



& Workers' Liberty Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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SCHOOLS: LEARNING NOT LABELLING

**By Duncan Morrison, Assistant
District Secretary, Lewisham NEU
(personal capacity)**

School worker activists in the National Education Union (NEU) are busily preparing for the consultative ballot about boycotting high stakes summative testing in primary schools.

The ballot was decided at the union's conference in April. The NEU says: "There can be no lasting solution to problems of children's well-being, teacher workload, curriculum narrowness and teaching to the test unless our assessment system changes.

"NEU members have asserted their conviction that assessment must be supportive of

learners and must be a matter of teachers' professional judgment. The days of universal standardised testing, designed more to make judgments about school performance than about pupil learning, are numbered".

The ballot opens on 4 June and will run until at least 12 July. The union is organising district meetings, representatives' meetings, and school group meetings, and speaking to members. All reports so far suggest the response of members is positive.

Generally, the union leadership do seem to be preparing to make a serious effort to win the ballot, despite having opposed it at conference. However, some around the leadership seem keen to amplify and embellish the honest concerns of the membership about the ballot: finding problems rather than solving

them. Rather than worrying about the exact implementation of the boycott, we should point out that school groups and members emboldened by a big "yes" vote and a vigorous campaign, will understand how to implement it.

Activists in the other school unions, in particular GMB and Unison, should be demanding that they join the boycott. If this is not successful then we must ensure their members do not carry out the work we are boycotting.

The motion passed at conference doesn't demand a boycott of preparation for tests.

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Labour and Brexit: call a Special Conference!

Alarm bell for Labour

By Rhodri Evans

The local elections on 2 May gave an alarm bell to Labour.

The Tories lost 1330 seats. They had expected to lose a lot. Those seats were last contested in 2015, on the same day that the Tories won the general election. They had not expected to lose so many.

Since the reference point was 2015, Labour had expected to gain. In fact Labour lost 84 council seats.

The Lib Dems had expected to gain. 2015 was a low point for them, when they were discredited by their 2010-5 coalition with the Tories. They gained more than they expected (704 seats).

The Greens were up 194 seats.

Almost as big a gainer as the Lib Dems were "Independents", up 605 seats. The label covers a wide range. Most usually, perhaps, "independents" are Tory-minded people wanting to dissociate from the official Tories. There were also many ex-Labour "independents".

The latest poll for the European election on 23 May shows Nigel Farage's new Brexit Party scooping up Tory-minded and Ukip-minded protest votes and getting a large lead over Labour, and the Lib Dems doing better at the expense of

Chuka Umunna's Change UK.

There are a lot of different notes in the alarm bell for Labour, and it is difficult to sort them out. At least the following points, though, are indicated:

- Labour's equivocal efforts to "bail out" the Tories over Brexit (as shadow minister Barry Gardiner put it) are losing left-minded voters, who go to the Greens or Lib-Dems (or don't vote). At the same time, they are not retaining Leave-minded voters, who, even if they might be won over by a clear argument on Europe, resent what they see as stalling and manipulation on Brexit. And they are not winning over waverers.

- Labour's party political broadcast before the 2 May poll was slickly made, but said nothing at all about what Labour councils would do. In fact Labour councils will continue making cuts as decreed by Tory central government, modifying them at best by gentler administration. Labour voters don't like that (and are right not to).

- From all we can gather, Labour's campaign was generally weak. There has been a big increase in Labour membership since 2015, but less of an increase in on-the-streets Labour activism. Of late ac-

tivism has been declining.

- Thus Labour is not rebuilding its base. For decades now, there has been a trend for party loyalties to decay as, simultaneously, parties' "face-to-face" operations in communities (and, for Labour, in workplaces, through unionists' activity) have declined, and politics has become a more atomised affair, mediated through TV, social media, etc.

The increase in Labour membership after 2015 offered a chance to rebuild that base. On the whole it hasn't happened. In particular, Labour's youth movement has scarcely rebuilt at all.

Even of those who have actually joined the Labour Party, an academic survey has found 41% who had had no face-to-face (rather than electronic) contact with other Labour Party members (although that survey was done straight after the 2017 general election, which must have mobilised some previously inactive people).

And union membership and organisation has not been boosted by the "Corbyn surge".

Socialist politics cannot be built by self-congratulation within a social-media bubble, but only by getting out into the workplaces and onto the streets.

Guaidó's big push fails

By Eduardo Tovar

Nearly four months into the Venezuelan Presidential crisis, it has come the closest so far to a literal coup dynamic.

On the morning of Tuesday 30 April, Juan Guaidó, the self-declared interim President of Venezuela, appeared in a video near a Caracas air base with opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez, who had previously been kept under house arrest. Accompanied by men in military uniforms, Guaidó announced the "final phase of Operation Liberty", calling on troops and civilians to make a last push against the incumbent President Nicolas Maduro.

Protests erupted in the streets. This time, several national guard

units joined the pro-opposition demonstrators, clashing with security forces still loyal to Maduro. That was the first time in the Presidential crisis that military personnel have directly combatted each other. Reportedly, one Venezuelan colonel was shot during the confrontation.

In fact, the military element didn't expand, and the bulk of Guaidó's operation was civilian protests.

Despite this being the most direct and dramatic challenge to his rule so far, Maduro very much retained the upper hand. Although Guaidó was clearly banking on splitting the Venezuelan armed forces, only a handful of national guard platoons defected to his side. The vast majority of the Venezuelan top brass remained loyal to Maduro.

At least 52 people were injured in Caracas during the protests. Footage that appeared to show armoured vehicles attempting to run down anti-Maduro demonstrators on the highway quickly spread across social media. Venezuelan Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino López condemned Guaidó's move as a terrorist act that was certain to fail.

President Trump has threatened Cuba, a consistent ally of Maduro's regime, with an embargo and new sanctions. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has reiterated that military action in Venezuela is "possible".

It is far from clear whether such sabre-rattling will actually become an armed intervention, but it is certainly possible that the White House is considering more drastic moves to topple Maduro after the events of this week.

We condemn Guaidó's attempt to seize control of Venezuela via an armed revolt, his alliances with right-wing demagogues like Trump and Bolsonaro, and the neoliberal and pro-imperialist government his party would almost certainly form if he were to take power.

As always, none of this should be taken as political support for Maduro himself.

Nevertheless, Maduro's ousting at the hands of a rival military faction within the Bonapartist state apparatus or, worse yet, a foreign invasion force, would only deepen an already dire situation for Venezuelan working class.



Semenya: a cruel decision

By Steff Farley

It was recently announced that the IAAF [International Association of Athletics Federations] will enforce a rule to make women with high testosterone levels take drugs to reduce the levels of the hormone in their bodies.

The policy has been enforced following a long and very public case surrounding [world women's 800 metre champion] Caster Semenya and was based on research that showed athletes in 400m, 800m and 1500m with hyperandrogenism (heightened testosterone but otherwise female sexual characteristics) had an advantage over female athletes without this condition.

There is no scientific justification for not classifying Semenya as female but there are several justifications for allowing her to compete as usual in the female category. Firstly, there has been a social reaction to Caster Semenya's natural material body through her whole life and

this is the social reaction that accompanies bodies interpreted as female. She has for the most part existed in the world as someone who has a female body.

Additionally, the mainstream narrative surrounding this situation overwhelmingly involves a Eurocentric understanding of sex and gender and enforcing this understanding as a global policy, one that in particular is targeting a black South African woman, is a form of ideological colonialism. Forcing your definitions of sex or gender onto a black woman from South Africa – where, incidentally, she is adored – is historically a white supremacist, patriarchal and colonialist act.

Primarily though, the reason why the ruling is wrong and Semenya should be able to compete in the category of her choice is because it is a cruel, humiliating punishment to not allow her to do so.

• More: bit.ly/sf-cs

Nothing to report?

By Keith Road

Since September the CLP (Constituency Labour Party) representatives on Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) have all been broadly on the left, 8 of them supported by Momentum and all 9 by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy.

After the September NEC, when they first took their places, they produced a single report of the meeting. They promised they would do that regularly going forward. In principle a joint report reflecting shared views would be a useful complement to individual reports from each member.

But in fact only Pete Willsman and Darren Williams (longer-term NEC CLP reps who already produced reports) have continued (at least moth months).

None of the other reps, all of whom stood on a platform of accountability and giving power to the membership have done so.

Both the joint reports, from

September and November, give very little detail. Either the NEC members do not wish to report on matters in any detail, or they found great limits to what they could agree on to report. No ordinary observer can tell.

For a transformative vision of the Labour Party to be realised, members need democracy, and that means being informed. The only other NEC member to produce regular reports is Alice Perry, one of two local government representatives.

January and March have been and gone and no joint report has been published. Does this reflect growing tension among the CLP reps. Or is it a conscious decision to stop reporting?

No minutes are circulated of the NEC, not even of debates where no issue of confidentiality could arise. Momentum chair Jon Lansman has said he is against the NEC having publicly available minutes.

So members must for now rely on reports that have been promised but not produced...

May Day arrests in Iran

By SZAC

Following a call by four independent labour organisations, workers, teachers, students and pensioners demonstrated outside the Iranian regime's "parliament" on May Day.

The regime's response was to arrest a large number of demonstrators.

The four were: Trade Union of the Tehran and Suburbs Vahed Bus Company, Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Workers' Union, Coordina-

tion Committee for Establishing Labour Organisations and the Retirement Alliance.

A full list of detainees in Tehran is at shahrokhzamani.com

The Shahrokh Zamani Action Campaign [SZAC] strongly condemns these arrests. We call on all trade unionists, socialists and other political activists to help us in defending the rights of all workers, social rights' activists and political prisoners in Iran.

• More, also, at IranProtestsLiveInformation, bit.ly/iran-pli



Making campaign wider



By Mike Zubrowski

Extinction Rebellion, after eleven days of ambitious, disruptive, relatively widespread, and extensively covered actions in their “International Rebellion”, (15-25 April), have moved into a “regenerative, resting phase”.

They have been celebrating wins so far: media coverage, politicians seeming receptive, changes in public narratives towards recognising the gravity of the situation; reportedly huge expansions of local XR branches. Socialist environmentalists should continue to get involved, and to push it towards the radical conclusions that its environmental commitments point towards.

They are at pains to draw distinctions between XR and the individual XR members, including their leading strategist, running as candidates in the European Parliament elections as “The Climate and Ecological Emergency Independents”.

A recent Greenpeace-commissioned poll of the UK public, carried out while the “International Rebellion” was happening, found that 63% believe there is a “Climate Emergency”, and 76% say they would “vote differently to protect

the planet and climate.” To what extent this is down to XR is not clear.

The 2018 *British Social Attitudes* survey showed that almost everyone believed in the existence of climate change, that most people are worried by it, think about it a lot, and think that its consequences will be pretty bad. That said, disturbingly, only 36% believed that it was caused entirely or mainly by human activity, while 53% believed attribute blame “[e]qually [to] human activity and natural processes”.

What some may see as the most substantive victory is Parliament agreeing to XR’s first demand, declaring a “climate and environmental emergency”. A motion, tabled by Labour, passed without a vote, as Theresa May did not turn up and reportedly encouraged MPs to go campaigning ahead of the local elections the following day instead of opposing it.

With its passing, the motion (bit.ly/2VCKsvP) now means that the House of Commons “calls on the Government to increase the ambition of the UK’s climate change targets under the Climate Change Act 2008 to achieve net zero emissions before 2050, to increase support for and set ambitious, short-term targets for the roll-out of renewable and low carbon energy and transport, and to move swiftly to capture economic opportunities and green jobs in the low carbon economy while managing risks for workers and communities currently reliant on carbon intensive sectors; and further calls on the Government to lay before the House within the next six months urgent proposals to restore the UK’s natural environment and to deliver a circular, zero waste economy.”

Labour’s leadership refused to move the proposed date to 2030, although McDonnell had previously agreed to consider this.

Michael Gove, Conservative Secretary of State for Environment,

Food and Rural Affairs, stressed the importance of tackling climate change, using left-sounding rhetoric about global justice, and tried to claim a history of environmentalism for his party and political tradition. “The first British politician — in fact, the first world politician — to make it clear that climate change was an emergency was Margaret Thatcher. She was a Conservative and a Christian who believed in the principle of stewardship, but above all she was a scientist who followed the evidence.”

He made further fantastical claims, as the environmental advances of governments since 2010, later even concurring with the Conservative Sir Edward Leigh “that the best way to reduce emissions is to have a vigorous, free-enterprise, low-tax, deregulated economy”, contrasting this to Stalinist command economies.

Stalinist states have an awful environmental record, worse even than most capitalist states. Capitalism’s record is nonetheless indefensible in its own right. Class societies driven by the - usually short-term - interests of their ruling classes, cannot be relied on to tackle climate change. Leigh’s “best solution” stands for little short of putting our foot down on the accelerator towards greater and greater climate catastrophe. The only solution is deeply democratic, genuinely socialist, environmentalism.

The fact that such anti-environmental politics can be advocated under the banner of supporting this motion highlights its lack of substance. This isn’t fundamentally altered by XR describing Gove’s ramblings as “complex” and “piss-poor” in a members’ newsletter.

Later, without a trace of irony, Corbyn added: “It’s too late for tokenistic policies or gimmicks. We have to do more than just ban plastic straws. Individual action is not enough. ... Today we have the opportunity to say, ‘We hear you.’”

Unionists say "stop Adani"

By Mike Zubrowski

Union leaders in Australia have dissented from the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU) union’s wider leadership over the construction of a coal mine.

Bob Carnegie is secretary of Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) Queensland, and member of Workers’ Liberty Australia. On 30 April he publicly called on Bob Shorten, the leader of the Australian Labor Party (the main opposition party) to oppose the construction of the Adani coal mine in Queensland due to its environmental impact. MUA in 2018 merged into the CFMEU to form the CFMMEU, and remains a section within it.

Peter Ong, Queensland secretary of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), has likewise stated opposition to Adani.

In Clermont, Queensland, protestors supporting and opposing the coal mine have clashed,



with some supporters waving CFMEU flags.

Bob Shorten has come under pressure from CFMEU Queensland’s mining division to “support coal mining jobs” with Adani, although from other states the union has opposed it. So far, Shorten has equivocated. Carnegie and Ong advocated a just transition to renewables, referencing historical struggles such as the “Green Bans” by builders’ unions in the ’70s, and the Franklin Dam protests.

They recognise, too, that sometimes wider considerations and the “greater good” should prevail over immediate job calculations.



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40 pages A4. Cover price £4. With postage — non-UK £6, UK £5. Cheap rates for bulk orders: four for £15, ten for £35, twenty for £60.

• Buy online at bit.ly/r-rebel

Third runway challenge fails

By Mike Zubrowski

A high court challenge to Heathrow’s third runway has failed. The challenge was brought by five London boroughs, Sadiq Khan, local residents, and environmental campaigning groups.

The third runway would see a huge expansion to the number of flights from the UK and nationwide.

Aviation is one of the most polluting sectors in the UK, and until serious technological advances are made, we need to scale it back. Had the case succeeded, it is likely the

government would have brought a modified National Policy Statement back to the house of commons, pushing ahead with the third runway anyway.

The runway can still be stopped: it is currently due to be built starting 2021. The first step is to win the Labour Party and labour movement to serious environmentalist politics, and to hold MPs accountable to these politics. Shamefully, Labour MPs were granted a free vote in the previous Commons motion to construct the third runway, and the proposal passed with a huge majority of 296. That was in part because major unions such as Unite supported it.

While Unite and the Labour leadership on paper oppose climate change, in practice they have opted for conservative policies of accepting proposals which offer prospects of immediate jobs, rather than fighting for the proposals and the jobs that we need.

We must have these arguments within our unions and within Labour.



Corrections

Through a technical glitch, a chunk of the page 2 article “Protest for ‘Two States’ on 11 May” in *Solidarity* 504 was obscured by another article. The whole article can be read at bit.ly/504-2

Upcoming climate events

Extinction Rebellion “International Mother’s Day March”, Sun 12 May, 12 noon, Trafalgar Square: bit.ly/xr-12may

UK Youth Strike for Climate, next national strike, Fri 24 May. See local events: bit.ly/ys4c-24

Momentum and People & Planet’s “Bankrupt Climate Change” second national day of action, Sat 25 May

Hard border: all the fault of the EU?



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

A bizarre episode occurred on 1 May in Cork, Ireland. Taoiseach [prime minister] Leo Varadkar was due to speak at a meeting organised by the ruling Fine Gael party as part of its campaign for directly elected mayors.

The meeting had to be adjourned for a period when members of the Connolly Youth Movement (CYM) – the youth wing of the Communist Party of Ireland – disputed proceedings.

Initially, the CYM's intervention seemed fair enough. A woman stood up and called for a minute's silence for two homeless men who had recently died on Cork streets. That was agreed by the chair.

Then other CYM members began denouncing Fine Gael and the other main Irish parties for support of what the protesters called "European militarism".

They described Varadkar's government as

a "ruthless blueshirt regime", a reference to the organisation that in the 1930s provided protection to political parties that became Fine Gael. Blueshirt leader Eoin O'Duffy attended the 1934 Montreux Fascist conference in Switzerland. He then founded the National Corporate Party, and later raised an Irish Brigade that took Franco's side in the Spanish Civil War.

What exactly "European militarism" has to do with the austerity policies that led to the deaths of homeless men in Cork, was not explained. Nor was the idea that Varadkar's mainstream centre-right government can seriously be described as "blueshirt" (i.e. fascist).

The incident was reported (with evident approval) in the *Morning Star* under the headline "Communists blast Varadkar's 'Blueshirt regime' at stormy Cork meeting".

The explanation for this strange incident can only be the Communist Party of Ireland's obsessive opposition to the EU. The CPI has accused the Irish government of "siding with the EU against Britain, which also happens to be our largest trading partner, and against the decision made by its citizens to leave the EU."

The CPI also echos the Tory ultra-right and the DUP in blaming the EU for threatening a hard border inside Ireland. Having opposed the "backstop" intended to prevent a hard border (again like the Tory Brexiteers and DUP), it argues that the problem is all down to the EU: "We must remember who's doing the threatening. It is not Britain's border, or Ireland's border: it is the EU's border. It is up to the EU to sort out this problem in the interests of its members, in other words Ireland, the only member affected by it."

As one Irish Marxist blogger commented, "The idea that the border of the EU in Ireland affects only the Irish state and not the rest of the EU demonstrates such as ignorance of the issue at stake that it is hard to work out what this (CPI) writer actually does understand."

The CPI's extraordinary complacency over the threat of a hard border and the possible collapse of the Good Friday Agreement (which for all its faults, is surely preferable to a return to a sectarian free-for-all) has led the *Morning Star* to effectively adopt the stance of the Tory ultra-right and DUP on Ireland. For instance, a recent editorial (headed "the merry-go-round of Irish border warnings is not what it seems") contained the following

dismissal of concerns over Brexit's effect on Irish peace as an "establishment-backed" conspiracy:

"This week the warnings connecting Brexit with the Irish border, the GFA and a revival of violence have been delivered by US House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi in speeches in London and Dublin..."

"Yet the whole 'Brexit-border-GFA-terrorism' nightmare scenario is a concoction of cynical and reckless politicians, commentators and top bureaucrats.

"Its intention is to undermine Brexit in general and justify the Irish backstop in the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement in particular."

That appeared in the *Morning Star* on 19 April – the very day that the world learned of the death of Lyra McKee at the hands of the so-called New IRA – a group that boasts of having "capitalise(d) on the opportunity" provided by Brexit.

The fact that the publication of that editorial coincided with such a tragedy just adds to the sadness and anger that those of us who care about peace and unity in Ireland, North and South, are presently feeling.

The *Morning Star* must be named and shamed over this at every opportunity.

Rebuilding Labour's base



Letters

Let's be honest. Even if Labour had a good line on Brexit, a better leadership, a PLP not out to sabotage it, and all the rest, a majority Labour government will be hard to win.

Unless other fronts are opened in the class struggle to break the barriers.

There is a long term decline in the Labour vote in:

1. Depressed de-industrialised small cities and towns with declining populations, especially those not in the orbit of big diverse cities.

2. The unfashionable working-class suburbs, owner occupied but by skilled or semi skilled working class people rather than the well-off. Or the dormitory villages next to towns, with no amenities but swelled by housebuilding in the 70s, 80s and 90s.

3. The Scottish working class.

Those groups kept Labour in office in 2005 and saved it from annihilation in 2010. But since then the Labour vote there has been in decline.

The Labour-right and Stalinist argument is to appeal to the conservatism, nationalism, and racism in those areas. Hence Labour's Brexit mess.

But really the stalemate can only be broken through struggle on other fronts than the Labour party. The general weakness on the industrial front is the key factor.

To counter that, we need organic organising to the point of winning struggles in retail parks and distribution centres off motorways.

The campaigns need the union movement, Labour, and Momentum activists to link up with them on a genuine basis.

Luke Hardy, Leeds

Hegel, Marx, Darwin



Letters

Paul Cooper (*Solidarity* 502, 503, 504) identifies both Aristotle and Hegel, and then also Marx, as asserting that "things change as their essence evolves".

Paul takes that assertion to be self-evident, "a tautology".

With Aristotle, "development is a property of real entities"; with Hegel, "of Logic, not actual material entities". But Hegel has a concept of contradiction, missing in Aristotle. "Marx takes the concept of 'contradiction' from Hegel" and identifies it within "the real entity".

For Hegel, however, the Absolute Idea was "the real entity", and "finite" things like "newts and money" were comparatively unreal.

"The truth is the whole", Hegel wrote. And thus he developed accounts highlighting interaction and contradiction within that whole.

But Hegel's expositions, supposedly developed by logical analysis of "the Absolute", were in fact constructed by collecting a mass of factual knowledge and then shoe-horning it into his general scheme.

"In beginning the study of Universal History", for example, declared Hegel, "we should at least have the firm, unconquerable faith that... the World of intelligence and conscious volition... must show itself in the light of the self-cognisant Idea".

How to show that? By presenting it as "the result of the investigation we are about to pursue; a result which happens to be known to me, because I have traversed the entire field". Hegel found out what happened, and then presented it as the "what it was to be" of a greater whole.

Thus what Marx's called Hegel's "false positivism", and the "whole parallel with the teleological act of the will", presenting the constitutional monarchy (for example) as generated by the purposeful activity of the Idea.

In contrast, I'd argue, Marx did his research without assuming things to have an internal "what it was to be" discernible by speculative philosophy. Dialectics was not a super-science, or a "science before the science", telling us about general patterns of development in advance of all particular, empirical investigation. He saw the great thing to be learned from Darwin that "for the first time, 'teleology' in natural science is dealt a mortal blow".

Maybe other readers will discuss other issues Paul has raised and for which I have no space here.

Martin Thomas, London

Mind your language



Letters

Sean's piece in this issue (pages 12-15) is extremely good. It is politically persuasive and lucidly takes the reader on the historical political journey of our tendency's thinking, the thinking of Sean himself, but a journey mirrored by many comrades, on Israel, Palestine and antisemitism.

I'd like to pick up on not the content, but some of the language used. Comrades should read Sean's article before this comment, to contextualise it. Sean writes that "Secular democratic state" was 'drive the Jews into the sea' for squeamish dimwits, or people made stupid by politics." Later, he writes "It was the reduction of their politics to something hard to distinguish from political lunacy."

Comrades should not use terms such as "dimwit" and "lunacy" as attacks in political

polemics. Doing so feeds reactionary narrative about mental health. Lunatic, dimwit, schizoid, moron, cretin and other terms are fundamentally everyday insults to people with mental health problems, learning difficulties, or even just eccentricities. Their use as insults by those on the left, including by some of Workers' Liberty's members, contributes to stigmatisation of such people and their difficulties, and of drives towards conformity. Politically, we oppose such things. Our rhetoric should be consistent with this.

There are some secondary reasons to avoid such name-calling.

Generally, engaging with arguments rather than attacking - or name-calling - their believers is better. In both quoted examples, Sean does the former as well as the latter, and in tracing a history of development of ideas, the latter is probably, in part, necessary. But this name-calling is lazy, or at best imprecise, where more descriptive terms could work.

Finally, it often comes across as snobbish.

Even when feeling intellectually superior to particular individuals or sets of individuals is justified, such snobbishness is generally not convincing or attractive. It can cut against building positive democratic cultures of debate.

I imagine some readers would accuse me of nitpicking over this, of this being a symptom of "excessive Political Correctness", or even try to bring some amateur psychoanalysis as to why I felt combined to write this note. In striving for a better world, details matter, and cannot be justified simply as stylistic licence, authors' rights, or their widespread current and historical usage. Sean is a good and creative writer, and could do better.

I know other supporters of Workers' Liberty feel similar, and I'd like to thank Janine for her insight on the issue.

Mike Zubrowski, Bristol

Schools: Learning not labelling!

continued from page 1

When we have won a significant vote for boycott, school groups (and indeed leaderships) will decide whether preparation for tests that won't happen is a sensible use of resources.

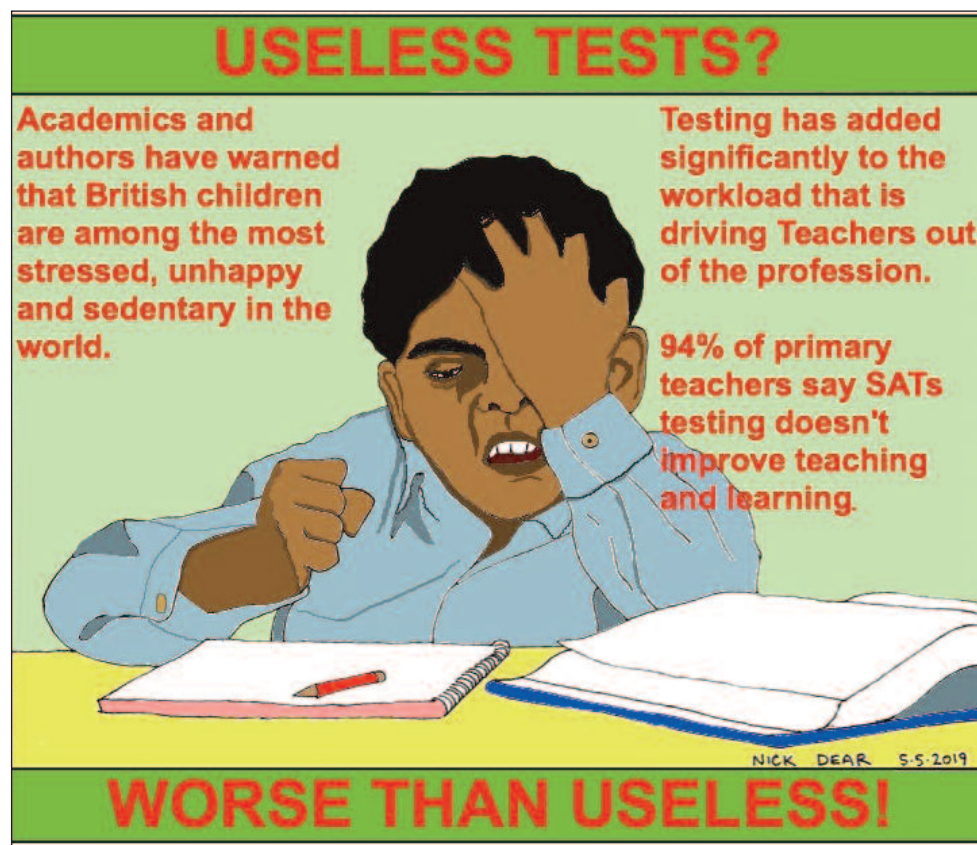
When asked what will replace the test, we respond that school workers constantly assess what children can do and what they need to learn. That is how most assessment was done in Primary school (outside Year 2 and Year 6) up until very recently and still is in many schools. Every Year 2 and Year 6 practitioner I have ever met can tell you in detail what the children they work with can

do and what they need to work on, they don't need tests.

We need to focus on the liberatory opportunity to rid children and school workers of these loathed tests, to regain the possibility of teaching what our children need and at a pace appropriate to them, to reclaim control of our work and to stop harming children.

The slogan the national union is pushing is "Too Much Testing!" I would add: "Learning not Labelling".

• Duncan Morrison is Assistant District Secretary, Lewisham NEU writing in a personal capacity



Don't bail out Tories on Europe!

From Labour for a Socialist Europe

Responding to Tory Brexit minister James Cleverly on the BBC, on 3 May, Labour's Shadow International Trade Secretary Barry Gardiner said:

"You as a Brexit Minister should understand that we are in there [in the Labour-Tory talks on Brexit] trying to bail you guys out". (bit.ly/bg-bx)

Whether or not this is how the entire Labour leadership and negotiating team views the talks, it must certainly reflect a strong strand of opinion – and in any case it reflects the unfortunate political dynamic. Whatever the risks for the Tories, the risks for Labour if it agrees a deal are greater. It would amount precisely to bailing the Tories out.

These talks, to the degree they are "successful", mean Labour accepting most of the Tories' Brexit agenda, including for instance its Immigration Bill. The political logic of this is shown by Rebecca Long-Bailey referring to discussions in the negotiations about workers' rights as "fantastic" (!)

Concerningly, John McDonnell tweeted "message from local elections – 'Brexit – sort it.' Message received." This ambiguous statement is being widely interpreted as leaning further towards making a deal.

The talks are effectively counterposed to Labour taking the fight to the Tories, as the local government election results show. Similarly they are now a risk to Labour's campaign in the European elections.

Labour members should protest about Gardiner's comments and, more importantly, demand the party withdraws from the talks. Activists are circulating a statement calling for that (below).



In the Euro elections, Labour for a Socialist Europe will be providing activists with materials to allow a clear left-wing, anti-Brexit voice within the Labour campaign. To do that we need money. Please help by donating to and sharing L4SE's crowdfunder – bit.ly/l4se-cf. For the materials, contact L4SE via bit.ly/l4se-w.

The statement reads:

As Labour members, we are writing to you regarding the ongoing talks between the government and the Labour Party over Brexit.

With local and European election campaigns ongoing, these talks are now proving to be a distraction. We need a radical and positive message on the doorstep, and we need to attack the Tories' Brexit plans. This is much more difficult to do when Labour is technically in negotiations about delivering some kind of joint Brexit plan.

The Tories want to use Brexit to deregulate the economy, and attack the rights of workers and migrants. Labour policy, adopted unanimously at party conference in September 2018, is to oppose a deal that does not meet Labour's tests. It is clear that these talks will not produce a deal which meets our tests.

Theresa May and the Conservative Party have no interest in acting in good faith in these negotiations, and they cannot give Labour enough to agree a deal anyway. There has been no progress, and our presence in the room serves no useful purpose, is wasting time, and is doing us damage.

We are therefore writing to you to urge you to withdraw from these talks, and turn the focus to fighting the Tories' Brexit plans.

Sign at bit.ly/no-bo.

Also on the web:

- L4SE call for a radical Labour manifesto in the Euro-elections, signed by over 500 Labour and trade union activists, including MEPs Julie Ward and Jude Kirton-Darling and MPs Marsha de Cordova, Ged Killen, Rosie Duffield and Lloyd Russell-Moyle: bit.ly/l4se-23M

- Other Labour left statements for the Euro-elections: bit.ly/left-23M.



Tickets for our summer school, Ideas for Freedom, are now available until 26 May at £38 waged, £22 low-waged and students, £9 unwaged.

Prices will increase in steps until the event, around 22-23 June.

The 22-23 June weekend agenda will include presentations and debates on issues around Brexit, antisemitism, climate change, 1919, 1989, and more. There'll be a walking tour on Thursday 20 June and an evening debate on Friday 21 June.

Venue: Camden School for Girls, Sandall Road, London NW5 2DB. Free creche. Overnight accommodation will also be available free.

• A provisional agenda and further information can be found at www.workersliberty.org/ideas



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Sixteen pages

This week's *Solidarity* has sixteen pages rather than our usual 12, and is organised differently from usual. The debate opened up on Israel-Palestine and the "right of return" will continue, but we wanted to get at least a solid chunk of it into this issue, rather than have it mor fragmented and make it harder for readers to understand the continuity.

Left needs clearer Euro-message

By Michael Elms

On 18 April, the European Parliament posted polling projections for the 2019 European elections.

The projections show the European People's Party (the big alliance of "centre-right" parties, though not including the British Tories) on track to remain the largest party in the Parliament – but by a slimmer majority.

The figures had the EPP falling from 217 to 180 seats. The mainstream-social-democratic bloc "Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats" (aka S&D, the European Parliamentary group of the pan-European reformist left Party of European Socialists, of which Labour is a member) was estimated to get 149 seats, down from 186.

Predictions on 25 April had the EPP and S&D on 180 and 161 respectively. The latest poll as we go to press, on 1 May, had the gap at 173-149.

At least before the 2 May local elections, polling in the UK showed Labour doing better than the European survey predicted.

In the 2017 British general election, Labour confounded the polling and made unexpected gains by putting forward the most left-wing manifesto in decades. With a left-wing manifesto that offers a glimmer of hope against the grimness of Brexit xenophobia and austerity, Labour could fatally wound the Tory government.

It could make a decisive contribution to taking the European Presidency, and the plum jobs on the European Commission, out of the hands of the EPP.

But that would take political courage rather than triangulation. It would also mean Labour committing to put Labour MEPs in office and keep them there. Currently the policy promoted by the Leader's Office is to get rid of all the UK's MEPs, by carrying out Brexit...

The UK Tory Party is in special difficulties on 23 May because it is not in the mainstream party of European conservatism. New Democracy, for example, the Greek Tories, the most unapologetic inflictors of austerity on Greece, and Les Républicains, the French Tories, the re-branded party of Chirac and Sarkozy, are part of the European People's Party, the UK's Tories hived off under David Cameron.

Judging the EPP "too federalist", they set up a grouping of their own, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). One outcome of the EPP-ECR split is that removing the UK from European elections would

Europe :
*Et maintenant,
le peuple !*



Vendredi 21 septembre - 20h30
Salle Battant - Besançon

Anne-Sophie Pelletier
syndicaliste et candidate
aux élections Européennes

Laurence Lyonnais
militante écosocialiste
candidate aux Européennes

Julian Augé
militant éducation populaire
candidat aux Européennes

Séverine Vézies
militante juriste insoumise

MEETING
France insoumise

on balance benefit the EPP, which draws no MEPs from the UK.

The ECR is not only an anti-federalist, Eurosceptic group. It is also markedly more reactionary than the EPP.

After the UK Conservative Party (18 seats), the second-largest component is the Law and Justice (PiS) party, the "national-conservative", anti-abortion party which rules Poland, whose leaders oppose LGBT people being allowed to be school teachers and are the leading anti-immigrant force in Eastern European politics.

In 2018, UK Conservative MEPs were the only right-wing governing party in Western Europe to vote against sanctions on Viktor Orbán's far-right government in Hungary in response to attacks on the independence of the judiciary, anti-migrant violence and a high-profile official campaign of antisemitic propaganda centred around the bogeyman figure of George Soros. UK Tory MEPs received letters of thanks from Orbán.

The far-right bloc Europe of Nations and Freedom, bringing together the German AfD, the Austrian Freedom Party, the French Rassemblement National (successor to the Front National) and Italy's Lega, is predicted to make the biggest gains on 23 May, leaping from 37 seats to 62. The biggest source of growth will be Italy, where Lega is predicted to take 20 additional seats.

The ENF bloc is unlikely to be big enough to have much of an impact on the Commission (yet). But its progress will strengthen the "nationalist international" in its work across the continent, attempting to drag politics as a whole rightwards.

The wipe-outs suffered over recent years by Greece's Pasok, France's Parti Socialiste, the Netherlands' Labour Party, and Italy's Democratic Party, have been called "Pasokification" – a process whereby those social-democratic parties are become discredited, hegemonised by neoliberal thinking, and hollowed out.

SYRIZA

Greece's Syriza was often held up as an alternative to Pasokification. Syriza formed a left-wing government in Greece in 2015 and promised defiance before collapsing into administering austerity.

It balked at serious confrontation with Greek and European capital and went into technocratic damage-limitation mode, carrying out austerity and claiming there was suddenly no alternative.

Syriza was the brightest star of its European grouping, the European United Left (GUE). Alongside Germany's Die Linke and Mélenchon's La France Insoumise, the larger components of GUE seemed to herald a left-

ward breakout from the fate of other social-democratic parties.

Now that bloc is faltering. Die Linke has been flirting with calls for stronger immigration controls, at the urging of former leader Sahra Wagenknecht. Mélenchon's party is resolutely populist, and with a nationalist edge: a platform that promises an expansion of the French arms industry, thinly-veiled anti-German protectionism, and a policy of flying tricolours instead of red flags at rallies.

A change of direction on the left is necessary.

A new grouping, Maintenant le Peuple (MLP, "Now the People") is being set up, with Mélenchon at its core, alongside the Spanish Podemos, Portugal's Left Bloc, the Swedish Vänsterpartiet, and others. But on what political basis? The name of the new bloc junks words like "left" or "socialist", let alone "worker" or "labour", and goes instead for "people". But who are the "people"? And who are the "people" against?

In January 2019, far-right Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán made a chilling speech setting out his vision for Europe. He said: "the conventional division of parties into those of the Right and of the Left will be replaced with a division between those which are pro-immigration and those which are anti-immigration". The MLP-type left is no better placed to combat that drift than is the "centre-left" S&D.

In France and Germany, the siren call of nationalism is tempting many left activists, as opportunist "socialist" politicians like Mélenchon or Wagenknecht try to harness base prejudice to further their careers, and sell it to their supporters with a lick of red paint.

In the UK, too, there is a "Lexit" constituency of self-promoting labour-movement careerists and ladder-climbing "public intellectuals" (most notably gathered around the Full Brexit project, the Morning Star, and their allies in the Brexit Party).

Unless they are displaced by a Europe-wide revival of working-class, Marxist socialism, these noxious forces on the left threaten to help make Orbán's sick dream come true.

The Euro-parliament and democracy

The European Parliament is a strange and weak body. It is dominated by its executive, the European Commission, and by the European Council, the body bringing together the European heads of state.

Unlike most parliaments, the European Parliament cannot initiate legislation. It can only approve, disapprove, or amend bills brought by the Commission.

Marxists have long favoured a United

States of Europe which could ease the deadly national rivalries of the past, lower borders, and permit democracy to function at the international level.

With or without a European federation, capitalists will continue to organise among themselves internationally. It is the working class that needs formal political structures to help make transnational issues the subject of votes and highly visible debates, and not just behind-the-scenes haggling.

The European Parliament falls far short of the kind of democracy that we want to see.

In European elections currently, the real prize is the ability to select Commissioners, secured by the biggest party.

Since 1999, the biggest party in the European Parliament has been the European People's Party – essentially, an international coalition of Tories, although excluding the UK Tory party.

CWU faces change

By Rosalind Robson

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) met for its conference on 29 April-3 May.

It took place as the union finalised reorganisation plans ("Redesign"), to tackle declining membership, in the context of industrial change in both the telecoms/financial services and post/courier sectors.

An emergency motion from the National Executive on Brexit passed at the union's general conference (attended by delegates from both sides of the union) was widely reported in the press. The conference voted decisively for "Labour's Manifesto commitment" to deliver "a Brexit deal that prioritises jobs and living standards".

It endorsed the NEC's line not to campaign for a second referendum. In the event of any referendum a line would be determined by a national policy forum. Such a forum has no constitutional status and it unclear what the real views of CWU members on this issue are.

The motion also said, "any deal should be consistent with a democratic socialist transformation of the UK economy in relation to competition, the undercutting of workers and public ownership and investment." Unfortunately no democratic socialist transformation is consistent with any version of Brexit.

A motion on supporting CWU members from the EU, and campaigning against discrimination, post-Brexit was also passed.

The issue of industrial change is important.

Whilst employment in both post, courier and financial services has remained steady, membership of the union has declined as markets, businesses and technology has changed. Membership was 217,807 at the end of 2009. It is now 178,975.

The CWU has had some success in recruiting outside BT in the telecoms/financial services sector, and importantly, the union has now won recognition in EE (formerly owned by Orange and O2, taken over by BT in 2016).

One casualty of the reorganisation has been the CWU's equality structures.

Annual separate Equality conferences (Women, BAME, LGBT, Disability) have been replaced by a single one day biennial Equalities conference alongside representatives on new regional committees.

Success for Nottingham Rider Network

By Zack, IWGB National Deliveroo Committee chair

On Tuesday 30 April, Deliveroo responded to the Nottingham Rider Network - IWGB's demand letter.

Beyond a load of the usual fluff, it became clear that NRN-IWGB had made steps forward: winning a hiring freeze, and an agreement to meet.

Unsure as to whether to continue with a

strike, the committee took the decision to riders more widely. The response was a decision to call off a strike.

The limited victory is good and must be celebrated. But the lesson time and again from Deliveroo, and from employers more generally, is that you win improvements, that you negotiate from a stronger position, by striking, and continuing to strike. When the pressure eases, so will progress, and eventually they will try to roll the gains back.

Couriers in Nottingham and elsewhere

should not let themselves get too demoralised by this decision by Nottingham couriers. Nationally, and in Nottingham, Bristol, York, Horsham, London, and elsewhere, we are more organised than we were a few months ago. In many of those places we have won small victories.

We can build from this to more sustained and impactful strikes, winning yet more gains, winning our bigger demands. The second issue of our bulletin, Puncture, should be out before mid-May.



Reclaim May Day for workers' struggle!

By Ollie Moore

Three strikes took place this May Day, 1 May: Addison Lee cab drivers at Luton Airport, organised by the IWGB; outsourced workers at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, organised by PCS; and drivers on the London Tramlink, organised by Aslef.

May Day, International Workers' Day, has historically been a celebration of workers' struggle. Unfortunately, the London May Day parade has shrunk to a small, desultory gathering mainly attended by ultra-Stalinist sects and cults, who march behind enormous banners of dictators.

If the small trend of unions organising strikes on May Day continues, this could represent an opportunity to reinvigorate May Day as a celebration of struggle, rather than a day out for gulag fantasists.

Tube workers strike on jobs and safety

By Tom Saff

Train maintenance workers on London Underground will strike from 7am on 17 May to 7am on 20 May, to demand their bosses abandon a plan to extend train preparation schedules.

London Underground trains are currently "prepped" (i.e., have full safety checks performed) on a 24-hourly basis. Tube bosses want to extend this schedule by varying degrees across different lines - some to 96 hours, some to 28 days, and some to an "MOT"-style system that could see trains go months without being fully prepped.

Tube union RMT argues that these plans will affect safety and could put passengers and other staff at risk, as well as posing a threat to train maintenance workers' jobs.

Workers are also undertaking action-short-of-strikes, including a refusal to lone work, a refusal to work without a fire warden present, and a refusal to deliver or participate in training for work outside of their substantive roles.

Rank-and-file socialist bulletin *Tube worker* has been arguing for the dispute to be broadened out to other grades of workers.

Some RMT branches have already called for Tube drivers to be balloted for strikes on this issue.



The German Revolution

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To be sent our e-reader version of Solidarity, email awl@workersliberty.org.

This may be helpful for dyslexic readers. E-readers enable you to choose the font, type size, and line-spacing you prefer, in a completely uncluttered layout.

Please give feedback so that we can find out whether these efforts are worthwhile, and, if they are, improve them.

PCS: step back and think

By a civil servant

Our union, PCS, announced on 30 April that our pay ballot had failed to get the 50% turnout required by law.

Since then the union leadership has announced its next step as "to hold a further statutory ballot for industrial action over pay at the earliest appropriate time".

That proposal will go as an emergency motion to our conference on 21-23 May.

To go for another push as soon as possible to edge us over the 50% mark would be wrong. We need to step back and think why we couldn't get even 50% of our membership to open an envelope, tick a box, and send back the form.

The problems are not just organisation. The way the pay demand was constructed was part of it. Just plucking a 10% figure out of the air hasn't gripped the membership.

TACTICS

Obviously the claim should include a general increase for all members.

But it should also include equalisation of pay across departments - which members can easily understand - and a national system of pay.

It should include a demand about progression pay. In most government departments you can't get to the maximum, or only with great difficulty.

If we're going to win over members, we also need to explain more what the tactics will be. The union did say that there would be a different approach, not just one-day strikes, but it didn't hammer this message home.

WIN

Fundamentally, the union over the last few years has given people no indication of how we're going to win.

The union has become an affair of top-down campaign messages, and that's it, with no effective support for local initiative.

Before the next ballot we must have a clear plan with a mixture of mass actions, selective strikes, rolling strikes, and effective action short of strike action.

We need a proper discussion about disaggregated ballots. If HMRC [Revenue and Customs], say, got over the 50% and took effective action on pay, that could pull other departments along.

But we need a serious debate about why we lost. Not a sterile debate in which we say we were magnificent and if only we'd make a few more phone calls then we'd get over the 50%. We don't want just to get to 50% plus one, but to 60%, 70% etc.

To do this we need to take a bottom-to-top look at ourselves, and build a union one where activists and members have the decisive say in what to do.

The Right of Return and the One

By Barry Finger

“Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.”

“Since its violent establishment in 1948 through the ethnic cleansing of more than half of the indigenous people of Palestine, Israel has set out to control as much land and uproot as many Palestinians as it can. As a result of this systematic forced displacement, there are now more than 7.25 million Palestinian refugees. They are denied their right to return to their homes simply because they are not Jewish.”
<https://bdsmovement.net>

How many distortions and misdirections can be packed into one proposition and three sentences?

Let’s unravel this: UN resolution 194 “stipulates” a Palestinian “right of return.” Israel was established “violently” through the “ethnic cleansing” of “indigenous people” resulting in “7.25 million Palestinian refugees”.

It is surely safe to say that these unexamined propositions represent the overwhelming political framework around which the far left builds its politics. Each one of these contested points would require a separate essay.

A little background information first. UN Resolution 194 is a recommendation of the UN General Assembly, not a binding resolution of the Security Council. All the Arab nations rejected the resolution when it came up for a vote, because it included recognition of the State of Israel. More pertinently, the resolution only refers to a right of return for those “who wish to live at peace with their neighbors.” It therefore invites a political vetting process on the part of a state whose legitimacy no Arab nation at the time endorsed and with whose process no Arab state would have collaborated.

Moreover – and this refers to the BDS proposition, rather than the UN resolution, a refugee is one who directly experiences expulsion, not one generationally related to that experience. And the expulsion needs to be from one’s homeland, not from one’s home. Being displaced 30 miles within the territory of Palestine does not make you a refugee. But without the right to self-determination, it does make you stateless, which is the immediate and pressing cause of Palestinian oppression.

Marxists have classically approached the national question from two broadly distinct perspectives. Marxist internationalists, at one end, tended to favor large multinational viable states as laying the capitalist predicate to a socialist order. At the Leninist pole, the national question is treated as a political contingency in the service of socialism; a question of examining the historical context of whether the separatist option temporarily serves as a necessary interim step before reunification under socialism.

The national question, and the divisions within the socialist movement arising from that question, originated not primarily from the decolonisation struggles of overseas holdings, but from the need for socialists to engage with nationalist movements that threatened the breakup of multinational European or peripherally European empires—Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Czarist. These incipient divisions over national via-



bility were compounded to the breaking point by the struggles for a fundamental reorientation in the face of overseas decolonisation. The exercise of democratic rights to self-governance, as the Leninists argued, was a precondition for the development of class differentiation and working class socialism in the distant colonies.

For it is here – where the dimension of viability, both in its economic and political aspects, gets thorny. Neither revolutionaries nor reformists denied that capitalism both suffocated and developed the third world. But evaluations from on high of sustainability – in modern terms of whether such newly freed states would fail – became in practice a bad-faith excuse for the retention of colonies under “socialist” tutelage. The viability that reformist socialists were defending was primarily their own, which resided in the enlarged prospects of extracting capitalist concessions realizable by the extra layer of fat arising from colonial exploitation.

ONE-STATE

The one-state solution in all its inglorious aspects reached its prior crescendo in the historically discredited post-war response of Guy Mollet’s social-democrats aligned with the French Stalinists, to maintain Algeria, and all overseas territories, as part of the Union française.

The PCF endorsed associated territorial status for Algeria with the ultimate aim of creating an Algerian republic enjoying internal autonomy.

The Israel-Palestine conflict, revisits and deepens all these difficulties. The one-state solution offered by Israeli rightwingers, including Netanyahu—with its suggestion of internal self-governance within a large metropolitan Israeli state—is largely a prescription for Palestinian bantustans. Its purpose is to maintain all of historic Palestine, while withholding or overwhelming and subordinating the conditions needed for Palestinian economic and political viability as an independent entity. It promises neither full civic nor national equality.

From the Israeli left and much of the international left, the single-state solution is a proposal for a supranational, rather than a binational, state. Failure to recognize this distinction has been the cause of much confusion. The single-state solution is a call for the fusion and dissolution of two nationalities; for not only the political, but also the social elimination of both the Hebrew/Israeli and Palestinian/Arab identities and its replacement with a new, previously nonexistent and unknown, nationality. This state may be

bilingual, but it is not binational. It would be a federal state of its citizens—a state modeled on the US, rather than a confederal state, such as, Belgium or Yugoslavia or even Canada. It is a sanitized, revived call for a version of the secular, democratic state, where clerical hierarchies and discreet histories and scars of oppression, dhimmitude, and domination are wished away by a concerted leap of collective amnesia. It is a noble utopia.

But even this, in all its unreality, bears only superficial resemblance to that which the Palestinian nationalist and resistance movements have in mind. They understood, and still fashion their orientation, around a secular-democratic Arab state. That is, the Palestinian solidarity movement fancies itself not merely an anti-colonial movement, seeking to free the occupied territories and Gaza. It is a movement that foundationally sees Israel as an illegitimate, hijack, imperialist imposition – a crusader state.

The only case for denying Israelis the right to self-determination is by denying that they are a nation. That is not merely the viewpoint of Hamas, of the “Palestine will be free from the river to the sea” crowd. The objective was restated clearly by Omar Barghouti, a founder of the BDS movement. “Bi-nationalism today, despite its variations, still upholds this ahistorical and morally untenable national right of the colonial-settlers.” Where the modern resistance movement of Barghouti differs from its previous incarnations and Hamas is in its expansiveness and its purported renunciation of violence. BDS no longer actively desires the expulsion of Israelis whose antecedents arrived after the Balfour Declaration. But it still envisions a future state in which Israeli-Jews only have equal civil, religious and political rights as individuals, but no rights to national self-expression as a collectivity.

According to the lies with which people justify themselves, the loss of sovereignty and the would-be vulnerability of Jews, once again dependent on the tender mercies and good-will of their neighbors, involves nothing more substantial than the loss of their colonial privileges. That millennia of Jewish oppression, subjugation, powerlessness and slaughter – European and Middle Eastern – can be so simply and imperially dismissed as unworthy of consideration reveals how insignificant the Jews are to the concerns of revolutionary movements.

It is high time the socialist movement came clean with itself. The Trotskyist movement (the American SWP) in particular took the lead in championing a novel theory in the early 1970s that took root throughout the far-left, that the right of the oppressed to deter-

mine the form of their liberation may include separation or unity with their oppressor under conditions by which they and they alone judges as necessary. The SWP then stretched this proposition in the most shocking direction: that the nationalism of the weaker nation in its struggle against the stronger may justifiably invalidate the latter’s claim to sovereignty itself, if those are the conditions the oppressed so choose. And it was the left’s internationalist obligation to defend that choice with unconditional solidarity. They thus buried any politics rooted in the pursuit of national reconciliation through a program of consistent democracy in an impenetrable haze of revanchism and irredentism.

What this denied should have been obvious. While the nationalism of the oppressed cannot be equated with the nationalism of the oppressor, the political aspirations of the oppressed and the politics that embodies those aspirations can still be inconsistent with a principled socialist position.

The secular democratic state of their imagination – the imagination of the Palestinian resistance – is an Arab chauvinist state, the chauvinism of the oppressed, in Lenin’s language, in all the same ways that a Zionist Israel, with a large Arab minority, is a Jewish chauvinist state, save one. Zionist two-staters recognize the Palestinian right to self-determination on territories exterior to the 1967 Israeli state. Palestinian nationalism accepts no such room for Israeli (Jewish) self-determination on any part of historic Palestine.

As Barghouti states elsewhere, “If the refugees were to return, you would not have a two-state solution, you’d have a Palestine next to a Palestine.” And it is as a Trojan horse that this demand for the “right to return” – to politically overwhelm the Jewish population and return Israel to the Arab fold, remains a non-negotiable aspect of the Palestinian solidarity movement in all its forms.

The left now defers to the consensus viewpoint of the Arab people – a people whose roots are in the Arabian peninsula, not the Levant—whose fourteen hundred year old conquest and colonization of the Mashreq and Maghreb is seen as their manifest destiny, challenged by the upstart return of an indigenous and marginalised people to the land that gave birth to them as a nation, to their language and to their religion. From a Jewish nationalist perspective, it would be like accusing the Lakota or the Cherokee nations – if they were to seize back land stolen from them by Europeans – of being racists and colonialists for daring to challenge “American” sovereignty, of being “ethnic cleansers” if they were to eject those recruited

The debate in pages 8-15 have been prompted by recent articles discussing the “Right of Return”, and related topics. For all articles in this debate see workersliberty.org/ror

State Solution

to a genocidally-imbued war against their return and for being intransigent and nonrepentant in their refusal to abandon their “facile” claim to nationhood. And, then the ultimate affront: for them and their supporters to be taunted, here and around the world, by left-wing jeers equating their nationalism to that of Andrew Jackson’s, and their expulsion of those who fought against their return as creating a new “trail of tears.”

Zionism, in contemporary terms, is not the “national liberation movement” of the Jews. The Jews were/are not oppressed as a colony, were not exploited as a captive nation, and did not have their resources plundered to enrich a colonial overlord. Jews experienced their oppression in exile and dispersion as a racialised “other”: hated, hunted, slaughtered and finally driven back to Palestine, the only corner of the earth they could possibly retreat to. Zionism did not create Israel, history did. Zionism kicked the door open. And it is Israel—not Gaza, not the West Bank—that remains the largest refugee camp in the world. What Zionism prematurely invoked, and what it had the desperate right to invoke, was a form of Jewish nationalism based in indigenous rights theory, the very theory that Palestinians now so obliviously subvert to the frothy joy of their left-wing amen corner.

But even if there were no Jewish claim to indigenous status in Palestine—even if we remain uncommitted to whether world-wide Jewry constitutes a nation—there is inarguably a Hebrew-speaking, fully class differentiated people whose Jewishness is part of their national patrimony that exists in a portion of its contested homeland. For consistent democrats—for third camp socialists—and believers in national self-determination as a principal, that should be enough to settle the question as to whether Israel has a “right to exist.”

SOLIDARITY

Either way, this does not mean that socialists need bow down before any movement or any peoples’ national rights.

There are higher forms of human solidarity: ones that arise out of the quest for an equal application of democracy and justice among nations; those that are based on national reconciliation and class solidarity. Rational people, who once included socialists among their ranks, understand that the attainment of these higher democratic rights necessitate a reining in of nationalist maximalism, of isolating humanity from its poisonous extremes. No nation can exercise their right to self-determination beyond the point where it precludes another nation’s equal right to self-determination.

Zionism as an indigenous rights rationale for Jewish self-determination is defensible on democratic grounds, regardless of whether it is also a necessary justification for Israel’s existence. But the justification for self-determination and the arrangement of the state that embodies that right are two different propositions.

Pre ’67 Israel consists of two nations: a majority Jewish and minority Arab nation. A Jewish democratic state—even if it were honestly implemented (which it never was) would grant Arabs as individuals complete equality, but Arabs as a collectivity no comparable rights to self-expression. A democratic Jewish state is no more binational than the secular, democratic Arab state envisioned by Palestinians. It is of one and the same

principal, with only the power axes reversed.

A revolutionary and democratic alternative is the socialist call for Hebrew and Arab self-determination within a de-Zionized Israeli state: to advocate, in other words, a state that grants Israeli Arabs an equitable distribution of state resources not only for its cultural and economic development, but also to implement their full right of secession with an independent and liberated Palestinian state in the occupied territories, if they so choose.

That is, our tradition has counter posed a non-Zionist binational Israel, not only to the Israel that exists today, but also to the liberal democratic Jewish state that today’s leftwing Zionists sincerely envision and desire. A Zionist Israel, even with robustly enforced anti-discriminatory protections that it now so sorely lacks, would, of course, be a welcome civilizational upgrade. But it would still be a Jewish chauvinist Israel.

Now is Israel the only state in the Middle East that practices national chauvinism? Let’s take the case of revolutionary Algeria. How did Algerian revolutionaries in power define citizenship? They granted citizenship only to Muslims; requiring that only those individuals whose father and paternal grandfather were Muslims could become citizens of the new state. Nationality by birth, rather than descent was not granted to children. By a stroke of the pen, it excluded Christians who, one might argue, had ties with France and other European nations and Jews, who preceded the Muslim and Arab conquests by centuries and had no prior association with any other state. Neither individual equality nor national equality was offered to Algerian and north African Jews. The difference between revolutionary Algeria and Zionist Israel? Algeria is considered a legitimate state and Hebrew self-determination in any form is considered a crime. And Algeria is the tip of the iceberg. Every Arab and Muslim majority nation withholds national rights to the minority populations within their midst—Kurds, Berbers, Syrians, Copts, Assyrians, Yazidis. The non-Arab state of Iran subjugates a huge Ahwazi-Arab minority that it periodically slaughters, dispossesses and treats as an oppressed colony.

There is no part of the “Arab” and Muslim homeland writ large where minority nations have the slightest experience of being equal among equals. And the millions of Mizrahi Jews expelled or descended from expellees, who now constitute Israel’s majority are fully aware of that. As long as the Israeli left—revolutionary and moderate—are committed to peace predicated on some level of collective equality within historic Palestine, of decolonisation of the occupied territories and Gaza as a first step, consistent revolutionaries will have a platform upon which we can advocate a more robust multi-national movement to deepen and extend democracy.

Revolutionary politics consists in mobilizing all the internationalist forces, minority nations, Israeli dissenters and Arab progressives, for the goal of achieving Palestinian statehood on as just terms as possible for a first step; and for broadening that struggle to revive the Arab Spring and liberate the Arab peoples and minority nations within its midst.

BDS, despite its militant character, practises the politics of delegitimation over solidarity; of isolation over dialogue. It is the false start ally of chauvinism on both sides of the Arab-Israeli divide.



Avnery (left) with Yasser Arafat

Revisiting Uri Avnery

By Barry Finger

There is a real dispute in our camp over how socialists orient to the “right of return”.

It derives from comrades who view that purported right through the lens of the Israeli peace movement and those who peer through the other end of the telescope, that of the BDS anti-peace movement.

Those, such as myself – and perhaps Daniel Randall, though I wouldn’t presume to speak for him – have been educated and informed on this subject by the literature of Gush Shalom, for many decades the most militant wing of the Israeli anti-occupation movement.

Its spokesperson and leading personality, Uri Avnery, argued that no progress towards a two state solution would make headway, if some token face-saving concession were not offered to Palestinian and Arab leaders on this issue. It would be impossible, he felt, to bypass the feeling of injustice and betrayal of the Palestinian cause that a humiliating public renunciation of that “right” would entail.

And so, Avnery concluded, progress towards a two-state solution would self-sabotage if it were perceived as a diktat to a defeated people. He advocated instead a limited, face-saving return and the acceptance of responsibility on the part of Israel, noting that Ben-Gurion and Sharett offered to take back 100,000 Arabs in 1949, the equivalent of 500,000 in comparison to the Jewish population of today. He himself proposed an annual quota of 50,000 for ten years. This, he continued, would not disturb the demographic balance, since Israel was absorbing 50,000 Jews per year.

No right can be exercised unequivocally. The right to free speech does not secure the freedom to foment a lynch mob. And any honestly advocated “right to return” invalidates itself if exercised to the degree necessary to imperil the right to Israeli self-determination. Doubly so, since the right to return is unnecessary to the exercise of Palestinian self-determination.

But—and this is crucial – such a limited return as Avnery advocated would only be adopted in conjunction with a comprehensive peace plan between Israel and the entire Arab world. Some Palestinians might chose to return to their divided families and communities within Israel; other would be disinclined to live in a state with a different

national and cultural background, after seeing the reality with their own eyes.

But, Avnery argued, the overwhelming majority of Palestinians would seek participation in the project of Palestinian state building where they would finally enjoy the freedom of undisputed and untrammelled sovereignty. In the end, reality would trump ideology; the prospects of advancing to a promising future would outweigh the stagnant need to nurture injustices, real and in many respects self-inflicted.

The problem resides in this. BDS is not the Palestinian equivalent of Gush Shalom and their supporters do not seek national reconciliation. They seek Israel’s national obliteration.

Avnery’s perspective may have seemed reasonable yesterday, and may again seem reasonable in some future tomorrow. But for now, the “right of return” is a self-proclaimed Trojan horse, advocated as a ruse to destroy the two-state solution and to permanently deprive Israeli Jews of any right to self-determination. That is precisely why BDS did not see Avnery as their partner (bit.ly/vs-avn).

Tactically flexible as Avnery was, he was ultimately unwilling to capitulate to the Arab chauvinist perspective that Israel itself is occupied Arab territory.

But that’s also why it’s worth revisiting Avnery’s perspective. BDS is an enormous counterweight to any progress towards a democratic future for both peoples. Any prospective Palestinian partner would face an enormous revanchist backlash from their BDS right flank the moment talks might revive.

And this right wing movement is growing in strength and colonizing the far- and not so – far left. The Israeli peace movement needs to extend any would-be Palestinian peace partner cover to diffuse the BDS resistance, peel away soft supporters from that end of the political spectrum and implicate the most implacable BDS advocates as the war mongers they most certainly are.

We must tell the full truth about BDS. But we must also be sensitive to the Palestinian sense of grievance and those of their supporters motivated not so much by root and branch ideological hatred for Israel, as for their justifiable impatience with the ongoing injustice of an occupation without end.

Patiently explain, don't

By Daniel Randall

Sean Matgamna's reply to me in *Solidarity* 504 (bit.ly/sm-504) begins with a bizarre, lurid analogy about a man stalking his partner.

The imagery is frankly sexist, the meaning unclear. I think the character of the stalker in the analogy, in denial about his partner's infidelity, is supposed to represent me. I'm not sure who the character of the partner is supposed to be. Reading it, I thought - well, this has started badly, but perhaps it'll improve as it goes on. Sadly, I was largely disappointed.

Maintaining ideological steadfastness and clarity without succumbing to a kind of inchoate, despairing denunciation of one's opponents is not always easy, especially if one is in an embattled minority, as Workers' Liberty is within the ranks of the revolutionary left on some issues. Despairing denunciation might serve as catharsis; it will not win us any arguments.

That's why I take issue with Sean's approach to the debate on the far left about national self-determination in Israel/Palestine, which imagines that simply repeating one's revulsion, in increasingly horrified terms, with the existing common sense of the far left will be sufficient to persuade those currently conditioned by it to change their minds. It won't. Patient explanation, and engaging with where people actually are, even when that place is a confused admixture of different ideas, is necessary. And only someone incapable of patient explanation believes that this requires, or equates to, ideological slipshod.

Since the debate began there has been flare-up of violence in and near Gaza; the IDF has assaulted the area, and shot protesters on the borders. 25 Palestinians have been killed. Islamist militants have fired hundreds of rockets into Israel, killing four Israelis. This is part of the real-world context that any debate on the left about Israel/Palestine must maintain contact with. Against a backdrop of despair, and the apparent remoteness of any immediate progress, revanchist politics have asserted themselves. The demand in Gaza for freer movement, for an end to the blockade and bombardment of the area, has become tied to a generalised demand for "return".

Yahya Sinwar - a leader of Hamas, surely the central, organised political element in pushing the tying together of immediate aspirations with the generalised demand for "return" - describes "return" as "refusing to concede a single inch of the land of Palestine". This radical pose may help Hamas shield its own domestic power, recently threatened by social protests against the inequality and authoritarianism characteristic of its rule, behind an impossible, maximalist demand that it knows is unachievable.

"Refusing to concede a single inch of the land of Palestine" would require a bloody war to reverse at least the last 71 years of history. Neither support for this, nor support for an absolute "right of return" for all descendants of the 1948 refugees, is compatible with a belief that the two national communities currently living in Israel/Palestine have an equal entitlement to national rights. The prominent Palestinian nationalist Omar Barghouti makes this clear when he says that, were the right of return granted and claimed, "there would be no two-state solution, you'd have a Palestine next to a Palestine."

Nor is the policy, as some claim, merely another way of advocating free movement and open borders in Israel/Palestine. Free movement and open borders would afford no special, privileged right of return to anyone; with genuinely free movement, a person, of any national or cultural origin, from Los Angeles or Lagos or Tokyo would have as much right to move to Israel, or a future Palestinian state, as a Palestinian refugee or their descendant. For consistent democrats, national rights are not something afforded depending on the historical length of one's connection to a physical territory, but are rather dependent on whether a community has a national character and wishes to self-determine on a national basis.

I am as clear about all that now as I was before I wrote my reply to Sean. I am also clear - much clearer, I think, than Sean is - about the content of contemporary left antisemitism, and antisemitism in wider society, including from the far right. I have spent no small amount of time writing and speaking about both, attempting to analyse and understand the dynamics, and develop responses. Sean accuses me, variously, of "taking the edge off" or "shying away from" confrontation with left antisemitism, or "soften our conflict" with it. He stops short of straightforwardly accusing me of being a left antisemite, but who knows what joys *Solidarity* 506 will bring? I think my record speaks for itself; other readers of *Solidarity* can make their own minds up. I am yet to decide if I find Sean's claim, that my advocacy of political education against all forms of antisemitism encountered on the left is "smug", disappointing, wildly off-beam, or merely risible.

Understanding the ways in which the strain of left antisemitism descending from post-1950s Stalinist anti-Zionism intertwines with the older, "primitive" left antisemitism ("socialism-of-fools" invective against "Jewish bankers", and so on) is not a matter of blurring specifically "left" antisemitism into a more general picture, and therefore blunting sharp criticisms of the specifics, but rather a matter of understanding the interrelationship between two threads of distinctly left-wing antisemitism, one more "primitive" and another more recent, with the latter drawing on the former. The general growth of conspiracy-theorist modes of thinking in left-wing politics is also an important accompanying context. If Sean wishes to dismiss all this, and continue obstinately and monomaniacally insisting that only the "right of return" policy matters, and that the best way to combat its hegemony is simply to repeat that its advocates are "racist", that is his prerogative. It will not clarify anyone's understanding, nor aid anyone's education, nor change anyone's mind.

It is hardly surprising that a nationalist-revanchist policy is hegemonic amongst a stateless people who, in the territories where they are the majority, are the colonial subjects of an powerful oppressor. Such conditions distort democratic politics. That doesn't require that we endorse, or censor criticism of, reactionary ideas developed as a response to oppression, but it does require that we understand their origins. It requires, in other words, that we understand the relationship between the objective and the subjective, rather than treating the latter as something that exists entirely abstracted from the for-



mer. To acknowledge that Hamas would be significantly politically undermined if Israel ended the blockade of Gaza, withdrew from the West Bank, and acknowledged a viable Palestinian state which it supported with reparations and aid, is not to "blame" Israel, still less "the Jews", for the reactionary politics of Hamas, which is an independent force with its own project; it is to understand the fundamental reality that conditions of colonial subjugation and immiseration are a better breeding ground for reactionary ideas than conditions of self-determination and democratic security.

KNEE-JERK

A great many of those who will march on 11 May, on a Palestine Solidarity Campaign demonstration called explicitly in support of the right of return demand, will do so out of a simple, knee-jerk solidarity with the oppressed.

Screaming at them that they are racists and cheerleaders for genocide is unlikely to change many minds. Sean now claims he "didn't say [advocates of the "right of return"] are racists". I quote from his article in *Solidarity* 497: "The absolute anti-Zionists are racists. That is a word that has lost much of its meaning and become the equivalent of a swearword, expressing detestation and moral repugnance. It serves to obliterate all distinctions and gradations. Here it is precise, literal." Given that Sean makes clear that he thinks any species of support for the right of return, however this is subjectively conceived of, puts one in the camp of the "absolute anti-Zionists", Sean's original meaning seems clear to me.

There is an ongoing debate inside the AWL, reflected previously in *Solidarity* 454 and 455 in articles by Martin Thomas and Carmen Basant (bit.ly/cb-454, bit.ly/mt-455), and which Sean has thus far not engaged with, about whether "racism" is an accurate or useful descriptor for the politically-constructed antisemitism of much of the far left. I tend to agree with Martin in thinking that "racism" is not a useful descriptor here. This debate expresses many of the "distinct and gradations" I referred to in my original article, which Sean's blanket (and now denied) assertion that all supporters of the "right of return" policy entirely erases. To say that it's neither rhetorically useful nor politically accurate to describe supporters of the right of return as "racists" is not to say that the policy is a good or operable one! Sean wields the term precisely in the way he himself denounces, to "express detestation and moral repugnance", rather than to accurately describe, politically educate, or to persuade.

Sean says that the subjective intent of different supporters of the right of return don't matter, and that one only needs to address oneself to the objective consequences. If only politics were so simple! People's minds are rarely changed except by an interlocutor sensitive to their subjective intentions and motivations, rather than one who beats them about the head with the objective logic of a position they may only hold by unchallenged default.

Our job is to sharpen political demarcations, to make the young person who rightly feels an instinctive sympathy with the Palestinians question whether they really believe the policy of Hamas, however watered down or refracted through degrees of vicariousness, can bring justice. Proceeding as if there is already a clear and universally-understood binary between support for Hamas and our own policy simply fails to connect with reality. Take a young marcher on a PSC demo who has barely thought about the politics beyond a rudimentary sympathy for the oppressed on the one hand, and a hardened ideologue shaped by Stalinist anti-Zionism on the other: Sean wants to tell someone in the former category that they're really, actually, in the latter one, whatever they might themselves "subjectively" believe. Such "persuasion" stands a far greater chance of becoming a self-fulfilling prophesy than it does of developing their instincts of solidarity in an internationalist, rather than vicarious-nationalist, direction.

For sure, there is not a simple binary, between unformed instinctive solidarity and fully-worked-out Stalinist anti-Zionism, waiting to be politically exposed. All sorts of variations exist, with some people assimilating aspects of Stalinist-influenced absolute anti-Zionism but not others. But we can only hope to move people politically by engaging with the specificities and the full complexity of the "distinctions and gradations".

Marx's adage that a national people "that oppresses another forges its own chains" is a useful educational tool here. Applied to Israel/Palestine, this means, in the first instance, that the Israeli Jewish national community will never have peace and security while its state stands as the colonial oppressor of the Palestinians. But it also means that Palestinian national liberation cannot be realised via a framework which denies national rights to Israeli Jews. Patient explanation of the basic principles of consistent democracy, national self-determination, and workers' unity across national divides can present a concrete alternative to a knee-jerk vicarious nationalism.

Ironically, Sean's approach shares, in an in-

denounce

verted way, some of the same ideological infrastructure of the vicarious-nationalist left. For them, a policy is judged not by whether it stands any chance of advancing Palestinians' material interests in current conditions, but by how totalising its hostility to Israel is. The Palestinian refugees become a political cipher, and demands that might stand some chance of connecting with immediate conditions – such as the demand that they be given the right to fully and properly integrated into the societies to which they have been scattered, or the demand that Israel offer reparations to the descendants of those driven from their homes in, or prior to, the 1948 war – are eschewed in favour of an impossible maximalism. The flesh-and-blood Palestinians refugees and their descendants disappear in a haze of vicarious-nationalist hostility to Israel. But in Sean's schema, too, the real Palestinian refugees, their oppression, and their right to justice and redress vanish behind the vision-obscuring edifice of the rotten common sense of the far left.

We are not active in Israel/Palestine; we mainly face the left in our own national context, and exist to renew and transform the left, to scrape off the muck piled by Stalinism on top of the democratic-libertarian, internationalist project of Marxism. But that involves not only a reactive, negativist critique of Stalinist ideas, but a positive statement of their opposite. In this case, that means clearly stating an alternative policy – undoubtedly, given our distance from the issue and, like all the left, lack of connection to any agency capable of attempting to intervene in the situation to bring it about, sketched only in broad terms – for justice for the Palestinian refugees, in order that we might hope to develop in those labour movement activists we can reach an internationalist, rather than vicarious-nationalist, spirit of solidarity.

GUSH SHALOM

Gush Shalom, the Israeli peace organisation, has long acknowledged that meaningful reconciliation and peace requires an acknowledgement by Israel of the ethnic cleansing that took in the process of its formation, and serious, material concessions to redress it.

Without these, any settlement would leave the Palestinians feeling, yet again, like a defeated party rather than an equal partner in a mutual recognition of rights. Gush Shalom has therefore promoted a peace plan which proposes that: "In order to heal the historical wound and as an act of justice, Israel will allow the return into its territory of an appropriate number of refugees, taking into consideration its national character and keeping a reasonable demographic balance. Both parties through negotiation will determine the number of refugees who will return as well as the criteria and priorities of the allocation of return permits. Returnees will be allowed back under a reasonable annual quota within a time-limit not exceeding 10 years."

As a group active on the ground in Israel/Palestine, they obviously approach the issue in a greater level of detail than any British socialist group, at a distance, can or even should. And Gush Shalom also says that, as part of this proposed plan, Israel should accept the right of return "in principle". This, in my view, is meaningless rhetoric, as the right is obviously not conceived of as an absolute. But does Gush

Shalom's attempt to grapple - yes, perhaps inadequately - with the "subjective" realities, while acknowledging the material, objective ones, mean they, too, are "shying away from confrontation" with antisemitism?

My point in citing this is not to argue that we, like Gush Shalom, should propose Israel accept the right of return "in principle" but not in practice (although I fully expect Sean to accuse me of doing both in any subsequent reply), nor to say that their scheme is perfect. It is to acknowledge the issue as one that exists in the real world, not only on the plane of the left's abstract theorising, and to which a healthier left response can only be developed by posing a positive alternative, not merely a negative, despairing critique, to existing left common sense.

Sean says I "retreat up the ladder of generalities from the kitsch-left dog barking at our heels." In his reply, Sean more or less turns me into a kitsch leftist, implying that any disagreement with his presentation of the issues means ideological slippage and concession to left antisemitism. Perhaps one day, there will be no-one left but him, as anyone who wants to approach those under the influence of Stalinist common sense as a persuader, rather than simply a denouncer, is condemned and cast into the enemy camp. Sean treats the Stalinist-influenced left common sense less as a barking dog and more as a vast creature, swallowing up everything in its path, which can never be swept aside, only pointed at and denounced. Before this all-obscuring behemoth, it is him, not me, who is retreating. I want us to confront toxic ideas with means capable of persuading those influenced by them of other ones.

On 11 May, some thousands of people will attend the PSC's demonstration – surely more now, as desire to oppose Israel's latest bombardment of Gaza swells the numbers. Workers' Liberty supporters will be there, as part of a distinct bloc explicitly supporting a two-states settlement, politically differentiated from the politics of the PSC and its implicit identification with Hamas. What would Sean say to those on the demonstration who were motivated to attend not by any conscious support for pro-Hamas politics, but simply by an immediate instinct of solidarity with the oppressed, were he to find himself in conversation with them?

"You do realise, don't you, that if you are here for any reason other than to support our bloc, that you're a racist? That you hate the Jews? That you want to drive them into the sea? You may think you're here to support the Palestinians, but you're not; not really. You're a dupe of the PSC. Join our bloc, or go home." That would be right, wouldn't it, Sean? That would be fulfilling our revolutionary duty to tell the truth? And if the person stops listening and walks away after the first sentence... well... that only shows the reader was too addled by left antisemitism to hear these simple facts, and shows how right we were to denounce them?

I hope for better. I think we can explain to people that there is a better political framework for their entirely laudable and necessary instinct of solidarity with the Palestinians than the vicarious-nationalist revanchism on offer from the PSC and its milieu.

"Good Bolshevism" means not retreating from that hope into an attitude of despair.

The return of old formulas

By Martin Thomas

There are about 13 million Palestinians across the world. They do not have a state of their own.

They are disadvantaged in all the countries where they are mainly concentrated, though in different ways from country to country.

About 2.9 million live in the West Bank, mostly in over 160 patches of land where the Palestinian Authority has limited autonomous powers of administration (mostly to hand out foreign aid money and jobs), but which are hemmed in and dominated by a surrounding Israeli military presence.

About 2 million are in Gaza, which is nominally independent but pauperised by being blockaded by and dependent for all basic supplies on Israel (and Egypt).

About 3.2 million are in Jordan, and 1.9 million in Israel; in both those countries they are disadvantaged. [1]

The statistics indicate about 500,000 in Lebanon and about 500,000 in Syria. A large number of those from Syria will have fled from the civil war there to Lebanon or Jordan. Most of those in Lebanon and Syria are in official or unofficial refugee camps.

In Lebanon they are denied access to public services and to many categories of jobs; in Syria they are denied citizenship.

The other 2 million are scattered across many countries, with the largest groups in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states; the USA; and Latin America, especially Chile.

For every oppressed nation, the first democratic remedy is national self-determination: the right to form an independent state.

The compact core of the Palestinian population is in the West Bank and Gaza, where almost 90% of the population is Palestinian. An independent Palestinian state there would allow real self-rule and enable all the scattered Palestinians to have a citizenship to refer to and a "homeland" to return to if they wish.

Its creation would be a lever to help the Palestinians in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Israel win equal rights.

It would also improve the economic prospects of the people.

A thorough transformation of those prospects requires a socialist federation of the region, capable of sharing the immense natural riches now confiscated by a few.

To make a socialist federation requires a working class united across borders. And that requires both a common democratic policy of mutually-recognised rights, and a framework at least minimally able to allow industrial and working-class development.

Bit by bit from the 1970s - and decisively since the first mass mobilisation of the Palestinians, in the West Bank and Gaza in 1987-8 - the democratic program of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel ("two nations, two states") was moved from being a way-out proposal of the Palestinian and Israeli left to being the subject of diplomatic negotiations.

To being a "consensus" – in words. Not in facts. In the early 1990s a precarious path to "two states" looked open. An upsurge of right-wing chauvinist forces both in Israel and among the Palestinians, and the force of inertia, blocked it.

Any development other than a worsening of the impasse will require big political shifts to make it happen. "Two states" requires political shifts which are *possible*, and could then facilitate further shifts.

If we have no confidence in the underlying (for now submerged) strength of the desire of the working people on all sides for peace, democracy, mutual respect, then the shifts look impossible. And old formulas revive.

The "Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions" agitation claims that it "does not advocate for a particular solution to the conflict"; but actually makes its main distinctive demand the "right to return" of "more than 7.25 million Palestinian refugees" to what is now Israel.

Hamas has organised demonstrations in Gaza for more than a year now under the title "Great March of Return". The Palestine Solidarity Campaign, which in the past has organised demonstrations round specific demands (e.g. against Israeli bombing of Gaza) or generic slogans like "Free Palestine", has called its next protest on 11 May on the slogan "Exist! Resist! Return!", and to chime in with Hamas's mobilisations in Gaza.

The demand to "return" to some better or supposedly better past condition cannot make good the bad turns of history. Not in the world, not in Israel-Palestine. The Holocaust, the closing of doors to Jewish refugees from the Nazis, and 1940s antisemitism in Europe, cannot be undone. The crimes and misdeeds of the Jewish forces in the wars of 1947-9 cannot be undone. Nor can the crimes and misdeeds of the Arab forces in those wars. Nor can the pushing-out of 600,000 or more Jews from other Middle Eastern countries after 1948.

Progress is possible only by finding a basis to move forward in solidarity and mutual respect among living people, now, without each trying to find redress for the sufferings of their grandparents.

Back in the early 1950s, "right of return" meant the return to their actual homes and land of people who had recently fled or been driven out in the wars of 1947-9. Most of the Palestinians then were peasants.

History would have gone better if there had been a peace deal between Israel and the Arab states then, including return of refugees. It didn't happen. Time has moved on. Seventy years.

Now "return" means the movement of the refugees' grandchildren, ten times as numerous, highly urbanised, few of them peasants, into an Israel whose population is also ten times what it was in 1948, and where only 2.3% of GDP is agricultural.

That couldn't possibly restore the conditions of pre-1947, even if that were desirable. It surely doesn't express a preference that this or that Palestinian might have to live in a majority-Jewish society rather than a majority-Arab one.

It is a coded form of the demand to stop Israel existing as the mainly-Jewish society it is - to overrun it, in fact to displace most of its population, among whom those who trace their origins to Arab and other Asian and African countries from where their families were pushed out after 1948 are more numerous than those descended from the Jews active in the 1947-9 wars.

It won't happen. If, through some twist of world politics, it could - then only through a

shattering war of conquest. Life among the war-shattered ruins would be no "return" to previous joys for the Palestinians.

This demand does not express an unformed urge to find at least some "immediate" alleviation of misery. It is a highly "ideological" demand. It offers no prospect of improvements for the Palestinians. It serves only as a lever to substitute anti-Israel for pro-Palestinian activity.

As long as 26 years ago, in the "Declaration of Principles" agreed in 1993 as the start of the "Oslo process" (which was meant to lead to a Palestinian state but foundered), the PLO signed up to the idea that a peace settlement would include compensation, but no great collective "return". The two-states Geneva Accord of 2003 made by Israeli and Palestinian negotiators acting unofficially (then welcomed by PA leaders and denounced by the then Israeli government) includes provisions for refugees, but no principle of "return".

Of course many Palestinians, seeing "two states" prospects fade, have gone back to old formulas. Of course Israeli leftists can and should press for Israel to offer acknowledgements, apologies, conciliations. But focus on "right of return" as the principle blocks progress.

The issue here is the agitation in Europe and the USA to boost "rejectionism" and depict it as no more than just anti-racism.

As Norman Finkelstein, fiercely anti-Zionist himself, has said "they [the BDS people] think they are very clever because they know the result of implementing [their demands] is... There's no Israel!... They're not really talking about rights. They're talking about they want to destroy Israel".

The "right of return" demand is the lever to call Israel "the apartheid state" (although Israel's very real misdeeds do not have the same pattern as South Africa's), to present "boycotting Israel" as a spuriously "commonsensical" response, and to convey the same message as the old "smash Israel" without actually saying it.

Take the Lara Alqasem case (bit.ly/1-alq). In October 2018, Alqasem, a US student of Palestinian family background, was detained at the airport when arriving in Israel to study at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem be-

cause she had taken part in pro-Palestinian campaigning in the USA, and admitted only after appeal to the Supreme Court.

The BDS campaign was not bothered by the detention or relieved by the court decision. The bad thing, for them, was Alqasem's wish to study in Israel at all.

One of the founders of BDS, Omar Barghouti, himself moved from the USA to Israel for postgrad studies at Tel Aviv University. Israeli-Palestinians are 16% of the students at Israeli universities: it would be better if the percentage were higher, not if they "boycotted" those universities. Agitation like that against Alqasem is not helping Palestinians. Its only function is to brand Israeli Jews as outside human community.

That the "right of return" banner is an ideological construct is also shown by its focus on those Palestinians designated as "refugees" rather than Palestinians generally. UNRWA is the UN agency which was set up as a temporary device in 1949 to help the Palestinian refugees (and also, initially, Jewish refugees arriving in Israel). The political impasse leaves it still operating 70 years later. It logs people as Palestinian refugees if their father was logged as a refugee.

Seventy years on, it has six million people logged as refugees, 2.3 million in Jordan, about 500,000 in each of Lebanon and Syria, 1,000,000 in the West Bank, and 1.4 million in Gaza.

So the 1.9 million Palestinians in the West Bank, the 600,000 in Gaza, who are not logged as refugees - what about them? 70 years on, the fact that their grandparents didn't come from what is now Israel doesn't make them better off than the others.

In Jordan, the West Bank, and Gaza, to be registered as a refugee is, if anything, a ticket to slight alleviations, by way of the services provided by UNRWA.

In Amman, some 46% of households do not have piped water (bit.ly/un-slums). UNRWA reported some years ago that only 5% of refugee-camp households in Jordan lacked piped water. In Syria (before the civil war), 19% of the whole urban population were in slums; in Lebanon, 53%. The UNRWA camps are slums with some minimal improvements funded by UNRWA.

The worst-off refugees live there because

they most value the meagre UNRWA provision. Only 17% of the registered refugees in Jordan; 24% in the hemmed-in West Bank; but 40% in blockaded Gaza, and 49% in Lebanon, where Palestinians are banned from a large range of jobs and from public services.

Outside the camps, refugee status is a ticket to the schools, health care, and occasional dole and loans, provided by UNRWA. Those are meagre. UNRWA schools are overcrowded and often have to operate in two "shifts" per day. Yet they get better results than the (also-underfunded) government schools in Jordan and the West Bank.

The scandal to be fixed is the plight of the whole Palestinian people, not just the registered refugees.

To make "right of return" the pivot of the Israel-Palestine question is to make the single "Arab land" the pivot, and not the two peoples now living. (The BDS movement website, for example, reckons Islamist agitation in Jordan against all Israeli fruit imports to be good because the fruit was grown on "Arab land").

Leftists who campaign to make "return" central present their efforts as just the expression of general anti-racist principles.

In recent articles (e.g. in response to Ashok Kumar, *Solidarity* 469: bit.ly/sm-469), Sean Matgamna has jolted that presentation by arguing that "if 'racism' is involved here", it is in the argument of those who maintain that "'rights' in Israel come from genes" (hereditary right to land) rather than from living politics.

Daniel Randall (*Solidarity* 498: bit.ly/dr-498) disputes that argument.

Randall does not tell us about another argument than a "genetic" one for saying that all Palestine is "Arab land", whoever actually lives there. He doesn't tell us what other actual in-the-world "meanings" of the "right of return" there may be, as distinct from instructing us to avoid being sharp about what the slogan means with people who pick up "right of return" as a casual or token way of expressing sympathy with the Palestinians.

He ignores Matgamna's explanations that "all left-wing antisemites I know of sincerely hate racism and antisemitism. They just don't recognise the antisemitism they practise...

They think their absolute anti-Zionism, and their advocacy of the conquest and destruction of Israel, is a form of 'anti-imperialism' or 'anti-racism'."

We should try to make our arguments as accessible as we can to those people. But accessible is not the same as diluted.

It is not the same as retreating to suggestions that reactionary slogans are not so bad as long as you don't think them through.

Around 1973, Alan Adler, then a member of the International Marxist Group (later a left-wing translator) remonstrated with me that the "secular, democratic (single) state" line our group then held was "left anti-semitism".

I was shocked, puzzled, not yet convinced. It was a one-off conversation. It took another decade or more for the argument that Adler had presented to filter through my mind.

But the fact that his words still stick in my mind, 46 years on, show that they had better effect than the more blurry words of others roughly on Adler's wavelength.

[1] The Palestinians in Israel are citizens with voting rights (except in annexed East Jerusalem: some 260,000 Palestinians there are ruled as part of Israel but are only "permanent residents"). But they are underrepresented in the government administration (only 11% of government jobs even after recent increases). Getting building permits, for example, is difficult for Palestinians, and demolitions of their "unapproved" shops and dwellings are commonplace. The police are almost exclusively Jewish, and infected in their dealings with Palestinians by the chauvinism widespread in a Jewish population long in conflict with its neighbours and intensified in recent years. Arabic-language schools and other public services in Palestinian majority areas are underfunded. The new Nation State Law is so far mostly symbolic, but threatens Arabic language rights. Already universities teach only in Hebrew and English.

In general Palestinians are poorer, as minorities often are even in societies with formal equality; they have suffered more from the increased social inequality in Israel in the right-wing neoliberal Netanyahu years.

The development of Workers' Liberty's ideas on Israel and Palestine

By Sean Matgamna

Here I will give a brief account of the evolution of the ideas of what is now AWL on the Israeli-Arab conflict, and of those of us whose ideas these were.

Before Stalinism replaced communism, communists rejected the Zionist project on three main grounds. It was a "utopian nationalism". It misdirected Jews away from the class struggle in the countries in which they lived. Its goal could be achieved, if at all, only in collaboration with the British (League of Nations mandate) authorities in Palestine, and by siding with Britain against the Arabs. (Britain occupied the territory, formerly part of the Ottoman Empire, from 1918. It was only at the beginning of British rule that Palestine became an entity separate from Syria).

The Communist International was "assimilationist". Until the end of the 1920s it was nevertheless for free movement, and there-

fore for the right of Jews to go to Palestine.

In the 1930s, when the Zionist project became linked to the urgent need for a Jewish refuge from the Nazis, Trotsky and his comrades argued that logistically, if for no other reason, small and underdeveloped Palestine simply could not provide a refuge for all the Jews who now needed it. The fate of the Jews of Europe would be decided by the class struggle in Europe; it was inseparable from the fate of the revolutionary workers' movement.

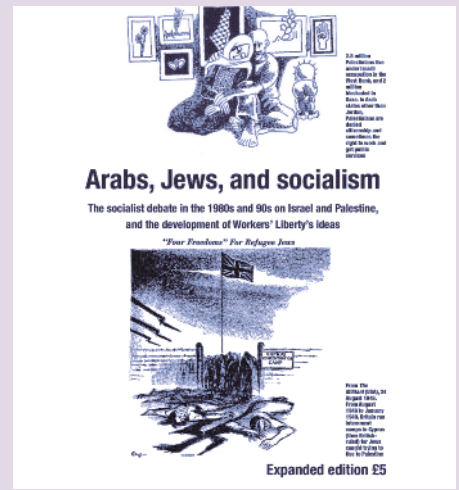
At the time of his death in August 1940, Trotsky was studying the Jewish labour movement in Palestine. Pamphlets and books on the questions were found on his desk. He wrote in 1932-3 seemingly in support of Jewish migration into Palestine. "There is no such thing on this planet as the idea that one has more claim to land than another". That cuts both ways, but it was the Jews who were being kept out of Palestine and desperately in need of a place to go.

The Communist International's demonisa-

tion of Zionism - as distinct from politically opposing and fighting it - began with the pogrom that broke out in Palestine in 1929. The small and mainly Jewish Communist Party in Palestine and the Communist International first defined it as the anti-Jewish pogrom movement it was. Then the Stalinist Communist International decreed that it was in fact an anti-imperialist movement and should be endorsed and supported.

It was decreed that the leadership of the Communist Party of Palestine had to be Arabs (few members were).

The Stalinists were now against free Jewish migration to Palestine. In parallel, at the same time, the British authorities severely limited Zionist land purchases, and continued a process that incrementally rescinded the Balfour declaration. In the late 1930s, strict limits were placed on Jewish migration to Palestine - 75,000 over five years. The British authorities imposed those limits rigidly during the war and the great massacre of Jews by the Nazis and local antisemites in the Nazi-occu-



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The Militant, 1 October 1929: "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'..."

Trotsky pointed to antisemitism in the Moscow Trials of 1936-8, in which men like Gregory Zinoviev and Karl Radek, who had been known by such names for decades, were given their original Jewish names.

The Trotskyists remained in favour of free Jewish migration until the mid 1940s. In the 1930s, throughout World War 2, and after, the US Trotskyists advocated that the US open its doors wide to Jews who needed refuge.

On the Jewish movement for independence at the end of World War 2, the two main currents into which Trotskyism had split in 1940 developed important differences. The self-named "Orthodox Trotskyists" - those who would go on to see the expansion of Russian Stalinism in the war (though they criticised it severely) as positive and progressive - and the Heterodox, those who saw Russia and its replicas in many countries as a horrendous new form of exploitative class society, had differences in their approach to the "Jewish Question" after the war.

Both advocated opening the gates of the US to the Jewish survivors then confined in displaced persons' camps in Europe, some of them made-over old concentration camps. The Orthodox did not now advocate free Jewish migration to Palestine, and they did not support the Jewish guerrillas fighting the British in Palestine. The Heterodox did both.

In the 1948 war, neither current backed the Arab states. The Heterodox regretted the partition of Palestine, but defended the right of the Palestinian Jews to have a state of their own, and their right to defend that state, i.e. themselves.

Thereafter there was de facto recognition of Israel by the Orthodox. The formula of a Socialist United States of the Middle East, with autonomy for minorities such as Jews and Kurds, came into use among the Orthodox. The Orthodox wrote very little about Israel or the Palestinians; the Heterodox a lot more, much of it very critical, as in Hal Draper's articles on the ill-treatment of Israel's Arab minority (1956-7).

What is now the common coin of most would-be Trotskyists, the equation of Zionism with Nazism and hyper-imperialism, is found in the work of Lenni Brenner and his political siblings and offspring. It first took shape as a deluge of Stalinist propaganda between 1949 and 1953. That was spread in the Stalinist press across the world - in Britain by the *Morning Star*, then called *Daily Worker* - from the USSR and Eastern Europe.

From 1949 to Stalin's death in 1953, show trials of leading Stalinists mainly of Jewish origin were held in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland indicting them as Zionist-imperialist agents. "Zionists" (in fact, long-time leading Stalinists) were hanged in Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

At his death Stalin was preparing a big anti-Zionist show trial in Russia. It would have been the visible part of a mass purge and rounding-up of Jews, and the killing of we can't know how many of them. Stalin's successors stopped it. In 1956 antisemitism would be among the crimes for which his reforming successor Nikita Khrushchev posthumously indicted Josef Stalin.

All the Trotskyists in 1949-53 identified the anti-Zionism of the Stalinists for the antisemitism it was, and condemned it.

In 1956 Israel joined Britain and France in invading Egypt, which had nationalised the Suez Canal. The Trotskyists condemned the invasion and helped mobilise people against it. Nobody said Israel had forfeited the right

ZIONISM: RED IN TOOTH AND CLAW

Harry Sloan sketches the history of Zionism - racist against the Arabs and a death-trap for the Jews



A headline inside *Socialist Organiser* 91 in 1982, some years before we rethought our views on Israel-Palestine

to exist because of it.

In the 1950s and 60s, the Trotskyists looked on the Egyptian-controlled PLO leader Ahmed Shukeiri's enunciations of the slogan under which Egyptian armies had entered Palestine in 1948 - "drive the Jews into the sea" - as reactionary ravings with which they had nothing in common. [1]

In 1967 Israel defeated Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in the Six Day War. The West Bank, designated for the territory of a Palestinian state alongside Jewish Israel in the UN's 1947 partition plan, had been annexed by Jordan, and Gaza had been under Egyptian rule. Israel conquered them in 1967, reuniting 1948 Palestine, but under Israeli rule.

An Israeli offer of those territories in exchange for normal relations was rejected by the Arab states, none of which at that point recognised Israel. (Egypt and Jordan would, years later). Israel for the first time entered into close alliance with the USA.

The shift to what is now the common left-wing position did not happen all at once. The main movement was towards acceptance of a formula adopted by the PLO to replace "drive the Jews into the sea": a secular democratic state in all of Palestine. The shift to present-day full-throttle absolute anti-Zionism did not take place until after the aftermath of the Yom Kippur war in 1973.

Egypt made a surprise attack on Israel during a Jewish religious festival. For a while it looked as if Israel would be overrun. Israel won. The Arab states then used oil price rises as a weapon and triggered economic crises, with high inflation, in Europe and the USA.

Now there was a shift in the Western media to sharp criticism of Israel and hostility to it. That was paralleled by sharpening hostility on the left, for instance in the press of the SWP-UK. It was still far from the present level of hysterical anti-Zionism, which would require another SWP intensification of "anti-imperialism" and "anti-Zionism" in 1986-7.

II

AWL began in late 1966 as four people, two of whom, Rachel Lever and Phil Semp, were Jewish in background.

We had to sort out what we thought about Israel at the time of the June 1967 war in the magazine *Workers' Republic*, which Rachel Lever and I produced in association with an exile Irish political organisation, the Irish Workers' Group.

In common with all Orthodox Trotskyists,

we saw the world as experiencing a great "colonial revolution", which in some cases, China for example, led to the creation of states modelled on Russia. The Middle East was part of that. There were progressive Arab nationalists (Egypt, Iraq, Syria) freeing themselves from imperialism, and reactionary Arab regimes (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the emirates, etc.) who opposed that progressive nationalism. Israel was on the side of the Arab reactionaries against the anti-imperialist Arab nationalists. We were (in retrospect: the war was over by the time we were producing the magazine) for Israel's defeat by the Arab nationalists. We were for a Socialist United States of the Middle East and autonomy for Jews and Kurds.

We did not understand ourselves to be for Israel's destruction. Any "drive the Jews into the sea" nonsense we dismissed as vicious reactionary ravings. [2]

We shifted in the moving consensus of the left, in response to Israeli rule in the West Bank and Gaza, to acceptance of the new PLO slogan, secular democratic state. It seemed to offer justice to both Palestinians and Jews.

The idea that it did was deeply stupid, but it was a stupidity that quickly conquered most of the revolutionary Marxist left. And, once adopted, it had an anti-Israeli logic of its own. It delegitimised Israel. It preached a seemingly benign alternative to Israel. The benignity was only seeming. Delegitimising Israel was the political reality.

When people in politics are being a lot more stupid on some issue than usual, you ask the question: what political and psychological function does this advanced level of stupidity serve for them? Here, it served to allow us to side with the beaten and oppressed Palestinians and the anti-imperialist Arabs and at the same time do something like justice to the Jews, who would (we persuaded ourselves) have equal rights in a secular democratic state. The Jews would not have national rights; but neither would the Palestinians. It seemed a just compromise. A liveable solution.

But how do you get to that? We didn't examine it too clearly. We were content to fudge and go on fudging, our whole complex of thinking set and fixed in place by hostility to what came to be Israel's colonial rule in the Palestinian majority territories in the West Bank and Gaza. We chose to inhabit a culpable delusion, a political fiction. We were for

the defeat of Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur war.

III

I had been religious, but I have no memory of direct animosity to Jews. I'd read a Catholic re-telling of the Old Testament and thus had some vague idea of ancient Jewish "history".

I had had to persuade Rachel Lever - who had been a five year old child in Jerusalem during the Arab siege of 1948 - to the view we took on the 1967 war. Later, "secular democratic state" made most sense to us as the solution to a complex conflict. I was no less, and possibly more, vehemently hostile to Israel than the other comrades.

Politics had to rule; but on a certain level I was unhappy to be thus in conflict with most Jewish people.

Midway between 12 and 13 years old, I had moved with my family from the town of Ennis in the west of Ireland to Manchester. For 15 years I lived in the Cheetham Hill Road area, which then had a large Jewish population. In 1947 a pogromist crowd, triggered by the British-Jewish conflict in Palestine and led by Mosley fascists, had surged up Cheetham Hill Road from the nearby city centre, throwing stones, breaking windows, and attacking people they thought were Jewish. Similar things happened in Leeds and Liverpool at that time.

My arrival in England involved me in a precocious instant politicisation as an "anti-imperialist". I was in the land of the ancient enemy. I had in my head the story of Ireland's long history of oppression and resistance to it. I had heard my mother's and father's stories of the Irish war of independence, the Black and Tan war. My mother had been in her late teens then, and living on the west coast of Clare (The Hand, Milltown Malbay), in one of the flashpoint areas of the conflict. I had learned to share my mother's love of the old songs, many of them nationalist.

I remember only one notable incident from that time in my life, when I refused to stand for "God Save The Queen" at a Halle Orchestra concert at the Manchester Free Trade Hall. I generalised from Irish history. The world was divided into oppressed people and oppressors, and I identified with the oppressed. "We" were of the oppressed, and the oppressed were of "us". For instance, I picked up that there was a war in Algeria against French rule, and knew exactly where right

and wrong was there, which side I was on, though I knew little else about it and had difficulty finding the information about it which I sought. I was 15 at the time when Britain invaded Egypt and occupied Port Said over the nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956.

I was not yet a communist: it would be the better part of a year before I learned to see communism as the liberating Russian Revolution, and not as it was epitomised in the horrid old men ruling Russia. But I sided with Egypt. I remember how someone at work summed up what I was arguing for, to a third person who had just joined us: "He thinks that if he agrees Eden [the British prime minister] has a right to invade Egypt, then he will be saying that England was right in Ireland". The Irish paradigm of national oppression of peoples and resistance was a serviceable one.

It didn't misdirect me about "the Jews", either, then or now. I learned in some detail about Hitler's massacres of Jews. Excerpts from or early drafts of what became *The Scourge of the Swastika*, by Lord Russell of Liverpool, were serialised in the Daily Express in mid 1954. [3] "The Jews" were oppressed people, too. Like us, but more so. There was, naturally, a certain degree of identification.

Jewish migration north from Cheetham was well underway, but everything I became involved in as a teenager, the Young Communist League, the local Labour Party youth organisation, the clothing industry, was heavily Jewish. The conversation of oldsters in the CP tailors' and garment workers' union group, for instance, would often centre on what some of their rivals and sparring partners in the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen, Ajax, had said or done. The local leaders of the small Trotskyist group I would join, Harry Ratner and Bert and Greta Karpin, were of Jewish background.[5]

My first job after leaving school was in a small furniture factory, and my first adult partner there, standing across from me as we fed raw timber back and forth through a sawing machine to make planks, was a Polish Jew whom we called John. He was a survivor of the Hitler camps, then only a decade in the past. A very small, quiet, subdued man. I had enough sense to resent it and see it for what it was when another adult wood machinist whom I'd been moved on to serve told me that John was "a mean, tight bastard".

Vehement against Israel after 1967 as the oppressor of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza I was; but slowly, after a long

time, towards the end of the 1970s, I was assailed by doubts about the "secular democratic state" formula. Because of the strong commitment to the immediately oppressed, the Palestinians, I had a lot of entrenched resistance, and conditioning and self-conditioning, to break out of. But it finally registered that "secular democratic state" simply didn't make sense. It couldn't possibly mean in reality what we wanted to it mean and had convinced ourselves it did mean: equality for Jews and Arabs. And eventually it clicked that it wasn't good for the Palestinians, either.

A "secular democratic state" demanded Israeli agreement. Since Israel would never agree to dismantle its state and to put itself at the mercy of a hostile Arab world, it meant the prior conquest of the Israelis. At the culmination of that conquest, what was left of the Israeli Jews would not have and could not have equality in a "secular democratic state". The practical meaning of "secular democratic state" was the same, more or less, as that of "drive the Jews into the sea". "Secular democratic state" was "drive the Jews into the sea" for squeamish dimwits, or people made stupid by politics. Immediately it meant delegitimising Israel, saying that it had no right to exist, still less to defend itself.

All that is obvious and very simple. But for us, our ideas buttressed by emotional siding with the Palestinians, the oppressed, it was not simple and least of all could it be obvious. That sort of mechanism is possibly a factor with people now, except that the level of antisemitism geared round the "secular democratic state" formula is a great deal higher.

The strong resistance meant that it took a long time for this to establish itself clearly in my head. When it had, I sought separate discussions with each of the people in the organisation who, I thought, had more than a superficial knowledge of the Middle East, half a dozen people perhaps.

I couldn't get anyone to agree with me. Rachel Lever rejected the argument vehemently. I couldn't unpersuade her. When I raised the question with members of the leading committee I met with incredulity as well as incomprehension and dismissal.

The comrades did, however, by their blocking out of the problem I saw and the issues I raised, succeed in letting me convince myself that I was right.

Years later I asked one of them, who tries to be rational in politics, why he couldn't then see the problem I raised. He answered: "I followed the Jewish comrades". That is, it was easier to stick to the comfort of a blatant political fiction. As I had done for a long time.

A lot of people in the wider revolutionary left "followed the Jewish comrade" - Tony Cliff - into de facto antisemitism.

If not "secular democratic state", then it had to be either the status quo in the West Bank and Gaza, or two states.

In a letter to our paper, *Workers' Action*, in 1974, a comrade, Neal Smith, had advocated two states soon after the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine had started to advocate it (as a stepping-stone to a "secular democratic state"). I was among those who opposed him.

In fact, though, "two states" was only a more developed, fleshed-out, more concrete version of the old policy - socialist United States of the Middle East, with autonomy for Jews and Kurds. It had the advantages of accepting the right of Israel to exist and defend itself, and of working outwards from the idea of an independent Palestinian state. It was no more than what had been stipulated in the 1947 UN resolution.

For me it had been a circular movement from autonomy to "two states". The other comrades, Rachel Lever and Phil Semp, who also had started with Jewish autonomy, stuck with "secular democratic state". (Phil Semp eventually agreed with two states, but by then he had dropped out of political activity).

I had to accept that I couldn't shift the oth-

ers, and I think on one level I was content with that. I had the same strong inhibitions about seeming to side against the Palestinians that the others had. The truth, I think, is that I wasn't unhappy at being a political prisoner on the issue.

The other realisation also had to work its way through slowly: that the destroy-Israel slogans, postures, intentions, and activities were in fact the bitter enemy of the oppressed Palestinians - the living Palestinians, as distinct from the symbols of Arab defeat in Palestine, of Muslim subordination and loss of territory, and, for the left, of anti-imperialism.

The Israelis had Israel, a sovereign state; the Palestinians had nothing. Any proposed "settlement" that demanded the destruction of Israel - whether it be called "drive the Jews into the sea", "from the river to the sea", Muslim Holy War and reconquest, or "secular democratic state" - condemned and condemns the Palestinians to an indefinite purgatory. Its realisation required the collapse of the will of the Hebrew nation to live and defend itself.

Once the US-Israel alliance was established, from 1967, it required an epochal change in the balance of world power. It left the Palestinians without redress while they waited for the change in Israel's ability to defend itself and in the world balance, and entirely dependent on the good will of whatever Arab big powers might conquer Israel. The most seemingly radical slogans and demands, expressed in the obsession of Arab-nationalists and Islamists, and sections of the anti-imperialist left, with aspiring to destroy Israel, did not at all serve the living Palestinian people.

"Siding with the oppressed", in its political expressions in the various destroy-Israel slogans and programs, was not siding with the oppressed. It was just siding against Israel - and siding with Arab, Islamist, and "anti-imperialist" intransigents and irreconcilables for whom the Palestinians were a cipher. Bringing down Israel, not raising up the Palestinians, was its core drive.

In our political tradition, the answer to the question whether siding with the oppressed demands of us that we accept the given policy at all times of the oppressed (in fact, of their leaders), is, no, it does not. Our basic politics demands of us that we fight the chauvinism of the oppressed, too, and promote workers' unity. We'd have given that correct copy-book answer to that question, in the late 1970s - in Lenin's words, "we fight against the privileges and violence of the oppressor nation, and do not in any way condone strivings for privileges on the part of the oppressed nation" - but in practice it was tremendously difficult for us to disentangle and disengage.

When others on the ostensible left did begin to differentiate from the majority view of Palestinian leaders, it was to side with Hamas against Fatah. Hamas were better anti-imperialists (that is, more tunnel-visioned) than Fatah, you see. Some on the left rejoiced at the victory of the clerical-fascist Hamas over the quasi-secular Fatah in the Palestinian elections of 2006, and the Hamas coup in Gaza in 2007. It was the reduction of their politics to something hard to distinguish from political lunacy.

IV

In 1981 our group, by then called Socialist Organiser, fused with another Trotskyist group, the Workers' Socialist League.

Led by Alan Thornett, it was a breakaway from the Workers' Revolutionary Party [WRP] of seven years earlier - the WRP as it was before its leaders sold themselves to Arab governments and it became the crazily antisemitic thing it was at the end.

In the discussion preceding the amalgamation, both organisations were for a "secular



democratic state". That would be the position of the new organisation. No problem there.

In fact the fusion brought together people who adhered to a common slogan, "secular democratic state", but gave it radically different political, historical, emotional, and moral content. The Socialist Organiser people found that the Thornettite "secular democratic state" was not quite theirs, and so from their side for our new comrades.

The Socialist Organiser people did sincerely (albeit stupidly) believe in equal rights for the Israeli Jews in the future "secular democratic state". The questions I had been raising about the "secular democratic state" may have made some comrades more aware of that and strengthened their need to assert and believe that "secular democratic state" meant equality.

The Thornettites understood "secular democratic state" as meaning Arab self-determination in the "secular democratic state" and Jewish subordination. It was a contradiction in terms - a joint Jewish-Arab "secular democratic state" which was also an Arab "secular democratic state" and gave Palestinian Arabs self-determination. In fact, they had a far less effete and more realistic idea of what "secular democratic state" meant (and could only mean) than the Socialist Organiser people did.

It was as with the different understandings now of the "two states" position on the left. Some who notionally are for two states, the antisemitism-fomenting *Morning Star* for example, rage against and demonise Israel and Zionism. Their extreme and in many cases hysterical hostility to Israel points not to their notional politics - two states - but to an adoptive Arab-Islamic chauvinism and support for the conquest and destruction of Israel.

So it was with the Thornettite adherents of the "secular democratic state". Some of them even proposed the slogan: "Drive the Zionists out of the labour movement".

This very soon became obvious. I used the open and incipient clash to get people to think about the issue and about our politics on it. The contradiction between the two versions of "secular democratic state" would be the locomotive of radical change in the understanding of a lot of comrades.

In June 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon to get at the PLO military forces there. Lebanon was an unstable confessional state set up in 1943, based on rules for power-sharing between Muslim and Maronite Christian Arabs. The PLO presence destroyed the delicate confessional balance. The Maronites allied with Israel. In September 1982 they massacred Palestinians in two refugee camps, Sabra and Chatila, in territory within the overall control of the Israeli army under Defence Minister Ariel Sharon. An Israeli enquiry would later apportion some of the blame to Sharon and



This pamphlet republishes a selection of articles written by members and supporters of Workers' Liberty, along with an interview with the late Marxist theorist Moishe Postone, and an article by the Bolshevik revolutionary Leon Trotsky. It is a contribution to the political debate and education.

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his colleagues. The anti-Zionist left instantly gave all the responsibility and blame to Israel.

The Russian invasion of Afghanistan at Christmas 1979 had triggered what came to be called the Second Cold War, and that was the international background to the conflict in Lebanon and to how the left perceived it.

A tremendous hysteria gripped the pro-Palestinian, anti-Israeli left. Our organisation too. It could be argued, I think, that *Socialist Organiser* was the worst of the left press in that period on Israel and the Middle East. Part of it was style. Alan Clinton, who was by this time Chief Whip of the ruling Labour group on Islington council, under Margaret Hodge, suggested - in the paper - that Israel should never be referred to as Israel. So it was screaming headlines about "the Zionists". Another problem was that John Lister, joint editor of the paper, a thoughtless and conscienceless hack who saw his place in the political world as that of Alan Thorne's amanuensis, wrote most of the stuff on "the Zionists". It was very unpleasant, and more than a little crazed.[5]

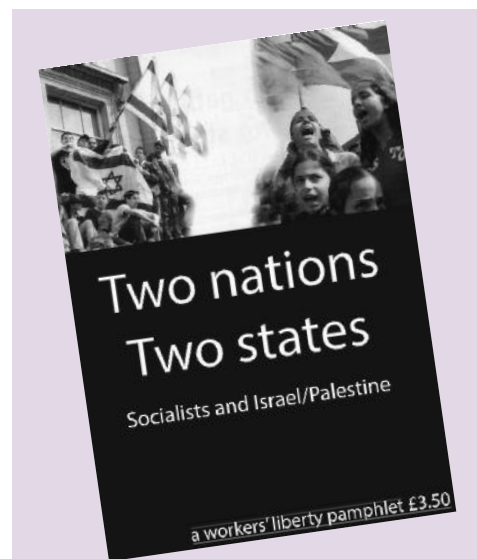
Less than a year after the fusion, the organisation had begun to pull apart. The group was united in opposing Thatcher's Falklands War (April-June 1982), and for the first six weeks also largely united in rejecting any support for Argentina, which had invaded the Falkland Islands, 400 miles from Argentina and with a British population.

Then the Thorneites discovered that the Falklands War was a major event in the world struggle against imperialism, and that the fascist military junta ruling Argentina was now "in our class camp" (alongside Russia). Siding with Argentina was the common Orthodox Trotskyist response (of the Mandelbrot Fourth International, for instance). Our side refused to accept what we saw as ridiculous fantasy politics.

The hysteria about Israel in Lebanon merged into that anti-imperialist "high". Denunciation of "the Zionists" at meetings became even less inhibited and more of a gut-level hostility to "the Zionists" than a pro-Palestinian position.

The organisation came very close to imploding. It didn't, but we had reached the political turning point on the Middle East.

The National Committee, formed by amalgamating the committees of the two previous organisations, was big, about 40 members.



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Into this committee, with the Middle East on the agenda, Alan Thorne brought an Israeli Jewish socialist, a member of the Workers' League in Israel. He spoke for the outright destruction of Israel. He himself had, like Tony Cliff in the mid 40s before him, done the logical thing and left.

Everybody in that room, except for one other comrade (Clive Bradley) and I, was for a "secular democratic state", and yet the two halves into which the meeting divided faced each other across a great political chasm. There were those who saw "secular democratic state" as involving equality for Jews and Arabs in the future political settlement, and wanted it to mean that; and those for whom it meant primarily the destruction of the Jewish state, by war and conquest. I drove wedges into the gap between the two versions of "secular democratic state". "Secular democratic state" must mean equal rights for Jews! Half the meeting believed that. I remember the excitable Alan Clinton beating the table when I was talking about equal rights for the Israeli Jews, chanting "No rights for Jews! No rights for Jews!"

Alan was a decent man (fallen among municipal reformists, and soon to leave us for them), and I didn't believe that he was antisemitic on a personal level. He meant no rights for Jews in Israel-Palestine, in the "secular democratic state".

Those who had "secular democratic state" in the old *Socialist Organiser* version now saw themselves in the mirror of their formal political co-thinkers, and some of them experienced a crisis of political identity. The equipose of the politically-hybrid slogan, "secular democratic state", was shaken. "Secular democratic state" could no longer provide an emotional refuge from thinking about the real situation and the real choices. They had to think about the issues without the comfort of a nonsensical fantasy solution.

The Middle East was also discussed at a big conference of *Socialist Organiser* supporters in mid-1982, at the height of the hysteria. People talked about "secular democratic state" as "self-determination for the Palestinian Arabs". I took the floor to argue that "secular democratic state" for Jews and Arabs implied, and had to imply, Jewish and Arab equality. It couldn't mean self-determination for the Palestinian Arabs any more than self-determination for the Israeli Jews. Each people, the Jews and the Arabs, had to be taken into account by the other side. I remember two things from that long-ago meeting - the waves of hostility I evoked; and two youngsters close to the front of the meeting, one of whom I think was Jewish in background, nodding emphatic agreement with what I was saying.

V

The group was being dragged through the libel courts - or John Bloxam and I, on behalf of the group, were - by the WRP which, among other things, accused us of being part of a world Zionist conspiracy stretching all the way into Thatcher's and Reagan's cabinets.

I was able in *Socialist Organiser* to publish a reasonably comprehensive attack on their antisemitism. It had to be done within bounds, but it included a criticism of our own antisemitism too. I wrote about the slogan "drive the Zionists out of the labour movement", which had been raised - by some of our own comrades.

I became joint editor of *Socialist Organiser* in June 1983, and Clive Bradley later became a staff writer. The hysteria about "the Zionists" had abated a little by then. We began to publish such things as a critical assessment of Lenni Brenner's rehash of Stalinist antisemitic "anti-Zionism" of the 1949-53 period. Jane Ashworth had become student organiser in mid 1982, at the height of the anti-Zionist agitation. She came to agree with me on "two



states", and began to influence some of our younger comrades on the question.

The Thorne group had fallen apart bit by bit in the course of the political battles, with groups and individuals peeling off, and Socialist Organiser parted company with the rump in mid 1984. The organisation's mind changed over time and we formally adopted a two-states position in 1985.

We allied with the Union of Jewish Students against the "ban Zionists" kitsch-left in the colleges, and that was educational for some comrades too. We worked to enlarge what we saw as our island of socialist sanity in the swamp of left absolute anti-Zionism and barely disguised antisemitism. Already in the 1970s, and again in the mid 1980s, we opposed attempts to harass and ban Jewish student societies, seeing the advocates of the bans for what they were - "left-wing" antisemites and boneheaded "anti-Zionists".

VI

The present-day antisemitism, or absolute anti-Zionism, of the ostensible left does not of course exist in a vacuum, and it is not the start of something new in history.

Uninhibited Nazi-style and simply Nazi antisemitism has been cultivated inside the Arab countries, without a break as far as I know, after the crushing defeat of the Nazis in 1945. Across the world antisemitism has become "anti-Zionism".

The left has inherited and developed the Stalinist "anti-Zionist" antisemitism of the years 1949-53 (some of which can be traced to Stalinist ideas in the 1930s). Events and the passage of time have moved the ostensible left onto strange new ground. The agitation now for the "right of return" is in literal terms a species of racism, or of "gene-ism".

Of the six million Palestinians designated as "refugees" who should collectively "return" to and repossess what is now Israel, perhaps 200,000 were alive in 1948, that is, about one in thirty. (Or, on another estimate, as few as 30,000). The number of Jews in Israel who were there in 1948 must be about the same. In due course we will reach the point where none of the designated refugees are actually refugees from 1947-8.

Do the six million Arabs have a right to displace - that is what "return" means, inescapably - a similar number of today's Israeli Jews, who have grown up in Israel and (in many cases) whose parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents were born there?

What is that right to displace based on? The six million are descended from certain people, and that gives them rights stronger than those of the people born there?

Racism is used as a swear-word now, a bludgeon, a demagogic obliteration of grades and nuances in the continuum from affinity to nationalism to chauvinism to warfare against a nationality to what is properly called racism. But what is the Palestinian "right of return", the superior claim over the existing Jewish Israel of the six million "refugees" who are mostly not refugees but descendants of refugees, based on, if not genetic continuity, "race"?

Guarding the proportions here, it can be truly said that the absolute anti-Zionist "left" unites the Stalinist political antisemitism of 1949-53 with aspects of the older, racist-genetic, antisemitism. I repeat: that is what the superiority of the claim to the territory of pre-1967 Israel of the designated refugees, over the community who live there, comes down

to: genes.

And of course Western history is saturated with the many strands of another antisemitism, Christian antisemitism, beginning with the assertion that "Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, did it" - the condemnation to death of Jesus Christ - "at the desire of the Jews". (That is how it was put until recently in the Catholic Catechism of Faith) [6]. That Christian antisemitism also inspired the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, forged by the secret police of Holy Mother Russia a hundred years ago, and circulated in vast numbers and many languages since.

The Bible story has the Roman governor Pontius Pilate speaking to the Jewish crowd: "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children".

On the heads of those who in 1948 won Israel's right to exist against people marching under the injunction to drive the Jews into the sea, and on their heads of the generations of their children, is the fault that deprives Israel of historical legitimacy and makes the claim of those born and living in Israel forever inferior to the claims of generations born elsewhere.

Those who now get gratification and joy out of uninhibited crusading against the blood-guilty "Zionists" continue a foul tradition of demagogic campaigning and spurious self-righteousness and hate-blinded antisemitism.

Footnote

[1] One measure of how things stood in the early 1960s: I debated Israel with a Zionist, another member of the Labour Party youth organisation in Cheetham, Manchester. My main argument, as I remember, was that the kibbutzim were utopian socialist colonies and that therefore Israel offered no viable socialist model.

Irish in background, and therefore "anti-imperialist", I would have been more aware than average, not less so, of the sort of "colonial" question that would dominate discussions of Israel later. There was little general awareness of Palestinian refugees, and certainly no putting all the blame for their continued plight as refugees on Israel alone.

[2] Worrying that a line in the Workers' Republic article on the Six Day War might be taken to imply the wish or the threat of destroying Israel, I travelled in a dinner hour across Manchester from Salford to Cheetham, where *Workers' Republic* was being produced on a stencil duplicator, to double-check. Memory suggests that we re-did the page.

[3] I've checked: it was part of a big campaign against creating a new German army.

[4] In the later 1950s, I even found Jewish-background youngsters in the YCL who sang Irish nationalist, Irish Republican, and even Catholic-sectarian songs, led by the branch secretary Terry Whelan, who was making a bit of a name for himself as a folk singer - "Johnson's Motor Car", "Kathleen Mavourneen", and a darker song, of which all I can remember are the lines: "Early one morning, on my way to Mass, I met a bloody Protestant and killed him for his pass". No, I didn't approve.

[5] See for example "Zionism red in tooth and claw", John Lister, *Socialist Organiser* 91, 1 July 1982, and "Zionist policy: genocide", Andrew Hornung, *Socialist Organiser* 89, 17 June 1982.

[6] A good-hearted neighbour had me learning the catechism early, and I could recite that at the age of four or five. It was similar with all Christians brought up in that tradition.

See page 4 for a letter by Mike Zubrowski, Mind your Language, prompted by this piece.



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Protest for "two states"

By Martin Thomas

Workers' Liberty, the Worker-communist Party of Kurdistan, the Worker-communist Party of Iran (Hekmatist - Official Line), and others, will be demonstrating for a democratic "two states" settlement, peace, and workers' unity in Israel-Palestine on Saturday 11 May.

We will meet at noon at the BBC, Portland Place, London W1. That is near where the Palestine Solidarity Campaign has called a march.

The PSC protest is widely sponsored, but the message from Unite union general secretary Len McCluskey backing it (bit.ly/mc-c-11m) makes no reference to its actual demands.

Our protest calls for Israel to withdraw from the West Bank, the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, and an end to the blockade of

Gaza.

The PSC calls for the "right of return" to what is now Israel of the six million Palestinians who have inherited refugee status, and links its protest to Hamas's "Great March of Return" actions in Gaza.

"Right of return" may sound like a call for individual rights, but collective repossession of the territory by six million people is a different matter.

As Omar Barghouti, one of the chief figures in the boycott-Israel movement, explains: "You cannot reconcile the right of return for refugees with a two-state solution. That is the big white elephant in the room and people are ignoring it - a return for refugees would end Israel's existence as a Jewish state" (bit.ly/ob-09).

It is a recycled "smash Israel" slogan. It won't happen, any time short of an epochal shift in the military balance - so it offers no practical improvement for the Palestinians - and if it did happen

it would be only through a terrible war.

On 7 May there is an event of a different sort in Israel - the 14th annual "alternative Memorial Day", organised by Combatants for Peace, which brings Israeli Jews and Palestinians together to mourn all those killed in the conflict. As in 2018, the Netanyahu government tried to ban Palestinians from the West Bank from attending. As in 2018 the Supreme Court finally overruled the government.

On 6 May Israel and Hamas agreed a ceasefire on the Gaza border. Since 3 May Hamas and Islamic Jihad had fired 690 rockets into Israel, killing four people. Israel had bombed Gaza, killing 25 and destroying 130 homes.

The battle began on 3 May with Islamic Jihad sniper fire from Gaza that wounded two Israeli soldiers. At one point Hamas blustered that its next step would be to "blow up Tel Aviv", and the ceasefire bro-

kered by Egypt and Qatar could break down when the Eurovision song contest in Tel Aviv (14-18 May) provides a "soft" target.

Behind it was tension over the implementation of deals made in constant haggling between the Israeli government and Hamas over slight easings of the Israeli-Egyptian blockade on Gaza and over the transfer through Israel of money from Qatar to Hamas. The answer is a peace deal giving self-determination to the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and recognition to Israel.

In the West Bank, tension is rising in the run-up to the promised publication in early June of Trump's plan for the Middle East which has been trailed as abandoning even nominal commitment to "two states".

Since 17 February Israel has deducted from the tax revenues which it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, and then re-mits, an amount equivalent to

what the PA then pays out to Palestinians in Israeli jails. The PA, in response, has refused to accept the reduced remittance, wagering that Israel will not want to see the PA collapse and have to take direct responsibility for the Palestinian cities and towns in the West Bank. EU efforts to broker a deal have so far failed.

The whole Israeli occupation regime in the West Bank is untenable, and will become only more untenable if Netanyahu goes ahead with his plans to annex to Israel "Area C", the 60%-plus of the area of the West Bank already under direct Israeli control.

"Area C" includes the Jewish settlements and the Israeli military roads, and surrounds the 160-plus patches of the PA-administered Areas A and B.

Our protest on 11 May will call for Israel to withdraw from the West Bank and negotiate "two states".

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