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Left: one of the recent protests organised by Workers' Liberty with other socialists at the Israeli embassy. Above: poster we produced in 2012.

Introduction

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).

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

thorities 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-occupied countries, and until the foundation of Israel in 1948 allowed the Jews in European displaced persons' camps to migrate.

The Trotskyists rejected the Stalinists' 1929 turn on Palestine. Max Shachtman wrote in *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 now 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 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 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.[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.

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? 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 there? We didn't examine it too clearly. We were content to fudge and go on fudging, with the whole complex of thinking set 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 were for the defeat of Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur war. We chose to inhabit a culpable delusion, a political fiction.

III

I have no memory of direct animosity to Jews. I had been religious; 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.

On a certain level I was unhappy to be thus in conflict with most Jewish people. However, politics had to rule.

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 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, 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 big 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 for freedom from France, 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 massacre of the 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. (I've checked: it was part of a big campaign against creating a new German army). “The Jews” were oppressed people, too. Like us, but more so. There was 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-led 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 Greta Karpin, were of Jewish background.[3]

My first job after leaving school was in a small furniture factory, and my first 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, 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 through. 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 meant: 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". Immediately it meant delegitimising Israel, saying that it had no right to exist, still less to defend itself. "Secular democratic state" was "drive the Jews into the sea" for squeamish dimwits, or people made stupid by politics.

All that is obvious and very simple. But for us, 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 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 unper-

suaude her.

They 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. When I raised the question with members of the leading committee I met with incredulity as well as incomprehension and dismissal.

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, of course, 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 others, 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.

Another 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, 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 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 not easy 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 ended as.

In the discussion preceding the amalgamation, it was agreed that both organisations were for a “secular democratic state” and 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. Similarly 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 effect 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.

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 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 Maronite Christian and Muslim 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 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 Thornett's amanuensis, wrote most of the stuff on “the Zionists”. It was very unpleasant, and more than a little crazed.[4]

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 opposing support for Argentina, which had invaded the Falkland Islands.

Then the Thornettites discovered that the Falklands War was a major event in the world struggle against imperialism, and that the fascistic military junta ruling Argentina was now “in our class camp” (alongside Russia). Siding with Argentina was the common Orthodox Trotskyist response. Our side refused to accept those 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. Into this committee, with the Middle East on the agenda, Alan Thornett brought an Israeli Jewish socialist, a member of the Workers' League in Israel, linked to *Politica Obrera* in Argentina. He spoke for the outright destruction of Israel. He himself had, like Tony Cliff 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 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 don't know if minutes of the meeting survive, and it's a long time ago.

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 the old Socialist Organiser version of “secular democratic state” now saw themselves in the mirror of their formal political co-thinkers, and some of them experienced a crisis of political identity. The equipoise 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. (In fact, that was one reason for rejecting it). 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 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 Thornett 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 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 could 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, 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) [5]. That Christian antisemitism also inspired the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, forged by the se-

cret 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 uninhibitedly crusading against the blood-guilty "Zionists" continue a foul tradition of demagogic campaigning and spurious self-righteousness and hate-blinded antisemitism.

Footnotes

[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] 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.

[4] 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.

[5] 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.

Preface (1993)

This pamphlet contains a large selection of articles and letters about Israel and the Arabs, and how socialists should see the Jewish-Arab conflict, which were published over a number of years in the weekly Marxist newspaper *Socialist Organiser*.

In the last few years *Socialist Organiser* has reassessed and revised its attitude. Until mid 1985 — though with decreasing conviction — SO held that socialists should advocate the replacement of Israel with a secular democratic state in the whole of pre-1947 Palestine, within which Jews and Arabs would have equal citizenship. In September 1985 we brought a long process of reassessment to a conclusion by deciding that, desirable though the creation of a joint Jewish-Arab state in Palestine might be, it was impossible that it could come into existence by peaceful agreement in any foreseeable future, and that in practical politics the “secular democratic state” slogan functioned as a cover for a programme of conquest and subjugation of the Jewish nation in Israel by the Arab states. On any realistic account, the first stage would have to be such a conquest — and after that inevitably bloody conquest of the Jews, there would be no second stage in which Jews and Arabs would live together as equal citizens.

We found ourselves having to go through a prolonged and painful reassessment because, in line with the general drift of would-be Trotskyist opinion in the 1970s, we had too uncritically accepted the “secular democratic state” programme adopted by the Palestine Liberation Organisation in the late ‘60s. We did so under the moral pressure to side with the defeated and oppressed. We understood the formula in our own way as meaning complete equality for Jews and Arabs in the new Palestine — this diverged appreciably from the PLO’s own version, in which the secular, democratic state would be an Arab state in which the Jews (or some Jews) would have equality of citizenship and religion.

The sad truth is probably that we were less concerned with thinking things through rigorously than with adopting a consistently militant and uncompromising stand of support for the oppressed: and we were not too keen to probe beyond the superficial plausibility of the “secular, democratic state” programme and its seeming promise to do justice to the Palestinians and reconcile Jews and Arabs on a higher plane.

With us, as with many on the left now, something more was involved than mere obtuseness and political and moral cowardice. The Palestinian Arabs are terribly oppressed. Though arguably they have suffered far greater massacres at the hands of Jordan, Syria, and Lebanese Christian and Muslim militias than from the Israelis, the root problem for the Palestinian Arabs has been their displacement by the Israelis

Therefore it is easy to lapse by way of proper moral indignation into a vicarious Arab revanchism and nationalism. But something more specific was a factor in our (and others’) obtuseness on this question: the fact that it is impossible to do full retributive justice to the Palestinian Arabs without doing a grave injustice to the Jewish nation that has grown up in Palestine. No full restoration of the Palestinian Arab position is possible without driving out the Jews.

Where no satisfying solution exists, there is scope for fantasy and vagueness. The “secular, democratic state” is a fantasy solution — the promise that the lion will lie down with the lamb, that those who have fought each other for at least seven decades will integrate into a harmonious unit, either by the Israeli Jews voluntarily abandoning their own nation-state in order to share the disputed territory or by the Arab powers conquering the Jews and then instituting the sort of equality of nationalities that exists nowhere in the Middle East.

If you rule out the ‘secular, democratic state’ as a fantasy, then the only possible and equitable solution is conciliation and division of the disputed territory between the two peoples.

The articles and letters reproduced here look at the Arab Jewish conflict and its history from a number of radically different viewpoints. They are all reproduced exactly as published. The pamphlet also contains two items not previously published in *Socialist Organiser*: a contribution (written at the time, by me) to the discussion on whether *Socialist Organiser* can now be called “Zionist”, which, for reasons of space, balance, and decent editorial restraint was not published in the paper; and a brief comment on a contribution to the SO discussion by Lenni Brenner (author of ‘Zionism in the Age of the Dictators’ and ‘The Iron Wall’)

which nobody bothered to reply to when it was published.

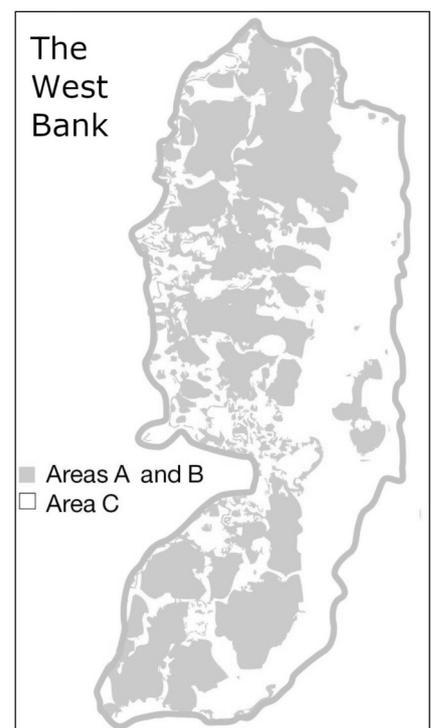
As is to be expected in a prolonged discussion in which people’s ideas evolve, change and develop, the reader will find many ragged edges. One thing that jars with me particularly is the unqualified definition of Israel as simply a ‘racist state’ in pieces I wrote as recently as two or three years ago (or some five or six years after I personally had begun to argue that Israel had a right to exist). Now Israel’s treatment of the Palestinian Arabs is racist, and it deserves to be called racist. The problem is with classifying the entire entity of the Jewish state as ‘racist’.

Ideas and attitudes that anywhere else would be readily identified as nationalist (and in Israel’s case, it is a nationalism surrounded by murderously hostile other nationalisms) are in relation to Israel classified as ‘racist’. This misuse of ‘racism’ to describe Israeli-Jewish nationalism (or chauvinism) is only another way of denying that the Jewish state has a right to exist and asserting that it is an illegitimate nation.

There are other examples of unevenness and confusion, and of residual ideas and attitudes jostling with newer ideas and attitudes which, rigorously worked through, imply their opposite. All this is mortifying. But none of us have denied that we were immersed for a very long time in the general quagmire of confusion on these questions which chokes and distorts the thought processes of the left.

We have been trying to work our way out of it as best we can. We collect these articles under one cover in the hope of helping other socialists to work their way out.

Sean Matgamna, 1993



DEBATE: JIM HIGGINS AND SEAN MATGAMNA

This debate between Sean Matgamna and the late Jim Higgins (former National Secretary of the SWP), was sparked by a column by the late Paul Foot in *Socialist Worker* and Sean Matgamna's comment on it. The debate ran in *Workers' Liberty* nos.32-34 and 38, in 1996-7.

“Mr Foot, do you hate the Jews?”

By Paul Foot

I got this letter recently from a woman in Surrey.

Dear Mr Foot

I was so disappointed in you when I heard your hysterical outburst against Israel on Any Questions.

I have admired your column in the *Guardian* and your cogent socialist views for a long time. However, you did yourself no good in the programme in revealing your up-till-now well-hidden anti-Jewish bias.

You took no account of the provocation received by Israel for such a long time from the terrorist group, Hezbollah.

You just hate Jews — it was perfectly obvious. And you should be honest enough to say so instead of hiding it behind your criticism of Israel.

Here is my reply.

Thank you very much for your letter. Almost every time I manage to publicise my strong views about the state of Israel, I get attacked for being anti-Semitic and for “hating Jews”.

My instinctive reaction — ‘No, I don't hate Jews at all’ — harks back to the old and notoriously patronising, “Some of my best friends are Jews”.

So let me explain why I am against Israel. The idea of a safe homeland for Jews gained a lot of sympathy among socialists after the long years of Nazi persecution.

The problem with the chosen homeland, Palestine, however, was that it was already populated by Palestinians. A Jewish state could not be created there without the forcible expulsion from their homes of a million people, most of whom have been living as refugees ever since.

This expulsion was followed by the grossest discrimination against the Palestinians living in Israel, and periodic outbursts of unashamedly imperi-

alist aggression and occupation of neighbouring countries.

The Six Day War in 1967 was a war of conquest in which thousands of miles of other people's territory were added to Israel by force of arms.

Naturally, all this led to violent resistance among the expelled and stateless Palestinians, which in turn led to Israeli counter-terrorism in an apparently endless spiral.

Throughout, the Israeli aggressions were supported by the United States government, whose greed for cheap oil is always threatened by Arab nationalism, and especially by Arab socialism, both of which have been sidetracked and contained by the very existence of Israel.

The arguments which gave rise to the sympathy for a Jewish homeland on the left were turned on their head. The persecuted became the persecutors — the oppressed the oppressors.

One result is that Jews are far less secure in Israel than they are, say, in Britain or the United States or in most other places in the world.

This brings me to your accusations. It is you, not I, who automatically connect the state of Israel with Jews, and construe every attack on or defence of Israel as an attack on or a defence of Jews.

In this, it seems to me, you are cutting yourself off from the best Jewish socialists and reformers who have consistently been anti-Zionist.

So, although it's true, I don't rely on the fact that some of my best friends are Jews.

More optimistically, I conclude that some of the fiercest fighters for human emancipation are Jews, and all of those are anti-Zionist.

Paul Foot, philosemite

By Sean Matgamna

Dear Paul Foot:

In your *Socialist Worker* column (16 May 1996) you print a letter in response to what you said about Israel on “Any Questions”, headed “Mr Foot, Do You Hate The Jews?”, and reply: “No, I don't hate Jews at all”.

Of course not. Who could possibly suspect you of hating Jews — a life-long socialist and for three and a half decades the most prominent acolyte of Tony Cliff, who is in origin a Palestinian Jew? No.

You deny the right of Israel to exist. You are hostile to Jews (and others) who are “Zionists”, that is, to Jews who pointedly defend Israel's right to exist, which means most Jews alive. You engage in blinkered, savagely partisan, propaganda against Israel on

the radio, on TV, and in newspaper columns. Against Israel you support even such an Arab Hitler as Saddam Hussein.

To tell you the truth, if I didn't know you for a socialist I might conclude: “Typical upper-class twit giving vent to the ingrained prejudice of his sort — a bit like the people who run *Private Eye*, perhaps — part of the romantic Arabist strain of British upper-class anti-Jewish feeling”. But I know you for a member of the Socialist Workers' Party. You do not hate Jews.

But substitute hate for being bribed, and the position is rather as described in the well-known comment, Hilaire Belloc's I think: “You simply cannot bribe or twist/ The honest British journalist./ But seeing what the chap will do/ Unbribed, there's really no occasion to”.

You consistently reject the only socialist approach, Arab-Jewish working-class unity and consistent democracy as a means to achieve that unity — that is, the most equitable settlement possible in this tragic conflict, two states for the two peoples and full equality for Jews and Arabs in each others' states.

Your column is astonishing in its ignorance of or lack of concern for truth — astonishing not according to the standards of a high-profile bourgeois journalist, but according to the standards of someone who might possibly consider himself a Marxist.

You say socialists sympathised with the idea of a safe home for Jews as “the long years of Nazi persecution”. In fact, 12 years. You substitute an exaggerated measure of time to avoid mentioning the relevant measure: six million Jews murdered and many others uprooted.

You say the “chosen homeland”, Palestine, was “already populated” by Palestinian Arabs. But the Jews were by 1947 a big national minority, about one-third of the population: why did they not have rights, including the right to separate and the right to defend themselves?

“The Jewish state could not be created without the forcible expulsion from their homes of a million people”. In fact, Israel was proclaimed, in May 1948, in territory allotted by the United Nations, without any Arabs being expelled. Hundreds of thousands of Arabs did flee — the great majority not expelled — after Arab states, with the backing, naturally enough, of the Palestinian Arabs, invaded Israel.

If Israel had not won that war, then the Jews would have been massacred or expelled: indeed, in the following years, almost as large a number of Jews were expelled from or fled Arab countries. It would have been better if no-one had been expelled, but what sense other than malevolent Arab chauvinism can there be in such dis-

tortions of history — if you yourself know the history, such lies — for the too-tolerant readers of Socialist Worker?

The Six Day War of June 1967 did become a war of conquest by Israel, but the moves that triggered the war came from Egypt, which blockaded the Gulf of Aqaba. Until the Egypt-Israel treaty of 1979, all the Arab states — and, until 1988, the Palestine Liberation Organisation — took as their goal the complete destruction of Israel and the subjugation of its people. That being so, to talk as if the long conflict came only from Israel's "unashamedly imperialist aggression and occupation of neighbouring territories" is to be the socialist equivalent of a Sun journalist, a shameless lawyer for a preconceived view rather than an objective analyst.

Israel has been moving — so I would argue, though the 30 May election may change that — towards withdrawal from the occupied territories, trading land for peace. If the Arab states and the PLO had been willing to make peace in the aftermath of the 1967 war, then Israeli withdrawal from those territories would have been the immediate result, and without the painful uncertainties that accompany the process three decades later.

The cycle of terrorism and counter-terrorism did not begin with Israel's "shameless imperialist aggression". It began way back in 1929, or earlier, with Muslim chauvinist pogroms against Jewish settlers (who were not always "Zionists", either).

"The persecuted became the persecutors, the oppressed the oppressors". Yes, tragically, that was the experience of the Palestinian Arabs. Yet all this occurred in the context of Arab invasions, threatened invasions, or foiled invasions.

"Jews are far less secure in Israel than they are, say, in Britain and the US". Yes indeed: in other words, Arab chauvinism is a real threat. But in the 1930s and 40s, when Israel was shaped, all major countries — from the US through the UK to Stalin's Russia — kept out the Jews threatened with annihilation. Britain kept them out of Palestine.

After the Second World War many thousands of Jews languished in Displaced Persons' camps — often former German concentration camps — or in British internment camps in Cyprus. Some Jews going home to Poland from Hitler's camps met with pogroms and murder.

What should the Israeli Jews do now? Pack up and move?

It is not you, so you say, who connect Israel, and your hostility to it, with Jews in general; rather, it is those who say that your attitude to Israel is anti-semitic. But can you possibly fail to understand that since Israel has come

to be central to the identity of most Jews alive — a few religious people and revolutionary socialists excepted — the distinction you make is spurious and false? Isn't it no more than a smirking smart-arse hypocrisy, the equivalent of saying "if the cap fits, wear it"?

By her attitude to Israel, you say, your correspondent is "cutting herself off from the best Jewish socialists and reformers". They have "consistently been anti-Zionists". Some of your best friends are Jews, eh? These are "some of the fiercest fighters for human emancipation". "All... are anti-Zionists".

Is it that you don't notice that here you automatically label almost the entire Jewish population of Israel — workers, socialists, the lot — as reactionary, together with most Jews worldwide who are not "anti-Zionist", and read them out of the forward march of humankind? Surely not! You are not, as supporters of Workers' Liberty are, critical of Israel, and in support of those within it who fight for equality between Jewish and Arab Israeli citizens and for an independent state for the Palestinian Arabs where they are the majority. You want Israel destroyed. Even a Saddam Hussein is to be supported in such an enterprise.

You probably are unaware that since Trotsky, continuing to follow the pre-Stalinist line of the Communist International, supported the right of Jewish migration to Palestine (as to Britain, the US, etc.), he would not qualify as a latter-day anti-Zionist, and that in SWP terms his credentials as a "fierce fighter for human emancipation" would have to be severely reviewed, if not revoked!

It is you, let me suggest, and Cliff, your mentor, who part company with the fight for human emancipation. That, ultimately, is a fight for socialism. It will not be waged under the banner of Arab nationalism or of any other nationalism. In practice you are vicarious Arab nationalists.

For you, Israel is to blame even for Arab chauvinism. "Arab nationalism... and Arab socialism have been sidetracked and contained by the very existence of Israel". Israel, and the Jewish settlers before that, are to be blamed for not letting themselves be crushed? Comrade Foot, isn't this a disgraceful exhibition of British bourgeois Arabism disguised as socialism and licensed for socialist consumption by the strange figure of Cliff, the Palestinian-Jewish Arab chauvinist? Cliff gets away with training people like you in such politics because it is hard to pin the proper anti-Jewish tag on someone who in his persona is a benign person's idea of an old Israeli Jew. But that is what Cliff is: an Arab chauvinist.

Nonsense? Recall the interview with

Cliff about his history in the SWP magazine in which he criticises himself for believing in 1938-9 that Jews should have a right to flee from Hitler to Palestine (Socialist Review no.100).

Think about it. What is he saying here but that, if countries like Britain and the US could not be persuaded to let Jews in, then it would have been better that they were left at the mercy of Hitler than that they should go to Palestine? The interview is very sloppily done, but the implication is clear — and it fits the vicarious Arab chauvinist politics which Cliff purveys and has educated you and others in.

Cliff presents himself as having been in the Stalinist party in Palestine in the mid-1930s. If that is true, then he was brainwashed, like other young Jewish members of the CP, into Arab chauvinism. (Some were sent to plant bombs in Jewish quarters: if you want more details, see the article on "Trotsky and the Jews" in Workers' Liberty no.31). Even if he did falter in 1938-9, for 30 years now he has spread an updated version of such politics. Your politics on Israel/Palestine, Paul Foot, are rooted in Third Period and then Popular Front Stalinism in Palestine!

I repeat, contrary to the SWP's vicarious Arab chauvinism, the only socialist policy for the Jewish-Arab conflict is the fight for Jewish and Arab working-class unity on the basis of mutual recognition of national rights: two states for the two peoples!

For sloppiness, double standards, deliberate misconstruction, misrepresentation, and plain mendacity, it would be hard to find so large a concentration in so small a number of words as your column contains. Paul Foot, the line you push on Israel is an anti-socialist disgrace! But no, you are not anti-semitic. Some of your best friends are Jews. You, comrade Foot, are for the Jews what Belloc's journalist was for the truth.

"I really must refute your views, Believe me: I don't hate no Jews. For seeing what pure love will do, What need have I for hatred too?"

A secular-democratic state

By Jim Higgins

It is always a pleasure to see Sean Matgamna in full spate and my enjoyment of his piece, "Paul Foot, philo-semite" (WL 32), was abated only by the fear that the might do himself a serious mischief, carrying that immense weight of heavy irony.

What a spiffing wheeze, Sean must have thought, to belabour Footie with Hilaire Belloc, because one thing is sure, whatever Foot's prejudices may happen to be, Belloc was a brass-

bound and copper-bottomed anti-semitic, the author of the lines: "How odd of God, to choose the Jews."

Now I have not read, and I hope I do not have to do so, the Paul Foot articles that have so aroused Sean's rage, but I assume that it is anti-Zionist and that it sees the state of Israel as the single greatest barrier to socialism and peace in the region. If that is the case then Paul Foot has adopted, in this case if no other, the only tenable position for a Marxist.

There used to be a man, I do not know if he is still alive, called Pat Sloan. He was for many years the secretary of the British Soviet Friendship Society. If anyone suggested in the press that Joe Stalin had smelly feet, or Molotov was "old stone bottom", Pat would write in to say that he personally owned two pairs of Stalin's socks, and they glowed in the dark, suffusing his bedroom with a perfumed aroma like Chanel No.5. As to Molotov, his bum was in fact made of the finest Ferrara marble, which like aeroplanes, cars, radio, TV and the air conditioned pogo-stick had been invented in Russia. Sean on Israel puts me very much in mind of Pat Sloan in full apologia mode.

Let us take the question of the expulsion of a million Arabs from their homes. Sean says, "In fact Israel was proclaimed in May 1948, in territory allotted by the United Nations, without any Arabs being expelled. Hundreds of thousands of Arabs did flee — the great majority not expelled — after Arab states with the backing, naturally enough, of the Palestinian Arabs, invaded Israel." In this case Sean is guilty of exactly that of which he accuses Foot, distorting history. As the result of a plan conceived in January 1948, the Zionists moved in April of that year. The Irgun Zvei Leumi bombarded Jaffa for three days, Haganah attacked the Arab community in Jerusalem, and on the 9th April, the Irgun and the, fascist-trained, Stern Gang attacked the Arab village of Deir Yassin, killing in cold blood 254 men, women and children. It was the news of these massacres which set the Arab refugees on the move and it was their land expropriation that enabled the Zionists to increase their share of the partitioned state by 25% before the UN resolution was even passed. In 1948 the Arab armies, apart from a few Egyptian troops, all fought on Arab land.

In a sense, the detailing of who did what to whom is not very productive. What the Arabs did to Jews in 1929, and on several other occasions, or what Jews did to Arabs in 1948 and have done consistently ever since, suggests an equality between Arabs and Jews that does not exist. It suggests that they were acting as in a vacuum. It really was not like that.

From the very beginning of the Zionist movement, its leaders attempted to get the support of powerful backers. Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, tried unsuccessfully to approach the German Kaiser and the Sultan of Turkey. After his death, Weitzman had a first meeting with Arthur Balfour in 1906, that bore fruit in 1917 in the Balfour Declaration for a Jewish National Home in Palestine. Balfour was not only giving away a land already occupied by Palestinians, but also was effectively disposing of the spoils of war that had yet to be won.

Weitzman, however, had chosen wisely, and a Jewish population that had stood at 130,000 in 1914 under the British increased by half a million by 1939. Naturally enough, while this represented no great British sympathy for Jews — Balfour in fact was an anti-semitic — it did represent a useful counterbalance to the Arabs and made it easier to control Palestine which was important strategically for its proximity to the Suez Canal and as a vital link for the sea route and air routes to India and the East. Oil from Iraq flowed through the pipeline to Haifa, which was known as the Singapore of the Middle East.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s British imperialism put on a virtuoso performance of divide and rule. They blew up Arab houses, they demolished villages to punish "collective guilt", established concentration camps, which they justified on the basis of protecting Jews and Jewish property. On the other hand the British would turn off the immigration tap to punish Jews and reward the Arabs. Any sign of Arab-Jewish rapprochement would be met by a sold alliance of Arab feudalists, Zionists and the British administration.

At the beginning of the war in 1939, the Zionists recognised that Britain was in decline and that America was a much more powerful patron. America in its turn sought to replace Britain as the power in the Middle East; Zionism was a useful weapon in this project.

The role that Israel has played in the Middle East was nicely summed up by the editor of the Israeli daily newspaper, Ha'aretz, when he explained in 1951: "Israel has been given a role not unlike a watchdog. One need not fear that it will exercise an aggressive policy toward the Arab states if their will contradicts the interest of the USA and Britain. But should the west prefer for one reason or another to close its eyes one can rely on Israel to punish severely those of the neighbouring states whose lack of manners towards the west has exceeded the proper limits."

Israel has certainly lived up to its promise to punish those failing to show proper respect and in the process has taken on more and more

of its neighbours' territory. Of course, they have learned, like other invaders before them, that it is not always easy to keep the natives quiet, even if you pursue a humanitarian Rabin policy and just break the arms of stone throwing children.

Sean makes much of Tony Cliff's 70th birthday statement: "I used to argue that poor Jewish refugees should be allowed to come to Palestine... That was an unjustified compromise..." To which Sean responds: "Think about it. What is he saying here but that, if countries like Britain and the US could not be persuaded to let Jews in, then it would have been better that they were left to the mercy of Hitler than that they should go to Palestine?" There is, however, a slight problem here, because at the Bermuda Committee in 1943 Roosevelt suggested that all barriers be lifted for the immigration of Jews from Nazi persecution. To avoid offending British sensibilities Palestine was excluded from consideration. Zionist reaction was immediate and hostile, alleviation of Jewish misery was to be in Palestine or not at all. As Dr Silver told the 22nd World Zionist Congress: "Zionism is not an immigration or a refugee movement, but a movement to re-establish the Jewish state for a Jewish nation in the land of Israel. The classic textbook of Zionism is not how to fund a home for the refugees. The classic textbook of our movement is the Jewish state." You cannot get much clearer than that. Hal Draper, a Marxist with some prestige in Workers' Liberty circles, records: "Morris Ernst, the famous civil rights lawyer, has told the story about how the Zionist leaders exerted their influence to make sure that the US did not open up immigration (into the US) to these Jews — for the simple reason that they wanted to herd these Jews to Palestine."

Sean, quite correctly it seems to me, says the answer is the unity of Arab and Jewish workers. He then goes on to spoil it by suggesting they then set up separate states. What kind of states are these? Is there a mini-Palestine on a bit of the West Bank, plus the Gaza Strip, and a bigger, much more prosperous Jewish state, or has Sean got some complicated scheme for population exchange, like he used to have for Ireland? Surely, what is needed is a secular Arab-Jewish state based on socialism and democracy in all of Palestine.

Paul Foot, of course, can speak for himself, and why not, it is his favourite subject, but there is nothing manifestly anti-semitic in the points Sean attributes to him. Indeed what is strange about Sean's piece is the absence of any mention of the role of British and American imperialism in the Middle East. There is nothing Stalinist in a recognition of Israel's client status to

US imperialism. Nor is there anything anti-Semitic in recognising that a Zionist state smack in the middle of the region, is the greatest enemy of peace and socialism for all the Jews and Arabs of the Middle East.

Two states for two peoples

By Sean Matgamna

In the recently made Disney cartoon version of the “Hunchback of Notre Dame” — so I’ve read somewhere — Quasimodo — “Quassi” — is not seriously deformed, and he is not cripplingly deaf; the villain is no longer a priest; the chirpy, friendly characters sing to each other in American accents; and, for all I know, it ends with Esmerelda and Quasimodo — “Essie and Quassi” — going off together hand in hand into the sunset.

It explains quite a lot, though it does, I admit, surprise me, that Jim Higgins operates with a — darker-toned — Disneyfied version of history.

When I read Jim’s whimsy about smelly socks and marble backsides it did flit through my mind that he was, inappropriately, trying to be funny. I had to abandon that idea because he never pulls out of it. The supposedly serious stuff is all on the same level!

The feeble humour disappears, but his entire account is in the same mode, consisting of snippets of chewed up “history” concocted into a simple albeit malevolent tale.

Highly complex questions of national conflict are reduced to children’s tales of good guys and black-jewelled bad guys.

Let me tell you the grown-up story, Jim. You’d have done better to leave Stalinism and its spinners of malign fairy stories out of it, for your politics on Israel come directly from Stalin.

Stalin was, to take the pertinent example, at the end of his life running a raging campaign of paranoid anti-Jewish propaganda, complete with show trials, and seemingly getting ready for a wholesale rounding up of Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe — he died too soon — and possibly for large-scale massacres.

Following Kremlin propaganda, in support of Russia’s post-1949 foreign policy in the Middle East, and Stalin’s anti-Jewish — “anti-Zionist” — purges and trials in Eastern Europe, the Stalinists created in the early 50s and after a full-scale account of modern history, and of Jewish history, in which the “Zionists” were the great villains, possessed of a demonic power and malevolence. The Zionists in, for example, the show trial in Prague in 1952 were revealed as being almost

as tricky as the Trotskyists, who had been exposed and branded as allies of fascism in the Moscow Trials of 1936-8.

There, the Trotskyist left of Bolshevism was amalgamated with the Bukharinite right, old Bolsheviks were shown to be Fascists and the men who led and organised the October revolution were shown to have been secretly working for its defeat!

Things were never what they seemed: eternal vigilance was the price of Stalinist probity, and eternal paranoia was even better.

Like the Trotskyists, the Zionists too were not always what they seemed. The devil can change his form in a flash of light.

Zionists? Ha! In a world where Jews were surrounded by anti-semitism, they worked with anti-semites, “implicitly accepting” their racist premises: the Zionist Herzl visited Von Plehve, the anti-semite Tsarist minister, just as Trotsky had treacherously negotiated with the Germans at Brest-Litovsk. More: they worked closely with the Nazis: didn’t some of them freely choose to negotiate with the mass murderers who held guns to the heads of millions of Jewish captives?

Jewish nationalists whose avowed mission was to redeem the Jewish people from the Diaspora and to recreate a Jewish nation in Palestine — why, these were in reality the arch-colaborators with the Nazis who set out to kill every Jew in Europe, and did kill two out of three of them.

This was propagated and believed from the late 40s and early 50s by the world “communist” movement: the great irony is that it spread in the 70s to the Trotskyist current and is still a power there.

Against fairy-story history it is necessary to erect real history, and against Arab-chauvinist politics working-class politics, and I will do that. But first we need to establish what the point of all this is. Can it be that those of us who defend the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state so long as that is what the Israeli Jews want, and propose as a solution to the conflict what the PLO now proposes — two states; and full and equal citizenship for Palestinian Jews and Arabs in each other’s state — simply lack sympathy or empathy with the Palestinian Arabs?

Is our attitude the mirror image of the vicarious Arab chauvinism I would ascribe to Jim Higgins — and Tony Cliff and Paul Foot? Are we just native or adoptive Jewish nationalists? No we’re not!

Of course we sympathise with the losers so far in the Arab-Jewish conflict, the Palestinian Arabs and their descendants. Of course we supported their Intifada against intolerable conditions and Israeli occupation of the ter-

ritories where they are the majority. Of course we support the PLO aspiration to have an independent Palestinian state — where the Palestinian Arabs are a majority.

They have our sympathy and in general our support. But then what? Then we adopt their viewpoint in its entirety? We do what kitsch Trotskyists and Jim Higgins, who has spent a lot of his life sneering at “Trots”, do and propagate the old Stalinist paranoid myths about modern Middle Eastern history? We express and elaborate and rationalise the Arab bourgeois and petty bourgeois account of their own history?

No, we don’t, no we can’t — if we aspire to be communists and not one or another sort of vicarious nationalist.

Let us look briefly at history, matching facts against fairy stories, and real history against Jim Higgins’ Disneyisation of the story.

How did it happen that in the middle of the 20th century a Jewish state reappeared after 2,000 years? From where did the ideologists of ‘Zionism’ suddenly derive such power over the minds of so many Jews, people of many classes scattered across many lands, as to induce hundreds of thousands of them to be pioneer settlers and workers in Palestine?

Zionism gripped Jewish minds as an urgent project of Jewish resettlement because of the alarming growth of anti-semitism in the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. There are recorded statements of astonishing accuracy predicting large-scale massacres of the Jews — Weizmann in 1919, for example. Judo-phobia would continued to grow until it produced the murderous crescendo of the Holocaust.

After 1881, there was the start of systematic pogroms in the Russian empire, including Poland, whence many of those who went to Palestine came. In France, where the great revolution had long ago raised the Jews to equal citizenship, anti-semitism became a powerful rallying cry for the right (and not only for the right; there was ‘left’ anti-semitism too: “the socialism of idiots”).

Everywhere there were stirrings of anti-semitism. Jews became the victims of the international plague of nationalism and chauvinism, and the widespread post-Darwin pseudo scientific racist nationalism.

Zionism, initially a minority among Jews, gained force and strength from these events until, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, the big majority of Jews were Zionists.

The uneasy sense of mortal danger and real persecution gave much of its energy to Zionism.

The gathering poison gas of Judo-phobia drove the Zionist enthusiasts of the first and second waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine, from Tsarist

Russia and Poland. Long before Hitler came to power, in the mid 20s, the third great wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine came from Poland, a direct result of anti-Jewish measures taken by the regime there. Already, the alternative escape routes were closing. The USA had ended its open doors policy for emigration in 1924. The next great wave in the 30s was a direct response to Hitler and to continuing Polish anti-semitism. The point here is that already, before the Holocaust, mass Zionism as an idea, and migration to Palestine as a refuge, as the best option in a world closing in on the Jews, were inextricably bound together and impossible to prise apart.

The same was true only much more so after the Holocaust. Tens of thousands of Jewish survivors of the death camps languished for years in Displaced Person's Camps, some of them made-over former concentration camps.

Anti-semitic feeling did not hide its head for shame then, as you might think it would.

There was widespread prejudice: in the USA at about that time the cinema newsreels were showing pictures of the Nazi death camps there was a spate of attacks on Jews and even on Jewish children in American city streets, in Minneapolis to take an example reported in the US Trotskyist press of that time.

Another example from the same source: asked in 1945 by the US Department of Education in a questionnaire what they thought of educational provision and training for their profession, the official association of US dentists made the formal and official reply: everything is fine except that there are too many Jews in the dental colleges.

Deported Jews returning to Poland met with pogroms and murder. In an opinion poll taken amongst Jewish Displaced Persons in camps in Europe the big majority gave Palestine as their first choice of refuge: they wanted to be with their own; they couldn't trust strangers after their experience.

By that time there were half a million Jews in Palestine, about one in three of the population. Why from a socialist as distinct from an Arab chauvinist point of view did they not have national rights?

The Jewish national minority in Palestine was first offered partition by Britain in 1937 and then had it taken away: on the eve of the war Britain announced that Jewish immigration would be cut to a few thousand a year and after five years stopped. Effectively, Britain closed the ports of Palestine to Jews fleeing Nazi Europe.

Jewish "boat-people" crossed the sea in unseaworthy craft that sometimes sank; if they got to Palestine they were refused the right to land, or interned. In 1942, one unseaworthy

boat, the Struma, driven out from a Turkish port and refused the right to land in Palestine, sank, killing 700 people, including children.

Leave the demonology aside here, for a moment Jim and what do you get? Jews threatened with annihilation — six million of whom would die — for whom it was a "world without a visa."

For example, on the eve of World War Two a shipload of Jewish refugees — the St. Louis — sailed around the coasts of the Americas and, refused the right to unload its human cargo anywhere, had to go back to Europe. Almost all these people perished.

The idea that "the Zionists", who indeed were, avowedly, in the business of getting Jews to Palestine, and whose leaders made statements to that effect — Jim Higgins quotes one — shaped and controlled this situation is ridiculous.

The idea that because Zionists wanted Jews in Palestine, therefore they would prefer them dead than have them elsewhere is grotesque.*

Jim Higgins' malignant fairy tale level of anti-Zionist demonology is there in his tale about the 1943 Bermuda Conference. The good guy Roosevelt wanted to open the doors to Jewish refugees but was dissuaded by "the Zionists." No Jim, two things were specifically excluded from the agenda at Bermuda: Palestine at Britain's behest, and US immigration policy, at the insistence of the USA. That was just "the Zionists"?

In relation to what other groups of people would the utterly monstrous charges that are so casually bandied about, be even given a hearing? As I understand it, in both Britain and the USA at that time, the authorities kept quiet about the systematic killing of Jews for fear that to make much of it publicly would provide a backlash and the charge that this was "a Jewish war." The "Zionists" who, according to Higgins, could tell Roosevelt in 1943 what his policy was to be couldn't — and they tried — get the allies to bomb the railway lines to Auschwitz to stop the death trains bringing victims to the ovens.

There was, over the ages, continued Jewish focus on Jerusalem — and always a small Jewish element in Palestine. The majority of the population of Jerusalem was Jewish at the turn of the century. The Jewish population built up slowly.

Why exactly was it ruled out that large numbers of Jews should come in here, even if that meant that they would eventually be a majority?

It is not just Zionist myth that desert and swamp and uncultivated land made up the greater part of the areas settled by Jews under the League of Nations Mandate.

What did the Communist Interna-

tional say about Jewish migration to Palestine?

When it was a communist movement, it did not oppose Jewish immigration into Palestine, though they opposed the Zionist project and called on Jewish and Arab workers and farmers to unite. They were not concerned that if enough Jews went to Palestine they would be the majority, or that the steady influx of Jews was creating a national minority, with great implications for the future. These were seen as living processes, self-regulating. The shift to something like Jim Higgins' politics on the question came in the Communist International after 1929.

In the 30s Trotskyists did not share the Stalinist's blinkered Arabism. The dominant line of the Trotskyists was not that Jews should not for anti-imperialist principle or out of deference to Muslim-Arab chauvinism flee to Palestine if they could get in but that Palestine could not possibly take enough of them for Zionism to be any solution to the threat they faced.

In fact, the Arab-Jewish conflict and its vicissitudes, is very complex. In the 20s there was a sizeable Arab migration into Palestine from surrounding territories as a result of the increased economic life attendant on the Zionist colonisation. Conflict erupted for cultural and religious reasons as well as for reasons of Arab resentment that Britain and the League of Nations had designated Palestine as a Jewish national home. In 1929 there were major elements in the pogroms of the backward Muslim countryside being raised against the urban heretical Jews. The aristocratic Muslim clans demagogically attacked the newcomers. These are recognisable processes and patterns in many countries.

I am not sure this complex of animosity on the part of Muslim society, led by landlords and priests who were the oppressors of the Arab peasantry, is something sacred, to which all else has to be subordinated; I'm not sure why the growing Jewish national minority in Palestine, who were in the grip of their own nationalist egotism, should have bowed down to Arab or Muslim national, cultural and religious egotism. Or from what point of view socialists should ask them to — or damn them to the third and fourth generation for refusing to.

For the Palestinian Arabs, I can understand such an attitude. For socialists? These things are generations back. Whatever the past rights and wrongs, the Israelis are now mainly people whose parents, and often their grand or great grandparents, were born there; and conversely the overwhelming majority of Palestinian "refugees" were not born in the territory that is now Israel.

Whatever it was in the past, it is a

conflict now of right against right: consistent democrats and socialists seek the best “compromise” solution, rather than a solution that crushes one side. From what point of view other than a narrowly Jewish or Arab one, can either side claim all the right? So, we might if we were gods choose — given a real choice, I would — a secular common Jewish-Arab state with Arab and Jew sharing equal citizenship? Unfortunately, it has no purchase on reality, nor did it in the 1940s when the idea of a bi-national state had some support as the alternative to partition. It presupposes mass willingness to dissolve existing entities and national identities.

That does not exist on either side. The call for it functions only to demonise Israel and to legitimise the objective of subduing and crushing it. The good and desirable solution changes imperceptibly into a sanction for conquest, subjugation and as much violence to the Jews as necessary.

From an Arab nationalist point of view I can see the sense: but why should international socialists take responsibility for advocating or supporting the inverting of the present Jewish-Arab position? There can be no socialist or democratic reason.

But imperialism... A J Balfour somewhere talked of the Jewish colonists as creating a “little loyal Jewish Ulster” that would be England’s outpost. The actual course of events however is far more complex. Pretty quickly Britain concluded that the little loyal Jewish Ulster was more trouble than it was worth. By 1930 after the riots and pogroms of 1929 Sydney Webb with the initial backing of Prime Minister J R MacDonald, tried to kill off the Jewish National Home and retreated under fire.

After the Arab uprising of 36-38 Britain first came out for Partition (1937) and then retreated under Arab pressure until in 1939 it turned sharply against the Jews, closing the doors to Jewish immigration. On the eve of the Holocaust, Britain’s responsibility for the Jews, as Arabs saw it, had opened the possibility of an Arab-Nazi alliance in which Germany would use the Arabs against Britain as Britain had used them against the Turks in the First World War.

Britain maintained that hostile stance until it scuttled in 1947/8. The rigour and fanaticism with which Britain policed Palestine against Jewish refugees from 1939 to 1948 is a very ugly story.

Jim Higgins is right that fighting, including the indefensible massacre of Deir Yassin, preceded the Declaration of Israel; it is of no consequence. Britain had effectively abdicated the state power after the United Nations declared for partition in November 1947 and there was continuous fight-

ing thereafter, with Jews and Arabs jockeying for position. Jewish Jerusalem suffered a long siege and the Jewish quarter of the old city fell to the Arabs. Deir Yassin is said to have been a link in the chain around Jerusalem, though nothing can excuse what happened there [it was immediately condemned by the mainstream Jewish forces].

The very next day nearly 60 Jewish medical personnel were ambushed and massacred...

In other words it was a horrible, communal war, involving outside Arab volunteers and then after 14th May 1948 invasion and attempted invasion by the armies of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and a task force of Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Inevitably, Israel has relied on its US alliance: the Arabs too have made such alliances — with Russia and the USA.

The idea that American imperialism depends on Israel for “control of the Arabs” when it has friendly links with Egypt and Jordan and Saudi-Arabia is so far from any reasonable picture of Middle-Eastern reality as to be risible. Conor Cruise O’Brien in his valuable book, *The Siege*, makes a convincing case that the USA’s relationship to Israel a) owes more to the power of the Zionist lobby in the USA than to anything else and b) has actually hindered the USA in pursuing its real interests in the area. Amongst other things he shows that there have been many ups and downs in the relationship. Israel has pursued its own interests, playing states off against each other.

I will join Jim Higgins in morally condemning the whole system of world and regional power politics: I will take it as evidence of bias and prejudice when he condemns only, or especially, the Israelis.

But then he is awash with prejudice. The conflict from November 1947, when Britain began the process of withdrawal, in which perhaps three-quarters of a million Arabs fled or were driven out can only be blamed on the Jews alone if you deny them the right to defend themselves against armed attack — in May 1948 by five armies.

Jim Higgins quotes Hal Draper.** The Trotskyists in 1948 did not support the Arabs! None of them, as far as I know, did. That sort of stuff came later.

Where in fact there was a war Jim has “Zionists” as the only aggressors: the “Zionists”, though they were under attack from November 1947 and earlier, “moved” in April 1948 — when Jewish Jerusalem was already besieged...

Where Jewish Jerusalem was besieged and fell, Jim sees only tales of Haganah attacking the Arab community in Jerusalem... Israel alone is the enemy of peace and socialism in the Middle East!

This is not history, not even on the level of honest narrative! Tell me Jim: should the Jews in 1948 have surrendered? Let themselves be massacred? Driven out? Where, in a world where Jewish Displaced Persons were still languishing in European camps, should they have gone? That wasn’t the Arabs’ problem? No, but it was the Jews’ problem: they resolved it by fighting and winning...

History is a messy business. Isaac Deutscher’s image for Jewish-Arab relations of the Jews as a man jumping out of the window of a burning building and accidentally injuring an innocent civilian down below, captures it, I think.

A Palestinian Arab state would be economically much weaker than the Jewish state? States have unequal wealth. He uses that as both an argument against the giant step forward for the Palestinians of having their own state and against the right of the Jewish nation not to be forced to dissolve itself!

It seems to me that in response to the tragic fate of the Palestinian Arabs, Jim Higgins and all his Arab nationalist co-thinkers in effect propose that we abandon a class interpretation of history in favour of an account in terms of good and bad peoples and the malignity of demonic forces like “Zionism”.

They abandon any attempt at an objective overall Marxist assessment of the history of the Arab-Jewish conflict, including factual accounts of what really happens and why. They settle uncritically into repeating the hurt account of the losers in a national conflict in which, had their side won in the 30s and 40s, they would have done to the other side everything that was done to them or worse. The underlying idea is that they would have had a right to...

Because Higgins and his co-thinkers are indignant at Israeli treatment of those they defeated, we demonise the Jews — “Zionists” — backwards in time for generations and forwards in time to the hoped-for day when the forces of progress, enlightenment, justice and righteousness — which just happen to include Saddam Hussein and the King of Saudi Arabia! — will triumph and conquer Israel.

They stigmatise Israel, surrounded by enemies, for its collaboration with imperialism, and ignore the connections of the Arab states with imperialism — right back to British-Arab collaboration during World War 2 to stop the Jewish national minority opening the gates of Palestine to Jews who otherwise faced annihilation.

They become vicarious Arab-nationalists who find unforgivable even after half a century the uneasy and conflict ridden Jewish-British collaboration in the late 30s and early 40s, and pardon with a benign shrug of complacent shoulders the collaboration of Pales-

tinian Arabs and, in the first place their leader, Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, with the Nazis for the specific purposes of a common programme of wiping out the Jews, who tried to organise a Muslim brigade to fight for Hitler and whose supporters organised a sizeable anti-Jewish pogrom in Baghdad in 1941 during the pro-Nazi Iraq coup of Rashid Ali.

Your viewpoint, Jim, is shaped and determined mechanically and comprehensively by the taking of sides with the defeated side — the “oppressed.”

But suppose the other side had won: suppose, to tell the shortest version of the story, that the Nazis, and their despised Arab clients had won — even temporarily, as they might have in the Middle East in 1941-2 — and that the half million Palestinian Jews had gone the way of the six million in Europe? Why then our sympathy would now be on the other side — with “the poor, poor Jews.”

The Palestinian Jews are on the other side of your good people/bad people divide because they did not let themselves be crushed, because, in a limited sphere, they prevailed.

Your standpoint has no point of contact with Marxism or even with the old-fashioned belief in the equality of peoples. For Marxists there are no bad peoples: conflicts between competing peoples contain more or less of a tragic element of right as against right. We look to working-class unity and reconciliation.

Socialists support the Palestinian Arab demand for liberation and justice — that is, for self-determination in an independent state on the territory where they now constitute a majority — but we do not demonise one people, or erect Zionism into a demon-ex-machina force above history: we see it in history; that is, we look at the real history, recognising that this is the only basis on which to prepare the force — the minds of the working class, Arab and Jewish — for the fundamental solution to the conflict: consistent democracy and socialism.

* Jim Higgins’ equation of the nationalist machinations of bourgeois Zionists during the war with the cold statement of Tony Cliff decades after the Holocaust that Jews should have been barred from Palestine before the war is very revealing.

** The quote from Hal Draper is misleading. Draper was a bitter critic of Israel; in the 50s he published very scathing and, from anything other than a Jewish chauvinist point of view, unanswerable accounts of the systematic expropriation of Arab land within Israel. Draper continued to advocate the “de-Zionisation” of Israel. But he was not in favour of the subjugation and destruction of Israel. More to the point, the Workers’ Party in the 40s

was outspokenly in favour of the right of Jews to go to Palestine. They wrote it into the programme they printed each week in Labor Action! It was a bone of contention between themselves and the Cannon organisation. The truth is that Jim Higgins’ politics and Tony Cliff’s politics on this question come out of the degenerating “Fourth International” of Pablo and Cannon, which broke in the 40s with the old Communist International and Leon Trotsky’s position on this question of Jewish migration. Tony Cliff, the honorary Arab nationalist, was one of the theorists of this break and descent into vicarious Arab revolution.

I am an anti-Zionist because I am an anti-racist!

By Jim Higgins

Arguing with Sean Matgamna is rather like wrestling with a warm jelly and, despite my long-term experience with the gelatinous character of his political method, I was foolhardy enough to agree to his request to enter the debate flowing from his article: Paul Foot: Philo-Semite (if I am not mistaken this means a lover of Jews).

This I did, under the proposed headline: Sean Matgamna: Philo-Pede which means lover of feet. The article actually appeared with another, quite inappropriate headline: A Secular Democratic State says Jim Higgins.

This is inappropriate for two reasons. 1. Nowhere in my article do I call for a secular-democratic state. 2. I do not believe in a secular-democratic state. The reason for the headline is presumably to justify such absurdities as Sean’s accusation that I am, along with Foot and Cliff, a sufferer from “vicarious Arab chauvinism.”

It would seem that if the PLO has the demand inscribed on its banner then, according to Sean’s brand of chop-logic, anti-Zionists must adhere to it as well. I do not know if Tony Cliff or Paul Foot subscribe to the secular-democratic formulation. If Cliff does I would lay a fair shade of odds that Foot does too, but what either of them think is a matter of supreme indifference to me. I am, though, virtually certain that Cliff and Foot are not anti-semitic and I know for sure that I am not and I take strong exception to Sean suggesting that this is the case. One of the reasons I have agreed, after further urgent representations from Sean Matgamna, to write this piece is to take the opportunity to protest at his inability to debate without characterising his opponents as racists. I am an anti-racist and that is

the primary reason why I am also anti-Zionist.

I was not seeking in my piece in Workers’ Liberty to write a history of Arab-Jewish relations in the Middle East, merely responding to various dubious statements by Sean. He wrote in Workers’ Liberty 32: “In fact Israel was proclaimed in May 1948, in territory allotted by the UN, without any Arabs being expelled. Hundreds of thousands of Arabs did flee — the great majority not expelled — after Arab states, with the backing naturally enough of the Palestinian Arabs, invaded Israel.”

In my reply I pointed out that in April 1948, according to a strategy worked out in January of that year, the Irgun bombarded Jaffa for three days, Haganah attacked the Arabs in Jerusalem, and the Irgun and the Stern Gang carried out the massacre at Deir Yessin. It was these three events that set in motion, as was the intention, the Palestinian refugees. Sean does not dispute the facts that make nonsense of his original assertion, his response to his mildly expressed correction is pure bluster: “Jim offers us only tales of Haganah attacking the Arab community in Palestine... Tell me Jim,” he says, “should the Jews in 1948 have surrendered?” How about that for a piece of bare-faced impudence. In April Israeli forces attack and Sean thinks their only alternative was to surrender. How about the alternative of not attacking the Arab community in Jerusalem? How about not shelling Jaffa? What say you to not killing 250 men, women and children in Deir Yessin?

Why, readers of Workers’ Liberty might as, do people go on about Deir Yessin? After all, they might say, 250 dead Arabs is terrible enough, but it is a mere drop in the ocean compared to the millions of Jews lost in the Holocaust? The reason why Deir Yessin is so important and why the deaths should not be forgotten, or brushed aside as a matter of little consequence is that these people died because they were Arabs. They had done nothing to offend the Zionists. Nothing at all. The villagers had refused to allow Arab irregulars to fortify the place. They had a non-aggression agreement with Jewish settlers in the area. An agreement they faithfully carried out.

It was precisely because of this, because they were Arabs living at peace with their Jewish neighbours, that they were killed and their houses reduced to rubble. It is worth repeating, they died because they were Arabs. The few pathetic survivors of Deir Yessin were paraded in triumph through Jerusalem, what any survivors of Hitler’s death camps thought about this one can only speculate. (For those interested in a fuller discussion of the Deir Yessin massacre there is a wealth

of documentation, but the one that may be most authoritative for WL adherents is by Hal Draper in Israel's Arab Minority: The Beginning of a Tragedy, New International Vol XXII No.2 1956 from which this account is taken.)

It is absurd, but apparently necessary, to have to tell Sean that racism is indivisible. Just one dead child because he or she is an Arab, or a Jew, or Irish or a Red Indian is exactly one more than any self-respecting socialist can countenance and is quite enough to condemn the perpetrators. If Sean thinks that Deutscher's analogy, of the man jumping out of a burning building and landing on some innocent pedestrian, is appropriate to Deir Yassin, or any of the actions of April 1947, then I can only suggest that he seeks urgent advice about the moral vacuum in his consciousness. The analogy would be better if it involved a man burning down another man's house and when the owner rushed out to avoid the flames, directing him to a tent on the other side of the Jordan.

I have neither the time nor the inclination to follow Sean through every irrelevancy with which he chooses to pad out his reply. Nevertheless, I would like to take up a couple of his additional attempts to rewrite history included in his two nations piece. The Comintern he suggests, in its brave days, was not opposed to Jewish immigration into Palestine. Wrong. At the second congress of the Comintern, The Theses on the National and Colonial Question, drafted and introduced by Lenin, says in part: "... Zionism as a whole, which, under the pretence of creating a Jewish state in Palestine in fact surrenders the Arab working people of Palestine, where the Jewish workers form only a small minority, to exploitation by England." Or the ECCI statement of July 1922 on the question of Poale Zion: "... the attempt to divert the Jewish working masses from the class struggle by propaganda in favour of large scale settlement in Palestine is not only nationalist and petty bourgeois but counter-revolutionary..." (Degras Vol 1 p144 and p366). In late 1923 the Palestine Communist Party was formed, and admitted as a section of the CI, on a programme of opposition to the "Anglo-Zionist occupation." Where Sean gets the idea that the CI was not opposed to Jewish settlement in Palestine is a mystery.

Next we have Sean co-opting Trotsky as one of those not opposed to Jewish immigration to Palestine. Wrong again, Sean. All his life Trotsky was firmly opposed to Zionism and on occasion wrote and spoke against it with some vigour. Around the beginning of 1937 he reformulated his ideas after seeing the extent of anti-semitism in Germany and Russia. He came to the view that the Jews, even under so-

cialism, would require a "territorial solution." According to Deutscher: "He did not believe, however, that this would be in Palestine, that Zionism would be able to solve the problem, or that it could be solved under capitalism. The longer decaying bourgeois society survives, he argued, the more vicious and barbarous will anti-semitism grow all over the world." (Deutscher The Prophet Outcast, footnote p.369).

Sean does not even acknowledge the client status that Zionism gladly performed for first British and then American imperialism, a fairly serious omission for a socialist you might think. He ignores the fact that Israel's existence has had a profoundly reactionary effect on the region and that is one of the reasons that the major powers conspired in its founding. The Arab revolution has been put back and the Arab masses have suffered every kind of repressive regime, from the pre-feudal primitives of the House of Saud to the murderous tyranny of Saddam Hussein, taking in on the way the clownish Arafat whose tiny statelet requires several police forces and where even the fire brigade maintains its own jail. All this, one assumes, should be of concern to socialists, even those of the bureaucratic collectivist persuasion. This legacy of 1948 and the previous 50 years of Zionist endeavour have destabilised the region in which Israel has pursued an aggressive and expansive nationalism and where Israelis live in neurotic insecurity that is in no way strengthened by possession of nuclear weaponry.

In July 1940 Trotsky wrote that: "... the salvation of the Jewish people is bound up inseparably with the overthrow of the capitalist system." It is just as true today as it was 56 years ago.

Anti-racism is indivisible

By Sean Matgamna

Let us start where this debate started, with Cliff and the SWP. There was a sea-change on the Israel-Palestine question in the post-Trotsky Trotskyist movement in the middle and late 1940s.

Tony Cliff, who left Palestine in September 1946, played a central role as an ideologist of this change. His pamphlet Middle East At The Crossroads (1946) was published in at least three languages; he was boosted in the SWP-USA's internationally-circulated Militant, after the Cannonite fashion, as one of the Great Marxists whose "method" allowed him to understand things obscure to everyone else, etc. etc. In the SWP-USA internal bulletin

Cliff functioned as a hatchet-man against an opposition (Goldman-Morrow) sharing the Shachtmanite Workers' Party's support for free Jewish immigration into Palestine, which was a big issue between the WP and the SWP-USA.

Cliff's 1946 pamphlet does not deal at all adequately with the political questions in the Middle East, having more to say about the price of oil than about the rights of national minorities. Where concrete politics should have been, there was a vacuum; and, to fill that vacuum, the "official" Trotskyists took the Arab nationalist line against the Jewish minority in Palestine. In the US Militant, for example, it was said candidly that any line other than opposition to Jewish immigration and to a Jewish state would isolate the Trotskyists from the "Arab Revolution". This catch-penny opportunist adaptation to Arab chauvinism foreshadowed later attitudes.

Between 1948 and 1973, however, there was in the Trotskyist press a tacit acceptance of Israel's right to exist. In 1967, after the Six Day War, Tony Cliff wrote a pamphlet which is closer in its political conclusions and implied conclusions to what Workers' Liberty says than to what the SWP and Jim Higgins say now. The decisive shift came after 1967, and was brought to the present level of nonsense after the Yom Kippur war of 1973. The "honour" of having established the post-1973 IS/SWP line belongs, I think, to none other than Jim Higgins (in an article in IS Journal).

Obviously, the "objective" explanation for the shift is the fact that pre-partition Palestine had once again been united, but under Jewish rule — brutal, predatory colonial rule in the Arab-majority areas. It had, however, been prepared for by decades of ambivalence and confusion. There was a general drift on the left, an often unexamined acceptance of the new Palestine Liberation Organisation policy of a secular democratic state as the solution.

We (the forerunners of Workers' Liberty) went along with the drift, for the same reason, I guess, as everybody else — hostility to Israel's brutal colonialism and wishful thinking about what a secular democratic state meant. In my own case, that was the culpable delusion that it could mean a state in which Jew and Arab could be equal citizens.

Cliff's personal role in this history has been a big one, and not only in Britain. Now I don't share Jim Higgins's feelings of being cheated and betrayed by Cliff, since I was never other than politically antagonistic to him. The old factionalism in IS was by its nature often nasty, but there was not on Cliff's part much gratuitous nastiness. God knows what 25 years of being Tsar and Caliph of the SWP has

done to his brain by now, but I found him then a more than halfway decent human being.

Yet Cliff has been a carrier of a poison to the left he influences. He gets away with it, to a large extent, because of his origins in Palestine. In practice he is an unteachable Arab chauvinist. That is paradoxical only if you don't know the history of the Communist Party of Palestine, in which Cliff claims to have received his political education. Take Cliff at his word that he was in the CPP in the mid 1930s, and you have a self-portrait of someone who, a Jew, was part of an organisation in which young Jews were heavily brainwashed into extremes of hostility to the Jewish community.

Cliff first appears in the English-language Trotskyist press in 1938-9, in discussion pieces in the American magazine *New Internationalist*. It is serious work by a young man trying to think things through. The political conclusions are vague and unclear, yet he is for the right of Jews to go to Palestine as a refuge from persecution.

He next appears in the English-language press in 1944, in the *British Workers' International News* as a fierce, almost modern-day, "anti-Zionist". (It is an unsigned article, but the scissors-and-paste technique, incorporating bits of his 1930s articles, strongly suggests Cliff). In this article, aimed to influence British labour movement opinion, much is made of a Jewish demonstration against Arab produce being on sale in what they wanted to be a Jewish-only area. This, in a world where the Holocaust was still going on, and where Jewish refugees were being killed and interned, as a result of British state policy, when they tried to get into Palestine! Cliff would regale audiences in the late 1960s with the same story. The sense of proportion and perspective are, as always, crazy. The publication of that article then in the Trotskyist press was, in my opinion, evidence of the movement's radical disorientation.

Later, with the 1946 pamphlet, Cliff became one of international Trotskyism's two "authorities" on the Palestine question (or, with Ernest Mandel, three). The other was Abram Leon, who died at the hands of the Nazis in 1944, and whose unfinished historical writings, shaped and edited by Ernest Mandel, were published posthumously, eventually in book form (*The Jewish Question*). Neither the dead Leon nor the living Cliff had much to say about the politics of national conflict in Palestine.

Leon had an account of Jewish history which quickly became an article of factional faith for people who had no independent means of judging it (though in my view Maxime Rodinson makes a convincing case against Leon's thesis). Cliff offered mainly an

economic analysis, slotted into Arabist anti-imperialism.

Whatever intrinsic merits they may have had, for the purposes of politics the writings of both Cliff and (though the dead man, unlike Cliff, can hardly be blamed for it) Leon were a species of pseudo-knowledge, offering no political answers. The political conclusions were filled in by chameleon adaptation to Arab nationalism, which was seen as part of the "colonial revolution" segment of the imminent world revolution. There was a clear parallel between the method of the disoriented Trotskyists and that of the Third Period Stalinism after 1929. Post-Trotsky Trotskyism, in its degeneracy, had found a use for the personal history and prejudices of Tony Cliff!

Cliff separated from Mandel and the "official" Trotskyists in 1950. After a silence of two decades on the Israel/Palestine question, he resumed in 1967 and after as if he were still in the 1930s, fighting old factional battles with Zionists in Palestine. At the end of the 1960s, he revived what had been mid-1930s CPP policy on Palestine. Others did the same, but Cliff had a special authority. Cliff could get away with bias, double standards, Arab chauvinism, and outright hatred of the Israelis, where others could not.

It is to Cliff's credit that as a youth he sided with the most downtrodden people around him, the Palestinian Arabs. It was not enough, however, and his present attitude probably has twisted roots. Cliff is obviously guilt-stricken about the terrible fate of the Palestinian Arabs, but that does not explain his savage hostility to the Palestinian/Israeli Jews. Isn't there in his attitude also guilt about surviving the Holocaust, safe, as it turned out, in Palestine? His feelings about the Jewish national minority in Palestine were, after all, about the pre-1946 Palestinian-Jewish national minority — those who, like himself, survived; and he experienced a violent shift between 1939 and 1944. Cliff's vicarious Arab chauvinist hatred for Israel may well be a somewhat unusual form of self-hatred. Long-range "assassin psychoanalysis" is of course of limited use, though Cliff's role demands and licences it and strips away his right to privacy on this issue.

II

It is a pity that Jim Higgins's 'humour' has gone and is replaced by choler, rodomontade, unleavened abuse, some of it purely personal, and by evident social embarrassment before his SWP friends and former comrades. Protesting that Paul Foot, Tony Cliff, and the SWP are "a matter of supreme indifference" to him, he is nevertheless at pains to explain publicly how he came to get involved in a discussion with vile people like our-

selves. He seems to offer an over-the-shoulder apology for it.

It did take a long argumentative letter from me to persuade him to reply to my reply. I hoped for serious argument. In vain. He declines to take up the reasoned case I made over three pages of the last *Workers' Liberty*, and focuses instead on repeating points made or conceded [1], and on red herrings. He has neither time nor space to deal with the central thing I said, and argued in some detail — that the appearance of a Jewish state in the middle of the 20th century can be understood only in terms of a complex history and not in terms of a demonised devil-ex-machina "Zionism." I asked the not entirely rhetorical question why the Jewish minority, a third of the population of Palestine in the 1940s, did not have national rights there. He declines to reply. Did they or didn't they? If not, why not? If they did, then they had a right to defend themselves in 1948, and the entire elaborate scheme in which "Zionism" is the cause of all evil dissolves into a series of concrete questions, on each of which Israeli policy can be evaluated and if necessary denounced — as we denounce Israel's behaviour in the occupied territories now, for example.

Jim Higgins does have time and space, however, to protest that I killed the very obscure and never very strong joke he put as a headline on his piece. (It was in Latin! Tridentine Trotskyism?)

With more justification, he is angry about the headline we put on his piece. He says we misrepresented his position. I offer him my apologies for it. But I can not see that the mistaken headline strengthened the case for my allegation that Jim Higgins (and Cliff and Paul Foot) are Arab chauvinists.

III

Jim Higgins wrote — and, of course, we printed — "What is needed is a secular Arab-Jewish state based on socialism and democracy in all of Palestine".

I take it that he means by socialism what I mean: democratic working-class power. If so, then there are two problems.

Everywhere the Arab working class is in the grip of Islamic chauvinism, or at best secular populism. It has been and is crushed, politically, under the weight of dictatorial states. It is potentially very powerful, but it has as yet scarcely begun to realise itself politically, or to emerge as a "class for itself". It will, but we cannot gauge how soon.

Therefore, as any sort of immediate solution, socialism in the Middle East — if you mean working-class socialism — is a non-starter. Suppose, however, that there were a powerfully organised and more or less international-socialist

working-class mass movement in the Middle East now, with a real possibility of taking power in the short or medium term. What would be its programme for the smaller non-Arab nationalities in the Middle East — Jews, Kurds, Armenians? What programme would we advocate? One of two things: either this mainly-Arab socialist working-class mass movement would be suicidally poisoned by Arab (and probably Muslim) chauvinism and obscurantism, or it would have a Leninist policy on the non-Arab peoples.

“Socialism” would resolve the issues in Israel/Palestine only if the mainly-Arab socialist mass movement had such a Leninist, that is a consistently democratic, working-class programme. The Bolsheviks in 1917 did not only say to the oppressed nationalities in the old Tsarist empire: “socialism is the answer”. They had a democratic — Leninist — programme on the national question. They advocated the right of self-determination for all peoples where they were the compact majority; preached the indifference of consistent democrats and socialists to existing state borders; repudiated all national revanchism. On that basis, they advocated the unity of the working class, and consistent socialist policies, across all national and communal divisions.

Jim Higgins will agree with that in general — but he will exclude the Israeli Jewish nation from the application of the general principles. For them, the film of 20th century history will be rolled back. To the Israeli Jewish workers, though to the workers of no other nation, international socialism will be presented as an ultimatum. Dissolve your national state — instantly! Now! — or be forced to. Surrender your right to be a compact nation, or be forced to.

The secular democratic state meant — whatever various left-wingers understood it to mean, and wanted it to mean — an Arab Palestine with religious (not national) rights for such Jews as survived the process of Arab conquest necessary to get their state dismantled. If the solution Jim Higgins favours — “a secular Arab-Jewish state based on socialism and democracy in all of Palestine” — is really democratic in the sense that Lenin’s, Trotsky’s, and the Communist International’s national programme was democratic, then, even after the working class in the whole region has taken power, it will include the right of the Israeli Jewish nation to keep its own state, and the right of the Kurds, Armenians, and others to set up their own national states. If it does not do that, then it will be neither democratic nor socialist.

The “smash Israel” policy can not be squared with socialist or democratic politics by reference to the Palestinian

Arab refugees. For here, too, the “solution” favoured by many socialists is unique to Israel. Nobody on the left argues that the Poles, in areas which are now Poland, should make way for the ten million Germans driven out of those areas in 1945, or for their many millions of descendants — or that we should insist on a joint Polish-German state to allow for it. Nobody on the left argues for reclaiming the Sudetenland for the three million Germans driven out of what was then Czechoslovakia in 1945, or their many millions of children. Nobody on the left has any time for the German revanchists who talk of such things. Israel is special.

Socialism in its early stages will radically soften national antagonisms, but it will not dissolve nations. The socialists who would inscribe on their banners or their VDUs the demand that nations should immediately dissolve — in this case, that one nation amidst competing nations should dissolve — would be not Marxists but anarchists. Their attitude would be wildly ultra-left in theory, and in practice mean vapid self-removal from real politics, leaving a vacuum to be filled by something other than the consistent democracy in these affairs which Leninists argue for.

The entire tenor and substance of what he wrote in WL 33 — malignantly anti-Israel and wildly prejudiced comic-book history — suggests that Jim Higgins agrees with the SWP, whose essentially meaningless “socialist” solution leaves them free to back Arab chauvinists and militarists against Israel? [2] Or does he have nothing to say at all about immediate politics except “socialism is the answer”? The outright Arab chauvinists. Cliff and Foot, draw their conclusions. When Jim Higgins says that their practical politics do not define them as Arab chauvinists, that — to me — brands him as one too. Can it be that you don’t know that, Jim? [3]

IV

The pre-1929 Communist International rejected, opposed and denounced the Zionist project. I said this, and then asserted that nevertheless neither they, nor Trotsky in the 1930s, opposed Jewish migration into Palestine, as the post-1930 Stalinists and the “orthodox” Trotskyists from the mid-40s did. The Leninists and Trotskyists believed in the free movement of workers to Palestine as elsewhere in the world. Jim Higgins replies by citing evidence for what I said, in the form of quotations. Thank you Jim! The political descriptions and denunciations he cites are about Zionism as a political ideology and as a practical project which involved a favourable attitude to British imperialist occupation of Palestine. Of course the Communist International was against British occupation, which the Zionists favoured —

and that is what the quotation about “Anglo-Zionist occupation” means.

When the Communists appealed to Jewish workers to stay in the class struggle in the countries where they were, and not to go in for utopian-socialist colony-building in Palestine, Higgins equates that with advocacy of the exclusion of Jews from Palestine. In doing so, he is reading later attitudes backwards, anachronistically. Jews were not, and were not considered to be, identical with Zionism. Most Jews, including Jews fleeing persecution, were then, unlike now, not Zionists. The Communist International’s opposition to Zionism did not take the form of advocacy of or support for the exclusion of Jews, still less of support for Arab/Muslim chauvinism against them.

The Communist Party of Palestine was throughout the 1920s almost entirely Jewish, beginning as a break from the socialist Zionists, Poale Zion. Against Zionism, they advocated Jewish-Arab worker and peasant unity in Palestine. Demonisation was not part of it, though rough polemic was. The Histadrut could, for example, take a stall at a workers’ gathering in Moscow in 1923.

The Communist Party of Palestine competed with the Zionists for the allegiance of the Jewish workers: they advocated neither their own expulsion — though the British were normally eager to expel Jewish Communists — nor the exclusion of Jewish workers who, for whichever of many possible reasons, wanted to enter Palestine. According to one report, when the anti-Jewish movement began in 1929, the small Executive Committee of the CP, all Jews, was meeting in an Arab village and had to be rescued by the Jewish defence force, the Haganah; the CP turned over guns to aid the Jewish self-defence. Then the line was changed in Third Period Moscow and the pogroms were redefined as part of a holy anti-imperialist crusade. After a post-1929 Stalinist “Arabisation” drive which insisted that the main leaders be Arabs in a party of supposed equals, still consisting mostly of Jews, Jews were made second-class citizens in the Communist Party of Palestine.

The Trotskyists at the time did not go along with the Stalinist line on the 1929 movement (see Max Shachtman, *Militant*, October 1929). Later, in the 1930s, the American *Militant* published an outraged report, based on an article by ex-Stalinist Malech Epstein in the social-democratic Yiddish daily *Forward*, that the Communist Party of Palestine was sending young Jewish members to plant bombs among Jews.

V

The Deir Yassin massacre was denounced by the mainstream Zionist

leaders when it happened. I neither defended nor justified nor excused it, though I did put it in its historical context. Deir Yassin was the work of a Jewish group against which the mainstream Zionists were prepared to wage civil war a few months later!

Higgins raises it again because it is easier to beat the reverberating drums of big atrocity than to reason about the overall picture. He says he raises it because it was an act of racism — “these people died because they were Arabs” — though how to distinguish between ideological racism and nationalism in a “civil war” situation like that of 1948 might perplex a more cautious man. “Racism is indivisible”, he says. “Just one dead child because he or she is an Arab, or a Jew, or Irish or a Red Indian, is exactly one more than any self-respecting socialist can countenance and is quite enough to condemn the perpetrator.”

Agreed! I’ll vote for that with both hands. If it will carry greater conviction, I’ll prick my thumb and sign a resolution to that effect in my own blood. But what is this fine universalist principle doing in this debate, in the mouth of someone who is a passionate partisan of one side, to the extreme of wanting to force the other people to dissolve as a national entity? How does it square with the double-standard-skewed one-sidedness of what he says about the Arab-Jewish conflict? Can Jim Higgins really think that no Jews have died because they were Jews at the hands of Arabs and Muslims? In which case he needs only to be reminded that, for example, 60 Jewish religious teachers and pupils were massacred in Hebron in 1929 — they were not Zionists — and he will change sides. Or understand that socialists need an overview and an overall programme for the whole complex of issues.

In fact, though, the universalist principle is just empty rhetoric, isn’t it? It is a common enough gambit. The Provisional IRA paper, *An Phoblacht* has, for example, a convincing line in anti-sectarianism — directed against the other side and used to bolster with self-righteousness similar attitudes on its own side.

Anti-racism is indivisible, Jim, but someone who uses talk of the “indivisibility” as a means of damning one side in the interests of the other, which has also killed children, is a hypocrite.

It is “absurd but evidently necessary” to point out to you, Jim, that though one dead child may be and is enough to condemn its killers, the idea that the cause — or in this case the entire people to which the killers belonged — is thereby condemned, is either the theme of a note resigning from the sinful human race before going into the desert to found a utopian-socialist colony, or something

you write just before you blow your brains out. Otherwise it is a lot of flabby-minded old guff. Hypocritical or hysterical guff.

I accused Jim Higgins of being “awash with prejudice”, citing his demonising “history” as proof and refuting it. Now he passionately defends himself — and, I think, the SWP — against a charge I never made, that of “racism”. No, Jim, I don’t think you or the SWP are racist, that you subscribe to zoological theories about some peoples being inferior, that you are predisposed towards hostility to individual Jews, or any similar idiocy. I know that I was not a racist when I held views very like yours.

The views you hold about Israel do, however, commit you to a pretty comprehensive hostility to Jews who will not endorse your fervently held anti-Zionism or join you in branding Israeli-Jewish nationalists as racists — Jews into whose identity Israel has been incorporated and who will, not always gently, defend Israel’s right to exist. Your views commit you to making the Israeli Jews an exception to the general principles you proclaim for every other nation. They commit you to advocating the destruction of the Israeli-Jewish state: you can not believe that in the calculable future the state of Israel will voluntarily be liquidated and subsumed into something higher. They commit you to an emotion-charged propagation of Arab-chauvinist myths and thinly made-over old-fashioned anti-semitic caricatures of Jews.

All that, Jim, may not be anti-Jewish racism, but it shares the essential element common to all the various anti-semitisms of history, be they religious, nationalist, or zoological-racist: comprehensive hostility to most or all Jews alive. The tub-thumping and fulminating that you are not a racist can not suppress the fact that your attitude is a form of anti-semitism. Since you want Jews to “convert” from the identification with Israel which a terrible history has stamped on modern Jewish consciousness, your attitude has more in common with the old Christian anti-semitism, which wanted to save the souls of Jews even if it had to burn their bodies, than with the racism of the 19th and 20th centuries. Insisting that you are not a racist is here a means, and perhaps also an internal psychological mechanism, for evading the plain implications of what you say. Even if you draw no practical conclusions from your demonisation of Israel, others will and do. At best there is a division of labour.

Higgins in an earlier contribution to *Workers’ Liberty* showed undisguised bitterness towards Tony Cliff. He doesn’t seem to notice that the worst thing Cliff did to him was to poison him with anti-semitic anti-Zionism.

Footnotes

1. My original article confused things by hanging the story on the date of Israel’s declaration of independence. I said that this was of no consequence for the process described. Jim Higgins ignores that, but repeats the point. Yet he himself made a similar inconsequential slip, seeming to date the United Nations resolution not in November 1947 but in April 1948.

2. You might, developing Lenin’s analysis of “Economism” and then “Imperialist Economism”, call this line “Arab Nationalist Economism” — a happy marriage of the general economic method of the SWP with Cliff’s personal prejudice.

3. I hold no brief for the idea that the ousted one-time leaders of the IS/SWP such as Jim Higgins possess special, or even ordinary, levels of sharpness in political understanding. Rather the opposite. In a reasonably wide experience I have never elsewhere encountered anything like the Malvolio-like collective self-conceit, snobbery and self-satisfaction, built on small achievement, that I saw in the leading circles of the IS group, and see now in Jim Higgins’s article. Disdaining any attempt to be consistent Leninists, this group of eclectic sectarians found themselves in the late 1960s, unexpectedly, in very favourable circumstances. They blundered about for a while, helped Cliff create a monstrosity of an organisation, wasted a tremendous opportunity, and then abandoned the field of politics to Pope Tony and his toy-town Bolshevik “party”. They could not understand what was happening in the organisation they “led”, not even when it was pointed out to them in plain English; and they have not understood it yet. But Jim, even you can not but be aware that if socialism and democracy is the answer, then it can only be in the sense of working-class politics and equal rights for all nations, and therefore that demonisation of Israel is no part of it. You can not but know that what you write is grist to the mill of the SWP who back Saddam Hussein and Assad of Syria against Israel.

4. There is a subtext in this discussion: repeated attempts to cite Hal Draper as for us high general authority against what we say now. This is a misunderstanding. On the concrete questions of the Jewish-Arab conflict such as the right of Jews to go to Palestine, the Shachtman organisation was right, in my opinion. Draper was generally right in his criticism of Israel, though a lot of what he wrote on Israel reminds me of the legendary bird without feet unable to alight, doomed forever to hover high above the ground. But Draper was on our side as against Higgins, Cliff et al. He was in favour of Israel’s right to exist. James D Young tells a story of an encounter between

Cliff and Draper on the question in the late 50s. After a meal in London, Draper, Cliff, Young and others are sitting around a table, the taciturn Draper silent, the talkative Cliff talking — about Israel. Suddenly Draper turns on Cliff in irritation and accuses him: “You want to destroy the Israeli Jews! I don’t!”

The arrogance of the long-distance Zionist

By Jim Higgins

This will be the third time that I have ventured to disagree with Sean Matgamna on the vexed question of Zionism.

I do so with some trepidation because, or so it seems, even when I am right I am in reality exposing myself as fundamentally wrong and mischievously so. In my first article I attempted to lighten the subject with a few mildly humorous quips. I was sternly rebuked for this failure of seriousness. Chastened, in part two I adopted a serious tone. Sean responded by regretting my humour had been replaced by ‘choler, rodomontade, unleavened abuse, some of it purely personal...’ Did I really do all of that? I feel particularly cheered to hear that I was guilty of choler and rodomontade, rather like the man who discovered at an advanced age that he had been speaking prose all his life. Normally, of course, I only use unleavened abuse during Passover. Sorry about that.

Having reviewed Sean’s articles I can see that they fit quite nicely into the Matgamna mode of polemic. First and foremost, his views are lumped together in such a way that they will sharply divide him from other socialists. This is what Al Richardson calls ‘consumer socialism’ and Marx calls ‘sectarianism.’ In practice, this means that since Bernard Dix died, there have been no adherents of the Shachtmanite school of bureaucratic collectivism on these shores and if Sean were to occupy this vacant franchise he would acquire a whole slew of policies to differentiate himself from everybody else. All you need is a file of the New International (published monthly between 1936 and 1958) and you can start to kid yourself you are writing with all the style and eloquence of Max Shachtman. Along with all the clever nonsense about Russia you will also inherit the Workers’ Party — International Socialist League line on Israel.

A comparison of Sean’s article with a sampling of the WP-ISL texts shows

that whatever Sean lacks in originality he has made up for in the diligence of his researches into the New International. In the September issue of Workers’ Liberty we have Sean as follows: ‘Cliff’s 1946 pamphlet does not deal at all with the political questions in the Middle East, having more to say about the price of oil than about the rights of national minorities. Where politics should have been there is a vacuum...’ Now here is Al Gates in the New International in September 1947: ‘Cliff’s competent analytical work on Palestine, and here too we observed a fine study of the economic growth and problems of the Middle East and the place of Palestine in that situation. Yet the whole work was outstanding for its studied evasion of the political questions of the class and national struggle taking place there.’

Gates is more polite than Sean, but that will probably surprise nobody.

Another standard feature of Sean’s method is the one where he complains bitterly that he is being abused unfairly as a prelude to unleashing a little of his own venom into the argument. For example, I raised the case of Deir Yassin because it took place in April 1948 and set in motion the Arab refugees, countering Sean who had said that they only fled in May 1948 when the Arab armies started their offensive. In so doing I neglected to mention the killing of 60 Jews by Arabs in the bloody attacks of 1929. For this I was accused of hypocrisy. Perhaps now I should go on to apologise for failing to condemn the similar Arab outrages of 1920, 1921, 1929, 1936 and 1938. In the interests of balance perhaps I should also throw in the massacres of Sabra and Chatila, because I condemn them as well. In the same vein, Sean insists that he does not believe that I, or the SWP, are racist, but in virtually the same breath he repeats his accusation that we are anti-semitic. This does not come from the WP-ISL, I have nowhere in the pro-Israel polemics of Al Gates and the rest seen them accuse their socialist opponents of anti-semitism. For that we must look to official Zionist spokesmen and Sean Matgamna. It is, I suppose, always nice to have two sources of inspiration.

Let us now turn to Sean’s predilection for discovering sinister and malign purposes in the work of others and constructing a sort of retrospective amalgam. About a quarter of his piece is devoted to a partial and not very informative trawl through Cliff’s works on the Middle East. On the strength of his 1946 pamphlet Middle East at the Crossroads, this apparently made Cliff, along with Abram Leon, one of the Fourth International’s two experts on the Jewish question. Unfortunately, Leon was killed by the Nazis, so after

1946 Cliff must have stood pre-eminent, although Sean assigns a subordinate role to Ernest Mandel. Thus we have the sinister Cliff leading the FI along the road of ‘anti-semitic anti-Zionism.’ Unfortunately, by the time Sean got round to this particular fantasy he had forgotten what he had written on the previous page: ‘In 1967, after the Six Day War, Cliff wrote a pamphlet which is closer in its political conclusions and implied conclusions to what Workers’ Liberty says than to what the SWP or Jim Higgins say now. The decisive shift came after 1967 and was brought to the present level of nonsense after the Yom Kippur war of 1973. The ‘honour’ of having established the post 1973 IS/SWP line belongs, I think, to none other than Jim Higgins (in an article in IS Journal).’

There you have it, comrade readers, Cliff set the style for the FI and especially the American SWP, except that until 1973 his views were not much different from those of Workers’ Liberty, which I assume are the same as Sean’s. Far from Cliff being the *deus ex machina* of anti-Zionist anti-semitism, I am. In International Socialism No.64 in 1973, I wrote this seminal offending piece, ‘Background to the Middle East Crisis.’ At the same time, the ground-breaking significance of the article passed without a murmur. Nobody, including the author, was aware that it was any more than a very short explanation of the IS Group’s attitude to the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, which I had reported for Socialist Worker. In the 23 years since it was written probably only Sean Matgamna has read it. Now that Sean, with Holmes-like skill, has unmasked me as the eminence grise of ‘non-racist anti-semitic anti-Zionism’. I too have read it, and regret that it has no claims, subliminal or otherwise, to trend-setting originality.

Delving further into the Matgamna polemical method we encounter that special form of arrogance that insists on setting all the terms of any debate and finding significance in a failure to follow him up any logical blind alley he may choose. Let us then consider his ‘serious and not entirely rhetorical question, why the Jewish minority, a third of the population in the 1940s, did not have national rights there.’ Let us leave aside the fact that rhetorical questions are precisely the ones that are not looking for answers, and think about this one. First, in those terms of *realpolitik* to which Sean is so addicted, who was to afford them national determination in the 1930s and 1940s? Was it the Arab majority? Not a bit of it, the very notion of any kind of accommodation with the Arab majority was totally anathema to the Zionist leadership. Should they have addressed themselves to the British? Actually they did and were turned down. The fact is that there were no rights for

self determination for anyone in Palestine. British policy had been to utilise Zionism as a force to divide and discipline the Arab masses. That is how the Jewish population rose from fewer than 100,000 in 1917 to over 400,000 in 1939 (a third of the total population). The plan was eventually for a Jewish homeland under strict British tutelage. The turning off of Jewish immigration in 1939 was because the British were concerned to pacify the Arab majority to safeguard Palestine as a British controlled Middle Eastern hub, especially the oil pipeline, in the war.

The question of self-determination for the Zionists had nothing to do with democracy, because any solution, while the Jewish population remained a minority, would under democratic norms have to be cast in such a way that came to terms with the Arab majority. It is for this reason that the Zionist leadership fought so hard for unrestricted immigration and why the Arabs were against it. It is for the same reason that the Zionists while demanding Jewish immigration were opposed to Arab immigration. It is the same reason why Zionist policy was bitterly opposed to the idea of a constituent assembly. This vexed question of population arithmetic is what distorted the political agenda of Palestine.

With two thirds of the population the Arabs would seem to have a fairly safe majority. In fact, they had a plurality of only 400,000. For the Zionist leadership this was the magic number and to overhaul it took precedence over all other considerations. Such a number might just, with massive difficulty and at the expense mainly of the Arabs, be accommodated. This was the emphasis of Zionist propaganda, despite the fact that Palestine, assuming a complete disregard for the Arabs, could take only a small proportion of the Jews threatened and eventually murdered by Hitler. The massive propaganda effort was expended on altering Palestine's population statistics, instead of demanding asylum from the US and Britain (who were infinitely better able to provide it) for these and many, many more Jews who were to be lost in Himmler's ovens. This was not a matter of emphasis, shouting louder about Jerusalem than New York, it was a positive opposition to Jews going anywhere other than Palestine. If the intention had been to save Jewish lives at all costs, the argument should have been: 'If you will not let Jews into British-mandated Palestine, then you have an urgent and absolute moral responsibility to give them asylum elsewhere.' No such campaign was mounted.

Nevertheless, comrades might ask, is not the hallmark of socialist internationalism the free, unfettered flow of all people throughout the world? Why

should Palestine be different? The short answer is that immigration as part of a concerted plan that will take over the country, expropriating, expelling and exploiting the native masses, is less immigration and more a long drawn out and aggressive invasion. For socialists, the reactionary character of Zionism is defined by its racist ideology, imbued with the spirit of separation and exclusion, the very reverse of socialist solidarity. It was prepared to ally itself with every reactionary force that might help its purposes. It lobbied such figures as the Kaiser, the Sultan of Turkey, for twenty years it cosied up to British imperialism, finally snuggling into the embrace of the biggest imperial power of all, the United States. In the process, it has treated the Arab population as a species of untermensch and has effectively driven a large portion of the Arab masses into the hands of Islamic obscurantists and bigots. It stands in the way of any socialist advance in the Arab world, operating as imperialism's gendarme in the region, a far more effective force for imperialism than, for example, the feeble Saudi royal family or the Hashemites. If Zionism has had one redeeming feature over the years, it is that it never bothered to conceal its intentions, but it is difficult to commend a man for his honesty in telling you that he is going to beat your brains out, especially if he then delivers the mortal blow.

As Sean indicates, the development of ideas on Zionism in the Trotskyist movement is quite interesting. As Sean says, Cliff, in his New International article of June 1939, was for Jewish immigration into Palestine and for the sale of Arab land to the Jewish population, both points vigorously opposed by the Palestine CP. His argument for this, and it is a thin one, is: 'Yet from the negation of Zionism does not yet follow the negation of the right to existence and extension of the Jewish population in Palestine. This would only be justified if an objectively necessary identity existed between the population and Zionism, and if the Jewish population were necessarily an outpost of British imperialism and nothing more'. Like a lot of Cliff, this takes a bit of time to get your head around. With perseverance one is, however, struck by how abstract it is as a serious formulation. Whether this is a reaction against the Arab chauvinism of the CPP I cannot say, but it clearly suggests that unless Zionism is 100 per cent in the pocket of British imperialism it is OK to augment its forces. But as we well know, nationalist movements are not wedded to any particular sponsor, and their interests are never seen as identical and often antithetical. The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem could make overtures to Hitler, Jabotinsky, the founder of reviv-

ionist Zionism, was a great admirer of Mussolini, and, during the war, Chandra Bose, the leftist Indian nationalist, worked with the Japanese, building an Indian national army. In the same way, the Jewish population were not 100 per cent identified with Zionism, Cliff and the handful of Jewish Trotskyists were not and neither was the CPP, but in the absence of anything of consequence, Zionism certainly had at least the tacit support of an overwhelming majority of the Jews. After the war and the holocaust, that support became far more active.

I have a suspicion that it is from this 1939 article that Sean acquired his idea that the Comintern were not opposed to Jewish immigration to Palestine in the 1920s. In truth Cliff, as is his wont, is being a bit economical with the actualité here. He says: 'The members of the Comintern in Palestine... while absolutely opposed to Zionism (against the national boycott [of Arab goods and Arab labour-JH], against slogans like the Jewish majority and the Jewish state and the alliance with England, etc), declared at the same time that the Jewish population is not to be identified with Zionism and hence demanded the maximum freedom of movement for Jewish immigration into Palestine...' You will notice the odd usage of the 'members of the Comintern in Palestine'. He is trying not to refer to the CPP, which he excoriated earlier in his piece, and also neglects to say that the CPP was formed of resignees from the semi-Zionist Poale Zion in 1922. Whatever the CPP's policy, may have been, up to 1926-7, it was not the Comintern's.

Cliff's article concludes by proclaiming that the only solution is socialism, but in the meanwhile calls for a secular, unitary state in a parliamentary democracy. The suggested programme included: compulsory education for all, a health service, pensions, minimum wage and all the other appurtenances of the welfare state. All of this seemed to have a familiar ring about it, especially when taken with the call for Jewish immigration. Then it struck me, Cliff's 1939 policy was the same as that of the WP-ISL, as set out in various resolutions of that party. Shachtman never acknowledged this fact, but then he always denied that the theory of bureaucratic collectivism came from Bruno Rizzi. We are now left with a terrible problem. We have it on no less an authority than Sean Matgamna that Cliff, in 1946, had set the political line of Palestine for the Fourth International, especially of the Cannonite SWP. Now I find that such is the dastardly cunning of T Cliff, he had previously masterminded the opposing Shachtmanite WP-ISL policy. With the brain reeling, one realises the full horror of it all. The Cliff-inspired Shachtman variant has now been

taken up by Sean Matgamna. When one recalls that for some years there was no greater fan of the US-SWP and James P Cannon than Sean Matgamna (he endorsed their defence, violent anti-Shachtmanism as well as their anti-Zionism), we might describe this phenomenon as 'deviated apostolic succession'.

In all this chopping and exchanging of opinions, we can confidently affirm that Sean's 'two states for two peoples' formulation did not come from Lenin, Trotsky, Cliff (pre or post-1946), Shachtman, Cannon or any other international socialist source. In Sean's thesis it seems that if most Jews support a Zionist state, although the overwhelming majority of them do not and would not live there, then socialists must support them regardless of the democracy of numbers or the rights of others. By the same token, presumably, the rural Afrikaners who want their own state must have it because they represent a significant minority.

It is possible to argue that after the war the people who suffered the ultimate barbarism of the holocaust deserved special treatment from the world that bore no little responsibility for that horror. It is a persuasive argument and one that struck the heart-strings of many in the aftermath of 1945. It was that public sympathy at the condition of Jews, who had endured so much, languishing in displaced persons camps, that put pressure on the Allied governments to solve this humanitarian problem. What none of them were going to do was open their own doors to a flood of immigrants. Not least of their calculations concerned the fact that there were also hundreds of thousands of displaced people and prisoners of war who might have claimed similar privileges. Their attitude was rather like that of Kaiser Wilhelm II who thought of a Jewish homeland as 'at least somewhere to get rid of our Yids.' The people's conscience about the Jews was salved at little cost to the world but at the expense of the Palestinians. Many of the other refugees were herded callously to their deaths behind the Iron Curtain. In both instances, a cheap and easy solution for the Allies, but not one that readily commends itself to international socialists. It is ironic that the displaced persons camps in Europe emptied as the displaced persons camps in the Middle East were filling with Arabs. Why should the world's debts be paid by the poorest people?

Of a piece with this affection for the accomplished fact and his perverse inability to see the need for change and to fight for it, is his sneering response to the suggestion that the answer is revolutionary socialism. For Sean, the fight must be for the maintenance of Israel. The socialist Matgamna is the

eager partisan of this robustly capitalist state, this proud possessor of an arsenal of atom bombs, this outpost of imperialism that enshrines the expropriation and exploitation of its Arab citizens and finds its justification in the notion of the exclusive and superior character of its Jewish people. Sean might condemn (but not too loud) the denial of human and democratic rights, the legal theft of property and land, the arbitrary arrests, the rigorous application of collective guilt, the deportations and curfews, but he draws no political conclusions other than to excuse this on the grounds of the right of Israel to be secure. For my part, I believe that so long as Israel exists as a Zionist state, then Jews and Arabs will continue to die needlessly and to no good purpose, as they are dying while we conduct this argument. There will be no peace. I further believe that only under socialism can the national question be solved for both peoples, because only then can there be any chance of fairness and equity. The history of the last 50 years is the negative affirmation of that fact.

Scattered throughout Sean's text are four footnotes. Footnote 3 is quite charming, because it bangs on at length abusing the leadership of IS, during Sean's recruiting raid within its ranks from 1968 to 1971. As part of the leadership during that time I was overjoyed to discover that, along with Cliff, Duncan Hallas, Chris Harman and Nigel Harris, I had displayed 'Malvolio-like snobbery, self-satisfaction, and brain-pickling conceit, built on small achievement...' As Malvolio said: 'Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them.' I have to say that, since he transferred his loyalty from Cannon to Shachtman, Sean has acquired an entirely better class of vituperation, although he still has some way to go before he is in the same street as Max Shachtman for his high-grade abuse. Probably better to get the politics right, Sean, especially the WP-ISL's opposition to Zionism and two nations theory.

The disconnected footnote 4 concerns an anecdote told to Sean by James D Young, concerning a discussion about Israel, in the late 1950s, between Cliff and Hal Draper, witnessed by James. According to Sean: 'Suddenly Draper turns on Cliff in irritation and repudiation, and accuses him: 'You want to destroy the Israeli Jews! I don't!' Leaving aside the 'irritation' and 'repudiation' — this is just Sean spicing up the story — this little anecdote is actually more revealing of Sean's method than of Cliff's. We hear what Hal Draper said, as recalled by James, forty years after the event. But what did Cliff respond to this accusation of his wanting a pogrom of holocaust proportions? Did Sean ask James for

this information and he could not remember? Or is that Sean, having acquired the evidence for the prosecution, did not want to confuse matters with any defence? Or did Cliff have no explanation and confess that he, along with the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, wanted to drive all the Israeli Jews into the sea? If the answer to this last question is 'yes', then he should have been scandalised out of the movement. Or is this just something that Sean has failed to check properly with James D Young? What we do know, however, is that Draper was against the Zionist state and wanted to replace it with an Arab-Jewish socialist state. And so say all of us, including Cliff, I think.

Throughout Sean's reply there runs an accusatory thread that I am conducting this argument as some way of making my apologies to Cliff. If I defend his line on Palestine in Workers' Liberty it is to cover my 'social embarrassment before [my] SWP friends and former comrades.' Which ones are those, pray? Paul Foot, Chris Harman, Jim Nichol? I think not. I do not defend Cliff's line on the permanent arms economy, because I no longer agree with it. I no longer defend his line on Russia, because I no longer agree with it. I defend his line on Zionism, because I agree with it. I defend the IS line on the Minority Movement that both of us, I and he, abandoned. It may come as a surprise to Sean but there are those of us who can disagree on fundamentals with Cliff without consigning everything he has said or done to the dustbin of history. At the same time, I do feel a degree of bitterness that what I saw as the best hope for the revolutionary movement in Britain since the 1920s, that I spent some time in helping to build, should have been diverted down various blind alleys at the behest of Cliff's impressionism and caprice. Most of all, my real complaint is not that Cliff has maintained his position on various matters, it is that he is capable of jettisoning almost any of those positions for at worst imaginary and at best transitory benefit. All of this and a great deal more, I have set out in a recently completed book on the IS Group [2]. At the end of it I do not think anybody, including Cliff, will think that I am apologising, or wonder why I, and many others, are a touch bitter.

Finally, I would like to apologise to those Workers' Liberty readers who have got this far, for taking up so much of their time, but they really should blame Sean. He started it.

1. Current medical research suggests that Alzheimer's may be caused through eating from aluminium cooking utensils. If Sean still has such pots in his kitchen, I suggest he replaces them without delay.

2. More Years for the Locust by Jim Higgins, to be published by the International Socialist Group.

* Jim Higgins' suggested title for this piece was 'Sean Maxshachtmana'.

Up on the Malvolian heights

By Sean Matgamna

I find it difficult to accept that Jim Higgins intends his piece as a serious contribution to the discussion. He merely regurgitates and reformulates much that he said earlier, and which I refuted and corrected earlier — on Deir Yassin, for example.

Higgins, I fear, confuses track-covering repetition with serious argument, just as he confuses oblique evasiveness with wit, and elephantine orotundity with a praiseworthy style.

Up on the oxygen-starved Malvolian heights, Higgins has adopted the late Healy's idea of a powerful argument — saying things twice or, preferably, three times and four times, at increasing length, lacing the polemic with desperate abuse, direct and 'stylish'. Like the late Healy, the late Higgins fails to notice that this sort of thing harms no one so much as its author.

Higgins does try to give value for money — politician, literary critic, literary detective, style guru, Jim is all of these and more. Those who can, do, those who can't, try to teach? Jim — no fool he — has twigged that I've read the files of old Workers' Party USA publications. His conclusion that what I say about the Middle East is culled from this treasure house identifies him as someone who left politics in the late 70s, and has no idea of what happened after his demise. What we say about the Middle East and similar questions — and Northern Ireland is, in principle, almost the same question — is the result of long public discussion in the pages of Socialist Organiser. His idea that other people do what Tony Blair and bourgeois politicians do, and change policies in pursuit of 'market openings', accurately describes Tony Cliff's approach — for example, it is what Cliff did when he became a 'Luxemburgist' circa 1958 — but not that of the AWL. (By the way, the late Bernard Dix became a Welsh nationalist and joined Plaid Cymru, around 1980!)

The idea that the political identity of a tendency can be put on like clothes found in an attic is worthy of someone who, I understand, has written a book to prove that Jim Higgins is the living embodiment and custodian of 'the IS tradition'. It doesn't work that way, Jim. The politics of the AWL are the result

of work to develop and clarify what we started with — the politics of the Cannon tendency — in the light of discussion and experience, and work in the class struggle too. As it happens, it is true that we probably are now the nearest approximation in politics to the Workers' Party of the 1940s — though we are not identical with it, and, for myself, though I criticise Cannon, I make no blanket repudiations of him and what he tried to do.

In brief: which is Higgins saying? That I haven't read Cliff's 1946 work? Or that I wouldn't notice without help, not unless Al Glotzer had already noticed it forty years earlier, that it simply has nothing to say about the political issues I spend much time debating? Or is Higgins simply short of something to say? He should have read the footnote where I link the approach to the Middle East conflict he and Cliff share with a famous discussion in the Marxist movement between Lenin and Bukharin-Piatokov on the so-called 'imperialist economism'. He might then have avoided the method Lenin rightly castigates there and dealt seriously with my question: why, from a socialist and consistently democratic point of view, did the Jewish national minority not have national rights? He deconstructs this basic question in a welter of not always accurate detailed 'practical' considerations. Who, he asks, was 'to afford' national rights to the Jews? In fact, nobody did: they won the right of self-determination in war with the British, the Palestinian Arabs and the surrounding Arab states. I repeat why, in the world as it was and is, were they not entitled to do this?

Neither before, during, nor after the war did 'the world' protect the Jews: that is where the often very brutal psychology of the Israeli state, of the heirs of those who survived Hitler's slaughter, and those who died in it, comes from. It is the Palestinian Jews who have the irreducible right of self-determination. As for the rest of the world's Jews — if we denounce as racist all those who do not agree to, or advocate, the destruction of Israel then we are comprehensively hostile to most Jews alive. We therefore fall into a form of anti-semitism. Higgins can't seem to take in the idea that to say this is not to say that 'left-wing' anti-semites are racists. No, you are not racist; yes, you are for practical purposes an anti-semite — comprehensively hostile to most Jews alive.

This comprehensive hostility does not on the left go back much more than a quarter of a century, though its roots can be traced far into the past, as I explained. Higgins puts the Arab propagandists' picture of European displaced persons' camps emptying of Jews as Middle Eastern displaced persons' camps filled up with Arabs. Missing is the fact that almost as many

Jews were then 'displaced' from Arab countries — to Israel — as Arabs from Palestine. Missing is the element in the situation of the deliberate maintenance for political purposes by Arab regimes of the refugees as refugees. Possibly Jim worked too long for an Arab bourgeois journal to be still able to see such things.

Unteachable, Higgins drops his idiotic — but very revealing — idea that it was 'the Zionists' who stopped the benign F D Roosevelt opening the USA to Jewish refugees [WL 34], but he goes on blaming 'the Zionists' for all the closed doors in 'the planet without a visa' for Jewish refugees. I think the Trotskyists were right, in the USA for example, to demand of Zionist organisations that they join in our campaign for open doors. Like the blinkered sectarian he is, underneath the desperate mimicking of urbanity, Higgins still blames the Zionists for everything that followed. Our old political criticism of Jewish nationalism thus becomes the attribution of moral responsibility to Jewish nationalists for all that was done to millions of Jews! Essentially the demand here is that the Zionists should have ceased to be nationalists, that is Zionists. Nationalists are nationalists, of course. But Jewish nationalists are worse than other nationalists — indeed, on them falls the guilt for what the nationalists, chauvinists and racists of other nations do to their people. In fact, they 'bring it on themselves', don't they, Jim?

Higgins, like Cliff, confuses what could reasonably be said in a debate with a socialist Zionist in say 1930 with an attitude to the reborn Jewish nation in Palestine; except that the old Marxist criticism by words is replaced with Arab bourgeois and feudal criticism by bomb, gun and poison gas. Israel will not cease to be 'Zionist', in Jim Higgins' sense, unless it is militarily conquered and overrun. But Jim Higgins says that, though he wants Israel done away with, he would like to see it replaced by socialism. The problem is that Saddam Hussein, etc. will not make socialism, or even accord Jews equal citizenship.

At this point I find myself very impolitely thinking that Jim Higgins is incorrigibly stupid; and then, abundant evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, I remember that he isn't; and thus I reach the truth: here stupidity, impenetrable, albeit would-be smart and 'stylish' stupidity, serves the same purpose as hypocrisy; it is a variant of it. For nobody not born yesterday can think socialism is an immediate Middle Eastern option if only Israel is no more, or not know that Jim Higgins-style anti-Israeli propaganda, including his deceptive talk of socialism — socialism without an agency — serves those who in the world of realpolitik want to destroy Israel in the name of

Arab and Muslim vindication and revenge.

Leninists are not vague socialist propaganda mongers: we are always concerned with 'realpolitik'. Without realpolitik — as Lenin explained to those socialists, the so-called economists, who wanted to leave the struggle for democratic rights, a bourgeois republic and other non-socialist things to the Russian liberals — your enemies establish their version of realpolitik and use it against your socialist cause. Here Jim Higgins, who is in fact an old-style socialist sectarian of the sort Lenin fought, winds up spouting fine socialist words that have no grip on life and in real politics he finds himself happily in tow to Arab bourgeois realpolitik. So does the SWP.

I refuted Higgins' tunnel vision account of things by putting the emergence of Israel in historical context. He repeats it now in terms of the politics of population arithmetic in 30s Palestine. He sees the calculations of the Zionist demon as all-determining. As if the movements of the Jews to Palestine can be understood apart from Hitler and earlier smaller Hitlers! But I have already covered this in considerable detail.

In fact the Zionists would have accepted the partition proposed by the British Peel Commission in 1937 — and then, under Arab pressure, rejected by the British government. Higgins admits that Arab immigration was important in Palestine in the 20s and 30s; why was that legitimate, and Jewish immigration — the migration of people fleeing for their lives to their

own community in Palestine — not?

It is of small consequence, but I never imagined that in Higgins' 1973 piece he was being anything but Cliff's hack, on the way out: the piece seemed to me to register a stage in the degeneration of SWP thought on this question.

I said that the Trotskyists in Trotsky's time believed Jews had a right to go to Palestine. The exceptions to that I know of were the French POI, the group which published Spark in South Africa, and, I think, C L R James. Jim responds with speculation that I formed this opinion from Tony Cliff's 1938-9 pieces in New International. I didn't, though Cliff's stuff then is evidence for my case. What I said was derived from the whole history, including Trotsky's writings.

Thus drooling over Cliff and speculating, Higgins evades the whole broader question! Is my account of the pre-war Trotskyist movement right or wrong?

Higgins is too busy being stylish to be loyal in the discussion: I am concerned for the 'security' of Israel against those who advocate its destruction in the name of 'anti-imperialism' and 'socialism'; but I am for those Israeli socialists, Jewish and Arab, and for those in the Arab world, who want equality and democracy and a free Arab state alongside the Jewish state in Palestine. All nationalists — Irish nationalists for example — see their nation as 'superior' and 'holy' and 'elect' — it is the nature of the thing. [How do I know? Guess] Calling it racism can sometimes make people

think: but you can't do it to only one nation in a national conflict without lining up on the side of the other no less 'racist' nation. Jim Higgins does that, despite his repudiation of realpolitik and talk of socialism, because he is a sleepwalking 'socialist' sectarian who has no notion of the Leninist way of combining socialism and working class realpolitik.

I like jokes and humour and 'style', Jim, and I'm not invariably unappreciative of an adroit, well filled double negative, in good season. But to tell it to you plain, in old-fashioned English: I don't give a fuck for any of that if it is counterposed to politics, and I don't see anything that is not simply pitiable in would-be funny polemic that evades the issues, and cleverisms that tie the author, not his opponent, in knots. The style appropriate to our business — mine anyway — is one that lets you say it truthfully, plainly, and as sharply as necessary for presenting things as they really are. The rest is trimming. If Shachtman is the measure here, Shachtman used humour to throw light on things: in the work that I know he never sacrificed political substance to style, still less to the vain pursuit of it — that way, Comrade Higgins, lies decadence, as you have here once more demonstrated.

Arabesques, he once turned in Cliff's rodeo,

Who now sits ad absurdum, reductio!

See him fret, see him fume,

Watch him preen and presume:

'God, I'm pleased I was me', sighs Malvolio.



1. ANTI-ZIONISM AND ANTISEMITISM

Gerry Healy and the World Jewish Conspiracy

Sean Matgamna, SO 127, 14.4.83

Newsline has continued in its ridiculous campaign of bluff and bluster against the BBC Money Programme. But still, litigious though it is, it has not got round to suing the BBC.

Many — solicited — letters from members and supporters have been printed. The campaign continues against Socialist Organiser, linked with the BBC according to the well-tried Stalinist technique of the “amalgam”. Example from a piece by long-standing member Alex McLarty: “Trade unionists! Members of the labour movement! Be warned! Depending on its substance a small dose of poison can do a lot of harm. What is the substance of Matgamna and ‘Socialist Organiser’? We know enough now. Time may tell even more”.

Much of the denunciation of SO is extremely shrill and hysterical, lynch mob stuff.

It is also extremely sad. People write expressing their faith in the charlatans who put out Newsline. Letter after letter testifies to real sacrifices and devotion. People who couldn't possibly know the secrets of the autocratic and conspiratorial leaders of the organisation write to testify from their own experience of struggling to raise money for the paper that it could have no financial link with Libya. Playwright Tom Kempinski writes in ringing tones, “We are not bought” — rhetoric that rings pathetic and false in the circumstances.

As false has always been the hopes and wishes of the many fine revolutionaries who have devoted themselves to Healy's “machine for maiming militants”. We reproduce the editorial in which they responded to our comment last week.

Newsline's editorial uses the code word “Zionist”, but in fact it is talking about a conspiracy of Jews which runs, they say, from the centre of Mrs Thatcher's Cabinet, to the commanding heights of the BBC, all the way through to Socialist Organiser. If a Jew becomes “the youngest ever chairman” of the BBC, what else can it be but a “Zionist” conspiracy?

Pre World War Two antisemites explained communism and finance capi-

tal alike as different aspects of a single World Jewish Conspiracy. So now do these petrodollar anti-Zionists of Newsline depict “the centre” of Thatcher's government and Socialist Organiser as secretly linked and bonded — despite ocean-wide class and political differences — by a hidden network of “Zionists”.

“Zionism” here is not a political reference meaning those who support the right of Israel, or a modified Israel, to exist. That would include the overwhelming majority of the people of Britain.

There are Zionists and Zionists. There are Zionists and Jews. It is the latter who are the conspirators. Even an anti-Zionist Jew, this racist logic says, will have ineradicable loyalties and allegiances more basic than politics: some people are congenital “Zionists”.

SO is opposed to Zionism? It supports the national rights of the Palestinians? SO advocates a secular democratic state in Palestine within which Jewish and Arab Palestinians could live as equals? Though rejecting with contempt the “socialism” of the “Green Book”, it would support Libya against an imperialist invasion?

That's just a front. Don't the communists pretend to denounce the “finance capitalists” and the “finance capitalists” make war on communism so as to fool those on both sides who don't know there is an International Jewish Conspiracy? Thus Gerry Healy in his dotage seems to have rediscovered the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” — that forgery of the Okhrana, the Tsarist political police, which became a warrant for genocide against the Jews of Europe.

Newsline in effect defines Jews as “agents of Zionist imperialism” — which must be the very heart of imperialism if, as they say, its controlling tentacles reach secretly right into “the centre” of Mrs Thatcher's Cabinet. The Jews, it would seem, are now the international janissaries of imperialism.

How can the mutant remnants of what was once the most serious revolutionary organisation in Britain have come to this? For the last nine or ten years, the WRP has seen the world, and especially the international Trotskyist movement, mainly in terms of police “conspiracies” and the operations of “agents” and counteragents.

Vast amounts of newsprint, time and money have been given over to the search for the “conspirators” and “agents” who are the root of all evil in the world, and whose subterranean combats and manoeuvres seem in the WRP's eyes to have replaced the struggle of classes as the locomotive of history.

Add to this paranoid obsession Mr Healy's present “cupboard love” politics which puts Zionism and anti-Zion-

ism at the centre of world politics — because to judge by all the circumstantial evidence, Libyan gold is at the centre of the WRP's survival — and the scenario more or less writes itself. The inbuilt logic of such “politics” takes over and takes off.

It easily becomes a matter of Jews — “Zionists” — against all the rest.

The racist logic breaks through in their account of the Money Programme's “witch hunt”. Why is this the work of “Zionists”? Because a Jew is appointed chairman of the BBC? Because only “Zionists” are concerned with the Middle East? Because the Jewish Chronicle showed interest in an expose of people it must regard as at least potential pogromists? Of course, if the Jewish Chronicle was tipped off in advance, that is proof positive that “Zionists” were in control!

Or it is that all “witch-hunters” are Zionists? No: it is a view of the world in which the Palestinian question is the central pivot of the struggle of two basic camps, the imperialist and the “anti-imperialist”; which decrees that within the imperialist countries, “Zionists”, linked by ineradicable ties to the arch-imperialism — Zionist imperialism — are the main enemy, everywhere.

Faced with an earlier left wing flirtation with antisemitism dressed up as anti-capitalism [the German socialist] August Bebel said that: “antisemitism is the socialism of idiots”. WRP-style anti-Zionism is the anti-imperialism of idiots. And it is indistinguishable from antisemitism.

All Jews other than certain religious anti-Zionists and some revolutionary socialists do support Israel — that is, they are Zionists.

They are a people scattered through all segments of society. Seek evidence that there may be a conspiratorial network of Jews and you will find it — red Jews and Rothschilds, members of Mrs Thatcher's (or Ronald Regan's) cabinet and writers for SO. These links are the raw material from which theories about “Zionist conspiracy” can easily be spun.

But the only possible “rational” common denominator on which to base such a theory is “race” (whatever that may be).

The leaders of the WRP are people whose history must make them ashamed in some part of their minds about what they have become. So, cheaply, they warn that Mrs Thatcher, who now (they say) has Zionist conspirators at “the centre” of her government, may engage in antisemitic agitation. But they can't even disavow antisemitism without linking the Zionists to Hitler, saying that Hitler consciously and deliberately made forcible conversions to Zionism.

Morally outraged by Israel — and rightly outraged — the more emotional or “third worldist” left in Britain has

From 'Socialist
Organiser' to
Thatcher & Reagan

This SATURDAY
April 9, 1983
morning ...

The Zionist connection

sometimes tried to brand all Zionists, that is, the vast majority of Jews, as racists, and (especially during the ultra-left heyday of the early 70s) proposed to treat them accordingly. The slogan "drive the Zionists out of the labour movement" has been raised — it can only mean: drive the Jews out of the labour movement.

There is simply no way that this sort of anti-Zionism can avoid shading over — despite the best "anti-racist" intentions — into antisemitism.

Even if it were true that Jews who support Israel are racists, the evil consequences of left wing antisemitism would far outweigh any help it would give the oppressed Palestinians. But in fact it is hysterical and stupid to think that all Jews who support Israel are racists.

Most of them have the haziest notion of the history of Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine. They do have an understandably vivid awareness that six million Jews were murdered in mid 20th century Europe. Naturally they are inclined to believe its official spokesmen.

Yet the recent outcry against the Begin government by millions of non-Israeli (Zionist) Jews and the vast demonstrations within Israel itself when the facts about Israel's treatment of Lebanon were made known, and it became impossible to shut out knowledge of Israeli complicity in the massacres, prove how far millions of Zionists are from being conscious racists. Most of them can be got to understand that the treatment of the Palestinian Arabs by the Palestinian Jews is a betrayal of the best traditions of the Jewish people.

But idiotic attempts to treat them all as part of a "Zionist conspiracy" can only convince Jews that in parallel to what they see as the Arab threat to wipe out the Jews of Palestine, those in Britain who talk of justice for the Palestinian Arabs are a crowd of loony future pogromists. And that won't help the Palestinian Arabs either.

The state of the left on this question is indicated by the fact that Ken Livingstone in the same issue of Newsline chattily adds his support to the idea that the Money Programme expose on the WRP was a Zionist plot. He hadn't then read the antisemitic editorial printed on the opposite page? What does he think of the editorial? Does he think we should just shrug and accept antisemitism as a feature of the far left?

Perhaps what the Ayatollah Healy has discovered in his political dotage is not the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" but the last will and testament of Joseph Stalin, who during his last years infected much of the Stalinist and quasi Stalinist left with his own ingrained antisemitism. At the time of his death in 1953 Stalin had set the stage

A POWERFUL Zionist connection runs from the so-called left of the Labour Party right into the centre of Thatcher's government in Downing Street. There is no difficulty whatever in proving this.

Top of the list, we have the most recent appointment of Mr Stuart Young, a director of the 'Jewish Chronicle', as youngest-ever chairman of the BBC, having been a governor only since 1981. He is the brother of Mr David Young, another Thatcher appointee who is chairman of the Manpower Services Commission.

This is the key organisation which the Tories are transforming into a 'corporatist front', behind which they seek to mobilise jobless youth from 14 years upwards into a 'slave labour body to break trade union wages, safety procedures and working conditions . . . Thatcher has rolled out these appointments with magisterial arrogance while the Labour Party and TUC chiefs have accepted them without a murmur of protest'. (News Line, March 28, 1983).

The Tories know they can rely totally upon Zionist imperialism to produce the most hated reactionaries, in order to transform the situation at a later date into a pro-fascist, anti-Semitic pogrom against all the Jews in general.

Zionism made it possible for a number of rich Jews to leave Nazi Germany with the agreement of the Fuhrer provided they agreed to become Zionists. The Tories know too they have a powerful anti-Semitic trump card up their sleeves, to replay once again as the most reactionary manifestation of racialism, which is anti-Semitism.

From the support and advance publicity which the 'Jewish Chronicle' gave the BBC 2 'Money Programme' on March 20, the reactionary Zionist link was clear for all to see. But it also stretches through Downing Street channels right into the White House and President Reagan.

The latest Reagan military provocation against Libya early in March raises in its sharpest form the central political question. Do Trotskyists defend the Libyan regime of Gaddafi against US imperialism as a matter of principle, or do they

denounce it as 'the reactionary Islamic government of Libya' and seek a 'neutrality' between US imperialism and Gaddafi? This is the position of 'Socialist Organiser', claiming to speak for 'lefts' in the Labour Party.

The same organ supported the Zionist-sponsored 'Money Programme' on March 20. They wrote: 'We ('Socialist Organiser') didn't wait for the BBC to tell us about the WRP's probable links with Libya. The fact that the BBC now says it *doesn't make it any less likely to be true.*' (April 7, 1983) (Our emphasis).

Here is unqualified support for the work of Thatcher's appointee as chairman of the BBC, who is also a director of British Caledonian Airways and the British Overseas Trade Group for Israel. 'Socialist Organiser' has landed itself right bang in the middle of Thatcher's hand-picked Zionists as an outright supporter of their policies of witch-hunting the WRP and the News Line for our principled stand against imperialism and in support of the Libyan masses under their leader Muammar Gaddafi.

The question of the hour, we repeat, is the pro-Zionist policies of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations and their hatred of the Palestinians and Libyans alike.

In the background of the 'Socialist Organiser' one can detect a powerful current of anti-Arab racism — also shared by Reagan and Thatcher. This is the substance of their support for the 'Money Programme' and their lying affirmation that Gaddafi finances the WRP with a '£1.5 million subsidy', claimed by the faceless person on the BBC 2 programme.

This is a lie from start to finish. Because the WRP unhesitatingly supports the Libyan and Palestinian people and its leadership against the nuclear war plans of Reagan, Thatcher and the Zionists in their campaign to destroy all national liberation movements in the Middle East. 'Socialist Organiser' has joined the class enemy.

The Zionist connection between these so-called 'lefts' in the Labour Party right through to Thatcher and Reagan's White House is there for all to see in its unprincipled nakedness.

for a purge trial of five “Jewish doctors” from the Kremlin’s own hospital accused of plots, poisonings etc.

It was to have been the signal for a final act in the vast anti-Jewish campaign, legitimised as “anti-Zionism” which had raged in most of Eastern Europe and the USSR since 1948 — which for example, was a prominent feature of purge trial like that of Rudolf Slansky in Czechoslovakia in 1952. The trial of the doctors would have been the signal for the mass deportation of the USSR’s Jews — and possibly for their annihilation.

Stalin’s successors cancelled the trial, but antisemitism remains rampant in the Stalinist states.

When the WRP (then SLL) went Maoist for a year back in 1967 Mr Banda, now the WRP General Secretary, wrote that they would “march” even under the portrait of Stalin. Once again he is “marching” under the portrait of Stalin.

He won’t write about it, but he is also uncomfortably close to marching under the portrait of Adolf Hitler.

Free speech for Zionists!

Unsigned [Sean Matgamna], Workers’ Action 77, 29.10.77

The National Union of Students Executive is to consider taking action against certain Student Unions in response to bans on college Israel Societies and/ or Jewish Societies.

Those who want to proscribe the Zionists from exercising free speech within student unions argue as follows: The Zionist state of Israel is based on racial criteria. It is a racist state in its constitution and its definitions of citizenship. Zionism established itself in Palestine in a racist manner (e.g. boycotts of Arab produce and labour by the Zionists) and with racist goals. The practice of the state of Israel since its inception has been racist.

Therefore pro-Israel propaganda is racist through and through. Any and every apologist for the existence of the state of Israel must take as a starting point the denial of any rights to the Palestinian Arabs

By logic Zionists, like other racists, should be denied the right to organise, recruit, and justify the crimes of the state of Israel.

But to establish the fact that Zionism is racist, a form of racism, does not completely describe the problem. For who are the Zionists in Britain?

The hard core Zionists with a firm commitment to Israel are the Jewish community.

In Britain in general, there is widespread sympathy with Israel and ac-

ceptance of the Zionist state. But in the Jewish community this amounts to complete identification. Apart from revolutionary socialists whose origins are in the Jewish community, there are very few Jewish non-Zionists.

This identification with Israel has its roots and motive force not in anti-Arab racism, nor in a thought-out programme of displacing the Palestinians, but in the fact that the Jewish masses in Europe have themselves been the victims of racist persecution. It was only during and after the Third Reich’s “Final Solution” the terrible paroxysm of antisemitism that slaughtered six million Jews, that Zionism gained general acceptance among the European and US Jewish communities. Before that, the Zionist project to colonise Palestine had been a minority creed among Jews.

The identification with the Zionist colony and later the state established with US imperialist support was largely identification by those who escaped the Nazi holocaust with a Jewish state that claimed to be a guarantee that the ages-old persecution of Jews would cease as a Jewish “homeland” was acquired.

That this state was European and not Middle Eastern, that it was exclusively Jewish, no doubt made it easier for western Jews to identify with it; but these were not the essential starting points for them. Far from being conscious racists, most Jews in Britain are not even conscious of the racist basis of the state of Israel.

Zionism is inescapably racist. But to say that Zionists are racists who should be treated like the National Front is to miss the point that the hard core Zionists are Jews not motivated by fascist-type race hatred but by a wrong and misguided response to anti-Jewish racism.

The Jewish community which is the bedrock of Zionist support is not organised and kept together by this Zionism even. Still less is it a racist selection of people. Its collusion with Zionism is not the essential characteristic of the Jewish community

Of course Zionist Jews are responsible for themselves. Those who support the state of Israel are supporters of a racist state even if they have evaded the less acceptable facts about Israel’s origins and its mode of operation in the Middle East in the past thirty years. As Zionists, they are still our political and ideological enemies.

That is quite a long way, however, from being the same as the National Front or other groups formed around fascist programmes and fuelled by race hatred.

Most members of the Jewish community can be reasoned with. The self-same consciousness of their own history that is manipulated by Zionism and imperialism leads many Jews to

oppose those who are the organised racists in this country, such as the National Front. Even the conservative Jewish Chronicle said after Lewisham: “Not even the Mirror made the (to me) obvious point that, what ever their defects, the Trotskyists have the right attitude to the National Front and should not be left alone to stop its provocations”. (Article by Philip Kleinman, cited in the anti-fascist paper CARF).

These Jews should be welcomed as allies in the anti fascist struggle, even while they give support to racist Israel.

The abstract logical chain — Zionism is racism and since racism must be denied free speech so must Zionism — leads to the suppression of the rights of a community which is itself still potentially threatened with racism. As the NF has grown it has felt more confident to express its antisemitism more and more openly. It cannot at all be excluded that the constant outpourings against “finance” capital (by which they mean Jews) will lead before long to violent attacks on the Jewish community

With extreme Zionist organisations such as Herut, which are overtly and aggressively racist against Arabs, direct action rather than debate may be needed. But ordinary college Jewish Societies can not be treated the same way. A general proscription of Zionist meetings is an unnecessarily blunt instrument.

Their pro-Israel propaganda should not pass unchallenged, but there are many other ways to intervene and oppose it. Such interventions may well lead to violent incidents, as there are certainly thuggish Zionists who try to silence anti-Israel views. We should be prepared for that; but it is preferable to a blanket ban on any student society or group that is explicitly (Israel Societies) or implicitly (Jewish societies) Zionist.

Banned for being Jewish

Jane Ashworth, SO 216, 13.2.85

The Union of Jewish Students is still outlawed at Sunderland Polytechnic. Over 500 students at the almost 1000-strong general meeting voted last Friday to continue the ban.

Student Union President Andy Burke, who opposed the ban, now faces a no-confidence motion at the Executive and intends to take the whole matter to the union council later this week.

During the week leading up to the general meeting, the Union of Jewish Students organised a national rally in Sunderland which was leafleted by Socialist Students in NOLS (SSIN)

supporters from the North East and Manchester.

Unfortunately, there is now the danger of the Polytechnic's management stepping in. The leader of Sunderland Council — Jim Slater — is a Zionist and a right winger who sits on the governing body. It is feared that the ban will be used to further erode the union's autonomy.

The ban has more serious implications than at first seems.

The confrontation at Sunderland started when the general meeting passed a motion saying that Zionism is racism. So it followed that the UJS, which is a Zionist organisation, should be banned.

But that simple equation is a nonsense in principle. Certainly Israel is a racist state, but to say that Zionism — the belief that Jews have a right to a state — is racism is ridiculous. The subsequent ban at Sunderland Poly is bordering on antisemitism.

Large numbers of Labour Party members are Zionists. And not just right-wingers. Tony Benn, Eric Heffer, Jo Richardson all support the continued existence of the state of Israel. In that, they are Zionists. Even though support for Israel is only one part of their politics, they are still Zionists.

Many of the comrades at Sunderland who voted to ban the UJS are also in the left of the Labour Party. Some will be supporting the campaign to pressurise Tony Benn to run against Kinnock for Labour Party leader. That Benn is a Zionist doesn't stop them supporting him.

So the only objection they can have is to organised Zionists. But that doesn't hold true either. Benn and Heffer are members of Labour Friends of Israel, so in that sense they are organised Zionists.

When it comes to wider politics, then the misguided comrades at Sunderland do not think that being a Zionist puts you beyond the pale. Zionism is not such an issue for them that everything else is always secondary. So to say that Zionism is racism, and to mean it, must lead the comrades to want to ban large chunks of the Labour left.

It would also mean that the comrades would want to ban a Labour Club which supported the continued existence of the state of Israel.

But Sunderland wouldn't carry that out. Certainly they may choose to leaflet or picket a Tony Benn meeting, but to talk about banning him is clearly ridiculous.

The only people Sunderland want to ban are the Jewish Zionists!

Don't ban Zionists!

John O'Mahony [Sean Matgamna],
SO 221, 28.3.85

Israel is a racist state, and Israeli atrocities such as its savage reprisals against Arab men, women and children in Lebanon are crimes against humanity.

Should anti-racists therefore treat Zionists — or all those who support the right of the Israeli state to exist — as racists? Sunderland Polytechnic's ban on the Union of Jewish Students has placed this issue at the centre of student politics. The issue goes way beyond student politics.

For almost all Jews — apart from revolutionary socialists and some religious zealots — are Zionists (at least in a broad sense), and therefore what is at issue here is whether or not socialists, and anti-racists, should politically persecute Jews.

The Sunderland student union ban was not the work of an unrepresentative minority. Over 1000 students attended its General Meeting last month which endorsed the ban on the Union of Jewish Students on the grounds that the UJS is racist because it is avowedly Zionist.

Nor is the majority attitude at Sunderland untypical of the Left.

Lenin and Trotsky never dreamed of 'banning Zionists' — though such a ban would have been a much less drastic matter in their day, when only an ideological minority of Jews were Zionists. They opposed Zionism politically: but, for example, the Poale Zion (Workers of Zion) movement continued to publish its paper in the USSR until 1927, the year the Left Opposition was outlawed.

Yet many today who consider themselves Leninists or Trotskyists support a ban on Zionists.

The intention of the Sunderland Poly students is to show the sharpest possible intolerance and hostility towards what they consider to be racism — and that is good.

What they have done, however, looks more like racism than the anti-racism they intend. They have targeted a community which for something like 1500 years has been the victim of Europe's ingrained, traditional Christian anti-Jewish racism. The greatest racist crime in recorded history was done foot by Jews but against Jews.

Israel exploits that fact, and uses the Nazi holocaust of six million Jews for self-

justification and moral blackmail. But the holocaust does not thereby become some thing we can forget about or regard as an event of ancient his-

tory.

One of the tragedies of Israel, conceived as a refuge against anti-semitism, is that its activities now combine with the effect in the West of the increased power and wealth of the Arab states to generate antisemitism dressed up in the garb of anti-Zionism.

Today the rump National Front has turned "left" and denounces "finance capitalism", which it says is 'Jewish capitalism'. They are poking around in the old vomit of the Nazis, who tried to appeal to workers by scapegoating the Jews for the crimes of capitalism. The new NF even denounces Israel and Zionism for their ill-treatment of the Palestinians.

The drive, motives and intentions of even the most confused left-wing anti-Zionist are of course radically different. Yet today justified hostility to Israel has pushed much of the revolutionary left to the edge of a new antisemitism, and some so-called leftists ("Newsline") over the edge.

It is not that they are supporters of Hitlerite racial mumbo-jumbo, or anything like that. But whatever the good intentions, there is no way that a ban like that at Sunderland Poly can avoid being antisemitic.

Zionism is part of the identity that modern history — centrally, Hitler's massacres, and the callous attitude of the big powers to those massacres and their survivors — has stamped on Jews. To differentiate between banning Zionists and banning Jews is no more than a thin fiction when the vast majority of Jews today identify with Israel and are supporters — active or passive, callous or guilty, blinkered and happy, or deeply troubled supporters — of the existing Jewish state. This is part of their identity as Jews, and not easily detachable.

The ban on Zionists is akin to the old proselytising Christian anti-semitism which wanted to convert the Jews, rather than, like Hitler and the racists, to kill them, but was bitterly hostile to those who refused to change and be converted.

Jewish identification with Israel has its roots and motives not in anti-Arab racism, nor even in a thought-out commitment to displace the Palestinian Arabs, but in the Jews' experience of racist persecution, culminating in the Nazi slaughter.

It was only during and after the Third Reich's "Final Solution", the terrible paroxysm of antisemitism that slaughtered six million Jews, that Zionism gained general acceptance in the European and US Jewish communities. Before then the Zionist project to colonise Palestine had been a minority creed among Jews.

The identification with the Zionist colony, and later with the Israeli state, was identification with a Jewish state that seemed to offer a guarantee that

the age-old persecution of the Jews would now cease.

Far from being conscious racists, most Jewish Zionists in Britain are not even conscious of the racist basis of the state of Israel.

They are not motivated by race-hatred, but by a wrong and misguided response to anti-Jewish racism.

Of course Zionist Jews are responsible for themselves. Those who support the state of Israel are supporters of a racist state even if they refuse to acknowledge the less acceptable facts about Israel's origins and its mode of operation over the past 40 years.

As Zionists they are our political and ideological opponents.

That is quite a long way, however, from being the same as the National Front or other groups formed around fascist programmes and fuelled by race hatred.

The attempt to treat Zionist Jews as if they were racists is both unjust and itself inevitably productive of racist attitudes, albeit wrapped up in good intentions.

Listen to the usefully crass "Newline" editorialising in support of the Sunderland decision. Benevolently they conclude:

"We reject the spurious premise that all Jews are and must be Zionists, or that anti-Zionism is antisemitism. Sunderland Poly students are right to take a stand. We would support the formation of a Jewish Society which anti-Zionist Jews would be eligible to join. But a Zionist society is not acceptable."

Repeat: "We would support the formation of a Jewish Society which anti-Zionist Jews would be eligible to join".

Newsline of course goes in for childish pretences and denies that most Jews are Zionists. But its 'benevolence' shows how closely the attitudes of sections of the Left now parallel traditional antisemitism — in this case, the Christian antisemitism that wanted to convert the Jews.

One of the blocks to rational discussion of this question on the left today is that things are rarely spelled out. Even many who would not — for tactical or better reasons — ban Jewish student societies, share the notion that Zionists should — more or less — be treated as racists. Translated, that means that most Jews — those who cannot be persuaded to stop believing that Israel, or some version of Israel, has a right to exist — should be persecuted.

Some people define away the problem by pretending that antisemitism must be defined as Hitlerism or bigoted Christianity (and therefore cannot include them).

As if there haven't been many antisemitisms in history! Hitler's antisemitism was very different from the Catholic antisemitism to be found in

old Austro Hungary or Poland: different again was the antisemitism in Poland in the 50s and 60s in which hatred of a Jewish Stalinist terrorist like party boss Beirut blended with the older Catholic strain. It was a section of a Stalinist bureaucracy, not an old ruling class, which offered its Jewish Beirut (like Rothschilds in pre-war Europe) as scapegoats to deflect popular hatred.

Jews — rich and poor alike — have been the universal scapegoat. The basic culture of Christian society for two millennia has been saturated with the Bible's myth about who killed Christ.

If hypocrisy is a tribute paid by vice to virtue, mental dishonesty here is a device to keep the left from facing up to the implications of its attitudes. But the implications are there under the surface. And sometimes they show through — as in the ravings of Newsline about the "Zionist world conspiracy" or the crude drawings of "Zionists" in the style of traditional anti-semitic caricatures of Jews published in the early Labour Herald. That these people are tolerated on the Left as part of the anti-Zionist common front tells its own story.

We should try to be logical — because that is the only way to be honest.

In face of the crimes of the Israeli state. perhaps we should say that the old antisemites had something after all? That is an abhorrent idea for almost everybody on the Left. Yet it is the right way to pose the question, because it honestly sums up what is implicit in the attitude that 'all Zionists are racists'.

After all, if the ban on the Jewish student society at Sunderland Poly is right, then we should not stop there. Other Jewish societies should be banned. Jewish community organisations like the Board of Deputies should be outlawed. Mainstream Jewish newspapers should be proscribed. And then what about the synagogues? Centres in each area of organised Zionist support for Israel? Why should they be allowed freely to meet like that?

If it is right to ban a Jewish student society, then it makes no sense to tolerate synagogues (unless they adhere to those small Jewish religious sects who reject the state of Israel).

It is, of course, this horrible logic that keeps sections of the Left from recognising the implications of their position. They also do not recognise the antecedents.

The truth — and many on the Left naturally find it unpalatable — is that antisemitism of various sorts has more than once found a home in the organisations of the working class and of the Left.

In the late 19th century many antisemites identified Jews with money-

grabbing capitalism, though most Jews were terribly poor. Areas of the labour movement became tainted with the sort of "well-intentioned" antisemitism which Marxists denounced as the 'socialism of idiots'. Even the Austrian Marxists, faced with a powerful Catholic antisemitism, ostentatiously declared themselves "neither antisemitic nor philosemitic".

For many decades — and still to this day — antisemitism has been rampant in the USSR and in most of the East European Stalinist states. For example, in 1968-9 there was a thoroughgoing antisemitic purge in Poland.

In the later 40s and early 50s, a virulent antisemitism, thinly disguised as anti-Zionism, was poured out by the propaganda machine of the Stalinist governments and by the western Communist Parties.

On the eve of his death in 1953, Stalin was about to stage an antisemitic show trial of the 'Jewish doctors in the Kremlin'. Most likely this would have been the start of Stalin's version of Hitler's "final solution", mass deportation and slaughter for the surviving Jews of the USSR and Eastern Europe.

Today, overwhelming revulsion at the crimes of the Israeli state and sympathy with the Palestinian Arabs provide the emotional drive for the sort of "anti-Zionism" which has antisemitic implications:

Some of the most fervent and confused left-wing 'anti-Zionists' are 'Third Worldists' or 'socialist bloc'-ists, seeing the world not in terms of class struggle but of "progressive" and reactionary national bloc, and of a division of the world into 'imperialism' and 'anti-imperialism'. In one way or another, they think in terms of national conflicts, national confrontations, national causes and national — not class — solutions. They see progressive and reactionary peoples, 'good' and 'bad' nations. It is a small step from all this to the idea of good and bad peoples.

Memories of fascist antisemitism stop such ideas from developing clearly. So the logic of such 'Third-Worldism' remains just under the surface.

Another root of "left-wing" antisemitism is the fact that many of the vociferous 'anti-Zionists' do not accept that the Palestinian Jews have any rights in Palestine. To put it at its weakest, it is usually not at all clear what positive alternative much of the Left is advocating when it denounces Israel and the crimes of its governments. All too often the implication certainly the logical and emotional implication — is 'Zionists out of the Middle East' (with the escape clause that this is nothing against Jews, because anti-Zionist Jews can remain). Many left-wing anti-Zionists operate not on class politics but on Palestinian

or pan-Arab nationalism.

So believes that the solution to the Jewish-Arab conflict is the creation of a secular democratic state for Palestinian Jews and Arabs, with guaranteed rights for the Jewish nation in Palestine. (A small minority of SO supporters think that the only practicable solution is some rearrangement in two states. Jewish and Arab). The idea of the democratic secular state is widely accepted. But that part of it which says that the Jewish nation, too, has rights, is often downplayed. SO accepts it and means it.

We should denounce the crimes of the Israeli state. We should defend the Palestinian victims of that state and champion their rights. But we must do so as working class socialists, not as Third Worldists or vicarious Arab chauvinists. We must not mumble about our fine anti racist intentions, fall ourselves into a variant of the oldest racism in history.

Are nations guilty?

Jakob Taut, SO 229, 22.5.85

The recent banning of a Jewish student society at Sunderland Polytechnic — on the grounds that it is Zionist, and Zionism is racist — has stirred debate on the British left about Zionism, anti-Zionism, and antisemitism.

The West German left has also been pushed into controversy on these issues following a visit to the Middle East by a delegation from the Greens, the West German ecological party.

The leader of the delegation, Jürgen Reents, came out in favour of the Palestinians. But he put it like this: "German anti-fascists must stand for compensation to the Palestinians because they are 'victims of the victims of the Nazis'."

Responding to the official Israeli argument about the guilt of the whole German people in relation to the Jews, and the obligation therefore for Germans to aid Israel, he declared: "The Nazi atrocities and neo-Nazi daubings pale in comparison with the Zionist atrocities, and not only I ask myself, when will the Jews be given something to think about, that will stop them murdering their fellow-beings".

Pro-Israeli critics of Reents within the Greens responded in the same terms of collective national guilt: precisely as a German, one should not complain too loudly about what Jews do.

In the socialist paper Was Tun, Jakob Taut, a Marxist of German-Jewish origin now living in Israel, responded:

The Zionist idea of the solution of the Jewish question through the "gath-

ering-together of the exiles" and their settlement in Palestine arose over 100 years ago in Eastern Europe as a consequence of a wave of anti-Jewish pogroms. The founders built Zionist organisations to realise this dream.

Eventually the trauma of the Nazis' annihilation of the Jews gave the idea and practice of Zionism a previously unknown force among the remaining Jewish communities and individuals. This, among many other factors, was a powerful impetus behind the setting-up of the Jewish state of Israel in Palestine in 1948.

Originally Zionism neither planned the driving out of the Palestinian Arabs nor intended to create a bastion for imperialism. Zionism was a product of the extremely tragic and complicated Jewish problem. If revolutionary Marxists nonetheless declare war on Zionism, this is primarily on the basis of two points.

Firstly... the concentration of some millions of Jews in Palestine/ Israel, where the original Arab population was mostly driven out in 1948-9 and 1967 and the same fate threatens the Arabs remaining there, cannot be a basis for overcoming the ghetto existence of Jews. A nationally or ethnically oppressed people has never been liberated by oppressing or discriminating against another people.

The situation of the isolation of Israel in the Arab region created in fact the biggest ghetto... We are thus anti-Zionists because Zionism inevitably, because of its principles, oppresses another people and can be no solution to the Jewish problem.

Secondly [the alliance between Israel and US imperialism against liberation struggles all over the world, including Central America.]

These two starting points of anti-Zionism do not mean, however, that every anti-Zionism is automatically "progressive" or "revolutionary". We seek neither to deny nor to gloss over the deeds of Zionism. But to compare those deeds with the Nazi atrocities is outrageous... The Nazis systematically, as an industry, murdered all the Jews they could get hold of because they were Jews, and wanted to exterminate the whole of world Jewry. In all the shameful record of Zionist "atrocities" there is — up to now, anyway — no trace of such behaviour by Israel against the Palestinians.

The demand to "give the Jews something to think about" would have gone well in the bloodthirsty Nazi paper Der Stürmer... To call the Palestinians "victims of the victims of the Nazis" and on those grounds to give them "humanitarian" aid from the descendants of the Nazis, is tasteless. Intentionally or not, "compensation" here substitutes for support for a people fighting for its rights.

Besides it is incomprehensible why

the anti-fascist forces of today, who have nothing to do with the plight of the victims of the Nazis 40 or 45 years ago, should relieve their consciences by "compensation" to the "victims of the victims of the Nazis"... Are the Greens, or their spokesperson Reents, somehow of the view that they carry the guilt of their "elders" in their blood?...

If Reents wants to help the Palestinians as "victims of the victims of the Nazis" and not from internationalist solidarity with an oppressed people, like every other oppressed people whether it is a "victim of the victims of the Nazis" or not, then this betrays a nationalist narrowness. And nationalist narrowness is fertile soil for the example, above, of a reactionary anti-Zionism...

In conclusion, a personal note: the writer of these lines ... had to flee Hitler Germany, lived as a retired worker in Palestine (later Israel), and has been politically active there for 50 years. He was also seriously injured by Arabs in the Jewish-Arab "conflict"...

The intention "as a German not to complain too loudly" not only does not compensate for the crimes of the Nazis against the Jews, but shows cowardice and lack of principle. As a victim of the whole complex I am of the view that both the Nazi crimes and international and regional Israeli policy — without in the least equating the two — can and should be sharply condemned and fought by Jews and Germans and all other people.

Distorted ideas of national "honour or dishonour" unfortunately hinder the vitally necessary international action to prevent the destruction of human civilisation, which the Israeli regime, at least objectively, is helping to pave the way for.



The left and antisemitism

Sean Matgamna, SO 265-6, 3 and 10.4.86

The WRP split wide open last October, and now there are two organisations calling themselves the WRP.

One, led — perhaps nominally — by Gerry Healy, the dictator of the old organisation for 3/4 decades, resumed publishing a daily paper, “The Newsline”, at the beginning of February. The second WRP, which seems to contain all the other prominent leaders of the old organisation — the Banda brothers, Cliff Slaughter, Tom Kemp, Bill Hunter, etc. — now publishes a weekly, the Workers Press.

The Newsline group is indistinguishable from the WRP of the previous decade except that one more conspirator and enemy is now added to the long list of its devils — the “Banda-Slaughter clique”. For the Newsline group all the old lunatic certainties — like the dogma that the miners did not suffer defeat in 1985 — remain fixed and the dialectical prophet Healy is still in his place in the firmament.

The Workers Press group is the interesting WRP. For many weeks now they have given over a large proportion of the paper to a free discussion of some of the issues thrown up by their break with Healy. They have a long way to go yet before they will have worked themselves clear of Healyism, and it is not at all obvious that they will arrive at coherent or stable revolutionary socialist politics as a result of their political reappraisals.

The pressure on them, and the temptation, must be to sink into a lowest common-denominator of “kitsch-Trotskyism” — that is, “Trotskyist” forms filled with the current, often populist, fashions and enthusiasms of the broader left.

Those who were prominent leading members of Gerry Healy’s WRP still maintain the transparent fiction that “they didn’t know” about Healy’s misdeeds. On the other hand, it must take a great deal of courage for those of them who spent decades inside Gerry Healy’s “machine for maiming militants” even partially to confront their own past and set about radically reassessing it.

That they are trying to do that testifies to a continuing devotion to the socialist goals they must have thought they were serving during all their years of moral, intellectual, political and physical thralldom under the unfettered rule of the brutal and sadistic bully Gerry Healy. Old-timers like Bill Hunter, politically eclipsed and silenced for a quarter of a century, now seem to be playing a prominent role.

In a curious way what is happening to them resembles what happened to thinking members of the British Communist Party in 1956-7 after Khrushchev denounced Stalin at the so-called 20th Congress of the CPSU in February 1956 and thereby blew the lid off the Stalinist parties, putting everything up for reassessment. And as a matter of fact some of them went through that experience as CPers in 1956-7 before making their way to a sort of Trotskyism.

The discussion pieces published by Workers Press have included a letter by SO’s editor John O’Mahony which asked for clarification on the Workers Press group’s attitude to such things as the libel case the Healyites brought against SO. The Workers Press group itself is now facing a barrage of legal actions by the Healyites — actions designed to drive them out of business.

One very important issue raised in response to John O’Mahony’s letter is the question of the antisemitism of Healy’s WRP. In 1983 SO published an article by John O’Mahony accusing the WRP of blatant antisemitism, and now Charlie Pottins, a Workers Press supporter and also a prominent member of the Jewish Socialist Group, has re-raised this question in Workers Press.

He accuses O’Mahony of “smearing the Party as ‘antisemitism’ and even ‘pogromists’” (Workers Press, 8.3.86). Such “vicious slanders and incitements” are not “honest polemics”, he insists.

In fact in 1983 it was Charlie Pottins who wrote the three-page Newsline reply to O’Mahony’s SO article, lending his name as a prominent Jewish Socialist Group member to cover for the Healyites’ antisemitism.

Now this is a very important question. It can be easily demonstrated that the Healyite WRP was and is indeed blatantly antisemitic. But if that were all there was to it, then it might not be worth returning to the subject now.

The fact is, however, that the explicit antisemitic ravings of Healy’s WRP are no more than an extreme and open expression, in (as we shall see) language and forms close to those of traditional antisemitism, of ideas which are implicit in the fervent “anti-Zionism”, the strident insistence that Israel must be destroyed, common to much of the left.

To go over the edge into more or less explicit antisemitism the Healyites needed only to add to the common left anti-Zionist demonology their own characteristic paranoia and a mercenary desire to get into step with the most extreme anti-Israeli Arab chauvinism.

While it would be libellous to identify the “anti-Zionist” left with the antisemitism of the Healyites, it nevertheless seems to us that what the

Healyites made of the anti-Zionist demonology which they share with much of the left (and until not so long ago with SO too) holds an accurate mirror up to that ideology,

The Newsline editorial reproduced on [page 25] was not just something that can be shrugged off as a peculiarity of Healy’s crackpot WRP. On the same day that the editorial appeared, and side by side with it on the same page, Newsline carried an interview with “Red Ken” Livingstone, then leader of the Greater London Council. In that interview Livingstone — who now considers himself a candidate to become leader of the Labour Party — chattily agreed with the interviewer that, of course, the item in a recent BBC Money Programme exposing the distribution of Libyan money to political groups in Britain, and in the first place the WRP, had been inspired by “the ‘Zionists’” to discredit the WRP.

Livingstone was then a joint editor of Labour Herald — a publication set up by Healy’s WRP for Ken Livingstone and Ted Knight and technically edited by Steven Miller, a member according to Workers Press) of the Central Committee of Healy’s WRP.

Livingstone did not demur at the antisemitism of the Newsline editorial. SO publicly asked him to say where he stood on it: “What does he think of the editorial? Does he think we should just shrug and accept antisemitism as a feature of the far left?” (SO 14.4.83).

Livingstone never answered explicitly — but he continued to collaborate with the WRP and appear on its platforms at public meetings for two years longer. In its own way that was a pretty clear answer.

Such tolerance of Healy’s antisemitic ravings tells its own story.

It would be wrong and unfair to hold the Workers Press group responsible for the Healyite editorial (though one still finds some echoes of its ideas in WP — see below). Reflex self-defence, such as Charlie Pottins’, is humanly understandable and may prove to have no political significance — even for Pottins himself. The Workers Press group may well choose to cleanse itself of this most filthy part of Healy’s legacy too.

I take it up here not to try to brand the Workers Press group with the Healyite editorial but because of the general importance of the issue re-raised by Charlie Pottins.

Though Healy has now gone yet deeper into the isolation of his own political sewer, the question of our attitude to the Jewish state and our political programme for the Middle East — which Healy solved by merging pseudo anti-imperialism with vicarious Arab chauvinism into something close to Hitlerite antisemitism — remains a major one for the left.

The first part of this article deals with

Healy's WRP. The second, next week, will deal with the serious left and Israel.

Charlie Pottins says it is just a smear to accuse Healy's WRP of anti-semitism.

What are the facts? Healy's WRP did publish undisguised and unmistakable antisemitic material, as I'll now prove. As well as the particular record of the WRP, I think much that an entire broad spectrum of the revolutionary, "Trotskyist", left says about Israel and "Zionism" is implicitly antisemitic. I'll separate the two issues out.

On Saturday 9 April 1983 Newsline's editorial ("This Morning") appeared with a small strapline in the top left hand corner "From Socialist Organiser to Reagan and Thatcher" followed by the main headline, across the column: "The Zionist Connection".

The strapline summed up the editorial's thesis: there is an international Zionist conspiracy stretching from Ronald Reagan's cabinet, through Mrs Thatcher's Downing St, all the way to Socialist Organiser!

The editorial began:

"A powerful Zionist connection runs from the so-called left of the Labour Party right into the centre of this government in Downing St. There is no difficulty whatever in proving this".

Evidence? "Mr Stuart Young, a director of the Jewish Chronicle" has been appointed "the youngest ever Chairman of the BBC". "He is the brother of Mr David Young, another Thatcher appointee, who is chairman of the Manpower Services Commission... This is the key organisation the Tories are transforming into a corporatist 'front' [Newsline's quotes] to mobilise jobless youth from 14 years upwards into a slave labour body to break trade union wages, safety procedures and working conditions". "The TUC and Labour chiefs have accepted these appointments" of the Zionist Young brothers "without a murmur of protest".

Yes, but what is special about the Young brothers as distinct from any other Tory pigs? Why is it essential to give the job of organising slave labourers to David Young as opposed, say, to Norman Tebbit?

Following immediately after the last quote comes Newsline's answer

"The Tories know they can rely totally upon Zionist imperialism [sic] to produce the most hated reactionaries" for use in such filthy work. But the Tories have other goals too. They can turn to their own use the reasonable hatred people will feel against these "Zionist imperialists", "in order to transform the situation at a later date into a pro-fascist antisemitic pogrom against all the Jews in general".

There follows a paragraph in bold type intended to illustrate the last point but which is sheer gobbledegook. Zi-

onism and Hitler agreed to let rich Jews leave Germany on condition that they become Zionists. Today the Tories "know they have a powerful antisemitic trump card up their sleeves, to replay..." Dastardly Zionist imperialists like the Youngs — i.e. politically prominent Jews — are helping them prepare it.

In what way do the Young brothers especially represent "Zionist imperialism"?

That's not clear, but in the context the answer can only be that they are Jews and that any Jew in any similar position is necessarily a link in the chain through which Zionist imperialism interlaces itself with the other imperialisms — which the editorial will later strongly suggest, it guides and may even control.

Newsline continues:

"From the support and advance publicity which the Jewish Chronicle gave the BBC's Money Programme the reactionary Zionist link was clear for all to see [sic]. But it also stretches through Downing St channels right into the White House and President Reagan".

Naturally any Jewish Chronicle interest in an organisation it knows to be funded by Libya is proof positive that the WRP, Libya etc. are victims of an international Zionist conspiracy.

Now the editorial goes off on another tack.

US provocation against Libya "raises in its sharpest form the central political question". Do "Trotskyists" support Gaddafi's "régime" [sic] against US imperialism on principle, or seek neutrality between US imperialism and Gaddafi? Newsline lies that Socialist Organiser is neutral

And Socialist Organiser supported the "Zionist-sponsored Money Programme". Now we come to the knot-tying exercise — "Here from SO is unqualified support for the work of Thatcher's appointee as chairman of the BBC" who is also a director of British Caledonian Airways (eh?) and the British Overseas Trade Group for Israel.

So it is all clear. They needed to put in a Jew as chair of the BBC to get the Libyan gold item into a little early Sunday evening programme! And of course only Jews backed by the Cabinet could organise this attack on the WRP.

Newsline continues: "SO has landed itself right bang in the middle of Thatcher's hand-picked Zionists as an outright supporter of their policies of witch hunting the WRP and the News Line for our principled stand against imperialism and in support of the Libyan masses [sic] under their leader Muammar Gaddafi". Gerry Healy obviously thinks that Thatcher has set the Jews on him!

"The question of the hour, we re-

peat, is the pro-Zionist policies of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations".

So who is in charge here? Zionism? Or Washington and London? Which is dog and which tail?

We shall see. But the author has more to reveal. He knows or senses something special about SO that explains how SO fits into the "Zionist connection".

"In the background of the Socialist Organiser one can detect a powerful current of anti-Arab racism — also shared by Reagan and Thatcher. That is the substance of their support for the Money Programme..." By contrast. Newsline "unhesitatingly supports the Libyan and Palestinian people and its leadership". Yes. And against what exactly do they need support? "Against the nuclear war plans of Reagan, Thatcher and the Zionists in their campaign to destroy all national liberation movements in the Middle East. Socialist Organiser has joined the class enemy". We are probably making our own small nuclear device in a cellar somewhere in London as our contribution.

Finally comes the editorial's punch line and finale. "The Zionist connection between these so-called 'lefts' in the Labour Party right through to Thatcher and Reagan's White House is there for all to see in its unprincipled nakedness".

Now the writer of that editorial could be briefly dismissed as a nutcase — albeit an antisemitic nutcase. Petty personal paranoia oozes out of it, interwoven with the grand historical paranoia of the various world Jewish conspiracy theories with which the editorial aligned itself. If a Jew becomes chair of the BBC, then what else can it be but a "Zionist conspiracy" calling on the aid of the prime minister to fix up for a rather mild item on the WRP to be broadcast on a low-audience early Sunday evening television programme. If the WRP is feeling persecuted, why it must be "the Zionists".

Why was the Money Programme's alleged "witch-hunt" the work of "Zionists"? Because a Jew is chair of the BBC? Or did the WRP notice what might be a Jewish name credited for part of it? Or is it because only "Zionists" are concerned with the Middle East? Because only "Zionists" exhibit the sort of powerful current of "anti-Arab racism" that the sensitive and omniscient "one" who wrote the editorial could detect in the background of SO? (There are people with a flair for detecting these things, you know...)

Is it because the Jewish Chronicle showed interest? Interest in an exposé of people it must regard as at least "potential pogromists" (to quote what I said in the 1983 SO article).

The Newsline editorial is the work of a writer who feels himself to be sur-

rounded by Jews — Tory “Zionists”, Reagan “Zionists”, SO “Zionists”. Perhaps his buried conscience is troubling him.

But the small-beer paranoia of one who needs to believe that Thatcher had to appoint a Jew chair of the BBC to secure the very tame revelations of the Money Programme should be separated out from the picture of the world which is painted. It is a very familiar picture.

The Newsline editorialist theorises along the well-worn paths of classic antisemitism, such as that embodied in the Tzarist secret police forgery “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion” (1905) — the book that has rightly been called a warrant for genocide against the Jews of Europe under Hitler.

What the editorial asserts is that there is a world-wide “Zionist” conspiracy linking and bonding people who are politically millions of miles apart, from members of Reagan’s government to the centre of Mrs Thatcher’s cabinet, the commanding heights of the BBC and all the way through to... the publishers of Socialist Organiser.

And what links these seeming polar opposites? “Zionism” and “Zionist imperialism”. But Zionism here is a transparent code word, and plainly the writer is talking about a conspiracy of Jews — a conspiracy of political opposites who can nevertheless conspire together in the interests of “Zionist imperialism” because they are Jews.

Who are the “Zionists”? For Newsline the Zionists are all Jews who do not accept the proposal to smash and dismantle the Israeli state and to replace it by a Palestinian Arab state in which Jews are promised individual though not national rights — in other words all Jews except a few revolutionary socialists and a few of the ultra-religious.

“The Tories know that they can rely totally upon Zionist imperialism to produce the most hated reactionaries...” Newsline in effect defines all Jews as “agents of Zionist imperialism” (or, to put it at the mildest, it assumes the right to so define any hostile Jew it can identify in any place of prominence within the capitalist system).

In this picture Zionist imperialism is no small or secondary power. Israel is not merely what it really is, a mere regional sub-imperialism with special features. “The question of the hour” is not US imperialism, or the domination of a large part of the world by Stalinist totalitarianism: it is the subservience of the US to “Zionism”, “the pro-Zionist policies of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations”.

“Zionist imperialism” must be the very heart of imperialism, whose controlling tentacles reach secretly right into the centre of Mrs Thatcher’s cabinet and into Reagan’s too.

The Jews, it seems, are now the in-

ternational janissaries of imperialism and — the logic is inescapable — possibly imperialism itself is only a projection of the Jewish drive for world domination.

Now there are Jews — or if you like “Zionists” — in bourgeois cabinets, perhaps in some politburos still, in the BBC and in SO. The Jews are a people scattered through all segments of society and throughout the world.

Seek evidence that there may be a conspiratorial network of Jews, and you will find it — red Jews and Rothschilds, members of Reagan’s and Thatcher’s cabinets and writers for SO. These “links” are the raw material from which theories about “Jewish” or “Zionist” conspiracies can easily be spun.

But — given the vast political gulf separating those linked together in the Newsline editorial — the only possible rational common denominator on which to base such a theory is race (whatever that may be).

Of course not all the “Zionists” are imperialists. Some of them are socialists and call themselves Trotskyists, like SO. They too are part of the conspiracy — and to judge by all the attention we were being given, a very important part of it. This is the proof of the vile racist basic structures and logic embedded in that editorial.

There is a parallel if not identity with Jewish world conspiracy theories popular before World War 2 (and still virulently alive in Eastern Europe). The Hitlerites and other antisemites used to explain that both communism and finance capital — those seemingly implacable enemies — were really different aspects of a single world conspiracy, coordinated by the “Elders of Zion” and directed against the German nation, against “Christian civilisation”, or whatever.

Likewise the Newsline editorial portrayed the centre of Thatcher’s government and SO as secretly linked and bonded — against the WRP and the Libyan and Palestinian peoples — by a hidden network of “Zionists”.

But SO is opposed to Zionism (if that means Israeli chauvinism or Jewish exclusivism)? It supports national rights for the Palestinians? Though contemptuous of Gaddafi’s claims to socialism, and of much of his hollow anti-imperialism, SO would defend Libya against an imperialist invasion? Why, all that is just a front, a mere sham division of labour among the conspirators.

Didn’t the pre-war communists pretend to denounce finance capital and the finance-capital police shoot the communists in pre-war Germany? It’s just a show to fool those who have not heard about the international Jewish conspiracy.

You could object: isn’t the asserted common thread political Zionism? Isn’t

it a case of making Israel and hostility or friendliness to Israel the measure of all things? Isn’t it a matter of starting with the Arab-chauvinist picture of Israel and reading everything off negatively from that?

No: Zionism here is not a political reference. Today “Zionism” commonly means pro-Israeli sentiment of one sort or another. It includes the overwhelming majority of the people of Britain. If political Zionism is the point, then adding a Zionist Jew to the cabinet is to add nothing, as all the cabinet members are Zionists anyway!

There are Zionists and Zionists: there are Zionists and there are Jews. Plainly it is the Jews who are the core conspirators and who make up the special “Zionist connections”.

The implication is inescapably this: that even anti-Zionist Jews like the SO writers the Newsline writer had in mind will have ineradicable loyalties and allegiances more basic than politics.

These are the conspirators: some people are congenital “Zionists” whatever their politics.

(And such ideas have not all gone with Gerry Healy. In his recent long article on the history of the Fourth International Michael Banda ascribed alleged errors by the movement over Palestine in 1947-8 to the “Zionist” proclivities of Ernest Mandel. What is he talking about? There was no serious dispute in the FI on this question in 1948. Ernest Mandel played no notable part in discussing the position on Palestine in 1947 or 48. There is no political reason to link Ernest Mandel with Zionism in 1948 or 1986 except by way of the underlying thought that he has a “Jewish” name, therefore is — or may be, I don’t know — a Jew.)

I submit that whatever Charlie Pottinger may say, the charge of overt, blatant antisemitism is one that the Healyite WRP has to answer to, and that one of the clearest examples of it is this editorial. The writer sub-consciously (I assume) found himself pencilling in the outlines of the world view enshrined in the Protocols of Zion theories. He fills those outlines, to be sure, with fervent though incoherent and false “anti-imperialism”; but then the Nazis and other antisemites used to get very angry at the crimes of capitalism — what they called, in scapegoating fashion, Jewish Capitalism.

How did the WRP arrive at such a position? There are reasons peculiar to the WRP and reasons which the WRP has in common with many “Trotskyists”.

Though Healy’s WRP has gone further into explicit antisemitism than anyone else on the left, because of its leaders’ paranoia and the malignant influence of the petrodollar brand of anti-Zionism, I think that the fundamental cause of this degeneracy is the mistaken position on the Middle East

which the Healy WRP and the present one share with much of the left (and until recently with SO). As I'll prove below, much of the left has Arab-chauvinist and not working-class politics on the question, though for good anti-imperialist reasons and from the fine impulse to champion the defeated and oppressed Palestinians.

But first let us get out of the way what was specific to Healy's WRP in generating that editorial.

From the mid-'70s or earlier the WRP saw the world and especially the international Trotskyist movement, mainly in terms of police "conspiracies" and the operation of "agents" and counter-agents.

Vast amounts of money and time were given over to the search for the "conspirators" and "agents" who were seen as being at the root of all evil in the world, and whose subterranean combats and manoeuvres sometimes seemed in the WRP's eyes to have replaced the struggle of classes as the locomotive of history.

You can find large numbers of individuals in the labour movement who will never be politically rational again after an intensive course by Mr Healy on world history and politics for the last 50 years as a spy-hunt.

Add to this paranoid view of the world Healy's financial links with Gaddafi and Iraq, etc., which put Zionism and anti-Zionism at the centre of world politics because Libyan and Iraqi gold was at the centre of Healy's survival, and the scenario virtually writes itself.

There is more to it than that, though. There is the effect of an inbuilt "Pabloite" tendency in the WRP to see the world in terms of the struggle of two basic camps.

This view arose first as the basic pattern of a world divided between the Stalinist states and the capitalist. But over the years it has shifted — and not only for the WRP — to mean imperialism and "anti-imperialism".

During the Falklands/Malvinas war most of those calling themselves Trotskyists accepted even the butcher Galtieri who ruled bourgeois (and indeed sub-imperialist) Argentina into our "class camp".

In the view of the world developed by the WRP under the influence of paranoia and petrodollars, the Palestine question came to be seen as the central pivot of this struggle of the two basic camps, the imperialist and the anti-imperialist. The Arab bourgeoisies, whatever their "faults" and "limitations", were in the "anti-imperialist" camp — ours.

Now if the Palestine question and "Zionism" is the pivot of this world struggle between two basic camps, then I suppose it does make a sort of twisted sense to think that within the imperialist countries the "Zionists",

linked by ineradicable ties to the arch-enemy, the very core of imperialism — Zionist imperialism — are the main enemy, everywhere. As we saw above, the Newline editorial even defined London and Washington politics by their relation to Israel, not the other way round. This was no slip: it fits perfectly into the picture.

In one sense therefore the world view held by the WRP — and not only by the WRP — implies and demands antisemitism. What is remarkable is not the editorial but that the basic Trotskyist and socialist conditioning of Healy has kept open antisemitism partly at bay, relying on such little mental tricks as the transparent pretence that "the Zionists" are only a few super-villains and not most Jews.

Writing soon after World War 2 in one of the essays collected in "The Non-Jewish Jew", Isaac Deutscher reported that he had found rampant antisemitism and open hostility and contempt for the Jews among British army officers guarding Jews in the displaced persons' camps of Europe.

The DPs had survived Hitler and now — Britain having forbidden Jewish migration to Palestine, and the doors being closed elsewhere too — they were told that they had to stay in or return to their countries of origin. For most of them that meant return to virulently antisemitic Poland. Their wish was to get to Palestine.

Deutscher commented that it was the tragic fate of the Jews, even after the holocaust that engulfed almost six million of them, to exist still in popular consciousness as the embodiment and personification of lucre and dirty money.

Not only in popular speech, where a mean or tight person may be called (and not necessarily with conscious malice) a "Jew", will you find the Jew used as a symbol of money and capital in their dirtiest functions. You will find that even in the writings of Karl Marx, who spoke often in the brutal language of 19th century national and racial stereotypes but was surely free of anything we would call racism.

Before Hitler sections of the socialist movement too identified the Jews with money and capital, and accepted Jews — rich, poor and destitute alike — as a representative and symbol of the things they were fighting against in capitalism.

A "socialist", anti-capitalist, anti-semitism was a living current in or on the fringes of most European socialist and labour movements. "Rothschild baiting" merged with popular Christian antisemitism, which was often, as in Central Europe, quite fierce. For example, faced with a Christian antisemitic crusade, the Austrian Social Democrats — whose leader Victor Adler was a Jewish atheist — ostentatiously declared that they were neither

anti- nor philosemitic.

Prominent British Labour leaders supported the 1905 Aliens Act passed in Britain to keep out Russian and Polish Jews. In the published correspondence of Frederick Engels with Karl Marx's son in law Paul Lafargue you will find Lafargue expressing enthusiasm for the socialist "potential" of the quasi-fascist and antisemitic Boulangist movement of the late 1880s and Engels reprimanding him, affectionately but sharply.

Against this once quite important current in socialism, Engels (or was it the German socialist leader August Bebel) launched the slogan: "antisemitism is the socialism of idiots".

Today this sort of antisemitism exists widely in the far left, slightly transformed — now the Jew in his guise of the "Zionist" has come to symbolise racism and imperialism.

"Zionism" — which though the precise meaning of the word is no longer clear must include most Jews — has entered the consciousness of large parts of the left as another word for the worst form of imperialism and racism. Our attitude to it should be little different from our attitude to fascism. The prevalent programme on the left for dealing with it is to "destroy Zionism", that is, destroy Israel.

Is this accurate? Is this reasonable?

The Israeli state has committed and commits great wrongs against the Palestinian people. Israel could only come into existence at all by displacing the Palestinian Arabs and then by defeating the various Arab armies which tried to conquer and overrun the Jews of Palestine in 1948. In the course of the 1948 war vast numbers of Palestinian Arabs fled the Jewish-occupied territory or were driven out.

Israel wound up with more of Palestine than the UN had allotted as the Jewish portion, and the UN was already generous, giving the Jewish one-third of Palestine's people much more than half its resources. And in 1949 Israel joined together with the Arab state of Transjordan (now Jordan) to divide up what was left of the territory allotted by the UN to the Palestinian Arabs.

After 1948 the Israeli state systematically robbed Palestinian Arabs within Israel of their land. Israel is a regional sub-imperialism allied to US imperialism. Since the 1967 War Israel has occupied the West Bank and Gaza, acting as a brutal colonial power there. Israel recently invaded Lebanon.

There is much for socialists to criticise and condemn in Israel, and indeed most far left socialists are outspoken in their criticism and condemnation.

There is also much to condemn in all the other states of the Middle East, such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, etc. Both Iran

and Iraq continue to wage barbaric war on the Kurdish nation. Jordan in 1970 and Syria in 1976 subjected the Palestinian Arabs under their rule to mass slaughter. The Christian Arabs in Lebanon have done likewise. In addition much of the Arab world which surrounds Israel is in the grip of a resurgent Islamic fundamentalism which threatens to throw its society and culture back to the Middle Ages. The religious barbarians who rule Iran leave socialist observers little room for pretence about the consequences of resurgent Islam when it has the whip hand.

Yet socialists — or at any rate most “orthodox” Trotskyists — are surprisingly reluctant even to fundamentally criticise the Islamic states and brand them as reactionary. Some of them — and not only Healy’s WRP — sometimes accept some of their bourgeoisies into our “class camp”. Much of Ernest Mandel’s “United Secretariat of the Fourth International” continues to see something “progressive” in Khomeini’s Islamic revolution. Where the Iranian oppression of the Kurds is objected to, for example, the press of the section of the USFI led by the US SWP talks about “errors” and “mistakes” of the revolutionary regime.

The contrast with the left’s attitude to Israel could not be sharper.

It is, as we shall see, often wrapped up in seemingly reasonable proposals like creating a secular democratic state in Palestine, but, put starkly, the far left’s programme for Palestine is that “Israel must be destroyed”.

Now this is a unique programme: the destruction of a state and the radical alteration of the population of that state’s core area (the pre-1967 Israeli borders). From this everything else follows.

The programme is made to appear not unique by identifying Israel with South Africa. But that is an utterly false comparison of an organic society, made up of all classes and not essentially dependent on exploiting a submerged population, on one side, and on the other a society in which the white population are an exploiting caste dependent for what they have on the submergence and helotry of a numerically much bigger black population.

Whatever similarity in political military techniques there may be between South Africa and Israel, they are radically different societies. Israel was given its character by the Zionists’ resolute refusal to exploit Arab labour and their drive instead to replace it. Whatever one thinks of the left Zionist colonists’ “Jewish labour only” policy it was the opposite of that mass exploitation on which modern South Africa was built. The exploitation of Arab labour from the occupied territories since 1967 has not fundamentally

altered the character of Israel in this respect.

But, whatever about the comparison with South Africa, don’t the crimes of Israel brand it as something specially abhorrent and therefore justify the programme of destroying the Zionist state? Doesn’t the fate of the dispossessed Palestinian Arabs make any other programme than the destruction of the Jewish state inadequate if justice is to be done?

The proper socialist answer is no. To answer yes is to take up the goals of Arab nationalism and chauvinism, but most of the left does answer yes.

This is the dominant, all-shaping fact on the far left: that the left supports the destruction of the state of Israel — not merely its defeat in this or that battle where such defeat might be desirable on the issues, but the destruction of the core pre-1967 Jewish area as a territory where the Palestinian Jews can congregate as a compact national mass

From that everything else follows. It only takes a twist of Gerry Healy paranoia or the touch of the petro-dollar to bring up the antisemitic logic.

Uniquely in the whole world, the left thinks that in the Israeli Jews, it confronts a “bad” nation which can not be reformed or modified, not even by its own proletariat — unless they abandon their national identity and the national territory where most of them were born — and which must be destroyed. In this unique case, unlike all the others created by the complicated and immensely tragic events of the last 40, 60, or even 80 years (and for what people were those years more tragic than for the Jews?) the left takes — its stand on a historical-reversionist, roll-history-backwards position. The position is inseparable from Arab revanchism and Arab chauvinism.

In part one of this article I proved that Gerry Healy’s WRP was rabidly antisemitic. I asserted that the basic reason for this — to which Healy added paranoia and the mercenary desire to earn Arab petrodollars — was the WRP’s support for the destruction of the Jewish state of Israel by its Arab neighbour states, a position which the Healyite WRP and the present one share with much of the left.

It follows, therefore, that much of the left is — though repudiating the paranoid ravings of a Gerry Healy — implicitly antisemitic. I will now substantiate and justify what I said about the broader “Marxist” and “Trotskyist” left...

Israeli chauvinism once rejected, the Middle East reality allows of only two possible or imaginable solutions to the Jewish-Arab conflict in Palestine.

Either drive the Jews out; or accept that a Jewish nation has, despite the understandable Arab resistance, come into existence, and must be accepted

as having rights, in the first place the right to exist as a nation in Palestine.

The programme of driving out the Jews means continuing to try to do what much of the Arab feudalists, bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie and working class have been united in trying to do for at least five decades. The latter option must mean compromise over the disputed territory, recompense for the Palestinian Arabs, and a comprehensive peace in which Israel’s right to exist with agreed borders (not necessarily the present ones) is not challenged militarily.

At a later stage in the peaceful development of the region the integration of the Jewish state into a Middle East federation would be posed. Exclusivism would break down as the barriers between the formerly warring nations have partly broken down in Europe over the last four decades.

It seems to me to be no part of a socialist solution to national conflicts like that of the Jews and Arabs in Palestine to advocate the destruction of one of the warring nations. The socialist programme in such a situation is for compromise, compensation, reconciliation.

But isn’t there a third alternative — the secular democratic state! No, there isn’t, because — as we shall see — it is unrealisable in reality and the slogan functions in politics as a propaganda auxiliary for the drive out the Jews position.

Of course the idea of solving the terrible national conflict by simply enfolding, intermeshing and merging, as equal citizens, the hostile nations who compete for the disputed Palestinian territory is an attractive one, and all the more seductive because there is no other solution that even appears to do justice to both sides.

But it is nonsense. The idea that you could integrate any other two nations — say France and Germany — in the territory occupied by one of them would be dismissed as ludicrous, even given the fading in the last decades of much of their old animosity. In Palestine the proposal for a secular democratic state amounts to a proposal to so enfold two nations, peoples who have related to each other with the most bitter and merciless war for half a century and more. As a practical proposal it is a utopian absurdity. National identities and conflicts will not be overcome or superseded historically in anything like that way.

More than that. It is inconceivable that the Jews would agree to dismantle their state in return for a promise of equal citizenship. So the road to the secular democratic state lies inescapably through war and full-scale conquest of the Jews — after which the victorious armies (of Iraq, Syria, Iran?) will gallantly establish and protect the democratic rights of the Jews

as individuals (rights their own citizens do not have now) in a Palestinian Arab state.

In reality such a conquest would be resisted to the death by the Jews, and the idea of such a conquest is in practice inseparable from a proposal to drive out the Jews or massacre them.

The secular democratic state is far more attractive and internationally "saleable" than the programme of driving the Jews into the sea that Yasser Arafat's predecessor Ahmed Shukhairy used to advocate in the 1960s. For many people the "secular democratic state" slogan also represents a different intention and aspiration. But in practice it comes down to the same thing. It cannot but come down to the same thing, because it cannot be done by agreement. It differs essentially in being a more useful propaganda tool.

So the secular democratic state is in fact a proposal to destroy the existing Jewish nation and at best to grant equal citizenship rights to those Jews who survived being conquered and wanted to remain in an Arab state.

But — so many say — if the Jews reject this proposal of equal citizenship in a secular democratic state, then they are demanding to retain intolerable privileges and therefore they deserve what they will get. The choice will be theirs, and the responsibility for what happens theirs.

But this is a-historical moralism; moreover it takes as its premise, as something to be taken for granted and beyond discussion, a stark denial of any national rights for the Jews in Palestine. It demands of them that they do what no other nation has ever done, and what no people extant will ever do — submit to the forced dissolution of their own national community and surrender the protection of their own state.

For the Jews this would involve additionally putting themselves into the hands of those they have been fighting for 40 years and more — people in whose own states minorities like the Kurds (or Palestinian Arabs) are habitually repressed and routinely butchered. Yet if one questions the sense of proposing to the Jews that they agree to secular-democratic-state individual citizenship status when in fact none of the Arab states are fully secular or at all democratic, then no doubt that is anti-Arab racism.

That, I think, is a fair account of the reasoning one finds on much of the "Marxist" left. It is a series of moralistic demands cut loose from any consideration of how the world works, and addressed as an unique ultimatum to the Palestinian Jews — a series of demands that it would be impossible for serious people to make without the prior unquestionable assumption that the Jewish nation does not have the

right to exist — still less the right to defend itself.

In short, in its superficially attractive up-front version the idea of a secular democratic state is simply a delusion. The slogan could not ever help deliver the solution it seems to promise — conciliation and equality of Jews and Arabs in a common state.

It could not unless the way politics and the relationships between peoples work everywhere else in the world could somehow be replaced in Palestine — 40 years after the Israeli war of independence — by a different set of ways of functioning.

A common democratic state could only be realised by agreement. So to believe that the "secular democratic state" could be realised, you have to believe that the Jews can be persuaded that the way things are between conflicting peoples and interests through out the rest of the world can be superseded and dispensed within Palestine. You have to believe it possible to persuade people who know themselves surrounded and who are motivated in part in their notorious ruthlessness by the living memory of what happened to them when they were disarmed and helpless minorities in other states to surrender all their defences, first, as an act of faith in this new way of doing things. And this new way would at best make them one more minority in the Arab world, and a minority that had agreed to surrender national rights of the sort that the Kurds have spent decades fighting to establish.

The "secular democratic state" is either disingenuous or it is absurd. And it is worse.

If you take it at its face value the "secular democratic state" idea is an attractive utopian proposal. But we have seen that it cannot be taken at its face value. It is a political ultimatum behind which is posed a fearsome "or else". Immediately it is refused by Israel and the "Zionists" it translates into a moralistic-political denunciation of those who refuse. They are "exposed". That "exposure" and denunciation then become a warrant for the military destruction of the Israeli state, the subjugation and if necessary killing of the citizens of Israel, and the forcible removal from them of national rights.

What happens if the Israeli Jews don't accept the "secular democratic state" formula and fight? Conquer them and remove from them all powers of resistance, or of self-defence. What if they don't trust a promise that the conqueror will give them equal personal citizenship and absolve and protect them from the charge of being or having been agents or spies for the "Great Satan" US imperialism, or of "Zionist imperialism" — why, that's proof beyond dispute that they are unreasonable in rejecting "secular demo-

cratic state" citizenship and deserve what they get.

What they would get would be expulsion or the right to emigrate. It is to be 1948 again, and worse — only this time the "right" people do the uprooting and expelling.

The raising of the "utopian" secular democratic state demand as the opening political/ideological gambit produces a political and moral opiate for the left about what must inevitably follow from and is implied in the proposal to destroy the Jewish state and deprive the Palestinian Jews of national rights. Under the influence of this opiate, the most horrendous things are then proposed to be done to the Jews of Palestine — things no socialist would advocate or tolerate for any comparable situation.

It is surrender and dissolve, or resist and deserve to be forcibly dissolved.

So the secular democratic state is not an alternative to driving the Jews out; it is a treacherously barbed facet of that programme to drive the Jews out or reduce them to a vastly depleted territorial minority.

What might possibly be an attractive idea, and is certainly in the minds of many of its advocates a respect-worthy ideal, has to be judged by how it fits into the whole picture, and by what function it performs in the mechanics and ideological swordplay of Middle East politics.

We have seen what role it does play. In the circumstances it could play no other role. Those who seek to avoid the real choice and try to settle for the unrealisable ideal wind up nevertheless tied to the war chariot of Arab chauvinism.

They flee from the real choices into a fantasy, and wind up nevertheless having a choice imposed on them by the logic of circumstances.

All the "secular democratic state" evasion does it act as camouflage for the chauvinist position and, for the left, introduce a deep measure of mystification, confusion and some times hysteria.

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THE ISSUES AND FACTIONS IN THE
PRE-CONVENTION STRUGGLE

By Ben Hall

The Jewish Problem After Hitler

By Albert Gates

<small>By Robert Stone: THE PLUNDER OF SOUTH AFRICA-II</small>	<small>By Albert Goldman: RUSSIA: WHAT IS THIS MONSTROSITY?</small>
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Al Glotzer's 1947 article on "The Jewish Problem" is in Workers' Liberty 3/13

Yes, smash Israel!

Andrew Hornung and Tony Greenstein for the Labour Movement Campaign for Palestine, SO 271, 29.5.86

Not long ago Socialist Organiser initiated discussion about the attitude to be taken by socialists towards the Palestinian and Hebrew national questions. The seriousness with which that discussion was undertaken contrasts sharply with the curious methods of John O'Mahony's polemic of recent weeks.

O'Mahony's central thesis is made clear in "Anti-semitism and the left, part 2" (SO no. 266). He writes: "Zionism — which though the precise meaning of the word is no longer clear must include most Jews — has entered the consciousness of large parts of the left as another word for the worst form of imperialism and racism. Our attitude to it should be little different from our attitude to fascism. The prevalent programme on the left for dealing with it is to 'destroy Zionism', that is, destroy Israel."

It is curious that O'Mahony thinks that Zionism no longer has any clear meaning, though he seems to think that the term "anti-semitism" has so clear a meaning that it doesn't merit the slightest attention.

Let us say straight away that we do not think that there is any truth in what O'Mahony asserts. That does not mean that there are no mistaken attitudes towards Zionism, towards racism, imperialism, Arab nationalism and the ways of dealing with these currents in and out of the labour movement. But to reduce all this to "anti-semitism" is a ridiculous perversion of the truth.

First of all the problem: it is true that on the left there is a widespread tendency to mask the shortcomings, failures, even crimes of those forces engaged in a struggle with an imperialist power or the agent of an imperialist power.

Obviously this leads some leftists to oversimplify such struggles and see them in moral terms: as if the forces of unalloyed good were combatting the forces of unmitigated evil. No doubt this is as true of the Palestine-Israel conflict as of scores of others.

But while O'Mahony — who has often written on this general problem — claims that the attitude taken by the left towards this conflict is unique, the truth of it is that the attitude taken by the left on the Palestine-Israel conflict in general and on the question of the destruction of the state of Israel in particular is completely in line with its attitude on other cases of conflicts between settler states or the states

deriving from colonial settlement and the national movements of the indigenous population directed against these states. We need only mention in this connection South Africa and Ireland to prove our point. Of course the left may be wrong on these questions, it may have been wrong on Algeria — though we don't think so — but it is not making a special or "unique" case of Israel!

Thus we see no reason to attribute the left's errors — if errors they are — on the question of Israel to some "unique" cause — like antisemitism. O'Mahony's claim that the left tries to make its programme on the Hebrew national question seem not unique by identifying Israel with South Africa is absurd: it is the identification of Israel as a society based on recent settler colonialism that is the essential feature it shares with South Africa.

O'Mahony's point, however, illustrates that he is just as guilty of dealing with moral rather than scientific judgements as those he inveighs against. He says "Whatever similarity in political military-techniques (!) there may be between South Africa and Israel they are radically different societies. Israel was given its character by the Zionists' resolute refusal to exploit Arab labour and their drive instead to replace it (!). Whatever one thinks of the left Zionist colonialists' "Jewish labour only" policy, it was the opposite (!) of the mass exploitation on which the modern South Africa was built." Really, this is amazing!

Is the colonisation and the denial by a relative minority of settlers of the national rights of the indigenous majority simply a matter of "political-military techniques"? Isn't Israel's character based not so much on the replacement of Arab labour by Jewish labour, but the driving out of their homes of hundreds of thousands of people, the denial of their right to return and the imposition on the area to which they had undisputed rights of an alien rule? Is the effect — rather than the technique — of Zionist colonisation really the "opposite" of that in South Africa?

It isn't simply the same, that's true: indeed right now South Africa seems to be attempting something like an Israeli solution while Israel seems to be developing certain traits reminiscent of South Africa. But let's be clear: the point isn't that Israel is just like South Africa, but that despite their differences they share essential colonial-settler traits. O'Mahony might take issue with this: he might believe that Israel can't be classed as a colonial-settler state. But then this is the nub of the issue and not this obsessive silliness about anti-semitism.

It is possible — indeed likely — that identification of Israel with South Africa (with whom of course it has a special relationship) and identification of Zionism as a racist ideology leads some

leftists to thinking that they can do away with concrete analysis and rest any strategy on these generalities. But does this invalidate the generalities? Not at all! Zionism is racist even if many of those diplomats insisting on this in the UN daily defend racism: Zionism is racist even if the way socialists should deal with Zionism is markedly different from the way they should deal with traditional British racism.

Is it true that for large parts of the left Zionism is another word for the worst form of imperialism and racism? Firstly, it is obvious that for the avowedly reformist left, Zionism is a form of socialism. For which avowedly revolutionary organisations then is it "the worst form of imperialism and racism"? For the Healyites? But O'Mahony has written in the past that the Healyites aren't even part of the labour movement, let alone the left. For Militant? Hardly. For the USFI? [Mandelite Fourth International] We don't think so and a single quote revealing its shortcomings on Iran can hardly be said to prove the case.

In any case, doesn't the USFI support the right of Israeli Jews to self-determination? That hardly makes it a candidate for the charge of anti-semitism.

The SWP, perhaps? Despite some very irresponsible positions taken by SWP students, an organisation that founded the Anti-Nazi League, launching it with a call signed by scores of celebrities who no doubt support Zionism, can hardly be accused of adopting an attitude towards Zionism little different from our attitude to fascism. Which "large sections" does that leave bloodied by O'Mahony's sharp-edged polemic?

Surely the point is simply that those who think that the world is divided into two moral camps and whose most sophisticated analytical tool is the allegation of guilt by association — as O'Mahony does himself time and again — end up with wrong political positions.

The trouble is that O'Mahony adds to the confusion — which is not in fact as great as he points out, which is why the only texts he can analyse in detail are Gerry Healy's nonsense — by his disgraceful claim that to oppose Zionism is to be anti-semitic.

It is true that sections of the early socialist movement (especially the anarchists) saw something progressive in anti-semitism and others, including Marx, were too inclined to identify Jews with the rise of capitalism. True too that Stalinism made use of anti-semitism, particularly in its attacks on Trotsky, and that the German Communist Party made concessions to anti-semitism in order to try to relate to the nationalist "volksische" right both in the 20s and in the 30s. Ruth Fischer,

shortly before she became Party leader, called on her audience to “crush the Jew-capitalists, string them up from the lamp-posts, trample them underfoot”. This is not unimportant, but we must be wary of the conclusions we can draw from it.

Whatever its ideological shortcomings from time to time the left — which is today infinitely more sensitive to issues of racism than in the past — has an unparalleled record of fighting fascism and racism, including anti-semitism. We ask: whose heroism in the Battle of Cable Street helped to stop the Mosleyites? Who supported the Anti Nazi League? Who are the activists in scores of anti-fascist and anti-racist committees up and down the country that, among other things, monitor and combat anti-semitism? What is O’Mahony’s answer? The right, the middle of the road liberals and social-democrats?

Let’s be serious: even if O’Mahony’s description of the traditions of the left were accurate — and it most certainly isn’t! — does it make any sense to call these fighters against antisemitism “antisemites”? When one considers the very large number of Jews among these fighters — most of them anti-Zionist Jews — O’Mahony’s insulting designation becomes even more lurid.

But O’Mahony’s mud-slinging is not only insulting. It implies a rewriting of history. For if the left can be called anti-semitic for some times in its pre-World War 2 past endorsing or echoing anti-semitic ideas, in however small measure, cannot Zionism itself be called antisemitic with even greater justice? Here we have a movement which has no real history of fighting antisemitism, though it has a long history of doing deals with antisemites. Here we have an outlook held by community leaders who spend their time pouring abuse on anti-fascists (retailing claims similar to those now being rehearsed by O’Mahony) when they organise to combat anti-semitism. Here we have an ideology which has at its core the idea that fighting anti-semitism is useless because anti-semitism is essentially justified.

Indeed, while it is true that prominent British Labour leaders — to their shame — supported the 1905 Aliens Act (something which had more to do with their reformism and nationalism than with antisemitism), what O’Mahony fails to mention is that Balfour and the anti-semites of the British Brothers League who lobbied for the Act were given unequivocal support by the Zionists organised in the English Zionist Federation in the 1900 and 1906 general elections. David Hope-Kydd, who described the Jewish immigrants as the scum of the European nations” was supported by the Zionists in the Whitechapel constituency. Similarly the French anti-semites and later

Mussolini and even certain Nazis before 1941 actually praised Zionism and saw it as an ideological movement similar to their own.

We don’t cite this to prove that Zionism is simply the same as anti-semitism — though both drink in part from the same poisoned pools — rather to show that O’Mahony’s account is not only absurd in its conclusions but partisan to the point of mendacity.

Anti-Zionist socialists are in the habit of explaining both in the face of slurs from Zionists and as part of their struggle against anti-semitism, that anti-Zionism and anti-semitism are not the same. We patiently explain, for instance, that Zionism was for half its history a minority trend among Jews, indeed one seen by millions of Jews as a treasonous current, always willing to do the bidding of antisemites. We point out — and O’Mahony makes the point too — that certain ultra Orthodox Jews are vigorous opponents of Zionism and that orthodox Jews of all trends were opposed to Zionism up to 1948.

But O’Mahony knows better. To want to see the destruction of the state of Israel — not the only but certainly a widely-held aim of anti-Zionists — is, he says, “implicitly anti-semitic”.

Sometimes he seems to be resting his argument on the fact that today the vast majority of Jews support the existence of the state of Israel — which is like claiming that support for Algerian independence was a product of a racist view of the French and sometimes on the spurious claim (dealt with above) that the left’s programme for Israel is “unique” when all along it is of a piece with other attitudes towards colonial settler states.

It is not surprising that O’Mahony’s slurs, illogic and fact-twisting influence his analysis of the slogan of the “secular, democratic state”. For someone supposedly interested in the living political struggle, one would have thought that he might mention that this slogan was adopted by the PLO as the result of a struggle against those elements who wanted simply to throw the Jews into the sea.

The fact that some elements who would be happy to return to the old position currently claim to support the “secular, democratic state” slogan has nothing to do with the matter. The fact that one of the world’s most conservative powers calls itself the “Soviet” Union doesn’t invalidate the significance of the soviet idea for revolutionaries.

Central to O’Mahony’s argument is his estimate of the Arab or pro Arab forces: “The road to the secular democratic state lies inescapably through war and full-scale conquest of the Jews — after which the victorious armies (of Iraq, Syria, Iran?) will gal-

lantly establish and protect the democratic rights of the Jews as individuals (rights their own citizens do not have now) in a Palestinian Arab state.” Truly a remarkable statement. Has it not occurred to O’Mahony that one of the most important aspects of the ‘secular, democratic state’ slogan is the criticism it implies of the lack of democratic rights prevailing in the Arab states, in Iran, etc? And since when do revolutionary socialists give up their strategic conceptions simply because the balance of forces for their fulfillment is not present?

One might as well ask what on earth the propagation of the idea of a socialist Britain could possibly mean when the vast majority of those calling themselves socialists are led by one Neil Kinnock. Even if you don’t agree with the slogan of the “secular, democratic state”, comrade, you should see that it is an attempt to create a democratic, non-confessional society in contradistinction to all others in the region (including Israel).

As far as the supposed “utopianism” of the secular, democratic state slogan” is concerned, we insist that it is no more utopian than the slogan of a socialist united Ireland. Nor, more to the point, is it more “utopian” than O’Mahony’s own solution: two states in the area currently held by Israel with the right of secession for Arab areas inside the pre-1967 boundaries. What “ism” should one ascribe to O’Mahony’s inability to see any possible progressive developments within the Arab camp (that would realise the slogan of the “secular, democratic state”), while holding firmly to a solution which implies a fundamental transformation of Israeli Jewish consciousness? If O’Mahony stood in the Zionist tradition, we would just say it was typical left Zionist arrogance.

Israel is not South Africa

Sean Matgamna, SO 271, 29.5.86

Oh what a monstrous deal of splutter and bumph to so small a part of solid matter! So many angry words, and so few of the key points I made on anti-semitism taken up!

No, I did not reduce what the writers describe as ‘mistaken attitudes towards Zionism...’ to ‘anti-semitism’ — i.e. say these things arose as an expression of the traditional anti-semitisms. I said that the attitude to Israel dominant in most of the far left is unique in that it proposes to destroy not only a state but the Israeli Jewish nation, and that on that level ‘anti-Zionism’ is inevitably anti-semitic — firstly and primarily towards the Israeli

Jews, and secondly, by derivation, towards the big majority of Jews throughout the world who solidarise with Israel. This may include attempts to treat Zionist Jews (as distinct from other, non-Jewish, Zionists) as if they are fascists — for example banning their student associations, as was done recently at Sunderland Poly.

The writers insist that the attitude taken by the left on the Palestine-Israel conflict "... is completely in line with its attitude on other cases of conflicts between settler states or states deriving from colonial settlement and the national movements of the indigenous population directed against those states". As other examples they mention South Africa, Northern Ireland, and pre-independence Algeria, which had a large white population.

The comrades scientifically satisfy themselves that all these, especially Israel and South Africa, are similar 'settler states', and then read off mechanically a common political programme: Smash the settler state.

But — isn't it obvious? — even if the 'settler state' tag fits Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Israel, these societies are so vastly different that the tag alone is inadequately concrete to base any political conclusions on. What differentiates them is more important than the common name-tag.

It is preposterous to equate Northern Ireland's Protestant community with the South African whites. One is a replication of British society — though with some peculiarities — the other is a vastly privileged white caste ruling over a much large black population who are super-exploited, disenfranchised, repressed helots.

And in Israel there is not a ruling Jewish caste exploiting Arab helots. There is a comprehensive Jewish society organised in a Jewish nation state. This is not the same sort of society as South Africa's or colonial Algeria's! 'Smash the settler state' in South Africa or colonial Algeria means: abolish the monopoly of power and the caste privileges of the white minority: let the majority rule.

But what does 'smash the settler state' meant for Israel? It is a state which is extremely democratic for its Jewish majority. Its army is pretty close to being a citizen army. For an external force to 'smash the state' is not a matter of destroying a repressive apparatus, or defeating it in war, but of overrunning Israel and forcibly destroying the Jewish nation. It could only be done by slaughter, expropriation and terror — and, pretty much for certain, the driving out of large parts of the population.

Do the crimes of the Israeli occupying forces in the West Bank and else where make this poetic justice? If so, say so! The comparison with South Africa and with Algeria — where the

settlers were mostly driven out — implies that programme, but I'm not sure that the writers understand that that is what they are saying.

People who play around the edge of a question, juggling with abstract labels, often do so because they need to avoid the real issues. In politics, comrades, the truth is always concrete.

The comrades' attempt to prove that it is not true that large parts of the left think of Zionism as another word for the worst form of imperialism and racism is junior debating society stuff.

Sure, I've written that the Healyites are not part of the labour movement — but the Healyite text which I analysed appeared on the same page as an endorsement from Ken Livingstone of the Healyites against their "Zionist" persecution, and Livingstone did not repudiate the editorial when specifically invited to do so. Labour Herald, the Healyite Labour Party paper, was for a long time highly respectable on sections of the left.

Of course the SWP is anti-racist and opposed to anti-semitism. I never said otherwise.

Most telling of all is the case of the USFI [the Mandeliste Fourth International]. Yes, the USFI believes in self-determination for the Jews of Palestine. [Note (2019): that was true in 1985; it is not now, in 2019]. But what do their people in Britain say and do about it? They are silent about it. It is common to find members of theirs utterly unaware that their organisation has held this position for many years.

Do the comrades seriously want to deny that the most common attitude of the hard (and much even of the soft) left now is intense hostility to Israel, support for the Palestinians, and support for the 'secular democratic state'? That, even though it often lacks coherence and consistency, the left attitude often goes far beyond the criticisms of Israel which SO shares, and in fact supports the replacement of any Jewish state with something else?

It is true that Israeli apologists attempt to morally blackmail critics of Israel into silence with cries of 'anti-semitism'. Criticism of Israel on of Zionism is equated with antisemitism. This of course is contemptible.

There is, however, a level at which 'anti-Zionism' is indeed anti-semitic — the level at which 'anti-Zionism' becomes support for the destruction of the existing Jewish nation in Palestine.

Quite the most revealing thing in the comrades' article is their account of anti-semitism and the labour movement. They know something about the subject. Therefore I don't believe they really think it all came to an end with the Second World War. They know, for example, about the tide of thinly disguised anti-semitism in the USSR and Eastern Europe — and the Western CPs — after 1948. The reason the

learned comrades prefer much more remote examples, of course, is that this, the most sustained and murderous anti-semitic campaign in any body claiming to be part of the labour movement, was conducted under the banner of 'anti-Zionism'.

Most of the stuff on why and how the left could not be anti-semitic is bumph, answering charges I never made, and missing the point that I did make: that the widespread left-wing commitment to the destruction of the Jewish state is inescapably anti-semitic, however sincere the same left is in its condemnation of Nazism, Christian anti-semitism, etc. etc.

The writers trip themselves up, too. How could left-wing movements have been anti-semitic when they contained Jewish militants, they ask. They themselves give us at least part of the answer. Earlier they mention the German communist leader Ruth Fischer denouncing 'Jew-capitalists'. Yes. But, comrades, unless my memory is playing tricks, Ruth Fischer — who was an honest communist who lived to learn from her mistakes — was a Jew!

The argument about Zionism and Nazism is irrelevant. I am not concerned to defend Zionism's record, and no thing I say about Israel now depends on doing that.

It is also obscene. For what is the point of going on about the many episodes of Zionist would-be realpolitikers who made the best deals they could with various anti-semites, from Turkish dignitaries at the beginning to Nazis 50 years later?

The point for some 'anti-Zionists', like Tony Greenstein, a prominent member of the Labour Movement Campaign for Palestine, is to try to smear the Zionists with some of the responsibility for the crimes of the Nazis — for the holocaust of six million Jews.

Wrongheaded, shortsighted, stupid, criminal as were many of the activities of the Zionist leaders who thought they could find some common ground with anti-semites because both agreed on the separating out of the Jews, it is obscene to attribute to them a part of the responsibility for the holocaust.

It is a childish attempt to escape from the powerful retrospective logic the holocaust imparts to the Zionist case by saying to the Zionist: you caused or helped cause Hitler — you collaborated!

And it is double-edged and very dangerous for pro-Palestinians to attempt to condemn the people of Israel now because of the deals which some of their grandfathers and fathers made or attempted to take with the all powerful monster which destroyed so many helpless millions of them. For the leaders of the Palestinians collaborated with the Nazis too. Their chief political leader, the Mufti of Jerusalem,

actively worked for the Nazi cause from Berlin. There is no good reason to doubt that had the Nazis got to Palestine — and they almost decided to try in 1940-1 — then Palestine would have become a slaughter house for the Jews and the Mufti's Palestinian Arab followers would have been actively on the side of the Nazis, just as the Zionist Haganah collaborated with the British to brutally put down the Syrian-Palestine Arab revolt in 1936 — but with the difference that the Nazis would have killed every last Jew in Palestine.

Of course this ancient Palestinian collaboration with the Nazis can have no effect on our attitude to the oppressed Palestinians today. But neither can all the historical footnotes about the Zionists in the 1930s have any effect on our attitude to the rights of the Palestinian Jews. Our attitudes must come from the rights and wrongs of the conflict, and from the possible solutions.

Time and again the comrades' argument comes down to moral exasperation. And the lesson is that if you stop at moral protest, then you only distance yourself from 'Zionism' but remain on the same nationalist plane. You do not rise to the level of working-class, internationalist politics.

Ignoring the real Israel

Tony Greenstein, SO 272, 12.6.86

Having accepted that "Israel's apologists attempt to morally blackmail critics of Israel into silence with cries of 'anti-Semitism'" and having, quite correctly, described such behaviour as "contemptible" John O'Mahony is guilty of exactly the same behaviour himself.

There can be to other interpretation of the phrase "some 'anti-Zionists' like Tony Greenstein, a prominent member of the LMCP". Given the context of the article, the inverted commas can only mean that I am an anti-Semite masquerading as an anti-Zionist. I suggest that O'Mahony either substantiates this allegation or retracts it.

For the record I have been active in the anti-fascist movement all my political life.

Nor is it true that I "smear the Zionists with some of the responsibility for the crimes of the Nazis for the holocaust of six million Jews". On the moral and political level, the responsibility is solely that of the Nazis.

There is no serious historian — Zionist or otherwise — who has not raised the question as to whether the Zionist goal of statehood did not act at cross purposes to the need to rescue as many Jews as possible.

It is equally untrue to suggest that the Zionists tried to get the best deals from various anti-Semites from the Ottoman dignitaries to the Nazis. Unless you mean the best deal for the Zionist movement. In Czarist Russia they did their best to undermine Jewish participation in the revolutionary movement. In Weimar Germany they abstained from all anti-fascist activity, even the most minimal bourgeois kind.

The tragedy is that with his talk of the Israeli army being a "citizen army" (i.e. a conscript army like South Africa) and being "extremely democratic" for its Jewish majority, O'Mahony has now adopted identical positions to those of traditional left Zionist apologists for Israel. Even for the Jews of Israel, the options are narrowing as Israel follows a path not unlike that of Nazi Germany and South Africa today. It is overtly racist and the fascist right is growing, not the left Zionists that O'Mahony identified with. Unfortunately O'Mahony ignores the reality of Israel today in favour of ideological abstractions.

The Jewish nation

Liam Conway, SO 273, 19.6.86

It is a pity that Tony Greenstein has not bothered to read John O'Mahony's position on Palestine. Maybe then he wouldn't take isolated comments and give them ludicrous importance, inventing a political position that doesn't exist.

In fact O'Mahony's writings like those in Socialist Organiser generally, have persistently sought to condemn the nature of the current Israeli state. Indeed SO condemns racist policies in states all over the world, including Britain.

But condemning the racist nature of Israel does not mean that the Palestinian Jews are not a nation or that there cannot be a smaller non-racist Israel where Arabs have full rights, including regional rights to secede to a Palestine Arab state.

Greenstein may be right to say that Israel "is overtly racist and the fascist right is growing". It may even be true that "Israel follows a path not unlike that of Nazi Germany".

But then is he suggesting that Germany has no right to exist because of its Nazi past? That any state which is "overtly racist" forfeits its right to be a nation?

Considering the widespread occurrence of racism in the world it appears to me there would be few people left with national rights in Tony Greenstein's world.

Thus any solution in Palestine which fails to recognise the existence of two nations there is not a solution at all be-

cause it seeks to build class consciousness by trampling on the national rights of the Jewish workers.

Tony Greenstein sees no political difference between Jewish national rights and the present Israeli state. Greenstein is not an anti-semite but he fails to recognise the proposed secular democratic state has massive antisemitic implications for the Jews in Palestine. Indeed, it is only achievable over the dead body of the Jewish nation, which is both impossible and undesirable.

A moral blackjack

John O'Mahony [Sean Matgamna], SO 275, 3.7.86

Tony Greenstein (SO 272, 5 June) gets very excited because I put the description of him as an 'anti-Zionist' in quotation marks; that, he writes indignantly, is to say that he is an anti-semite masquerading as an anti-Zionist.

But this is just bluff and bluster by Greenstein, who doesn't even try to answer the serious points I made.

Greenstein — like much of the hard and soft left — is committed to the destruction of the state of Israel and its replacement by a "secular democratic state" (SDS). In reality, this means commitment to the defeat and destruction of the Jewish nation in Palestine.

Some advocates of the SDS think it is a benign compromise in which Jewish and Arab Palestinians could co-exist as equal citizens (that is what most supporters of SO used to think). But as I've argued at some length in SO, the SDS is no more than a seemingly benign mask used in the West by those who pursue the military conquest and destruction of the Jewish nation.

That Israel's apologists sometimes equate any criticism of Israel with anti-semitism should not blind critics of Israel to the fact that an 'anti-Zionism' that proposes to treat the Palestinian Jewish nation as a bad and illegitimate nation which does not have the right to exist; an anti-Zionism which sets itself the goal of destroying the Palestinian Jewish nation and will be satisfied with nothing less — such an 'anti-Zionism' is certainly a form of anti-semitism.

It is distinct from earlier Christian or racist strains of anti-semitism, but nonetheless it too is comprehensively hostile to Jews. Since the big majority of Jews, critically or otherwise, support Israel's right to exist, the hostility to Israel inevitably spills over from Israel to engulf Jews everywhere.

Extreme and active hostility to Jewish Zionists (who are treated quite differently from other Zionists) is now, for example, an established feature of college political life.

And we should keep in mind that 'anti-Zionism' has long served in Russia and Eastern Europe as a thin disguise for the old anti-semitism that has never ceased to be a force there.

Tony Greenstein does belong to the 'smash Israel' current, and thus I put 'anti-Zionist' in quotes. But I'm concerned with drawing out the logic of what Greenstein and other socialists say about Israel, not with casting aspersions on their motives.

It's a shame that Greenstein takes refuge in the pretence that I'm branding him as some sort of old-style anti-semitic instead of answering the charges I do level against him.

And isn't it strange that he so neatly parallels and inverts those Zionists who avoid thinking about our specific criticisms of Israel by branding the critics as anti-semites? Greenstein too is concerned not with thinking about the issues, but with getting hold of a moral blackjack and wielding it.

No self-determination!

Tony Greenstein, SO 278, 7.8.86

In reply to Liam Conway: Israel is one of the few remaining settler colonial states in the world, established by driving out another people, institutionalising racism, into every aspect of its functioning. Israel is an apartheid state, supporting reaction both in neighbouring states and worldwide.

The fact that it is Jews who are the perpetrators of racism is irrelevant as is the question of anti-Semitism. As long as Israel remains a Jewish state, it cannot help but be a racist state constantly at war with the Palestinians.

And because Israel is a state founded in alliance with imperialism, which only survives today by virtue of the support of US imperialism, to imagine a "smaller non-racist Israel" is to substitute fantasy for reality. Israel is an expansionist state with a strategic role in the Middle East, and a Zionist ideology that imbues both "left" and right Zionists with the idea of a biblical greater Israel.

In so far as Israeli Jews constitute a nation, and that is debatable, it is as an oppressor nation. The question of self determination does not arise as they are not oppressed as a nation.

Zionism is an intra-class alliance based on the oppression of the Palestinians. As long as the latter are oppressed, either inside Israel or in the bantustan on the West Bank, or both, then the Israeli workers will never achieve even the most minimal class consciousness.

It is precisely because Israeli Jews are held together by their relationship to the Palestinians and the Arab

masses, that a democratic, secular state solution is the most basic democratic demand that socialists should support. It is a demand opposed both by the Zionists and the Islamic chauvinists in the region. In no way is it inconsistent with e.g. language rights for those Liam Conway rightly terms Palestinian Jews. Far from being implicitly anti-Semitic it stands in opposition to all chauvinisms in the region. It may be incompatible with Israeli Jewish nationhood, but then so is the latter with Palestinian self-determination.

Utopia in Palestine

Clive Bradley, SO 279, 14.8.86

Tony Greenstein (SO 278) has, once again, missed the point in his defence of the 'secular, democratic state in Palestine' argument.

Of course, Marxists seek to use even limited democratic demands as tools for mobilisation; and any mobilisation necessarily poses new social questions, so that a struggle for purely democratic demands may develop into an assault on the entire social system. But it is not the Marxist approach to say: this is our democratic programme, but it is utterly meaningless unless all social relations are overhauled and society begins afresh.

This is precisely what the 'secular democratic state' slogan boils down to. To be at all possible it would require a complete change in consciousness of the vast majority of the Hebrew-speaking nation. Currently they are opposed even to autonomy for the Palestinians, let alone an independent Palestinian state: but they would have to accept, on Tony's own account, the extinction of Israeli Jewish nationhood. They would not only have to reject nationalism, but discard national identity — something Marxists generally reckon to be possible only after generations living under socialism.

The 'secular democratic state' can not rationally be a proposal for an immediate solution to the Israeli/Palestine conflict. It can only be a proposal that could, possibly, take effect some time in the future, after the conflict is solved. Yet Greenstein et al talk about it as if it could be implemented immediately.

How? By what means are the Israeli Jews to miraculously change their consciousness overnight?

This question is not answered, because it cannot be. In reality, the 'secular, democratic' state could only come into being in the foreseeable future on the basis of the military defeat of Israel if a way that could not be 'democratic' at all. The result would not be the happy intermingling of the two commu-

nities, but the opposite. This is all that can be meant by 'smashing the Zionist state', whatever the subjective intentions.

2. 'SECULAR DEMOCRATIC PALESTINE' OR 'TWO STATES'?

The only answer: two states

John O'Mahony [Sean Matgamna], SO 233, 19.6.85. This was one of a series of short articles in Socialist Organiser formally opening a public discussion on "secular democratic state" and "two states".

For about seven years Socialist Organiser editor John O'Mahony has held to a minority point of view among SO supporters in that he rejected the call for a secular democratic state in Palestine as unrealistic, and argued that socialists should advocate a solution to the conflict of Arabs and Jews in Palestine on the basis of two states. Here he outlines his views.

We have to support the Palestinians, as the oppressed, against Israel as the oppressor. However, what is our alternative to the existing situation of oppression?

The idea of a secular democratic state as a solution to the Jewish-Arab conflict is a good and attractive one in the abstract, but it is impossible to realise. These are distinct nations which have related to each other with bitter communal-national hostility or unrestrained war for 50 or more years (from the 1936 Syria-Palestine general strike and earlier).

The Jews occupy a distinct national territory (most of the area within the pre-1967 borders of Israel).

The secular democratic state as we have understood it involved the smashing and destruction of the Israeli state, an end to the Law of Return (which gives Jews everywhere in the world a right to Israeli citizenship), the return of the Palestinians to all the territory of Israel. All this was expected to unfold and merge the two peoples into a democratic secular state.

The attraction for us of the idea of a secular democratic state lay in its alleged ability to do justice to everyone concerned. The Jews would cease to be "Zionists". The Palestinians could return and either repossess or be compensated. The Jews would have equal rights to what they have created in the last 40 years.

It is plainly nonsense.

Nothing short of the complete, inevitably very bloody conquest of the Jews, and driving them out or slaughtering them, would be required to enforce it.

At the end of such a process, the last thing you would get would be the intermingling of the two peoples in one secular democratic state.

The idea of the secular democratic state is a mental construction incapable of realisation in our benevolent version of it. Since the PLO was reorganised in the late 1960s and the old “drive the Jews into the sea” leader Shukairy gave way to Yasser Arafat, the secular democratic state slogan has served fundamentally as just an Arab propaganda weapon in a conflict which could not conceivably, by the victory of the Arabs who supposedly fought for it, lead to the creation of a secular democratic state in Palestine.

A roughly equivalent project would be to amalgamate the German and French nations on the territory occupied by one of them. The difference is in the intense level of fear, grievance, and mutual animosity that exists between Jews and Arabs compared with French and Germans.

In reality, there are only two alternatives in the situation:

1. Drive out the Jews (that is, accept that that is what military conquest — “smashing the Zionist state” — would mean). Abandon any commitment to defend the rights of the Palestinian Jews. Or:

2. Create two states.
“Drive out the Jews” — most of them born in Palestine from parents the core of whom were refugees from racist persecution — has no place in our programme or world outlook. It is the programme of rampant Arab chauvinism.

That leaves the two states solution.

It would serve no purpose for us to try to define precisely where the borders would lie, or what precise relationships the two states would have with each other and with Jordan, the Lebanese communities, etc. (If it could be achieved, some form of federation of Israel, the Palestinian Arab state, Jordan and the component parts of Lebanon would seem to be the best framework with in which to solve such problems as economic viability, overlapping and intermingled populations, etc.)

The point of principle here is that there is no way other than the creation of two states in Palestine to express the idea that the Palestinian Jews have the right to stay in Palestine, and at the same time to express and define the demand for the restoration of the national rights of the Palestinian Arabs. Full Arab restoration to all of Palestine is now impossible short of driving the Jews out.

This is a basic outline of my posi-

tion, so I have not attempted to elaborate on any of the points made or to anticipate objections.

A single state is the best structure

Bruce Robinson, SO 233, 19.6.85

Bruce Robinson argues that a single democratic state in Palestine is the best framework to advocate; the collective rights of both Arabs and Jews can be safeguarded by some form of local autonomy.

The Palestinians suffer three aspects of national oppression. Firstly, they lack a territory in which to live as a nation. The areas from which many of them came in 1948 have since been settled and are now inhabited by an established Jewish population. Many Palestinians wish to return to live in those areas.

Secondly, the West Bank and Gaza Strip have since 1967 been under a military occupation by Israel, which has combined wide-ranging repression of the Palestinians with settlement of these areas by Israelis.

Finally, there is a 650,000 Arab population within pre-1967 Israel, who are discriminated against as second class citizens. In the northern parts of Israel in which they are concentrated, they form a majority in some areas.

As Marxists we are concerned to find a consistent democratic solution to national oppression which allows both national groups the fullest rights compatible with not oppressing anyone else. This is both because we oppose national oppression as such and because the divisions it causes prevent the development of class consciousness.

In most cases, we favour the right of the oppressed nation to secede and form its own nation state. In the case of Palestine, this approach is not possible because both nations lay claim to the same territory and if the Palestinians and Israeli Jews were to have a separate nation state it could only be by denying at least some of the national rights of the other group. This is both because of the large degree of intermingling of the population that exists and because the form the national question has taken in Palestine is that of driving out the indigenous population and settling the same areas.

Given this situation there are three possible approaches:

- 1) Choosing an arbitrary division — such as the pre-1967 Israel border, which either leaves minorities in both states who do not wish to be part of that state or can only come about with transfers of population.

- 2) Redrawing the boundaries to allow for example, those parts of pre-

1967 Israel with Palestinian majorities to secede and join a Palestinian state.

- 3) Recognising that a democratic solution cannot be based on a territorial division of pre-1948 Palestine.

The first option would lead to both arbitrary borders and to continued national conflict. Given that Israel would remain the dominant economic and military power in the area and that in this option Israel would remain a Zionist state, a West Bank/Gaza state would either have no room for independent action and be subject to Israeli domination or very quickly come into conflict with Israeli “national interests”, probably leading to war.

While it might provide an immediate solution for the Palestinians in the occupied territories, it is unlikely to lead to a long-term defusing of national conflicts.

The second option tries to solve the problem by giving both Palestinians and Israeli Jews the right to decide on which state they want to belong in. This option does not seem to deal adequately with the wish of many of the Palestinians to be able to live in the areas of pre-1918 Palestine from which they originally came. It is also not clear how the West Bank/Gaza state would be a step towards such a federal solution.

A common state — the third option — seems to me to provide the best structure for a long-term solution. Such a state would have to be based on a recognition and guarantee of the collective rights of both Arabs and Jews to maintain their separate identities. Such rights would include freedom of religion and language, control of education, etc. They could be implemented by a form of local autonomy where communities — whether Arab, Jewish or mixed — would have the power to decide freely on these issues.

A number of objections have been raised in this. Firstly, that it would fail because what both the Palestinians and Israelis want is their own national rights, including the right to separate territory. However, if that right can only be granted at the expense of the other national group’s rights, then part of any process of solving the national conflict would require a recognition of this from both sides. The Palestinians would have to recognise the rights of the Jews in a Palestinian state and at least a large section of the Jewish population would have to break with Zionism and be prepared to give up the privileged position they at present enjoy vis-a-vis the Palestinians.

The overwhelming weight of the concessions have to come from the Jewish population — not surprisingly, given that they at present form the oppressor nation.

This may sound a distant prospect but the conditions under which a fed-

eral solution which includes a non-Zionist state for the Jews would come about would be very similar, while the short cut of the West Bank/Gaza state option would not come anywhere near to solving the problem.

This seems also to deal with the objection that a single state could only come about by a forcible integration of two nations. Any lasting solution would have as a prerequisite considerable reconciliation of the two peoples. No external force would be able to impose a solution.

Finally, we should re-emphasise that, while we defend the rights of the Jews, it is at present the Palestinians who are suffering national oppression. We have a duty to give them our unconditional solidarity in that struggle, whatever our differences on their tactics or long-term aims.

Merge oppressor and oppressed?

Martin Thomas, SO 233, 19.6.85

Some Socialist Organiser supporters who previously advocated a democratic secular Palestine have been convinced in the recent discussion that this formula is not an answer to the national conflict in Palestine, but rather a description of something desirable which might be possible after the national conflict has been resolved. Martin Thomas argues this view.

Generally no situation of serious national oppression can be resolved by proposing to amalgamate oppressor and oppressed nations on the basis of individual equal rights. To propose this in Palestine is to produce a democratic sounding formula which actually can only be a gloss for Israeli-Jewish subjugation of the Palestinian Arabs (in a Greater Israel) or Arab subjugation of the Israeli Jews (in an Arab Palestine).

Or else it is advice to the Palestinians to become super-internationalists, and then to wait until the Israeli Jews are also super-internationalists and they can live in harmony.

Paradoxically, the 'democratic secular Palestine' slogan actually denies the Palestinians' national rights as much as the Israeli Jews'. The slogan tells the Palestinian Arabs either to wait until the Arab states subjugate the Israeli Jews or to wait until the Israeli Jews become internationalists.

But Marxists should propose objectives for struggle to the Palestinians which they can win without having to rely on dubious external saviours or a miraculous change of heart by their oppressors themselves. That, to my mind, is a crucial argument for a two states position (whether simply two states, or coupled with a proposal for the federation of those two states, is a

secondary matter).

The Palestinians can fight for their own state in part of Palestine, perhaps also linked to a revolutionised Jordan: they can fight for Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, and for national minority rights (including the right to secession) for the Arabs in Israel.

They can — in principle — force such concessions from Israel. They do not have to emancipate themselves in advance from all national prejudice for such a solution to be possible.

The Palestinians could get a democratic secular Palestine — a real democratic secular Palestine, a real merging of the two nations — only by themselves first becoming pure-minded internationalists, and then the Israeli Jews freely agreeing to give a democratic Palestine to them.

Far from being a solution to the national question, the democratic secular Palestine is something which might be possible after the national question has (by some other means) been solved. You could almost say about it what Marx said about the "labour money" demand popular with socialists of his day: it can be realised only under conditions where no-one would any longer particularly want to raise it.

Transform Israel from within

Clive Bradley, SO 233, 19.6.85

Clive Bradley argues that support for an independent Palestinian state can and should be coupled with a political struggle within Israel against its discriminatory structures.

Our position should look something like this: We are for, here and now, the establishment of a Palestinian state. Such a state could be established on the West Bank and in Gaza if Israel was to grant these areas self-determination.

We are for a Palestinian state with no strings. We would be against, and if we had forces there, would fight against, any attempt to restrict or limit the real independence of that state — either by subordinating it to Israel, or to Jordan or to anybody else. We would oppose any conditions on the establishment of a Palestinian state that limited its independence. To say that we recognise Israeli national rights means one thing: we are not in favour of forcing change on the structures the Israeli state through external military force. We are not in favour of an independent Palestinian state attempting (assuming — which is a daft assumption — that it was capable of it) to 'destroy Israel', to 'smash' the Zionist state from the outside.

Accepting Israeli national rights

means that and that only. It cannot commit us to accepting that an inherently racist, discriminatory state is unchangeable. It cannot commit us to sacrificing the democratic rights of those many Palestinians for whom a West Bank/ Gaza state is no solution.

We are against conquering the Jews. We are not against transforming the Israeli state from within.

Unsigned editorial introduction

SO 233, 19.6.85

The Zionist movement began as a Jewish response to anti-semitism in late 19th century Europe. The Zionists — mostly middle-class Jews — hoped to evade anti-semitism by creating a Jewish state elsewhere.

Marxists at the time condemned this strategy as utopian, a cop-out, and realisable only in alliance with imperialism.

But after the horrors of Nazism, Zionism became a mass movement among European Jews.

Over 30 years — 1918-1948 — the Zionists colonised Palestine, under British imperialist protection. Through deals with Arab landlords they pushed Arab peasants off the land. Through a policy of establishing an autonomous Jewish economy (Jewish labour only, Jewish produce only), they excluded the Arabs from employment.

Then in 1947-9 the Zionist settlers kicked off the British harness. The ensuing war, as Britain bailed out, drove out the majority of the Arabs, or panicked them into fleeing and then prevented them returning home. Some 800,000 Arabs were made refugees. A Jewish state was established over 77% of the land area of Palestine a country where in 1947 Jews had been only about a third of the population.

The Arabs remaining in the Jewish state — a sizeable minority, about 16% today — have been third-class citizens. Most of them lived under military administration from 1948 to 1966. Perhaps 70% of their land was confiscated under various pretexts.

Many state and quasi-state services and benefits are reserved to Jews only: for example, 92% of the land, controlled by the Jewish National Fund, is reserved for Jews only. Arab municipalities suffer discrimination as regards public services (electricity, water, etc).

Militant expression of nationalism — i.e. their actual majority politics — is forbidden to the Israeli Arabs. For example Israeli Palestinians who protested at the Sabra and Chatila massacres were jailed for demonstrat-

ing, inciting, stoning military vehicles, and “supporting the PLO”.

In 1956, in 1967, in 1973, and again in 1982-5 Israel went to war against the neighbouring Arab states. In between times, Israel pursued a policy of massive reprisals for any Palestinian action.

In 1967 Israel seized those parts of Palestine which the Jewish forces had not conquered in 1948-9, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Another 350,000 or so Arabs were made refugees, many for the second time. (Another wave of some hundreds of thousands of second-time-over refugees has since been generated by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon). Since 1967 those Arabs who remain in the occupied territories have lived under Israeli military rule, without even the rights of the Israeli Arabs. Some 40% of their economically active population works in Israel proper, but they are not allowed to stay the night there.

Harassment and straightforward deportations have driven over half a million Arabs out of the occupied territories since 1967, but still some two million Palestinian Arabs out of 4 million Palestinian Arabs altogether live under Israeli rule as third-class citizens or fourth-class non-citizens.

The other 2 million are refugees, many of them still living in miserable refugee camps. Even there they are at risk from the Israeli military machine, as in Lebanon recently.

Yet the Israeli Jews are a nation — a nation whose rights must be taken into account for any progress to be possible. They have a national language, a national economy, a more-or-less defined national territory.

Despite the increasing use of Arabs as menial, low-paid labour, the Israeli Jews are a nation rather than an exploiting caste like the whites in South Africa. Despite the considerable power of Orthodox rabbis within the Israeli state, the Israeli-Jewish identity is national rather than religious. Many Israeli Jews are atheists or only nominally religious.

Israeli-Jewish national consciousness is generally an oppressor-nation consciousness, usually chauvinist, and often shot through with open racism.

However, these facts do not do away with the reality of the nation. A majority of Israeli Jews — 57% as of December 31 1981 — were born there. A majority of adults — 66% of over-20s — are settlers born elsewhere. But most of them came fleeing persecution — including the persecution under which the Nazis systematically murdered perhaps one third of all the world's Jews. Most of them individually have, and certainly the community is a whole has, no other homeland.

Before 1947 the Palestinian Arabs were, in their great majority, peasants.

Like peasants elsewhere they were not able to create their own autonomous political leadership. They fell under the leadership of the reactionary Arab landlords and money-men. This gave their resistance to Zionist colonisation the form of wild outbursts of peasant fury, topped by chauvinist rhetoric and stained by anti-Jewish atrocities.

After their desperate and bitter rebellion in 1936-9 was suppressed by British and Jewish force, the Palestinian Arabs were politically exhausted for nearly 30 years.

Between 1947 and the late '60s the Arab states spoke in their name. In 1948-49 they talked bloodthirsty chauvinism — Azzam Pasha, general secretary of the Arab League, proclaimed: “This will become a war of extermination and an enormous massacre” — while actually fighting to see which state could grab most of Arab Palestine for itself. In 1967, again, the Arab leaders proclaimed that they would ‘drive the Jews into the sea’.

Meanwhile these Arab states were mistreating and discriminating against the Palestinian refugees in their territory, sometimes carrying out or sponsoring massacres of them (Jordan 1970, Syria/Lebanon 1976).

Out of this experience the Palestinians emerged as an autonomous political force, with Fatah's takeover of the PLO in 1968-9. The social composition of the Palestinians had changed dramatically, and there was a new leadership. The old Arab-chauvinist rhetoric was replaced by the slogan of a secular democratic Palestine.

But the new leadership was and is a bourgeois leadership, attuned to manoeuvring with Arab states and imperialist powers rather than to any endeavour to unite Arabs and Jews from below. Its guerrilla attacks frequently hit civilian targets in Israel.

Thus the bitterness and despair — and on the other side, the spiralling chauvinism of Israeli-Jewish society — have not been ended.

What rights for Jews?

In May 1980 the editorial board of Workers' Action — one of the groups which founded SO in 1978 — discussed Palestine. The discussion was summarised in minutes taken by Martin Thomas. The issues now being discussed by SO supporters were spelled out clearly. Excerpts:

John O'Mahony [Sean Matgamna]: Think about the concrete implications of the secular, democratic state slogan for Palestine. It has no grip on reality. It's an ambivalent slogan, fundamen-

tally wrong because it proposes the forcible integration of two peoples. The history of Zionist oppression is terrible. But forcible integration means forcible abolition of nationality, which is hardly possible. We're for a socialist united states of the Middle East, but we also need to uphold self determination. We don't need to question the sincerity of the Palestinians' declaration of not being hostile to Jews as such. But what is the logic of depriving the Jews of the right to their own state? It's inconceivable it will be acceptable to the Jews. Who's going to do the forcible integration? There is no force capable of making it happen. The only even conceivable method is conquest of Israel by the Palestinians and/or Arabs. A socialist revolution is more feasible than the secular democratic state.

The secular, democratic state slogan is not 'algebraic' in a real sense, just ambivalent. It actually means just Palestinian nationalism. But the national rights of the Israelis must be part of our programme. A nation has been created — by terrible means perhaps, but it exists.

Our error: to identify with the oppressed (which is correct) but to go from that to identifying with their nationalist programme (which is wrong).

Our only real answer for the Palestinians consistent with the Israelis' rights must be some sort of partition. (Though I don't know what dividing line).

We've failed to distinguish between the historic reality of Zionism and Zionism as a political entity now. There is not just Zionism as an ideology but also the vicissitudes (i.e. recent history) of the Jewish people.

The USFI approach, which has coloured our attitude, is woolly sentimental third-worldism.

And what about the Jews in Israel who were born there? We can't visit the sins of their fathers on them. Parallels with South Africa, Northern Ireland, etc., do not hold up. Zionism is not fundamentally about exploiting Arab labour. And, if Northern Ireland were a homogeneous Protestant state, would we advocate military conquest of it?

I don't propose raising self-determination for the Israeli Jews now. But it should be part of our programme. Self-determination for the Palestinian people — does that include the right to determine what happens to the Jews? It seems to, so I'm against it.

Israel is a racist state? Yes it is. But aren't all states racist. What's different about Israel is the hostility to and driving out of the Arabs. But the major racist crime is now a fact of history.

Is a different Israeli state possible? Yes, it is possible: e.g. withdrawal to 1967 frontiers, etc.

Bas Hardy: John's attitude would

amount to left Zionism. He approaches it entirely from the Israeli angle, not at all from the Palestinian.

John ignores the evolution of the PLO. Fatah states it "would help Jews any where if they faced persecution by racists". It also recommends rights for the Jews and, e.g. Hebrew as an official language in a secular, democratic Palestine.

The PFLP say they don't think Israel is a nation — colonialism cannot be justified just by continuing a bit longer. Israeli workers, even, gain from their settler-state status.

These positions are completely different from the caricatures presented by John. There is even considerable racism within Israel against Oriental Jews. Yes, Jews were terribly oppressed. But that cannot justify their oppression of the Palestinian nation. If Israel were even curtailed as John indicates, then there would in any case be massive emigration.

Imperialism wants a Palestinian mini state. John's attitude is similar. And where are the Palestinian refugees to go?

Rachel Lever: The Israeli nation is not just some cultural society, but it has a big state apparatus, an expansionist logic, etc. Crimes of 30 years ago? There have been two wars and a lot of other crimes since. The crimes continue.

But John is contradictory. The Jews are supposed to be so backward that they will quit and go to New York rather than live together with the Palestinians. And at the same time the Israelis are presented as innocents, while the Palestinians are presented as likely to cut the Israelis' throats and drive them into the sea.

If the Israelis want to emigrate because they can no longer oppress the Palestinians, that is up to them.

Bruce Robinson: Is the secular democratic state feasible? Well, is John's proposed reformed Israeli state, e.g. within 1948 frontiers, feasible? And how would repartition help the struggle for socialism? It would increase tensions and conflicts.

The secular, democratic state is not, I think, utopian — it is an algebraic slogan for the national conflicts in Palestine. John seems to confuse the rights of the Jews in the area and their right to a state. And much of what he says about the changes in the nature of Zionism is a myth. Logically, John's position would lead to arguing the PLO should give up their struggle.

What we said in 1973

SO 233, 19.6.85

This is an excerpt from an editorial in the paper Workers' Fight, October 20 1973. It contains two political commitments — to the destruction of the Israeli state by external force, and to full rights for its Jewish population who inhabit it. Its author, John O'Mahony [Sean Matgamna], now argues that these two commitments are incompatible, rendering writing such as this politically incoherent.

A decisive and crushing defeat for Israel will be good news for revolutionary workers throughout the world, and for enemies of imperialism everywhere.

We say this knowing that the working class rules in neither Israel nor in any Arab country, and that on that level there is nothing to choose between them.

Yet the world's working class, including the Israeli working class though it doesn't yet know it, has an interest in the defeat of Israel and in the victory of the Arabs.

Israel is a pro-imperialist policeman in the Middle East, a bayonet permanently pointed at the throat of the Arabs and their desire to free themselves from imperialist rule. Israel is also a racist state.

The 'pampered child of imperialism' in the Middle East, the Zionist State of Israel, has by its very existence been the main force militating against the growth of independent working class consciousness in both the Arab and Jewish Middle East peoples. Only the defeat of Israel and the destruction of the Zionist state opens a way through the road block which Israel is for the Arab, and Jewish, masses of the area.

The open support of the British press for Israel has as its centrepiece defence of the "right of Israel to exist". That, for once, takes us to the heart of the question.

We are firmly opposed to the existence of Israel: we say it has no right to exist.

We are opposed to Israel's existence because its existence is inseparable from the oppression of the Palestinians, who have been driven from their homeland because, according to the way the Zionist state is constructed, they are racially unsuitable. Whilst the Palestinians are prepared to participate in a multi-racial state, the Zionist state is racially exclusive and must be destroyed before such a multi-racial state can be built.

The Jewish community has, of course, a right to reach an agreement with the Arabs, and the demand for the

defeat of Israel is not at all the demand to expel or drive out her population. The only solution is to create a secular democratic state in which the Palestinians have full right to return to their homeland with compensation and full equality with Palestinian Jews.

But the existing exclusive Zionist state can only exist at the expense of the Arabs, in alliance with and under licence from their imperialist masters: such a state can never be even a normal capitalist state, because it is based on 'religion' and 'race' and deprives the Palestinians of the right to live in their own country, while every Jew in the world... is automatically a citizen of Israel...

How to unite Arab and Jewish workers

John O'Mahony [Sean Matgamna] and Martin Thomas, SO 234, 3.7.85

At the Socialist Organiser AGM on June 22-23 [1985], we discussed Palestine.

Until now SO has supported the slogan of 'a democratic, secular Palestine'. Some SO supporters still say we should call for a single state in Palestine, embracing Jews and Arabs; others argue we should propose an independent Palestinian-Arab state alongside a modified Israeli Jewish state.

The AGM felt that we weren't yet ready to take a decision, and so resolved to continue the discussion.

This week we publish a draft statement of the 'two states' position by John O'Mahony [Sean Matgamna] and Martin Thomas. Further contributions to the debate are welcomed, and will appear over the coming weeks.

Preamble

The Palestine question mainly presents itself to working-class militants as follows:

a) 37 years ago a new Jewish state, Israel, was created in Palestine by immigrants from Europe, America and the Arab countries. The core of them were refugees from European anti-semitism, including survivors of the greatest racist crime in recorded history, Hitler's massacre of six million Jews. The Jewish state is heavily dependent on outside financial support and it functions as a satellite of US imperialism, though it has autonomous interests and projects of its own.

b) Most of the Palestinian people have been displaced, and transformed into refugees and stateless persons outside Palestine. The remainder are either an oppressed minority within pre-1967 Israel. or under military rule

in the West Bank and Gaza.

c) A chronic national antagonism exists between Israeli-Jewish and Arab workers in the region, and between Jewish and Arab workers in Israel and in the Israeli-occupied territories. This antagonism has crippled the working class in the entire region for many decades.

Our problem is to explain and interpret these developments and to answer the question: what programme do socialists propose as a solution to the Jewish Arab antagonism in Palestine and in the region?

The most widespread left-wing reaction to the Palestine problem states or assumes that the Zionist enterprise was and is a 'conspiracy', and identifies Zionism totally with imperialism. General denunciation of 'Zionism' and 'Zionists' follows, in terms which imply that the 'Zionists' have no rights in Palestine except possibly individual rights.

Class considerations therefore give way to national/communal categories.

The Arab ruling classes have more than once massacred Palestinians, and willingly condemn them to be pawns on the political chessboard; but this outlook puts the Arab states on the 'progressive' side. The whole question is seen as a mere item in the struggle between progressive and reactionary, good and bad, camps on a world scale. The problem is thus defined almost as a conflict of good and bad peoples.

Against this, we assert basic Marxist working class ideas. Class is decisive. We approach all questions of national and communal antagonisms from the viewpoint of the class struggle, and of the working-class programme for solving such conflicts by way of consistent democracy.

The Palestinian Arabs are bitterly oppressed; but a Jewish nation exists in Palestine and has a right to continue to exist there, with national rights which irreducibly include the right to self-determination on some territory of its own. We champion the Palestinian Arabs' fight against oppression and displacement on a programme not of the implicit or explicit denial of Jewish rights, but of compensation, restitution, division of the disputed territory, and conciliation.

We advocate the immediate creation of a Palestinian Arab state alongside an Israeli-Jewish state (a modified version of Israel). We advocate an end to all discrimination against the Arabs under Israeli rule. We advocate full and equal citizenship for the Arabs, and the right to secede to the Palestinian-Arab state of the majority-Arab districts in Israel.

Revolutionary militants must approach this question from two viewpoints simultaneously, and integrate those two viewpoints. We are against

chauvinism and national exclusivism everywhere, whether in Britain, Northern Ireland, or Palestine, and the Palestinian Jews are chauvinistic and exclusive. We support those in Israel and the West Bank/Gaza who fight for Jewish Arab equality. But the ending of Jewish chauvinism and exclusiveness is not and cannot be, for us, a precondition for accepting that the Jews have rights in Palestine.

The Jews have the right to a certain portion of the territory of Palestine by virtue of the fact that they are there, and most of the Jews now there were born there. Their rights there cannot be made conditional on how they conduct themselves in that territory, any more than the vile racist immigration laws of Britain — which we fight and oppose, as some Israeli socialists fight and oppose the chauvinism of the Israeli Jews — nullify Britain's right to exist. (Or any more than the openly chauvinist line of the Palestinian Arabs' leaders up to the late 1960s could nullify the Palestinian Arabs' national rights).

We recognise the right to self-determination of the Israeli Jews; we support those in Israel who fight chauvinism and exclusiveness and advocate equal citizenship of Arabs and Jews; we advocate an independent Palestinian-Arab state on the best terms possible which are compatible with Israeli-Jewish national rights. All these elements must be combined into one coherent working class socialist viewpoint.

Resolution

1. In general we support the oppressed Palestinians against oppressor Israel. We seek a solution which gives both Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews the right to a life as a nation.

2. The proposal to amalgamate the two Palestinian nations — Arabs and Jews — into a unitary democratic secular Palestinian state is unfortunately utopian. Such an amalgamation is impossible. National identity, and still less national oppression and conflict, cannot be conjured away; two hostile nations cannot be amalgamated into a single unit.

Where there is national oppression, the demand to forget national differences is usually a cover for the oppressor. A unitary Palestine — in the foreseeable future — would mean a state in which the Palestinian Arabs were oppressed by the Israeli Jews, if there were no outside intervention.

In fact the practical meaning and implications now of the Arab-nationalist slogan, 'democratic-secular Palestine', are: full conquest of the Israeli Jews by the Arab states. It is not a proposal for a democratic solution, but the cutting edge of Arab propaganda which would turn the Jews from oppressors

into the oppressed.

A 'democratic, secular Palestine' is not an answer to the national question, but something desirable which might be possible in the distant future after the national question has (by some other means) been solved — indeed, after national identities and prejudices had begun to wither away. As a proposed solution to the Palestinians' oppression, either it tells them that they must themselves shed national prejudice, and then also convince their oppressors to do likewise — or it is an encoded term for full suppression of the Israeli Jews by the Arab states.

3. Immediately, we demand an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, in line with the right of self-determination of the people of those territories.

4. A Palestinian mini-state in the West Bank and Gaza could alleviate the situation, but the national conflict of Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews would certainly continue. A solution to that conflict demands a more far-reaching programme. Considered as a national territory for 4 million Palestinians, these areas — essentially fringe districts of the Israeli state — are very limited in size and resources. They could not provide an adequate Palestinian homeland.

5. Meanwhile some 600,000 to 700,000 Arabs would remain under Israeli rule. The Israeli Arabs consider — rightly — that they are part of the Palestinian Arab nation, that they have rights in the area where they live and have long lived, and that the territory of Israel cannot be considered the exclusive property of the Israeli Jews. The situation of the Israeli Arabs is thus not a separate 'minority question', but an integral part of the Palestinian Arab/Israeli-Jewish conflict.

We support the right of secession to the Palestinian-Arab state of the mainly Arab areas within present-day Israel (western and Central Galilee, Little Triangle).

Over one million Palestinians live in Jordan, forming half or more of the population there. They live under the rule of a monarchy artificially created by British imperialism, and propped up militarily and financially in succession by Britain and by the US and oil-rich Arab states. We support the overthrow of the monarchy in Jordan, and federation or merger between a Palestinian mini-state and a democratic Jordan.

6. If it can be achieved, a federal relationship (in the circumstances, necessarily a loose one) between the Palestinian Arab state and a modified Israel (or over a broader area), including agreements to defend the rights of the Arab minority and of Arab labour in Israel, will be preferable to Arab secession from Israel and full-scale repartition.

a) The two nations are at present

heavily intermeshed (Arabs living in Israel, West Bank and Gaza people working in Israel, etc.) Full intermeshing is not possible in the short term, given the national hostilities. However, we should seek to minimise the separating out.

b) Economically, a larger unit is preferable. The present economic isolation of Israel from the surrounding countries is economically irrational and politically leads to dependence on the US, etc. Generally, the division of the Middle East into several, mainly small, nation-states boosts nationalist and communal narrowness, economic underdevelopment, and imperialist manipulation. A West Bank/Gaza state, or even a West Bank/Gaza state united with Jordan, would be extremely weak economically and thus would be forced into dependence on states like Israel (the main employer of West Bank/Gaza labour) or Saudi Arabia (the paymaster of the present Jordanian state).

Though our programme is a socialist federation of the Middle East, with self-determination for national minorities (Israeli Jews, Kurds, etc.), this should not contradict proposals for smaller federations, e.g. in Palestine.

c) Full-scale repartition would be bloody and almost certainly untidy, creating material for fresh conflicts.

For these reasons, advocacy of a federation would be advantageous for Jewish-Arab working-class unity. However, the 'two states' formula is not conditional on federation being possible. It is the irreplaceable first step to peaceful coexistence of Arabs and Jews in Palestine and thus to working-class unity.

Historic Zionism, 1897-1948, was reckless and devastating in its consequences for the Palestinian Arab people.

But we reject the idea that either historic Zionist or modern Zionism (i.e. pro-Israel Jewish sentiment, however defined) can be simply described as racist. The state of Israel is a state pursuing racist policies and heavily based on racist institutions. It was not and is not a racist conspiracy, but rather a product of many circumstances. To try to 'ban Zionists' is to try to outlaw the reflex nationalism of the mass of Jewish people, and it is thus in effect anti-Jewish.

In terms of political argument, however, we counterpose internationalism to Israeli-Jewish nationalism, and democracy to Jewish sectarianism and Jewish supremacy in Israel (or any modified Israel). Within Israel (or any modified Israel) we argue for full individual rights and national minority rights for the Arabs; for an end to the ban on Arab labour in major industries; for an end to Israel's alliance with US imperialism and its role as a major military supplier to South Africa, Central

American dictatorships, etc; for the full separation of religion from the state; for the dismantling of the specifically 'Zionist' features of the state (in particular, the set-up whereby quasi-state organisations, the Jewish Agency and the Jewish National Fund, provide funds and services to Jews only); for the creation of a labour movement independent of the state and the employers.

We demand compensation from Israel and the US to fund the resettlement of the Palestinian-Arab refugees in the Palestinian-Arab state.

The repossession of all Palestine by the Palestinian Arabs is now impossible without suppressing the Jews; and the Israel Jews' national rights cannot depend on them ceasing to be 'Zionists' or agreeing to an unqualified right of resettlement in all of Palestine for Arabs. However, among the Israelis we would argue for immigration laws which would allow individual Palestinian Arabs to move in and out freely or to go and live there. Israeli-Jewish agreement to easy entry for Arabs would be an essential contribution to national reconciliation and working-class unity.

We explain to Israeli Jews that no nation that oppresses another can itself be free or secure, and that they can achieve peace, freedom and security only by a democratic attitude towards the Arab peoples — just as we explain to the Palestinian Arabs that any solution that would oppress the Israeli Jews would be regressive and reactionary.

8. While the Arab states have been victims of predatory attacks by Israel, they themselves are bourgeois or bourgeois-feudal states with expansionist and predatory ambitions. They have cruelly oppressed and more than once massacred the Palestinian Arabs. While in some circumstances we side with the Arab states against Israeli attack, we do not support the destruction of Israel by the military forces of the Arab states.

Democracy is only possible in a single state

Bruce Robinson, SO 238, 24.7.85

The Socialist Organiser AGM on June 22-23 decided to continue our discussion on Palestine. Until now SO has supported the mainstream Palestinian Arab slogan of 'a democratic secular Palestine' with equality for Jews and Arabs (Muslims and Christians). Some SO supporters now argue for a separate independent Palestinian Arab state alongside a modified Israeli-Jewish state; here

Bruce Robinson argues for a unitary democratic Palestinian state.

John O'Mahony refers sarcastically to our old position having an "alleged ability to do justice to everyone concerned", contrasting it to his approach, which starts from the real divisions that exist. Our approach, however, should be precisely that of what Lenin described as "consistent democracy".

Our job is not that of acting as diplomatic advisors to the Palestinians or arguing about which policy is most likely to be acceptable to the Israeli working class at present given their present consciousness and attitude to the Palestinians. We are only interested in the national question from the viewpoint of finding a programme that represents a real solution to the national oppression and thus removes it as an obstacle to class unity.

Lenin poured scorn on Rosa Luxemburg (who was opposed to Polish independence from Russia because, as a Polish Socialist she was frightened it would strengthen Polish nationalism) for emphasising that what was required was a "practical" solution to the national question.

"The whole task of the proletariat in the national question is 'unpractical' from the stand point of the nationalist bourgeoisie of every nation, because the proletarians, opposed as they are to nationalism of every kind, demand 'abstract' equality: they demand, as a matter of principle, that there should be no privileges, however slight. Failing to grasp this, Rosa Luxemburg, by her misguided eulogy of practicality, has opened the door wide for the opportunists, and especially for opportunist concessions to Great Russian nationalism".

John O'Mahony's position is similar to Rosa Luxemburg's, in that out of fears about the effects of the nationalism of the oppressed — the Palestinians — on the rights of the Israeli Jews, he looks for a practical solution which avoids challenging the privileges of the oppressor nation. It is an attempt to find a short cut to a solution without any fundamental changes in the relationships between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

His position amounts to saying that a solution will be achieved on the basis of the Palestinians giving up their unrealistic demands, so as to avoid having to face the thorny problem of how it is possible to break the Israeli workers from their current attitudes towards the Palestinians. John O'Mahony claims that any policy of a single state in Palestine must imply forcible integration of the two nationalities. Martin Thomas also seems to accept that the nations will want to hold on to their separation above all else, even if Israel was no longer a Zionist state.

The policy I am proposing is unlikely

to recommend itself to the bourgeoisies of the Arab states, who either want a deal with Israel or are not in any position to impose a solution anyhow. (Even if they were, I would oppose it as there would be no way that they would impose an even remotely democratic solution). It is based on the idea that both sides would have had to move towards a recognition of the other's rights as a precondition of any lasting and fair arrangement.

John O'Mahony argues that two elements in the programme of a unitary state make its voluntary acceptance by the Israelis impossible. His first point is that a single state is in itself a denial of Jewish national rights and thus unacceptable. On this basis, however, for the reasons outlined above, no solution will ever be possible if one (or both) nationalities continue to claim an exclusive right to even a part of the territory. If the Palestinians were to give real guarantees of Jewish rights of the type I have already mentioned, such a claim would not be justified.

John O'Mahony's second objection is that the right of the Palestinians to return to any part of pre-1948 Israel means dispossession of the Jews currently living there and would be resisted. However, the right of return does not necessarily require the restoration of every square inch of land to whoever owned it in 1948. Obviously given the length of time that has passed, changes in the economic structure of the country, etc., this would be impossible.

What is at issue is a) the right of Palestinians to return to live in those areas; b) some form of compensation for land taken as part of an overall settlement; c) removal of some recent settlements. Of these, the third can be called dispossession — and it would also be required to set up a West Bank/Gaza state.

Both communities will have to make concessions for any solution to work. The Palestinians will have to recognise that moving towards their goals requires winning over a large section of the Jewish population. This in turn requires them to recognise the permanence of the Jews in the area and the collective rights which this implies. It probably also requires a change of tactics from one which emphasises guerilla action to one which puts more emphasis on political action and has an active orientation towards winning the trust of the Jews.

However, the main balance of concessions must come from the Israeli Jews as they are at present enjoying privileges as the oppressor nation. The national consensus across classes in Israel is not just maintained by Zionist ideology or an external threat, but also rests on the fact that all sections of society benefit from the present discriminatory and oppressive relationship to

the Palestinians, e.g. access to better or more secure jobs, land, more extensive political rights. As in the case of Ireland, it is often those sections of the population for whom the relative privilege is smallest who cling to it most — in this case, the working class Oriental Jews.

What forces then will break out of the vicious circle of mutual antagonism between the Palestinians and the Israelis? In the short term, it is difficult to be optimistic, whatever position you hold. It is possible that the national conflict would only be ended as a result of successful social revolutions elsewhere in the region, though clearly we cannot advocate that all the parties concerned wait around before trying to find a means of coming together.

More positively, a number of developments have begun which undercut the basis on which Israel has been able to maintain 'national unity' in the past. The war in Lebanon has led to some questioning of Israel's claim to act militarily only in its own defence and to a war-weariness among some sections of the population. The economy is in more or less permanent crisis. The shift in US policy in the region lessens Israel's room for manoeuvre.

None of these developments necessarily mean a progressive shift in general attitudes towards the Palestinians, but perhaps a few cracks are appearing in the general acceptance of the national interest of Israel.

In such a situation it is difficult to assess what the effect of a Palestinian declaration of recognition of Jewish rights would have. It is however a precondition of any long-term progress

1. A democratic solution to the national conflicts between the Israeli Jews and the Palestinian Arabs can only take place within the framework of a single state. The intermingling of the two national groups is such that any territorial division would be unlikely to be democratic or provide a lasting solution to the conflict.

2. Such a unitary state would recognise and guarantee the collective rights and identities of both groups, including freedom of religion, language and education. These would be implemented by devolving powers in these areas to whichever level would assure the two communities best control of their own affairs without imprisoning minorities. The Palestinians would have the right to live in any part of the state (which would cover the area of pre-1948 Palestine).

3. While defending the rights of the Israeli Jews, we recognise that at present it is the Palestinians who are the oppressed nation and give them unconditional support in their struggle against the Israeli state.

4. For a single Palestinian state to be realisable requires that at least a sizeable section of the Israeli popula-

tion break from Zionism and the 'national consensus' currently existing in relation to the Palestinians. No solution is possible while the Israeli working class enjoys privileges at the expense of the Palestinians. Such a break will only come about if the Palestinians make it clear that they have no intention of suppressing the Jews and are willing to grant them the collective rights in a common Palestinian state.

The normal approach of Marxists to the national question has been to argue for the right of self-determination — that is, for the right of an oppressed nation to secede and form its own nation state. We generally support self-determination, not because we support nationalism or think that the nation state is the best political unit for socialism, but because it provides a democratic solution which ends national oppression and removes a divisive obstacle to developing class unity between the different national groups.

However the right to self-determination cannot be applied where the two national groups are intermingled and both claim the same territory with some degree of legitimacy.

In Palestine there are no borders suited to a democratic solution based on separate states for the Israeli Jews and the Palestinians. Even if the present population were to fall into two distinct territories, there is still the problem of the Palestinians currently living outside pre-1948 Palestine who wish to return.

Of the Palestinian refugees about 10% lived in the areas which became Israel in 1948 prior to that date. Of these about half remain refugees. Many of those born in the camps since 1948 identify themselves as coming from the areas where their families lived before fleeing in 1948.

Whether all of the Palestinians would return to those areas given the choice or whether they would accept a West Bank/Gaza state is a debatable point. However, given that the process of settlement and colonisation of these areas has been the root cause of their national oppression, it seems to be that the demand for the Palestinian right to return to those areas must be granted as part of a democratic solution. (How this could be done is discussed later).

Given this population distribution and the precise form the national question takes in Palestine there are three different ways of dealing with the situation:

a) drawing boundaries which essentially maintain the existing majority-minority relationships using a recognised border, such as the pre-1967 one. This would mean either leaving minorities within the new states or some form of population exchange;

b) drawing new boundaries by allow-

ing pieces of territory with a majority different to that with in the pre-67 borders to secede and join the other state (e.g. the areas of pre-67 Israel with Arab majorities):

c) recognising that a democratic solution cannot be based on a territorial division or redivision of pre-1948 Palestine.

The second position at least has the merit of recognising that the pre-1967 borders are undemocratic. If the national question in Palestine was merely one of national minorities wanting to form their own state or associate with another state, it would provide a feasible solution.

However, it does not take account of the odd features of the situation which come from Israel being a state based on settlement of an area, whose previous inhabitants have not disappeared, but still have legitimate claims to rights within the same area.

It is also difficult to see how a West Bank/Gaza state would be a step towards this solution. If a West Bank/Gaza state were to succeed in the aim of reducing national tensions, it would have to become the status quo for relations between the two peoples for some considerable period of time. While the Palestinians could in principle force concessions, including the right for Arabs in Israel to secede to the other state, who would be able to enforce it? Presumably the Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza. How would this give the breathing space for reconciliation Martin Thomas talks of?

A common state would have to be based on and guarantee the rights of both the Israeli Jews and the Palestinians to maintain their separate collective identities, unhindered by the state and with control over those aspects of political life necessary to require them to do this. This differs from the classic conception of the secular democratic state as advocated by the PLO in giving collective rights to the Jews within a unitary state and offering such rights unconditionally.

Such rights would include freedom of religion and language, control of education, the rights of free political organisation etc. They could be implemented through a form of local autonomy where communities — whether Arab, Jewish or mixed — would be able to decide what provision would be made for these issues in their area.

Local autonomy is not however the cornerstone of my argument. It merely seems to be the most likely way of guaranteeing to the furthest possible extent the rights of both communities. Some rights, however, such as the right to use either language would have to be guaranteed by the central government. What is crucial is that the means exist for justice to be done

within the framework of a single state.

The main argument against this has been that it ignores what is fundamentally at stake — namely, the rights of two nations rather than merely democratic rights.

It is suggested that real autonomy would lead to one or other nation wishing to secede from a united state. However there is no way that full national rights (which include the right to a territory) can be put into effect for either nation without it oppressing the other.

For what it's worth, I would recognise the Israeli Jews as a nation. However we should remain aware of some of the peculiarities of both national groups.

Firstly, the national consciousness of the Israeli Jews has until now been based on the Zionist ideology of the right to an exclusive Jewish state in Palestine, a state which has been based on settlement of the territory previously occupied by the Palestinians. Whether the Israelis feel themselves to be political Zionists in the full sense is irrelevant. Quite what form a Jewish national consciousness would take if the exclusivist, chauvinist and, usually, racist elements based on this ideology were to disappear (or even begin to break down) is highly problematic.

Secondly, the rights of the peoples of the area and whether they form nations or not cannot be asserted simply by reading off a set of characteristics (language, culture, economy, territory) a la Stalin of 1912 and seeing how well they fit. On this basis, one would have to reject the Palestinians' claim to be a nation on the grounds that they do not have — and never have had — a distinct national economy or historically well-defined national territory.

It is precisely the fact that the Palestinian question is not a straightforward issue of the rights of nations or national minorities which makes it so intractable.

Any programme we put forward must deal with three aspects of Palestinian oppression as well as the rights of the Jews. Firstly, they lack any territory in which to live. Secondly, in the West Bank and Gaza Strip they face a military occupation. Thirdly, within Israel the Arabs are treated as second-class citizens.

Will “two states” divide?

Robert Fine, SO 238, 24.7.85

I am particularly interested in the Palestine debate which I think is fascinating and on precisely the right terrain. I have been entirely supportive of the efforts of John O'Mahony and others to break from the common left position with its blanket endorsement of third world nationalism and its hints/strains of anti-semitism. I am less enthusiastic about the proposed two-state solution, but I withhold judgement.

One aspect which disturbs me is what it entails for those consigned to live within the Israeli state. I think that we should recognise that Israel is not racist in an ordinary way. The idea of a Jewish state is not an ordinary nationalism. There has never been an adequate separation of church and state, for all the secularism of the Zionist movements, and this lack of separation has become much more pronounced. The exclusion of non-Jews from full citizenship rights is not an ordinary racism.

Obviously we oppose these things whether there is one state or two, but it seems to me that the latter option does not help. We have to consider in my opinion what a Jewish state implies not in abstract but as a present reality.

It is racist in an extraordinary way and undemocratic in an extraordinary way. Surely there is a potential among Jews fed up with the influence of religious orthodoxy, with militarism, with Jewish particularism, with siege mentality, etc., to tie their dissent to the dissent of Palestinians and others who bear the brunt of state and para-state repression?

Does not advocacy of two states cut across this unifying potential? Does it not, from the Jewish point of view, assume a static fixation with a Jewish state that for many is becoming more of a weight than a means of emancipation?

Are we not underestimating the effects of the gulf between the idea of Zionism and the reality of today's Israel on the consciousness of ordinary Israelis?

My own knowledge and experience of Israel — where most of my family lives — is well out of date now. I have not visited for many years and I have not studied developments in any detail beyond the Guardian and the Jewish Chronicle. But my strong impression — from friends, family and even the Jewish Chronicle — is that we would be foolish to underestimate the growing disillusion with the particularism represented by Israel.

Racism will remain until Israel is destroyed

Tony Greenstein, SO 239, 7.8.85

The article by John O'Mahony and Martin Thomas (July 3) calling for the establishment side by side with Israel of a Palestinian state, fails to understand the specific features of the Israeli state that prevents it from becoming a normal western capitalist state with a working class capable of moving from economic to political struggles.

Over 52% of the land of the West Bank has already been confiscated. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on settlements and the necessary infrastructure. There are already over 30,000 settlers and the West Bank is an integral part of the Israeli economy and a reserve of cheap labour.

How else than utopian can we term the call for a separate Palestinian State? No Zionist party in Israel, including Mapam — the so-called Marxist Zionists — supports such a state.

Precisely which forces in Israel would push for such a settlement? At least Arafat recognises that only the United States is capable of exerting pressure to achieve such a state as part of an imperialist solution to the Palestinian question, not that they display the least inclination to do so.

Such a state would become an Israeli Bantustan, in which the Jordanian regime held the whip hand. It would be dependent on the Gulf regimes and Israel economically and its first actions would be to crush the Left and Trade Unions in order to guarantee its existence. It would be a state where confessionalism reigned supreme. Surely the example of partition in Ireland demonstrates this?

Far from uniting the Israeli Jewish and Palestinian working class, it would erect state borders between them whilst providing the opportunity for mass expulsions from Israel and the opportunity to remove even the most marginal rights that Israeli Arab workers possess. It would reinforce the feeling of privilege and racist supremacy that Israeli workers possess.

O'Mahony and Thomas demonstrate that they don't really understand the nature of Zionism. Zionist settlement began in earnest after the First World War under the British Mandate and the alliance between the Zionists and British imperialism lasted until 1945.

It is factually incorrect to say that the core of the Israeli state when it was founded consisted of refugees from European anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. The latter came to Israel after

its founding.

As Lenni Brenner and others have documented, the Zionists used these people as a battering ram to open the gates of Palestine to Jewish immigration whilst at the same time supporting immigration controls against Jewish refugees in the USA and Britain, just as today they oppose Soviet Jews settling in any other country but Israel.

But what has this to do with the nature of the Israeli state! Did not the Plymouth Brethren feel oppressed when they colonised America? And the Australian settlers? And what about the pious noirs in Algeria, amongst whom there was a far stronger Communist Party than ever existed in Palestine and some of whom had fought against Franco in Spain.

All that this demonstrates is how reprehensible colonialism and Zionism are, in that it creates racists out of the most progressive of people, including Socialists. And weren't the Afrikaaners the first victims of (British) concentration camps?

Instead of an analysis of how Zionism created a settler working class which never fought for its own independent class interests, we are told of a "chronic national antagonism" between Israeli Jewish and Palestinian/Arab workers. Not a hint of where this comes from nor any attempt to differentiate between the nationalism of the oppressed and oppressor.

The racism of Israeli workers derives from the settler colonial state they live in. It doesn't magically appear when different peoples come into contact. Until the Israeli state is destroyed, the racism and chauvinism of Israeli Jewish workers will remain, indeed increase if there is a repartitioning, and they will never go beyond a rudimentary economic class consciousness.

The same holds true of the South African white working class and the Loyalist working class.

Instead Israeli workers will cling to their privileges and see their main enemy as the Palestinians. It is little wonder that the Israeli working class has been unable to create its own independent trade unions, still less a Party, and instead is contained within Israel's largest employers' federation and economic empire, Histadrut.

I don't accept that a Jewish nation exists in Israel, but even if it did it would still be an oppressor nation like the Afrikaaners. It has no right to a separate portion of territory. What they do have is the right to live in a democratic secular Palestine and enjoy all the same religious cultural and individual rights as others.

The question of 'self-determination' of the Israeli Jews does not arise because they are not an oppressed group. They enjoy a high standard of living precisely because of the role that Israel plays in the Middle East. fi-

nanced but not exploited by the USA.

The comparison between Israel and the British state is thereby false. Israel is a settler colonial state and has an expansionist and racist dynamic of its own.

In contributing to this debate we hope that Socialist Organiser does not abandon the fight against Zionism and go for a muddle-headed, middle of the road approach that tries to walk a tightrope between the oppressor and oppressor.

A socialist union of the Middle East

Moshe Machover and Jabra Nicola, SO 240, 14.8.85

Moshe Machover, a founder member of the Israeli socialist organisation Matzpen and currently a member of the editorial board of the journal 'Khamsin', will be speaking on Zionism and Palestine at the Socialist Organiser summer school on August 23-26 1985. As a summary of his views he has asked us to print the following article by himself and Abu Sa'id [Jabra Nicola], originally written in 1969 and adopted as a policy document by Matzpen.

The Middle East is approaching a crossroads. The four great powers are conferring in an attempt to reach an agreed "solution", which they will then proceed to impose on the inhabitants of the region, and which they hope will restore the stability that was shaken by the June 1967 war and its aftermath. Our aim here is to analyse the dangers which wait at this crossroads and which threaten the future of the revolution in the Middle East.

An important new protagonist has appeared on the Middle Eastern political stage: the Palestinians. True, they had taken action into their own hands a few years before the June 1967 war, but the real impetus came only after that war. The positive factor here is that Palestinian action has transferred a struggle formerly between governments into a mass struggle.

For nearly twenty years the Palestinians had been an object of history, passively awaiting salvation by the Arab states in general, or by the "progressive" Arab states, in particular Egypt, under the leadership of Abdel Nasser. The 1948 war exposed the bankruptcy of the old middle-class and landowners' leadership of the Arab national movement. As a result, a new leadership — petit bourgeois in its class nature — came to the forefront; it overthrew the old regime in several Arab countries and scored considerable successes in the anti-imperialist struggle. But the June 1967 war re-

vealed the limitations of this leadership: limitations resulting from its class nature and its nationalist ideology. Among other things it proved its total inability to solve the Palestinian question. Despite the Soviet support, Nasserism and Ba'athism are in a state of political bankruptcy.

Against this background the emergence of Palestinian mass struggle can be understood. As mentioned above, the emergence of this new factor is a positive phenomenon. But one can also discern a negative and dangerous trend in it. Some sections of the Palestinian movement have adopted the view that the Palestinian masses can and should "go it alone" and solve their problem themselves, in separation from the all-Arab revolutionary struggle. Those who hold this view present the problem solely as a Palestinian one, which can be solved in a purely Palestinian frame work. The stick has not been straightened, it is being bent in the opposite direction.

The former passive attitude, hoping for salvation by others, risks being replaced by a narrow localist attitude. The only help which is demanded from the rest of the Arab world is aid to the Palestinian front itself. This attitude disregards the connection between the Palestinian struggle and the struggle in the Arab world as a whole, and it therefore advocates non-intervention in the internal affairs of the Arab states. The Arab governments encourage this attitude. The very mobilisation of the masses in Arab countries — even if only for the Palestinian cause — threatens the existing regimes. These régimes therefore wish to isolate the Palestinian struggle and to leave it entirely to the Palestinians.

The Arab governments both reactionary and progressive are trying to buy stability for their regimes with a ransom to the Palestinian organisations. Moreover, the governments want to use this financial aid to direct the Palestinian struggle along their own politically convenient lines, to manipulate it and to utilise it merely as a means of bargaining for a political solution acceptable to them. The Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian governments are mainly interested in regaining the territories they lost in the June war (and in thereby regaining their lost prestige and consolidating their authority), while the Palestinian cause is, from their point of view, only secondary, a means rather than an aim. This is what the Arab governments mean when they call for "liquidating the results of aggression."

Clearly, if the Arab governments achieve their aim (e.g. through the four great powers), they will be prepared to desert the Palestinians, and even to take an active part in political and physical liquidation of the Palestinian movement. The four powers will prob-

ably insist on this as a condition for a political settlement. As the consequences of the 1948 war provided the background for the downfall of the old national leadership in the Arab world and for the emergence of the petit bourgeois leadership — so the consequences of the 1967 war have set the stage for replacing this leadership by a new one, representing a new class.

Since the propertied classes proved unable to solve the social, political and national problems of the Arab world, it has become apparent that only the exploited masses themselves, under a working class leadership, are capable of solving their historic problems. But the existence of suitable objective conditions does not mean that this new leadership will automatically emerge. For this further requires a subjective factor — a political organisation with a revolutionary theory and a revolutionary all-Arab strategy.

However, it is precisely this need for political work and for an all Arab revolutionary strategy that is explicitly rejected by some important sectors of the Palestinian movement. They advocate the confinement of the struggle to the Palestinian front alone and its limitation to armed operations without a political programme. The balance of forces, as well as theoretical considerations, shows the impossibility of solving the Palestinian problem in a separate Palestinian framework.

What is the balance of forces? The Palestinian people are waging a battle where they confront Zionism, which is supported by imperialism; from the rear they are menaced by the Arab regimes and by Arab reaction, which are also supported by imperialism. As long as imperialism has a real stake in the Middle East, it is unlikely to withdraw its support for Zionism, its natural ally, and to permit its overthrow, it will defend it to the last drop of Arab oil. On the other hand, imperialist interests and domination in the region cannot be shattered without overthrowing those junior partners of imperialist exploitation that constitute ruling classes in the Arab world. The conclusion that must be drawn is not that the Palestinian people should wait quietly until imperialist domination is overthrown throughout the region, but that they should rally to the wider struggle for political and social liberation of the Middle East as a whole.

Just as it is impossible in practice to defeat Zionism without overthrowing imperialist domination throughout the region, so it is theoretically absurd to present formulas for solving the problem within the territory of Palestine alone: if one speaks about the situation existing before the overthrow of imperialism in the entire region — then the de-Zionisation of Israel and the establishment of a Palestine without Zionism is quite impossible. And if one

thinks of the situation after the overthrow of imperialism — then what is the sense of a formula which refers to Palestine alone, without taking into account the necessary changes which would take place in the whole region?

In the last analysis, the formula that restricts itself to Palestine alone, despite its revolutionary appearance, derives from a reformist outlook which seeks partial solutions within the framework of conditions now existing in the region. In fact, partial solutions can only be implemented through a compromise with imperialism and Zionism. In addition, the solutions which are limited to Palestine, cannot grapple successfully with the national problem. The formulas which speak of an independent democratic Palestine all of whose citizens, irrespective of religion, will enjoy equal rights have two defects.

On the one hand, they imply the creation of a new separate Palestinian nation whose members do not differ from one another nationally but only religiously. The authors of these formulas are themselves aware of the absurdity of separating the Palestinians from the general Arab nation; they therefore hasten to add that "Palestine is part of the Arab fatherland". This looks suspiciously like the old slogan of "Arab Palestine" dressed up in new — and more nebulous — garb.

This attitude results from a misapprehension of the national problem in general and of Israeli reality in particular. It is true that the Jews living in Israel came to settle here under the influence and leadership of Zionism, and that they — as a community — have oppressed and are still oppressing Palestinians. But it is impossible to ignore the patent fact that today this community constitutes a national entity (which differs from world Jewry on the one hand and from the Palestinian Arabs on the other), having its own language and economic and cultural life. In order to solve the Palestinian problem, this community (or at least a substantial part of it) must be severed from the influence of Zionism and attracted to a joint struggle with the revolutionary forces in the Arab world for the national and social liberation of the entire region. But clearly this can not be achieved by ignoring the existence of that community as a national entity.

This problem cannot be solved within the narrow framework of Palestine. If one is thinking of a democratic state pure and simple — "one man, one vote" — then in fact it will be a state with a Jewish majority, and there is nothing to prevent it from being like the present state of Israel, but having a larger territory and a bigger Arab minority. If one is thinking of a binational state, then it will be an artificial creation separating the Palestinian Arabs from the rest of the Arab world and

from the revolutionary process taking place in it. Besides, in a binational structure there are no inherent guarantees that one of the two national groups will not dominate the other. All this refers to proposed solutions which can be considered feasible within the present condition of the Middle East, i.e., which do not presuppose a comprehensive social revolution.

On the other hand, if one considers the situation which will exist after a victorious social revolution, after imperialism and Zionism are defeated, then there will not exist a separate Palestinian problem, but rather the problem of the various national groups living within the Arab world (Kurds, Israeli Jews, South Sudanese). This problem can be solved only by granting these nationalities the right to self-determination. Of course, recognition of the rights to self-determination does not mean encouragement to separation; on the contrary, it provides the correct basis for integration without compulsion or repression. Moreover, self-determination in the Middle East is impossible so long as that region is under direct or indirect imperialist domination, but is possible only after it is liberated from all imperialist influence, i.e., after a victorious socialist revolution. In particular, this situation presupposes the overthrow of Zionism.

To sum up: The existing objective conditions enable and require the creation of a revolutionary mass movement, led by the working class, guided by a revolutionary Marxist theory and acting according to an all-Arab strategy, which will recognise the national rights of the non-Arab nationalities living within the Arab world and prove capable of attracting them to a common struggle for the national and social liberation of the entire region.

What is the “democratic secular state”?

SO 241, 21.8.85

Socialist Organiser supporters are debating whether we should continue to back the mainstream Palestinian slogan of a democratic secular Palestine, or instead adopt a policy which would allow for the existence of a modified Israeli-Jewish state alongside a Palestinian state or a wider Arab federation. These two statements, from Fatah and from the more left-wing DFLP, summarise what the Palestinian movement meant by a democratic secular state when it adopted the slogan in 1969. [Fatah moved to back “two states” in 1988, and the DFLP floated a version of that

idea in 1974].

Pre-1948 Palestine — as defined during the British mandate — is the territory to be liberated, the territory where the democratic progressive state is to be created.

The liberated Palestine will be part of the Arab homeland and will not be another alien state within it. The eventual unity of Palestine with other Arab states will make boundary problems less relevant and will end the artificiality of the present status of Israel, and possibly that of Jordan as well.

The new country will be anti-imperialist and will join the ranks of progressive revolutionary countries. Therefore, it will have to cut the present life-line links with and the total dependence on the United States. Therefore, integration within the area will be the foremost prerequisite.

It should be quite obvious at this stage that the new Palestine discussed here is not the occupied West Bank or the Gaza Strip or both. The area of the homeland of the Palestinians usurped and colonised in 1948 is no less dear or important than the part occupied in 1967.

Besides the very existence of the racist oppressor state of Israel, based on the expulsion and forced exile of part of its citizens, even from one tiny Palestinian village, is unacceptable to the revolution. Any arrangement accommodating the aggressor settler-state is unacceptable and temporary.

All the Jews, Moslems and Christians living in Palestine or forcibly exiled from it will have the right to Palestinian citizenship. This guarantees the right of all exiled Palestinians to return to their land whether they have been born in Palestine or in exile and regardless of their present nationality.

Equally, this means that all Jewish Palestinians — the present Israelis — have the same right provided, of course, that they reject Zionist racist chauvinism and fully agree to live as Palestinians in the new Palestine.

The revolution therefore rejects the supposition that only Jews who lived in Palestine prior to 1948 or prior to 1914 and their descendants are acceptable.

After all, [Moshe] Dayan [minister of defence and [Yigal] Allon [deputy premier] were born in Palestine before 1948 and they with many of their colleagues are diehard racist Zionists who obviously do not qualify for a Palestinian status, whereas newcomers may be anti-Zionists and work ardently for the creation of a new Palestine.

In the interview referred to earlier [published in al-Taleea, June 1969], Abu Iyad, one of the officials of Fatah, asserted that not only progressive anti-Zionist Jews but even present Zionists willing to abandon their racist ideology will be welcome as Palestin-

ian citizens.

It is the belief of the revolution that the majority of the present Israeli Jews will change their attitudes and will subscribe to the new Palestine, especially after the oligarchic state machinery, economy, and military establishment are destroyed.

The call for a nonsectarian Palestine should not be confused with a multi-religious, a poly-religious or a binational state. The new Palestine is not to be built around three state religions or two nationalities. Rather, it will simply provide freedom from religious oppression of any group by another and freedom to practice religion without discrimination. No rigidification of religious lines is desired by the revolution. No hard and fast religious distribution of political offices and other important jobs is envisioned.

Furthermore, religious and ethnic lines clearly cross in Palestine so as to make the term binational and the Arab-Jewish dichotomy meaning less, or at best quite dubious.

The majority of Jews in Palestine today are Arab Jews — euphemistically called Oriental Jews by the Zionists. Therefore, Palestine combines Jewish, Christian and Moslem Arabs as well as non-Arab Jews (Western Jews).

The DFLP’s version

SO 241, 21.8.85

The struggle for a popular democratic solution for the Palestinian and Israeli questions to be based on the liquidation of the Zionist entity exemplified in all the government establishments (army, administration, police) and all the chauvinistic Zionist political and labour organisations. The establishment of a people’s democratic Palestine state in which the Arabs and (Israeli) Jews will live without any discrimination whatsoever, a state which is against all forms of class and national subjugation, and which gives both Arabs and (Israeli) Jews the right to develop their national culture.

In accordance with the link of history and destiny that exists between Palestine and the Arab nation, the people’s democratic state of Palestine will be an integral part of an Arab federal state in this area. The Palestinian state will have a democratic content hostile to colonialism, imperialism and Arab and Palestinian reaction.

The democratic solution put forward is capable of liberating the Arab and the Jew from all forms of chauvinistic (racist) culture — liberating the Arab from reactionary culture, and the Jew from Zionist culture.

The Democratic Front for the Libera-

tion of Palestine calls on all the Israeli and Jewish elements and groupings who are hostile to Zionism and imperialism to support the above solution and participate in the common Palestinian and people's armed struggle for the implementation of this democratic revolutionary solution.

Unite Israel and Palestine

Arthur Bough, SO 241, 21.8.85

Some comrades have argued that the "democratic secular state" cannot conceivably be made a reality. As an alternative they have put forward the idea of establishing a separate Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza. (and may be some parts of present-day Israel), and a struggle for a modified Israel in which the rights of the remaining Palestinians would be protected.

There are, however, more problems with the two state theory than with the Democratic Secular State. Firstly, the establishment of a separate state would be opposed not only by the Israeli State, but by the Jewish working class.

A basic right of a Palestinian State would be the right of a standing army. Imagine what fears Jewish workers would have about a Palestinian State on their doorstep which would no longer be restricted to launching guerrilla attacks like the PLO so far, but would be tooled up with all the military hardware of a fully fledged state.

Imagine their fears being heightened by the fact that some 700,000 Palestinians would still remain trapped inside Israel, still denied democratic rights, and that such a Palestinian state could hardly be expected to stand idly by when those Palestinians called on it for assistance.

In short whilst in principle the Palestinians could fight for the establishment of a separate Palestinian state, in practice there is no more chance of it being achievable than the Democratic Secular State. It also lacks a grip on reality.

On both sides would be capitalist states within which would be trapped national minorities. In Israel the racist, Zionist State would remain unchallenged, now with a large section of its most radicalised population, the Palestinian workers, hived off. With a new hostile neighbour on its border the Zionist State would be even more able to avert class antagonism by rallying Jewish workers around the flag. Mean while, the link between Israel and US imperialism would probably be strengthened.

On the other side of the border would be a feeble bourgeois Palestin-

ian State, economically dependent on neighbouring Arab capital. Such a state could offer nothing to the Palestinian workers, and even less for the minority Jewish population trapped within its borders.

We have a duty to advocate a programme which is aimed not just at the Palestinian workers, but at the Jewish workers.

The first step in winning Jewish workers away from the Israeli state is to remove their fears. A basic position of any Marxist should be to say that we are opposed to any attack on Israel by the Arab States, and that we are opposed to the military campaign of the PLO other than where it is a matter of it acting purely as a self-defence squad against attacks by the Israeli State.

The military campaign of the PLO, like the military campaign of the IRA, is an alternative to political struggle, not an integral and subordinate part of it. It is a typical petit bourgeois strategy.

If the Palestinian workers were to approach Jewish workers on the clear basis that they opposed that military campaign it would open up a powerful opportunity for political dialogue. The Peace Now campaign showed that Israeli workers do not like being in a constant state of war.

That political solution has to be one that is consistently democratic, that provides for the rights of both nations to exercise considerable self-government in those areas where they constitute a majority, and which at the same time protects the rights of minorities. It requires the establishment of a federal United States of Israel and Palestine.

The Israeli state would obviously oppose such a solution, and so too, probably, would the bourgeois leaders of the PLO. Our job as Marxists, however, is to mobilise the workers of both nations against their respective bourgeoisies in the political struggle for the demand.

It is an algebraic demand — mobilising the workers without limiting in advance the scope and aims of that mobilisation. The demand for a United States of Israel and Palestine would have to be supplemented by other demands.

A Democratic Programme would have to be elaborated which would protect the rights of minorities. In addition we would need to raise various transitional demands such as the sliding scale of wages, disbandment of the standing army and establishment of workers' militias, a crash house building programme financed by a massive reduction in the military budget, so that the Palestinian refugees could be rehoused, etc.

Put in this way the Jewish workers could see that they did not need a massive military machine, that their liv-

ing standards could be improved if they were to come to a political settlement with the Palestinians, and that their potential for winning such improvements would be considerably strengthened if the Palestinian working class was fighting alongside them.

The demand for a United States of Israel and Palestine, therefore, by focusing on the Palestinian and Jewish workers as the only force capable of resolving the problem, establishes the basis for deepening the struggle into one for socialism in accordance with the theory of Permanent Revolution. In contrast, both the Democratic Secular State and Two State solutions mirror the Stalinist stages theory. Both see the necessity of a first stage whereby a bourgeois democratic solution to the national question is achieved before "normal" class struggle can take place.

Israel can't be reformed

Lenni Brenner, SO 252, 14.11.85

Socialist Organiser has been carrying a discussion on socialist programmes for the Israel/Palestine conflict. Here we print a contribution from Lenni Brenner, author of the recent books "The Iron Wall" and "Zionism in the Age of the Dictators".

The Palestine question is of the profoundest importance for revolutionary internationalists. "Israel" and a "democratic secular Palestine" are not squares on an American Monopoly game board. Human equality, legal, economic and social, is at stake. The slightest accommodation to Jewish chauvinism in Palestine will, inexorably, lead to similar capitulations in principle to communalism in other parts of the world.

Classic Zionism was unabashedly colonialist, and never concealed its aim of converting of Arab land into a Jewish state. However, lacking the power to seize Palestine on its own, Zionism perforce developed under the often grudging patronage of British imperialism, until it was able to take advantage of the unusual conjuncture of political factors in the post-World War 2 period to establish a racist regime. The near-Apartheid system in the territories conquered in 1967 is an extension of, rather than a departure from, the herrenvolk order created in 1948.

Can Israel be reformed? No. The Zionist state also discriminates against Jews. Jewish women cannot initiate a divorce, testify in such cases, or sit on the religious judicial benches, which have exclusive jurisdiction over all Jews in marriage matters. Nor can Harry Cohen — Hebrew for priest — marry a convert or divorcee.

For yea, verily, the Lord will yet restore His Temple in His holy city, and Harry, today a butcher-baker-candlestickmaker, would be defiled by sexual contact with such unclean creatures and couldn't perform the ritual animal sacrifices on that grand and glorious day. Their children would be bastards, and Zionism's medievalist rabbis will not marry them, year unto the tenth generation.

Anyone who expects a movement so fanatic in its official discrimination against Jews to ever grant legal equality to any mere Arab is a certified idiot.

There are those who would concede that Zionism is both sectarian and racist, but see an Israeli nation in place, and conclude that it has a right to its own state, sans racism.

To be sure, Zionism has created a Hebrew nation, and that nation, as with the Afrikaners, is entitled to linguistic equality. However no right of self-determination is acquired in today's world by conquering another nation, denying it self-determination in any part of its land, dispersing much of it. Savagely discriminating against the national development of the remaining natives, and then bringing in middle class Jewish bible-bashers from Brooklyn to usurp their remaining patrimony.

The Palestinian refugees were driven from their homes by rabid Irgun and Stern Gang murderers at Deir Yassin, and Haganah war criminals at Lydda. They and their descendants are fully entitled to return to every inch of their homeland and live there as equals.

Further: equality means that Arabs from the surrounding region have as much right to immigrate into the country as any Jew. But a Jewish state, Zionist or otherwise, would only have legitimacy for democrats if Jews are a majority within its borders. Eventually those borders would have only one purpose: to keep the Arabs from demographically annexing the country, which is exactly the situation today.

And in fact a successful revolutionary upsurge in the Arab world, which is an historic inevitability, would find itself in instant conflict with such a racist crusader state, which cuts the territorial bridge between the Asian and African Arabs, and which is eternally linked to imperialism, because such a state, like the imperialists, will always be the sworn foe of Arab unity.

Those who call for a two state solution do so as a concession to the prejudices of the Jewish population. They forget that it is the oppressed who make revolutions, and that only a portion of the dominant caste in such stratified societies as Israel, Ulster or South Africa will ever come over to the side of the oppressed, regardless of what assurances are given to them.

What demoralises the oppressed is always to be rejected and it is obliga-

tory to stress that recognition of Israel can never be a Palestinian rallying cry.

The formula for success is an alliance of the majority of the Palestinians and the progressive Jewish minority. Without winning over that minority the Palestinians can never — repeat — never win.

But it must be clear to that minority that they must come over to the Palestinians and not the other way round. That minority must grasp that it is sociologically impossible for them to emancipate themselves from the sectarian and capitalist nature of Israeli society without that alliance.

There can be no illusions: Israeli society is teeming with fanatics. The Hatikah and Florentine Oriental Jewish slums of Tel Aviv are the Shankill Road of Israel. Only a minority can ever be won over to the revolution from such reactionary po' white trash communities. The doctrine of equality is universal, but it is never universally received. Similarly, only a minority of the Ashkenazi intelligentsia — as with any intelligentsia — can be won over. The bulk of the educated will stay loyal to the system that gives them privileges, and the liberals amongst them will stay loyal to the Labour Party as the lesser evil.

About 20% of the Jews are religious fanatics and cannot be won over, except in the rarest cases. Even among the women, only a minority of progressive women can envision anything more enlightened than a Labour Alignment government, sans the Likud.

That is to say that most liberal Zionist women are prepared to accept a government of the criminal party that took away the right of civil marriage which the state had inherited from the British Mandatory.

An alliance with the Palestinians, the 17% Arab minority of Israel's citizens, the Palestinians of the territories conquered in 1967, and the progressives of the surrounding Arab states, on a programme of a democratic secular socialist Palestine in a democratic secular socialist Arab Middle East, is the only way forward for the Jewish left.

But, in their July 3 Socialist Organiser article. John O'Mahony and Martin Thomas maintain that the implications of the slogan, 'democratic secular Palestine' are: full conquest of the Israeli Jews by the Arab states.

Which Arab states are they talking about? Egypt? Lebanon? Jordan? Morocco? In fact only a few Arab states can be thought of as resisting Zionism.

Libya, for one does not accept the slogan, it calls for an Arab Palestine, but it has no following among the Palestinians. Syria backs the Amal gangs against the Palestinians, and by now is opposed to Israel only in so far as it holds the Golan Heights. Algeria is nominally opposed to Zionism but the struggle is hardly a priority for the

bureaucrats there.

And South Yemen says nothing that could be thought of as seeking a chauvinist solution.

Contrary to the two writers, in today's Arab world, the democratic secular notion is profoundly revolutionary in its implications, and an indictment of the bankrupt regimes. Within the PLO, we have seen the same phenomena.

The Arafat clique long ago abandoned the notion of a unitary Palestine, and for over a decade its entire diplomatic effort was on behalf of precisely the sort of mini-state Socialist Organiser's two writers so cherish. Now the full implications of Arafat's retreat on principle are clear: he is completely demoralised and hopes for nothing more than that Reagan will pressure Israel into agreeing to a ban-tustan firmly attached to the Jordanian police state.

There is no more communally oppressed group on this earth than the blacks of South Africa, yet the ANC is open to whites, unlike the PLO, or even its most left element, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, for all its Leninist pretensions. Everyone who is intimately involved with the Palestine question knows that the entire PLO is ideologically stagnant, and it can be said with certainty that it, or even its left wing, will remain stultified until they transcend their reflex nationalism, as have the black comrades within the ANC. All know this — except the two writers.

For they, in their own backwardness, have done nothing more than reinforce the dead end nationalism of both the Jewish and Arab left in Palestine. In so doing they have committed a grave disservice to them both, and not merely to them but to the international revolution. For every word they wrote against democracy and secularism and bi-nationalism was an argument against Marxism.

We are for democracy or we are for nothing. We are for secularism or we are for nothing. We are for the unity of the workers of both nationalities, and all nationalities, on the basis of an uncompromising solidarity with the oppressed — and no one else — or we are for nothing.

Lenni Brenner's fake internationalism

Sean Matgamna (first published in the first pamphlet edition of *Arabs, Jews, and Socialism*)

The welter of empty phrase-mongering and senseless ultra-left sloganising in which Brenner's *Socialist Organiser* contribution indulges has so little grip on reality that you are naturally inclined just to shrug and get on with the real discussion of the real issues.

To unravel the tangled skein of weasel words, good aspirations, slogans, double standards and empty phrases promises to be both tedious and difficult, and also pointless. Yet it isn't pointless.

Brenner's two books on Zionism, and Jimmy Allen's use of Brenner's work as part of the basis for his notorious play *Perdition* have given Brenner a certain prominence in the discussion on the Middle East. And his incoherent sloganising in *Socialist Organiser* does, if you look at it closely, show up the school of thought of which he is so vociferous a representative.

The ideals of internationalism are essential to socialism. It must therefore go without saying that socialists are against Israeli nationalism, and that we condemn Jewish chauvinism and all its manifestations. So far, so good.

But Israeli nationalism does not exist in a vacuum. It is part of a network of interlocking nationalisms and national antagonisms. It is confronted by Arab nationalist chauvinisms which have taken as their goal the destruction of the Israeli state and nation. Any fair account of Israeli nationalism would therefore put it in its framework. The demurrals and condemnations would take account of the counter-nationalisms and condemn them also.

Not so with Brenner. He is scathing about the PLO. But where he concludes from his strictures on Israeli nationalism and chauvinism that therefore the national organism itself does not have a right to exist, he makes no such conclusions for Arab or Palestinian nationalism.

The "internationalism" is unequal and false because in practice the condemnation of Israel that flows for Brenner from his internationalist credo is absolute and mortal: the condemnation of the Arabs is a moral stricture only, and a series of admonitions. Brenner does not make his support for the Arab (or Palestinian) side conditional on them not being nationalists or chauvinists. They are the legitimate nation. The Jewish is the illegitimate nation. One lot of nationalists have

positive rights, the other the right only to surrender and submit.

The PLO's old commitment to a "secular, democratic Palestine" is here used as a mechanism for having double standards. Brenner accepts the disguise of one of the competing nationalisms, a disguised and mystified version of its chauvinist demands. His internationalism is thereafter a club to bludgeon a way clear for Arab nationalism.

Human equality, legal, economic and social, is at stake", writes Brenner. "The slightest accommodation to Jewish chauvinism in Palestine will, inexorably, lead to similar capitulations in principle to communalism in other parts of the world".

"Human equality" does not exist between states and peoples. We want it to. How do we proceed? By advocating that all state boundaries and citizenships be dissolved, and all nations and nation-states abolished? No: we advocate the right of nations to self-determination, hoping on that basis to make the dissolution of national frontiers possible after a long period of reconciliation.

If all we can do in the face of the existing nationalisms and chauvinisms, with their deep material roots, is to preach internationalism and call for people to rise above national concerns, then our struggle is hopeless. In fact we do not pretend that it is possible to dissolve national distinctions immediately, or even after a socialist revolution. On the contrary. Why did the Bolsheviks have a programme on the national question for the USSR after the 1917 Revolution?

We have both a democratic and a socialist programme. We do not pretend rationalistically that national identity is a misunderstanding that can easily be dispelled. We ignore neither national oppression nor the fears of it.

Neither does Brenner. But he has a double approach. Towards the Israeli Jews he is a dogmatic, rationalistic internationalist, offering internationalism or nothing. Towards the Arabs he loses this rigidity, and becomes an enthusiastic advocate of the rights of oppressed nations. In effect his programme is Arab nationalism.

In Brenner's historical writings, the trick is to blame the Zionist movement — presented as some sort of diabolical power outside the ordinary Jewish people — for the Holocaust, as if the Zionists in Europe did not go to the death camps too. The argument ranges from the possibly reasonable point that if the Zionist movement had devoted all its energies to opening the doors of the USA, then that might have made a difference, all the way to the libellous nonsense that "the Zionists" would rather have the European Jews dead than have them go anywhere but Palestine.

The latter claim is backed up by grossly unfair use of quotations like a 1938 comment by Ben Gurion that humanitarian work for refugees must take second place to building the Jewish state in Palestine.

Ben Gurion was not talking about the Holocaust. He was a hard-headed politician convinced that there was only one real solution to antisemitism, and fighting for that. It is possible to disagree with Ben Gurion's objective, or condemn it outright — but you have to tell the most scandalous lies to pretend that Ben Gurion was condoning the Holocaust in advance.

In 1938 the Zionist leaders still saw events under Hitler in the framework of the worst previous Judaeophobia. They probably could not imagine what was to come, and in any case they can't possibly have known what was to come. Which Zionists would, with clear foreknowledge, have chosen the Palestine colony at the cost of six million dead? None of them did, and none of them saw the issue that way.

Brenner is effectively saying of Hitler's victims: "It was their fault, or at least the fault of their leaders. And, look, the Zionists (this time the entire Israeli Jewish nation, not only the Zionist leaders) are still pursuing the perverse racist doctrine which helped bring the Nazi catastrophe down on their heads. This can only be brought to a proper end if they consent to dissolve the Israeli Jewish nation or, failing that, they are overwhelmed".

This political programme, which implies the bloody subjugation or destruction of an entire nation, is dressed up and presented in terms of anti-nationalism and anti-racism.

Instead of arguing for Jewish-Arab working-class unity on the basis of an agreed democratic solution. Brenner relies on ultra-left fantasies, in which he talks vaguely about "permanent revolution" and an Arab conquest of Israel merging into or triggering the socialist revolution. While in fact what is proposed is just the conquest and destruction of one nation by another.

One of the things that makes this most disgusting is the way Brenner and others sift through some or the most terrible events of which we have detailed records looking for cheap political dirt. Did Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann in the late '30s ruminant out loud about the probable fate of the older layers of the Jewish population who remained in Germany and had little prospect of being able to make a new beginning in Palestine, saying that they would "perish like dust"? It seems he did.

Well then, grab hold of it and present it as if he was talking with full foreknowledge of the fate of the German Jews, and blame the kith and kin of the victims for the horrors!

None of this is serious history, and it

is indecent politics. It is either dirty propaganda, or else it is hysterical “factionalism” against Brenner’s Zionist opponents within the Jewish community.

The memory of Hitler’s massacre of the Jews acted for a long time as a bulwark against antisemitism, forcing it underground. Even today, in most circles, it dare not bear its own name. It disguises itself.

The attempt to put part of the blame for the Holocaust on Jews does more than attempt to discredit Israel and to buttress the Arab chauvinist case that it has no right to exist in any form. It breaks down that bulwark against anti-semitism.

On the left, Zionist complicity in the Holocaust is now increasingly an article of faith in a movement which has adopted an attitude of comprehensive hostility to Jews, in Israel and outside it, who will not “convert” to anti-Zionism and adopt the demand that Israel cease to exist.

There are striking parallels. “Holocaust Revisionists” of history say that the Jews didn’t die in Hitler’s death factories at all. The “blame Zionists” revisionists say: yes, they did, but they died partly because of the machinations of their leaders whose successors now rule Israel.

A candid antisemitism, indifferent to the massacre, might say: the Jews got what they deserved. The left “anti-Zionists” say: they got what their leaders decreed, or at least connived at. The different versions are, of course, not identical, least of all in their motives; but the parallel exists independently of anyone’s good intentions.

Brenner’s basic thesis presents the issues in terms of a world-wide Jewish conspiracy (“Zionism”) — with the assumption that even when the Jews were being massacred in Central and Eastern Europe, the world-wide Zionist movement was still powerful enough to decide whether or not every other door would be closed to the Jews.

Logically you cannot separate this “Zionist conspiracy” view of reality from the Jewish conspiracy thesis of Hitler and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. And many people who believe Brenner will not have the inhibitions of his Trotskyist and leftist dogmatism, and will make their own way “back”.

That is one basic reason why the whole left “anti-Zionist” campaign against the Jews — yes, against the Jews — is part of a cultural ferment that can lead to full-fledged persecution of Jews.

Summer school debate

SO 242, 28.8.85

Moshe Machover, a founder member of Matzpen and now an editor of the journal *Khamsin*, spoke in the debate on Palestine. He was against both the ‘democratic secular Palestine’ and ‘two state’ formulas.

‘Democratic secular Palestine’ as an immediate or short term proposal is sheer fantasy. Moreover, it is not quite what it appears. The term secular implies a definition of the people involved as three religious groups (Christian, Muslim, Jewish), and thus denies the national identity of the Israeli Jewish or Hebrew nation.

In the long term, in the context of a socialist revolution in the whole region, the proposal for ‘democratic secular Palestine’ is pointless: for what reason should we insist on the territory of Palestine being a single and separate political unit in that context?

‘Two states’ could be a short-term proposal. But both states would be unviable fragments. Socialists cannot advocate this, even if we recognise that Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, and creation of a Palestinian state there, might ease the situation slightly.

We should have two slogans, Machover concluded: a socialist, Arab federation, with the right of self-determination for non-Arab minorities like the Hebrew nation; and, immediately, the right of self-determination for the Palestinians in those areas where they are a majority.

Brice Robinson argued for a unitary democratic Palestine. He accepted much of what Machover had said against the standard formula of a ‘democratic secular Palestine’; but argued that, given the intermeshing of the two peoples, Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian Arab, no partition could yield justice. A democratic settlement would be possible only in a single state giving rights to both nations.

John O’Mahony agreed with the gist of what Machover had said, but argued that we must guard against putting off answers to national conflicts until after the socialist revolution. A socialist revolution can be made only by the working class; therefore any programme for socialist revolution in the Middle East must include proposals which can unite Arab and Jewish workers before the revolution.

Tony Greenstein of the Labour Movement Campaign for Palestine said that O’Mahony’s argument was “left Zionist”. “The Israeli Jews are an oppressor community, like the South African whites or the settlers in colonial Algeria. There can be no solution

until that colonialist presence is removed”. That means not driving out the Jews but smashing the Zionist state and creating a democratic secular Palestine. It is possible only through a socialist revolution in the whole region.

Tom Rigby replied that Greenstein’s method was similar to that of Militant: “socialism is the only answer”. Except that Greenstein uses the formula “democratic secular Palestine” in place of “socialism”, explaining as an answer to objections that the two are in practice the same.

Moshe Machover also spoke in a workshop on Zionism, and Dave Rosenberg of the Jewish Socialists Group did a workshop on anti-semitism.

Compromise for coexistence

Avraham Shomroni, SO 243, 12.9.85

Avraham Shomroni, UK representative of Mapam, an Israeli Socialist Zionist party, replies to Tony Greenstein’s article in a recent issue of *Socialist Organiser*.

The discussion in *Socialist Organiser* has shown a welcome and helpful realisation that the problem of the Palestinians and Israel can be solved only by an awareness of the rights and needs of both contenders. Indeed, only if British socialists maintain an even-handed attitude can they play a constructive role in helping the sides to come together.

It is all the more sad therefore to see in your pages also the oft rehearsed outpourings of Tony Greenstein calling for the destruction of Israel with the complete denial of Jewish national rights (*Socialist Organiser*, 7 August).

None are as blind as those who will not see, but for the genuinely-concerned, some points are worth restating.

In complete contradiction to what Tony Greenstein writes, Mapam’s position in regard to the Palestinian question has its roots in the long-held view that the historic Land of Israel is the common homeland of two peoples — the Jewish people returning and the Palestinian Arabs living there.

As socialists, in the 30s the hope was cherished that there might be cooperation with the Arab working class over the heads of their feudal rulers, but of course national solidarity always prevailed. Today, Mapam fully recognises the rights of the Palestinians to political, national sovereignty and in the wake of a peace agreement with Jordan and the Palestinians, the Palestinians themselves should decide whether they want an independent

state, federation with Jordan, a theocracy, monarchy or what-have-you.

For Tony Greenstein to advocate a concrete solution on their behalf smacks of arrogance.

National liberation movements are, by definition, concerned about solving the problems of their own peoples in a given historical context. As the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, the Zionist movement is concerned with the Jewish problem, and Israel was not chosen arbitrarily by spinning a globe and blindly sticking in a pin.

Similarly, the national liberation movement of the Palestinians is not, primarily, worried about the needs of the Eskimos, Red Indians or Corsicans. This implies neither indifference nor opposition and has nothing whatsoever to do with racism.

The antagonism of the Jews and Palestinians is rooted in the fact that for close on a century they have been competing for the same plot of land with both sides having been oppressor and oppressed. On this it is worth quoting the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, who said that when two just causes meet there are two possible outcomes — tragedy or compromise.

In order to lessen the great tension which has accumulated, we need to separate; not 'it's all mine', not one instead of the other, but two peoples living side by side. As the dynamic of national conflict has brought increasing violence and hate, so we may hope that a dynamic of peace will slowly but surely engender co-operation and a feeling of security for all.

One of the proposals glibly propounded is that of a 'democratic secular Palestine' where Jews would also enjoy all the same religious, cultural and individual rights as others'. Is the experience of South Lebanon, where the PLO ruled for years over Shi'ites and others, to serve as an example? Where in the Arab world might we see such an example?

In fact this is a code which hides more than it reveals. Other codes like 'free trade' sound good because anything 'free' sounds attractive. In the case of the democratic secular state, the talk is of Christians, Muslims and Jews; the context makes it clear that here the Jews are considered, like the others, only a religious, not a secular, group. In other words, it is a cover for another national Arab state instead of the only national Jewish state in the world.

In utterly absurd contradiction of the situation, Tony Greenstein writes that "the Israeli working class has been unable to create its own trade unions, still less a Party". Similarly, to call the Histadrut "the largest employers' federation" is completely ridiculous, it being nothing of the kind.

The Socialist-Zionist movement, as

part of the broadly based Zionist movement, has made great gains in giving the whole movement a socially positive content. New forms of social organisation have been evolved, with great measures of equality, self-management, welfare, mutual solidarity and direct democracy.

The kibbutzim have been strong, leading elements of the Israeli working class and the great economic enterprises created are the inalienable property of the organised working class and both a guarantee of the independence of the working class as well as a model sought by others the world over.

There is, of course, no totalitarian ideological consensus in the Israeli labour movement but a very vigorous (sometimes bitter) interplay of policies, which is an expression of the innate democracy of Israel

Much still remains to be struggled for, and the imperfections are many, but looking at the great British labour movement, who can say of it that all has already been won? There is still much to be learned from the lessons of the nationalisation of industry and the NHS, and the experience of the Histadrut enterprise with its bank and its great workers' sick-fund, which supplies up-to-date health service for the vast majority of Israel's Jewish and Arab population, may also serve British Labour to advance to a socialist society.

Changing our view

SO 243, 12.9.85

At a National Editorial Board meeting on Sunday September 8 [1985], Socialist Organiser decided to change its long-standing assessment of the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine and to adopt new proposals for solving that conflict. A motion advocating two states for Jew and Arabs in Palestine was carried against one calling for a single democratic state.

For many years the majority of Socialist Organiser supporters have subscribed to a version of the democratic secular state position — that the answer to the Arab-Jewish conflict is a single democratic state in which all are equal citizens.

Following a long and wide ranging debate — it began six years ago — Socialist Organiser has decided that the secular democratic state is an unattainable fantasy. The creation of such a state by amalgamation of the two bitterly warring peoples as equal citizens in a common territory is inconceivable.

Although the democratic secular state appears to offer reconciliation

between the two peoples and therefore to point towards working class unity, in fact it does not and cannot do that. In reality it denies the national rights of the Jews.

The socialist revolution itself is much nearer than the merging of the national identities of the Jewish and Arab Palestinians in a common secular state. At best it is a consoling fantasy. At worst it is a propaganda weapon of Arab nationalists, the logic of whose position is the conquest and driving out of the Jews.

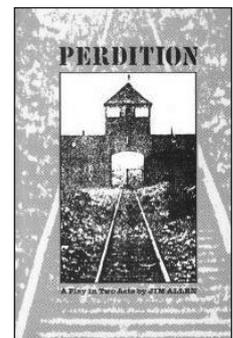
In reality there is a stark choice in Palestine. In broad terms only two solutions are possible. Either drive out (or massacre) the Jews, thus restoring the land to the Palestinian Arabs, or divide the disputed territory. This being so, the choice for socialists must be advocacy of compromise and division or redivision of the disputed territory. Despite the immense practical difficulties no other democratic or socialist solution is conceivable.

Rejection of Zionist expansion and condemnation of the Israeli treatment of the Arabs inside pre-1967 Israel and on the West Bank is common ground on the left; so should be rejection of the programme of Arab nationalism and revanchism in all its variants, including the democratic secular state which is understood by its Arab nationalist advocates as a Palestinian Arab state with no more than religious rights for Jews on a confessional basis.

Socialist Organiser continues to support the oppressed and displaced Palestinians in their struggle for justice — but we do it from our own class standpoint and programme, not by way of endorsing Arab nationalism and revanchism wrapped up in consoling fantasies. We support those Israelis who are fighting against the expansionism and chauvinism of the Israeli state, and for withdrawal from the West Bank.

But we insist that it is no part of a democratic or socialist programme for Palestine to call for or support the destruction of the Israeli Jewish nation — and this is what is implied in the slogan for the secular democratic state and is in fact its only real political content.

The discussion will continue in Socialist Organiser.



For debate in 1987 over Jim Allen's play *Perdition*, see [workersliberty.org/node/18867](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/18867)

3. ZIONISM AND THE HOLOCAUST

Zionism, twin of antisemitism

Andrew Hornung, SO 109, 18.11.82

Andrew Hornung reviews Tony Greenstein's pamphlet 'Zionism — anti-semitism in Jewish garb'.

Chief Rabbi Emmanuel Jacobowitz was once asked by a BBC interviewer whether there was any difference between being anti-Israel and being anti-semitic. 'In theory that is possible', he replied, 'in practice it isn't.'

Earlier this year, a Jewish shopper in Regent Street, no doubt impelled by the same view, insisted that police arrest Labour Committee on Palestine members who were picketing the Israeli state airlines in protest at the invasion of Lebanon.

'I want you to arrest these people, officer, for stirring up racial hatred. They are anti-Semites,' he confidently asserted, undaunted by the fact that the people he was pointing to said they were Jewish.

Tony Greenstein's pamphlet, *Zionism, antisemitism's twin in Jewish garb* is an attempt to give the lie to the equation made by Jacobowitz; and to show, on the contrary, that early Zionists particularly collaborated regularly with anti-Semites.

Now people aren't convinced of the wrong headedness of Zionism today by having it pointed out to them that Theodore Herzl, the founder of Zionism, negotiated with the notorious Russian anti-Semite von Plehve and with the Czarist minister, Count Witte, who openly boasted that 'if it were possible to drown six or seven million Jews in the Black Sea I would be perfectly happy to do so...'

But the pamphlet also reveals that far from being a road to emancipation for Jews, Zionism has always constituted an obstacle to emancipatory movements.

The establishment of the state of Israel was not only the culmination of a colonial drive whose victims were the people of the Arab East, but the foul fruit of a movement that set its face against all progress for Jews in Europe.

Zionism began in an age in which quack science looked to physiology for many of its answers. Phrenology and palmistry aspired to be scientific pursuits, and theories were developed according to which criminal behaviour was the outcome of certain physical features.

Thus Pinsker, a pioneer Zionist, could write in 1882 that "Judophobia is... a mental disease, and as a mental disease it is hereditary, and having been inherited for 2,000 years, it is incurable".

Herzl came to the same conclusion as Pinsker: the Jews were not to be assimilated; gentile society rightly rejected them. So they had to become a colonising force which, under the protection of imperialist-colonialist powers, would create a Jewish state. In his diaries, Herzl wrote, "In Paris... I achieved a freer attitude towards anti-Semitism, which I now began to understand historically and to pardon. Above all, I recognise the emptiness and futility of trying to 'combat' anti-Semitism."

With blackhearts like von Plehve and Witte, early Zionism shared the assumptions that racial persecution was inevitable — and the view that socialism was to be opposed.

Tony Greenstein quotes from Herzl's diaries again: "Herzl told von Plehve, 'Help me faster to land and the revolt will end. So will the defection (of Jews) to the socialist ranks'."

Two decades on, Zionism proved no less intransigent in its attitude towards revolutionary socialism. The Zionist Organisation in Palestine in 1921 was glad to see the arrest and deportation of leaders of the Jewish Communist Party by the British authorities.

Three years later the fledgling Histadrut (the Jewish trade union movement in Palestine and then Israel) expelled members of the Palestine Communist Party.

Even those trends within Zionism which claimed to be socialist collaborated with the British both against the Arabs and against Jewish revolutionaries. The petty-bourgeois nationalist 'socialism' of these trends gloried in pseudo-radical phrases concerning 'liberation of the land' and 'non-exploitation of Arab labour', when all this meant was the snatching of land from those who actually worked it and debarring Arabs from employment. The contradiction between the radical phrases and the reactionary reality is well-brought out in this quotation from David HaCohen, a leading Labour Zionist.

"I had to fight my friends on the issue of Jewish socialism to defend the fact that I would not allow Arabs in my Trade Union... to defend preaching to housewives that... they should not buy at Arab stores; to defend that we stood guard at orchards to prevent Arab workers from getting jobs there... to pour kerosene on Arab tomatoes; to attack Jewish housewives in the markets and smash Arab eggs they had bought... to take Rothschild, the incarnation of capitalism, as a socialist and to name him the 'benefactor'... to do all that was not easy..."

The image of the Nazi daubing Jewish shops with the slogan 'Don't buy Jewish' here finds its grotesque parallel in the Jewish 'socialist' ruining the Arab crops and telling Jewish 'housewives' 'Don't buy Arab'...

But Zionism did not simply replicate some features of German anti-semitism, it collaborated with it.

The Nazis were well aware that the Zionists were not their enemies. In 1935 Heydrich ordered the activities of the Zionist orientated youth organisations are not to be treated with the same strictness that it is necessary to apply to the members of the so-called German Jewish organisations (the assimilationists).

In line with this policy the Zionists were put in control of Jewish representative bodies, because, as Hannah Arendt put it, 'according to the Nazis, Zionists were the decent Jews since they too thought in national terms'.

A Jewish police force was established to bring in those unwilling to be sent to concentration camps.

Through the period of the holocaust, the Zionist organisations set out not to rescue Jews but to rescue Jews, preferably young ones, who wanted to go to Palestine...

The Jewish Agency consciously decided in the midst of the most terrible carnage the world had ever witnessed that they should concentrate on making propaganda for a Jewish state rather than give aid to Jews in desperate need. As an ex chairperson of the Chief Rabbi's Rescue Committee wrote in *The Times* in 1961: 'My experience in 1942/3 was wholly in favour of a British readiness to help openly, constructively, and totally, and that this readiness met with opposition from Zionist leaders who insisted on rescue to Palestine as the *only* form of help.' (My emphasis — AH)

At every stage Zionism, while it reflected the emancipatory hopes of some Jews, sided with reaction, refused to rally resistance and played an ignominious part in ensuring that there could be no escape... except via Palestine.

Tony Greenstein's pamphlet provides irrefutable evidence of the reactionary nature of Zionism in terms of the interests of Jews. He takes for granted that the colonising pro-imperialist project of Zionism had wholly reactionary results for the people of the Arab East, above all the Palestinians.

The weakness of the pamphlet arises out of its initial intention — to reply to the jibes coming, for the most part, from Jews. In attempting to counter, the common charges levelled against anti-Zionists by Jews, the author some times fails to give a balanced assessment...

For instance, he rightly attacks the nationalist ideas of Zionism. But what makes Zionism reactionary is not its

nationalist character alone.

After all, the Garvey movement in America (and beyond) was a profoundly progressive one — despite Garvey's announced intention not to stay to fight American racism but to organise emigration to a 'Negro Zion', despite Garvey's contact with the Ku Klux Klan, and despite a certain inverse racism.

Why — I can almost hear the question being asked by people like Jacobowitz — pick on Jewish nationalism? Tony Greenstein isn't sufficiently explicit about what makes Zionism different.

Zionism's unremittingly reactionary character arises out of the fact that:

firstly, it teamed up with imperialism to establish and maintain itself where other national movements fought imperialism to gain liberation;

secondly, because Zionism was a colonial movement of Europeans it inevitably became an instrument for the denial of the national rights of millions of Arabs;

thirdly, unlike Garveyism, for instance, it did not draw hundreds of thousands — even millions — into political struggle but out of it;

and fourthly, its class composition and dependence on Diaspora capital as well as imperialism meant that from the beginning Zionism was virtually devoid of those class contradictions that remain live within nationalist mass movements in spite of their nationalism.

Lastly, because the author is at pains to fling back the accusations of Jews, the pamphlet — its title immediately reveals this — is too much concerned to deal with the events of the first half of this century. Too little is said about, say, Zionism in the last ten years.

The last six months have revealed the open collaboration between the fascist inspired Phalange and the Israeli forces; the blitzkrieg and the butchery have reminded less-blinded Israelis of the hellfire of Hitlerism.

Such will always be those living proofs of the nature of Zionism that might be capable of raising a movement to oppose it, stronger and more compelling than the most thorough historical research.

More demonology than Marxism

Jeremy Green, SO 112, 9.12.82

Comrade Andrew Hornung's review of Tony Greenstein's pamphlet 'Zionism — antisemitism in Jewish Garb' was almost as bad as the pamphlet itself. Both present a picture of Zionism

as an evil conspiracy rather than as tragic illusion; their accounts have more in common with demonology than with Marxism.

The version of history they offer is of Zionism as a consciously reactionary group, seeking actively to promote antisemitism, work together with antisemites, and suppress Jewish resistance in order to achieve their aims.

For Greenstein and Hornung, Zionists have always lined up with anti-socialist forces. Any indication, any evidence that there were contradictions in Zionism, that there was any more to it than this, are resolutely ignored. Thus, from Greenstein we don't learn about the left Zionists who fought side by side with Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War (mentioned by Trotsky) or the Zionists who went from Palestine to fight in defence of the Spanish Republic.

And while we are told a lot about Zionist 'collaboration' with the Nazis, we hear nothing of the Zionists who organised Jewish partisan groups in the forests and ghettos of Poland — including Zionists from Palestine like Hannah Senesh who were parachuted into Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe specifically to organise Jewish resistance.

The argument about Zionist 'collaboration' with Nazis is based on:

1. Quotes from Nazi sources (hardly reliable on Jewish matters anyway), all some years before the Nazis decided on extermination as the 'final solution' to the 'Jewish problem'.

2. The desperate behaviour of Jews faced with mass extermination. To argue that this is evidence of sinister conspiratorial deals between antisemitic Nazis and antisemitic Zionists is quite simply sick.

Moreover, there is hardly an indication as to the origins and mass appeal of Zionism.

Both Greenstein and Comrade Hornung seem to want to obscure the fact that Zionism grew up among Jewish communities of Eastern Europe faced with a degree of murderous persecution almost unique to European history. Fifty years before Hitler, mass slaughter of Jews was a regular occurrence in Eastern Europe.

Thus Pinsker's 'Auto Emancipation', quoted by Greenstein as evidence of Zionist racism towards non-Jews, appeared in 1882, as a response to the Kishinev and Odessa pogroms, in which literally thousands of Jews were murdered. Greenstein ignores this. In the absence of this context, Zionism must indeed seem like a conspiracy.

Greenstein ignores the way in which the failure of the labour movement to fight antisemitism, and the support given to immigration controls by socialists anxious to prevent Jewish refugees from coming to Britain, lent

plausibility to Zionist arguments.

Finally, Comrade Hornung takes Greenstein to task for ignoring the last ten years of Zionism. A similar complaint might be made against his own account of antisemitism.

Over the last few years, Jewish people have been killed all over Europe, sometimes by so-called 'communist' groups, acting in the name of anti-Zionism. Fascist antisemites have made 'Zionist conspiracies' a central part of their world view, and argued that anti-Jewish racism must be balanced against 'Jewish racism'.

In order for socialists to convincingly claim to Jews that we are anti-Zionists and not antisemites, we have to fight hardest against real antisemitism. We have to purge our writing of comments which have the rhetorical flavour of antisemites. We have to understand sympathetically the Jews and aspirations of Jews. In his review Comrade Andrew Hornung fails to do all these things.

Brenner on the Nazi massacre

Gerry Ben-Noah [Jeremy Green], SO 199, 4.10.84

Gerry Ben-Noah reviews Lenni Brenner's books 'Zionism in the Age of the Dictators' and 'The Iron Wall'.

Denial of the holocaust has become the stock-in-trade of the far right in Europe and the USA, from Richard Harewood's 'Did Six Million Really Die?' to Arthur Butz's 'The Hoax of the Century'. That pro-Nazis should seek to excuse their heroes of one of the greatest crimes in history can hardly be surprising.

What is remarkable, however, is the recent emergence of a "left-wing" version of holocaust revisionism.

At the most extreme, a French Trotskyist defends Robert Faurisson's right to deny the existence of gas chambers and extermination camps. More often, though, the "left" revisionists do not deny that the holocaust happened: they merely argue for a redistribution of responsibility for the tragedy. They suggest that the Nazis were not solely to blame for the disaster that befell the Jewish people. Zionism, too, must share the guilt.

Now, in fact, various Zionist leaders did calculate that antisemites would for their own reasons collaborate with them. They understood that there was logical common ground between Zionism and anti-semitism — old-fashioned, central-European, pre-Nazi Christian antisemitism — in that both rejected assimilation.

Zionism was generated by anti-semitism. Then, once embarked on their project of removing the Jews to

Palestine, out of reach of the anti-semites, the Zionist leaders made hard-headed calculations and assessments of the world they lived in, seeking to find ways of realising their programme.

Thus Zionist leaders had discussions with ministers of the viciously anti-semitic Tsarist government, with Von Plehve, for example.

In the same way the Zionists have allied in succession with Turkish, British and then US imperialism. Brutal realism and cynical realpolitik in the service of their central goal of creating the Jewish state has always characterised the central leadership of the Zionist movement. It has led to shameful episodes and unsavoury contacts.

The realpolitik of the Zionist leaders — together with a slowness to realise that older strains of anti-semitism had evolved in to the lethal, genocidal Nazi variant, with which there could be no accommodation — may well have helped blunt the response of European Jews to Nazism.

But to go on from this tragic confusion to identify Zionism and anti-semitism, to place the moral or political responsibility — or any share of it — on the Zionist Jews for Hitler's holocaust of European Jewry — that is hysterically and obscenely stupid.

Yet that is what the new revisionism — at its sharpest when it stops playing with hollow, abstract logical identification between Zionism and anti-semitism and bases itself on the historical facts — concludes and now proclaims to the world.

It is important to recognise that, whilst holocaust revisionism is absolutely central to the ideology of the far right, "left" revisionism remains — so far — a marginal and aberrant belief within the socialist movement.

Until now, it has been propagated only by scattered articles in the "Workers Revolutionary Party" press, or by quaintly titled pamphlets such as Tony Greenstein's 'Zionism: antisemitism's Twin in Jewish Garb'. Until now, it has looked like the work of cranks.

Until now. Lenni Brenner, 'left' revisionism's newest recruit, is a Jew, whose books have all the appearance of serious works of history and are published (expensively) by commercial publishers.

Both the books argue, with apparent authority, that Zionists did not fight back against anti-semitism because they were in sympathy with it. According to Brenner, the Zionists saw anti-semites as nationalists like themselves, with a common objective in the removal of the Jews from Europe and a similar evaluation of the intrinsic worth of diaspora Jewry.

Where does one begin to review work like this? The revisionists of the right have shown how easy it is to con-

test and even subvert what had seemed unassailable historical facts. For, of course, very little history can survive scepticism of this kind, based on the rejection of any evidence one does not like.

Now Brenner does not, by and large, engage in this kind of revisionism. Brenner's unique contribution to historical revision lies in the sense he makes of events.

Most of the events he refers to are real and publicly known. They have been described before by pro-Zionist writers, notably Hannah Arendt in 'Eichmann in Jerusalem'. (This is not to say that a sizeable catalogue of inaccuracies and contradictions within the Brenner corpus could not be assembled — but such an exercise would miss the point).

Brenner's theory of Zionist-Nazi congruence rests upon two sets of phenomena: the actions of individual collaborators who were Zionists, and the policies of Zionist organisations which, for him, were lacking in anti-Nazi resolution.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is, of course, easy to see that many Zionists underestimated the Nazis. They thought the new anti-semitism would be like the old; brutal, humiliating and dangerous for individual Jews. They could not and did not conceive of the annihilation that was to come. Thus, their strategy was based on a series of assumptions about the immediate prospects for Europe's Jews which was horribly wrong.

To move from this tragic confusion, however, to the suggestion that they were unconcerned about the fate of those Jews is absurd. To argue that they were therefore in sympathy with the Nazis is bizarre.

It would be foolish to deny that there were Zionists who collaborated. So, no doubt, did some Communists, Bundists and liberals. In the nightmare world of Nazi Europe many people did bad things to save their own lives or those of people they loved.

For Brenner, though, these individual acts of collaboration are expressions of the inner logic of Zionism. Individual or collective acts of anti-fascist resistance by Zionists on the other hand, are dismissed as merely historical accidents, exceptions that in some unexplained way prove the rule.

It would be trivially easy to write a similar account of the "inner logic" of capitalist democracy, or of Marxism, which proved to this standard their affinity with Nazism. Such accounts have little to do with serious history.

Brenner claims to be opposed to Jewish, Arab and every other kind of nationalism. Perhaps he is so far from nationalism that he does not feel the need to avoid racial slurs, which he sprinkles throughout his writing. Thus, the inter-war Palestinian Arab leader-

ship were not only "a parasitic upper class" but also "classic levantines" (Iron Wall p.57); and the Palestinian Arabs as a whole had a "low level of culture" (ibid p.65). As for the Jews: "... the old Jewish slums were notoriously filthy: 'Two Jews and one cheese make three smells' was an old Polish proverb. Karl Marx was only being matter-of-fact when he remarked that 'The Jews of Poland are the smeariest of all races.'" (ibid p.11).

For a self-proclaimed socialist to repeat anti-semitic Polish proverbs as matters of fact is simply incredible. Such remarks are frequent in Brenner and range from the paranoid: the suggestion that rich Jews control the US Democratic Party and thus American foreign policy — to the merely unpleasant Agudat Israel demanding from the Likud "their pound of flesh" (p.207) as the price for parliamentary support.

There is, then, a curious ambivalence in Brenner's writing. He censures Zionism for despising Jews and on the other hand he clearly despises them himself. Similarly, he characterises the Zionist Revisionists as near-fascists, and cites quotes from anti-revisionist Zionists to establish this. But he also argues that the Revisionists were the most authentic Zionists, closest to the inner logic of the movement.

Therefore, the opposition of the Labour Zionists to Revisionism, of which good use is made in proving the latter to be reactionaries, is then dismissed as either bad faith or false consciousness. Either Labour's disagreements with Jabotinsky's followers were entirely tactical, a contest over who should control the colonialist venture — or the left simply did not appreciate, as Brenner can appreciate, that they were really just logical Zionist-Revisionists.

For a Marxist, Brenner places enormous weight on his own ability to critically examine other people's psyches across the years. (This ability is not restricted to the minds of Labour Zionists; Brenner also "shows" that Betar was fascist by reference to the mental states of a hypothetical "average Betari" (ZAD.p.114).

We are also offered a psychoanalysis of Jabotinsky: "... there was nothing ambiguous about Jabotinsky's oral fixation... he hated mathematics and was always undisciplined as a student: the infallible signs of oral fixation... He had other stigmata of the fixation... he became hopelessly addicted to detective stories and westerns." (Iron Wall, p.6).

This is the sort of thing that gets psychoanalysis a bad name. It reveals, too, that underneath the glossy covers Brenner's work is every bit as crankish as former attempts to construct a "socialist" version of historical

revisionism.

Why, then, has it any credibility? A comment by Isaac Deutscher offers a clue:

“The anti-Zionist urged the Jews to trust their gentile environment, to help the ‘progressive forces’ in that environment... and so hope that those forces would effectively defend the Jews against anti-semitism ... The Zionists on the other hand dwelt on the deep-seated hatred of non-Jews and urged the Jews to trust their future to nobody except their own state. In this controversy Zionism has scored a terrible victory, one which it could neither wish nor expect.” (The Non-Jewish Jew. p.91).

Brenner, like most socialists, wishes that this victory had not happened. But instead of thinking seriously about what kind of socialist strategy could win the Jews away from Zionism, he constructs a fantasy-world in which the Zionists did wish for and expect the holocaust, and in which the most fanatical Jewish nationalists were, in reality, ardent anti-semites.

All of this would undoubtedly be an interesting case-study for psychoanalysts. Marxists would be better off by turning to Nathan Weinstock’s ‘Zionism, False Messiah’.

Rewriting Zionism

Tony Greenstein and Andrew Horning, SO 208, 6.12.84

Tony Greenstein and Andrew Horning take up a debate with Gerry Ben Noah’s review (SO 199) of Lenni Brenner’s books *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* and *The Iron Wall*

To reply to Gerry Ben Noah’s review article, “Re-writing the holocaust” (SO 199), we shall ignore some of the detailed remarks concerning, for instance, Lenni Brenner’s books. On some of these questions Ben Noah is right, on others wrong — most of the time his points are simply not relevant.

What we are concerned with are the central issues raised by Brenner and others and raised again by Ben Noah; we are concerned with the “sense he makes” (to use Ben Noah’s own phrase) of the history of Zionism.

A second preliminary remark: for an article that accuses certain writers of creating a grotesque “amalgam” — of equating Zionism with anti-Semitism — the review itself offers a pretty bizarre example of this very technique when it equates Nazi apologists who rewrite the history of the holocaust (note the title!) with people with a proven record of combatting racism including anti-Semitism.

Running through the article is the argument that there exists a “left” anti-

Semitism equivalent to that of the right, as if the Left has, from the days of Marx onwards, constituted a second wing of anti-Semitism.

While examples of anti immigrant campaigning of a decidedly anti-Semitic character are not hard to find before World War 2, it is the Left, the working class movement, that has proved the most consistent opponent of anti-Semitism.

Indeed, here we have the whole issue in a nutshell: it is the Left (with all its imperfections) that has been the opponent of anti-Semitism while the self-styled movements of national salvation of the Jews, Zionism, has manifestly failed.

That Zionism should seek to falsify this — indeed, claim the contrary — is not surprising. How else should it justify itself? By its colonial conquests alone?

This distortion — the picture of “left” anti-Semitism — is peddled by the Jewish establishment in Britain today. Firstly, it serves as a cover for their own inactivity in fighting the real anti-Semites of the fascist and Tory Right. Whether it has been the Lewisham demonstration of 1977, the formation of the ANL, the fight to exclude Patrick Harrington from North London Polytechnic or other situations where a stand against racism and fascism needed to be made, the British Board of Deputies — the overwhelmingly Zionist “representatives” of the Jewish community in Britain — has opposed them.

The simplest justification for their refusal to fight has always been to claim, falsely, that the Left who organised opposition in these cases is anti-Semitic because it is anti-Zionist.

Of course, the inactivity of the BoD today is hardly different from the inactivity of the BoD before it was overwhelmingly Zionist. Zionism does not determine — in the above cases — the BoD’s stand entirely, rather it gives an ideological cover to its inactivity.

Secondly, Zionism justifies its general programme by claiming that no country, no regime and no social movement can provide a solution to the Jewish question because all are inevitably anti-Semitic. It is one of the many crimes of Stalinism that anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union under Stalin appeared to prove the truth of this view. The consequences of this for Soviet opposition movements can be felt to this day.

Just as it is ludicrous to place the Left in the same camp as the Right when it comes to antisemitism, so it is nonsense to talk of a “left” version of fascist revisionism which seeks to deny the holocaust took place. What some Leftists are, however, trying to do is measure Zionism against its implicit and explicit claim to be the movement which saved Jewry and which

offered a resistance to fascism that non Jewish movements could not do.

Stating that the Zionist movement — not merely individual Zionists — collaborated with the Nazis (why they did is another matter) and, more to the point, even obstructed attempts at rescue does not minimise the Nazis’ guilt, as Ben Noah states.

To claim as much is like asserting that Trotsky, by insisting on the responsibility of Stalinism for Hitler’s rise to power, was minimising the Nazis’ responsibility for what happened as a consequence of Hitler’s victory.

Or perhaps Lenin was wrong to see German Social Democracy’s class collaboration as a decisive element in the victory of German imperialism over the labour movement? Perhaps he was whitewashing German imperialism!

Clearly this line of argument is simply a sentimentalist’s confusion. It is utterly alien to Marxism.

Of course, the Nazis were responsible for the holocaust. The Nazis’ responsibility, however, should not be used to obscure or conceal the role of others. Despite the good intentions of many Zionists — and many people joined the Zionist movement when all else had failed, more out of desperation than ideological conviction — we have to say (and Gerry Ben Noah nowhere denies it) that Zionism’s starting point was the abandonment of the fight against anti-Semitism.

No wonder then that the Nazis looked to the Zionists to run the Judenrat’s Jewish Councils and the Jewish police. As many have testified, they played an important part in pacifying the Jewish communities and in Hungary and elsewhere actually helped in rounding up victims. This is why the Judenrate were so despised and hated.

Let us emphasise one thing: we do not say simply (as an antisemite might) that Jews betrayed Jews. It is neither a matter merely of individual Jews nor of Jews in general — we are talking about Zionist organisations. Gerry Ben Noah’s whole article bases itself on just the kind of confusion — the confusion between “Jew” and “Zionism” that he rails against.

It is essential to remember that before World War 2 Zionism was almost everywhere little more than a small trend within Jewish communities.

In order to increase the confusion, the article claims that the Polish Bund — the majority party of the Polish Jewish working class — collaborated on the same scale as the Zionists. It did not: it had a record of unswerving opposition to Nazism. Again, we are not talking about individual members but about the movements as a whole.

Ben Noah’s defence of Zionism on these matters leads him to try to justify Herzl’s meeting with von Plehve, the Tsarist Minister of the Interior and a

noted anti-Semitic pogromist. But it won't do simply to brush this off as a "hard-headed calculation", an alliance with the devil by a movement with its back to the wall.

The fact is that Zionism sought to ally with Russian autocracy against the progressive forces amongst whom the Jewish workers and petty bourgeoisie formed a sizeable number.

Again, Ben Noah's sentimentalism breaks through. Perhaps he would prefer to see Herzl as a basically noble man. Who cares? The argument is not about good and bad persons, people acting in good or bad faith. The argument is about political affinities and political logic.

If Herzl, Weizmann — and, yes, why not? — Jabotinsky were all good people and devoted to the survival (as they saw it) of Jewry, then it is all the more clear how reactionary an ideology Zionism is when it was capable of getting the first to praise von Plehve, the second to praise Mussolini and the third to support Petlyura, the leader of the White Russians with over 200,000 Jewish lives on his hands.

Note well: Jabotinsky did not simply parley with Petlyura, he supported him against the Left!

To Ben Noah this is all "tragic confusion", the product of desperate circumstances. Weizmann's comparison of the Bolshevik Revolution with the advent of Nazism was perhaps such a "tragic confusion" — a confusion between those who outlawed pogroms and those who instigated them!

Perhaps the leaders of Hungarian Zionism whose "Rescue Department" worked under the aegis of Eichmann and Becher and without whom Nazism could never have been so successful in their exterminatory drive in Hungary — perhaps they were also tragically confused?

Or perhaps the economic transfer agreement between Nazi Germany and the Zionist settlement in Palestine — an agreement approved by the Zionist Congress of 1935 — which helped break the anti Nazi boycott was both a "hard headed calculation" and a "tragic confusion".

The only "confusion" here is in Ben Noah's own head. And it is a double confusion: firstly, he is confused about the facts (Weizmann was well aware of the genocidal drive of Nazism as his speech in 1937 to the 20th Zionist Congress made clear) and secondly he is confused about the point under debate.

No one argues that the Zionists were just as willing to kill six million Jews as the Nazis.

The point under debate is whether or not Zionism as an ideology disarmed its followers in the face of persecution, whether it minimised the implications of anti-Semitism by its belief in the worthlessness of Diaspora

Jewry (Weizmann in the above mentioned speech refers to the millions about to perish as "dust, economic and moral dust in a cruel world") and whether as a movement it didn't always put the building up of the Jewish settlement in Palestine before the saving of Jewish or other lives... even to the point of obstructing emigration if it wasn't to Palestine and of rounding up Jews for the gas chambers.

Let Gerry Ben Noah answer the simple question as to whether Zionism as an ideology and as a movement disarmed its followers in the face of fascist attack and obstructed efforts at saving Jewish lives. If he believes it did not, let him say what part of the overwhelming evidence — "events (which) are real and publicly known", as he himself calls them is wrong.

The truth is that the overwhelming evidence demonstrates that Zionist leaders were concerned about the fate of European Jewry only insofar as it concerned the establishment of a Jewish state. To understand why, it is necessary to realise that Zionism was never about saving Jews but redeeming them.

To the logical Zionist, then, a great stream of refugees to non Nazi Europe or the US could only marginalise the effort to build up a Jewish state — the precondition for 'redeeming' Jewry from its Diaspora mentality — and threaten the existing communities in the countries of reception.

Ben Gurion put it most succinctly when he said, by way of warning the Zionist Executive at its December 17 1938 meeting: "If Jews will have to choose between the refugees, saving Jews from concentration camps, and assisting the national museum in Palestine, mercy will have the upper hand and the whole energy of the people will be channelled into saving Jews from various countries. Zionism will be struck off the agenda not only in world public opinion, in Britain and the United States, but elsewhere in Jewish public opinion. If we allow a separation between the refugee problem and the Palestinian problem, we are risking the existence of Zionism."

Ben Noah knows that such quotations can be produced in great quantity from spokes persons of every wing of Zionism. He knows Zionism opposed the anti-Nazi boycott; he knows Zionism opposed the opening of the US to Jewish refugees in excess of the numbers stipulated in pre-war rulings; indeed, he recommends to us Nathan Weinstock's excellent book, "Zionism, False Messiah" as an alternative to the books he condemns though that book tells us (p.136) that, "The role of the Zionist Organisation's refusal to contribute to the rescue of European Jewry elsewhere than in Palestine remains to be written. Sometimes, this attitude was akin to outright

sabotage."

So what is he saying? That Ben Gurion was joking? That he was lying to the Executive, playing a diplomatic game as Herzl had done with von Plehve? Or simply that the coincidence between the words and actions of Zionism's leaders is just that... a coincidence, a fluke of history?

In the final analysis, all Ben Noah has to say is this: even if Zionism as an ideology aided the Nazis and other reactionaries before them and even if there are documented acts of collaboration between Zionists and reactionaries (not just diplomatic agreements), the ultimate aims of the Zionists and those of the anti-Semites were different: the former wanted to redeem Jews while the latter didn't.

Needless to say, that is not something we deny, nor is that very surprising. But that is not what the dispute is about.

A final word to Socialist Organiser. It is a good thing that you publish views that you don't agree with. This only becomes a problem when it is not clear what your own position is. Is it the position contained in a review some time ago which did not dispute the interpretation that Gerry Ben Noah attacks or is it Gerry Ben Noah's? Or have you no view at all?

It is time you pinned your colours to the mast before others do it for you.

Ignorant and libellous

Lenni Brenner, SO 234, 3.7.85

The world, she do run in funny ways. Way back on October 4 1984, your publication ran a review by one Gerry Ben Noah of my books, 'Zionism in the Age of the Dictators' and 'The Iron Wall'.

Now Ben-Noah is forced to admit that "Most of the events he (Brenner) refers to;" meaning my charges that various Zionist factions collaborated with the Hitlerites, "are real". However, "This is not to say that a sizeable catalogue of inaccuracies and contradictions within Brenner's corpus could not be assembled".

Well said, except that he then kind of forgot to tell us about even one specific inaccuracy.

After wasting a page with unsubstantiated charges about my alleged errors, Ben-Noah sagely counselled us that "Marxists would be better off turning to Nathan Weinstock's Zionism: False Messiah". An excellent choice, especially as Weinstock has been kind enough to write me that my book is "a fine piece of work," and that he has tried to get it translated into French!

Ben-Noah had the audacity to call

me a “paranoid”. Why? Because of the suggestion that rich Jews control the US Democratic Party and thus American foreign policy”.

Except that since the Democrats don’t control Washington, not even a paranoid like me can think that any Democrat, Jewish or otherwise, runs Reagan’s foreign policy.

However, crazy guy that I am, I do not ‘suggest’, I insist that rich Jews — not rich Albanians — are the single most important financial factor in the Democratic Party, and that therefore that party will stick with Zionism to the end.

But would you believe it, I’m not the only lunatic on the set. Certainly most American scholars would acknowledge G. William Domhoff as the great specialist on the country’s rich. That sociologist wrote, in his ‘Fat Cats and Democrats’, that:

“Since the gentile financial community is almost exclusively Republican, however, it is the Jewish financiers who by default provide the Democrats with their handful of essential money raisers among the super-wealthy... Jewish investment bankers combined with other Jews... to provide the financial leadership of the Democratic Party in every major non-Southern city except Boston.”

There is no need to go on, it is obvious that when Ben-Noah is not libellous he is ignorant, and when not ignorant he is libellous. All that needs to be further said is that it is evident that Zionism is in deep trouble over my charges if the Jewish Chronicle had to stoop to trying to utilise Ben-Noah’s frothings to defend itself.



“Star of David = Swastika” or “Zionism = Nazi” imagery has become more frequent, including on the would-be left, since the 1980s

4. ‘ZIONISM’ AND ‘ANTI-ZIONISM’ IN BRITAIN

Pink Ken changes

“Graffiti” column (unsigned), SO 267, 17 April 1985

It must say something about the state of the left that the drift to the right of former leftists sometimes, incidentally, leads them to adopt better politics than they used to have before. Socialist Organiser has commented on this phenomenon, for example, when their move to the right led careerists like Neil Kinnock to drop the “identikit leftist” Little-England opposition to the EEC [EU].

And now Pink Ken Livingstone has changed his position on Zionism.

Remember that Livingstone used to talk about “Zionist” conspiracies to Gerry Healy’s “Newline” (see last week’s SO). Though he spoke on many WRP platforms for three years, he never in the smallest degree disassociated himself from the antisemitic ravings of Healy’s organisation.

But now all is changed. Last week Livingstone told a meeting at the National Union of Students conference in Blackpool that he now realises that Zionism is not “racism”, but merely a form of “nationalism”. Well done, Ken! Take 3 out of 10.

But what a comment all this is on Livingstone’s past. More to the point, it is probably a comment on his future too. For during his years with Healy, Livingstone was no hot-eyed young rebel blinded by enthusiasm or anger into going along with whatever “politics” Healy dished up. He was a calculating operator who balanced everything he did and said according to the advantages of disadvantages it would bring to his career.

His was a self-serving relationship with the WRP — which provided the material basis for Labour Herald among other things — and with Ted Knight. As well as that, it served him well to mouth the consensus politics on the Middle East of the identikit left.

He differentiated himself from the protection of that consensus only at the point where Thatcher put him up against the gun and he had to choose between his career and defying the government. Then he gave into the government and openly broke with the left.

Probably he broke from the left for the same reasons that he had mouthed its slogans and ideas in the

first place.

Just as he once adopted the career-indicated left-wing political colouring, now he adopts the career-indicated political colouring of the Labour centre. At heart Livingstone is not — as rumour has it — a newt, but a political chameleon! It so happens that the Labour Party centre politics Ken now accommodates to has a more sensible attitude to Zionism than the identikit left has.

So the former Red Ken valiantly strives to improve himself, in more senses than one! And he succeeds.

It was always highly improbable that Livingstone ever privately shared the positions he associated himself with and sometimes endorsed as part of his package deal with Healy and Knight. He is too urbane, too civilised a man to share in the stupid “anti-Zionist” demonology or in the antisemitism of Healy’s WRP. The best thing about his administration at the GLC was its aggressive commitment to fight anti black racism. It just happened to suit what he thought were his career interests to appear to go along with Healy.

Of course, in a serious situation Ken Livingstone might surprise everybody, including Ken Livingstone. But in his career so far he has shown himself to be the very type of those much-discussed German and Central European politicians of the ‘30s and ‘40s who adapted themselves to antisemitism when that current was at its strongest and then after the war adapted themselves to the newly prevailing liberal anti-racist consensus.

He is of the type — for example — of Konrad Adenauer, who made a good career as the Catholic mayor of Cologne under the Nazis and lived to be Germany’s post war “liberal-democratic” Chancellor, disavowing the crimes of the fascists whom he was never conspicuous in opposing when it might have made some difference.

Gerry Healy is not Hitler. He is not in a position to threaten to massacre “Zionists”. But the type to which Livingstone belongs remains what it always was — politically spineless and soulless, and without commitment about anything other than the well-being of its practitioner.

And what it is in small scale and not very important things like Livingstone’s participation in Gerry Healy’s circus, that it will also be in big and important things in the future.

Unfair to Pink Ken

Letter from Edward Ellis [Clive Bradley] and reply [unsigned], SO 268, 24 April 1986

Last week's SO (no. 267) carried an article on Red Ken Livingstone that I feel went a bit over the top. The author of the article "Pink Ken changes" in the "Graffiti" column compared him to Konrad Adenauer "who made a good career as the Catholic mayor of Cologne under the Nazis and lived to be Germany's post war 'liberal democratic' Chancellor".

The basis for this charge is Livingstone's opportunism on the issue of Zionism: he will do what he has to do further his career.

I certainly have no sympathy for Livingstone. And I applaud SO's break with the anti-imperialism of idiots — the crude, latently, potentially and sometimes actually antisemitic logic to much of what has passed as anti-Zionism. People like Livingstone, who have indulged in world Zionist conspiracy arguments, deserve to have their faces rubbed in the dirt.

But however crass, careerist, and offensive Livingstone is, he is not a Nazi nor a Nazi collaborator.

Such charges are very serious and should never be made lightly. The imagery of the Second World War does much to obscure issues, and the endless desire of socialists to call their opponents "Nazis" is deeply unhealthy. It is to substitute name calling for political argument.

Edward Ellis, Deptford

Reply

Edward Ellis has simply got hold of the wrong end of the stick here. The Graffiti piece didn't say Livingstone is a "Nazi", or an antisemite. It said, precisely the opposite — that he is not an antisemite and that he was not deluded into sincerely believing the antisemitic ravings of Gerry Healy, which he associated himself with and publicly endorsed.

That's the point! He went along with it because he thought it was to his advantage to do so. He was the man who "didn't notice", the "normal philistine citizen" with no convictions of his own who says what is expected of him (as when he chattily told Healy's Newsline yes, the BBC's allegations that the WRP gets Libyan money does look like a Zionist job on the WRP), and who tolerates anything from those people he expects benefit or favour from. And who can switch his line as casually as he changes his shirt when he thinks that it's to his advantage.

Konrad Adenauer was no Nazi. He

was one of a vast number who tolerated and went along with the Hitler regime when it was in his interest to do so — and then became a new-fledged post war democrat when it was in his interest to do that. The point is that such people made the crimes of the Nazis possible either by their collaboration or by their passivity. Of course the Konrad Adenauers risked getting shot or jailed. What did Livingstone risk?

What is 'Zionism' today?

Mick Ackersley [Sean Matgamna], SO 289, 23.10.86

'Pillar of Fire' was made, as the credits say, for Channel Four by the Israeli Broadcasting Authority. It is therefore likely to be dismissed by the left as 'Zionist propaganda'. It shouldn't be.

Zionism is a term that has now ceased to have any very clear meaning. It originally meant a Jewish political movement aiming to set up a Jewish state in Palestine. The Zionists were a minority of Jews until well after Hitler took power in Germany.

With the founding and consolidation of the state of Israel in 1948 and after, the original 'Zionism' was consigned to history.

What does 'Zionism' mean today? The right of the Jewish state of Israel to exist, even if you would like to see it radically changed? In that sense probably a majority of politically aware people in the world, vastly though their outlooks differ, are 'Zionist'. In that sense, too, Socialist Organiser is 'Zionist'.

But the 'Zionism' that is denounced on the left is not some vast amorphous body. It is far narrower than that. In practice it means the Zionist hard core of activists and enthusiasts, that is the Jews.

The commitment of large chunks of the left to the destruction of the state of Israel inevitably leads it to adopt attitudes of deep hostility to Jews — not racist hostility, for the left is not racist, but political hostility — except that it is political hostility to almost an entire people, and on a matter of life and death.

'Pillar of Fire' tells a story which should make every 'anti-Zionist' socialist who sees it examine his or her conscience. For the facts do not lie. And though inevitably the story told by 'Pillar of Fire' is the story as seen by the Jews, and the series is thus 'biased', beyond that the facts are straightforward.

The late Isaac Deutscher compared Israel to a 'life-raft state' — the Jews who have survived the Holocaust fled

there. The tragedy was and is that there were people there already.

Hitler — the most terrible enemy in the history of the Jews — made the state of Israel. In the 30s hundreds of thousands of Jews went to Palestine — because no other country would have them.

The great American democracy, whose Statue of Liberty invites the world to give me your poor, your huddled masses, could not find room for Jewish refugees even to save their lives. A shipload of Jewish refugees crossed the Atlantic but the few hundred passengers could not get permission to land in the USA — or anywhere else on the two American continents.

They returned to Europe on the eve of World War 2. Most of them perished.

There are many pictures of the millions of Jews of Eastern Europe going about their daily lives — traders, peddlers, scholars, children playing in the street — almost all of them destined to die soon at the hands of Hitler's racist maniacs.

In 1937 a Commission of Enquiry was set up by the British government which then ruled Palestine, and it recommended that Palestine be partitioned, giving the Jews their own state. It was shelved because of Arab opposition.

The Arab opposition was understandable enough: but maybe if the Jewish state had been set up, the Jews of Europe would have had a refuge, and millions might have survived. Instead the Jews of Europe were trapped on a continent which soon offered them nothing but death.

Palestine itself came close to being a death-trap for the Jews there. If the Germans and Italians had won the battle in the Western Desert in 1942, then Palestine would have been theirs. In fact the British had plans for evacuating Palestine.

Last week's episode told of the Holocaust — the systematic extermination of Jews which began with the Nazi invasion of the USSR in mid-41. In Poland, the Jews had been treated with great brutality and herded into a ghetto in Warsaw — the Jews the Nazis encountered in the USSR were slaughtered immediately.

Then came the extermination camps. All in all, nearly six million Jews died.

Presumably the next episode will show what happened when the few survivors of the death camps tried to pick up their lives again. In Poland, many were attacked and driven out: they fled, mostly to Palestine.

The terrible truth is that 'Zionist propaganda' had all its work — and much more — done for it by the virulent anti-semites and those who either connived with them or looked away.

'Pillar of Fire' made the telling point

that though the Allied airforces had control of the air over Europe from mid 1944 and hit innumerable airports, depots, munitions factories, etc. (not to speak of cities), and though what was happening in the death camps was known to the Allied governments, no attempt was made to destroy the death factories or the railway lines leading to them.

Watch what's left of the series.

Not Zionist: 1

Clive Bradley, 20 290, 30.10.86

I disagree with some of what Mick Ackersley had to say in his review of Pillar of Fire, I didn't see the programme so I can't comment on it; but the review raises broader issues.

It is true that Zionism in its original sense has been 'confined to history' — the movement for separate Jewish state. But I cannot agree that Zionism as a term now means no more than the belief that the Israeli Jews have the right to a state. If this is so, the majority certainly of Israeli anti-Zionists and non-Zionists are 'Zionists'. I do not agree that SO's position is, or should be in any sense Zionist.

Much of what is reactionary and oppressive in the Israeli state flows from its specifically Zionist character. That it is defined as a state for all Jews rather than its citizens is not incidental; that Jews are free to immigrate to Israel but displaced Arabs are not, is not incidental either. These features, among others, define Israel as a Zionist state, and to understate this aspect of the issue is liable to lead to an underestimation of the problems posed by the Middle East conflict.

Similarly, it is right to condemn the anti-semitism of the 'democratic' Allies prior to 1948 in refusing to open their borders to Jews fleeing Hitler; but it seems to me to undermine that condemnation to add "maybe if a Jewish state had been created, the Jews of Europe would have had a refuge, and millions might have survived". Maybe. But far better, surely, if they had been able to escape to America, or Britain, where most of them would have preferred to go. And where were the communists, homosexuals, gypsies, trade unionists supposed to seek refuge? A 'refuge' was not the answer — as post-1948 history has tragically shown.

In any case, the fate of the 'refuge' would have depended on Allied military success in north Africa.

SO is right to bend the stick against the 'idiot anti-imperialists' on the question of the Middle East; but I think maybe there's a danger of bending it too far.

Not Zionist:2

Bryan Edmands, SO 290, 30.10.86

I wish to correct the balance of, and one of the central assertions made in, the article "The making of the Jewish state" in SO 289.

Mick Ackersley states that "Zionism is a term that has now ceased to have any very clear meaning". However, as he asserts, it does mean the right of the Jewish state of Israel to exist", even if perhaps "radically" altered.

But the state of Israel, a state clearly based upon the democratic wishes of the vast majority of its Jewish people, is a state fundamentally resting upon the oppression of over 2.25 million Palestinian Arabs — Arabs scattered throughout the Middle East (and elsewhere) or forced to live under the Israeli state's military control of the annexed West Bank and Gaza Strip, not to mention the concentration camp-like ghettos in South Lebanon, denied democratic, civil rights, expelled from their homelands.

To say that in a "sense", then, Socialist Organiser is "Zionist" is thus akin to saying that we support and condone all of this — and the manifestation of the Israeli government's foreign and domestic policy in the region, namely the continued and systematic terrorisation of the Palestinian and Arab peoples.

I understand the motivation behind the sentiments expressed in the article — there is no easy solution to this situation: and that most solutions put forward by the Left in essence reduce to an external and forceful destruction of not only the Israeli state but Jewish society and people!

But in trying to differentiate from this position Mick Ackersley has gone too far the other way!

Zionism is a thoroughly racist and reactionary ideology — one today based upon the maintenance of power of one people, the Jews, organised in their own militarised state, over that of a dispossessed and dispersed people, the Palestinian Arabs.

The terrible tragedy of the Jewish people is that in fleeing the Holocaust they built a homeland by the systematic brutalising and oppression of another people — a people who to this day continue a hard, bitter, misrepresented and all too often forgotten struggle against this reality.

Where 'anti-Zionism' leads

Jack Cleary [Sean Matgamna], SO 293, 20.11.86

Clive Bradley was one of the first

two or three SO supporters to break away from the delusion we used to share with many on the left that the answer to the Jewish-Arab conflict is a "secular democratic state" in Palestine.

His comments on Mick Ackersley's review of "Pillar of Fire" are therefore significant, because, it seems to me, they are inspired by an emotional left-over from the old position and the attitudes that properly went with it.

Like "Socialism", "Communism" and "Trotskyism", "Zionism" is now a pretty decayed word with lots of different meanings: it no longer defines something clearly — today you need additional information before you know what the word is being used for and what it means.

Its original — now its historic — meaning was clear enough; the goal of a Jewish state and activity to achieve it. Its logical meaning now, developing from its original meaning, should surely centre on the state created by the original Zionists and in one's attitude to that state. Those who support the right of the Jewish state, in some form, to exist, are, logically, "Zionists" — and that now includes a vast spectrum of opinion, including those, like SO, who are hostile to aspects of the existing Jewish state.

When we wanted to replace Israel with the mythical and impossible secular democratic state, we logically regarded all who supported Israel as Zionists of one sort or another. I did, certainly. Now we should try to be consistent and honest with ourselves.

If the word 'Zionism' could be forgotten about or left in its decayed form to the reforming Israeli critics of the Jewish state as a term of abuse for the Israeli establishment, fine. But we have to relate to the word 'Zionism' according to its use in the society around us, and especially its use on the left. For, though logically all who support Israel's right to existence are Zionists, 'Zionist' on the left now in fact means Jew.

It is the Jews who have the hard core commitment to Israel and from whom come Zionism's militants. It is the Jewish Zionists who are the target of the "no-free-speech-for-Zionists" campaigns.

It was surely established in our discussions in SO that the left's "anti-imperialism-of-idiots" Zionist-bashing is anti-semitic — a new form of anti-semitism, if you like, but antisemitic nonetheless.

It is anti-semitic not only because of its unique proposal to destroy a nation, but also because of what it implies towards most Jews outside Israel, who defend Israel's right to exist. That being so, we can distance ourselves from certain detestable policies and activities of the Israeli state; but to distance ourselves from 'Zionism' is nei-

ther consistent nor honourable.

No name, no mere word will saddle us with responsibility for the crimes of the Israeli state. But on the left now the violent repudiation of that word, when in fact it is used to mean Jew, would saddle us with some share of the responsibility for the latent, and sometimes rampant, anti-semitism implied in the left's attitude to Israel and 'Zionism' — and some responsibility for the left's vocal and active hostility to Jews ('Zionists') who refuse to break with Israel and Zionism and endorse the Arab goal of conquering and destroying the Jewish nation state.

Not Zionist: 3

Clive Bradley, SO 294, 27.11.86

If all that being a 'Zionist' meant or implied was support for the right of an Israeli Jewish nation to exist, and opposition to their forcible inclusion into a 'democratic secular state', I would have no quarrel with Mick Ackersley and Jack Cleary.

I am even prepared to concede that if that is all you mean by it, then I am a 'Zionist' too — it would be logically irrefutable.

But I don't think that is all it means. Zionism is an ideology — a decayed one, no doubt, but an ideology all the same. There are two claims in particular of this ideology that I think we should oppose.

First, is that the movement for the creation of Israel was a movement of Jewish national liberation. Whatever the subjective intentions of its adherents, it was in practice a movement of colonial conquest.

Second, even if it had not been a reactionary movement in this sense, the project of a Jewish state would have been a false method of fighting anti-semitism in Europe (as false as a notion of a 'homosexual state' for other victims of fascism): and a ridiculous method of developing a Jewish socialist movement as the 'socialist' Zionists believed.

Just history? I don't think so. Whilst to repeat; defending the rights of the Jews, we have to explain the origins of the conflict. It is simply impossible to discuss the question of Palestine without doing so. These historical issues are therefore very live political issues.

And the Israeli state is recognisably Zionist — recognisably the product of the Zionist movement. It is a state for Jews, as opposed to a state for its citizens; Arabs expelled since its creation cannot live in it.

I oppose a programme to conquer Israel. I think that to propose the self-obliteration of the Israeli Jewish nation is utopian rubbish. I think that the expelled Arabs have no absolute right, in the sense of a right that in principle

could be enforced by external armies and thus conquest, to "return". But I do think they have a "right" in a more minimal sense, to live in Israel, and that their exclusion is chauvinist, indeed racist.

Zionism, minimally, is Israeli Jewish chauvinism. I do not think we should call ourselves 'Zionists' any more than, through support for Palestinian national rights, we should be Palestinian nationalists.

To do so obscures real political issues rather than clarifying them.

Against ideological terror

John O'Mahony [Sean Matgamna], SO 295, 4.12.86

After Clive Bradley's letter in last week's SO I'm not sure what his quarrel with Mick Ackersley and Jack Cleary is about. Clive objected to Mick Ackersley's assertion that Zionism logically means support for the right of Israel to exist and that those who support its right to exist are Zionist. Now Clive — who does support the right of Israel to exist — concedes that if this is all that is meant by 'Zionism' then he too is a Zionist: 'It would be logically irrefutable'.

Clive insists that Zionism means other things too. Yet nobody proposed that we formally adopt the name — or the ideas and attitudes — of the campaigning Zionists, who are usually Jewish chauvinists.

Israel was created by 'a movement of colonial conquest' — of sorts. But people who emphasise this are usually concerned with more than precise classification. They use it to justify a denial of Israel's right to exist and to back up a proposal to roll back the film of history by destroying the Jewish nation in Palestine. It encapsulates a reactionary Arab revanchist and chauvinist programme.

In any case support for Israel's right to exist does not necessarily imply support for the 'movement of colonial conquest'. We can only relate to that now as an event of past history.

Setting up a Jewish state was a false way to fight anti-semitism in Europe? I'm not so sure about that. By the end of his life Trotsky, though he rejected the Zionist enterprise in Palestine, had come round to the view that a Jewish state was necessary.

The historic fact is that Zionism wasn't able to save Europe's Jews from anti-semitism, or from massacre. Nothing but the socialist revolution would have saved the Jews.

The fascist armies might very well have got to Palestine — they almost did early in the war — and turned it into a death trap for the Jews. Yet that

didn't happen. The Jews in Palestine survived, while the Jews of Poland and most of Europe were murdered in their millions. That fact makes one wish that what Isaac Deutscher called 'the life-raft state' had come into existence before the war.

History tells us that all methods of fighting anti-semitism in Europe failed, and that our method — assimilation — failed more thoroughly and disastrously than the Zionist method: and that it failed most completely in the country where the Jews had been most assimilated — Germany. Trotsky faced up to that fact after a lifetime spent as an assimilationist.

I don't conclude that, therefore, those who said to the Jews 'assimilate and fight for the socialist revolution' were wrong. The tragic outcome wasn't inevitable. But that's how it turned out.

The massacre of the Jews — like so much else — was a byproduct of the defeat of the revolutionary socialist workers' movement in the early twentieth century. But the workers were defeated; and the Jews were massacred; and as a knock-on effect terrible things were done — and are still being done — to the Palestinian Arabs (though incomparably less terrible things than were done to the Jews in Europe). From 1986 it is a matter of evaluating the history of the Jews in the 20th century and not what it was in 1900, a choice of programmes — Zionism or assimilation — to fight for.

Israel is a state for all Jews as opposed to a state for its citizens? Yes, but what is wrong with that?

As an ideal, a state in which Jews and Arabs would coexist as equal citizens is very attractive. But haven't we all agreed — very belatedly to be sure — that it is an utopia behind which hides the Arab chauvinist demand for the conquest and destruction of the Jewish nation?

Either the Jews have a right to their state, or they don't. And if they do we can't make it conditional on us liking or approving everything they do. Of course while defending Israel's right to exist we champion the Palestinian Arabs within Israel and on the occupied West Bank; we support those Jews who fight Jewish chauvinism and so on. I can't see why within that framework and within those qualifications — it is of special concern that Israel says all Jews in the world have a right to Israeli citizenship. Israel is a state conceived as a refuge for all the victims of anti-semitism — why demand that the Israelis forget this? The law of (Jewish) return and the treatment of the Palestinian Arabs are separable and should be separated.

Surely the big issue here, though, is not just whether our support for the right of the Jews to have a state makes us — strictly speaking — Zion-

ist or not. What makes that important and worth arguing about is that 'Zionist' now is used on the left as a form of condemnation whose emotional content — used to bludgeon, intimidate and stigmatise — is about equal to the term 'racist' and not too far away from 'fascist'. That is the political issue here.

It is necessary for us to stand up to this thinly disguised antisemitism and to insist that it is based on ideological lies and on pseudo-historical myths about how Israel came into existence

Think about it. On the left 'the Zionists' — read the very big majority of Jews — are stigmatised as imperialists and racists of the very worst sort. Israel is imperialism incarnate, with its tentacles everywhere. It was the undercover workings of powerful Jewish conspirators which led to the creation of Israel. Comparisons with Nazism come easy to those who see it like this and are frequently used. It may be only the demented "Petrodollar anti-Zionists" of Gerry Healy's old WRP who say all this clearly, but nevertheless that picture is widespread.

All this — despite the crimes of Israel against the Palestinian Arabs — is preposterous! The Jews have been chief single victim of imperialism in the 20th century. The supposedly all-powerful pre-Israel world Jewish community couldn't even save its own from massacre. It couldn't secure entry visas for refugees from Nazism in to Britain, the USA, or into any other country — not even to save their lives,

The picture of Zionism and Israel as a creation and tool of imperialism (as distinct from an ally playing power politics with various imperialisms) is a grotesque historic libel and misrepresentation. That isn't how things happened, or why, whatever the long term plans and machinations of the Zionist movement. The Jews who made modern Israel possible fled to Palestine from murderous fascism. As late as the all-decisive war in 1948 Israel depended not on monopoly capitalist imperialism but on Moscow and its Czech satellite for the arms without which they might have lost.

The picture of modern history and the Jews' demonic place in it, now dominant on the left is if you think about it, not too far off a left-wing version of the 'blood libel' of the Christian anti-semites, according to which Jews murdered children during their religious rituals.

You don't need to regard Israel and Zionists as they are regarded on much of the left to be able to oppose and condemn aspects of Israel and to demand justice for the Palestinian Arabs.

In fact our equivalent of the blood libel — which owes a great deal to the thinly disguised anti-semitism of the Stalinist movement and its post 1948 campaigns against 'Zionism' — serves

another purpose: It backs up and legitimises 'socialist' support for the Arab chauvinist programme of conquering and annihilating the Jewish nation in Palestine.

Clive Bradley has as little time for this horrible nonsense as I have. But I think he hasn't freed himself from emotional attitudes and from hints and halt thoughts which imply attitudes and policies he both rejects and condemns.

The job of SO is to help the left scour itself clean of the new anti-semitism. That is why, working in a political milieu in which Zionism is used as a demonological name tag to morally blackmail and ideologically terrorise Jews who stand up to the hysterical "anti-Zionists", SO cannot afford to go along even part of the way with the blackmailers. If we are Zionists, so then we are Zionists.

A perverse definition

Martin Thomas, SO 297, 8.1.87

Faced with rising anti-semitism in late 19th century Britain, Eleanor Marx used to declare at public meetings, 'I am a Jewess'.

Strictly speaking she wasn't, but she wanted to confront the anti-semites head on.

The position of Mick Ackersley and Jack Cleary is in some ways similar. Faced with anti-Zionists who say that if they defend the rights of the Israeli Jewish nation then they're Zionists, they respond: "So I'm a Zionist. So what?"

The impulse is clearly honourable. But the logic, I think, is faulty. Zionism had a clear meaning before 1948. Marxists opposed Zionism. They regarded it as a tragically mistaken attempt by the oppressed to respond to oppression, rather than as an anti-Arab imperialist conspiracy: but they opposed it.

They were right to oppose it, I think and I believe Mick Ackersley and Jack Cleary would agree. But an Israeli Jewish nation now exists and however it came into existence, it has rights.

Crude anti-Zionists often refer to the Israeli Jewish nation as 'the Zionists'. They evade the issue of the rights of the Israeli Jewish nation by first reducing the Israeli Jews to a political group ('Zionists') and then reducing Zionist politics to the driving out of the Palestinian Arabs.

Now most Israeli Jews would accept the label 'Zionist'. And historic Zionism did mean the driving out of the Palestinian Arabs. But historic Zionism also meant many other things. And the big majority of Israeli Jews are Israeli Jews not because of an ideological

choice but because they were born in Israel or found Israel as refuge from persecution. So the 'anti-Zionist' definition grossly distorts the reality.

Then the 'anti-Zionists' add an inescapably anti-semitic twist by proceeding further in the same line of argument and extending the term 'Zionist' to all those (Jews) who feel a special national allegiance to the Israel Jewish nation.

Even as a gambit in debate, saying "So then I'm a Zionist too; so what?" is a more confusing than clarifying response. Obviously we — Mick Ackersley, Jack Cleary, myself — do not feel any special national allegiance to the Israeli Jewish nation above all others. Rather, we defend the rights of that nation like all others.

The point is to separate out all the different elements blurred together in the word 'Zionism'. It is crucial to insist that the Marxist opposition to historic Zionism has no bearing on the issue of the rights of the modern Israeli Jewish nation.

There is another problem. In Israeli and wider Jewish politics, 'Zionism' has a current meaning which is narrower than Jack Cleary's 'logical' definition as meaning defending the right of Israel to exist (maybe with modifications).

The narrower meaning is: seeing the state of Israel as having some mystic mission for the redemption (physical, social or spiritual) of the whole worldwide Jewish people; and therefore seeing it as having not just rights proper to the Israeli Jewish nation as to any other nation, but special, additional rights, higher than those of other national entities.

I don't particularly advocate this narrower meaning as 'my' definition of Zionism. But it is certainly more logical than Jack Cleary's (one can very well condemn historic Zionism yet be a 'Zionist' in Jack Cleary's definition).

And another thing: in the general British labour movement we can very well deal with the crude 'anti-Zionists' by saying that their use of 'Zionism' is an ideological amalgam, and by insisting on defining issues more precisely: the politics of the state of Israel, and the rights of the Israeli Jewish nation, non-Israeli Jewish identification with that nation, etc.

But it is almost impossible to participate in Israeli, or broader Jewish, politics without accepting the narrower definition of Zionism, at least provisionally. And to have 'our' definition of Zionism in which almost all Jewish and Israeli anti-Zionists, and a sizeable spectrum of Palestinian nationalists, are 'Zionists', is perverse.

In the Zionist camp

Tony Greenstein, SO 298, 15.1.87

When, some 18 months ago, Socialist Organiser began debating its position on Zionism/Palestine, we forecast that SO would move into the Zionist camp.

Moshe Machover of Matzpen, the Socialist Organisation in Israel, was invited to participate in that debate, because he too disagreed with the democratic, secular state position. Were he to read John O'Mahony's article (4 December) he would, I am sure, disagree with it in its entirety. Moshe is one of those who struggled to win a previously Zionist left over to an anti-Zionist position. O'Mahony seeks to do the opposite.

By his own admission he is a Zionist supporter and despite all that has been written on the Zionist movement, its colonial roots, its reactionary role in Jewish politics, he has learnt nothing and forgotten all. He has even confused the terms 'Jewish' and 'Zionist' and then accused the rest of the Left of anti-semitism for the same sin!

Zionism never was a method of fighting anti-semitism. It held anti-semitism couldn't be fought, far better to come to terms with it and establish their own state. For most Jews it wasn't even a means of escape. Some 2.5 million Jews who did flee went not to Palestine but to Britain and America.

Describing those who believed that the Bolshevik Revolution made Zionism irrelevant, Chaim Weizmann, the first President of Israel, wrote "Nothing can be more superficial and nothing can be more wrong than that. The sufferings of Russian Jewry never were the cause of Zionism."

Similar statements were made by Ben Gurion during the Nazi era and the leader of American Zionism. Abba Hillel Silver. Israel was not conceived as a refuge for all the victims of anti-Semitism (otherwise it could hardly have seen in antisemitism a force for good that stimulated emigration) but the only means of preserving the Jewish people as a collectivity. It was the response of the Jewish petit bourgeoisie.

It is beyond doubt that the Zionist movement obstructed the movement to save Jews from the Holocaust, terming it 'refugeeism', e.g. it opposed the lowering of the immigration movements in Britain and the US arguing that the refugees should go to Palestine. Nor is it true that all methods of fighting anti-semitism in Europe failed.

Not only, by Begin's own admission, did some two million Jews survive by escaping into Russia, degenerated as

the revolution was, but opposition to anti-semitism in countries such as Denmark (where the entire Jewish community was smuggled out to Sweden), Bulgaria and Italy did prevent many more Jews being killed. In Holland there was even a general strike against the deportations which the Zionist Judenrat opposed. Whose reading of history is false?

Even today, far from being the 'life-raft state', Israel jeopardises the position of Jews in the diaspora with its genocide of the Palestinians. What was Israel doing when over 2,000 young leftist Jews were being tortured to death in Argentina? Selling arms to the Junta. And the Zionist leaders of that community? Telling others not to make a fuss. Compare that to the Zionist campaign over Soviet Jewry.

Nothing in Trotsky's writings leads one to the conclusion that he supported the Zionist enterprise in Palestine. In July 1940, just before his death, he wrote: "The attempt to solve the Jewish question through the migration of Jews to Palestine can now be seen for what it is, a tragic mockery of the Jewish people... Never was it so clear as it is today that the salvation of the Jewish people is bound up inseparably with the overthrow of the capitalist system."

O'Mahony's obsession with anti-semitism blinds him to the fact that anti-semitism today in Europe is not, unlike 50 years ago, state sponsored. It is a personal form of racism, confined to fringe fascist groups. It is black people in Britain, Arab people in France, Turkish workers in Germany who experience state racism. Jewish people have socially moved upwards and politically moved rightwards.

That is why we say that antisemitism has been redefined and the term 'black anti-semitism' like 'left anti-semitism' is used as a means of countering opposition to Zionism.

Racism is not merely a question of personal prejudice, but at the level of class, a specifically oppressed section of the working class. Apart from France, there is no Jewish working class in the West, unlike the 1930s. The Jewish people have changed and with it anti-semitism.

As Abram Leon noted, "Zionism transposes anti-semitism to all of history, it saves itself the trouble of studying the various forms of antisemitism and their evolution" (Jewish Question, p. 247). If Jews today, unlike the Jews of the East End who fought the fascists, base their identity around Israel, then that is a reactionary identity.

Zionism as a colonial movement is not something of the past. Internal colonisation has been a continuing feature of Israel's existence. Today's operations on the West Bank are no different to what it did in the Galilee.

O'Mahony asks what is wrong with

Israel being a state for all Jews as opposed to all its citizens. The answer is racism, not merely in this or that policy but in every single face of the State's operations.

It means Israel's Arabs are at best tolerated and at worst unwanted. It means the growth of Kach and Tehiya, it means apartheid and expulsion. It means concern over the 'demographic problem', i.e. too many Arabs.

The article demolishes other straw targets. Socialists did not advocate assimilation as a strategy, neither do we mourn it. Only incorrigible reactionaries would consciously seek to preserve differences of caste or religion where individuals choose otherwise,

Nobody on the Left believes Jews have a 'demonic place' in history. Those of us who are Jewish and whose opposition to Zionism came as a consequence of our revolutionary socialism understand not only Zionism's relationship to antisemitism but also its reactionary role within Jewish politics.

Even the Jewish Socialists' Group understand that Israel feeds off the diaspora Jewish communities, contributing nothing to their well-being.

Instead of an analysis which sees Israel as an artificial state, which can not exist other than in alliance with imperialism, O'Mahony resorts to moral relativism. Jews are 'the chief single victim of imperialism in the 20th century'. 'Incomparably less terrible things' were done to the Jews than to the Palestinians.* This ranking of hierarchies is ironically attacked on the facing page [of that issue of SO] by Ms Carlisle and Ashworth.

Even were these statements true they would be irrelevant. Since when has support for a democratic, secular state been part of reactionary Arab chauvinism? It is a demand that is rejected by all the Islamic chauvinists. Unfortunately, Socialist Organiser, in refusing to give any meaningful support to the Palestinians — either in the labour movement or in National Union of Students (where it is to the right of most reformists and on a par with Militant) has accommodated to imperialism.

As for helping the left scour itself clean of anti-semitism, this in itself speaks volumes about O'Mahony's analysis of racism — it's not located in society but in individuals. However not wishing to stand in his way, I suggest an open debate between ourselves and John O'Mahony in which he will have the opportunity to begin scouring.

* This sentence appears here as written in the original manuscript.

Huffing and puffing

Steve Channon, SO 299, 22.1.87

On the rhetorical polemic of Tony Greenstein (SO. 15 January)... So much huffing and puffing but very little in the way of actual accuracy. Yet another tirade of half-truths, sheer fantasy and what the writer would not doubt claim to be anti-Zionism and nothing more.

Firstly there is the question of Zionism and the Holocaust. In the inimitable style of the new breed of (left wing) Holocaust revisionists, Greenstein attempts to justify his illogical analysis with plain lies.

The truth is that Zionists were at the forefront of the resistance against the Nazis — in the ghettos, concentration camps and towns — and to label the Judenrat and others who did not resist as ‘Zionists’ is crass reactionary stereotyping of the worst order.

Jews did not die in the Holocaust because of so-called ‘Zionist collaboration’ but because of the failure of the working class and indeed the entire world to resist the Nazis. Don’t attempt to blame Jews (or Zionists, it’s the same thing really) for antisemitism — that is the sole responsibility of the antisemites.

True, there was some support offered against the Hitlerite regime by certain states or people but the fact the matter remains that these were isolated incidents. The majority actively assisted or passively accepted the attempted genocide of the Jewish people. That is why six million Jews were slaughtered and, as the renowned Marxist intellectual Isaac Deutscher wrote:

“If instead of arguing against Zionism in the 1920s and 1930s, I had urged European Jews to go to Palestine, I might have helped save some of the lives that were later extinguished in Hitler’s gas chambers.”

Secondly, there is Greenstein’s marginalisation and trivialisation of anti-semitism in contemporary society. However, state racism still exists against Jews in countries such as Syria and the USSR.

The truth of the situation is that anti-semitism remains the binding force of international fascism today — it is what links the National Front to Farakhan and to the neo-Nazi AWB in South Africa. Anti-semitism is still very much at the core of racist and fascist ideology.

It may not be so evident as, say, the oppression of blacks in this country, but to dismiss it as fringe, with it being at the bottom of Greenstein’s league table of oppression, is hardly a socialist response.

But if one is to believe Greenstein’s analysis then the reason why anti-semitism is not like it was 50 years ago is neither due to socialism nor Zionism but to capitalism. For according to the writer it is the process of bourgeoisification that has reduced anti-semitism to the fringe!

Then again, such a reduction of anti-semitism and intellectual perversion is hardly surprising from someone like Tony Greenstein.

Zionism is still racism

Bryan Edmands, SO 299, 22.1.87

Our stand against anti-semitism is both important and commendable. However, this has nothing to do with support for present day Israel.

Well-documented histories of the racism of the Israeli state since its proclamation in May 1948; of the preceding 30 years of Zionist encouraged and organised immigration to Palestine; and of the propaganda used by Zionists which often (purposely) served the interests of anti-semites exist.

It is now undoubtedly true that due in large part to the systematic and brutal terrorisation of the Palestinians, that Israel is held in contempt and haired by not only Palestinians but all Arab peoples.

This brings me to the question: the above being the case, what should Socialist Organiser’s position be?

I believe the basis of it should be: condemnation of the state of Israel; support for the Palestinian struggle; neighbouring Arab governments are no real friends of the Palestinians or indeed of their own working classes (they are their class enemies); a call — addressed to the only agency that could possibly carry it out, short of there being socialism in a good part of the world), the Jewish working class — that Israel should renounce all expansionist claims and move back to the very least its pre-1967 boundaries; and to begin to make extensive reparations, both in terms of financial aid and technical know-how if so desired by the Palestinians.

Unlike the supporters of the ‘democratic secular state’ I agree that if there is a desire by Jews for some territorial expression of nationhood (and likewise the Palestinians), and accepting the reality that history has placed before us, some modification of pre-1967 Israel should be established through negotiations between the Jewish working class and the Palestinians.

As Trotsky said in October 1934. in a reply to a letter from a group of Jewish Left Oppositionists working inside the Soviet Union:

“... for the Jews, as for any nation, the very best circumstances for cultural development should be created). This means, inter alia: to provide for those Jews who desire to have their own schools, their own press, their own theatre, etc., a separate territory for self administration and development... In the sphere of the national question there must be no restraint: on the contrary there must be an all-sided material assistance for the cultural needs of all nationalities and ethnic groups”.

It is not from emotionalism that we condemn Israel and support the Palestinians — it is in the name of democracy!

It is certainly not anti-semitic to condemn Zionism as an ideology, utterly and completely.

It is semantic nonsense to attempt to define Zionism away by saying that it now just expresses a desire for Jewish territorial rights.

The ‘Law of Return’ should be challenged, though not denied by us, on the basis that Israel is a diversion (and not a safe haven) from the class struggle. Jewish people would do better to fight for socialism in their countries of birth, rather than seeking a refuge along a spiritual/religious path.

Finally, Zionism is racism, of a peculiarly Jewish form true, but still racism.

So to assert as comrade O’Mahony does that ‘if we are Zionists, then we are Zionists’ does nothing in aiding Jewish people, the Palestinians, and the working class, but on the contrary, gives cover to Zionism and ammunition to our enemies.

Rights and wrongs

Clive Bradley, SO 300, 29.1.87

Perhaps the clearest way to reply to John O’Mahony’s comments (Letters, SO 295) is to explain briefly my overall views.

Much of what passes as ‘anti-Zionism’ is implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, anti-semitic. The nice sounding programme of a ‘secular, democratic state’ is a utopia, and in fact could only be implemented by force. In reality, whatever people mean by it, it is a programme unrealisable except by military conquest of Israel.

If it is supposed to be voluntary on the Jews’ part, it is not an answer to the national question. A long (who could know how long?) process of chance of heart by the Jews is not much of a programme for Palestinians facing oppression now. Withdrawal of Israeli forces from the post-1967 occupied territories, combined with the right of secession of majority Arab areas within pre-’67 Israel, is a big part of an

immediate democratic programme.

So, I support Israel's right to exist. I agree with John O'Mahony that this is an unconditional right — that is, it is ridiculous to say that we support the conquest of Israel until such time that Israel is a nicer place. I am completely opposed to the conquest of Israel.

John O'Mahony says that we should champion the rights of the Palestinians, and support Jews fighting Jewish chauvinism. On what basis, though? What does opposition to Jewish chauvinism mean?

It seems to me that it must include trenchant criticism of the refusal or Jews to countenance a large influx of Arabs into their state. We should not advocate 'return' on the point of a chauvinist's gun, nor deny the Jews rights until they agree to allow Arabs in. The agency for opposition to the racist, exclusivist character of Israel, and therefore for change, is the working class in Israel.

But Israel is exclusivist, and we do have a socialist responsibility to oppose this exclusivism. Israel's right to exist is not conditional upon it ceasing to be exclusivist, but opposition to its exclusivism should be part of our programme.

Israel's definition as a state for Jews rather than its citizens, which O'Mahony sees no problem with, is in expression of this exclusivism. It is part of the institutional structure that denies Arabs rights within Israel.

Because of this, I think it is wrong to identify ourselves with 'Zionists' even in a quiet way to make a stance against the hysterical 'anti-Zionists'. The Zionist movement — though not, of course, all individual Zionists — are our political enemies.

I think it is possible both to make stand against anti-semitism on the left and to maintain a socialist critique of the Israeli state.

A socialist federation

Duncan Chapple, SO 302, 12.2.87

Adam Woolf in SO-296 is quite wrong to say that John O'Mahony is in any way "condoning racist oppression". Even so there are some points John made I'd like to comment on.

Socialist Organiser takes a 'two states' position on the Middle East. Why? Not because we support Israeli national chauvinism, but because we recognise the national rights of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. That leads us to reject the formula of a military conquest of Israel.

SO supporters do not condone racism: we take the lead of Lenin on the national question in supporting national rights; but that should not lead

us to support the state of Israel in the way John O'Mahony seems to.

What we want is class unity for a socialist federation of the Middle East. Recognising those national rights lays a basis for building that unity. We want to smash the Israeli state only so far as we want to smash all "states", in as much as they are mechanisms for oppression.

The yes/no choice O'Mahony seems to offer ignores that there is more than one alternative. It ignores that our support for Israel to exist is based on our opposition to that blood-bath, not on support for Israeli-Jewish oppression and chauvinism, nor because we see Israel's existence as the best possible state of affairs in the Middle East.

Double standards and anti-Zionism

Sean Matgamna (written at the time of the previous contributions in this section, but not published until the first edition of this pamphlet)

I don't know what Tony Greenstein was doing getting himself involved in the SO discussion on Zionism. Apart from Greenstein it was a discussion between people all of whom share a certain common commitment to:

- The right of both the Israeli Jewish nation and the Palestinian Arabs to a state in Palestine — the two states position..

Opposition to the Judaeophobic 'anti-Zionism' that is dominant on the left; and

- Hostility to Israeli-Jewish chauvinism, and to Israel's treatment of its 'own' Arabs and those on the West Bank.

But Greenstein is a hard man to keep out. That's all right, except that he tends to drag the discussion down, and this time he did that too. Yet I welcome his presence in the discussion because it serves a useful purpose.

It demonstrates that you can't — despite what people like Martin Thomas think — have a calm, elevated, abstract, scholarly or pseudo-scholarly discussion on the mere meaning of the word Zionism. It is a living question of politics: the whole network of questions — of history and so on — cannot be separated from the central political questions at Middle East politics now: one state or two? the right of the Jewish nation to exist or the right of the Arabs to destroy it?

You cannot in the political arena discuss the meaning of 'Zionism' apart from current politics, or separate such a discussion from the attitude we should take, as socialists and democrats, to Jews and 'Zionists' who defend the right of Israel to exist and refuse to accept the ultimatum that they are

posed with by much of the left — endorse the demand that the people of the Jewish state agree to dissolve themselves in an Arab secular democratic state, or be branded (like Israel) as racists and imperialist stooges,

Thus Martin Thomas's letter is typically balanced, and a fair-minded summary of what has gone before — but it's five miles above the political terrain on which we operate. It simply does not engage with the political questions I have tried to take up. It doesn't relate to, let alone answer, the problem that we need to answer — that anti-Zionism mostly means antisemitism on the left, and moreover that it is part of a massive political infection. Or the fact that by running before the hysterical anti-Zionists we give their campaign extra power and momentum, and abandon those who cannot so readily solve their dilemmas by adding their own curses to a word — Zionism.

Martin Thomas should think about the very flattering analogy he makes between those of us who would be prepared to accept, with qualifications, the label Zionist, and Eleanor Marx's declaration during the anti-Jewish agitation in Britain that she was a Jewess. I think Martin misunderstands what she was doing. I don't think she was just making a romantic personal gesture. Eleanor Marx was a well-known and respected trade union activist among the East End workers. She had helped organise match workers, gas workers, dockers, and others, helping to start what is today the GMBATU. She taught the union's first secretary, Will Thorne, how to read and write.

Surely Eleanor Marx was trying to counter the xenophobia, the fear of aliens and outsiders, by identifying 'Jews' with someone her listeners know and accepted. SO has taught few on the left to read either English or Marxian, and there are those, in the hard left and the soft left, who would brand us ourselves as aliens; but still, something can be gained by making a demonstrative stand against the anti-Zionist hysteria — and all the more so if we combine this, as we should, with honest defence of the oppressed Palestinian Arabs and support for the anti-chauvinists within Israel.

The point was made very early in the discussion that Zionism is a word with more than one meaning. By now it is a pretty decayed word. I think the logical meaning is what Jack Cleary said: acceptance of the right of Israel to exist. Martin Thomas says that the Israeli left use 'Zionism' to mean the idea that the Israeli Jewish nation has rights above all other nations. All right! But how many copies of SO go to Israel? If we were in Israel we could adopt the terminology of the left, and we'd have no reason to quarrel about it. In Britain we have, and that's the

point of this discussion.

Greenstein takes advantage of the use of 'Zionism' in Israel to go all over the place on what is and what isn't Zionism. He is also dishonest.

Leave aside the dispute about words and labels for a moment. As far as I know almost all the Israeli left anti-Zionists are in favour of the right of (a modified) Israeli State to exist; they are against Israel being subjugated; they reject the secular democratic state slogan. Whether they choose to call themselves Zionists or not, they fit what our side in the discussion has been defining as 'Zionist'. They are not in Greenstein's 'anti-Zionist' camp. And, of course, the issue that concerns us over the use of the term 'Zionist' does not arise for them. In Israel Zionophobia can hardly be a code for Judaeophobia.

I did not 'admit' that I am 'a Zionist supporter' in any sense Greenstein uses. I do not support or accept responsibility for the crimes of the Israeli state, and no amount of play with words can saddle me with that responsibility. I want to defend the rights of Zionists and of Jews, not Israel's treatment of the Palestinian Arabs.

Have I "confused" the terms "Jew" and "Zionist": and then accused the rest of the left of anti-semitism for the same sin! More small-beer polemical trickery! At issue here is a question of fact: is it or is it not true that most Jews instinctively support Israel? The only exceptions are some very religious Jews and a thin smattering of revolutionary socialists.

It is not a matter of imposing the 'Zionist' label on Jews who would not accept it, a substitution of a 'congenital' Zionist definition of Zionism for the proper one, but of defining rigorously what exists now. Either we accept that any emphatic hostility to "Zionists" is in effect hostility to Jews, or we try to evade this problem by using Zionist as a tag only for the allegedly super-villainous super-Zionists. But who are these? There are specifically Zionist organisations. But a broad campaign against such people for their pro-Israel stand, or for the crimes of Israel, is impossible without at the first move clawing in most 'Zionists' in the wider definition.

Greenstein says that Zionism was never a method of fighting anti-semitism. It certainly wasn't our method — though I think it is a requirement of political honesty to re-examine our methods and the others in the light of what actually happened. What bourgeois Europe in its mid-20th century nationalist convulsions did to six million Jews does, it seems to me, in retrospect powerfully support the reasoning of the Jewish nationalists.

The logic does not dispose of the objections to the Zionist project — in the first place the existence of the

Palestinian Arabs. However, it suggests to me some sympathy with the Zionists and their terrible choices and dilemmas. I have no wish to defend or endorse the policies of historical Zionism. These were bourgeois, and also were steeped in the 'small nation' psychology and ways of working of the Jewish communities, who for centuries had lived and manoeuvred for survival in a sea of more or less rampant hostility.

Zionism's break with that past was inevitably only partial. It could only be partial. Zionism could only operate by trying to play realpolitik with more or less hostile powers — and, under the Nazis, at gunpoint. That is the fate of all small peoples and states caught up in the cross-currents of the competition between the big states, and the Jewish nationalists had no secure undisputed territory of their own, nor even, in almost all of Europe after 1940-1, general recognition that their people had a right to stay alive.

It is possible to understand the various shifts to which the Zionists were driven without necessarily endorsing them — and without shifting to the standpoint of Jewish nationalism. It is possible to sympathise with the Jewish nationalists without thereby ignoring the Palestinian Arabs or failing to sympathise with them and support their just demands. I think we should do that.

But it seems to me that sympathy, understanding, or even retrospective endorsement of the Zionist movement would be a thousand times more appropriate to the facts of modern Jewish history than the stupid demonology, based on utterly dishonest pseudo-history, in which Greenstein, Brenner, etc. engage.

For Greenstein to deny that Zionism was an attempt to tackle anti-semitism because 'logically' Zionism accepted antisemitism and tried to build a Jewish nation as the answer to it, is logic-chopping. To go on to depict the various machinations of the Zionists with anti-semites as burdening them with some share of the responsibility for the Holocaust is obscene. Greenstein's argument is not proper historical discussion, but a contrived use of history to preach a message about the present. Its only real content is hysterical and incoherent emotionalism about the present-day relations of Israel and the Palestinian Arabs.

Some Zionists spoke of anti-semitism as a force for good? But such views can be paralleled by statements from other radicals and nationalists about the ennobling or identity-restoring or galvanising effects of oppression. For example, try reading the most influential modern Irish Catholic nationalist, Patrick Pearse. You could cite remarks like his greeting of World War 1 in the name of an Ireland now

offered the chance to expel Britain according to the Fenian axiom, Britain's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity, "The tired old Earth needed to be refreshed with blood", and you could depict him as a fascist-minded maniac. He was very far from being anything like that,

The Zionists put nation-building above "refugeeism": as they saw it, they wanted a fundamental solution rather than palliatives. But the fact is that Zionism became a majority movement among Jews because Jews turned to it under the blows of Nazism.

There was some successful resistance to anti-semitism in Nazi Europe, says Greenstein. True. But three million surviving and six million murdered is not a good testimonial for assimilation... At the end of World War 2, Europe's surviving Jews overwhelmingly wanted to go to Palestine rather than to the USSR, or Denmark, or Holland, where workers had struck to save Jews. Why? Not because of the demon power of Zionism, but because they no longer trusted any promises of toleration and equal rights. They were resolved to trust only their own people.

But, despite Greenstein's determination to avoid it, the point of the argument does show through when he says that 'Israel jeopardises the position of Jews in the diaspora with its genocide (sic) of the Palestinians'. How, exactly? Because the 'anti-Zionist' agitation against Israel inevitably claws in all Jews.

Greenstein's answer to this problem is to join in the Zionophobic agitation, and to sanitise it morally with the demand that Jews support the destruction of Israel or stand condemned as 'Zionists' and racists.

We would not have advocated Zionist solutions before 1948. In fact our movement opposed those solutions and fought for different ones though, and it bears repeating, the politics of the entire Trotskyist movement before 1948 (including Tony Cliff, who now tells a different story) bore little relationship to the present Zionophobia and honorary Arab nationalist politics that have since become "Trotskyism". In any case the Jewish nation-state in Israel is now a fact.

Greenstein tries to evade the issue of the rights of that nation, and its possible place in any democratic or socialist future, by instead polemicising against Zionists of the first half of this century. It is an evasion and an underhand way of trying to justify having the same attitude to a whole people (the Israeli Jews, and all other Jews who identify with Israel) as to a rival ideological tendency. Clive Bradley is right that we have to discuss the roots of Israel (and that discussion will include criticism of Zionism before 1948) — but we must not confuse the roots with the tree that has developed from it.

I never said that Trotsky supported

the Zionist enterprise in Palestine. But I did show — at some length — that Trotsky concluded in the 1930s that a Jewish state was necessary. Greenstein quotes Trotsky: “The attempt to solve the Jewish question through the migration of Jews to Palestine can now be seen for what it is, a tragic mockery of the Jewish people... Never was it so clear as it is today that the salvation of the Jewish people is bound up inseparably with the overthrow of the capitalist system”.

This is an example of ‘cunning’ dogmatism used to stop thought. Trotsky sought to defeat anti-semitism through socialist revolution. He was defeated. There was no socialist revolution. Six million Jews were massacred. Then, in the aftermath of that defeat, Israel was established. Greenstein’s implication here is that Trotsky’s struggle in the 1930s for socialist revolution justifies the destruction of Israel today, because Israel arose as a result of the defeat of socialist revolution and the victory of a programme Trotsky fought against. But that is absurd.

Oddest, but most revealing of all, is Greenstein’s stuff about anti-semitism. “Anti-semitism today in Europe is not, unlike 30 years ago, state-sponsored. It is a personal form of racism, confined to fringe fascist groups. It is black people in Britain, Arab people in France, Turkish workers in Germany who experience state racism. Jewish people have socially moved upwards and politically moved rightwards.

“That is why we say that anti-semitism has been redefined and the term ‘black anti-semitism’ like ‘left anti-semitism’ is used as a means of countering opposition to Zionism.

“Racism is not merely a question of personal prejudice, but at the level of class, a specifically oppressed section of the working class. Apart from France, there is no Jewish working class in the West, unlike the 1930s. The Jewish people have changed, and with it anti-semitism”.

This could be better put, but Greenstein seems to be saying that anti-semitism today, even if it exists, doesn’t matter. In the first place, it is not state-sponsored, like Nazi anti-semitism in the 1930s or the discrimination through immigration laws and so on against blacks, Turks and Arabs. (As if even the worst of the racism suffered by blacks in Britain, Arabs in France and Turks in Germany today is in the same order of things as the ‘state anti-semitism’ of the 30s!)

Moreover, only workers can experience real antisemitism; or at any rate anti-semitism does not matter much if it does not target Jewish workers. Even to talk of anti-semitism (black anti-semitism, or left anti-semitism) today is a means of countering opposition to Zionism. To protest at anti-semitism is to play the Zionists’ game, as it

might have been put in the sort of Stalinist polemics in which the now-prevailing ‘left anti-Zionism’ first made its appearance nearly 40 years ago.

This version of a Marxist attitude to racism, if it makes any sense at all, is economic — assuming that we should be concerned about oppression and prejudice only as they immediately affect the working class. It also contains a prize bit of historical obtuseness.

Where does Greenstein think that state-sponsored antisemitic racism of ‘50 years ago’ came from? Did it spring into being fully-formed from a ruling-class brainstorm? No! The anti-semitism which in its Hitlerite version proved lethal for two-thirds of Europe’s Jews had been evolving, developing, inter-breeding and cross-fertilising for many decades. Part of the cross-fertilising came from left-wing anti-semitism — the well-named ‘socialism of idiots’. 1930s anti-semitism did not begin with state racism.

Greenstein argues: “If Jews today, unlike the Jews of the East End who fought the fascists, base their identity around Israel, then that is a reactionary identity”. And hostility to that ‘reactionary identity’ — what weak-minded a-historical people would call anti-semitism — is... what? Progressive? Or at any rate not reactionary? On the good side, that of the Arabs and the anti-imperialists?

Greenstein says that I am ‘obsessed’ with anti-semitism. No. Of course I am concerned about anti-semitism. But I am ‘obsessed’, or at any rate very concerned, with something else too — the state of the left.

I do think that anti-semitism is alive and a serious problem, and that it could become a very big problem in the future. Explicit anti-semitism has grown in Britain in recent years. Nevertheless, I agree that antisemitism is not now the main racism, or the most burning question of oppression in Britain. Anti-semitism is a burning, unpostponable issue for the left not only because of what it means now, immediately, for Jews in Britain, but because of what it means for the left.

Greenstein’s central thesis is that some of the victims of Nazi race-murder — ‘the Zionists’ — shared responsibility for the attempted genocide, and therefore that Israel, constructed by Zionists, does not have the right to exist. Zionism was always the central enemy of the Jews (and of others). It is a demon responsible even, in part, for the slaughter of the Jews in World War 2.

Yet Greenstein is not an isolated crank. Nor is Lenni Brenner, whose writings, though vastly superior to Greenstein’s and seemingly more ‘balanced’, also use history just as a source of material for preconceived and preposterously one-sided polemic.

Greenstein’s and Brenner’s ideas are widely accepted on the left, sometimes in diluted form, and sometimes even in cruder versions, as in Jim Allen’s recent play ‘Perdition’.

No socialist can defend or justify Israeli chauvinism or Israel’s treatment of the Arabs within and on its borders. I have no desire to. I condemn those policies. The problem, though, is that Greenstein’s camp is concerned to make the case for the destruction — not the modification, the destruction of the Jewish state — and in that cause it exaggerates and distorts without scruple.

No doubt there are Jewish racists in Israel. But what is elsewhere, in other countries, defined as nationalism, is here routinely translated as racism. The state of Israel is a vile capitalist state. Let us treat it as we treat other vile capitalist states — advocate a working-class revolution, and support the right for other nations oppressed by that state to get out from under its oppression.

For Greenstein this is ruled out. Israel does not have the right to exist. He sides against it with other vile capitalist states — all of them far viler towards the people they consider their own than Israel is to its own — and denounces Jews who don’t agree as Zionists, pro-imperialists, and racists.

This is double standards — or no standards, except the standards of wartime ‘say what you need to say’ propaganda.

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reason in revolt



Solidarity, yes! Boycott, no! Why supporters of "two states" should not join the "smash Israel" boycotters

An open letter to Hilary and Steven Rose from John O Mahony

COMRADES, As well-known supporters of the proposal to boycott Israel, you will have been pleased by the boycott resolutions carried recently by the factories union UCU and the journalists union NLU, and by the more to boycott Israeli resolutions contained in Resolution 14 to the conference (starting 19 June) of the public services union Unions.

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

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

The following, the main features of the relationship of Israel and the Palestinian people to aid for action against Israel and in behalf of the Palestinians.

- The relationship between Israel and the Palestinians is one of overwhelming Israeli superiority in the technology of modern war. Israel had during the July 2006 war in Lebanon not only the most advanced military equipment, but also the most advanced military technology.

- Israel uses the disparity in power and armaments with striking effectiveness and evident disregard for Palestinian civilian casualties.
- Israel has ruled over the Palestinian majority territories as an occupying colonial power for exactly forty years since the June war of 1967.



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Trotskyists and the creation of Israel



Most "Trotskyists" today are, everywhere, against and propagandising against the Jewish state of Israel. No one for the view that Israel should change its relationship with the Palestinians, or that it should help set up an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. No. The agitation and propaganda centres on the "demand" that Israel should come to exist.

In war they have sided with the Arab states — Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Jordan — in the hope and expectation that, victorious, they would get on to Israel. At the start of the 21st century they had the medieval-minded racism of Arab and

1930s, '50s and '60s — when Israel was established — in the days when socialism was mainly from the left. In the 1930s, they, looking back to the view that Israel should change its relationship with the Palestinians, or that it should help set up an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. No. The agitation and propaganda centres on the "demand" that Israel should come to exist.

Arab progress against Jews in Palestine as... programs, which they "had" and decided, that since this was a period, the "Third Period", where everywhere capitalism was going into a revolutionary, when programs must be part of the world-wide anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggle. They came out unreservedly for the "anti-imperialist" program. It was the start of what today the "left Zionist" "Anti-imperialist" had to be "anti-Zionist".

Shachtman, Albert Einstein and Hal Draper, who had fallen out with Trotsky in 1939 all over Russia's invasion of Poland — denounced Zionism but supported Israel's right to exist and to defend itself. Some other Trotskyists in Europe had supported Lenin's guerrilla war against the British.

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reason in revolt



How can we best help the Palestinians?

The Jewish-Palestinian Arab conflict is one of the most complex political questions that confront the serious Marxist left. Here we publish three articles on aspects of this issue. Stan Crooke writes on the background history of the boycott of Israel movement. An editorial from the US publication *Against the Current* presents its views on these questions. Sean Matgama criticises what he sees as the incoherence of the *Against the Current* article.

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Reason in revolt

Anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim racism in Europe

By Yves Coleman of *Ni patries, ni frontières* (France)



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Reason in revolt

Jewish revolutionaries, revolutionary Jews

By Daniel Randall

This article is adapted from a talk first given at Nottingham Liberal Synagogue in November 2013, and in different versions since at meetings of the Jewish Socialist Group (JSG) and Workers' Liberty, as well as at the Jewish educational and cultural conference Limmud in December 2014. A transcript of the original talk was published by the radical Jewish community organisation *JewVoice* in April 2014.

It is intended as a broad sketch of the topic, a brief introduction to key characters and episodes from the period discussed. It owes much to Bill Fishman's *East End Jewish Radicals*, Janine Booth's writing and talks on Minnie Glassman, Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers*, Tony Michel's *A Fire in Their Hearts*, and the writing and walking tours of David Rosenberg of the JSG.

"From the days of I. I. Khat Marn, and down to Trotsky (Russia), Boris Kuz (Hungary), Rosa Luxemburg (Germany), and Emma Goldman (United States), this world-wide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilization and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of armed development, of obvious malevolence, and impossible equality, has been steadily growing [...]. There is no need to exaggerate the part played in the creation of Bolshevism and in the actual bringing about of the Russian Revolution, by these international and for the most part individual Jews. It is certainly a very great one; it probably outweighs all others. With the notable exception of Lenin, the majority of the leading figures are Jews. Moreover, the principal inspiration and driving power comes from the Jewish leadership."



The above quote is from Vladimir Chernil. It appeared in a 1902 (English) Jewish *Israel* article, entitled "Zionism Versus Bolshevism: A Struggle for the Soul of the Jewish People". It really expresses one of the recurrent tropes of 20th century anti-Semitism that Bolshevism, or revolutionary anti-capitalist politics more widely, is a Jewish conspiracy, animated predominantly by Jews, with the aim of undermining and overthrowing present civilisation.

Some of the back issues of Workers' Liberty relevant to this debate.

Complete list at:
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Back issues of Workers' Liberty can be ordered at £1.50 each including postage via workersliberty.org/payment