyfus, was wrongly convicted of spying for Germany, and, as that became widely known, France divided for and against admitting that the army had made a gruesome mistake and releasing Dreyfus from his prison on Devil's Island. This left-vs-right, egalitarian-vs-antisemitic division of France would continue into the time when Vichy France would round up Jewish children, women, and men and deport them to the Nazi murder-camps.

Herzl concluded that Jews would never be accepted as common citizens in a world where they had no state of their own. Thus the idea of creating a Jewish state in Palestine took shape as a modern idea.

In November 1917, a few days before the Bolshevik revolution on the eve of the British conquest of Palestine from the Turks, Arthur Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, wrote a letter to Walter Rothschild, a prominent Jewish banker, declaring that a victorious Britain would look favourably at the project of creating a "national home for the Jewish people". (Balfour did not write of a Jewish state in Palestine). To a degree that letter was a by-product of the Russian Revolution of February 1917, an attempt to win the sympathy of Jews in Russia, and also of Jews in the USA, for Britain in the war. Strangely, Balfour seems to have thought that the declaration would endear Britain to the socialists of Jewish background in the ranks of the anti-Zionist Russian revolutionaries and maybe incline them to help Britain in the war.

Zionism evolved as a practical project of persuading and organising Jews to go to Palestine under the whips and spurs and goads of 20th century European antisemitism, and then of the Nazi-created ghettos and death camps. A big migration of Jews from Poland in the 1920s, fleeing severe ill-treatment there; another from Nazi Germany in the 1930s; and then an influx of survivors of Nazi genocide from all over Europe in the 1940s, created a Jewish nation in Palestine. Some



Theodor Herzl

hundreds of thousands of refugees driven out of Arab countries in the late 1940s, the 50s, and the 60s went to Israel.

A benign British attitude to Jewish migration to Palestine lasted no more than a decade, and then began to change under Arab pressure. By 1930 Britain was restricting Jewish landownership and moving to limit Jewish migration.

Palestine had been a backwater economically and socially, and sparsely populated (about 700,000 people in 1917, about 8% Jewish, 11% Christian, 80% Muslim). Jewish immigration changed that. The economy quickened and grew. Much waste land was reclaimed by the Zionists and put to use. One consequence of the quickening economy was Arab migration into Palestine (at least 40,000 between 1922 and 1945), in parallel with the Jewish incomers. Arab peasants in Palestine were evicted after Jewish land purchases. All such things are hurtful. But the numbers were smaller than those of peasant evictions in many "normal" cases of capitalist market-forces — "several thousand families were displaced... between the 1880s and the 1930s", that is, in 50 years.

Chronic conflict between Jews and Arabs soon became a feature of the changing Palestine. Jews had been tolerated for centuries, but as inferior beings, despised non-Muslims, paying a special tax (as Christians also did). Jews coming into a territory in which Britain under a League of Nations mandate now ruled over both Jews and Arabs, and Muslims no longer ruled over Jews, attracted cultural, religious, and then political hostility.

The basic units of effective Jewish colonisation at that time were the kibbutzim, agricultural entities run as collective socialistic enterprises. On principle they did not hire and exploit Arab labour: they were instruments of Jewish national settlement. They practised strict equality, including equality between men and women. The women of the Jewish communities, dressing for convenience in shorts and shirts, were especially offensive and resented. The incomers' way of life outraged the watching Muslims. This clash of cultures and of ways of living was and would be a major factor in the evolving Jewish-Arab conflict. And then there was political opposition to the Zionist project of building up a Jewish nation, especially on the part of the Palestinian Arab elite.

Jewish-Arab clashes started as early as 1919. In 1929 a strong surge of Arab attacks on Jews set the alarm bells ringing in London. It was a pogrom movement. It was not focused on British rule: one of the mobilising slogans was "the British

Sources for the articles

'How Israel came to be the world's hyperpower' (this page), 'Episodes in History' (page 5), 'How to fight left antisemitism' (page 6), 'What is left antisemitism' (page 7) and 'Jew or Zionist' (page 8) are all taken from the book *Left in Disarray* (see page 12 for purchase details). 'A mirror for anti-Zionists' (page 9) is taken from the AWL pamphlet *Israel-Palestine, Two Nations, Two States*, originally published in 2001.

'Solidarity, yes! Boycott, no!' (page 10) is an open letter to Steven and Hilary Rose, supporters of "two-states" and the BDS campaign. This was first published in 2007.

'Trotsky and the Jewish Question' (page 11) was first published in the *Two Nations, Two States* pamphlet.

'The warmongering anti-war demonstrations' (page 15) was first published in January 2009.

'Defend Jackie Walker, but not like this!' (page 20) was first published in *Solidarity* newspaper in October 2016.

'With Hitler on the road to Samara' (starting on page 20) was first published in *Solidarity* in September 2006.

are with us". The minority Labour government, in the person of Lord Passfield, the Fabian socialist Sidney Webb, set up a Commission of Enquiry, and Britain then began moves that by the end of the 1930s, on the eve of the World War and the Holocaust, amounted to rescinding the Balfour Declaration. With war looming in 1939, Britain turned to placating the Arabs. The Jews were not going to side with Hitler's Germany; the Arabs might, and most politically aware Arabs did. Britain resolved to end all Jewish immigration within five years, and to limit it to a total of 75,000 over those five years, i.e. about 15,000 a year. Nonetheless it failed to win over the Arab leaders. The main Palestinian Arab leader, Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem appointed by the British, went to Germany and in the war organised a force of Bosnian Muslims to fight for Germany.

In the traditional judgement of international socialists and consistent democrats, revolutionary nationalists have in principle a right to use their immediate enemy's enemy to help win their own freedom. This was more than that. It was an alliance based on a common murderous hostility to the Jews and a desire to destroy them. Husseini had close links with leading Nazis such as Adolf Eichmann and very likely knew all about the Nazi death camps. Had Germany occupied Palestine, even temporarily, during the war, the Arabs whom Husseini influenced would have helped the Germans kill all the Jews, as did antisemites in European countries such as France.

Those – Trotsky, for instance – who rejected the Zionist project as an answer to the threat that Nazism posed for the Jews of Europe had argued that Palestine could turn into a giant ghetto for the Palestinian Jews in which they would be trapped. That "ghetto", had the Nazis and Husseini won control of Palestine, would then have been emptied straight into Nazi death camps, as were the Jews penned in the Nazi-imposed ghettos of Europe.

Two of every three Jews in Europe died at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators in occupied countries, approximately six million people, between June 1941 and April 1945. At the end the Allies ignored requests that they bomb the railways to Auschwitz. For all the time the great slaughter of Jews was going on, the British patrolled and blocked the sea-paths of entry into Palestine for Jewish refugees from Europe. Shiploads of Jewish refugees sank in the Mediterranean, as shiploads of "illegal" migrants to Europe sink now. The British rounded up Jews who landed "illegally" and put them in internment camps in Cyprus.

The "Revisionist" Zionists inspired by Zeev Jabotinsky – unashamedly nationalist, anti-Arab, and anti-socialist – in 1944 started a small guerrilla war against the British in Palestine. After the World War, Britain continued to exclude all but a small quota of Jews from Palestine. More than 250,000 Jewish survivors of the death camps were now living as stateless "Displaced Persons" in camps in Europe. Jews going back to where they came from were victims of a pogrom in Poland and antisemitic riots in Paris. In Britain, in 1947, during the British-Jewish conflict in Palestine, anti-Jewish pogromist riots fomented by the Mosleyite fascists erupted in Liverpool, Leeds, and Manchester. In the Jewish part of Manchester, Cheetham Hill, windows were smashed and mobs attacked people in the streets. Conflict between the British and the Jews in Palestine, and between Jews and Arabs, escalated steadily. In February 1947 Britain announced that it would withdraw in 1948, and on 29 November 1947 the United Nations resolved to partition Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state. Russia voted for that. Desultory inter-communal guerrilla war escalated into a simmering Jewish-Arab war, priming for the struggle after British withdrawal.

On 14 May 1948 Britain officially relinquished its League of Nations mandate in Palestine, and the Jewish community declared Israel a sovereign, independent state in the part of Palestine allocated to them in the UN plan of partition. Europe's "Displaced Person" Jews now came to Palestine: for them, the declaration of the Jewish state in far-away Palestine spelt liberation. Immediately, Egypt, Jordan (Transjordan), Syria, Lebanon and Iraq invaded Israel. Azzam Pasha, secretary of the Arab League, declared: "It does not matter how many Jews there are. We will sweep them into the sea".

The Arab armies of Jordan and Iraq were in part officered by British soldiers. The Israelis lacked both weapons and enough fully-trained professional soldiers, though some of them had served in the British or US armies during World War Two. The widespread anticipation was that the Jews could not defend themselves, and that Britain would go back in and resume control as "peace-keeper" between Arabs and Jews. In fact the Jewish citizen army, the Haganah, defeated the invading armies and the local Palestinian-Arab armed forces which, naturally, had rallied to the invading armies. Peace in the form of an uneasy truce was established in 1949. No Arab state or entity recognised Israel, and to this day, in 2017, only two of them do, Egypt and Jordan. In the course of



Palestinian Arabs fleeing Galilee during the 1948 war

the war between Israel on one side, and the Arab forces on the other, some 750,000 Palestinian Arabs fled. Some were driven out, some chose to flee. The Revisionist-Zionist Irgun militia had slaughtered some 254 men, women, and children in the Palestinian Arab village of Deir Yassin on 9 April 1948, as a way of terrorising Palestinians to flee. Five days later some 78 people from a contingent of Jewish medical staff and their escorts were slaughtered. In the next years and decades about 600,000 Jews in Arab countries fled or were driven out to Israel, their property seized.

1948 WAR

In the 1948 war, the territory allocated by the UN for an independent Palestinian state was incorporated into Jordan, and small parts of it into Egypt and into Israel.

Both the USA and Russia stood godfather to the new Jewish state. Stalin wanted to make trouble for Britain in the Middle East, where, though declining, it was still the chief foreign power. This was a sharp turn for Russia. Stalin had backed the Arabs both in 1929 and in 1936. The Communist International first defined the 1929 rising as an anti-Jewish pogrom – which it was, or was primarily – and then decided that it had been a great manifestation of anti-imperialist rebellion. In 1936 and after the members of the Communist Party of Palestine, Jews and Arabs, were instructed to participate in terrorist acts against the Jews. The international Stalinist organisations began a world-wide and typically Stalinist propaganda campaign against Jews in Palestine.

Yet in 1947 Russia voted at the United Nations for partition of Palestine and for a Jewish state. More than that, Russia, by way of its satellite Czechoslovakia, provided guns for the Haganah, breaking an international arms embargo which in practice worked against Israel, since the Arab states already had guns, as states do. Soon after that, Stalin switched again. He launched a great campaign against "Zionism". Old Communist Party leaders in Russia's satellite states of Jewish background were tried, jailed or hanged, and denounced, as part of an international Zionist conspiracy. The world Stalinist press ran a full-scale "anti-Zionist" campaign. It was in that campaign that the now-common stories and constructions about the collaboration and inner affinity between Zionists and Nazis were put into world circulation and began to gain wide acceptance. After the Stalinist fashion, these ideas became dogmas, articles of faith, in the Stalinist world. And much of what the Trotskist left now says against "Zionism" was elaborated in that anti-Zionist campaign by the Stalinists. When Stalin died in 1953, preparations were being made for an "anti-Zionist" show trial in which the main defendants would have been the Jewish doctors who had looked after the health of the residents in the Kremlin.

That trial would have been the signal for deporting Russian Jews to Siberia and for the slaughter of unknowable numbers of them, in a smaller version of the Great Terror of 1934-8, but now focused on Jews.

That Stalin might have completed Hitler's work must be judged a serious possibility. After his death, Stalin's successors cancelled the trial. For two decades after the declaration of Israeli independence, the Trotskyist press had little to say

about Israel. The Stalinist campaign against Zionism petered out in 1953, with Stalin's death. Israel's right to existence was not questioned on the left. No-one on the left openly advocated that Israel be abolished and destroyed. Not even the Stalinists did. The pronouncements of Ahmed Shukeiri, head of the then Egyptian-controlled Palestine Liberation Organisation, who stuck to the old slogan, "drive the Jews into the sea", were seen as an embarrassment, and as something entirely alien to the left. The left was aware of the plight of the Palestinian refugees, but no-one put the sole blame for that on Israel. Israel said that "the Palestinian state" was Jordan, which had seized almost all the territory allocated to the Arabs by the UN in 1947. That was true, except that the Palestinians did not rule in Jordan and would suffer mass slaughter there in "Black September" 1970.

Outside of Arab countries, there was no talk of reversing the 1948 "settlement" in Israel-Palestine, not until in 1967 Israel acquired control of the whole of pre-1948 Palestine. Then, demands for Israel to withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967 were subsumed in the new Palestine Liberation Organisation policy, declared in 1969, of a "secular democratic" Arab state (with religious rights for Jews) in all of pre-1948 Palestine. That slogan won widespread support on the left. As has been said, its immediate political effect was to delegitimise Israel, defining it as a state which should never have come into existence and therefore had no right to go on existing. It delegitimised Israeli nationalism, which was redefined as "anti-Arab racism". The old Stalinist equation of Zionism with Nazism was there in the repertoire to be dug up and put front-stage, and it was. Indignation at Israel's continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza gave autonomous life to the "nice", "secular democratic state", version of abolishing Israel, that is, in practical terms, conquering it.

After 1967, Stalinist states, notably Poland, revived their old "anti-Zionist" themes from 1949-53. A forerunner of AWL commented: "One of the worst signs of the regression in Poland... has been a very thinly disguised eruption of antisemitism... Under the banner of anti-Zionism the Partisans [harder-Stalinist faction] play the anti-Jew tune blatantly, playing also the Polish nationalist tune – in this country which saw its millions of Jews leave few survivors as they vanished into Auschwitz only a generation ago".

Indignation over Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 helped generate the strange idea that Israel is the hyper-imperialism, the epitome of imperialism, the imperialism of imperialisms. Left-wing campaigners came, more and more, to pillory "Zionism" not as one of the competing nationalisms in the Middle East but as an absolute evil. Picking up on the shameless Stalinist obscenity of the late 1940s and early 50s, they branded Zionism as a sibling of Nazism. For form's sake, the Stalinists had said that not all Jews were Zionists – that there were many socialist (Stalinist) Jews. But the 20th century experience of the Jews of Europe had meshed Jewish identity with Israel and with Zionism. The equation of Zionism and Nazism, branding Israeli nationalism as racism, and Zionism as pure evil, as the epitome of imperialism, the most extreme reaction, the most virulent racism – that could not but imply a comprehensive hostility to the big majority of



Modern Israel: 2015 Tel Aviv peace demonstration against the Netanyahu government

Jews who to one degree or another, critically or fondly, support Israel.

The Trotskyists had resisted the demonisation of “Zionism” (as distinct from political opposition to it) from its first appearance in 1929. Max Shachtman, speaking for the whole US Trotskyist movement, published an article in *The Militant* (1 October 1929), which declared that: “Not every movement led by spokesmen of an oppressed nationality is a revolutionary movement. It is a lamentable fact that at the present time the Arab movement is directed by unconcealed reactionaries... They are against all Jews as Jews. They set up the reactionary demand for the ‘restriction of the Jewish immigration into Palestine’...” It denounced the way in which for the Stalinists “the magic wand of the ‘Third Period’” had transmuted this reactionary movement into a “national revolutionary uprising against British imperialism”. The American and other Trotskyists continued during the war to advocate an open door in Palestine (and in America, of course) for Jewish refugees.

After the war, some Trotskyists backed the Jewish guerrillas against the British, defining their struggle as an anti-imperialist movement (Felix Morrow in the USA, some in France). The Shachtmanite Workers Party USA backed Israel’s right to independence and its right to defend itself, though they also deplored the partition of Palestine, a political entity which had existed for a mere 30 years. It would have been impossible for the Trotskyists of that period to see Israel as a representative, surrogate, or tool of “imperialism”. As we’ve seen, arms supplies to it were embargoed by all the big powers except Russia, and certainly it was not a tool of Russian imperialism (which in any case the Orthodox Trotskyists did not recognise as an imperialism).

The Trotskyist press had denounced the Stalinists’ antisemitic campaign in 1949-53. In the mid-1950s, when Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin, there was widespread further comment in the Trotskyist press about Stalinist antisemitism, and this around the time when Israel invaded Egypt in alliance with the British and French, as part of a British-French operation to reclaim the Suez Canal.

The kitsch-left way of seeing the problem, like the Islamist clerical-fascist way, is not only anti-Jewish, but also anti-Palestinian. It rules out any redress for the Palestinians this side of the destruction of Israel, and the setting up of an Arab or Islamic state in all of pre-1948 Palestine, including what is now Israel.

That left routinely equates Israel with apartheid South Africa, an equation that does not stand up. The Jewish population of Palestine has never depended on the exploitation of Arab labour, and the treatment of Palestinians in Israel has never been remotely like that of black and “coloured” people in apartheid South Africa. There is, however, a “parallel” between Israel and South Africa that the serious left would do well to remember. Britain seized the Cape of South Africa during the Napoleonic wars, and began to put pressure on the Boers who had been there since the 17th century.

Starting in 1835, many of the Boers went off inland and founded new states. Eventually British expansion from the Cape caught up with them. The Boer War of 1899-1902 followed. Everywhere Britain was disliked. People backed the Boers. So did socialists. There was mass opposition to the war in Britain, from the socialist left, from Liberals and even from

future Prime Minister Lloyd George. Britain’s war was denounced by much of the anti-war “movement” as “a Jewish war” – a war for the interests of “Jewish financiers” and on behalf of Jewish settlers in South Africa. Though it is now half-forgotten, that was a large component of the case against the war made in Britain – and perhaps elsewhere: I don’t know – by the anti-war campaign, and it was a big, vigorous, raucous campaign.

The Boer republics had denied equal political rights to new settlers, and that fact was used as an ideological weapon to justify Britain’s war. What settlers? “Jews”, said much of the anti-war movement. (Including some leaders of the British Marxist organisation, the SDF, Henry Hyndman and Harry Quelch. Hyndman’s use of antisemitism in anti-war agitation was part of the bill of indictment which the British followers of Daniel De Leon, and James Connolly, who split from the SDF in 1903 to form the Socialist Labour Party, drew up against him. Hyndman was far from being alone in the SDF on that). Such people as the Liberal J A Hobson, whose study of imperialism Lenin would draw upon during World War One, also denounced the war as one for Jewish settlers and for international Jewish finance.

The “Jewish settlers” were the “Israelis” in the war; “international Jewish finance” was the world Jewish (or, today, “Zionist”) conspiracy or quasi-conspiracy, and, for some, hegemony; and Britain was what the USA is today, the chief backer of “the Jews”. The campaign against the “Jewish settlers” and Britain was a campaign on behalf of the Boers – who were the foulest anti-black racists.

HEBREW NATION

At the beginning of the 20th century, those who fulminated against “the Jews”, unlike the kitsch left today, had no inkling that they were feeding a fire that would engulf two out of every three of Europe’s Jews.

The policy of eliminating Israel – not of stopping Israel ill-treating the Palestinians, and of winning for the Palestinians their own state, on the land where they are the majority or were the majority in 1967, but of conquering the Hebrew nation in Israel, depriving them of self-determination, killing an incalculable proportion of them – that policy is, in and of itself, a fully tooled-up species of aggressive antisemitism. The attitude of wanting to eliminate an entire nation is, on the left, unique to Israel. Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians naturally and justly provokes hostility and condemnation, and sharpens the desire to help the Palestinians. The desire to see the Hebrew nation conquered and destroyed, coupled with positive support for any and all forces attacking Israel, ranging from suicide-murder bombers from the clerical-fascist Hamas to any Arab or Islamic state committed to destroying Israel – that is a form of self-generating and self-sustaining antisemitism. In the real world it is not an expression of concern for the Palestinians, though of course most of those who go along with it think it is. It is hostile to the needs and interests of the Palestinians on whom it batters.

By making any redress for the Palestinians dependent on the conquest and destruction of Israel, it rules out redress in the calculable future. A Palestinian state, however, is still not unachievable. It could be and should be imposed on Israel by international pressure and coercion. Tardiness in setting up

such a Palestinian state is allowing the Israeli chauvinists to work towards making it impossible by way of the expansion of settlements on Arab-majority land.

One segment of Israeli leaders is, it seems, reconciled to the program of an Israeli state, covering all pre-1948 Palestine, within which there will be a vast hostile Palestinian minority at odds with the Jewish Israelis and therefore subject to “preventive” ill-treatment as now for an indefinite span of history. Such a one-state “solution” would continually reproduce a hellish situation for both Palestinians and Israeli Jews, as would its mirror-image, an Arab-Islamic state in all Palestine with conquered Jews as a minority.

Those who advocate or pursue a one-state policy serve neither Jewish Israelis nor Palestinians. Leaving aside whether it is right or wrong, justified or unjustified, for practical purposes the demand that the Palestinians renounce self-determination in their own territory, until the destruction of Israel at some indeterminate but far distant date, is an anti-Palestinian policy too. The pseudo-left advocates of this policy are in the grip either of “anti-imperialist” fantasies which see Israel as the world’s hyper-imperialism, as the metaphysical essence of imperialism, or of God-will-find-a-way, other-worldly Islamists in whose picture of realities and likely future realities, the Palestinians as living human beings matter not at all.

The Palestinians are not well-served by their kitsch left champions and advocates, who follow their own agendas and fantasies, not the needs of the Palestinians or the possibilities of serving them. The kitsch left in Britain votes down Palestinian-serving two-states propositions at meetings.

The basic fact is that both the Islamic clerical-fascists and the “anti-imperialist” left, though they make full use in propaganda of Israel’s ill-treatment of the Palestinians and sometimes exaggerate it, are much more hostile to Israel than they are friendly to the Palestinians. Fundamentally, they are anti-Israelis, not pro-Palestinians. In practical politics their obsession with destroying Israel makes them poisonously anti-Palestinian, too.

On the level of policy and advocacy of policy, the candid answer of properly self-aware absolute anti-Zionists to the charge that they are antisemitic is: “so what? Our attitude is justified. It is antisemitic, but what of it?” Hostility to Israeli policy and Israeli actions against the Palestinians is just and necessary. Many Israelis disagree with their government’s policies and actions. Is hostility to those Israelis, too, justified? Yes, would answer the candid absolute anti-Zionists: those people too are Israelis, they do not support the abolition of Israel, they are Zionists. Not their political opinions, but their existence is their offence, and the warrant for treating them as enemies to be disarmed and made helpless, destroyed, or driven out. And what of Jews across the world who back Israel’s right to go on existing? Zionists, too.

The “anti-imperialist” hostility to “Zionists” – who, if “Zionism” is support for Israel’s right to go on existing, include most Jews alive – is on some levels as strange as the old antisemitism was when it identified Jews with money. It was not that there were no rich Jews, no Jewish financiers, as rapacious as other financiers, no Jewish small-scale gouging money-lenders. The poisonous twist was the identification of all Jews with usurious wealth.

So now there is Israeli colonial imperialism in the Palestinian-majority territories. To go from that to identifying all Israeli Jews, and all Jews across the world who have affinity with Israel, with “imperialism”, is the strange thing. Israel becomes the super-imperialism. Imperialism must be wiped out, and Israel is the epitome of imperialism, the imperialism of imperialisms, as Jewish capitalists were the money-capitalists of money-capitalism. There is imperialism. That is where imperialism lives – in Israel.

On one level this attitude is possible only to people who no longer see imperialism as primarily a system of state actions, but rather as an “essence” which they track to its worldly lair. Israel has all the real and alleged sins of all imperialism, and of advanced capitalism, loaded on to it, and all the hostility to imperialism focused against it. As gold is the universal equivalent commodity in which the values of all other commodities are expressed, so Israel is the universal equivalent of imperialism. It is not far along that trajectory to the idea of Jews everywhere being the embodiment of imperialism because of their typical identification with Israel. The article on Paul Foot and Tam Dalyell in *The Left in Dissarray* [see Appendix, page 8 of this pamphlet] records a rare public example of the workings of the mind of one who knowingly substitutes “Zionist” for “Jew” to rationalise hostility to Jews.

Confronting the old antisemitism which identified capitalism with Jews and Jews with capitalism, the German Marxist August Bebel famously said that it was “the socialism of fools”. Wipe-out-Israel “anti-imperialism” is the anti-imperialism of the fools.

Episodes in history

THE ISRAELI-ARAB WAR OF 1948

In November 1947 the United Nations proposed that Palestine, where, under British rule, Jews and Arabs were engaged in simmering guerrilla warfare against each other, be partitioned into a Jewish and an Arab state.

Previously, in 1937, the British Peel Commission had also proposed a partition: the Palestinian Jews accepted the idea, but Britain abandoned it because of Arab opposition. The British formally relinquished control of Palestine in May 1948. The Jews proclaimed the independent state of Israel in the UN-allocated territory. The surrounding Arab states, Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan, which were under British influence or quasi-control, immediately invaded. Some of their officers were seconded British soldiers. They joined with the Palestinian Arab forces that had already been at war with Palestinian Jews. Against most expectations, the Haganah (the Jewish militia) defeated the Arab armies and drove them back. A lot of Palestinian Arabs followed the Arab armies or were driven out. The UN-proposed Palestinian Arab state disappeared, with most of its territory taken by Jordan and Egypt and some by Israel.

The Orthodox Trotskyists had not yet hammered out the ideas that would shape them politically in the decades ahead: of "the colonial revolution" as the leading sector of the world revolution and indeed, where Stalinists controlled the anti-imperialist movement, as one of the roads to workers' states. Those would come after the Russian-Yugoslav split (June 1948); the Maoist victory in China (1949); the Orthodox Trotskyists' conclusion that the East European Stalinist states were a variant of not-quite-adequate workers' states, species of a new category, "deformed workers' states", which they had invented; and the start of the Korean war. The Orthodox Trotskyists' Second World Congress was held in April 1948, only weeks before the Israeli-Arab war started. With the possible exception of a handful of people in South Africa, no Orthodox Trotskyist, in Palestine or outside it, backed the Arabs.

The Palestinian Trotskyists, in a document of January 1948 published by the official Fourth International magazine in June-July 1948, declared: "By its racial war against the Jews of Palestine, the Arab League wants to... prove to imperialism that it is a factor that can serve it even better than Zionism... It is interested in... using this chauvinist war... to crush the Arab working class and all the left groups... to heighten racial hatred against minorities". The June-July introduction to the document denounced the May 1948 invasion and demanded "full national minority rights for the Jewish community".

SUEZ, 1956. ISRAEL AND THE BRITISH-FRENCH INVASION OF EGYPT

Egypt was in the vanguard of the Arab-nationalist politics of the Middle East. It had been under British hegemony, with varying legal formulas, for seven decades until an army officers' republican coup d'état in 1952 deposed the King and began to untie the British fetters on the country. Britain withdrew its troops in October 1954. In July 1956 Egypt nationalised the Suez Canal, built and owned by British and French capital. In 1956 Britain still had a grip on both Jordan and Iraq. To Arab nationalists, Israel was the great enemy.

Britain and France invaded Egypt and seized Port Said in November 1956. Their pretext was to stop an Israeli-Egyptian war which, with the collusion of Britain and France, Israel had started a few days earlier. The Egyptian state could not withstand the invaders. But the USA could and did. President Dwight Eisenhower put an end to the British-French-Israeli adventure by withholding credit from Britain and France. Financial weapons were used against the military weapons of the British and French, and they were superior. It was a game-changing moment in the history of post-World-War-Two imperialism.

After seven weeks in occupation of Port Said, the British and French, dollar-whipped, withdrew. The British prime minister, Anthony Eden, was forced out of office. Israel withdrew to its pre-war borders. A United Nations garrison was



Jordanian troops captured by Israeli troops in the Six Day War

established at Sharm El Sheikh to keep the peace: it would remain in place until 1967, when Egypt forced it out in preparation for an attack on Israel (which Israel would pre-empt in the Six Day War).

The Trotskyists everywhere condemned the British, the French, and the Israelis. The Trotskyists were strongly on the side of the Arab nationalists, against both the European powers and the Arab kings. None of the Trotskyists drew sweeping condemnations of Israel from its role; certainly no-one yet questioned its right to continue in existence. A small pamphlet, *Stop the War! Hands off the Arab people!*, by Gerry Healy, published at the start of the British-French invasion, encapsulated the mindset, delusions, and historical perspectives of the Orthodox Trotskyists then.

"The Arabs instinctively fear Israel because it is a Capitalist State which they feel is a threat to their desire for freedom... The Imperialists have, in Israel, succeeded in the creation of a state which can lead to a bloody holocaust that will make Hitler's crimes seem a tea party... The Jewish working people everywhere must denounce Israel's stab in the back to the Arab people. The future of Jewry lies through a socialist solution and not through a Capitalist Israel. A socialist solution demands a real solidarity with the Arab people. In Israel this means unity in action against the common Imperialist enemy between the Jewish and Arab poor peasant and working class. Any other road spells a terrible end for Jewry". Healy was cruder than others might have been, but the crudeness has its own value for understanding the processes by way of which Orthodox Trotskyist attitudes to Israel would evolve.

ISRAEL, THE LEFT, AND THE 1967 SIX DAYS WAR

On 5-10 June 1967, in six days, Israel defeated Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. The Egyptian government had been threatening war against Israel; on 19 May it had expelled UN forces from Sinai and Gaza (there since the war of 1956); and on 22-23 May it had closed the straits of Aqaba connecting Israel to the Red Sea.

Israel struck first, and suddenly, destroying the Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian air forces on the ground and quickly overrunning and occupying Jordan's West Bank, Egypt's Gaza, and Syria's Golan Heights. Militarily, it was a tremendous coup. The pre-1948 entity of Palestine was reunited, but under Israeli control and with the area designated for a Palestinian state in 1947 becoming effectively a colony of Israel.

On 19 June Israel proposed a general peace agreement to the Arab states; Israel would evacuate the occupied territory

except the Syrian Golan Heights and East Jerusalem in return for recognition by the Arab states and "normalisation" of their relations with Israel. None of the Arab states recognised Israel, or had diplomatic relations with it. In September a conference of Arab states resolved that there would be "no peace, no recognition and no negotiation with Israel". Things again settled into a tense armistice that would last until October 1973.

On the Jewish festival of Yom Kippur, October 1973, Egypt and Syria suddenly struck against Israel. Israel was taken by surprise. Egyptian forces advanced quickly, and for a while it looked as if Israel might be overwhelmed. Israel rallied, and the Egyptians and Syrians were driven back. Five years later Israel and Egypt would sign a peace agreement. Egypt recognised Israel, and Jordan would follow in 1994. Even today they are the only Arab states to have recognised Israel.

1967 was the start of, so far, 50 years of Israeli colonial rule over the Palestinians of the West Bank. In 1967, the international left was vehemently pro-Arab and consequently anti-Israel – "Israeli-defeatist". Though the Orthodox Trotskyists did not necessarily understand that, this "defeatism" could not be what socialist "defeatism" had been in say, Britain, or France, or the USA in World War One. Defeat for those states did not mean destruction of the country and the society. Defeat for the tiny land of Israel would necessarily mean that, unless there was speedy outside intervention on Israel's side.

The general attitude of the left before June 1967 was broadly summed up in the formula of the Pablo-Mandel Fourth International: for a socialist federation of the Middle East with full autonomy for national minorities such as the Kurds and the Israeli Jews. In fact defeatism for Israel in 1967 already contradicted that. Autonomy after Arab conquest begged the question: what would be left to be "autonomous"? And why would the victorious Arabs want to make terms with a defeated and conquered Israel? The 1967 and post-1967 line emerged straight out of the left's belief in the "Arab Revolution" as part of the "colonial revolution" – the colonial revolution that was also, for the Orthodox Trotskyists, a possible socialist revolution and certainly part of the struggle of the two great power blocs in the world, US "imperialism" against Russia and China, designated as non-imperialist.

It was the time of the great demonstrations against the Vietnam war in cities across the world. The habit of intense and uncritical partisanship for Vietnam which had established itself, and of editing out such details as the NLF's Stalinism, spread to other issues, and to Israel and the Arabs. Vietnam had made "anti-imperialism" the defining characteristic of the putative left. The movement against the Vietnam war

How to fight left antisemitism

We need to specify what left anti-semitism consists of, in order to debate, educate, and clarify. These, I think, are its main features.

1. The belief that Israel has no right to exist. That is the core of left anti-semitism, though it comes in more than one version and from more than one root, ranging from the skewed anti-imperialism of the Orthodox Trotskyists through Arab nationalism to Islamic chauvinism. Advocacy of the destruction of Israel, which is what separates left-wing and Islamist antisemites from honest critics of Israeli policy, should not be tolerated in the labour movement and in the serious left.

2. The belief that Israeli Jewish nationalism, Zionism, is necessarily a form of racism. That this racism can only be expunged if Israel, Zionists, and Jews abandon Israeli nationalism and support of any kind for Israel. That Jewish students, for example, can only redeem themselves if they agree that the very existence of Israel or of an Israeli Jewish nation is racist.

3. The view that Israel alone is responsible for the conflict with the Arab states (and, now, with Islamic states). The idea that Israel alone is responsible for creating Arab refugees, and is uniquely evil in doing so. In real history the Arab states mostly refused the Palestinians citizenship or even the right to work.

4. The claim that the Palestinian have a “right of return”, that is, the right to the organised settlement in Israel of six million people (only a tiny and dying-off number of whom were born in what is now Israel) is one of the many codes for in fact demanding the self-abolition of the Jewish state

and justifications for war to conquer and abolish it because it will not abolish itself. It is not the equivalent of free immigration to the UK, or even of mass migration to the UK of millions from Syria, Libya, and Africa. Its equivalent for Britain would be the settlement in the country, organised by a hostile authority, of sixty million people. Socialists should of course be in favour of agreements between Israel and the Palestinians for compensation and for letting individual Palestinians into Israel. Support for a collective right of return is only another form of the demand to conquer and destroy Israel, if it will not surrender.

5. The idea that the forced migration of 700,000 Arabs was a unique evil is also extravagantly wrong. In 1945, 12 to 14 million Germans were driven out of Eastern Europe. They were driven into a Germany reduced to ruins by wartime bombing, where economic life had seized up and millions were starving. Only fringe German nationalists now propose to reverse that forced population movement and to drive out the Poles, Czechs, Russians, etc. who live where Germans once lived.

6. There is a peculiar dialect of Holocaust semi-denial current on the left. I have never heard of anyone on the left who denies that six million Jews were murdered by the Nazis (though, in the nature of things, someone will now jump out from behind a bush wearing a “Hitler was Framed” badge, and call me a liar). What the anti-Zionist left habitually deny is that this unique fact of history had repercussions that we should at least recognise and try to understand, with some sympathy for the surviving Jews and their descendants. On the left the Holocaust is not denied, but it is relegated almost

to the status of a “virtual fact”. In truth, the Holocaust discredited all Jewish-assimilationist programs, including ours, the socialist one. It created and hardened the will for a Jewish solution to the Jewish question and for the creation of Israel. There is nothing to be surprised at or scandalised by in that. The Holocaust should be appreciated as a real fact of history, with repercussions and reverberations, and not as something outside the history we are all part of, as a sort of side-show, as a two-dimensional hologram rather than the enormously weighty, reverberating event it was and continues to be.

7. The idea that there are good peoples entitled to all rights, and bad peoples, entitled to none. That too is something I have never heard anyone voice plainly and explicitly. But it is there as an implicit subtext in the idea that we are concerned with national rights only for the presently oppressed, i.e. in this case the Palestinians.

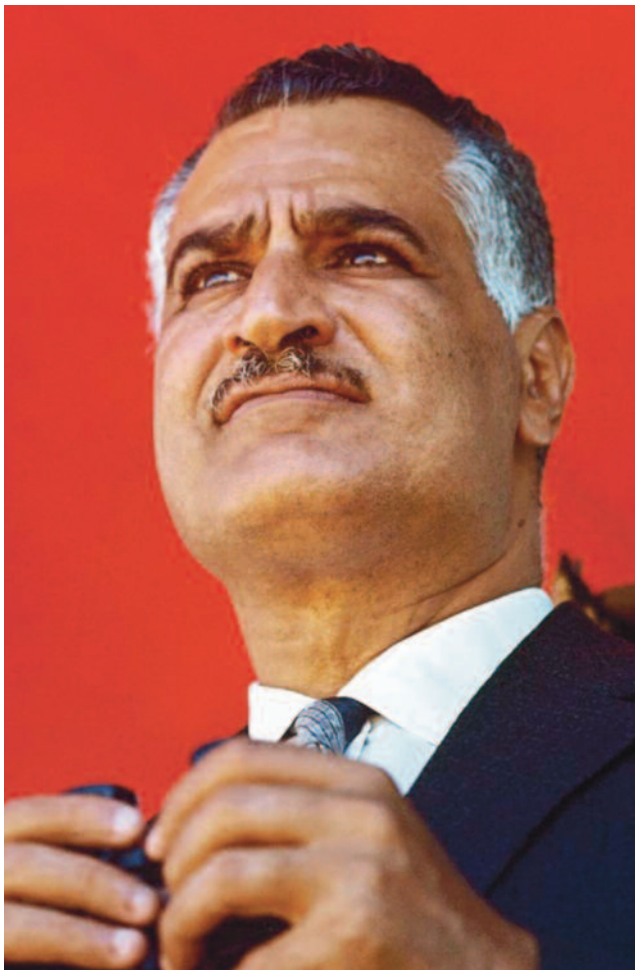
8. There is no one-state solution. Not, as now, by Israeli domination of the whole territory and Palestinians living indefinitely in a purgatory of Israeli occupation, nor through a Palestinian state “from the river to the sea” incorporating Israel after its Jewish population have been killed or overpowered by Arab or Islamic states. The only just solution that can serve both Jews and Arabs is two states: a sovereign Palestinian state in contiguous territory, side by side with Israel.

If, as may be possible, a Palestinian Arab state is made impossible by the spread of Israeli settlements, then the future will be grim indeed for both Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews.

brought a new generation into left-wing politics, but it was also a great political school teaching support for revolutionary Stalinism. It made “anti-imperialism”, identified as anti-Americanism, an absolute value, the great measure of opposition to all the evils of the capitalist world. Much of the way the left related to Israel in 1967, at the time of the Six Day War and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, was on the same “anti-imperialist” pattern, with the Arab states in place of the Vietnamese and the Israelis as the imperialist embodiment of all that was bad. No part of the blame for the plight of the Palestinians was allowed to lie with the Arab states who rejected Israel’s offer to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza in return for Arab recognition of Israel, and who had kept the Palestinians ghettoised in refugee camps as a political hard fact to use against Israel. Israel was seen as the antagonist of the Arab Revolution, of its “permanent-revolutionary” workers’ state reality or potential, and of the Russian bloc with which Egypt and Syria had friendly and collaborative relations. The Egyptian Communist Party had dissolved into the Nasserist state-apparatus “party”. Israel was also seen as the ally of the reactionary forces in the Arab world – the sheikhs and Saudi Arabia – which were closer to the USA. It was in that context, as part of that world viewpoint, that “revolutionary perspective”, that a new attitude to Israel was worked out.

In 1967 and immediately after the Trotskyists did not declare for the destruction of Israel. They called upon Israel to evacuate the Arab territories seized in the Six Day war. The Palestine Liberation Organisation in the build-up to the 1967 war had been under the effective control of Egypt and fronted by Ahmed Shukeiri, still shouting as in 1948 about “driving the Jews into the sea”. The PLO became a far more independent and politically sophisticated body in the wake of the defeat of the Arab states. In 1969 the PLO raised a new programmatic slogan, for a secular democratic state in all pre-1948 Palestine, with religious rights for Jews. This could be seen, and was widely seen, as a reasonable proposal to Israel. In fact it was used as an answer, an alternative, to the Israelis’ offer of land for peace. But the new proposal could only “work” if Israel voluntarily agreed to dissolve its state into a common entity with its antagonists and enemies of the previous half-century. There was never a possibility that Israel would do that. In practice, “secular democratic state” implied the conquest of Israel and the destruction of Hebrew self-determination.

Many who started off favouring the “secular democratic state” for its seeming reasonableness, its desirability, its seeming allocation of something like equal rights (though not national rights) to Jews, easily evolved to favouring the conquest of an unreasonable Israel in order to win that “secular democratic state”. Secular democratic state” was a vari-



Gamel Abdel Nasser

ant, or close relative to, the old policy of the Arab states, finessed into a semblance of reasonableness and acceptability for those who did not start out hostile to Israel or Jews as such. That was the policy which for Orthodox Trotskyists replaced commitment to “autonomy” for the Israeli Jews. It was a policy unique, unprecedented: that the Israeli state should abolish itself, or, failing that, be abolished by force and conquest which should be backed, morally and politically, by the anti-imperialist left.

You could, and many of us did, choose not to see that the “conquest of Israel” was implied by the “secular democratic

state”. Faced with Israel’s often brutal colonial rule in the West Bank and Gaza, and the stalemate between Israel and the Arab states, the “anti-imperialist” left turned into an advocate, in effect, of the conquest and wiping out of a nation which was deemed unworthy of existence because of its so-recent origins and its ill-treatment of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. Yet the situation in the West Bank and Gaza was shaped after the June 1967 war, as after 1948, at least as much by the intransigence of the Arab states — Arab states within some of which Palestinian refugees were kept in limbo as refugees by refusal to let them work or gain citizenship — as by any Israeli policy at that stage to annex the West Bank.†

After the Israeli victory in 1967, Israel formed close ties to the USA (for the first time), and the whole question became part of the general opposition to world “imperialism” whose traits and characteristics have been explored above. Thus by the time of the Yom Kippur war of 1973 the left was uninhibited and full-throttle for Egyptian victory and the defeat and destruction of Israel.

† We have seen that for Gerry Healy in 1956, the Arabs were already socialist and anti-capitalist. By 1967, in response to events, that idea had spread widely. The precise “class character” of the leading Arab nationalist states was in dispute among Orthodox Trotskyists. Ted Grant of the Militant (now the CWI, then the Revolutionary Socialist League and the British section of the Mandel Fourth International) had pronounced in mid 1965 that Syria was a deformed workers’ state, like the Stalinist states in Eastern Europe, China, etc., though Syria was ruled not by Stalinists but by the Ba’th party in symbiotic partnership with the military caste. Burma, so Grant thought, was also a deformed workers’ state. There were others in the Fourth International who came very close to arguing that Nasser’s Egypt was a workers’ state. In 1965, the Mandelite Livio Maitan wrote that a workers’ state could “emerge” in Egypt “in a relatively cold way, without the active revolutionary intervention of the masses at the crucial moment of the qualitative leap” (Hansen, *The Workers’ and Farmers’ Government, Education for Socialists* bulletin 1974, p.6). In Egypt the Nasserist state had expropriated the bourgeoisie, leaving them a stock exchange on which to trade the entitlements given them in compensation. The difference inside the Fourth International was between those who asserted that the Egyptian state, as it was, could become a deformed workers’ state without upheavals, and those who argued that for that to happen there would have to be a “mobilisation of the masses” of some sort.

What is “left-wing” antisemitism?

What is “left-wing antisemitism”? Where is it manifested? What is to be done about it? There are three difficulties, three confusions and obfuscations, that stand in the way of rational discussion of what we mean by “left-wing antisemitism”.

The first is that left-wing antisemitism knows itself by another and more self-righteous name, “anti-Zionism”. Often, your left-wing antisemite sincerely believes that he or she is only an anti-Zionist, only a just if severe critic of Israel.

The second is that talk of left-wing antisemitism to a left-wing antisemite normally evokes indignant, sincere, and just denial – of something else! “No, I’m not a racist! How dare you call me a racist?”

No, indeed, apart from an atypical crackpot here and there, left-wing antisemites are not racist. But there was antisemitism before there was late-19th and 20th century anti-Jewish racism. And there is still antisemitism of different sorts, long after disgust with Hitler-style racism, and overt racism of any sort, became part of the mental and emotional furniture of all half-way decent people, and perhaps especially of left-wing people.

Left-wingers are people who by instinct and conviction side with the oppressed, the outcasts, those deprived of human rights, with the working-class and the labour movement. We naturally side against the police, the military, and the powerful capitalist states, including our “own”. We are socially tolerant; in contrast to “hang ‘em, flog ‘em, build more jails” people; we look to changing social conditions rather than to punishment to deal with crime – we are people who want to be Marxists and socialists, and consistent democrats. Confused some such people may be, racists they are not. We are not saying that left-wing antisemites are racists.

The third source of confusion and obfuscation is the objection: “You say I’m an antisemite because I denounce Israel. I’m not anti-Jewish when I denounce Israel, but anti-Zionist”. And sometimes, at this point, you get the addition: “By the way, I am myself Jewish”.

The objector continues: Israel deserves criticism. Even the harshest criticism of Israel’s policies in the West Bank and Gaza, and of Israel’s long-term treatment of the Palestinians, is pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist, not antisemitic. To equate criticism of Israel with antisemitism is just crude and hysterical Zionist apologetics.

No, by “left-wing antisemitism” we emphatically do not mean political, military, or social criticism of Israel and of the policy of Israeli governments. Certainly, not all left-wing critics of Israel or Zionism are antisemites, even though these days all antisemites, including the right-wing, old-fashioned, and racist antisemites, are paid-up “anti-Zionists”.

Israel frequently deserves criticism. Israel’s policy in the Occupied Territories and its general treatment of the Palestinians deserve outright condemnation. The oppressed Palestinians need to be politically defended against Israeli governments and the Israeli military. The only halfway equitable solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, a viable, independent Palestinian state in contiguous territory, side by side with Israel, needs to be argued for and upheld against Israeli power.

Workers’ Liberty condemns Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians. We defend the Palestinians and champion an independent Palestinian state side by side with Israel.

The difference here between left-wing antisemites and honest critics of Israel – a category which includes a very large number of Israeli Jews as well as Israeli Arabs – is a straightforward one of politics, of policy.

The left-wing antisemites do not only criticise Israel. They condemn it outright and deny its right to exist. They use legitimate criticisms, and utilise our natural sympathy with the Palestinians, not to seek redress, not as arguments against an Israeli government, an Israeli policy, or anything specifically wrong in Israel, but as arguments against the right of Israel to exist at all. Any Israel. Any Jewish state in the area. Any Israel, with any policy, even one in which all the specific causes for justly criticising present-day Israel and for supporting the Palestinians against it have been entirely eliminated.

The root problem, say the left-wing antisemites, is that Israel exists. The root “crime of Zionism” is that it advocated and brought into existence “the Zionist state of Israel”.

Bitterly, and often justly, criticising specific Israeli policies, actions, and governments, seemingly championing the Palestinians, your left-wing antisemites seek no specific redress in Israel or from Israel, demanding only that Israel should cease

to exist or be put out of existence.

They often oppose measures to alleviate the condition of the Palestinians short of the destruction of Israel. Thus the petitions and chants on demonstrations: “Two states solution, no solution!” They use slogans like “Free Palestine” precisely because they can be understood in different ways, depending on your definition of “Palestine”. Therefore they can accommodate those who, without having studied the complexities or the history of the Jewish-Arab conflict, instinctively side with the oppressed and outmatched Palestinians, and for whom “Free Palestine” means simply that Israel should get out of the Occupied Territories. And it can also accommodate those, like the proponents of the slogan, the political Islamists of the Muslim Association of Britain/ Muslim Brotherhood and others, who define “Palestine” as pre-Israel, pre-1948 Palestine, and by “Free Palestine” mean the destruction and abolition of Israel, and the elimination in one way or another of the Jewish population of Israel, or most of them.

The political differences spelled out here are easily understood. But why is the drive and the commitment to destroy Israel antisemitism, and not just anti-Zionism?

Because the attitude to the Jewish nation in Israel is unique, different from the left’s attitude to all other nations; and because of the ramifications for attitudes to Jews outside Israel. Apart from a few religious Jews who think the establishment of Israel was a revolt against God, and some Jews who share the views of the leftists whom we are discussing here, those Jews outside Israel instinctively identify with and support Israel, however critically. For the left-wing antisemite they are therefore “Zionists”, and proper and natural targets of the drive to “smash Zionism”.

ANTI-ZIONIST LEFT

The attitude of the “anti-Zionist” left to Israel brings with it a comprehensive hostility to most Jews everywhere – those who identify with Israel and who defend its right to exist. These are not just people with mistaken ideas. They are “Zionists”.

In colleges, for example, where the anti-Zionist left exists side by side with Jewish students, this attitude often means a special antagonism to the “Zionist” Jews. They are identified with Israel. They, especially, are pressured either to denounce Israel, to agree that it is “racist” and “imperialist” and that its existence is a crime against the Arabs – or else be held directly and personally responsible for everything Israel does, has done, or is said to have done.

In such places, where the left “interfaces” with Jews, the logic of the unique attitude to Israel takes on a nasty persecuting quality. In the past, in the mid 1980s for example, that has taken the form of attempting to ban Jewish student societies. Non-Jews who defend Israel’s right to exist are not classified in the same category.

But is the attitude of the “absolute anti-Zionists” to Israel really unique? There are seeming similarities with left attitudes to one or two other states – Protestant Northern Ireland, apartheid South Africa, or pre-1980 white-ruled Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) – but the attitude to Israel is unique, because the reality of Israel cannot properly be identified with Northern Ireland, apartheid South Africa, or white Rhodesia.

In apartheid South Africa and white Rhodesia a minority lorded it over the big majority of the population, exploiting them. Israel is a predominantly Jewish state consisting of all



The left’s hostility to Israel is exceptional

classes. The Jewish nation does not subsist, and never has subsisted, on the exploitation of Arab labour, or depended in any essential way on such exploitation.

The general left hostility to the Northern Ireland Protestants – who are not exploiters of Catholic labour, and who are the compact majority, if not of the Six Counties, then of the north-east half of the Six Counties – is the closest to the attitude to Israel.

But it is not widely believed on the left that the Northern Ireland Protestant-Unionists simply have no right to be there. The right of the Jews to “be there” is denied in those sections of the left that we are discussing. The organisation of Jewish migration to Palestine – that was the root “crime” of Zionism, of which the “crime” of establishing Israel was only a further development. The “solution” is not only to undo and abolish Israel, but to reverse Jewish “migration” – which now includes people born there, to parents born there – and to roll the film of Middle-Eastern history backwards.

The prerequisite for left-wing antisemitism is the catastrophic decline in the culture of the left over the last decades, a decline which allows people who want to be socialists to chant “Sharon is Hitler, Israel is Nazi” and similar nonsense without checking on the words, without pausing to listen to what they are saying, or to think about it. The specific framework within which what we have been describing exists, and without which it probably couldn’t exist in these “left-wing” forms, is the poisonous and systematic misrepresentation and falsification of the history of the Jewish-Arab conflict and of the Jewish people in the 20th century. We can only touch on that here.

In real history, Jews fled to Palestine, where a small Zionist colony and a small pre-Zionist Jewish community already existed, from persecution in Europe in the 1920s, 30s and 40s. In the 1930s and 40s they fled for their lives from Nazism, which killed two out of every three Jews alive in Europe in 1939, in a world in which no non-persecuting state would let them, or enough of them, in. They fled to the existing Jewish national minority in Palestine (a long-established minority which, though small, was for example the majority in Jerusalem in 1900).

While Hitler was organising mass slaughter, Britain shut out Jews from Palestine, interned those who tried to enter. Overloaded, unseaworthy boats carrying illegal cargoes of Jews sank in the Mediterranean trying to get to Palestine (for example, the Struma, in which over 700 people died).

Israel was set up by those Jews on licence from the UN, which stipulated two states in Palestine, one Jewish and one Arab. When the state of Israel was declared in May 1948, the surrounding Arab states invaded. Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt were then British-dominated, and some of the armies were staffed by British officers.

The Israelis defended themselves and won. In the war three quarters of a million Palestinian Arabs were driven out or fled; in the same period and afterwards, about 600,000 Jews were expelled from or fled Arab countries.

In the Arab invasion of 1948, the Arab-Palestinian state was eliminated. Most of its territory went to Jordan, and fell under Israeli control in the war of 1967. That was a tremendous tragedy that will only be redressed when an independent Palestinian state takes its place alongside Israel.

This complex and tragic history is presented by the “absolute anti-Zionist” left as a conspiracy of Zionism, conceived of as a demonic force outside general history and outside Jewish history. It is not rare to find “left anti-Zionists” arguing that this Jewish-Zionist conspiracy was so all-powerful that it was able even to manipulate Adolf Hitler and the Holocaust in which six million Jews died (see the play by the veteran Trotskyist Jim Allen, *Perdition*, of which Ken Loach planned a performance at a London theatre in 1987). The core idea, the root of modern left-wing antisemitism, is that Israel, in one way or another, is an illegitimate state; and that therefore, in one way or another, it should be done away with. If its citizens will not be the first in history to voluntarily dismantle their nation-state and make themselves a minority in a state run by those whom they have had to fight for national existence; if they will not agree to voluntarily dismantle Israel and create a “secular democratic Arab state”, in which Israeli Jews can have religious but not national rights – then they must be overwhelmed and compelled to submit or flee by the Arab states, now or when they are strong enough.

Beginning with the benign-seeming proposal to sink Israel into a broader Arab-majority entity in which “everyone could live in peace”, the chain of logic rooted in the idea that Israel should not have come into existence, that it is an illegitimate state, leads directly – since Israel will not agree to abolish itself – to support for compulsion, conquest, and all that goes with it. Israel must be conquered.

Even the work of a writer like Hal Draper can feed into this poisoned stream. While Draper made valid and just criticisms of Israel, he accepted that it had a right to exist and a right to defend itself. He denounced those who wanted to destroy it. But he made his criticisms in the tone and manner of a prophet denouncing sin and iniquity. He too thought that Israel was an illegitimate state, that it should never have come into existence and should go out of existence as soon as possible.

By agreement, and only by agreement, he believed; but the subtleties get lost. There is nothing to stop someone swayed by Draper’s denunciations of Israel, and accepting his idea that Israel is an illegitimate state, then impatiently insisting: if not by agreement, then by conquest.

And so an increasingly-disoriented SWP-UK could look to a Saddam Hussein to “free Palestine”, that is, conquer Israel.

The point here is that states and nations are the products of history. There is no such thing as an illegitimate nation or a “bad people” which does not deserve the same rights as other peoples.

The antisemitic left today, which depicts Israel as the hyper-imperialist power – either controlling US policy, or acting as its chief instrument, the story varies – is in the grip of an “anti-imperialism of the fools”. And that in practice leads to a comprehensive hostility to Jews not far from what Bebel called the socialism of fools. One of the great tragedies of contemporary politics is that many young people, whose initial instincts to oppose Bush and Blair in Iraq and to support the Palestinians are initially healthy, are being poisoned with “left-wing” antisemitism.

“Left-wing antisemitism” is, in short, first a denial of Israel’s right to exist and rooted in that a comprehensive hostility to pro-Israel Jews, that is to most Jews alive, branding them as “Zionists” and seeing that description as akin to “racist” or “imperialist”. It excepts only those Jews who agree that Israel is racist imperialism in its most concentrated essence, and oppose its continued existence.

The general antidote to this anti-imperialism of fools is the propagation of rational democratic and socialist politics. Such politics focus on a political solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. They measure and criticise Israel – and the Arab states – according to their stand in relation to that just solution – the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

There is an immediate “antidote” to left-wing antisemitism too, and it is a very important task for Marxist socialists like those who publish *Solidarity*: relentless exposure and criticism of their politics and antics – without fear of isolation, ridicule, or the venomous hostility of the vocal and self-righteous left-wing antisemites.

Appendix: Jew or Zionist?

Learn how to do it smoothly, Tammy

A small outcry greeted the assertion by the veteran Labour MP Tam Dalyell † that there are too many Jews in Tony Blair’s and George Bush’s entourages, and that those Jews make Britain’s and the USA’s policy on the Middle East. I found the responses to Dalyell encouraging, but also seriously off the point. The important and effective antisemites now are not those who talk like Hitlerites about Jewish influence and Jewish “cabals”. Such people can usually expect the response Dalyell got.

Their talk is too close to what the Nazis said to justify genocide. It begs too-obvious questions and implies preposterous answers to them. Do all Jews have the same politics? How can the presence of “the Jews”, or of people of Jewish faith or Jewish background, add up to “Jewish influence” or “Jewish conspiracy”, when the individuals involved often have different opinions and advocate different policies? How, where the neo-conservatives of Jewish origin who are close to George Bush are out of line with the thinking of most American Jews, the big majority of whom are liberal Democrats? Where, though there may be a number of Jews who share the same opinion on certain questions, they are not alone in such opinions, and Jews can be found defending the opposite view? Where some Jews helped create the movement against the US invasion of Iraq, while others fervently supported the war, or, in Bush’s camp, helped initiate it?

There is only one semi-coherent version of the idea that where there are Jews around, irrespective of whether they agree or fight with each other, then that is a Jewish influence. And that is the Nazi doctrine that Bolshevik Jews and Jewish international financiers, irrespective of all that divides them, are all nonetheless part of one Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world. It is the only version that allows you to note the truth that there are bourgeois Jews and Bolshevik Jews, red Jews and Rothschilds.

That stuff doesn’t, I guess, have much of an open following now, though such bits of that old antisemitism as Dalyell spewed out should of course be stamped on. A number of writers in the Guardian did stamp on it. It was left to Paul Foot [of the SWP-UK] (Guardian, 14 May 2003) to defend Dalyell and put the most important present day antisemitism back in focus. Foot wrote: “Obviously [Dalyell] is wrong to complain about Jewish pressure on Blair and Bush when he means Zionist pressure. But that is a mistake that is constantly encouraged by the Zionists”. Foot advises Dalyell on how he should have expressed the same idea in widely acceptable words. Call them “Zionists”, not “Jews”, Tammy, and no-one can accuse you of being an antisemite without also having to take on the bulk of the “revolutionary left”. Learn how to do it in the modern fashion, comrade Dalyell. Of course you didn’t mean “Jews”, you meant “Zionists”, didn’t you?

Anti-Jewish feeling and ideas are usually now wrapped up in anti-Zionism. Not all “anti-Zionists” are antisemites, but these days antisemites are usually careful to present themselves as “anti-Zionists”. For that reason, it is light-shedding to find a prominent pseudo-left “anti-Zionist” recognising as his political kin someone who denounces Jews – and, Foot thinks, was at fault only in lacking the fineness to say Zionist when he meant Jew.

“Anti-Zionism” is the antisemitism of today. “Anti-Zionism”, that, is root-and-branch denunciation of Israel, involves comprehensively anti-Jewish attitudes – rampant or latent and implied – because it starts out from a stark refusal to recognise that the Jewish nation that had formed in Palestine by the mid 1930s had the right to exist, or the right to fight for its existence against those who would have destroyed it if they could.

In onslaughts the most important of which began in 1936, and in a series of wars, 1948, 1967, and 1973, Arab chauvinists tried to destroy the Jewish nation in Palestine. The “Zionists” had no right to defend themselves, still less to prevail! Arab pressure on the British overlords in pre-World-War-Two Palestine led to the closing of the doors to Palestine for Jews who otherwise faced death in Europe, and kept them closed all through the war and for three years after the war ended.

In his own way, Foot expresses the logic he himself sees in the “anti-Zionist” language he advises Dalyell to adopt. “There are lots of Jews in Britain who are bitterly opposed



Tam Dalyell

to the loathsome Israeli occupation of other people’s countries and the grotesque violence it involves”. Countries, plural? Which countries does Israel occupy other than the West Bank and Gaza? Foot does not mean the ex-Syrian Golan Heights, Israeli-occupied since 1967. He means pre-1967 Israel.

The attitude to Israel which Foot expresses, that it does not have the right to exist at all, begins with denial of equality to the Jews of Palestine and with demonising the Jewish nation there. From that denial comes grotesque anti-Jewish bias and misrepresentation in accounts of the history of the Jewish-Arab conflict and the origin of Israel. The Jewish nation had no right to exist; Jews who fled to Palestine from the Nazis had no right to do that; they never had the right to defend themselves, and they don’t have it now.

The overwhelming majority of Jews in the world, in whose post-Holocaust identity Israel is en-grafted, are guilty of racism and betrayal of Jewish internationalism when, however critical they may be of Israeli governments, they defend Israel’s right to exist.

Beginning with denial of the Jewish state’s right to exist, this “anti-Zionism” spreads out to also demonise most Jews in the world. The “Zionists” who are demonised by the “anti-Zionists” of Foot’s kind are always Jewish Zionists, not non-Jews who defend Israel’s right to exist and defend itself. (The exception is when they are those who can be denounced as renegades from pseudo-left orthodoxy on Israel and “Zionism” — like the non-Jewish supporters of Workers’ Liberty). “Anti-Zionism” is the most potent antisemitism in the modern world. It is especially and most venomously a property of the pseudo-left, as Dalyell’s statement and Paul Foot’s gloss on it shows clearly.

In fact Dalyell didn’t even get his facts right. Of the three “Jews” he named in Blair’s circle, two, Jack Straw and Peter Mandelson, though both have some Jewish ancestry, do not identify themselves as Jews. The daft old duffer blundered into a racist, “tell-me-who-your-ancestors-were” definition of Jewishness. By the time Foot came to defend Tam Dalyell, his mistake had been pointed out. Foot didn’t notice. Just call them “Zionists” Tammy and you can’t go wrong.

This “anti-Zionism” is no help at all to the Palestinians. For over half a century the Arab chauvinist demand for the destruction of Israel has been the best helper the expansionist Jewish-chauvinist Israeli right has had. If the Arab states and the Palestinians had accepted the Israeli proposal of September 1967 to withdraw from the territories it had occupied in June that year in return for Arab recognition and normalisation of relations between Israel and the Arab states, then the colonialist horrors of the last decades on the West Bank could not have happened.

People like Foot, are not socialist internationalists but vicarious Arab chauvinists. They are no friends of the oppressed Palestinians, for whom the only just and possible settlement is an independent Palestinian state side by side with Israel.

The main thing “socialists” like Foot and his mentor Tony Cliff have achieved is to infuse old left-wing anti-colonialism with virulent antisemitism, dressed up in the way Foot advises Dalyell to dress it up, as “anti-Zionism”.

† *Vanity Fair* magazine, issue dated June 2003

A mirror for anti-Zionists

Walking from Westminster to Trafalgar Square one afternoon in May or June 2002, I came upon a small picket-demonstration — a dozen people perhaps — waving Palestinian flags and placards on the pavement across the road from the entrance to the Prime Minister's residence in Downing Street.

I saw from a distance, and wondered at it, that half the demonstrators were dressed in the black hats and clothes and the beards that identified them as some sort of especially religious Jews.

I had known, of course, that some devout Jews believe that the creation of the state of Israel is a monstrous act of impiety and defiance against the God whose will it was that the Jews scatter across the world. I had never encountered such people before, so I stopped to talk.

An intelligent, alert man of about 30 explained their point of view. Those Jews who created Israel were rebels against God, criminals. Israel has no right to exist.

What, I asked, would he replace Israel by?

"A Palestinian state, of course!"

"The Israelis will not agree to that."

"They should get out, give Palestine back to the Palestinians."

"Where would they go?"

"Oh, there are many countries that would have them."

So I said that for the generation that founded Israel, nobody would have them. And what should they have done in face of Hitler?

"It was their own fault — Hitler only made war on the Jews because they made war on him. He said so!"

"So they shouldn't have fought back?"

"No! Jews were meant to suffer."

And so it went on.

To resist, fight back, struggle to shape their destiny — that was impious. He was very indignant with Israel and, I think, sincerely sympathetic to the Palestinians.

I was concerned to question and listen — to understand. My theological wits being blunt from lack of use, I didn't in time think to ask him how he knew that his God had decreed the Diaspora but not the Jewish "ingathering" in Israel.

After all, many fundamentalist Christians in the US and elsewhere — Ian Paisley, for instance — see the re-emergence of Israel as God's will, as proof that the world is being prepared for the "Second Coming" of Christ (such people, I understand, are a major part of the pro-Israel lobby in US politics).

I regretted afterwards also not thinking to ask what he and his friends would have done in the Warsaw ghetto in 1943, when those marked for systematic destruction by the Nazis rose in arms against impossible odds to write one of the great chapters in humankind's long struggle against predatory tyrants. But I have no doubt at all what the answer would have been.

I may, through lack of theological subtlety, be crudifying his arguments a bit here. I don't think so; but if I am, I do not do it knowingly, for effect.

Continuing my journey, it occurred to me that, apart from the small number of Jewish theological anti-Zionists, the only other group of people of Jewish background who are outrightly anti-Israel — wanting the destruction of the Israeli state, as distinct from being critical of Israel or opponents of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian-majority territories — are people influenced by "anti-Zionist" "Marxism", that special "Marxism" created by the Stalinists and taken over by post-Trotsky "Trotskyism".

Of proponents of this "Marxism", the most influential in the last 30 years was the late Tony Cliff, a Palestinian Jew in origin — he came to Europe in 1946 — and a vicarious Arab nationalist by conviction. Cliff could get away with preaching attitudes to Israel, and implicitly to Jews, that would, in someone who did not look and sound like Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, have been easily identified as virulent antisemitism.

By this I mean not "racism", but comprehensive hostility to most Jews alive, who to one degree or another give their support — often reluctant and critical support — to Israel; who are heirs to the identity stamped on Jews by the murderous anti-semitism of the 20th century.

The events of the first half of the 20th century turned Zionism — which fundamentally means commitment to a Jewish state, and then to Israel — from a minority movement amongst Jews to something that is part of the identity of al-



Orthodox Jews against Israel

most all Jewish people. Critically or mindlessly, unreservedly or grudgingly, to one degree or another, Jews identify with Israel. Why shouldn't they? How could they not?

Knowing something of the history as distinct from the poisoned mythology of how and why Israel came into existence, how could any person of average goodwill find this unreasonable? How could it be otherwise? Unless you share the viewpoint of the Jewish sectaries demonstrating in Whitehall, that Jews must eternally suffer, must humbly submit to ill-treatment, never by their actions try to influence the destiny which God, left to his own inclinations, would inflict on them, how could you argue that the Israelis in 1948 should not have defended themselves? Not that this or that should have been done differently, but that they should have meekly submitted to the invading Arab armies, which was the only alternative to fighting and prevailing. Or that they should now dismantle their national state and put themselves at the mercy of the surrounding states?

No people, no state in history, has ever done that. Why should anyone who does not have a "special" attitude to Israel and to Jews demand it of them? (As distinct from seeking a solution that would do something like justice to both Palestinians and Jews.)

This viewpoint in an anti-Israel religious Jew is one thing — eccentric, strange, bizarre, whatever you like. But when a socialist who is not a consistent pacifist adopts the attitude to the Jews expressed by the demonstrator I talked to in Whitehall, then it is not masochism of the Jewish mystics, but its exact opposite. It becomes a "special" attitude to Jews.

Support for any solution other than two states — Israel side by side with a Palestinian state — inescapably implies a "special" attitude to Israel. Unless you are an Israeli chauvinist opposed to a Palestinian state, it implies, logically and organically, a comprehensive hostility to most Jews alive because they will rightly resist the equation of Israeli nationalism with anti-Arab "racism", reject calls on the Israel nation to commit suicide by way of voluntarily dismantling its state, and refuse to find anything "progressive" in rocket attacks on Israel such as Saddam Hussein made in 1991 during the Gulf war (and some British pseudo-lefts accepted as useful "anti-Zionism"). In short, they reject the attitudes of my abnegating, self-denying mystic in Whitehall.

It is of course possible to argue that Zionism and Israel are such an evil that the neo-antisemitic implications of advocating Israel's destruction are an acceptable "overhead cost" of necessary political activity. That attitude is in fact implied in much of what the British pseudo-left says and does, and in what it does not say and do. But who would go so far as to state that and argue for it openly?

It is a precondition of rational discussion of the issues that these implications are brought into the light of scrutiny and

rational assessment.

The arguments which the man I met in Whitehall stated bluntly and with religious fervour closely parallel those which the pseudo-left uses, less candidly (and his attitude may, indeed, form the psychological and emotional substratum of the attitudes of a certain section of the "anti-Zionist" pseudo-left — some of the vociferous "anti-Zionists" in the SWP for example — who contribute no small part of the implicitly antisemitic confusion which poisons both themselves and those who listen to them). For the left, of course, the Israeli Jews are rebels not against God, but against "History", against the "Arab Revolution", against the perennial role of fatalistic, submissive victim...

The other-worldly Jews are entitled to those views. The international socialist left is not — not unless it applies such views comprehensively and consistently.

The point here is that, except where the Israeli Jews are concerned, normally the revolutionary left scorns such attitudes.

Two nations, Two states



New edition (2016), £4.70 including postage from www.workersliberty/israelpalestine

Solidarity, yes! Boycott, no!

An open letter to Hilary and Steven Rose

Comrades: You, I believe, support a boycott as something to help bring about “two states” in Israel/ Palestine — Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, and the creation of a sovereign, independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. On the goal of “two states”, I agree with you. But I believe the boycott will harm rather than help that cause, and in this Open Letter I want to explain why.

The mood for boycott is backed by strong feelings of indignation and outrage against Israel, and by a powerful and unanswerable sentiment that something must be done by the British labour movement to help the Palestinians.

The following, the main, features of the relationship of Israel and the Palestinian people cry out for action against Israel and on behalf of the Palestinians.

Israel has ruled over the Palestinian majority territories as an occupying colonial power since the June war of 1967 — a full half century.

The relationship between Israel and the Palestinians is one of overwhelming Israeli superiority in the technology of modern war.

Israel uses the disparity in power and armaments with sickening ruthlessness and evident disregard for Palestinian civilian casualties.

The Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are harassed in their livelihoods and studies by the Israeli army, pauperising them.

Israel, in fact if not in plain words, is opposed to allowing the Palestinians to set up their own state. When Israeli leaders speak of a Palestinian state, they do not mean what the Palestine Liberation Organisation means — a sovereign, independent, Palestinian state, in contiguous territory, alongside Israel. The Israeli leaders, or most of them, mean Palestinian autonomy in chopped-up territories under the military control of Israel.

Whatever chance it had of being forced on Israel has been a casualty of the chaos which has mired the USA and its allies in Iraq.

In order for Israel to accept, and collaborate in setting up, a genuinely independent Palestinian state, it will have to come under very strong and determined international pressure, in the first place from the USA. No such pressure is being put on Israel. Israel is a valued ally of the USA.

Those are the main elements in the case for boycotting Israel — or, rather, for taking some action against Israel and for the Palestinians. “Boycott” is the easy and obvious action.

It can be argued against the above list that it is one-sided and unfair to Israel — that it leaves out of the picture the long history of the Israel-Arab conflict, in which the Israeli Jews are a small nation surrounded by big enemies, and, for recent history, the terrible campaign of homicide bombings (mounted mainly but not only by Hamas and Islamic Jihad) which followed on (many Israelis would say grew out of) earlier peace agreements, which collapsed in 2000. The harassment of Palestinians which prevents them going about their business, oppressive though it is, and unnecessary and arbitrary as some, perhaps most, of it now is, cannot reasonably be separated from Israel’s effort to protect its citizens from homicide bombers.

But it is necessary at this point to declare my own point of view. I am a supporter of the PLO position of a two-states settlement — a sovereign, independent, Palestinian state in contiguous territory, side by side with Israel. And I think British trade unionists should help the Palestinians. We have a duty to help them.

I, like other supporters of the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, have been active in protest activities to try to do that — pickets, demonstrations, meetings (including speaking tours for Israeli refuseniks and Israeli peace activists — something which would seem to be ruled out by a comprehensive “boycott”).

I believe that a boycott, though at first blush it seems an obvious thing to do, is not in fact the way to help the Palestinians. On the contrary, it would be counterproductive. Its effect on Israel for the good would be marginal, and it carries enormous political overhead costs, costs that would be far greater than any help a boycott movement could conceivably give to the Palestinians. All in all, there are, I believe special consid-

erations to be taken into account in this case.

Why not boycott?

Three things — and they overlap — seem to me to speak strongly against a boycott movement.

A boycott movement against Israel would, once it took off, inevitably become a movement against “Zionists” in Britain. In practice, and according to all the relevant experience, that would mean: against Jews. The boycott movement would become, or, if you prefer, become indistinguishable from, an anti-Jewish movement.

As I’ve noted above, you, if I understand it correctly, support a boycott as a measure to put pressure on Israel to concede “two states”. Those who have the organisation to bring boycott proposals to union conference agendas do not. The hard core who promote boycott are in the first place, the SWP/Respect and those around it in such movements as the “Stop The War Coalition”. They do not support a two-states settlement. They oppose it. They are committed not to a Palestinian sovereign state alongside Israel, but to the destruction of Israel and its replacement by an Arab state in which those Jews who will survive the military conflict and its immediate aftermath would have religious but not national rights.

For hard-core boycottists like the SWP, the purpose of the boycott is not to push Israel to particular concessions. The purpose is to brand all Israeli Jews and all “Zionists” as unreachable except by force. For such people, boycott is seen as part of the programme of destroying Israel.

They used to call their programme “secular democratic state”, but, supporting Hamas as they do, they now tend to fade out the qualification “secular”. Talk of campaigning for any sort of secular state in tandem with political Islamists is, it seems, too preposterously self-contradictory even for the SWP/Respect!

KITSCH-LEFT

The ardent boycotters on the British kitsch-left support clerical-fascist organisations such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Muslim Brotherhood (in Britain, MAB). All such groups advocate and promote not the PLO programme of two states — the only basis on which any approximation to justice can be won for both the peoples in the Jewish-Arab conflict — but the destruction of Israel and its replacement by a theocratic Islamic clerical-fascist regime, as in Iran.

Their tactics are deliberate mass slaughter of civilians (including Muslims) by individuals who believe that their instant reward for mass murder will be ascension into a Hollywood Arabian Nights style paradise replete with harems of virgins. The reckless, criminal indifference of Israel to “ancillary” civilian casualties in their military action rightly outrages us. Even in its worst instances, however, this is something not to be equated with people who take the slaughter of people in the London Tube, in a Tel Aviv night club, or on a Baghdad street, as their deliberate purpose.

It is the Islamists’ slogans for Israel-Palestine that have dominated the “anti-war” movement and its demonstrations: “Palestine shall be free/ From the river to the sea”. On the Lebanon march in protest against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon last July, many (seemingly) non-Muslims took up the cry: “We are all Hezbollah”.

That, no doubt, expressed an emotional identification with the victims of Israeli warfare, and an emotional hostility to Israel. But such sloganeering is possible only to people who do not know the nature of those with whom they identify, and what they mean for Arabs and for Muslims, especially the women, or who are too politically disoriented to care. Large numbers of young people are in the first category. The SWP/Respect work to pull them into the second.

The kitsch left does everything it can to disorient young people who oppose war and obey the good and healthy impulse to side with the oppressed and with the weak (the Palestinians) against the strong (Israel).

It is not a question here only of the SWP adapting to its clerical fascist allies. Long before they discovered the progressive revolutionary potential of Islamism, even when they were passionately against those of us who championed the Muslims of Bosnia against the Serbian chauvinists who were

slaughtering them, this organisation advocated not two states but the destruction of Israel.

Not to argue for two states is not to serve the interests of the Palestinians.

This “background” cannot but affect what a boycotting campaign led by these people will mean in practice.

The forces who promote boycott have for many years actively opposed any effort to help the Palestinians secure their own state alongside Israel. When the activist left was united in the Socialist Alliance, in 2001, the SWP repeatedly voted down proposals that the Alliance should demand Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. They go on demonstrations with petitions and chants: “Two states solution/ No solution!”

Despite the “humanitarian” face they give their anti-Israel agitation, they are ultimately as little concerned with the well-being of the Palestinians as are the religious crazies of Islamist clerical fascism with whom they have twinned themselves.

Their goal implies, all things taken into account, no solution or relief for the Palestinians until Israel is destroyed; and not even those who most ardently wish the destruction of Israel believe that that will happen soon.

One of the issues in play now in the Middle East is whether or not the very historical possibility of a “two states” solution is being destroyed. The kitsch left no less than the Islamists and the Israeli right want it to cease to be a possibility.

The South Africa analogy

You, comrades Rose, argue from comparisons and analogies which on examination do not hold up. Apartheid South Africa, for example.

In the present boycott movement around the Jewish-Arab conflict, South Africa features on two levels. The precedent of the South African boycott is invoked to argue for a boycott of Israel. And Israel is said to be identical to, or travelling fast to being a society identical with, apartheid South Africa.

The comparison of Israel with apartheid South Africa is in my opinion very instructive. First, take the boycott tactic.

An international boycott lasted from the Sharpeville massacre at the beginning of 1960 to the end of apartheid in 1994 — that is, dating apartheid from 1948 when the Nationalist Malan regime formalised and extended racial segregation, for 34 years of the 46 year life of full-blow apartheid. A campaign that lasted so long, without any change in what it was campaigning against until the very end, was self-evidently limited in its effect!

Limited and, in fact, contradictory. Contradictory, because it struck also at blacks and coloureds. The academic aspects of the boycott, for example, did that.

The boycott “principle” was used by the ANC to oppose direct links between British unions and the new black-majority unions which grew up in South Africa in the 1970s and 80s.

The attitude of the kitsch-left to the Israeli trade unions is, like its attitude to the Israeli Jewish working class, one of stark hostility, and, frequently, denial that they are unions at all. But the Israeli unions, though their policies on Palestinian rights are not what we would wish, are genuine workers’ unions, not comparable to the whites-only unions in South Africa. There are many peace movements in Israel with which we can and should work. Boycott cuts off the channels for working for “two states”.

But, you will say, those channels have produced little, and even a limited new form of pressure must be desirable. Other things being equal, yes! In fact, however, the main function of the boycott of South African goods was not its practical effect in forcing concessions, but as a vehicle, a “hook”, for a relentless drive to make South Africa stink in the nostrils of people who believed in human equality.

That, of course, was appropriate. On a certain limited level, too, the boycott expressed the objective of smashing, beating down, and overthrowing the South African apartheid state — which (in contrast to what “smashing” Israel would mean) signified not foreign conquest, but replacing minority with majority rule. That too was good because it was necessary. The blacks and coloureds of South Africa were helots. Nothing except destruction of the apartheid regime could serve their interests.



Gazans flee Israel bombing (2014)

Here we already tread on the ground of what is wrong with equating Israel with South Africa. It is grotesque in its misrepresentation. As soon as we come close to facts, they speak out against those who equate Israel and South Africa.

South African white society was built on black economic enslavement, on the exploitation of people defined as without rights because of their “race”. That was true as far back as the mid and late 19th century, before the British conquest of the Boers in the war of 1899-1902.

And Israel? The all-shaping characteristic of the Jewish colony in Palestine was the determination of its dominant and most dynamic elements not to be exploiters of Arab labour. They aimed to create a Jewish nation, with Jewish workers and Jewish farmers as its essential component. The Jewish colony, and Israel, never rested on the exploitation of Arab labour. They built a society in parallel to the Arab society (and most of it, anti-Israel myths notwithstanding, on reclaimed waste and swamp land).

The amount and importance of Arab labour in the Israeli economy grew after June 1967, but in its extent, centrality, and irreplaceability it never came to merit even bracketing in the same economic species as South Africa. Israel was and is a Jewish nation state (with a 20% Palestinian Arab minority) separate and distinct from the Palestinian Arabs.

It is possible to deplore the fact, and possible to refuse to come to terms with it. But the fact is that Israel confronts the Palestinians and the rest of the Arab world as a national state. In contrast to South Africa, it is not necessary for the liberation of the Palestinian Arabs that the Israeli national state be destroyed.

You, comrades Rose — if I’ve got it right — accept that. You believe that a Palestinian state alongside Israel, “two states”, is the solution — not the destruction of Israel.

Yet you go along with, ally with, and in practice serve politically, those who favour a radically different outcome, the destruction of Israel. By invoking the nonsensical equation of Israel with South Africa, you feed the demonisation of Israel which is the root of so much that is poisonous on the left — and which in practice serves to push back, or aside, concentration on helping the Palestinians secure the settlement which you, like AWL think makes most sense, an independent Palestinian state.

DEMONISING “ZIONISTS”

If the movement to boycott South Africa served as an agency for spreading international understanding of the foul racist nature of apartheid South Africa, in the case of Israel the boycott movement comes after, not before, widespread demonisation of Israel. Again, the contrast with South Africa is telling, and not on your side of the argument.

There was never any real injustice in the way the Boers of South Africa were perceived by the international anti-apartheid movement.

There is great injustice, and injustice based on grossly misleading, one-sided, and falsified “history”, in the way Israel is perceived by most of the left. The “Stalin school of falsification” initially did that work, which the kitsch-left has now taken up.

Of course it is just and proper that Israel be faced with hostility for what it does to the Palestinians over whom it has such great, and greatly abused, power. It can be argued, and up to a point justly, that Israel here gets what it deserves, reaps what it sows.

Yet Israel is indeed — as uncritical apologists for Israel so often assert, without thereby invalidating the point — singled out, measured by standards applied to no other nation, its citizens now held responsible to the third and fourth generations for what their ancestors did or are alleged to have done.

Politically, on this question, you are products of the Cliff school of Jewish-Arab politics and history.

I can’t know how much of what you learned in that school you still hold to. But the role you have played in the boycott-Israel movement indicates that you still hold to a great deal of it.

THE PSEUDO HISTORY

You know how the pseudo history goes.

Jews were persecuted in Russia and Eastern Europe. Then came Zionism, a Jewish-nationalist and even Jewish “racist” mirror image of the nationalism and racism in the society around them.

The Zionists urged Jewish workers to abandon the class struggle in their own countries and to go to Palestine, to create utopian socialist colonies there, the kibbutzim.

True to their reactionary petty bourgeois nature, the Zionists allied with imperialist powers and worked to win their favour.

Eventually, in 1917, Britain, which would assume control of what had been Turkish Palestine a year later, declared itself in favour of a “Jewish national home” in Palestine.

In Palestine, the Zionist colonists built their own economy, excluding Arab workers from their enterprises. That was not Jewish nationalism: this was “racism”. What in other peoples was nationalism, in the Jews was racism, and racism most foul! It was racism identical to that of the Nazis.

Then, worse by far! The Zionists allied with the Nazis.

What comes next varies, depending on how deep-dyed in the kitsch-left culture on Zionism one is.

“The Zionists” collaborated with the Nazis, their mirror self in occupied Europe even as they were attempting to extirpate the Jews of Europe; some of them helped the Nazis to organise the deportation of a million Jews from Hungary to the death camps!

At the end of the 20th century, Jim Allen, arguably the most talented left-wing dramatist in Britain, wrote a play, *Perdition*, in which he descended to branding “Zionists” (and Jews — his target-finder wobbled a lot) as co-responsible for the Holo-

caust, or parts of it. Ken Loach, far and away the most important left-wing film-maker in Britain, produced the play — or tried to — at the Royal Court Theatre.

To pick up the main thread again.

In Palestine the Jews collaborated with the British imperial power.

As one British colonial official put it, the Jews would create a “little loyal Ulster” in the Middle East to serve Britain.

(Everyone in or near the kitsch-left hears about that dictum, early in their association with it: few hear that the official, Ronald Storrs, became one of the leading anti-Zionists of the 1940s). The Jews robbed the Palestinians of their land.

“The Zionists” (the Jews) used their great power in the councils of the world to ensure that, as the 1930s moved towards the outbreak of World War Two in 1939, no country would accept more than a trickle of Jewish refugees from Germany. Jews who wanted to escape the threat of Hitler would not — so “the Zionists” decreed, and statesmen like Roosevelt meekly followed their decrees — be allowed to go anywhere else but Palestine.

In this way, as in many other ways, “the Zionists” bore some responsibility for the Nazi massacre of Europe’s Jews (including the Zionists!)

At the end of World War Two, after a little bit of a misunderstanding between the Zionists and the British, the Zionists changed imperial masters, and put themselves at the service of US imperialism. The United Nations, serving the USA, decided to partition Palestine and create a Jewish state, Israel (and a Palestinian one, too, but that is something that tends to get lost in the telling, as is the fact that the territory allotted by the UN to the Palestinian state was taken by Jordan — the West Bank, until 1967 — and Egypt).

Israel then drove out millions of Palestinians. Ever since, Israel has served imperialist interests in the Middle East.

I’ve telescoped the story, but I haven’t crudified it: see, for example, Jim Higgins, a once-central representative of the old pre-SWP IS culture, and one who was not simply ignorant, in a debate in *Workers’ Liberty* in 1996-7 (www.workersliberty.org/node/8210).

Where to begin unravelling this writhing tissue of poisonous “historical” worms?

The first thing that strikes you in this kitsch-Left tale of irrepressible human evil, oppression, and mischief-making, is who the villains are. They are the people, and most of the leaders of the people, who were the victims of oppression and industrialised mass murder. The people who, after they and their forebears had, over decades and centuries, been maligned as human demons, the source of most of the evils in the world, had two in every three of their number in Europe — Europe all the way from the Caucasus to the Breton coast — murdered.

The second thing that strikes you is how relentlessly and stupidly malignant some of the constructions on the facts, quasi-facts, and alleged facts are.

“The Zionists” could tell the US President his policy on immigration, and they would tell him to keep Jews out? Of course they could! Of course they would! (See Jim Higgins, above). “The Zionists” were and are inhuman demons.

The third thing that strikes you is the stratospherical lunacy of much of what is attributed to “the Zionists”, if you tie it together into something like coherence. For example, in Allen’s play and Lenni Brenner’s books (on which Allen seems to have based himself), “the Zionists” wanted a million Hungarian Jews dead because that would help them “get” Israel after the war. (The four or so million already dead in 1944 were not a strong enough moral case, it seems — but I can’t explain what I can’t understand....)

“The Zionists” not only collaborated with the Nazis, but manipulated and used them for their purposes. Even during the Holocaust, the Jews (as “the Zionists”) were pulling strings and determining what happened! Even Hitler and the Nazi movement — ultimately, if you know how to interpret things, and what “really” happened — served the interests of Zionism. Of “the Jews.”

The fourth thing that strikes you is the stony-hearted lack of sympathy and empathy, or even sympathetic understanding, with which the absolute anti-Zionists, some of whom are, to their credit, moved by the suffering of the Palestinians, approach the history of their subject. Everything is grist to their mill. Conflicting or contradictory elements in the real history are ruthlessly cut away. The “absolute anti-Zionists” operate with a serene self-righteousness, an absolute set of double standards.

Did Jewish or “Zionist” leaders “negotiate” at gunpoint with the murderous power which had them in its grip? Of course some of them did. Aha, that tells you the “real” nature of Zionism, its true inner affinity with Nazism!

It is the testimony of history that anti-semitic persecution in Poland, Germany, and other countries drove those Jews who could get there to go to Palestine, and that anti-semitism after

the defeat of the Nazis (there were pogroms against returning Jews in Poland, and riots in Paris) convinced the surviving Jews that nothing would serve them but their own state. Those events turned Zionism from a minority movement into the viewpoint of a majority of Jews, and transformed the situation in Palestine by ensuring that hundreds of thousands of Jews moved there in the 20s, 30s, and 40s.

Is that how it was? No, in the conventional kitsch-Left account, it wasn't like that at all! It was the inner nature of racist, malignant "Zionism", its devilish plotting and string-pulling, that shaped events.

It is the testimony of history that little more than a decade after the British took over Palestine, and after the Balfour Declaration, Britain tried to renege on its promise that Palestine could be a Jewish national home. It began to impose restrictions on Palestinian Jews (on Jews acquiring land, for instance) and on Jewish immigration that culminated on the eve of World War Two (that is, on the eve of the Holocaust) in largely stopping Jewish entry to Palestine.

Throughout the World War and the Holocaust, and up until Britain quit Palestine in 1948, it systematically and rigorously excluded all but a meagre quota of Jews from Palestine. It interned illegal refugees, and effectively condemned many would-be refugees to death at sea as they, Jewish "boat people", sought to evade the controls in miserably unseaworthy craft.

True? Nonsense! Britain served "the Zionists"! "The Zionists" and Britain worked hand in glove.

It is the testimony of history that when the state of Israel was declared in May 1948, all the imperialist powers with one exception imposed a rigorous arms embargo (the same sort of thing as was done against the Muslims of Bosnia in the 1990s) against Israel, whose ill-equipped citizen army faced the professional (and some of them, British-officered) armies of Egypt, Syrian, Jordan and Iraq.

The exception was Stalin's Russia, which, eager to create difficulties for its British rival, sent guns via its puppet state of Czechoslovakia.

— Nonsense! Israel was a capitalist-imperialist stooge, always.

It is the fact of history that three quarters of a million Arabs were driven out or fled in 1948, in a war in which Arab armies attacked the territory allocated to Israel by the United Nations in 1947. The Egyptians came with the slogan, "Drive the Jews into the sea!"; and, naturally enough, they had or could hope for the support of the Arabs in the areas they invaded.

— Nonsense! Here too "the Zionists" were in absolute control — and millions, not three quarters of a million, were driven out or fled. There are now 6 million Palestinian refugees!

It is the testimony of history that nearly as many Jews — about 600,000 — were driven out of the Arab countries to Israel in 1948 and after.

— What's wrong with that? Why wouldn't they be? They were probably "Zionists".

And so on, and so on, and so on...

The fifth thing that strikes you is the one-sidedness, the grotesque all-pervading one-sidedness, of the "history" that underpins the kitsch-left's picture of the Arab-Jewish conflict. What in one side is damnable, down to the 4th and 5th generation, is in the other commendable.

Muhammed Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, the leader of the Palestinian Arabs, went to Europe and tried to raise a Bosnian Muslim legion to fight for Hitler. He shared Hitler's objective of annihilating Jews. He wanted the Nazis armies to drive the British out of Palestine. If the Nazis had gained control of Palestine — even temporarily — they and he would have massacred every Jewish child, woman, and man.

In the conventional kitsch-left account? — It is perfectly understandable! Hussein was an anti-imperialist, looking for what allies he could get. Of course he had a right to do that, and should not be judged adversely for it.

The wartime antics of the Mufti are no secret, but quite widely known. The most stern judges of the Zionist or Jewish "collaborators", at gunpoint, are entirely indulgent of the Mufti. The Arabs had rights in Palestine, you see. The Jews didn't.

That is the point of much of the poisonous pseudo-history.

The Arabs are and always were the legitimate people, with the normal rights of self-defence, including the right to manoeuvre for advantage between their enemies and their enemies' enemies. The Jews had no rights — no right to what? To be in Palestine? To live? If the choice were Palestine or death, it was better for them to die? They should be blamed for not doing that — and for defeating in 1948 those who wanted to kill them or, in the words of the proclamation of the Egyptian army invading Israel, "drive them into the sea"?

Comrades Rose: how much of this stuff do you go along with? How much of what you learned in the IS/SWP have

you jettisoned? How much of it have you simply not thought about for a long time?

THE DYNAMICS OF BOYCOTT

You can justly reply that this history, has no bearing on the question at issue: for or against a boycott of Israel now. It has, however, a very great deal of relevance to the political-cultural framework in which this discussion takes place. And to what the kitsch-left and their Islamist allies will make of a boycott movement.

The grotesque "history" — not history, but the demonisation outside of history of an entire people — which I have touched on (there is a very great deal more of it) is dominant on the kitsch left, and underpins the "solution" to the Israel/Palestine conflict most widely accepted on the "left" — destroy Israel. Destroy the demon spawn of Zionism (and the twin of Nazism: that is what is said, and when not said, widely implied, mad though it is).

It is the proponents of such views — themselves the allies of clerical-fascist Islamists who have their own mystic-religious "dialect" of this "devils and angels" story — that you ally with and serve in the "boycott Israel" campaign.

I want to keep the lines clear. Yes, boycott is logically separable from the historical demonisation. No dispute there. The policy of boycott is not necessarily tied into the demonisation. Logically.

But in reality? In reality, this boycott movement gains its active force from people who hold to and propagate the "absolute anti-Zionist" demonisation which I have touched on above.

Now, in Britain, the boycott is a weapon against Israel in the hands of people, secular kitsch-leftists and Islamist clerical-fascists alike, whose goal is to destroy Israel and — as a corollary — to pay no heed to the needs of the Palestinian people, except as a source of pseudo-humanitarian agitation against Israel.

Rejecting a Palestinian state alongside Israel, they have no rational goal, no goal realisable in the calculable future, no democratically acceptable goal, in their agitation against Israel.

They and no-one else — certainly not anomaly-ridden two-states supporters like yourselves — will dominate and shape the boycott campaign.

Comrades, you cannot but remember the numerous episodes in the colleges in the 1970s and 80s in which kitsch-left "anti-imperialists" and "anti-racists" banned college Jewish societies, or tried to ban them, and harassed their members. What else do you do with "racists"? And, unlike the nationalists of other peoples, Jewish nationalists (as we've seen) are ipso facto racists, the historical legatees of the Nazis and in some respects their living embodiment in the Middle East now.

The lunacy and hysteria are not mine, are not in the last sentence, but in the events I allude to, the bans on student Jewish societies, the branding and harassing of all "Zionists" as "racists".

You cannot but know that. You cannot but remember it.

MIRIAM SHLESINGER

You know about cases like that of Miriam Shlesinger, a former chair of the Israeli section of Amnesty International and a strong critic of the Israeli government's mistreatment of Palestinians, who in 2002 was thrown off the editorial board of an international journal of translation studies by the editor, a British academic, who wanted to boycott Israel.

You think such things can help the Palestinians? You think it would be progress to involve Stop The War, MAB, and the supporters of Muslim jihadists, in seeking out and hounding local "supporters of the racist state of Israel", "Zionist-racists", and "Zionist agents of imperialism"?

Or do you think it won't happen, or, to put it at its weakest, is not likely to happen, as a result of the boycott campaign? Why not? Such things can be kept under control? Who will control them?

Nobody will control them, once a freewheeling campaign gets going. Attacks by Muslims on Jews have increased greatly throughout Europe in the last years. The chance that a boycott of Israel now, in this situation, mounted by these people (SWP/Respect and their clerical-fascist allies), whose goal is to see Israel destroyed, will lead to a targeting of Jewish Zionists, is, I suggest, large enough to deter friends of the Palestinians and advocates of a two-states settlement from adding their weight to the campaign.

And let me remind you of something that is likely to be forgotten. In the old campus wars against "Zionism", it was Jews who were targeted as "Zionists". Non-Jewish Zionists — people like Tony Benn, then a prominent member of the Labour Friends of Israel group — were left alone. That won't happen

now? Why will it not?

At the conference of the university lecturers' union AUT in 2005, you, Steven Rose, said: "How dare they call me an anti-semitite when many of my family died in the Holocaust and I have fought anti-semitism all my life?"

Anti-semitism, of course, is the vexed question. And it begs the question, what is anti-semitism?

In terms of your feelings — how could anyone other than a moron entertain a general hostility to a whole category of disparate human beings, however defined? As a species, socialists tend to like people, to wish them well.

How could people of Jewish background subscribe to the idiocies of anti-semitism?

Yet that doesn't quite cover it.

Here it is surely not a matter of racism, or of comprehensive subjective dislike of all the vastly varied people who are, in one way or another, Jews. Leave aside the term "anti-semitism" for the moment, and examine the substance of what it means to hold to the position that the SWP/Respect and its political satellites have and propagate on the Jewish-Arab conflict.

They — unlike you — believe that the Israeli Jewish nation should be abolished. Since there is no way that it can be persuaded to abolish itself peacefully, that means in practice that it should be conquered and its state destroyed; and those who want it destroyed must support those "anti-imperialist" Arab or Muslim states that alone can, they hope, do it.

This proposal to destroy a nation state is unique on the left. There is no equivalent attitude to any other nation. The South African analogy is utterly false here: the objective of the serious left there was that minority rule be destroyed, and replaced by majority rule, not that a whole nation be conquered.

Whether you call that unique attitude anti-semitism or not, the position that the Jewish state should be destroyed is hardly "pro-semitic". And there is more, of course.

Most Jews alive today identify to one degree or another with Israel — critically and reluctantly, or uncritically and with gut chauvinism. Given the history we have briefly covered, how could it be otherwise?

The main exceptions I know of are some varieties of revolutionary socialist, and a small layer of religious Jews. Jews naturally identify with Israel, critically or uncritically. The drive against Zionism as the acme of "imperialism", as "racism", and all the rest — how can that not, to one degree or another, be, or become, a drive against non-Israeli Jewish Zionists? Especially those who can be identified because they stand up against the "anti-Zionists", belong to a Jewish or Israeli society at a college, or run a shop which refuses to join a boycott? How, therefore, can the political programme of the "destroy Israel" merchants not be anti-semitic? Antisemitic both in its core — destroy Israel; Israel is an illegitimate historical formation; the Jewish state must be abolished and swallowed up into a non-Jewish state — and in all that is spun from it?

The position that Israel is illegitimate contains in embryo (even if its proponents do not understand it or wish it) a full-scale anti-semitism. You don't share that position — but you ally with and help those who will use a boycott campaign to popularise and reiterate the idea that Israel is illegitimate, etc.

This is not, self-evidently, racist anti-semitism. Nor old-style Christian or Islamic anti-semitism. Yet it does involve a pretty comprehensive hostility not just to Israel but to most Jews alive, those who will not see "anti-imperialist" and "anti-racist" and anti-Zionist "reason".

Persecution of Jews, albeit on a mild level as these things go in history, was a feature of some campuses in the 1980s, organised and prosecuted by the SWP and their co-thinkers on this question. You can not but be aware of that, comrades Rose.

There have been quite a number of antisemitisms in history, feeding into and off each other, but distinguishable one from another. The nearest (partial) equivalent I can think of to today's "left" anti-semitism is the proselytising Christian antisemites. They were not necessarily hostile to Jews as people — they wanted to save their souls. And only incidentally, in pursuit of that benign goal, did they break Jewish bones and burn Jewish bodies — or cast a tolerant eye on those who did that on behalf of the cause they themselves wanted to serve.

Everyone knows August Bebel's statement that the "anti-Rothschild" type of old anti-semitism partook of "the socialism of the fools". You could call the present "left" anti-Zionism, the "anti-imperialism", or the "anti-racism", of the idiots.

I conclude: there is no way in the circumstances I have outlined that a boycott movement will not, to put it at its mildest, run the risk of being an anti-Jewish movement. There is no way that participation in a movement for boycott, led and shaped by people mortally hostile to the continuation of Israel, does not conflict with your commitment to the only rational settlement — two states.

Trotsky and the Jewish question

"The socialist revolution is the only realistic solution of the Jewish question. If the Jewish workers and peasants asked for an independent state, good — but they didn't get it under Great Britain. But if they want it, the proletariat will give it. We are not in favour, but only the victorious working class can give it to them." Leon Trotsky, 15 June 1940

It is one of the ironies of politics. Trotskyism, in most of its post-Trotsky mutations, embraces an "anti-Zionism" that implies nothing less than a comprehensive hostility to most Jews alive; yet Trotskyism in Trotsky's time and after was a movement in which people of Jewish origin played — and play — a massive part.

It is not right-wing myth, but plain truth, that Jews have always played a very large part in the socialist and communist movement. Lenin once commented on the splendid vanguard role of Jews in our movement. Karl Kautsky, ceremoniously addressing a small Yiddish socialist journal in Britain early in the 20th century, urged Jewish socialists to work at bringing overall socialist theory, revolutionary determination, and an internationalist outlook to the British labour movement — to be the heaven that they, indeed, often were. The role Jews played had nothing to do with innate Jewish characteristics, but with the historical and social experiences of the Jewish people.

In the first half of the 20th century, Jewish workers lived in a world that stigmatised, scapegoated and persecuted Jews. The pervasive Christian culture branded them in age-old sectarian terms as the accursed people, the God-killers who had rejected and then crucified Christ; the newer nationalist culture that increasingly gripped Europe's sundered nations before and after the First World War branded them as "aliens"; its racist sub-culture depicted them as human vermin who should be exterminated.

For decades the hounding and harrying would continue, now abating, now rising to a crescendo, until it would attain the mad paroxysm of the Holocaust, in which six million Jews, two-thirds of European Jewry, were systematically slaughtered in factories specially designed for the mass extermination of human beings.

In these conditions many Jews had the dearly-paid-for privilege of being able to see capitalism whole, in all its raw cannibalistic savagery, without the layered masks of conventional civilisation. So, naturally, they came to make up a large part of the socialist army gathering its forces for an attempt to remake the world and create a civilisation in which there would no longer be class, or race, or religious, or national oppression.

But while some Jews became revolutionary socialists, other Jews became nationalists, committed to building up a Jewish nation in Palestine, where at the start of the 20th century resident Jews were still only a small community. Some nationalists — the most effective ones, in fact — were also socialists. Rivalry between "assimilationist" Jewish socialists and Zionists was often bitter, but the demonisation of Zionism that characterises much of modern Trotskyism was unknown. Zionists fought alongside the Red Army to defend the workers' republic after the Russian Revolution of 1917.

In Palestine, the tiny Communist Party emerged from the left-Zionist Poale Zion. Arguing for international socialist revolution as the road to salvation for the Jews, and against the Zionist project, the communists nevertheless had an approach very different from the latter-day pseudo-left demonisation of Zionism.

Should as many Jews as wanted to go there be allowed into Palestine? Of course they should, answered the Communist International and the Communist Party of Palestine, advocating Jewish-Arab unity within Palestine and opposition to British rule there.

The shift to modern left "anti-Zionism" was part of the Stalinisation of the Communist International. When in 1929 Palestinian Arab chauvinists mounted widespread attacks on Jews — teachers and students at a religious college in Hebron, for example, were massacred — the Communist Party of Palestine at first called the attacks by their proper name, pogrom, as did the Russian and Comintern press. Then the international Stalinist leaders decided that it was an "anti-imperialist uprising", and that became the Comintern "line". In fact, one of the Arabs' mobilising slogans was "The British are with us" (Britain then ruled Palestine, and British forces had clashed with Jews).

Before and after World War I, revolutionary socialists opposed the Zionist project, but they did not side with the reactionaries, still less with the then equivalent of today's clerical



fascists, of the Arab world, against the Zionists. They defended the right of Jews to go to Palestine, as to anywhere else.

Then, in 1929-30, the Communist International, which at first had characterised the Arab pogroms against Jews in Palestine as... pogroms, switched their "line" and decided, that since this was a period, the "Third Period", where everywhere capitalism was giving way to revolution, the pogroms must be part of the world-wide anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist upsurge. They came out unrestrainedly for the "anti-imperialist" pogromists. It was the start of what is today the "anti-Zionist" "anti-imperialism" held to by most "Trotskyists".

It was tragically reminiscent of the response of the heroic Russian terrorists of the Narodnaya Volya, who had assassinated the Tsar, to the anti-Semitic pogroms of 1881. They had hoped by their spectacular assassination to detonate the people against the aristocracy — and lo, here the people were rising. The pogroms were therefore welcome evidence that "the people" were responding to the Narodniks. They were honest, though very confused, people. The Stalinists were cynical manipulators who, in the 1930s, '40s and '50s — with a short break in the late 1940s, when they backed the formation of Israel, in order to make trouble for the British Empire — would fill the labour movement with their own poisonous brand of anti-Semitic "anti-Zionism: what is now "Trotskyism" on the Israeli-Arab conflict.

After 1930, a Comintern drive "Arabised" the heavily-Jewish CP. The leaders of the party had to be Arab, and the Jewish majority were thus second-class members. Breaking with the old Communist International policy, the CP became bitter enemies of Jewish immigration. German refugees from Hitler were met off the boat by German-speaking Jewish CPers with leaflets telling them to go back home.

By 1936, when a serious Arab movement began in Syria and Palestine, this time having some anti-imperialist content, but in Palestine essentially a pogrom movement against Jewish civilians, the CP was an active part of the campaign. Jewish CPers were assigned to plant bombs among Jews. For example, as the American CPer Malech Epstein discovered when he visited Palestine, young Jewish CPers were assigned to blow up the headquarters of the Jewish trade union movement, the Histadrut.

Refusal to go with Stalinism on this question was one of the characteristics of Trotskyism while Trotsky lived. Trotskyists rejected the malignant fantasies of 1929 (for example, in an article by Max Shachtman in the US Militant, October 1929).

Their comments on 1936 did not pretend that it was purely an anti-imperialist movement, or that there could be anything "progressive" about Arab-Muslim chauvinism against Palestinian Jews. After Epstein broke with the Stalinists, the Militant reported, as evidence of the degeneracy of Stalinism, his account of what he had seen in Palestine of the CP's collaboration with Arab nationalists in terrorist attacks on Jews.

In this they reflected Trotsky himself. Throughout the 1930s Trotsky stood as the representative of the old attitude — support for Jewish rights, including the right to migrate to Palestine and anywhere else, while rejecting the Zionist project — and of sympathetic awareness that the world was closing in murderously on the Jews.

Born in October 1879, and killed by Stalin's agent in August 1940, Trotsky lived a life which almost exactly spanned the period from the beginning of systematic pogroms in Russia (1881) to the eve of the Holocaust. A Ukrainian Jew, he saw the westward migration of millions of Jews, stirred up by the Russian pogroms, across Europe and to the USA. He saw the growth of Jewish self-awareness in Europe in the later 19th and early 20th centuries.

Always an opponent of the Zionist movement, he warned in the '30s that Palestine could turn out to be a giant ghetto in which the Jews who had fled there might be trapped and massacred.

Yet it is plain from his writings in the 1930s that the experience of antisemitism in the 20th century, not only in Nazi Germany and Poland, but also in the USSR under Stalin, radically changed Trotsky's views.

By the end of his life he believed that the persecution of the Jews and the effect of that persecution on the consciousness of the Jewish people had made the creation of some sort of Jewish state an inescapable necessity. Rightly, he rejected the idea that the Palestine programme of the Zionists could provide an immediate refuge for Jews facing the Hitlerites. The only conceivable immediate solution was socialist revolution. But he viewed the demand for a separate Jewish state with growing sympathy. He asserted more than once that after a socialist revolution the Jews would have to have a state of their own if they still wanted it; and it is plain that he believed that they would.

II

In 1932-3, Trotsky discussed the "Jewish problem" with Class Struggle, an American Marxist publication. He was asked: "What is your attitude to Palestine as a possible Jewish 'homeland' and about a land for the Jews generally? Don't you believe that the antisemitism of German fascism compels a different attitude to the Jewish question on the part of Communists?"

Trotsky replied: "I do not know whether Jewry will be built up again as a nation. However, there can be no doubt that the material conditions for the existence of Jewry as an independent nation could be brought about only by the proletarian revolution. There is no such thing on this planet as the idea that one has more claim to land than another.

"The establishment of a territorial base for Jewry in Palestine or any other country is conceivable only with the migration of large human masses. Only a triumphant socialism can take upon itself such tasks. It can be foreseen that it may take place either on the basis of a mutual understanding, or with the aid of a kind of international proletarian tribunal which should take up this question and solve it."

In the context of the debates of that time, Trotsky's statement "there is no such thing as the idea that one has more claim to land than another" was, I think, plain support for the old Communist International policy for the right of Jews to enter Palestine, in opposition to the new policy of the Comintern after 1929.

In a January 1937 interview, Trotsky explained: "During my youth I rather leaned towards the prognosis that the Jews of different countries would be assimilated and that the Jewish question would thus disappear in a quasi-automatic fashion.

"The historical development of the last quarter of a century has not confirmed this perspective. Decaying capitalism has everywhere swung over to and exacerbated nationalism, one part of which is antisemitism. The Jewish question has loomed largest in the most highly developed capitalist country of Europe, in Germany.

"On the other hand the Jews of different countries have cre-



First Jewish refugee arrivals at the Displaced Peoples camp in Frankfurt, 1945.

ated their press and developed the Yiddish language as an instrument adapted to modern culture. One must therefore reckon with the fact that the Jewish nation will maintain itself for an entire epoch to come.

“Now the nation cannot normally exist without a common territory. Zionism springs from this very idea. But the facts of every passing day demonstrate to us that Zionism is incapable of resolving the Jewish question. The conflict between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine acquires a more and more tragic and more and more menacing character.

“I do not at all believe that the Jewish question can be resolved within the framework of rotting capitalism and under the control of British imperialism.

“And how, you ask me, can socialism solve this question? On this point I can but offer hypotheses.

“Once socialism has become master of our planet or at least of its most important sections, it will have unimaginable resources in all domains. Human history has witnessed the epoch of great migrations on the basis of barbarism. Socialism will open the possibility of great migrations on the basis of the most developed technique and culture.

“It goes without saying that what is here involved is not compulsory displacements, that is, the creation of new ghettos for certain nationalities, but displacements freely consented to, or rather demanded by, certain nationalities or parts of nationalities.

“The dispersed Jews who would want to be reassembled in the same community will find a sufficiently extensive and rich spot under the sun. The same possibility will be opened for the Arabs, as for all other scattered nations.”

In subsequent history, the tragic conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine would not be adjudicated by a benign proletarian socialist tribunal but by the United Nations which the victors of World War 2 set up. And it would be worked out by way of a series of Jewish-Arab wars.

In an article on antisemitism in Stalin’s USSR (22 February 1937) Trotsky developed his reappraisal of the Jewish question in the light of early 20th century experience. He speaks of a future socialist version of the Zionist “methods of solving the Jewish question”, methods “which under decaying capitalism have a utopian and reactionary character”.

“Are we not correct in saying that a world socialist federation would have to make possible the creation of a ‘Birobidjan’ [an equivalent of the official, though in fact token, autonomous Jewish republic within the USSR] for Jews who wish to have their own autonomous republic as the arena for their own culture?”

One of the most maliciously stupid ideas put into circulation by the Stalinists and adopted by post-Trotsky “Trotskyists” is that because Zionism proposed to create a Jewish nation-state it thereby “capitulated” to Nazi and other antisemitism. If so, then evidently Trotsky too was guilty of this “capitulation”.

Of course it is impossible to know in detail what Trotsky would have said once the Jewish state was established in 1948. It is plain however that there would have been no place in his thought for the anti-Zionist demonology and international conspiracy theories which dominate much of the left today.

Trotsky’s very loose use of the term nation to describe the Jews of the world may perhaps be explained as an unconscious by-product of his acceptance of the need for a territorial solution to the problem of the people “without a land” — the very idea he had scoffed at and fought against for most of his life as a reactionary utopia. He still says it is a reactionary utopia and a mirage in its bourgeois Zionist form. But now he counterposes to it not assimilation but a socialist version of the Zionist territorial state-creating solution.

What, for Trotsky, makes the Zionist project utopian and reactionary? The methods which flow inescapably from pursuing that project under capitalism and British rule in Palestine. The unpostponable task, for Trotsky, is the overthrow of capitalism, not a project for a tranquil corner in which to gather in the Jews and build a nation. With tragic accuracy, he says that such a project cannot save the Jews in the time available. After the socialist revolution, however, the Jewish people will need and be entitled to “a Birobidjan” because it is no longer reasonable to look to assimilation alone as the solution, or to have anything other than a supportive sympathy for Jews who cannot believe in assimilation. Trotsky finishes the February 1937 article: “How could any Marxist, or even any consistent democrat, object to that?”

On the left, it was not Marxists and consistent democrats who developed the ideological objection to it, but Stalinists and, after Trotsky’s death, those “Trotskyists” who from incoherent anti-imperialist zeal absorbed Stalinistic politics on the question.

III

But the revolutionary workers were defeated again and again throughout the 1920s and 30s — in the USSR, Germany, Austria, France, Spain. The socialist revolution did not happen — not in time to save Europe’s massacred Jews, to save the sixty million people who died in the Second World War, or to prevent Germany being pulverised and partitioned and having 12 to 14 million of its people driven out of Eastern Europe. Not in time to stop the atom-bombing of Japan, or the expansion of Stalinist totalitarianism to engulf ninety million people in Eastern Europe.

And history did not stop. The Zionists continued with their project and carved out the state of Israel in tragic conflict with the Palestinian Arabs.

The “reactionary utopian” solution to the Jewish question received an immense boost from the events of the world war. The need which Trotsky reluctantly came to realise for a Jewish national territory as part of the solution to the Jewish question was now felt with immense urgency by the majority of Jews. And it was made reality not in a benign socialist world after a workers’ revolution, but in a world dominated by imperialism and Stalinism, realised by way of bitter communal and national conflict and within the framework of a Zionist-Kremlin, and then a Zionist-US, alliance.

The Jewish state was established in a world which was not socialist but still capitalist dog-eat-dog. In Palestine it was not mainly the Palestinian Jews who decreed that. In 1948, the ter-

ritory allotted to the Jews by the United Nations was attacked by the armies of the surrounding Arab states, armies under the control of seconded officers of the British imperialist army. If the Jews had lost, they would have been massacred, driven out, or put back under the control of a Britain returning as “peacekeeper”. The Jews won the 1948 war, and three-quarters of a million Palestinian Arabs fled or were driven out. About 600,000 Jews were driven out of Arab countries in following years, though they would be assimilated in Israel, not, like the Palestinian Arabs, allowed to languish in refugee camps and even legally forbidden to work by some Arab governments..

That is how things worked in a world still dominated by capitalism and Stalinism.

IV

On this, as on other questions, Trotsky’s would-be followers did not after his death pursue his line of thought. In the 1940s, they were caught up in a world view akin to that of the Stalinism of the “Third Period” (1929-33) — the world socialist revolution was on the immediate agenda, and everything had to be interpreted as part of it. Among the forces seen as part of the great sweep of Revolution and anti-imperialism was rising Arab nationalism — the “Arab Revolution”.

Trotskyists stated plainly in documents of the 1940s (by Tony Cliff, for example) that anything other than support for the “Arab Revolution” against the Jews of Palestine/Israel would make it impossible for them to “integrate” into that “sector of the world revolution”. There was dissent.

Some French Trotskyists backed the Zionist guerrillas against Britain. The Shachtman group, the Workers Party USA, resisted the “Third Period” delusions, including the delusion that the expansion of Stalinism was a deformed variant of working-class revolution. They rejected the vicarious Arab chauvinism of the “orthodox Trotskyists”.

The Mandel-Pablo core group of “orthodox Trotskyism” came out for rights for Jews within a Middle East federation.

But the overall drift was towards the operation of gross double standards as between Jews and Arabs, and a comprehensive demonisation of Israel and of Zionism. As a rule, “Trotskyists” were vicarious Arab nationalists.*

In the 1940s the “orthodox Trotskyists” were not entirely uninhibited in their “Arabism”. They did not back the Arabs in the 1948 war. For 19 years after 1948 the Trotskyist attitude generally included a de facto acceptance of Israel. For most of them that changed after the Six Day War of June 1967. After the Six Day War Israel became an often very brutal colonial power ruling a large Arab population in the West Bank and Gaza. It was the time of the great movement against the Vietnam war and imperialism. Most of the “orthodox Trotskyists” drifted towards a root-and-branch “anti-Zionism” — that is towards the politics of post-1929 Stalinism on this question.

And worse. Now anti-Zionism meant not advocacy of Jewish-Arab working-class unity and opposition to the Zionist project of a Jewish state, but support for the destruction of the existing Jewish state in the name of Arab or Palestinian “liberation”. It meant siding with murderous, repressive Arab states against Israel. The “Trotskyist” movement had moved a long way from what it had been even in the 1940s. As someone once observed of religious denominations: sects change their doctrines more readily than their names.

“Zionism” — meaning anything other than support for the destruction of Israel — came to carry the same odium as “racism” and “fascism”. Israel (“Zionism”) came to be seen as the arch-representative of imperialism. Real history was faded out. “Anti-Zionism” was used as a bludgeon to intimidate and stigmatise and prevent thought about the issue.

V

The horrors of Nazism had driven the great majority of surviving Jews behind the Zionist project. And in response to the establishment of Israel views came to be established on the pseudo-left which pictured the Zionists as powerful conspirators pulling strings in the era of Hitler, and sharing in responsibility for the Holocaust. The idea of a Zionist-Nazi conspiracy originated in the Soviet Union in Stalin’s last years, but in the 1970s acceptance of it came to be a hallmark of most of those who thought they were disciples of Trotsky.

You cannot get a more crazy version of the “world Jewish conspiracy” propounded by the old antisemites than the one which sees “the Zionists” manipulating for their own ends the Holocaust, that is, manipulating Hitler and the Nazis even as they killed six million Jews. A clear and logical version of these ideas would have to characterise Hitler as a blind tool of the “Jewish conspiracy”. Yet such ideas, half-hidden but implicit, are articles of faith in wide layers of the Trotskyist left. They are expounded in erudite, albeit crazy, books by Lenni Brenner

and in the original version of Jim Allen's play *Perdition* (the book version has been bowdlerised).

The German socialist leader August Bebel once memorably defined left-wing antisemitism as "the socialism of idiots". Much of the Trotskyist movement has fallen into an anti-Zionism which is "the anti-imperialism of idiots". In fact, into antisemitism. Its stance is not, of course, racist, but it means comprehensive hostility to most Jews alive, in whose post-Holocaust Jewish identity Israel has a central place.

All of this has nothing to do with Trotsky's politics, or with his developing position on the question. It is "the Trotskyism of idiots"! Bits and pieces of Trotskyist politics are deployed one-sidedly and used in the service of vicarious Arab chauvinism.

VI

Internationalism is essential to socialism. It goes without saying that socialists are against Israeli nationalism, and that we condemn Jewish chauvinism and all its manifestations. But Israeli nationalism and Jewish chauvinism do not exist in a vacuum. They are part of a network of interlocking nationalisms, chauvinisms and national antagonisms. They are confronted by Arab and Muslim chauvinism which has taken as its goal the destruction of the Israeli state and nation. Any fair account of Israeli nationalism would therefore put it in its framework. The demurrals and condemnations would take account of the counter-nationalisms and condemn them also.

Yet the typical post-Trotsky Trotskyist's conclusion, from sometimes justified complaints about Israeli nationalism and chauvinism, is that the Israeli Jewish nation itself does not have a right to exist. No such conclusions are made from the facts of Arab or Palestinian — or any other — nationalism or chauvinism.

The "internationalism" is unequal because the condemnation of Israel is absolute and mortal, while condemnation of Arab chauvinism when it is forthcoming at all is only a moral stricture, and a series of admonitions. Support for Arab (or Palestinian) rights is not made conditional on them not being nationalists or chauvinists. They are the legitimate nation. The Jewish is the illegitimate nation. One lot of nationalists have positive rights; the other, only the right to surrender and submit to the nationalism and religious chauvinism of others.

For a long time, the PLO's old commitment to a "secular democratic Palestine" was used as a mechanism for disguising the double standards involved here. The Trotskyists accepted the disguise of one of the competing nationalisms.

For, in fact, the call for a "secular democratic Palestine" was a disguised and mystified version of the demand for an Arab Palestine — an Arab state in which Jews would have religious but not national rights; and its prerequisite was that the Israeli nation and the Israeli state should disarm and surrender to their enemies.

It was in fact inconceivable that they would do that. Therefore? Therefore it was reasonable for the Arab states to enforce it in the only way possible — by conquering Israel. The reasonable proposal with its promise of a just solution in practice became a rationale for supporting someone like Saddam Hussein in the attempt to conquer Israel.

For those Marxists who went along with this, internationalism became a vehicle for expressing an Arab-nationalist ultimatum against the Israeli Jews: be "internationalist", accept being a religious minority in an Arab Palestine, dismantle your national state, or deserve to be conquered!

That is not working-class internationalism, but pseudo-internationalism in the service of nationalism. A mystified political programme which implied the bloody subjugation or destruction of an entire nation, dressed up and presented in terms of anti-nationalism and anti-racism: such is the measure of the political decay of post-Trotsky Trotskyism!

And for what reason were Israeli Jews to be denied the rights of a nation? Because, as a national minority in Palestine in the 1940s, they fought and won, rather than bowing down to Arab nationalism, which would have subjugated them and driven them out if it could. No Trotskyist supports the collective mass "return" of the 13 million Germans driven out of Eastern Europe after World War Two.

The only Trotsky-consistent programme for the Israel/Palestine conflict is one that advocates Jewish-Arab working-class unity, defending both Israel's right to exist and the right of the Palestinian Arabs to have an independent state in the area where they are the majority — two states for the two peoples.

The writings of Trotsky are a blast of clean air through the swamps of hysteria, ultra-left fantasy, vicarious Arab chauvinism — and, I think, elements of age-old anti-semitism, recycled as "anti-Zionism" — into which much of post-Trotsky Trotskyism has disintegrated on this question.



The warmongering anti-war demonstrations

The demonstrations all over Britain since the Israeli offensive on Gaza began on 27 December [2008] have been heavily fuelled by raw, justified, outrage at the human cost to the Palestinians of what Israel is doing.

Israel's offensive in Gaza is in the tradition of the US-British slaughter of Iraqi conscript soldiers retreating from their occupation of Kuwait at the end of the first Gulf war in 1991. An American soldier described that as "like shooting fish in a barrel". So too in Gaza now.

Israel has immense technical superiority over Hamas. And the Hamas "fish" swim in the "waters" of a densely-packed civilian population. At least a third of the casualties, maybe far more, have, inevitably, been "civilians".

The disproportion between the damage being inflicted on Israel's people and what Israel is doing to the Palestinians of Gaza makes it seem beside the point that this is a two-sided war, that Hamas is waging war on Israel too. The slaughter in Gaza cancels out awareness of everything else.

The coverage in the press has focused heavily on the slaughter, on the horror, and on the number of civilians being killed in Gaza. So have the nightly images on the TV screens.

Thus the Guardian and other media have done most of the work in conjuring up the feelings and the outrage that fuel the demonstrations; and the "left", especially the SWP, have done much of the organising for the demonstrations.

But the politics of the demonstrations have been provided by the Islamic chauvinists. In terms of its dominant politics — support Hamas, support Arab and Islamic war on Israel, conquer and destroy Israel — the big demonstration on 10 January [2009] in London was politically an Arab or Islamic chauvinist, or even, to a horrifying extent, a clerical-fascist, demonstration. Their slogans, their politics, their program, echoed, endorsed, and insisted upon by the kitsch left, have provided the politics of the demonstrations, more or less drowning out everything else.

The clerical fascists have been allowed to hegemonise the politics of the demonstrations to an astonishing degree. Despite the intentions of most of the demonstrators, these have not been peace demonstration, but pro-war, war-mongering, demonstrations — for Hamas's war, and for a general Arab and Islamic war on Israel. On Saturday 10 January [2009] in London many placards portrayed Arab heads of state, depicting them as traitors for not going to the aid of the Palestinians.

In their political slogans and chants, the dominant forces on the demonstrations have been not only against what Israel is doing in Gaza now, but against Israel as such, against any Israel — against Israel's right to exist. Opposition to the Gaza war, and outrage at it, only provide the immediate justification for flaunting and propagating the settled politics of organisations that seek the root-and-branch extirpation of Israel and "Zionism".

Such politics have long been a central theme of "anti-war"

demonstrations, but my strong impression is that they are bolder, cruder, more uninhibited, and more explicit now than they have been.

On 10 January SWPers on loudhailers chanted: "Destroy Israel". This chant was pervasive: "From the river to the sea/Palestine will be free" — demanding an Arab Palestine that includes pre-1967 Israel — was pervasive. Placards called for "Freedom for Palestine", which, for Arab and Islamic chauvinists and addled left alike, means Arab or Muslim rule over all pre-1948 Palestine. It implies the elimination of the Jewish state, and since that could be done only by first warring against Israel and conquering it, the killing of a large part of the people of Israel.

Placards equated Israel with Nazism, and what Israel is doing in Gaza with the factory-organised systematic killing of Jews in Hitler-ruled Europe. Placards about "60 years since the Nakba" [the Arab term for their defeat in 1948] — though not many of those — complemented the chants about "Palestine... from the river to the sea" and pointed up their meaning.

The dominant theme, "stop the slaughter in Gaza", understandable in the circumstances, could not — in the complete absence of any demands that Hamas too stop its war — but be for Hamas and Hamas's rocket-war on Israel. In so far as the placards and chants gave the demonstration its political identity, it was a demonstration for more war. Even the talk of "the massacre", though all too accurate, subsumed Hamas into the general population, and was one variant of implicit solidarising with Hamas, its rocket war, and, inescapably, its repressive clerical-fascist rule over the people of Gaza. The SWP in 2007 had welcomed Hamas's takeover in Gaza.

Talk of "genocide" in Gaza implied an absolute equation of the people of Gaza with Hamas, and absolute solidarity with Hamas.

Even the identifiable Jews on the Saturday 10th demonstration — Neturei Karta, a Jewish equivalent of Hamas, whose people for religious reasons want to put an end to Israel — fitted into the general clerical-fascist politics.

On the January 3rd demonstration, a group of political Islamists near me, some with faces covered by scarves or balaclavas with only eye and mouth holes, pointedly raised their fists and started to chant Allahu Akhbar (God is great) as we passed the Houses of Parliament.

Platform speakers on Saturday 10th nonsensically but with demagogic effectiveness equated Israel — pre-1967 Israel too — with apartheid, and told us that Israel could be eliminated as white rule was in apartheid South Africa.

The "left" and the ex-left were heavily represented on the platform on Saturday 10th. Andrew Murray of the Communist Party of Britain (chairing), Tariq Ali (the rich "fun revolutionary" of long ago, all suffused in a grey-white tinge as if

Continued on page 16

he had been dug out of the freezer, the ghost of anti-war demonstrations past!), Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn, and George Galloway spoke. The SWP's Lindsey German, convenor of the Stop The War Coalition, wore a vivid red coat, but that was the only thing red about either her or the platform.

No criticism of the Arab or Islamic chauvinism or Islamic clerical-fascism of so much of the demonstration, nor even any distancing from it. No support for Arab and Palestine Liberation Organisation demands for a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Only one-sided anti-war war-mongering – pro-Hamas, demanding, in different degrees of boldness and clarity, war to put an end to Israel. Craig Murray, a former British diplomat, made the most clear-cut demand for the rolling-back of 60 years of history and the elimination of Israel.

There was no criticism of the Arab and Islamic regimes other than for their “treason” to the Palestinians in not making war on Israel. A genuine peace march would at least have had some degree of criticism of the refusal of most of the Arab governments to make peace with Israel. And no reference whatsoever to the Israeli working class or to the idea that the Arab and Israeli workers should unite (even if in the not-near future).

Thus, the “left” on the demonstration, its main organisers, were entirely hegemonised and hypnotised by the politics, slogans, and program of Arab and Islamic chauvinism and, explicitly, of the clerical fascists of political Islam.

The feelings expressed in the demonstration had had a six to seven year build-up, during which that “left” has promoted the politics of Islamic clerical-fascism, and even its organisations, the British Muslim Initiative and the Muslim-Brotherhood front, Muslim Association of Britain. Hamas is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The “left”, from outside the mainly-Muslim communities in Britain – it is still very much outside: the evidence of the demonstration is that the SWP has gained very few recruits of Muslim background from its half-decade of accommodating to Islam and posing as the best “fighters for Muslims” – has done all it can to push the youth of the Muslim communities behind Islamist political and religious reaction. It has courted and promoted the forces of political, social, and religious reaction within those communities.

Instead of advocating and building working-class unity on ideas and slogans such as “black and white – Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, atheist – unite and fight”, the kitsch-left have made themselves into communalists, the best “fighters for Muslims”. On the political basis of Muslim communalism, no working-class unity could conceivably be built.

Instead of helping secularising, rebellious youth in the Muslim communities to differentiate from their background, instead of using the anti-war demonstrations to give them a focus broader than their starting point, the kitsch-left has “re-

lated” to the communities as such, and to the conservative and reactionary elements within them – including clerical-fascists – and that has helped those right-wingers to control, and the political-Islamist organisations to recruit, the youth, including women.

Instead of organising anti-war movements on the basis of secular, democratic, working-class, socialist politics, it has organised an “anti-war” movement that advocates a general Arab-Islamic war on Israel.

Two seemingly contradictory things dominated the demonstration. The politics of Islamic chauvinism, clerical fascism, and hysterical hostility to Israel gave it its political character – an Islamic chauvinist demonstration in which the forces of the addled left sunk their identity, rather as the crazily ultra-left Stalinist German Communist Party in the two or three years before Hitler came to power sunk its own identity into fascist-led concerns with “liberating” Germany from the Treaty of Versailles.

And... it was a heavily a-political demonstration. A large part of the demonstrators, the majority I guess, have not sifted through the politics of the Israeli-Arab conflict, considered the options, studied the implications of slogans, and made deliberate choices, but react “raw” to the horrors of the Israeli offensive in Gaza, and many take the slogans, ideas, and programs stamped on the demonstrations by the Islamists and their “left” allies as things given.

For instance, “Freedom for Palestine”, for many of the marchers, does not mean that they have thought about and understood what the slogan means to those who raise it: Arab and Islamic rule over all pre-1948 Palestine, slightly encoded. “Free Palestine”, to such people, probably means freedom for the Palestinian-majority areas – Gaza and the West Bank.

That the clerical-fascists can politically dominate on the demonstrations is in part a result of this political underdevelopment. The precondition for it – for making people who react “raw” into demonstration-fodder for clerical-fascism – is the politics of the addled left vis-a-vis political Islam.

The demonstrations have also been undisguisedly antisemitic, more so than ever. Placards equating Zionism and Nazism and about Israel’s “Holocaust” against the Palestinians all have implications way beyond Israeli politics and Israel itself. Calls for a boycott of Israeli goods, understandable enough on the face of it, were pretty much central. The main argument against such a boycott is that it is an indiscriminate weapon against all Israelis, and that it would quickly become a targeting of Jews everywhere, in Britain too. A small event on 10 January illustrated the point: a Starbucks café was attacked by some of the demonstrators seemingly because some people thought that it is owned by Jews.

The 10 January demonstration shows that political Islam now has a serious political presence in Britain. Nor can socialists and secularists draw comfort from the experience in the first half of the 20th century when superstition-riddled

Jewish communities quickly assimilated and generated large-scale left-wing commitment by secularising Jews. The Islamist politicisation of the Muslim communities is not something specific to Britain, nor is it simply a movement of oppressed people.

Those politicised sections of the Muslim communities are part of a world-wide movement which includes powerful states and some of the richest people on earth (in Saudi Arabia, for instance.) This world-wide movement is, in political terms, very reactionary. It is not likely that any sizeable part of it will soon shed its present reactionary character.

The serious left has to find ways of supporting the Muslim communities here against racism, discrimination, and social exclusion, without accommodating politically or socially to their reactionary traits, and without falling into the politically-suicidal idiocy of pandering to Islamic clerical-fascism by way of adopting its slogans and goals. Involvement of Muslim workers and youth in the labour movement, combined with militant labour-movement commitment to defending the communities against racism and discrimination, has to be our chief method here.

Our keynote politics have to be of the type of “black and white, unite and fight”, not the adaptive Islamic communalism that has reigned on the left for the last decade. Within that general approach we must fight Islamic clerical-fascism and help its opponents in the Muslim communities.

The kitsch-left has a lot to answer for over the last decade. There is no way of measuring exactly what could have been done to wean sections of Muslim youth away from political Islam, but if the “left” – in the first place the SWP – had maintained a principled working-class socialist, secularist stand, and combined that with defending Muslims against racism and discrimination, for sure more people of Muslim background could have been won to socialism. The clerical fascists would not have had the virtually unchallenged political ride they have had on the back of an accommodating addled left, and are still having.

It has to be said again that the flood-tide of world-wide political Islam has worked and is working against separating large forces of youth from Islamic reaction. The predominant form of “rebelliousness” there seems to be against assimilating, “moderate” forces, and for political-Islamist militancy.

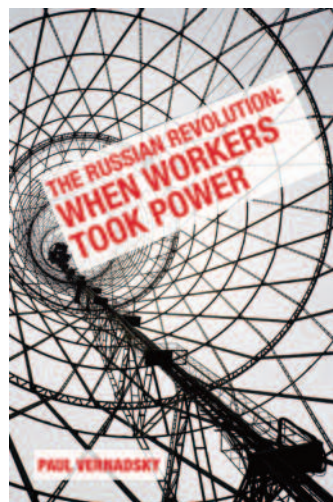
Even so, much could have been done. Instead the addled left has committed political hara-kiri, coloured itself Islamic green – and done its best to help reinforce the domination of conservative, reactionary, Islamic-chauvinist politics in the Muslim communities.

It has done everything it can to boost Islamic clerical fascism, promote it, and render it politically respectable in the labour movement. We are probably far from seeing the full consequences of the politicisation of sections of the Muslim communities under clerical-fascist hegemony that has taken place and continues now.

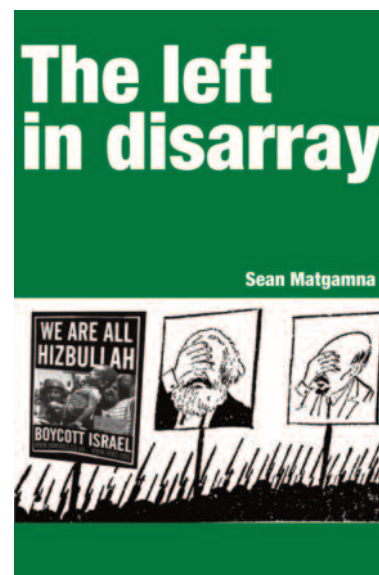
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With Hitler on the road to Samara

From back page

guessing what was going on, the guiding centres of the world Jewish Conspiracy helped him in this work of killing Jews.

The Jewish conspirators Hitler in all sorts of nefarious ways. For instance, by instructing the US government, before, during and after World War Two, not to let refugee Jews into America*. They did many other things to help the Nazis, some of them things that would need one cleverer than I am to unravel and chronicle for you.

Why did "The Jews" help Hitler kill Jews? That, you see, was the easiest way they could win a Jewish state. Israel.

By a process of reasoning inaccessible to the ordinary human intelligence, the Jewish super-conspirators decided that the best way to secure a Jewish state, Israel, was to kill six million Jews.

This idea is of course difficult to grasp. It is the political equivalent of that category of Catholic doctrine — for instance, the Trinity, the doctrine that God is both One and also Three Divine Persons — which is classed by the Catholic Church as a "Mystery of Religion." A Mystery of Religion is something which, though certified true by the Church, and therefore certainly true, is simply beyond ordinary human understanding.

Don't waste your time trying to understand. The subtlety in their evil of the Elders of Zion has always puzzled the ordinary man, who is doing well if he becomes aware that this conspiracy exists, and has the courage to raise the alarm about it. Neither formal logic nor Marxist dialectics will help you. Rational explanations are neither possible nor necessary. This is a Mystery of the World Zionist Conspiracy.

After all, it was too complicated for even Hitler to understand, and he devoted his life to probing into the Jewish Conspiracy. Even Hitler could not save himself from being made into an instrument of the omnipotent, omniscient International Zionist Conspiracy that he spent his life fighting.

All you need to know is that the Jews proved too clever for poor Adolf Hitler, who died confused, a Jewish dupe. Israel came into being with Hitler's inadvertent help, and it has never in all its history done anything but evil in the world.

II

The tale I have here sketched in is, of course, mad. Mad as Hitler? Madder than Hitler!

Yet one variant or another, one facet or another, of the crazy stuff which I have just set out in the form of a simple, straightforward story is now very widely accepted on the revolutionary left.

It is not usually expressed either as crudely or as candidly or as coherently as I have tried to express it here.

The thesis of much of the "left" — the "left" that sees nothing wrong in "allying" in Britain with the British offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Muslim Association of Britain — is that "the Zionists" are and always were, racists; that they collaborated with the Nazis, and, therefore, that they — and the state of Israel which they created: that in particular — share more or less in the practical and moral responsibility for what Hitler did to Jews, and others. That is: they share responsibility with the Nazis for the massacre of Europe's Jews, for the Holocaust. They are themselves the true heirs of the Nazis. Zionism is Nazi-like racism.

That's what the Morning Star (like its high-Stalinist predecessor, the Daily Worker which pioneered such ideas in Britain), Social Worker and their smaller satellites, such as the Mandelita "Fourth Internationalists" say.**

Originating with the Stalinist rulers of the USSR, this sort of stuff has become part of the folk wisdom of the kitsch left.

To traduce Hitler's victims, and those who were his potential victims, to blame Jews and Zionists even in part, for the Holocaust, outrages both common sense and known history; it outrages decency. It is plain bonkers!

How does the "anti-Zionist" "far left" attempt to make its case for such ideas?

- They indict "the Zionists" in the manner of a police prosecutor, and a very unscrupulous one at that, selecting and presenting only facets and shards of truth that serve to blacken the character of the accused. Some of the things they select are true, or half-true, or would be necessary aspects of a true and full historical picture.

- They isolate snippets of real history, stripping them of their social, historical and military context, and use them to misconstrue and misrepresent the thing as a whole. They use



Zionists were part of the fighting forces in the Warsaw ghetto uprising of April-May 1943

them to weave large, grotesque, lies. Here, their polemics are entirely Stalinist in character, typically: disloyal, tendentious, mendacious, unscrupulous, utterly contemptuous of truth, understood even on the level of the legal formula, "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

- The Zionists, the Jewish nationalists, they tell you, wild eyed with surprise and indignation, were... nationalists, and as narrow as other nationalists. Most of what they say is like that: banal. The critical cutting edge is given to the banality by the insistence that Jewish/Israeli nationalism is not a "legitimate" nationalism. Jewish nationalism, they insist, and it is a pillar of their entire outlook on the Middle East, is and can only be racism and fascism.

- They insist that by choosing a nationalist response to anti-Semitism, the Zionists thereby endorsed the racism of the anti Semites. Zionist nationalism is therefore, in its most fundamental notion, genetically, so to speak, racist. Jewish nationalism is and always was, essentially, a form of racism: it can not be anything else. It was racist when, fighting against great odds, the Israeli Jews defended themselves against Arab invasion in 1948. It is racist now.

- They wax indignant on the fact that the Zionists, in concentrating their efforts on building up the Jewish nation in Palestine, were sometimes short sighted, factional-minded, politically sectarian and, in the nature of the thing, as narrowly stupid as other nationalists often are.

- They denounce them because they steered a single-minded Jewish nationalist political course through the rocks and reefs of a world hostile to Jews, and large parts of it murderously so.

- They present "Zionism" as some sort of historical deus ex machina on the Jewish people, not as what it was, something rooted in their experience and one legitimate response to it, and a response shared from some time in the 1940s by most surviving Jews.

- The early Zionists, they tell you, eyes blazing with horror and self-righteousness, did not scruple to try and harness to their own purposes the will of anti-semites — even, that of the Nazis — to be rid of the Jews.

They did that in the 1930s and 40s, when it was a matter of

trying to rescue some Jews from the murder machine in which the Nazis and their allies had most of Europe's 9 million or so Jews trapped and marked for death.

- In hellish situations, such, for instance, as in Nazi-occupied Hungary in 1944, some Zionists attempted to manoeuvre and negotiate with the powerful enemy at whose mercy they stood. Not only were some such things possibly misguided, actions by desperate people, but, say the kitsch left, they were ipso facto treachery and collaboration with the Nazis. They rendered "the Zionists" identical with the Nazis.

They scour the records for instances of it on which to mount charges of "collaborating with the Nazis" and as proof that "Zionism" shares the responsibility for what the Nazis did.

The history of the Jewish people in the 20th century is an indescribably tragic one. The kitsch-left approach this history with all the empathy and sympathy with which one would look upon a head of cabbage ground under a ten-ton truck. And with all the understanding and breath of historical outlook, and empathy with the victims of Nazi mass murder, which that head of cabbage could be expected to bring to understanding the history of either cabbages or human beings.

- They are people drunk on Arab nationalism, vicarious Arab chauvinists and allies of political Islam, who use Marxist arguments against nationalist narrowness in general as tools of virulent Arab nationalism, and as the basis of an argument for destroying the Jewish national entity in the interest of the Palestinian Arab nation.

- They operate with something close to a kitsch-left dialect of Holocaust Denial. They do not deny that the Nazis killed six million Jews. They do deny to that enormous fact, the Holocaust, any weight or substance in shaping subsequent history; in explaining or excusing or justifying the ferocious spirit of the post-Holocaust Zionists. For the kitsch-Left it is closer to being a virtual fact than an event whose reverberations still, inevitably, impact on our world now. It took the awful, inhuman crassness of 1940s Stalinism to identify Jewish nationalism with Nazism and to attribute to "Zionism" a share of the responsibility for the Nazi massacre of 6 million Jews. It is the measure of the Trotskyist left now that it has made that Stalinist libel a fixed part of its outlook on history,

and on current history.

- They present the displacement of 750,000 Palestinians in 1948 as unique and uniquely evil. They ignore the 600,000 Jews displaced from the Arab countries to Israel in the late 40s and after. They ignore such things as the displacement of 13 million ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe.

- They ignore the fact that it was the Arab states that denied to the Palestinian refugees the right to work and integrate where they lived, thus consigning them and their descendants to the indefinite status of refugees.

- They accept the preposterous idea that the 750,000 Palestinian refugees of 1948, most of them in the course of nature dead, now number “6 million refugees”, with the right to occupy Israel.

Their political conclusion? Not that the Palestinian nation should have its own independent state side by side with Israel, but that Israel must be eliminated! The Israeli Jewish nation forged in the terrible history of the Jewish people in the 20th century, must be deprived of self determination, in the only way that such a thing is now conceivable, by being conquered. What remains of the Israeli Jewish people after their conquest by the Arab states, will be incorporated against their will in a single Arab state, where they may have religious rights, but not national rights.

They want not justice for Jews and Arabs, but the situation of Jews and Palestinians reversed.

III

This pile of ideological dung, laid down by the Stalinists in the 40s and 50s, is now domicile and diet to the “anti-Zionist” “Trotskyists”, who have lost both Marxist overview and working class historical perspective; who deal neither in historical truth nor in honest politics.

In short the dominant “left” culture now is a culture in which necessary and legitimate criticisms of Israel and championing the Palestinians, are amalgamated with root and branch condemnation of the Jewish nation in Palestine for having come into existence at all and for defending its existence now.

A culture which purveys a malignant Arab-Islamist chauvinist account of modern Jewish, Israeli, and Middle Eastern history in which the Jewish victims of the convulsions of mid-20th century capitalist Europe are demonised for seeking a refuge from persecution in Palestine and for defending themselves against the invasion of Arab armies in 1948. Demonised most of all for winning the right to survive in 1948 and after, and for surviving.

A culture in which the ostensible left is one of the main bearers of the most important modern version of anti-semitism, under the name of “anti-Zionism” — mortal hostility to the idea of a Jewish state, to its existence now, and to those, especially Jews, who accept and defend the Jewish state, critically or otherwise.

The elevation of this tissue of a-historical nonsense, one-sided anti-nationalism, one-sided anti-racism, into the place it now holds on the left is the index of what has happened to the left, or, better, perhaps, to the once upon a time left.

Just as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion was forged by the Tsarist secret police, this contemporay “anti-Zionist” thesis, in its turn, was formulated by the anti-semitic Stalinist state in the USSR. It spread first, in the 1940s and 50s, to the Stalinist parties around the world, and then to a wide spectrum of the anti-Stalinist left. Books like Lenni Brenner’s “Zionism in the Age of the Dictators” recycle them; so did Jim Allen’s play, *Perdition*; so have dozens of articles and pamphlets.

Why have such ideas spread amongst otherwise rational people of good will and socialist aspirations?

Proper emotional solidarity with the Palestinian Arabs, and therefore emotional hostility to Israel, is the living root of the credulity with which the fantastic tales and the Hansel and Gretel “history” of grotesque constructions on real events are accepted on the left.

It is the source of the emotional and intellectual “demand” which “anti-Zionism” supplies, and of the willingness and even eagerness to identify Zionism and Israel with Nazism, or to come as close as sense can be stretched and often way beyond — to identifying them. In a welthering of righteous “anti imperialism”, “anti-racism” and, in some respects justified, but incoherent and hysterical, indignation against Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians, the kitsch left, is like the hero in an old Hollywood film, who, sword-fighting with the villain in the final reel, moves closer and closer to the quicksand, or perilously close to the edge of a precipice. Except that the kitsch left long ago pitched itself head first into the pestilential morass.

Nihilistic “anti-imperialism” plays a central role here. Israel is identified as a mere stooge of Washington.

There is another root to the kitsch left’s identification of the Jewish nationalists with the Nazis. It is a way to escape the



Support for Zionism in Palestine grew under pressure of British attempts to play one community off against another. This demonstration in mandate Palestine was against the 1939 White Paper with called for the establishment of a Jewish national home in an independent Palestinian state within 10 years, rejecting the idea of partitioning Palestine, limiting Jewish immigration and restricting the rights of Jews to buy land from Arabs.

compelling logic, and the political conclusions, which 20th century history gave to the pre-war disputes on Zionism; a way to escape the obvious conclusions of modern history.

In Trotsky’s time, his movement opposed Zionism on two grounds. The whole project was possible only under license from the British imperialist overlord of Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Aden, etc. The Zionists would be compelled therefore to ally with the British against the revolt of Britain’s Arab semi-colonies.

The second reason was that the Zionist project in Palestine was not in their opinion an answer to the mortal threat with which the Jews of Europe were faced. Trotsky, who had a sharp pre-vision of what Europe’s Jews faced was tragically proved right. (Trotsky was influenced perhaps in this by his pre-World War One experience as a war correspondent in the Balkans, where he had witnessed terrible ethnic and sectarian massacres.)

The colonisation of Palestine simply could not in the short term provide a refuge for all the threatened Jews of Europe. (Though it could have saved many more than were saved had they been allowed to go there.) Only the socialist revolution, argued Trotsky, can save the Jews. Two out of every three Jews alive in Europe on Sept 1, 1939, were not saved.

The experience of the war and the Holocaust, however, threw a new light on the old disputes about Palestine. The Palestinian Jews survived. They might not have. The Nazis might, even temporarily, have overrun the area. The Jews might not have survived, but they did; and most of the Jews in Europe did not.

Importantly, too, the charge that the Zionists — that is, today, Israel, which is the point — “collaborated” with the Nazis, bear a share of responsibility for the Holocaust, are themselves Nazi-like, etc works to free people who start out with decent socialist and liberal instincts and attitudes from the tremendous moral pressure in favour of Israel’s right to exist and defend itself which the fact of the Holocaust engenders. If Zionism-Israel share responsibility for the Holocaust in any degree then the Holocaust can be removed as a powerful argument for a Jewish state now.

The whole thing is radically incoherent. But if the various “stories” now widely accepted and spread by so much of the ‘left’ are taken as true, that “the Zionists”, even while six million Jews were being killed, were nevertheless able to control such things as whether or not the US government let in Jewish refugees, and as a movement, calculatingly, for their own long-term “Zionist” purposes, helped the Nazis kill one million Hungarian Jews in 1944, and so on (and there is a lot more of it, and one or other bit of it is widely accepted on the left) — then “they” had a high degree of manipulative control

over what happened — even over the Holocaust.

The very idea, bluntly stated, is self-evident lunacy. But if “they” could do that during the war, then the Nazi theories of a powerful Jewish conspiracy before the war were wrong only in being understatement.

The prevailing “left” thesis about Zionism-fascism-Israel can rest on no logical ground except that of the pre-war Nazi and other world Jewish conspiracy theories.

Denouncing the Zionists as “Nazis”, they reproduce the old right wing and Nazi thesis, or at any rate a recognisable dialect of it, about the world Jewish conspiracy.

Hysterically identifying Israel (because of its treatment of the Palestinians, but not only that) with Hitler and Nazism, they embrace and propagate the core of the Nazi theories about the International Jewish Conspiracy!

IV

Of course nobody on the left would explicitly tell the story I told about Hitler. The anti-fascist, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist feeling of the anti-Zionist left prevents them from grasping and understanding, from seeing it whole, and from spelling out, coherently, what, nevertheless, so many of them implicitly believe and propagate...

Yet — to repeat — that is the tale sections of the left implicitly tell now. Try to spell out, clearly and honestly, what is said about Zionist collusion with the Nazis to secure a Jewish state; open out the implications which are plainly there in what is said — then you must come up with some version of the story I told above. That is the real and only possible relationship that what is now said by the left can be seen to have with what Hitler said on the same subject.

And it is not a matter of parallels that never meet. The assertion about the Zionists’ co-responsibility, or part-responsibility, for the Holocaust ties it all together. An honest historical balance sheet from that point of view would have to place Hitler himself in the perspective of history, that is, of the post-Holocaust working-out of the “International Jewish Conspiracy”. Hitler lost: the Third Reich fell, and Israel rose!

If those who demonise Israel would confront the logic of some of the things they say now. If they dared think it through without the constraint of powerful inhibitions rooted in our common hatred of Nazism, and of racism in general, then what the left says now would compel it to recognise that Hitler was informed and insightful and, in essence, correct on the “Jewish question”.

Most of the reasons why the “anti-Zionist” left do not tease out these conclusions speak in their favour, of course: horror of Nazism, disgust with racism, and so on. They are, after all, socialists, whose basic impulses and aspirations are the same as ours. Such people must denounce articles like this as foul slander.

Having done that, they will feel free to go on as before.

But this “good side”, which stops the kitsch-left thinking through the meaning of what they say, has a very bad consequence here. It allows them, fuelled by sympathy with the Palestinians and hatred of Imperialism, blithely to continue peddling a disguised and sanitised version of ideas and facets of ideas they would recoil from in horror if ever they were forced to look at what they say, in its wholeness, and to understand how what they say now relates to what the murderers of six million Jews — and many millions of others, too — said to justify their anti-semitism.

An anti-semitism that is now reproduced in the kitsch-left commitment to the destruction of the Jewish nation in Israel, and the comprehensive hostility to most Jews alive to which this inescapably commits them to.

There is a shift from what the German socialist, Bebel, said was “the socialism of the fools” to “the anti-imperialism of the idiots”, but hostility to Jews, and to the Israeli Jewish nation which emerged out of the terrible events of the 20th century is central to both.

V

We should support Israel’s right to defend itself; support the Palestinian Arabs in so far as it is a matter of them trying to gain control of their own territories from the Israeli army; and back the Israeli anti-chauvinists who want a just settlement with the Palestinians.

We should stand against the Islamist clerical fascists.

We should stand against the upsurge of hysterical “anti-Zionism”. We should strip off the masks and the illusions behind which lurk ideas like those I have explored here.

We are fighting for political sanity and against unreason on the left: therefore we should not let delicacy stop us from confronting our misguided comrades, brutally, with the brute — Nazi — logic, implications and ancestry of some of the ideas they have adopted from putrescent Stalinism. We must insist: **No, Hitler was not right!**

What we are and what we do

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty aims to build a movement which can replace capitalism, the current economic and social system based on class division and exploitation, with a new society based on consistent democracy, collective ownership and solidarity – socialism.

We are involved in many movements, struggles and campaigns. Our central focus is the organised labour movement — including trade unions and the Labour Party. Our organisation exists to educate and organise socialists so we can transform the labour movement into a force capable of liberating the working class, and humanity, by overthrowing capitalism.

WHY THE WORKING CLASS?

Capitalism means a world run according to the drives and dictates of the owning and exploiting minority which appropriates the wealth produced by those who have to work for wages — the big majority of people in Britain and a huge and ever-growing minority worldwide.

The “working class” is not just manual workers with a particular accent — it is everyone who has to sell their ability to work in order to live, train drivers and teachers, cleaners and social workers, call centre and IT workers and many, many more...

The capitalists always organise on a “class struggle” basis — fighting militantly and even violently for their interests against those of workers, oppressed people and the planet. Since the economic crisis began in 2008, they have been more aggressive than ever. To make real headway against these predatory appetites, the working class must learn to think and respond in kind. The class struggle will continue as long as capitalism does — to end it, we must fight to win it.

Under capitalism, people are oppressed on many different bases — including gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, sometimes nation — and struggles against these oppressions are crucial. The left must champion them. But it is only the (incredibly diverse) working class itself, as the basic fuel cell and driving force of capitalism, that has the possibility of challenging and overturning the whole system, creating a social and political force that can allow all liberation struggles to triumph.

The limited, insecure human rights and elements of democracy working people have won over centuries remain cramped and imprisoned within the confines and pressures of capitalism — a system in which huge areas of social life are completely excluded from democratic control and accountability, and in which the rich not only own the means of producing wealth, but dominate the media, the apparatus of administration and every structure of power.

STAND UP FOR SOCIALISM

It is because we want to help the working class defend and liberate itself from capitalism that we are socialists.

We want a left that fights for socialism — a world freed from class exploitation, an international system in which collective ownership of social resources and production for need allow much more genuine democracy, an end to dangerous climate change and a sustainable relationship between humanity and nature, a comfortable and secure life for everyone, and thus a radical flowering of freedom and individuality.

Until the 1970s or 80s, it was quite common for people even on right wing of the Labour Party to say that, whatever about immediate policies, they ultimately wanted a socialist commonwealth. Today, after the collapse of Stalinism in Russia and Eastern Europe, and decades of neo-liberal capitalist offensive, even the left is reluctant to talk about socialism. For the majority today, socialism is either discredited, or something they know little about.

Of course there are major differences among socialists about how to get socialism and indeed what it means. Since the left has won the leadership of the Labour Party, those differences have become more obvious. There needs to be a debate — and the point is the debate should be framed in terms of socialism. Socialists need to educate for socialism, to set down the goal of winning people to fight for a new



and radically better world. Campaigning on this or that issue, or against austerity, is not a substitute.

Popularising socialist ideas is not counterposed to, but necessary for, shifting the political debate. Without the spread and growing influence of socialist ideas in the 1880s and 90s, the Labour Party — not socialist, but a big step forward for independent working-class politics — would never have come into being.

After the disaster of Stalinism, we need to refound and renovate the socialist tradition, to clear away the influence Stalinist and Stalinist-inspired ideas have on even the anti-Stalinist left, so that we can build on clean, open ground.

AGAINST STALINISM

Many people, parties, and even states, both in history and today, call themselves “socialist”. For many people, “socialism” and “communism” are synonymous with the states that existed in Russia and Eastern Europe prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, or the states which exist today in China, Cuba, North Korea, or Vietnam.

We believe that these countries were not and are not socialist. They were based on systems of class exploitation just as brutal as capitalism at its most savage; in some ways, they were worse, with workers not even having the limited freedoms to form independent unions which we have in most major capitalist states.

The legacy of Stalinism continues to cast a long shadow over left-wing politics around the world, both in terms of the belief that those states represent some kind of model to aspire to, and in terms of Stalinist methodology: unquestioning deference to bureaucratic party or union apparatuses, and the cynical alliances advocated by some on the left with anti-working-class forces such as jihadist Islamism in the name of “anti-imperialism”.

Workers' Liberty wants to clean off the muck that Stalinism has heaped on the name and ideas of socialism, and rediscover the radically democratic core of revolutionary socialist politics.

TRANSFORM THE LABOUR MOVEMENT, FIGHT FOR A WORKERS' GOVERNMENT

The AWL argues and educates openly for socialism.

We also develop and campaign for demands to change society in the here and now, and to develop the labour movement into a more adequate instrument for that fight. We want to develop demands which can act as a bridge towards overthrowing capitalism, by developing workers' organisation, consciousness and ability to fight for their interests against the bosses. Demands like:

- Taxing the rich to reverse all cuts and create quality public-sector services, jobs and homes for all.
- A real Living Wage for all without exceptions; banning

zero hours contracts; scrapping anti-union laws and introducing strong trade union rights so that workers can fight to improve their position.

- Public ownership of the banks and high finance to end the banks functioning as an engine of crisis and inequality, unlock resources for social investment and create a public banking, pensions and mortgage system serving the whole community.

- Reversing privatisation; pushing forward democratic public ownership of services and industries.

- Democratic reforms to both how government is shaped and to the bureaucratic state machine.

To make it possible to fight for and win these demands, we need to fight for dramatic changes in the organisations of the labour movement:

- The trade unions: recruiting thousands and then millions of new members, while fight to make them into militant, democratic organisations of struggle, controlled from below by workers and not by a materially privileged bureaucracy. A special emphasis on recruiting, organising and defending migrant workers alongside those born here.

- The Labour Party: transforming its politics, democratising it from top to bottom and bringing elected representatives, particularly the MPs, under control. All socialists should join Labour.

- The left, and in particular Momentum, need to become capable of winning these changes.

We believe socialism is impossible without a revolution — a mass movement that breaks up the state machine (police, army, top judges and civil servants, monarchy...) that exists to protect capitalism and replaces it with a fundamentally more democratic system, in which representatives and managers are recallable and mandatable delegates, without material privileges. But such a revolution will only be possible when the mass of the labour movement and working class want it, ie are won over to revolutionary socialist ideas.

As a step forward, we advocate the whole labour movement fights to create a workers' government — a government as accountable and responsive to the labour movement as the Tories are to the capitalists, and which acts and helps mobilise against capitalist wealth and power.

EDUCATE, AGITATE, ORGANISE

Many times in the last century, the absence or inadequacy of socialist organisation has meant revolutionary openings missed, and capitalism surviving when it didn't have to — with terrible consequences for humanity.

Many times big, broad left-wing movements have come to be disastrously misled, or rapidly dispersed in a crisis for lack of a coherent, organised and politically clear core which could gain influence and help bring the movement to greater clarity. The ongoing left-wing movement in the Labour Party faces just that risk.

The radical socialist left in Britain is divided. We pride ourselves on encouraging cooperation and debate between different socialists organisation. At the same time, we believe we are doing work to develop socialist ideas and work in the broad labour movement which no one else is doing.

We educate, agitate, organise for socialism by:

- Working in the trade unions to develop working-class struggle and transform the trade union movement. Build rank-and-file workers' networks. Publish workplace bulletins to promote socialist ideas at the grassroots.

- Working in the Labour Party to develop a working-class political voice and a movement for a workers' government. Work in Momentum to make that possible.

- Working in the student movement to build strong, left-wing campus Labour Clubs, push forward student struggles, transform student unions and NUS and develop student-worker solidarity.

- Working in many different movements, including women's liberation and ecological struggles, and build links between them and the labour movement.

- Publishing a weekly socialist newspaper, Solidarity, pamphlets and books; organise regular meetings, debates and study groups.

Want to help? Work with us, discuss ideas with us and consider joining!

With Hitler on the road to Samara

By Sean Matgamna

Of course you know the story. A man is in the market place, and he sees Death, and Death looks at him intently, recognising him.

In a panic, the man runs to his horse and gallops away desperately, taking the road to the city of Samara.

As he gallops off, Death turns to his companion. “Strange,” he said, “that was so-and-so. I was surprised to see him here, because I have an appointment with him, tonight, in Samara.”

Death is all-powerful. There is no escape when he reaches your name on the list.

Consider now, and the association is appropriate enough, the fate of poor Adolf Hitler. This heroic son of the German people understood early in life that the Jews were responsible for all the evil in the world.

He knew that the Jews were behind everything! He knew that socialism and communism were Jewish, and that the Jews were also behind finance capital.

He knew that modern art was pornography and corruption, and modern culture decadent — and he knew that the Jews were responsible, as they were for everything decadent and evil in the world. This genius understood that Jewish Bolshevism and “Jewish capital” were all one. Despite the appearance of difference and antagonism between these things, Hitler could see that all of them — communism, socialism, finance capital, cultural and artistic decadence, all of them — were really one thing. They were aspects of one tightly organised and minutely directed world Jewish conspiracy.

And so Hitler fought the Jews. He roused much of Germany against them. In the middle of the 20th century, he recreated the medieval Jewish ghetto in some of the main cities of European civilisation.

When the Jews who ruled in London, Paris, Moscow and Washington declared war on the German Reich, Hitler set out to do the job properly: he organised the killing of six million Jews.

A quarter of these were children: but Hitler refused to be deterred. He knew the extent of Jew-Zion power. He understood that sentimentality would be fatal. And Hitler — before the Jews finally got him — managed to kill two out of every three Jews in Europe.

Now, you wouldn’t think, would you, that Adolf Hitler could have underestimated the power of the Jews?

The left at the time of Hitler used to say he was a criminal



Warsaw Ghetto, 1941

maniac. But the left just didn’t understand.

And neither did Adolf Hitler. This great man understood a lot about the Jews. But he didn’t understand everything. The truth is that even Hitler underestimated the extent and power of the World Jewish Conspiracy.

Not only communism and finance capital — those seeming mortal enemies — were tools of the international conspiracy of Zion — so were the Nazis, themselves! Hitler and his valiant warriors against Zion — farsighted men like Himmler, and Heydrich, and Streicher — were themselves tools of

the world Jewish conspiracy.

The Holocaust? That was just Hitler galloping off down the road to his own Samara. The Holocaust, too, served Jewish interests! It may well, in its entirety, have been part of a Jewish conspiracy, a Zionist Grand Design.

Without the great anti-Jewish warrior for one moment

Continued on page 17

Defend Jackie Walker, but not like this!

By Ruth Willis

The most informative thing about the recent controversy in Momentum — around comments made by Vice-Chair Jackie Walker at an antisemitism training event — has been less the words Jackie Walker herself said, and more the comments made by some of those who have rallied to her defence.

Walker claimed to have asked a neutral and innocent question about, and sought a clarification on, the issues of Holocaust Memorial Day and security for Jewish school students. It soon became abundantly clear that Walker’s defenders recognised (or chose to recognise) a subtext behind the comments. Though Walker’s comments were not antisemitic, these defenders wanted to, and were able to, draw out an antisemitic logic.

I have seen some shocking arguments, made by leftists, in the social media debates I have engaged in. Here are some of the phrases and arguments.

Some commentators have drawn out a meaning of Walker’s comment on Holocaust Memorial Day (about expanding the day to include remembering of other genocides), by saying, “The Zionists try to use the Holocaust as a propaganda weapon against anyone who opposes anything Israel does”; and “Holocaust incorporated at work again — this evil, Zionist mouthpiece must be challenged”.

Apparently, “Israeli Zionists are corrupting UK politics by lobbying UK MPs and by using accusations of ‘antisemitism’ as a weapon against their opponents”.

On the issue of school security commentators have said such things as, there are genuine “concerns about the deliberate hyping of fears of parents concerning anti-terrorism in order to build a climate of insecurity that enables Israel to then step forward as the ‘protector’”. Here we have a regurgitation of the trope about manipulative, lying Jews, playing the victim for gain.

The political hostility to any Zionist Jew no matter their political outlook has been palpable and clear. I have been assured “zio is short for Zionist or racist”. That we were dealing with “Zionist, nazi vermin. Scum of the earth” — a comment no one saw the need to challenge. It was just left standing there as the debate raged on. I was also told, “any Jew that supports Israel having their own state...needs to be condemned for supporting it.... I think those that have created and nurtured Zionism are part of the group that has worked for a long time to control the world”.

This is how the transition from the politics of Israel/Palestine to the recasting of far right tropes works. Ideas about Jews controlling the world are given a left-wing sheen of anti-capitalism. The word Jew is replaced with ‘Zionist’, ‘Israel’, or ‘Rothschild’.

Anti-Zionists have also reposted the infamous quote falsely credited to Voltaire, “To find out who rules you, find

out who you are not supposed to criticise” with a graphic of a hand crushing people down. When they were told it is in fact a quote from US neo-Nazi, Kevin Strom — was this quote removed? No. It was defended as being true no matter who said it.

Others wishing to support Jackie Walker have reposted articles from the website of Jeff Rense, notorious US conspiracy theorist who disseminates antisemitic and neo-Nazi propaganda.

In a discussion on an antisemitic Rothschild meme, I was informed that “money and debt control this world and its wars. And certain families are at the core of that.” Jews were described as “an alien breed like Rothschild, out to destroy mankind by creating mischief all over the world”.

In Corbyn groups and Momentum groups I have found links to Richie Allen Youtube shows (in association with David Icke).

One of the shocking things about this wasn’t just the obviously antisemitic nature of the original posts but the amount of people who defend this. There were arguments about whether the Rothschilds did indeed run the world.

Is this kind of racist antisemitism rife on the left? No. But it is there and it is often not recognised or ignored because the language can be similar to that used by those who support “anti-Zionism” as a solution to the political problems in Israel/Palestine.