

workers' liberty
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 Matgamna criticises what he sees as the incoherence of the *Against the Current* article.

Behind the “boycotters” movement

By Stan Crooke

THE equating of Israel with apartheid South Africa dates back to the “anti-Zionist” campaign launched in the Soviet Union and its satellite states in the late 1960s.

The Stalinist ‘anti-Zionist’ campaign was one in which traditional anti-semitic themes were given a “socialist”, “progressive” and “anti-imperialist” makeover: Jews as the crucifiers of Christ and the poisoners of waterholes were replaced by “Zionists” who were the agents of imperialism, colonialism and racism.¹

In books such as *Zionism in the Service of Anti-Communism, Zionism — A Tool of Reaction, Beware — Zionism!* and *Zionism and Apartheid*, Zionism was variously denounced as “an ideology impregnated with racism and militarism,” “a constituent part of modern imperialism,” and “a dangerous, fascistic force, reminiscent of the Black Hundreds, a doctrine which is racist and expansionist by its very nature.”

Zionist leaders were condemned as “spiritual brothers and supporters of the fascists and the racists” and as “the instruments of imperialist aggression against the Arab countries, the instruments of neo-colonialism.” The “Zionist rulers of Israel” were guilty of “carrying out the very same policies of genocide in relation to the Arabs as those which were carried out by the Hitlerites in relation to the Jews.”

A central facet of the Stalinist state-driven anti-semitic campaign was the identification of Israel with apartheid South Africa: “Israel has a special relationship of the closest kind with South Africa. Israel and South Africa are linked to one another by economic, military, and ideological ties... Israel and South Africa are linked by a common racist ideology and practice, and by reactionary domestic and foreign policies. ... The union of the racists of Israel and the racists of South Africa is a massive threat to the African peoples and to the whole of humanity.”

“Common ideological roots” underpinned Zionism and apartheid: “In the South of Africa, in the Republic of South Africa, and in Palestine, close to the Suez Canal, there arose two platforms of world imperialism, summoned... to put a check to the national liberation movements of the peoples.” In both countries “racial-biological doctrines have been raised to the level of an official ideology and of state policies, in accordance with which people are divided into the ‘elect’ and the banished.”

It was no coincidence that “the entire history of South Africa and Palestine reveals many identical events and common traits.” The first South African nationalist party and the first Zionist organisation, for example, were both founded in the same year (1880): “The former advocated separate development for Blacks, the latter opposed assimilation for Jews.” In the opening years of the twentieth century Zionism and Afrikaner nationalism underwent the same political evolution: “All possible variants of petty-bourgeois socialism became common in Zionism, just as in South Africa there was national socialism and labourist reformist socialism.”

The parallels between Zionism and the founders of the future apartheid regime continued in the years following the First World War: “Afrikaner nationalism and Zionism both became ever more overtly the right flank of imperialism, together with fascism. ... The Afrikaner bourgeoisie and international Jewish capital created a series of secret organisations, in their own way centralised Mafias.” Then, at the close of the Second World War, Zionism and the South African nationalists allied themselves with US imperialism in order to “break free from dependence on the British Empire. The Empire lost control over the Palestine problem, and its influence over South Africa fell sharply.”

Supported by the votes of various Arab and African states, the Soviet Union was eventually able to secure a majority in the United Nations General Assembly for its “anti-Zionist” version of anti-semitism and for its ideological amalgam of Zionism and apartheid South Africa: in 1975 the General Assembly adopted a resolution endorsing various “anti-Zionist” motions which had already been adopted by other international bodies, largely under the influence of the Soviet “anti-Zionist” campaign.

According to those motions, which served as a preamble to the General Assembly resolution, there was an “unholy alliance between South African racism and Zionism.” The “racist regime in occupied Palestine” and “the racist regimes in Zimbabwe [Rhodesia] and South Africa” had “a common

imperialist origin.” Zionism was a “racist and imperialist ideology... a threat to world peace and security.” Consequently, “co-operation and peace require ... the elimination of... Zionism and apartheid.” The General Assembly resolution concluded: “Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination.”²

Although the resolution was eventually rescinded — albeit not until 1991 — it was another United Nations event which signaled the extent to which the equating of Israel with apartheid South Africa had established itself as a political orthodoxy in the ideology of ‘anti-Zionism’: the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban in August and September of 2001, and attended not just by representatives of the member states of the United Nations but also by representatives of (at least nominally) Non-Governmental Organisations.

Outside the conference participants in demonstrations organized by the Muslim Judicial Council, the Durban Social Forum and the Durban Palestine Committee chanted “One Jew, One Bullet”, “Kill Jews” and “Zionism is Racism”. Placards on the demonstrations declared “Israel is an Apartheid State” and equated the Star of David with the Nazi swastika. Inside the conference copies of “The Protocols of the Elders of Zionism” were on sale at NGO stalls, t-shirts bearing the slogans “Israel is an Apartheid State” and “Zionism is Racism” were distributed, and posters depicted hook-nosed Jews as Nazis, spearing Arab children as blood dripped from their fangs.

A leaflet distributed by the Afro-Brazilian National Congress carried the header: “Down with Nazi-Israeli Apartheid”. According to a leaflet entitled “Racism, Zionism and Israel”, distributed by the Union of Arab Lawyers: “Israel is the perfect example of an intricate and comprehensive racism. In effect, this state is the incarnation of that specific racism which constitutes the basis of Zionism.”

Another leaflet, up to 20,000 copies of which were distributed by members of the Islamic Propagation Centre, carried a picture of Adolf Hitler above the question: “What If I Had Won?” The answer under the heading “The Good Things” was: “There would be no Israel and no Palestinians’ blood shed.” The answer under the heading “The Bad Things” was: “I wouldn’t have allowed the making of the new Beetle.”

The “Declaration and Programme of Action of the Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations” adopted by the NGO Forum at the Durban conference called for “the creation of a special United Nations committee on the apartheid crimes and other racist crimes against humanity perpetrated by the apartheid regime in Israel,” and for “the creation of a war crimes tribunal in order to investigate and bring to justice those who may be guilty of war crimes, acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing or of the crime of apartheid, amounting to crimes against humanity, which have been, and continue to be, perpetrated in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territories.”

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In addition, the Declaration advocated “the creation of an international movement against Israeli apartheid, like that put in place against South African apartheid, by means of an international solidarity campaign by international civil society and the organisations and agencies of the United Nations.” It also called on “the international community to impose a policy of complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state, as was the case with South Africa, which involves the imposition of obligatory and total sanctions and embargoes, the cessation of all relations (diplomatic, economic, and social, and military co-operation and training)

between all states and Israel.”

The relevant section of the Declaration (paragraphs 417-425) concluded by “condemning those states which support, help and encourage the Israeli apartheid state and its perpetration of racist crimes against humanity, including ethnic cleaning and acts of genocide.”³

The post-1967 Soviet “anti-Zionist” campaign which culminated in the United Nations General Assembly vote of 1975 was a blatant manifestation of anti-semitism. So too was the “anti-Zionism” on display at the NGO Forum at the Durban conference of 2001. But the Stalinist “anti-Zionist” campaign and the NGO Forum were not anti-semitic simply because, in the case of the former, they expressed traditional anti-semitic themes in the guise of “anti-Zionism”, or, in the case of the latter, were associated with an openly genocidal anti-semitism (“One Jew, One Bullet”).

They were also anti-semitic in that they defined Jewish nationalism (Zionism) and the state in which the historical project of Jewish nationalism had been realised (Israel) as uniquely evil.

One nationalism, and one nationalism alone, was inherently ultra-racist (“an ideology impregnated with racism”), colonialist (“a constituent part of modern imperialism”) and even fascistic (“spiritual brothers and supporters of the fascists”). One state, and one state alone, was defined as an “apartheid state” and a “Nazi state”, guilty of “racist crimes against humanity” and “acts of genocide”. The “Israeli apartheid state” was the incarnation of Zionist racism.

And that “Israeli apartheid state” deserved to be treated in the same manner as its supposed South African predecessor — “complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state.”

The boycott campaign in Britain

THE year of the United Nations Durban conference also saw the British Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) initiate its Boycott Israeli Goods (BIG) campaign, launched at a meeting in the House of Commons with Lynn Jones MP and George Galloway MP as the main speakers. The campaign was (and is) committed to a sanctions campaign, a divestment campaign, a popular boycott campaign and an end to cultural, academic and sporting ties with Israel.⁴

A second boycott campaign active in Britain, and one with a high profile on pro-Palestinian demonstrations and other demonstrations concerned with the Middle East, is the Islamist “Innovative Minds” campaign, “Boycott Apartheid Israel”. Like the BIG campaign, with which it co-operates in specific campaigns (such as the “Campaign Against Arsenal Football Club Support for Apartheid Israel” and the campaign against Selfridges), the Innovative Minds campaign advocates cultural, academic, sporting, and economic boycotts and sanctions, and consumer boycotts of “Israeli products and companies supporting the Zionist entity.”⁵

By the summer of 2007 support for a boycott of Israel, in one form or another, and to one extent or another, had been endorsed by four British trade unions: the University and College Union (UCU), formed in May of 2006 by a merger of the Association of University Teachers (AUT) and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE), both of which had also passed pro-boycott motions prior to their merger), the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), the local government union Unison, and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU — now in the process of consolidating its merger with Amicus to form the UNITE trade union).

A motion advocating a total academic boycott of Israel was defeated by a margin of two to one at the 2003 national conference of the AUT. In April of 2005, however, the AUT conference passed a motion calling for a boycott of the Israeli Bar-Ilan and Haifa Universities. But “conscientious Israeli academics and intellectuals opposed to their state’s colonial and racist policies,” explained one of the motion’s clauses, would be exempt from the boycott.⁶

The pro-boycott position survived as AUT policy for scarcely four weeks. In May of the same year a special AUT conference, called specifically to discuss the issue of an academic boycott, voted by a four-to-one majority to overturn the pro-boycott policy adopted less than a month earlier.

A few days later the NATFHE national conference passed a motion applauding the AUT for having adopted the pro-boycott motion which it had just overturned. Noting the deci-

sion of the April conference of the AUT to "boycott two Israeli universities", the motion adopted at the NATFHE conference expressed its support for "the AUT's right to make this decision [to boycott two Israeli universities]."⁷

The following year's NATFHE conference passed a pro-boycott motion of its own. Noting "continued Israeli apartheid policies" and "recalling" the "motion of solidarity last year for the AUT resolution [on Bar-Ilan and Haifa Universities] to exercise moral and professional responsibility," the motion "invited" the union's members to "consider their own responsibility for ensuring equity and non-discrimination in contacts with Israeli educational institutions or individuals and to consider the appropriateness of a boycott of those that do not publicly dissociate themselves from such policies."⁸

But this adoption of a pro-boycott position by NATFHE had no practical consequences. Only two days after the adoption of the motion, NATFHE ceased to exist and dissolved itself into the UCU.

At its first national conference, held in May of 2007, the newly formed UCU backed what amounted to a pro-boycott position. The conference voted to "condemn the complicity of Israeli academia in the occupation" which, the motion claimed, "has provoked a call from Palestinian trade unions for a comprehensive and consistent international boycott of all Israeli academic institutions" (although, in fact, the latter call had been provoked by an appeal for such a statement from AUT pro-boycott activists themselves, after the defeat of their motion at the 2003 AUT conference). A counter-motion moved by AWL member Mark Osborn was voted down.

The motion passed instructed the union's National Executive Committee (NEC) to: circulate a pro-boycott statement issued by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI); encourage members to consider the moral implications of existing and proposed links with Israeli academic institutions; organise a national speaking tour by Palestinian trade unionists; and issue guidance to members on appropriate forms of action.⁹

At the NUJ conference of 2007 a motion passed by 66 votes to 54 condemned Israel's military actions in the Lebanon, the Gaza Strip and "other occupied territories." The motion went on to call for "a boycott of Israeli goods similar to those boycotts in the struggles against apartheid South Africa led by trade unions, and (for) the TUC to demand sanctions be imposed on Israel by the British government and the United Nations."¹⁰

A month after the NUJ conference had taken place the national conference of Unison, the second-largest union in Britain, passed a motion calling on Israel to: withdraw to its 1949-67 borders; allow the refugees of 1948 to return home; remove all settlements from the occupied territories; dismantle "the Apartheid Wall"; and respect the Palestinians' right to self-determination. An end to the occupation, explained the motion, required "concerted and sustained pressure upon Israel including an economic, cultural, academic and sporting boycott." The motion also called for "a mandatory United Nations Arms Embargo on Israel of the kind the Security Council imposed on South Africa in 1977."¹¹

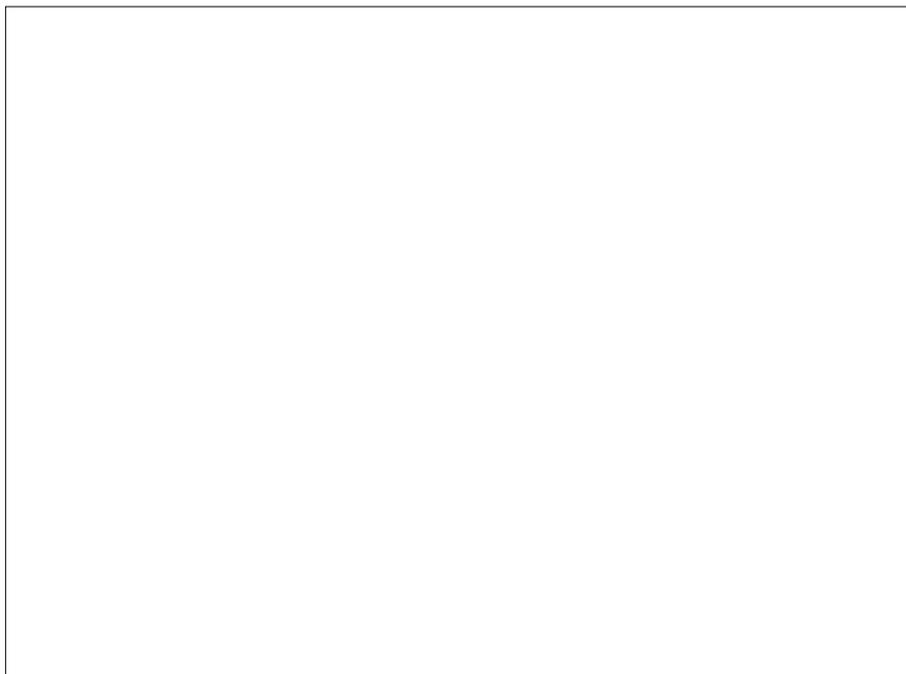
In July the TGWU section of the UNITE trade union became the fourth union in 2007 to adopt a pro-boycott position. Its national conference backed a motion calling for peace between Israelis and Palestinians on the basis of "justice, equality and freedom." The British government was urged to "stand up for international law and human rights" and to "take a stronger stance in support of the Palestinian people", while the TGWU itself was "called upon" to "support a boycott of Israeli products and goods" because of "the Israeli government's treatment and attitude towards the Palestinian people in failing to recognize their legitimate aspiration of a Palestinian state."¹²

Although the adoption of pro-boycott motions by the UCU, the NUJ, Unison and the TGWU has been hailed — or condemned — as a victory for the left, the British left is divided over the question of a boycott of Israel.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) — the largest organisation on the British left — has welcomed the adoption of pro-boycott motions. At the time of the AUT conferences in 2005, for example, the SWP's newspaper, *Socialist Worker*, argued: "(We) can bring Palestinian academics and teachers to Britain to build awareness of Palestine and of a campaign for a boycott of Israel along the lines of the boycott campaign against South Africa. The left and the opposition to oppression have been strengthened by the campaign for a boycott."¹³

Socialist Worker has also carried articles by Steven and Hilary Rose — leading figures in British Committee for the Universities of Palestine, which has played a driving role in the campaign for an academic boycott — in support of the AUT/UCU's pro-boycott position: "The boycott of Israeli academic institutions is a vital part of the struggle for justice for the Palestinians. The boycott is a powerful, and non-violent, method of creating international pressure for change. A boycott helped overthrow apartheid. Today it can play a vital role in the struggle for just peace in Palestine/Israel."¹⁴

The Socialist Party (SP) — the second largest left organisation in Britain — has adopted the opposite position. Following the NUJ's adoption of a pro-boycott position, the SP's paper argued: "A British and international trade-union-backed boycott is unlikely to have a significant economic impact. ... More seriously, it would play into the hands of the worst right-wing warmongers in Israel, and alienate Israeli



Jewish organisations picket the conference of the (now superseded) college lecturers' union, the AUT, over the policy of academic boycott

workers, who are the only force capable of removing the brutal Israeli regime and spearheading the reaching of a lasting settlement with the Palestinian people."¹⁵

Two years earlier the SP's student newspaper had carried a longer article on the AUT boycott: "Socialists do not encourage the tactic of a boycott, and counterpose the united action of workers and youth from both Israel and Palestine to boycotts imposed from outside that may divide the working class. We therefore did not build the AUT's boycott of Israeli universities, not least because such a strategy is so easily misrepresented."¹⁶

The newspaper was particularly critical of the proposal for a boycott of Haifa University: "Socialists in Maavak Socialisti/Nidal Amali Eshteraki (the SP's sister organisation in Israel) are active in Haifa University, fighting for a united movement of Palestinians and Israelis against imperialism and capitalism. A boycott of Haifa would make it harder to launch a united campaign at what is one of the very few universities in Israel with a significant number of Arab students."¹⁷

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At the end of the day, however, the SP's student wing had better things to do than take up the arguments about a boycott: "The issue of a boycott is not something to spend too much time arguing about. Far more important is building links between British, Israeli and Palestinian workers' and student organisations, which could seriously undermine imperialism and capitalism in the Middle East and Britain."¹⁸

Many of the smaller left-wing organisations are likewise opposed to the call for a boycott, mainly on the basis that a boycott is not a form of working-class struggle, and that it cuts across the need to build international working-class solidarity.

According to the *Weekly Worker*, for example: "As part of a working-class-led series of actions, boycotts can, of course, be useful and supportable. In general, however, we favour international links rather than boycotts. For example, should we end all exchange arrangements with universities whose authorities are anti-Palestinian, even though students and staff may be radical and progressive?"¹⁹

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty, on the other hand, argues not only that a boycott would be counter-productive but also that the inevitable result of a boycott campaign would be a consolidation of left anti-semitism and a strengthening of anti-semitism in general: "A boycott campaign (will be used) precisely to popularize and reiterate the idea that Israel is illegitimate. This is not, self-evidently, racist anti-semitism. Nor old-style Christian or Islamic anti-semitism. Yet it does

involve a pretty comprehensive hostility not just to Israel but to most Jews alive."²⁰

Just as British left organisations are split over the question of a boycott, so too are leftist Jewish organisations in Britain which campaign around the issue of the Middle East.

Some, such as Jews for Justice for Palestinians and Just Peace UK ("a mainly, but by no means exclusively, Jewish group") have not taken a position on the campaign for a boycott, although some of their more prominent members appear to be personally in favour of one. Other groups have taken diametrically opposed positions. A further complication arises from the fact that positions taken by their individual members do not necessarily always fully reflect the position taken by the organisation as a whole.

Insofar as the position of Jews Against Zionism (JAZ) is accurately reflected in the writings of its leading member Tony Greenstein, however, then the group is wholeheartedly committed to a pro-boycott position.

Writing in the magazine *Tribune* in June of 2005, Greenstein called for support for the recently abandoned AUT pro-boycott policy: "Those who claim that the AUT's boycott of Israeli universities is a threat to academic freedom are missing the point. For Israeli Arabs and anti-Zionist academics such as Ilan Pappé there is no academic freedom. ... Israeli academia is complicit in the repression and racism that Palestinians experience. South African universities were equally complicit in apartheid and the same arguments which are raised now about academic freedom and dialogue were raised then."²¹

Attending the 2007 Unison national conference as a delegate from his local union branch, Greenstein was equally enthusiastic about the pro-boycott motion tabled for debate at the conference: "I went to Israel at 14 and came back in 1969 convinced that what Israel was doing was inexcusable. As with apartheid South Africa, we have to give support to the oppressed, not to the aggressor."²² There was "nothing anti-semitic," Greenstein declared, in calling for sanctions against a state which operated "a racist system of control."²³

Jews for the Boycott of Israeli Goods (J-BIG), which also includes Greenstein among its founding members, is, by definition, committed to what is indicated by its name: "We are a group of British and Israeli Jews resident in the UK. ... Israel operates a form of racism in many respects worse than the South African apartheid system. ... We believe that this constitutes a betrayal of the best trends in Jewish ethical tradition. ... We therefore support the existing campaign for boycott, divestments and sanctions to enforce Israeli compliance with international law."²⁴

While Peace Now UK, the British offshoot of the Israeli Shalom Ahshav organisation, takes the opposite position, dismissing the call for a boycott as "ridiculous and divisive, ... destructive and ignorant"²⁵ and advocating support for the "Stop the Boycott" campaign, a more nuanced position has been taken by the Jewish Socialist Group (JSG).

The JSG 2005 national conference, held shortly after the AUT conference had voted for a boycott of two Israeli universities, passed a motion re-affirming "our belief that the best way to assist Palestinian communities and institutions is through positive forms of help," but also accepting that "tactics such as boycotts may be a legitimate form of solidarity, providing they are targeted and distinguish fairly between friend and foe."²⁶

Whilst opposing "generalised 'cultural' boycotts which are

both counter-productive and unjust," the motion "recognise[d] that the recent resolution by the AUT to boycott two Israeli institutions, Haifa and Bar Ilan, marks an honest attempt to confront specific links between academic institutions and repressive or discriminatory policies."²⁷

The motion did not, however, conclude with calls to promote an academic boycott, or any other kind of boycott, but rather with an appeal to "foster links with progressive Israeli and Palestinian academics, assist them in raising awareness of their struggles, and work with groups from 'Windows' to the Faculty for Israel-Palestinian Peace, in developing ways of overcoming barriers between peoples, and creating solidarity, co-operation and cultural exchange."²⁸

One problem with the JSG motion was that that "the recent resolution by the AUT to boycott two Israeli institutions" did not "mark an honest attempt" to confront links between academic institutions and repressive policies. Having failed to win support for a comprehensive academic boycott in 2003, the pro-boycotters in the AUT argued in 2005 for a selective boycott only as a step towards achieving the all-out academic boycott which they had failed to achieve two years earlier.

But the greater problem with the JSG motion was that it failed to locate both a "targeted" boycott and also a "generalised" boycott within the framework of a political phenomenon identified in another motion passed at the same JSG conference:

"There are elements among progressive campaigners who, knowingly or not, draw on traditional anti-semitic imagery to support the Palestinians' case. ... We warn against 'conspiracy theories' which divert attention from rational criticism of economic and political systems towards supposed plots, often spanning centuries, by mysterious groups, or even entire peoples and ethnic or religious communities. ... We will help in any way we can to expose anti-semitic or other reactionary elements and ideas, and oppose any tolerance towards them."²⁹

Israel, boycotts, and the "new" anti-semitism

At first sight — and not just at first sight — the post-1967 Stalinist "anti-Zionist" campaign and the anti-semitic witch-hunting at the Durban conference of 2001 are far removed from the current campaign for a boycott of Israel. The latter campaign has not, for example, been accompanied by overtly genocidal slogans such as "Kill the Jews" and "One Jew, One Bullet".

It would also be a mistake to treat the general "movement" in favour of some kind of boycott as a single and politically homogenous campaign.

There are differences of opinion (or, at least, differences of emphasis) over the agency of the boycott campaign — sanctions imposed by the European Union and the United Nations; or a popular boycott of consumer goods. And there are differing views concerning the extent of the boycott — only goods produced in the Gaza Strip and West Bank and sold as "made in Israel"; or all goods produced in Israel.

There are also different opinions about which companies should be targeted: companies which export or sell Israeli produce; or any and all companies with any kind of economic ties to Israel. And there are differences of opinion over which exports to Israel should be targeted: all exports; or specific categories of exports, such as armaments.

Above all, insofar as it is spelt out at all, there are also basic differences over the goal of a boycott — the achievement of a "two-state" solution; or an end to Israel's existence as an independent state.

Even allowing for all such qualifications, however, the overall drive for a comprehensive boycott of Israel — and especially in relation to the bulk of those most committed to a boycott — cedes ground to, and incorporates, many of the themes which constitute the contemporary "anti-Zionist" version of anti-semitism.

In that sense, and to that extent, it is legitimate to locate the politics of a broad swathe of the more active and more ideologically committed advocates of a generalised boycott within the "anti-Zionism" of the Stalinist campaign of the late 1960s and the "anti-Zionism" of the Durban conference of 2001.

The most fervent of the pro-boycotters demand that out of all the states in the world Israel — and Israel alone — is to be treated as a pariah state. According to Mona Baker, a leading figure in the academic boycott campaign: "One of the most important aims of any form of boycott, as I understand it, is to undermine the institutions that allow a pariah state to function and claim membership of the international community. ... (Israel is) what the boycott movement regards as a pariah state. ... A boycott is a non-violent form of action designed to deal a blow to the economic institutions of a pariah state, and to its international prestige and legitimacy."³⁰

An article in *Socialist Review*, the magazine of the SWP, whose members have played a particularly prominent role in encouraging support for the boycott campaign, combined the theme of "Israel the pariah state" with "Zionism the instrument of imperialist aggression": "Israel's continued existence as an apartheid pariah state is rooted not primarily in its legal and political structures, but in the need of US imperialism to have a ruthless outpost for western domination of the Middle East in order to protect the interests of western multinationals

and maintain profits."³¹

"An Open Letter from Palestinian Academics" on the website of PACBI, whose statements have been heavily relied upon by the pro-boycotters in the UCU to build support for an academic boycott, makes the same characterisation of Israel: "In conclusion, and appealing to your sense of justice and moral consistency, we hope that, until Israel fully abides by international law, you shall treat it exactly as most of the world treated racist South Africa, or indeed any other state that legislates and practices apartheid: a pariah state."³²

In line with the PSC's earlier call for a boycott of "any cultural events that perpetuate the impression that Israel is a normal and acceptable member of the international community"³³, the BIG campaign finds the thought of successfully branding Israel a pariah state to be nothing short of "inspiring": "Apartheid was weakened by a similar international movement of solidarity that succeeded in branding South Africa as a pariah state. ... This antecedent provides an inspiring model."³⁴

For the pro-boycott ideologues, Israel is not just one state amongst many which practises discrimination and commits human rights abuses (and to a rather lesser extent than many other states — although that is hardly any consolation for those who suffer the discrimination and human rights abuses). In the international "community of states" it is Israel alone which has to be isolated and singled out as a "pariah state".

As the quotes from *Socialist Review*, PACBI and the BIG campaign indicate, Israel is to be treated as a pariah state because it is defined (or, more accurately, labelled) as a racist apartheid state.

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Thus, for example, the BIG campaign declares: "Israel operates an entrenched system of racial Apartheid against its own non-Jewish inhabitants." This "racial Apartheid" is to be challenged by "a campaign against tourism in apartheid Israel", "divestment from companies who invest in apartheid Israel", "a campaign against companies which invest in apartheid Israel", "persuading businesses to stop trading with apartheid Israel", and "a campaign for UK and EU sanctions against apartheid Israel."³⁵

Reflecting the old Stalinist theme of Zionism as a racist and colonialist enterprise, PACBI's "Call for an Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel" defines Israel's "system of apartheid" (albeit one which merely "resembles" South African apartheid) as a necessary product of Zionism: "Israel's colonial oppression of the Palestinian people, which is based on Zionist ideology (emphasis added), comprises the following: denial of its responsibility for the nakba ... military occupation and colonisation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 1967 ... (and) the entrenched system of racial discrimination and segregation against the Palestinian citizens of Israel, which resembles the defunct apartheid system in South Africa."³⁶

In appealing for support for the Innovative Minds "Boycott Apartheid Israel" campaign, the Islamic Human Rights Centre (IHRC) goes a stage further: a boycott of "Apartheid Israel" is nothing other than a boycott of Zionism itself. The two terms are simply interchangeable — Zionism is Apartheid. Thus, for example, the IHRC urges its supporters to: "Boycott Zionism: Stop supporting Israeli Apartheid! Please support the Boycott Zionism campaign (of Innovative Minds). The aim of this campaign is to boycott those companies who either sell Israeli products, or financially support the Israeli regime in any way."³⁷

Alongside the constant invocation of "apartheid Israel" as a justification for the calls for a boycott of Israel one finds, albeit somewhat less frequently, echoes of another central theme of the Stalinist post-1967 "anti-Zionist" campaign: Zionist-Nazi collaboration, the equating of Zionism with Nazism, and the equating of Israel with Nazi Germany.

"Zionism and Nazism were twins in their narrow nationalism and even collaborated against the public. The Zionists thus found no reason not to collaborate with the Nazis in the mid-thirties to rid Europe of its Jews," writes Mona Baker on her website.³⁸ And, by way of justification for sacking two Israeli academics from the editorial boards of two of her journals, Baker lapsed into equating Israel with Nazism: "Israel has gone beyond just war crimes. ... Many of us would like to talk about it as some kind of Holocaust."³⁹

Similarly, in a letter to the "Guardian" in support of the AUT's decision to boycott two Israeli universities the secretary of the Birmingham branch of the National Union of Teachers wrote: "It is not the AUT members supporting the

boycott that remind me of the foe that the 'people of Britain' triumphed over 60 years ago, but the Israeli state with its repeated armed incursions into occupied land, destruction of houses, and construction of a wall to exclude those of the wrong race or religion."⁴⁰

An article from the *Al-Hayat* newspaper, entitled "The Israeli Apartheid Policy", which has been posted by PACBI on its website, makes a less subtle analogy: "The victim has turned into the Nazi-type persecutor, murdering, starving, and segregating, to the point that it only remains for the Palestinians to dress in colour-coded uniforms to distinguish them from the 'chosen' people."⁴¹

Writing in the *British Medical Journal* ran a poll on whether an academic boycott of Israel should be supported, responses included "Israeli occupation forces are as bad as Nazis," "Zionism is the new Nazism," and "too bad the only lesson they learned from Hitler was how to treat Palestinians the way they were treated. Shameful!"⁴² The secretary of the Birmingham TGWU branch which tabled the pro-boycott motion for the TGWU 2007 conference likewise explained his branch's support for a boycott in similar terms: "Israel is very intolerant and sometimes its behaviour is not dissimilar to that of the Nazis."⁴³

Gilad Atzmon, a particularly prominent member of the PSC, and one accorded an almost iconic status by some of its members, is another boycott supporter — albeit one who supports only "any form of financial restrictions on Israel and its supportive bodies", but not an academic boycott "led by some minor academics"⁴⁴ — who compares Israel to Nazi Germany, only to find the former worse than the latter:

"To regard Hitler as the ultimate evil is nothing but surrendering to the Zio-centric discourse. To regard Hitler as the wickedest man and the Third Reich as the embodiment of evil is to let Israel off the hook. To compare Olmert to Hitler is to provide Israel and Olmert with a metaphorical moral shield. It maintains Hitler at the lead and allows Olmert to stay in the tail. ... We have to admit that Israel is the ultimate evil rather than Nazi Germany."⁴⁵

Writing in the *Guardian/Comment is Free*, Tony Greenstein combined Nazism, Zionism, Israel and South Africa in a single question and answer: "What kind of state has an ex-Nazi supporter [the reference is to Israel Shamir] at its head? The same kind of state that had an ex-Nazi at its head in South Africa, viz. John Vorster. As the old saying goes, birds of a feather stick together."⁴⁶

For the most fervent boycotters, there is no prospect of any change coming from within "Nazi-Israeli Apartheid".

"Unfortunately," explains Mona Baker, "and much like white South Africa under apartheid, internally generated Israeli perceptions are so censored and inbred that their ability to understand the consequences of their national policies on the Palestinians is limited. ... A good number of Israelis are literally stuck in a world of their own where positions cannot get any 'harder'. ... What this [recent] electoral history indicates is that the majority of Israelis are either unwilling or unable to understand the real origins of their own insecurity and the nature of the occupation."⁴⁷

The SWP's *Socialist Review* shares Baker's pessimism: "This book [Uri Davis's *Apartheid Israel*] dispels the myth held by some on the left that change can come from within — from a reinvigorated Israeli working class. For Davis, Zionism's roots are too deep. Zionism in any guise — be it Labour Zionism, Socialist Zionism, the kibbutz or the moshav — is fundamentally racist and cannot be reformed."⁴⁸

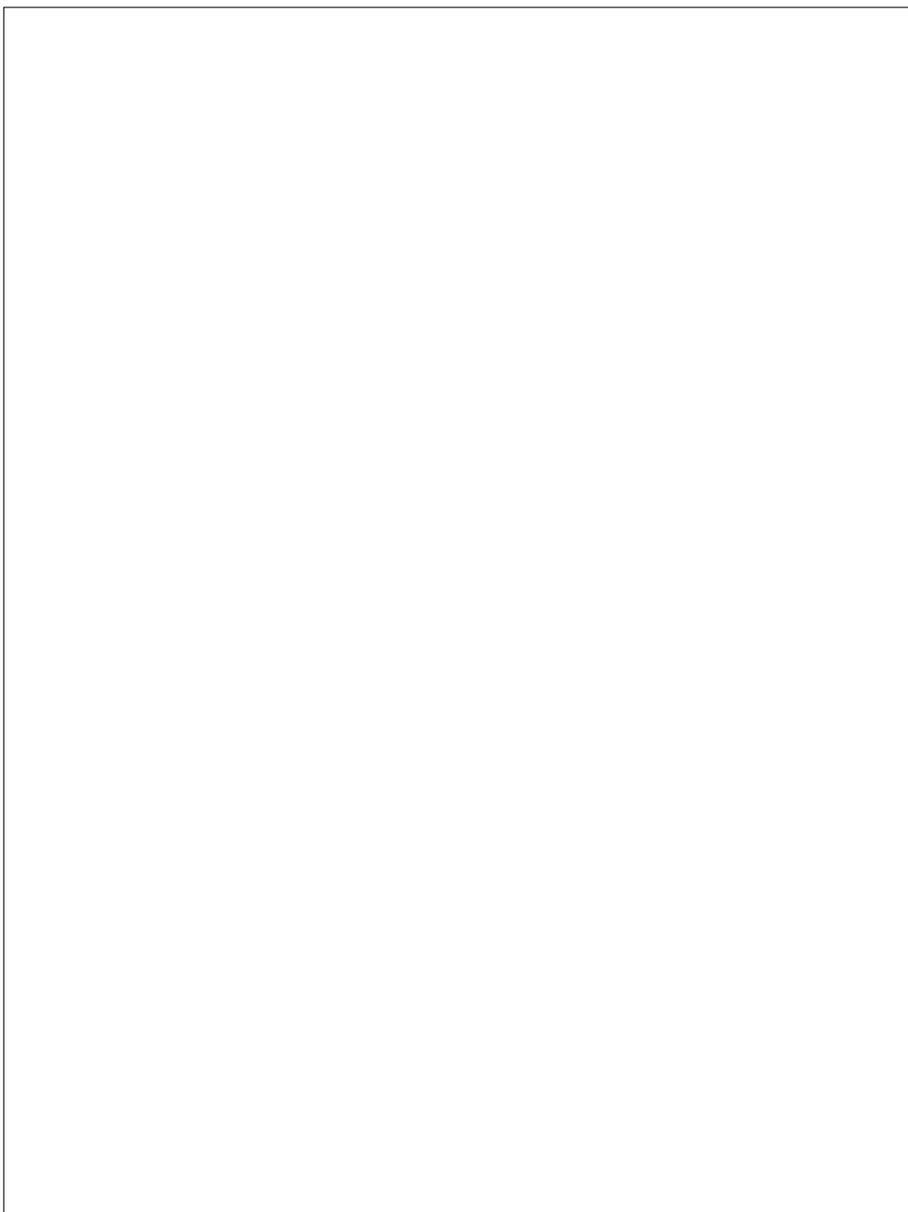
If Israel is incapable of change from within, and if, by its very nature, it is racist to an apparently greater degree than any other state, and oppressive to an apparently greater degree than any other state — given that no other state on earth is to be treated as a "pariah state" and subjected to "complete and total isolation" — then it is only logical to demand its destruction. And the pro-boycott ideologues do not shrink back from taking their arguments to their logical conclusion.

The likes of Greenstein are explicit in their advocacy of the destruction of Israel. As he declared in a letter to the *Weekly Worker* newspaper: "Yes, I want the state of Israel to be destroyed. It is a state whose primary purpose is to provide privileges for Jewish people at the expense of the Palestinians."⁴⁹

Other pro-boycotters use more guarded language: "Allowing the refugees of 1948 to return home" (the formulation used in the pro-boycott motion passed at the 2007 Unison conference) or achieving "the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland" (one of the PSC's principal goals⁵⁰), both of which formulations, as used by the pro-boycott ideologues, amount to a coded call for the dissolution of the state of Israel.

The SWP, on the other hand, talks in terms of "dismantlement". As *Socialist Worker* explains: "The Zionist state and Palestinian liberation are indeed incompatible, because Zionism systematically privileges the Jew at the expense of the Arab. Dismantling the Zionist state structure provides the only context for Arab and Jew to live together on the basis of peace, equality and harmony."⁵¹

Whatever the language used — outright destruction, the right of Palestinians to return, dismantlement, or one form or another of a "one-state" solution — the call for the elimination of Israel is necessarily one which places its advocates in a position of unremitting hostility to the overwhelming majority of the Jewish population of Israel (and also the bulk of the Jewish diaspora). As Israeli peace activist Uri Averbach put it in



Cartoon making the parallel between Israel and apartheid South Africa

a debate with Ilan Pappé (an Israeli academic centrally involved in the pro-boycott campaign) in May of 2007:

"Your alternative (i.e. a 'one-state' solution) is a solution which 99% of Jewish Israelis do not want, and which has no chance of being accepted. The one thing which is not possible is to convince the Israelis to dismantle the state of Israel. This simply will not happen, not under any conceivable set of circumstances, even in situations which go beyond the most wild imaginations. It will not happen in the foreseeable future. ..."⁵²

"A single state means the dismantling of the State of Israel. The adherents of this idea should say this loud and clear. You cannot walk around on a tiptoe and wrap it in a million disguises. ... If anybody here has found the way to convince six million Israelis to dismantle the State of Israel, for which five generations have fought, I raise my hat to them."⁵³

That the vast majority of Israeli Jews oppose the destruction of Israel counts for nothing with the most committed of the pro-boycott activists. Given the "inbred perceptions" of the Israeli Jewish population, any possibility of change from within has already been ruled out by the champions of a boycott. Logically, therefore, the only alternative must be destruction by external forces. Again, the pro-boycotters follow through the logic of their arguments.

Thus, for example, according to the SWP's then leader Tony Cliff, in an article published in *Socialist Review* in 1998: "The Palestinians have not the strength to liberate themselves. ... They are not like blacks in South Africa, who have achieved very important reforms. ... The key to the fate of the Palestinians and everyone else in the Middle East is in the hands of the Arab working class whose main centres of power are in Egypt, and less so in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and other countries. ... A revolution of the Arab working class would put an end to imperialism and Zionism."⁵⁴

More recent issues of *Socialist Review* and *Socialist Worker*

have continued to argue along the same lines.

Given that the Palestinians "cannot win a war against the US-backed armed might of Israel," the solution for them "lies with the organised working class of the Middle East and the wider world," explains *Socialist Review*.⁵⁵ Particularly important at the present time, according to *Socialist Worker*, is "the growing movement in Egypt to topple its dictator, Hosni Mubarak. That would be a major defeat for imperialism and the beginning of the process that could lead to the liberation of the Palestinian people," as well as being a welcome boost for Hamas, which, by itself, "cannot militarily defeat Israel, nor shift the Egyptian blockade on its southern border."⁵⁶

Nor is it only in relation to Zionism ("the twin of Nazism") and Israel ("an apartheid state" and "a 'ruthless outpost for western domination') that the "anti-Zionism" of the more prominent pro-boycotters evokes the archetypal Stalinist version of "anti-Zionism". Just as the latter incorporated traditional anti-semitic themes, such as Jewish control of the media and Jewish control of the body politic, so too such themes are also echoed by some of the pro-boycott ideologues.

According to Mona Baker: "For decades Zionists have had a near monopoly on the information flow in the West concerning the Palestinian situation. ... Zionist influence (that is, Israeli influence) spreads far beyond its own immediate area of dominion, and now widely influences many key domestic agendas in the West. In other words, unlike the Chinese, Russian and other oppressive regimes, the Israelis and their supporters directly influence the policy-makers of our own countries... The administration of George W. Bush and his neo-conservative advisers sees Israel and its aggressive behaviour as a model for their own policies."⁵⁷

The same theme of a powerful Zionist lobby has also been used by pro-boycotters to explain the decision of the May 2005 AUT conference to overturn the pro-boycott position

taken at the AUT conference held the preceding month. According to the newspaper of the Scottish Socialist Party (which has a pro-boycott policy, albeit only on paper), for example, the vote at the May conference was "the culmination of a major Zionist campaign to reverse the policy."⁵⁸

And for leading pro-boycotters Hilary and Steven Rose it was apparently not AUT members who secured a recall conference but international Zionism: "The AUT's act [to boycott two Israeli universities] provoked a furious counter-attack not just from Israel ... but from Zionist groups around the world. They have demanded, and obtained, a recall conference of the AUT to reconsider the boycott."⁵⁹

The advocates of a comprehensive boycott deny, of course, that their campaign has anything in common with anti-semitism. Just as Tony Greenstein, speaking at the 2007 Unison conference, stated that there was "nothing anti-semitic" in calling for sanctions against a state which "operates a racist system of control," so too Tom Hickey, the SWP member who moved the pro-boycott motion at the 2007 UCU conference, has dismissed the accusation of anti-semitism as "both absurd and offensive."⁶⁰

(In Greenstein's political universe the real anti-semites are the Zionists. Echoing an earlier work of his entitled "Zionism — Anti-Semitism's Twin in Jewish Garb", Greenstein wrote in one of his contributions to the *Guardian/Comment is Free*: "Beneath many Zionists there lurks an anti-semitic undercurrent."⁶¹ And in a contribution to a thread on the Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK website Greenstein wrote: "Zionism is a Jewish variant of anti-semitism."⁶²

According to the UCU and its predecessors the pro-boycotters cannot possibly be guilty of anti-semitism. Motion 56 passed at the AUT 2003 conference stated: "Council (i.e. conference) recognises that anti-Zionism is not anti-semitism."⁶³ (An amendment moved to delete from the motion specifically those words was defeated⁶⁴. As Mona Baker enthusiastically commented: "Thankfully, the use of anti-semitism to silence academics who support the boycott has become so discredited that even (sic) the AUT in Britain has now officially declared its recognition of the distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-semitism."⁶⁵

A motion passed at the NATFHE conference in 2005 similarly stated: "To criticise Israeli policy or institutions is not anti-semitic."⁶⁶ And according to a motion passed at the 2007 UCU conference: "Criticism of Israel cannot be construed as anti-semitic."⁶⁷ In order to underline the point, the conference rejected an amendment which sought to change the wording to: "While much criticism of Israel is anti-semitic, criticism of Israeli state policy cannot necessarily be construed as anti-semitic."⁶⁸

The existence of a "new" anti-semitism (which, by now, is hardly "new") and of "left anti-semitism" is not only rejected

The theme of a powerful Zionist lobby has been used by pro-boycotters to explain the decision of the May 2005 AUT conference to overturn its pro-boycott position.

by the boycotters-in-chief but also dismissed as a Zionist conspiracy. Thus, in an article published in *Marxist Voice*, Greenstein explained: "There is no social basis for anti-semitism in Europe today. It is no accident that those who are going around proclaiming that anti-semitism is on the rise, the 'new anti-semitism', are usually associated with various pro-Israeli or Zionist groups who point the finger at Muslims and Arabs in Europe."⁶⁹

When a report on the "new" anti-semitism was published by the British All-Parliamentary Group Against Anti-Semitism in 2006, *Socialist Worker* attacked the report as "an attempt to smear anti-Zionists into silence," and the pro-SWP "Lenin's Tomb" blog denounced it as "typical of conspiratorial racist propaganda" and "an obvious attempt to disarm anti-racists on the question of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism."⁷⁰

Another article in *Socialist Worker*, written by one of the SWP's UCU members who spoke in favour of the pro-boycott motion at the UCU 2007 conference, argued: "Recent moves to define criticism of Israel as anti-semitic have their roots in the growing questioning of the state among Jews. ... These 'legalistic' and authoritarian manoeuvres need to be understood in the context of the mounting crisis of legitimacy for the Israeli state. ... Israel's role as a militaristic tool of Western interests is far more widely understood. ... Serious splits are opening up in the Jewish communities. ... The problem for the Zionists (supporters of Israel) is that far too much truth is now in the public arena and they have to resort to illiberal means to stop it."⁷¹

But the "hard" boycott campaign itself, the boycott campaign directed at the total isolation of Israel as part of a political strategy for its "dismantlement", is exemplary of the "new" anti-semitism.

It takes splinters of reality (such as the meetings between Zionists and Nazi functionaries referred to by Mona Baker)

and misinterprets them in the worst possible light in order to delegitimise the existence of Israel (epitomised by Jim Allen's play *Perdition*: "Privileged Jewish leaders collaborated in the extermination of their own kind in order to help bring about a Zionist state, Israel, which is itself racist" ⁷⁵).

It reduces the history of the Middle East conflict to one of imperialist machinations and Israeli aggression and filters out, downplays or ignores anything which goes against the grain of such a simplistic narrative — the collaboration of Muslim leaders with the Nazis during the war, the welcome given to Nazi war criminals in Arab states after the war, the pledges of Arab political leaders to conduct "a war of annihilation" and to "drive the Jews into the sea", the role of Arab states in perpetuating the plight of the Palestinian refugees, the longstanding (but now abandoned) PLO policy of refusing to recognise Israel's right to exist, the sustained campaign of suicide bombings after the collapse of the Camp David talks, the anti-semitism of Hamas, the anti-semitism of Hezbollah, and the anti-semitism of political Islam in general.

It denies the right of Israel to exist as an expression of Jewish self-determination and instead variously defines it as a "hijack state" (title of an SWP pamphlet), the "ultimate evil" (Gilad Atzmon), an "illegitimate state" whose academics cannot be treated as "normal people from a normal state" (Sue Blackwell ⁷⁶), a "racist apartheid state that from the beginning was ideologically motivated even to the extent of cynically exploiting murderous Nazi anti-semitism to achieve its aims" (*Socialist Review* ⁷⁷), and the "cancerous Zionist entity (which) has got its tentacles hooked into numerous markets and economies - sucking each one to nourish itself" (*Innovative Minds* ⁷⁸).

Then, having created a political universe of its own, it hermetically seals itself from the charge of anti-semitism by way of decree: "anti-Zionism is not anti-semitism", "criticism of Israeli policy or institutions is not anti-semitic", "criticism of Israel cannot be construed as anti-semitic," and "there is no social basis for anti-semitism in Europe today." And anyone who argues otherwise is either the agent or the dupe of a Zionist conspiracy.

Alternatives

THE goal of isolating Israel through a campaign of comprehensive boycotts and sanctions flows out of the logic of this absolute "anti-Zionism".

If Israel is an "illegitimate state" and "the ultimate evil", then it is only logical to single out Israel as the target of such a boycott campaign. If, as *Socialist Review* claims, the struggle to achieve "justice for the Palestinians" really is "central to (emphasis added) the wider struggle against a system that daily breeds war, poverty and death on a global scale" ⁷⁹, then the isolation (and eventual destruction) of "apartheid Israel" through such a campaign is a matter of anti-imperialist necessity.

To talk of Israeli apartheid, especially in relation to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as an occasional metaphor or a loose analogy is one thing. To attempt to re-run a boycott campaign in the manner of the old Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), but this time with Israel as its target, is quite another.

Grafting the call for a boycott and sanctions onto the defini-

tion of Israel as a latter-day apartheid South Africa reinforces the overall demonisation of Israel pursued by the pro-boycott ideologues. The essential political message — sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit — of such a campaign is: the Israeli Jewish population is impervious to reason, it is unwilling and unable to break with the forces of Zionism, it will therefore succumb only in the face of external pressure.

The AAM sought the achievement of majority rule in South Africa. It did not seek the destruction of South Africa. The AAM, for all its weaknesses, was a campaign which promoted a greater awareness of the evils of apartheid. A boycott campaign against Israel would be, and already is, a vehicle for the demonisation of Israel and the dissemination of the 'new' anti-semitism.

The AAM had as its focus the injustices of the apartheid system within South Africa. The boycott-Israel campaign has as its focus the injustices of the Israeli occupation of, or Israeli restrictions on, territories outside of Israel. The AAM's demand for an end to apartheid flowed logically out of its focus. The demand which flows logically out of the focus of the boycott-Israel campaign is an end to the occupation — not an end to Israel.

(Most pro-boycott material relates to the situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, not to the situation within Israel itself. The BIG campaign for a sporting boycott, for example, was recently targeted at an England-Israel football game. The campaign's leaflet for the event referred to "an apartheid racist system on both sides of the 'green line'", but otherwise refers only to the situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. ⁷⁷ The same focus on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank is also in evidence in the campaign's "Open Letter to UEFA, FA, and FIFA", which calls for Israel to be banned from the Euro 2008 championship. ⁷⁸)

In fact, the BIG campaign's attempts to draw an analogy with the AAM's sports boycott is particularly weak. In South Africa a government proclamation issued in 1965 banned, except by permit, 'mixed' sports, and even 'mixed' audiences. In Israel, however, according to the Israeli Football Association (IFA) President: "The IFA backed the Palestinian FA's request to join FIFA in 1998. 30% of Israel's registered clubs hail from the Arab sector, and the Arab sector has four of the 29 delegates on the IFA management body, and at least ten others sit on various committees. ... Five Israeli Arabs have, over the years, played for, or still play for, the Israeli national team." ⁷⁹

The AAM sought to isolate South Africa as a pariah state because of its apartheid system. For the "anti-Zionist" pro-boycotters Israel is a pariah state simply by virtue of its existence. The AAM had a clearly defined enemy: white minority rule. The boycott-Israel campaign has an enemy so amorphous — "Zionism" — that it embraces, in its most extreme version, the bulk of the Israeli Jewish population and the bulk of the Jewish diaspora.

For the SWP, it should be recalled, a Zionist is anyone who is a "supporter of Israel" — not someone who is an uncritical apologist for any and every action of the Israeli government, but simply someone who "supports Israel", a term loose enough to cover anyone who supports Israel's right to exist. But to one degree or another the bulk of the Jewish diaspora identifies with Israel — at least to the extent of seeing nothing

progressive in its destruction, and certainly nothing progressive in its destruction by foreign conquest.

The "anti-Zionism" which underpins the boycott-Israel campaign in Britain therefore necessarily brings it into conflict with the bulk of the country's Jewish population. If Zionism is a form of racism which inevitably results in an apartheid system in Israel, then any and all Zionists must be — racists. And that 'logic' can, in turn, only lead to a re-run of the 1980s, when would-be Trotskyists demanded "drive the Zionists out of the labour movement" and members of the SWP campaigned, in the name of anti-racism and "anti-Zionism", for the closure of Jewish Societies at universities.

The first signs of the inevitable logic of a campaign to boycott Israel in the name of "anti-Zionism" are already visible, and not just in the resignations of a number of Jewish members from the UCU.

At a meeting of the NATFHE London Regional Council in March of 2006, for example, the delegation of one of its members to that year's NATFHE national conference was objected to on the grounds that the member in question was "a Zionist and a racist" (i.e. his alleged racism resided in his Zionism). ⁸⁰ And in May of the following year the Unison NEC refused funding for the internationally recognised trade union website "Labourstart" on the grounds that one of its 79 contributors was a Zionist and, therefore, a legitimate target of boycott. ⁸¹ Both the Zionists in questions were Jews.

The same logic is apparent in the BIG campaign's "Boycott Compendium: A Guide to the 'Boycott Israeli Goods' Campaign for Palestine", available on the BIG website as a manual for boycott activists. ⁸²

Prefaced by the exhortation, "the Zionist lobby have a reputation for obnoxious behaviour which we do not want to mirror", the handbook lists a wide range of targets, including Sainsburys, (which "stocks the give-away Zionist paper *Jewish News*") and Tesco, (which "stocks the give-away Zionist paper *Jewish News*", sells *International Jerusalem Times* and *Jerusalem Post* but does not stock Arab newspapers"). But, from the "anti-Zionist" point of view, the bulk of the British press consists of Zionist newspapers. And yet the only Zionist papers identified as a reason for boycott activists to lobby their sellers are ones with a mainly or exclusively Jewish readership.

Other targets listed in the compendium include: the Early Learning Centre ("write a letter of complaint to the company and ask them not to support Israel until they solve the Palestinian problem and stop murdering civilians"), Ecstasy pills stamped with the Star of David ("crime groups which specialise in recreational drugs have mushroomed in the Israeli secret service"), Estée Lauder ("the chairman of Estée Lauder International is a Zionist working with the land-grabbing Jewish National Fund, opposing the right of return for Palestinians"), and body parts ("a recent BBC Panorama exposed the trade in organs, rich Israelis buying from poor countries").

It might be objected that it is unfair to judge the likely impact of a boycott-Israel campaign by citing the contents of the "Boycott Compendium", given that the handbook has all the hallmarks of being the work of an anti-semitic crank. But the compendium is the "official" handbook of the "official" boycott campaign of the "official" Palestinian solidarity

Footnotes:

1. Subsequent quotes in the article exemplifying some of the main themes of Stalinist "anti-Zionism", and especially its equating of Israel with apartheid South Africa, are taken from: "Zionism in the Service of Anti-Communism" (V. Bolshakov, 1972), "Zionism — A Tool of Reaction" (R. Brodsky & Y. Shulmeister, 1976), "We Pass Judgement on Zionism" (M. Davydov, 1973), "Zionism and Apartheid" (V. Skurlatov, 1975), and "International Zionism — History and Politics" (V. Skurlatov, 1975).

2. The full text of the resolution (number 3379 (XXX)) is available at: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/000/92/IMG/NR000092.pdf?OpenElement>

3. The "Declaration and Programme of Action of the Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations" was not adopted by the "Intergovernmental World Conference" which was subsequently staged at the Durban conference. The Declaration was therefore not included in the official report of the Durban conference available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/english/about/ngohandbook/DurbanReport.pdf> The extracts from the Declaration quoted in this article have been translated back into English from a French translation of relevant sections contained in: "Precheurs de Haine" (P-A Taguieff, 2004).

4. The website of the BIG campaign is at: <http://www.bigcampaign.org.uk/>

5. The website of the Innovative Minds "Boycott Apartheid Israel" campaign is at: <http://www.inminds.co.uk/boycott-israel.php> For photographs of the Innovative Minds placards, "We Are All Hizbullah — Boycott Israel", on the July 2006 demonstration in London against Israel's invasion of the Lebanon, see: http://moonbat-media.com/against_israel_220706/

6. Full wording of motion (number 56) is at: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=1182>

7. Full wording of motion is included in: <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/4219>

8. Full wording of motion (number 198C) is at: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2645>

9. Full wording of motion (number 30) is at: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2555>

10. Full wording of motion (composite B) is at: <http://www.nuj.org.uk/inner.php?doicid=1072>

11. Full wording of motion (number 53) is at: <http://www.unison.org.uk/file/M%2053%20Palestin.pdf>

12. Full wording of motion (composite 31) is included in: <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/8812>

13. *Socialist Worker*, 4th June 2005.

14. *Socialist Worker*, 21st May 2005.

15. *The Socialist*, 14th June 2007.

16. *Socialist Student*, issue number two, 2005.

17. *ibid.*

18. *ibid.*

19. *Weekly Worker*, 12th October 2006.

20. www.workersliberty.org/taxonomy/term/597

21. *Tribune*, 24th June 2005.

22. *Jewish Chronicle*, 22nd June 2007.

23. www.labournet.net/ukunion/0706/jbigunis1.html

24. <http://bigcampaign.org/index.php?page=jews-for-boycotting-israeli-goods>

25. <http://blog.peacenowuk.org/>

26. Motion on Boycotts and Education, at www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/resolutions_2005.htm

27. *ibid.*

28. *ibid.*

29. Motion on Anti-semitism, at www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/resolutions_2005.htm

30. "On the Distinction Between Individuals and Institutions", paper delivered by Mona Baker at the "Resisting Israeli Apartheid: Strategies and Principles" conference, December 2004.

31. *Socialist Review*, April 2004.

32. www.pacbi.org/letters_more.php?id=186_0_3_0_M

33. The original PSC page is no longer on its website, but the quote can be found at: http://adloyada.typepad.com/adloyada/2006/05/paving_the_way.html

34. http://bigcampaign.org/index.php?page=why_boycott_divestment_and_sanctions

35. All quotes from the BIG website — see foot-

note 4 above.

36. http://www.pacbi.org/campaign_statement.htm

37. <http://www.ihr.org.uk/show.php?id=315>

38. <http://monabaker.com/quotes.htm>

39. Quoted in: <http://www.spme.net/cgi-bin/facultyforum.cgi?ID=1377>

40. *Guardian*, 24th May 2005.

41. www.pacbi.org/boycott_news_more.php?id=224_0_1_0_M

42. The BMJ poll responses are no longer on its website, but the comments quoted can be found at: <http://normblog.typepad.com/normblog/2007/07/the-reasons-the.html>

43. *Jewish Chronicle*, 13th August 2007.

44. <http://gilad.co.uk/html%20files/Mary%20Rizzo%20interview.htm>

45. The original quote is no longer on the Al Jazeera website, but can be found at: www.engageline.org.uk/blog/article.php?id=584

46. "A War on Rationality", 11th July 2007.

47. "In Defence of the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions", Mona Baker and Lawrence Davidson, September 2003.

48. *Socialist Review*, op. cit.

49. *Weekly Worker*, 20th July 2006.

50. See, for example, policies passed at the 2007 PSC Annual General Meeting: www.palestinecampaign.org/psc_news.asp?d=y&id=166

51. *Socialist Worker*, 22nd July 2006.

52. http://toibillboard.info/Transcript_eng.htm

53. *ibid.*

54. *Socialist Review*, May 1998.

55. *Socialist Review*, April 2004.

56. *Socialist Worker*, 23rd June 2007.

57. "In Defence of the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions", op. cit.

58. *Scottish Socialist Voice*, 3rd June 2005.

59. *Socialist Worker*, 21st May 2005.

60. *British Medical Journal*, 21st July 2007.

61. "A War on Rationality", op. cit.

62. <http://www.mpacuk.org/content/view/3047/1/>

63. <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=57>

The same motion "deplore(d) the witch-hunting of

colleagues, including AUT members, who are participating in the academic boycott of Israel." ^{64. *ibid.*}

65. "In Defence of the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions", op. cit.

66. See footnote 7 above.

67. See footnote 9 above.

68. See: <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/8557>

69. *Marxist Voice*, number two, June/July 2007.

70. See: <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/6944/print>

71. *Socialist Worker*, 21st April 2007.

72. See: <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/7583>

73. *Guardian*, 22nd April 2005.

74. *Socialist Review*, April 2004.

75. <http://www.inminds.co.uk/boycott-faq.html>

76. *Socialist Review*, April 2004.

77. [http://bigcampaign.org/uploads/File/0705football%20leaflet\(2\).pdf](http://bigcampaign.org/uploads/File/0705football%20leaflet(2).pdf)

78. [http://bigcampaign.org/uploads/File/UEFA%20letter\(1\).pdf](http://bigcampaign.org/uploads/File/UEFA%20letter(1).pdf)

79. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/582/sp2.htm>

80. See: <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/6015>

81. See: www.workersliberty.org/node/8555

82. The Compendium, from which the subsequent quotes in this article are taken, is on the BIG website at: <http://s109811772.websitehome.co.uk/bigcampaign/uploads/pdfs/bigcampaignboycottlist.pdf>

83. All the fatwas, including al-Qaradawi's, are at: <http://www.inminds.co.uk/boycott-fatwas.html>

84. *Jewish Post*, 17th January 2003.

85. *ibid.*

86. *Socialist Review*, April 2004.

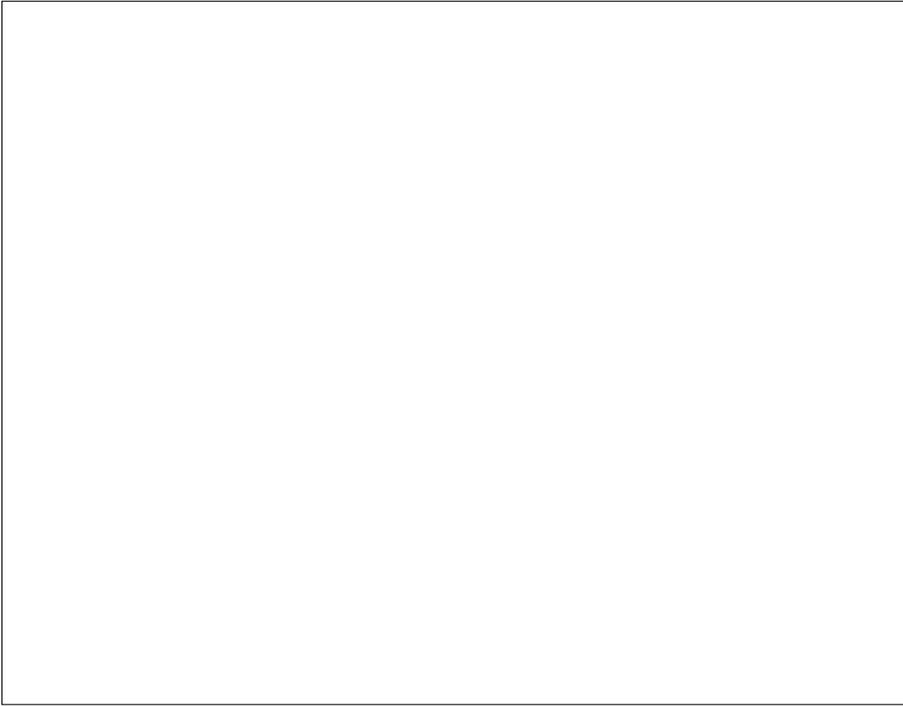
87. *Borderlands e-journal*, volume two, number three, 2003.

88. Posted on Women in Black e-mail discussion list.

89. The full NUJ statement is at: <http://www.nuj.org.uk/inner.php?doicid=1790>

90. See: <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/8705>

91. *Jerusalem Post*, 21st June 2007.



Israeli settler arrested by soldiers: Israel alone is singled out as a "pariah state".

campaign (the PSC, which enjoys the affiliations of sixteen trade unions at a national level in Britain). The contents of the "Boycott Compendium" are not (solely) the expression of some personal aberration — they sum up what a boycott campaign means 'on the ground'.

The Innovative Minds "Boycott Apartheid Israel" campaign is equally unlikely to gain a sympathetic hearing from Jews (and not just Jews) in Britain.

A boycott of "the cancerous Zionist entity," boasts Innovative Minds, is backed by "fatwas given by every leading Ulema from every school of thought," including the following: "Palestine is the land of the first Qiblah of the Muslims. ... The conquerors are those with the greatest enmity to the believers, and they are supported by the strongest state on earth — the USA, and by the world Jewish community (emphasis added). ... To buy their (the enemies') goods is to support tyranny, oppression and aggression. Buying goods from them will strengthen them; our duty is to make them as weak as we can. ... This fatwa is based on the proofs of the Book and Sunnah and Consensus of the Ummah. Allah Almighty knows best."⁸³

This particular fatwa was issued by Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi — the same Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi who has issued fatwas giving approval to suicide-bombings in Israel. If it is a caricature to sum up al-Qaradawi's position as 'boycott Marks and Spencers in Britain, but bomb it in Israel,' then only marginally so.

In theory, there could be a campaign for a boycott of Israel based on an explicit commitment to Israel's right to exist and with a clearly defined goal (Israeli withdrawal from the entire West Bank, and for the right of the Gaza Strip to exercise control over its land, sea and air borders). But even such a campaign would still legitimately be open to the charge of unfairly singling out Israel, as well as being confronted with more general criticisms concerning the value of boycotts per se.

In reality, however, there is no political "space" for such a campaign. Particularly on the British left, using the term in its broadest sense, there is a broad hostility to Israel's right to exist and at least an indifference to, if not an endorsement of, the themes of the 'new' anti-semitism. Any 'independent' boycott campaign would eventually end up as the fifth wheel of the overall "anti-Zionist" boycott campaign, with its 'ideologically sound' reasons for a boycott drowned out by the frenzied denunciations of Israel emanating from the pathological 'anti-Zionists'.

(Although there is more room for debate, this would also apply to the "targeted" boycotts advocated by, for example, the JSG, or to a boycott aimed solely at goods produced in the occupied territories. (Such a campaign was launched in Israel a decade ago by the Israeli peace organisation Gush Shalom.) It is difficult to see how, in Britain, even such "targeted" campaigns, motivated by very different politics from those of the SWP and its political allies, could not end up simply as an indistinguishable adjunct of the viscerally "anti-Zionist" boycott campaign.)

The boycott-Israel campaign also suffers from the broader problems faced by any boycott campaign directed at an entire country.

Despite the constant invocation by pro-boycotters of the effectiveness of sanctions and boycotts in putting an end to apartheid in South Africa, the real significance of the AAM's boycott campaign lay more in highlighting the injustices of apartheid than in bringing them to an end.

Full-blown apartheid in South Africa existed from 1948 to 1994. The South African boycott campaign was launched in 1960 (in a manner very different from the current development of a boycott-Israel campaign in Britain) and carried on for 34 years. That the campaign existed for over three decades was a measure of its lack of effectiveness. And when apartheid was eventually scrapped, it was essentially the result of internal political developments rather than any pressure generated by the international boycott campaign.

There is no reason to suppose that a boycott of Israel would be any more effective than its South African predecessor. As Miriam Schlesinger, one of the Israeli academics sacked by Mona Baker in 2002, explained in an interview with the *Jerusalem Post* the following year: "For better or for worse, Israel is not South Africa, and those who believe that the proposed boycott is likely to make the slightest contribution to the Middle East are mistaken. Anyone who thinks that Sharon is going to take even the slightest bit of notice of academic boycotts is incredibly short-sighted, and knows nothing about the mind-set of this kind of politician."⁸⁴

"It pained me," continued Schlesinger, "to realise, over and over, that knee-jerk reactions were no less common among supposedly brilliant academics like Mona than among any other group. ... It pains me to think that they will never really try to see the whole picture, that they — especially Mona — will never stop to think that they are achieving absolutely nothing constructive."⁸⁵

In their more honest moments the pro-boycotters themselves recognise that it was not the boycott campaign but domestic political developments which put an end to South African apartheid. As *Socialist Review* explains: "There are rightly many comparisons made (in Uri Davis's book *Apartheid Israel*) with South African apartheid, particularly the international anti-apartheid campaigns. Yet although international condemnation, boycotts and solidarity had an impact on this regime, its eventual downfall was brought about by the organised working class in South Africa, who alone had the power to hit South African capital where it hurt most."⁸⁶

A boycott campaign, especially one directed at an entire country (and, in the case of the campaign for a boycott of "apartheid Israel", one directed at the majority of that country's population) is also a blunt instrument. It targets the 'innocent' as much as the 'guilty' and can easily achieve the opposite of what it is intended to achieve. That too should be apparent from the boycott campaign targeted at apartheid South Africa.

According to the late Israeli academic Baruch Kimmerling, in an article dealing with the specific issue of an academic boycott: "A successful (academic) boycott will have a boomerang effect by cementing the dependence of Israeli academic institutions and their members on an increasingly capricious government. ... As for the 'cause célèbre' of the 'successful' boycott of South African academia, it is well

known that it mainly damaged the progressive forces within South Africa and probably hindered its democratisation process. As sociologists, the Roses have to know the inner dynamics of communities under siege."⁸⁷

And in the opinion of one of the members of Women in Black in Jerusalem: "The subject of a general or academic boycott of Israel is controversial even among peace organisations in Israel. Some individuals are in favour and others not. I cannot think of any Israeli peace organisation that supports it, but I may be wrong. ... I myself oppose a general or academic boycott on the grounds that I believe it is: (1) ineffective; (2) channels our energies away from more useful strategies; (3) pushes moderate Israelis into the arms of the right wing."⁸⁸

But all such considerations as to the effectiveness of boycott campaigns in general, or the likely impact of a boycott campaign in "pushing moderate Israelis into the arms of the right wing", count for little or nothing for the leading advocates of the boycott-Israel campaign. For the pro-boycott ideologues, the effectiveness or otherwise of such a campaign is not the issue. Nor is the likely impact of such a campaign in pushing Israelis to the right — given that the Israeli population has already been written off as a potential force for change by the pro-boycotters anyway.

What counts for the pro-boycotters is the value of the boycott campaign as a medium through which to implant in popular consciousness the idea of Israel as an illegitimate state and a pariah state — a state which, uniquely, has no right to exist.

Despite the fact that the adoption of pro-boycott motions by four union conferences has licensed the pro-boycotters to claim a trade union stamp of approval for their campaigning, it would be a mistake to overestimate the extent of their advances.

A referendum of UCU members on an academic boycott, for example, would indisputably result in an overwhelming rejection of a boycott. In the case of the NUJ, its NEC issued a statement in July of 2007 which concluded: "The NEC will take no further action to implement the boycott call" (on the basis that the motion in question did not instruct the union to organise a boycott of its own, but only to support a boycott led by the British TUC; since the TUC was not organising such a campaign, no further action was required).⁸⁹

In Unison the NEC has also made it clear that the pro-boycott motion will have no practical consequences. In recommending support for the motion at the close of the conference debate, the NEC speaker stressed that the motion did not commit Unison itself to boycott activity of any kind.⁹⁰ And the day following the conference's adoption of the motion Unison NEC member Helen Jenner was quoted in the media making the same point: "The motion recognizes the position but it does not commit the union to a boycott."⁹¹

The pro-boycott motion passed by the TGWU is equally unlikely to lead to any campaigning by the union itself: the inclusion of a pro-boycott clause in an otherwise unobjectionable motion was more a matter of internal politicking than a commitment to supporting a boycott of Israel. As a result of such politicking, the TGWU conference was confronted with the choice of adopting no policy on the Middle East conflict, or adopting a pro-peace composite motion which included a clause advocating a boycott of Israel.

Even allowing for such qualifications, however, there can be little no doubt that the trade union movement in Britain is approaching a crossroads, if it is not there already, on the question of the Israel/Palestine conflict.

"Solidarity campaigning" will degenerate into the cul-de-sac of a boycott campaign, giving expression to the crudities of an absolute "anti-Zionism", and impacting (negatively) on Jews in Britain far more than on the Israeli government. Or a campaign will emerge committed to the achievement of a democratic resolution of the Middle East conflict, and based on recognising the national rights of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

By all (honest) accounts, the readiness of union conferences to vote through pro-boycott motions was not an endorsement of the idea of a boycott per se. Rather, it was a manifestation of the belief that 'something must be done', and the expression of a healthy impulse to side with the oppressed against their oppressors.

Paradoxically, the success achieved by the pro-boycotters in seeing four union conferences adopt, in one form or another, a pro-boycott position may yet also provide an opportunity for building a campaign of practically and politically meaningful solidarity with the Palestinians.

The debate opened up by the adoption of pro-boycott motions offers a chance to show up the "anti-Zionism" of the pro-boycotters for what it is, and also to draw those who believe that 'something must be done' into a campaign based on solidarity and socialist class politics rather than on boycotts and an eliminatory "anti-Zionism".

If such a campaign does not emerge and grow rapidly, then much of what passes itself off as 'campaigning in solidarity with the Palestinians' will continue for a long time to come to bear an uncanny resemblance to the Stalinist "anti-Zionist" campaign of the late 1960s and the Durban conference of 2001. And time is not on the side of the Palestinians.

A Letter from the Editors: Nakba One, Two, Three?

Editorial from Against the Current
May-June 2007

IN sheer magnitude, the Palestine partition of 1947 wasn't even that year's most disastrous division of a former British colonial possession. The partition of the Indian subcontinent — between India and the new Muslim state Pakistan — produced roughly as many deaths, in horrific communal violence between Muslims and Hindus, as the numbers of Palestinian Arabs expelled from their homeland and robbed of their lands in the 1947-49 Catastrophe — al-Nakba — accompanying the establishment of the state of Israel.

Both tragedies were products, among other things, of the decaying empire of a one-time superpower. (Is it ironic enough that around the same number of Iraqi deaths, something over 650,000, are now estimated to have resulted from the US invasion and occupation?) But as we mark multiple anniversaries — 60 years since the Palestine and Indian partitions, and 40 since the 1967 war that marked the beginning of the world's longest-lasting modern military occupation — it's worth contrasting the subsequent events.

The partition of India produced two independent states, India and Pakistan today — despite three wars, despite the unsolved Kashmir crisis, despite severe intercommunal violence in both countries, despite the fact that Pakistan teeters on the edge of political chaos, and despite the fact that both are nuclear-at-med — now count essentially "normal" state relations, with a level of coexistence such that neither is seen as an "existential threat" to the other.

In contrast, the Arab Palestinian nation was cheated of the state that was promised to it under the 1947 resolution, however sad that solution would have been by comparison to the potential of a united democratic binational country. On the terrible twin anniversaries of partition, and then occupation Israel and Palestine today — despite the fact that Israel is a stable albeit troubled democratic state, for its Jewish citizens anyway — have never had worse relations.

Three generations after the expulsion from their homeland, among roughly six million Palestinians living in exile — not including over a million living as second class Israeli citizens — many remain refugees or in officially "stateless" status with few rights or security.

In the post-1967 Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), the entire fabric of society is close to destruction. Medical services are in collapse; the population has been robbed of economic self-sufficiency and more heavily dependent on international humanitarian aid than at any previous time; the life of villages and farmers is choked off as Israel's apartheid id-annexation Wall cuts them off from their livelihoods and access to basic services.

Today's reality has nothing to do with Condoleezza Rice's babbling rhetoric of "two states living together in peace." The hope for a "two state solution" — the Palestinian national movement's demand over more than thirty years (as well as the global consensus outside Israel and the United States) for an independent state alongside Israel, on 22% of the Palestinian people's homeland — is fading as fast as the Wall rises.

Whether that hope may be salvaged, under the aegis of the Arab League's proposal for full recognition and peace with Israel in exchange for full Israeli withdrawal from the 1967 OPTs, is debated among expert analysts. In any case, so long as an independent Palestinian state remains the demand of the population under occupation, socialists and principled democrats must support this struggle for self-determination, whatever its constraints and limitations.

Our main point here, however, is not to detail the brutalities and endless humiliations of the Israeli occupation. These are now widely and well documented, and some of them are discussed in our coverage in this issue. Instead the twin anniversaries of 1947 and June 1967 are an occasion for offering some broader historical perspective.

Tragic Missed Chances

THE long and tragic confrontation between Palestine and the Zionist movement is not a religious war, and never has been. Nor is it a conflict between ancient peoples or some "clash of civilisations."

This highly specific social and political conflict began in the late 19th and early 20th century, with the intrusion of a colonial settler movement into a largely peasant society already coming under pressure from the world market. It became ultimately a confrontation of two modern nations one of the indigenous Arab people who became an identifiably Palestinian nation in the course of the colonial carveups and crises of the twentieth century; the other of Hebrew-speaking Jews, partly from the Zionist settlement project but above all from hundreds of thousands of desperate survivors of Nazi genocide (in many cases herded to Palestine against their own wishes).

Two facts above all, then, must underlie any morally and politically viable analysis. The first is that there are two

peoples, two nations, living in historic Palestine, who must ultimately share a common future if they are to have any future at all. The second is that one of them, Israel, today has its boot on the neck of the other. The relationship in short is fatally asymmetrical — by which we mean that no solution, no real coexistence or mutual recognition, no end of "terrorism," no matter how desirable all these things are, can occur except through the struggle to get the oppressor nation's boot off the oppressed nation's neck.

There's a longstanding Zionist mythology that peace has been blocked by the Arab world's intransigent refusal to accept Israel's existence. It is almost completely false.

Years before the 1967 war, in fact, Egypt's ruler Gamal Abdel Nasser secretly approached Israel for peace; Israel's leader David Ben Gurion had no interest at the time, since in his view Israel hadn't yet achieved its "natural" (or Biblical) borders. His tactical acceptance of the 1947 partition and 1948 armistice lines never meant that these would mark a final renunciation of Zionism's claim to the whole land.

In 1967, Israel deliberately provoked a war, the Arab rulers fatally fell for it, several Arab armies were destroyed, and Israel seized Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem the part of formerly British-controlled (Mandate) Palestine left under Arab control after 1948. It also took the Egyptian Sinai and Syrian Golan Heights. But 1967 was not only a territorial expansion for Israel and a second Nakba for the Palestinian people, in which thousands more were expelled or fled. It produced a tectonic shift and two developments in particular which would bring the Palestine-Zionist conflict to the center of world politics.

Immediately after 1967, the broad international and Israeli consensus (outside the extremist "Greater Israel" movement) anticipated a withdrawal from the Occupied Territories in exchange for an Arab-Israeli peace deal. Instead, under the pretext of security, the secular (ostensibly quasileftist) Israeli government authorized the first military and religious settlements in the West Bank. It had also immediately annexed East Jerusalem.

These decisions enabled the settler movement that has become the entrenched base for Israeli national ist-religious fanaticism, poisoned Israeli-Palestinian relations, blocked the possibility for withdrawal and set in motion Israel's slow-motion course toward national suicide. But this was only one of the poisoned fruits of 1967.

The second and even more fatal consequence, in a way, confirmed Hannah Arendt's nightmare vision of 1945 (see the excerpt from her essay "Zionism Reconsidered" elsewhere in this issue), although not quite as she imagined. Having destroyed substantial Third World (Arab) armies, Israel would now become the prized strategic ally of the United States. Hence the "special relationship;" the explosion of US military aid to Israel between 1967 and 1973 and its further growth thereafter; the new importance of Israel as an arms supplier for dirty regimes like Guatemala; Israel's stature as the "unsinkable aircraft carrier" for US domination of the Middle East.

Out of this transformed relationship, in turn, would grow the poisonous tentacles of the "Israel Lobby" and of Christian Zionism in the United States — phenomena that admittedly existed before 1967, when Israel was immensely less powerful, but on nothing resembling the scale they achieved once Israel's military prowess established its value as imperial strategic asset. In 1956, President Eisenhower had effectively ordered Israel's army out of the Suez Canal after the British-French-Israeli conquest; after 1967, no more.

Fatal Choices

MORE missed opportunities followed, which can only briefly and partially noted here but follow a common pattern. In the early 1970s, Egyptian president Anwar Sadat sought US sponsorship for peace and Israeli withdrawal from Sinai; his snubbing by the Nixon-Kissinger administration led to the 1973 war. By the end of the decade, Sadat visited Jerusalem and ultimately signed a peace treaty with Israel; but Israeli prime minister Begin, having promised Jimmy Carter that "autonomy" for the OPTs would lead toward Palestinian self-determination, instead expanded the settlements and exploited the absence of an Egyptian front to invade Lebanon in 1982.

The combined impact of Israel's impasse in Lebanon, the First Palestinian Intifada (the uprising beginning in December 1987), and the political shock waves of the First Gulf War (1990-91) led to the first official direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and the hopes inspired by the Oslo Accords and the Rabin-Arafat agreement with Bill Clinton at Camp David.

Once again, fully backed by unconditional American support for "the Jewish State" — which now means support for an Israeli state governed by institutions of unquestioned Jewish supremacy, and for its guaranteed military superiority over all other Middle Eastern countries combined — successive Israeli governments systematically and deliberately sabotaged every chance for peace. Under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, settlements continued to grow (as he liked to boast) and the most basic concessions, the release of

Palestinian prisoners, was summarily denied.

When the Brooklyn-born fanatic settler Baruch Goldstein massacred 29 Palestinians at prayer in a Hebron mosque in 1994, Israel's Prime Minister and Nobel Peace laureate could have shut down the settlement in the heart of Hebron — instead, he locked down the Palestinian population in the city, which remains effectively imprisoned to this day.

After Rabin was assassinated by another settler, and after the Islamist movement Hamas had suspended all military operations due to overwhelming popular Palestinian support for the "peace process," Rabin's successor Shimon Peres authorised the assassination of its leading Gaza militant setting off an explosion of violence that led Peres's government to defeat. A few years later, yet another Labor Party prime minister, Ehud Barak, provided Ariel Sharon with a massive military escort to the Temple Mount, touching off the Second Intifada. The last seven years of escalating brutality — the thousands of civilian deaths, Israeli soldiers using Arab kids for target practice, the Jenin massacre, the virtual destruction of Gaza, Palestine's descent toward civil war — continues the story. Call it Nakba Three; and at every phase we continue to be told that it's all the Palestinian people's own fault for "refusing to recognise Israel."

Today's Impasse

EXACTLY what this is supposed to mean has been richly illustrated since the free and transparent Palestinian democratic election of January 2006. The United States, European Union and Israel immediately quarantined the newly elected Palestinian Authority government, demanding that it "recognise Israel, renounce violence, respect previous agreements," blah blah — while simultaneously making it impossible for this or any Palestinian government to do any of it.

Indeed, the strategy of the United States ever since the failed Israeli war in Lebanon last summer has been to provoke an internal Palestinian civil war: to induce president Mahmoud Abbas to dissolve the Hamas-led Palestinian parliament and call early elections, an act which would have produced uncontrollable internal violence. The strategy was not to support Abbas against Hamas, but rather to destroy both of them — to crush Hamas and then turn Abbas into a Bantustan-type puppet.

The Hamas-Fatah agreement reached between prime minister Ismail Haniya and President Abbas in Saudi Arabia, leading to the long-delayed national unity government (discussed in our interview with Hisham Ahmed in this issue), thwarted this plan, for now at least. The underlying destruction of Palestinian society, in the absence of self-determination and denial of the principled right of return remains as brutally unresolved as ever.

Meanwhile, even with Israel's economic recovery, Israel's own slide into social crisis and political demoralisation continues. And if there is any "existential threat" to Israel today, it lies in the US administration's cynical pretext of "protecting Israel" as an excuse for launching a war with Iran.

Among many conclusions to be drawn from 60 years of disastrous history, two stand out today with special force. First, the long-denied achievement of self-determination of the Palestinian people is the essential condition for progress on any level. In that context — an authentic peace agreement, and above all as a choice made — c,ely, and with the nation ~ dignity intact - Palestinian recognition of Israel and renunciation of violence would be altogether positive.

But such "recognition" has no progressive meaning at all if imposed on imperialist terms, as an act of Palestinian defeat and ultimate humiliation. Not only wouldn't it bring peace, but it couldn't be considered morally or politically binding on a future movement. The delusion of "peace" imposed by overwhelming firepower is no peace at all.

The second point is particularly important for those of us living in the dominant political and intellectual culture of North America, where the population is thoroughly indoctrinated, via both religious and secular media, in the special and unique quality of the state of Israel.

Israel's right to exist is never posed like that of any other independent nation state — on the straightforward basis that its citizens want it to exist. Rather, the demand imposed on the Palestinian people is unique, to "recognise Israel as a Jewish state," which has come to mean the unique historical privilege of their oppressors to establish unconditionally and forever a "state of the Jewish people," a Jewish-supremacist state, on the land taken away from them and in which nonJews would never have full equal rights.

This special demand not only forecloses the Palestinian right of return; it strongly implies indulgence in advance for future "population transfers" as necessary to insure the precious "Jewish and democratic character of the state," a perspective that is by no means an abstraction in Israeli political discourse, and by no means only on the extreme right.

This is not political recognition of a state, but rather a demand to surrender to racism. The former is legitimate and ultimately necessary, while the latter is unacceptable and repulsive. For socialists above all, and for partisans of the rights of the Palestinian people, it is essential to "recognise"

Pandering to the “absolute anti-Zionists”

Dear comrades,

I WANT to discuss the “Letters from the Editors”, entitled “Nakba One, Two, Three?”, in the May-June 2007 issue of *Against The Current*.

It seems to me that one of the fundamental responsibilities of those who fight for a rational, working-class, socialist, and consistently democratic approach to the Jewish-Arab conflict is to work to banish the demonisation of Israel and the pervasive falsification of the history of the Israeli Jews, to banish it to the dunghill to which history has consigned the other products of Stalinism.

Your editorial letter manages to combine politics which I think correct — “two states” — with the grotesque misrepresentations of the issues and of the history which is typical of the bitter opponents of a two states solution. By unravelling the issues here, I hope to contribute to the work of separating out rational socialist politics on these questions from the nonsense of the kitsch-left.

I want to discuss your article for a number of reasons, but mainly because I find the mixture of elements in the article both strange and shocking, and also, perhaps, instructive.

In terms of hard political line, though it is to an extent buried and obscured by other elements, broadly speaking I agree with you. I agree with many other things you say too.

You say that “socialists and principled democrats must support... an independent Palestinian state... a ‘two state solution’ ...” — that is, being for a two-states solution, you accept Israel’s right to exist. By implication, though you don’t say it, and maybe wouldn’t choose to say it, you accept Israel’s right to defend itself.

You identify as “one of the poisoned fruits of 1967” “Israel... becom[ing] the prized strategic ally of the United States”. By dating that in 1967 (not earlier) implicitly you cut away a large part of the myth-poisoned “history” propagated by the kitsch-left (in Britain anyway), which nonsensically

portrays the whole history of the Jewish community in Palestine as an imperialist conspiracy.

You say, I think rightly, that the Palestinian nation that exists now was forged in the struggle with the Zionists in the 20th century and “became an identifiably Palestinian nation in the course of the... crises of the twentieth century”. This recognition should make it possible to discuss the real history of the interaction of the two nationalisms. (Unfortunately, you do the opposite in your article).

You side with the weakest, with the oppressed — with the Palestinians. Of course I agree with you here, too. As James Connolly said well about those who fail to do that: “To side with the oppressor against the oppressed is the wisdom of the slave”.

You rightly add, “No solution... can occur except through the struggle to get the oppressor nation’s boot off the oppressed nation’s neck”.

However, for Marxists, siding with the oppressed should not, and if we are committed to our own political outlook, cannot mean accepting the chauvinist and other myths about their own history held by the oppressed. Still less does it imply the role of succouring the oppressed and their unschooled sympathisers with myth-spinning and myth-guarding, and doubly less when those myths stand in the way of rational politics for the oppressed and their supporters.

It should not mean adopting the nationalism, or the chauvinism, of the oppressed. If it does do that, then not only do the Marxists in question fail to hold to an independent working-class line. They also muddle, weaken, or destroy their own capacity to think about the issues, and other issues, clearly and honestly.

As well as the fundamentally correct politics — two states, one of them Israel — your letter contains what is, for so small a space, a vast quantity of myth-spinning. I had to read your letter twice before I properly grasped what the hard politics under the conventional left glosses of history — with all due respect, Arab-Palestinian nationalist misrepresentations — were.

That may have been because of my incapacity to absorb

what I read, but it wasn’t only that. The politics are obscured and half-hidden in the gross bias and misrepresentation which compose so much of your letter. Taking the points on which we agree as given, it is the elements of misrepresentation that I want to discuss. It shows up very clearly what is wrong with so much of the left on Israel-Palestine.

SOME of the traits of your article may be the result of putting together a text agreeable to a number of editors with differing views. In principle there is nothing wrong with that — provided that the result is coherent, and not unprincipled for any of the participants. And provided that the result does not resemble a pantomime horse in which the two people encased in one skin are going in different directions. I think the politics of your letter — which, to repeat, I agree with — are seriously at odds with the version of history in it, and with the nods and bows to the views of people who erect politics opposite to yours and mine upon gross historical misrepresentation.

I approach the discussion, of course, from the perspective of Britain, where most of the would-be left is openly allied with Islamist clerical fascism and where the bourgeois liberals (the *Guardian* newspaper, for instance) are “soft” on Islamism. I understand that the political climate on this question is different in the USA.

My essential problem with what you’ve written is this. We are faced with recreating a rational left. We need a left that does not run away from reality; one that does not, instead of working to change reality — and it is usually instead — manipulate fantasies in its head. You do the opposite in your article.

Your blur and mis-state the issues as you survey the history, often by suggesting associations or implying cause and effect in a sense that is both wrong and grossly biased against the Jewish settlers and Israel. People of different viewpoints can read your assessments in their own different ways. That may indicate skill in drafting a compromise text, but it produces

something that to the unknowing reader serves not to clarify and enlighten, but to do the opposite. Not to clear the way for your politics, but to bury them in a miasma of anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli nonsense originating with Stalinism.

You pay a mumbling lip-service to the poisoned mythology of the "absolute anti-Zionists" of the kitsch-left, who reject your politics ("two states"). Their historical mythology is at least in line with their policy of wanting the destruction of Israel. Yours is not only false in terms of history, but at stark odds with your own politics.

Sometimes facts are so wrapped up in the "tribute" you pay to conventional kitsch-left pieties that they are probably invisible to those who don't already know those facts. For instance, take the number of Palestinian refugees in 1948. In the first two paragraphs, you say "around the same number", "something over 650,000", of people may have died in Iraq as a result of the US/UK invasion.

That implies a number, but three paragraphs down you write: "Three generations after the expulsion from their homeland, among roughly six million Palestinians living in exile... many remain refugees or in officially 'stateless' status with few rights or security".

Leave aside the fact that "expulsion" does not cover all the 700,000 or so who fled in 1948, during conditions of communal war and attacks by five Arab armies on the territory allocated to Israel by the United Nations. The idea that there are now six million Palestinian refugees or semi-refugees begs too many questions, and attributing all their plight to Israeli "expulsion" begs even more.

It is plain from your own description of the conditions where the Palestinians live "with few rights or security" that you know that the treatment of the Palestinians by the Arab states, too, has shaped the terrible and tragic situation in which the Palestinians find themselves. Palestinians have often been refused the right to work in Arab states. In both Jordan (1970) and Lebanon (1970s and 80s) large numbers of them have been butchered.

IN reviewing a long space of history in which — as you plainly know — the policies of the Arab states have shaped the consequences of the population shift of 1948, to attribute to Israel all responsibility — except obliquely and gnomically — for the evils which afflict the Palestinians is not history, but political special pleading and scapegoating. Isn't it?

And in your ruminations about the partitions of India and of Palestine, and the "ironic" coincidence of numbers between Palestine 1948 and Iraq 2003-7, you might have broadened your reflection to include another pertinent "around the same number". Around 600,000 Jews fled from or were persecuted out of the Arab countries, to Israel, in the years after 1948.

You note and properly regret that "the Arab Palestinian nation was cheated of the state that was promised to it under the 1947 [United Nations] resolution". By whom? Someone who doesn't know would, from the whole tone and content of the letter, assume: by the Jews, or Israel. In fact the Jewish community accepted the UN resolution. After the 1948 war, Israel gained extra territory, but the bulk of the territory allocated to the Palestinian state was taken by Jordan and Egypt.

Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967 was the occupation of territory that had been Jordan's for nearly two decades. I agree with you that Israel should give up that occupation immediately. But you think it is useful to let the story seem worse for Israel than the 40-year continuing occupation does? Why? You think the kitsch-left does not need to be told the truth? Why? You want to sing in consonance with the myth-adulterated kitsch-left? Why? You think you can best propagate your own two-states programme if you wrap it up in the poisonous historical myths of the Stalinists and the present-day absolute anti-Zionists whose programme of eliminating Israel is the opposite of your own?

You half-apologise for your own "two states" politics with this comment on the Palestinian state projected in 1947: "however sad that solution would have been by comparison to the potential of a united democratic binational country".

In this way you chime in with the opponents on the kitsch-left of a "two states" settlement: in a shamefaced sort of way you bow to (though seemingly without sharing) the idea that Israel is an illegitimate historical formation. That idea and the vicious historical myths on which it is erected serves to license the politics of all the "destroy Israel" left, and their projects of replacing it with something more to their taste.

Is it that you, or some of you, believe in a binational state settlement? Not just that (of course) it might have been better, but as something that might have been feasible? Surely it never was remotely feasible. Those who advocated it in the mid-1940s like Judah Magnes had little influence. As a proposed "settlement" to the conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine, it did not deserve to have influence.

Suppose that somehow a binational Jewish-Arab state had been set up in 1948, something like the arrangement in Lebanon established in the National Pact of 1943. Surely such a binational state could not have survived the rise of Arab nationalism without collapsing into civil war as Lebanon did in the late 1950s?

Arab nationalism would not have arisen without the stimulus the Arab defeats in 1948 gave it? In the decolonising world of the 1950s, surely it would, maybe with some details and the tempo different.

ALTERNATIVE history is tempting. I've read one effort at alternative history about what would, or might, have happened to the much-despised and ill-treated native Palestinian Jews if the Zionist colonisation had not happened —

that in the period of the anti-colonial movements they would have been likely to reach a sort of nationalist consciousness of their own and revolt against their overlords.

The problem with "alternative histories" of the Middle East and reprints over the binational state "that might have been" is that they all start from or arrive at the idea that Israel is an illegitimate state, the root idea for all the poisonous vicarious Arab (or, now, Islamic) chauvinist nonsense that engulfs so much of the would-be left (and in Britain almost all of it).

The same is true of Hal Draper's article on the 1948 war, some of which you reprint. Another largely forgotten fact — like the fact that the UN projected a Palestinian state alongside the Jewish one, and what happened to the territory allocated to the Palestinians — is that none of the Trotskyist groups, either in the USA or in Israel-Palestine, supported the Arabs in the 1948-9 conflicts. None of them, that I know of. The "orthodox" Trotskyists didn't; and the "Other Trotskyists", the Workers' Party of Max Shachtman and Hal Draper, positively, though with important caveats, supported Israel's right to exist and to defend itself.

Draper's 1948 article, with its implicit idea that Israel, or working-class Israel, could play the sort of role in the region which France played in Europe for a while in the 1790s — that it could sink the national, cultural, and religious differences in an all-embracing anti-colonial battle, which it would spearhead — was the sheerest fantasy. He had imaginatively cut loose from all the circumscribing elements in the situation.

Attractive fantasy, yes. But it was a programme for a different Middle East, not for the real one. It became pernicious when the real Israel, the real Israeli Jewish people and the real Jewish working class, were afterwards condemned for not living up to the fantasy-Israel which in Draper's utopia had replaced the real one.

I agree with you that the possibility of an independent Palestinian state is itself threatened with relegation to the museums of historical might-have-beens, and that therefore a solution is very urgent. But your way of putting things about "two states" (some sort of compromise formulation, I guess) gives away far too much to the malevolent political obscurantism of the kitsch-left. "So long as an independent Palestinian state remains the demand of the population under occupation, socialists and principled democrats must support this struggle for self-determination, whatever its constraints and limitations".

Only because it is the majority view in the Occupied Territories? Not because it is the only conceivable arrangement that will secure the best that the Palestinians can hope for? And because it also offers justice to the legitimate claims of the Israeli Jewish nation too?

WHAT if the Palestinian "population under occupation" were now in its majority to revert to the old slogan of Egypt and one-time PLO leader Ahmed Shukhairy — "Drive the Jews into the sea"? Would socialists and principled democrats then accept an obligation to support that? Would they then lose the moral or political right to do other than support it? That is what is wrong with your way of putting it: it implies that socialists and principled democrats do and must follow the majority view. No: we should make and argue for our own independent assessment of the situation, its possibilities, and what is desirable.

The PLO is for two states. What if it weren't? Two states would still be the only democratic as well as the only conceivable solution. It was that before the PLO formally adopted it in 1988.

You express it as: "support this struggle for self-determination". The struggle for a Palestinian state alongside Israel is the only conceivable form, and for socialists and consistent democrats the only supportable form, of Palestinian self-determination. Two states is the only practicable solution. There has been and is a Palestinian — and Arab, and Islamic — "struggle" against Israel which is not for two states and not for Palestinian self-determination, but which sets as its goal to forcibly deprive the Israeli Jewish nation of self-determination. Hamas, which won what you praise as "the free and transparent Palestinian democratic election of January 2006", has that goal.

Because of the confusion on the left, two states needs to be advocated with conviction and, where necessary, with aggressive debunking of nonsensical alternatives. How would you answer someone who, following your own method here, insisted with you that Hamas won the election and therefore "the" Palestinian policy now is that of Hamas, "to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine".

Either you would bow down to their reasoning, and apologise for having trifled with "two states", or you would have to assert your right to think things through for yourselves. As it is, your way of presenting the issue, in terms that suggest that you root yourselves in an obligation to reflect or follow the Palestinian majority (at any time? That's how I read it) contradicts your advocacy of two states. Two states — concretely, a sovereign, independent Palestinian state, in contiguous territory — will remain the only socialist and democratic programme for the Israel-Palestine conflict whatever the fluctuations in support for Hamas.

I agree with the first four paragraphs of your letter under the cross-head "Tragic Missed Chances". In fact, it is well done: it cuts away the malevolent anti-Zionist mythology which mystifies and muddles the kitsch left. Both the Palestinian Arab and the Israeli Jewish nations were formed in the 20th century, in their mutual conflict (though of course the roots of Israel, the impulse to mass Jewish migration in the 20s, 30s, and 40s, were not only in Palestine).

Yet even here you weight the scales a bit. It was not just the interaction of an "indigenous Arab population" and "the intrusion of a colonial settler movement". A proportion of the Arab population in, say, 1948, were recent incomers, attracted by the economic dynamism that came with the Jewish colonisation. There was a Jewish population before the Zionist incoming. A majority of the small population of Jerusalem in about 1900 was Jewish.

You describe the formation of Israel as the "desperate survivors of Nazi genocide... herded to Palestine against their own wishes" you should have added the 600,000 or so "herded" from the Arab countries to Israel. And going to Palestine was not against the wishes of the survivors of Hitler's death camps who found themselves in the displaced persons' camps after 1945. According to reports at the time, the big majority of such people wanted to go to Palestine, and nowhere else.

YOUR true picture of the interactive formation of two nations begs questions which you either don't answer, or answer falsely.

Why, for instance, did the Jewish segment of 1930s and 1940s Palestine not have the right to receive people whom they thought of as their own, fleeing for their lives from Europe? Or to receive the survivors of the Nazi massacres languishing in DP camps? The same right as the Arab population surely had to "receive" Arab incomers in the 1920s and 30s?

All this is an example of true and urgent things you say being marred and mired and obscured by bias and prejudice — or the bows you make to bias and prejudice, for you are absolutely right that "any morally and politically viable analysis" must include recognition that "there are two peoples, two nations, living in historic Palestine", that both have rights and must learn to accommodate each other — and that the Israeli Jewish nation must "get the oppressor nation's boot off the oppressed nation's neck".

Historical demonisation of Zionism and Israel, or the echoes and smudges and half-revised residues of that demonisation in your letter, will not help either of those objectives. Very much the opposite, I believe.

All details aside, Israel can be made the villain of the long failure to reach a peaceful settlement between itself and the Arab states only from when Israel gained the predominant power. That is how things are now? Yes, though the failure — all in all, the defeat — of Israel in Lebanon last summer shows how relative and insecure that may be. But I agree that the responsibility of power puts the onus on Israel to sort out a settlement that is just to the Palestinians and liveable for both the Palestinians and the surrounding Arabs.

Israel deserves condemnation for not doing it — for its relentlessly savage treatment of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and for its evident intention — and activity — to hold on to as much territory that was Palestinian before 1967 as possible.

But it is nonsense to read the present situation backwards through the many decades of the Israel-Arab conflict. The section of your letter where you do that is the least emancipated from the "all-powerful Zionist demon" Stalinist and now kitsch-left accounts of the history of Israeli-Arab relations.

Example: "In 1967, Israel deliberately provoked a war, the Arab rulers fatally fell for it, several Arab armies were destroyed..." Israel "provoked" a war and the Arab rulers "fell for it"? That account, I suppose, is a little better than the notion that in June 1967 Israel launched a treacherous surprise attack on Arab states which wanted nothing but peace, but it is as partial as a mother describing how her aggressive child got the worst of a fight.

"My Johnny did nothing. He was only acting as if he intended to kick the other boy in the crotch. Then the big bully, whose provocation he fell for, got a kick in first, and flattened him".

IN a world in which the then Egyptian-controlled Palestine Liberation Organisation still talked of driving the Jews into the sea, Arab leaders made war-mobilising speeches, Egypt ordered out UN peacekeepers which had been in place for a decade, and blockaded the gulf of Aqaba. Against that background, Israel struck first, devastated the military power of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, and occupied the West Bank, Gaza, and (until 1982) Sinai.

That Israel seized the chance to do to the threatening armies what it surely wanted to do anyway, and improved its victory by seizing the maximum of bargaining points, is true. That is the sort of thing that states in a condition of latent war with neighbours do, if they can. Audacity, ruthlessness, and motivation achieved results for Israel that surprised both sides.

Certainly Israel's victory could not have been predicted. The Arab victories at the start of the 1973 war showed that the 1967 Israeli victories were not just a mechanical registration of the static strength of the powers involved; and Lebanon last summer disabused believers in the limitless power and self-sufficiency of Israel's superiority in military technology.

To present 1967 as the leaders of the Arab dictatorships of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan being ensnared by Israel is perilously close to either an Israeli-chauvinist notion of an all-dominating ingrained superiority, or a paranoid vision that "the Jews" control everything. As you will know, segments of the anti-Zionist kitsch-left argue in a way that implies Jewish control over, or successful manipulation of, even the Nazis when they massacred Europe's Jews — that is, over the Holocaust (Lenni Brenner, for instance; Jim Allen, in *Perdition*).

The same when you discuss the aftermath of the 1967 war. What you write reads as if it was the Israeli government's

basis that its citizens want it to exist. Rather, the demand imposed on the Palestinian people is unique, to 'recognise Israel as a Jewish state,' which has come to mean the unique historical privilege of their oppressors to establish unconditionally and forever a 'state of the Jewish people,' a Jewish-supremacist state, on the land taken away from them and in which non-Jews would never have full equal rights".

However they define themselves, or some of them define themselves, or the constitution of the state defines them, there is as you yourselves say a Jewish nation in what 60 years ago was Palestine. Whatever frills and definitions are juggled with, that nation is what is being discussed in all talk of Jewish rights, and so on.

Plainly for socialists and principled democrats the Arab minority in Israel should have full and equal citizenship rights with all the other Israeli citizens, just as any national minority anywhere should have equal rights. That the Israeli Arabs, or some of them, will have, or can reasonably be expected to have (indeed, must have!), divided loyalties, is inbuilt in the situation, and will remain so at least until the Jewish nation's relations with the Palestinians and other Arab nations are regularised and Israel is recognised. Those who fight for equal rights for Arabs in Israel should be supported. Yet here again you blur things seriously. As with any nation, the right to equal treatment for minority citizens cannot undo the right of the nation to self-determination. Unequal treatment of a minority cannot invalidate the right of the majority to self-determination.

You go on: "This special demand... forecloses the Palestinian right of return... This is not political recognition of a state, but rather a demand to surrender to racism. The former is legitimate and ultimately necessary, while the latter is unacceptable and repulsive. For socialists above all, and for partisans of the rights of the Palestinian people, it is essential to 'recognise' and insist upon the difference".

With all due respect, this reads to me like political gobbledegook. It goes with a statement earlier in the text: "The underlying destruction of Palestinian society, in the absence of self-determination and denial of the principled right of return — remains as brutally unresolved as ever".

As with so much else, it is unclear what you mean by "principled right of return". You mean the right "in principle"? You recognise that, as distinct from "principle", the actual "right of return" is incompatible with recognising Israel's right to self-determination? That is what both advocates and opponents of the "right of return" have always understood — that its call for restoring the status quo is an alternative to the right of self-determination of the Israeli Jewish nation.

For its advocates, it is precisely a way of denying Israel's right to exist. But you advocate a "two states" settlement, and recognise the right of the Israeli Jewish nation and state to exist! Yet at the same time you seem — it is not clear — simultaneously to brand insistence on the Jewish character of Israel as "racist".

I repeat: however it "is posed", what is in question is the national rights of the Jewish nation in Israel. Plainly those citizens do want Israel to exist. The fact that all Jews everywhere are defined by that Israeli Jewish nation as having rights in Israel has no bearing on that. The demand on the Palestinians and the Arab states is to recognise the existing Jewish nation state.

One of two things, either the Israeli Jews have a right to self-determination — "two states" — or they don't. Implicitly you seem to say that they don't, while explicitly saying that they do!

If the entire Arab minority in Israel do not want it to exist — I don't know — then that could not bind the Jewish nation (four-fifths of the population). If the Palestinians outside Israel do not want it to exist, that could not bind the Jewish majority either. The idea that it could, applied to any nation but that of the Israeli Jews, would be dismissed out of hand as an absurdity, wouldn't it?

Those who reject a two-states settlement and want some all-Palestine state (in the real world, an unimaginable one) whose precondition is the destruction of Israel (secular democratic state, binational state...) say that the boundaries between Israel and the Palestinians should not exist and should not be taken into account, and that the unit for "self-determination" is majority opinion across both nations. You want two states, and therefore logically you can't see it like that. Yet you present it like that — from a viewpoint that is not your own and is not in consonance with your advocacy of two states.

What does "Jewish-supremacist state" refer to? Relations between Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs? In practical terms, that resolves into the struggle within the Israeli state for absolute equality of all its citizens, Arabs and Jews, and into the demand for a secular, a consistently secular, state. But in your text "Jewish-supremacist states" seems also to refer to the "supremacy" within the 1967 borders of Israeli Jews over other people outside those boundaries — or else what can your talk of the "right of return" refer to?

Israel is a "Jewish-supremacist state" because it gives its national majority rights above the claims of other people, outside its borders, who think that the territory should be theirs instead? But that idea is implicitly to deny the right of Israel to exist.

It has to be one thing or the other: either the Israeli Jewish nation has the right to self-determination, or it does not. Two states means that it does. Fifty or a hundred years in the future, "two states" might evolve into a Palestinian state and, beside

"As you will know, segments of the anti-Zionist kitsch-left argue in a way that implies Jewish control over, or successful manipulation of, even the Nazis when they massacred Europe's Jews — that is, over the Holocaust"

authorisation of the first settlements, in September 1967, that frustrated "the broad Israeli and international consensus" that "anticipated" Israeli withdrawal in exchange for a peace deal with the Arab states.

Such a deal was forthcoming from the Arab states? Surely it was not. It would have been forthcoming, and was deflected by the authorisation of settlements? To define the problem of the settlements as it has emerged over four decades — into a great power in Israeli politics — as already existing on that scale or anything comparable to it in the aftermath of the 1967 war is ridiculously anachronistic. (In 1972, for example, there were 800 Israeli settlers in the West Bank. Today there are nearly 300,000.

The growth of the settler colonies was a result of the failure to reach an agreement after 1967, not the cause of that failure. No, saying that is not to justify the settlements! The point that matters here is that Arab — including Palestinian — unreality and unwillingness to reach a modus vivendi with Israel have, in changing forms, been one of the great engines of Arab and Palestinian political destruction, back over many decades.

The settler movement, you write, is "the entrenched base for Israeli nationalist-religious fanaticism... [it has] poisoned Israeli-Palestinian relations, blocked the possibility for withdrawal and set in motion Israel's slow-motion course toward national suicide". True, I think. And successive Israeli governments of all colours authorised and encouraged the settlements. But all that grew out of a situation that the Arab states too, after 1967, shaped for Israel and for themselves.

YOU give the same sort of warped account of the 1973 war: Egypt attacked Israel not by any decision of its own, but only because the Nixon administration would not help it make peace. "Egyptian president Anwar Sadat sought US sponsorship for peace and Israeli withdrawal from Sinai; his snubbing by the Nixon-Kissinger administration led to the 1973 war".

Your chronicle of fatal choices omits mention of the breakdown of the peace talks in 2000, which signalled the reverse of the seven years of tentative improvement after the Oslo agreement and the start of a succession of horrors that have engulfed the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. Nor do you even mention the Hamas-initiated suicide-bomb campaign in Israel which has had such a part not only in killing innocent people but in turning Israeli public opinion away from belief that peace is possible.

You describe Ariel Sharon's soldier-surrounded visit to Temple Mount on 28 September 2000 as "touching off the Second Intifada" as if those who decided to respond as the Palestinian organisations did simply did not have a choice, instead of branding the actions of those responsible for the suicide bombs — as utterly self-destructive of the Palestinian cause as they were murderous of Israeli civilians.

You depict the Palestinian organisations as will-less, politics-free, forces which only react, mindlessly and automatically, to Israeli stimuli. To put it at its mildest, the ineptitude and incapacity of the Palestinian leadership was one of the elements shaping the last seven terrible years for the Palestinians.

The grounds for condemnation of Israel now are that, especially, as you say, after the proposals of the Arab League for peace, Israel is in a position to secure all its legitimate interests and to reach a just settlement with the Palestinians, and it does not do that. Israel and its international allies did not need to respond to the Hamas election victory in 2006 as they did. Israel should, I agree, be condemned for that.

AND yet your account here too is seriously skewed. Hamas was the initiator and main perpetrator of the suicide-bombing campaign. It is a clerical-fascist organisation linked to others outside Palestine, a religio-political formation committed to the destruction of Israel. Even if we disagree with what Israel did, as you and I do — from what point of view did Israel not *in principle* have the right to respond to Hamas's victory as to a declaration of war, as the victory of a movement that would turn what there was of a Palestinian state into an entrenched forward position from which to make war on Israel as soon as it could? What has the democratic character for Palestine of Hamas's election got to do with that?

You invoke the right of the Palestinians to democratically elect any government they liked, and the right of the Palestinian nation to prepare for war against the oppressor. To do that, comrades, is automatically to conjure up the reciprocal right of those who are the intended target to resort to their own sacred national egotism. Isn't it? How can it not be?

For the opponents of two states, the candid answer is: "No, Israel doesn't have such a right. Israel, unlike other nations, has no rights". And for you, advocates of a two-states settlement?

You do not even address the issue. I would condemn Israel for acting with unnecessary brutality: yes, Israel has acted to pulverise the Palestinians politically as well as to defend itself. But you do not deal at all with the character of Hamas or with what Israel might reasonably fear from Hamas-controlled Palestinian territories.

FINALLY, the worst and in my opinion the most confused segment of your letter is the one headed "Jewish supremacy". Here, you have let yourselves get bogged in the hopeless mireland of "definition" of "Jews" and "Israel". Here too, the result looks like a pantomime horse, with two or three people trying to take the outer skin in two or three different directions.

You write: "Israel's right to exist is never posed like that of any other independent nation-state — on the straightforward

it, not a Jewish but a binational state. But right now, and foreseeably, two states means that Israel has the right to exist — a state which the Jewish majority can if it likes define as a state of the Jewish nation.

You are, comrades, either for two states — one of which is a Jewish state, however the Israeli Jews choose to define “Jewish” — or for the right of return (that is, for a Palestinian right to take away the Jewish character of Israel). You can't be for both.

The Arab minority can and should demand full equality, but surely it cannot claim the right to deprive the majority of its right to define itself and its state. The existence of a minority cannot reasonably mean that the majority nation ceases to have the right to national self-determination (though it may well imply some special national-minority rights).

How can you combine two states, which means the right of the Israeli Jewish nation to a state (with these or those modifications), with what you write? And why is it “racism” for the Israeli Jews to want a Jewish state? Nationalism, particularism, patriotism, chauvinism, racism form a continuum: there are no impassable walls between them. But there is a distinction. And why is what is nationalism in, say, Germany, racism among Israeli Jews? Why does opposition to chauvinism, and championing of equality for Israeli Arabs, demand that we define Israeli Jewish nationalism as racism?

Here you glibly repeat the poisonous nonsense that Israeli Jewish nationalism is, per se, racism. What is in others nationalism (or chauvinism) — insistence on their own identity as against others' — is in the Israeli Jews “racism”! But, comrades, then you, with your two states formula, partake of the Israeli Jews' “racism”! The answer to what you call “racism” is a struggle within Israel for equal right for all who live there — not the destruction of the Jewish nation, or quibbling such as yours that confuses the issue.

Why opponents of two states define it as racism is clear: to rule it out of court, to brand it and bracket it as amongst the most evil things they know. Why do you, two-staters, do it? I suggest you are here incoherent and confused.

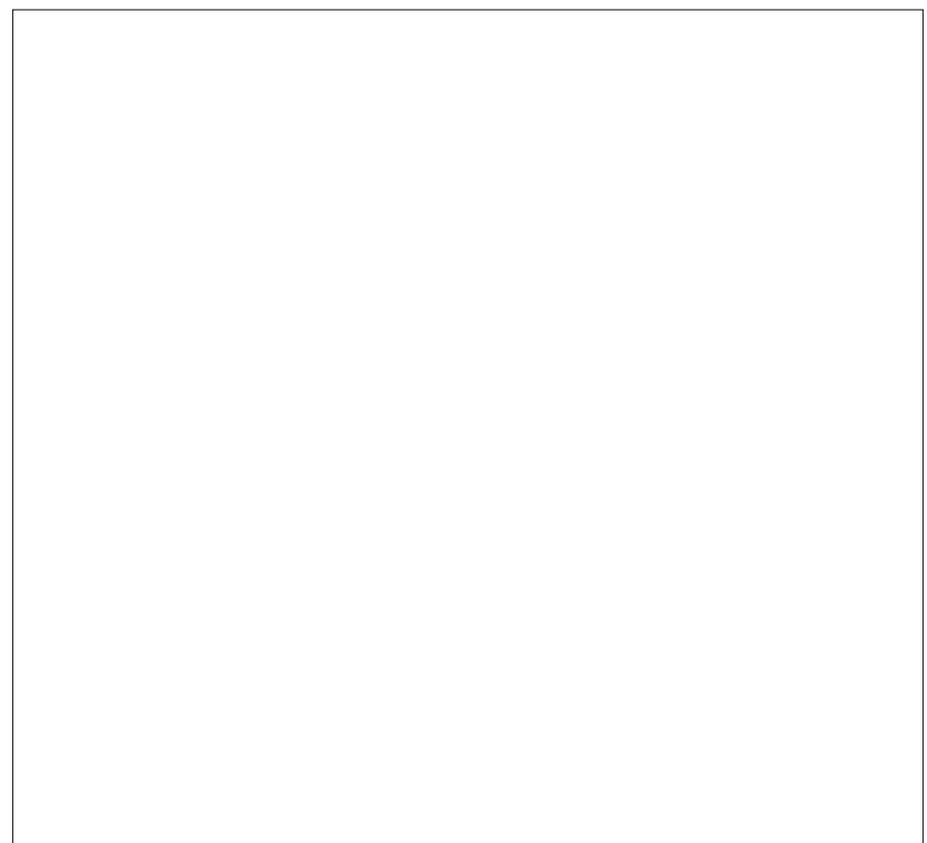
So also with the “right of return” for Palestinians. A Jewish state, under the will of its majority, by definition “forecloses the Palestinian right of return”. How could it not? Either the Israeli Jews have a right to a state or they don't. “Right of return” has been understood by its advocates and opponents as a “demand” for the abolition of Israel as a Jewish state. That is what it means now, and it could not mean anything else.

Now, if such an unprecedented thing were to happen as the Jewish nation agreeing to Palestinian “return” — in real terms, to the organised resettlement of millions of descendants of Palestinians who fled in 1948 — and the Jews and the Palestinians could merge into a common peaceful citizenship of a common state, it would be wonderful. It would not be for socialists or consistent democrats to object. We are not the guardians of Jewish or of any other nationality.

BUT it is as inconceivable that the existing Israeli Jewish nation will ever agree to that as that they will dismantle their state and put themselves at the mercy of people and states with which they have been in conflict for not too far off a century.

The insistent demand that it should do so comes from peoples and states no less nationalistic, no less (at least!) religious-sectarian, and no less (if you insist on using that word) racist than the Israelis. It is a weapon of one side. Should we support such a demand or not? Logically, advocates of two states cannot.

It would be disingenuous to pretend that we support Israel's right to exist, but oh — one detail! — we also want the right of



The armed Hamas movement aims for the destruction of Israel

“return” to the territory of the Israeli state for up to six million Palestinians. That is the demand for the abolition of Israel — the self-abolition, or, since that will not happen, for the conquest of Israel. It has never been anything else.

For sure, this stuff and two states are horses galloping in opposite directions. Of course, “non-Jews” — the six million Palestinians — “would never have full equal rights”, any more than citizens of Germany have “full equal rights” in the Russian Federation, or vice versa. Not so long as national barriers have not come down. We, as socialists, want them to come down: but voluntarily, not against the will of any nation participating in the union of the formerly distinct states.

Initially and for the foreseeable future, citizens of the Jewish state will not have full equal rights in the Palestinian state, and vice versa — though minority citizens in both states could and should have equal rights. The Palestinians in Israel already have a substantial part of the rights of equal citizenship — though they are entitled to more, and we should support them in fighting for it.

There was talk during negotiations a while back of some right of “return” for a token, emblematic number of Palestinians, combined with compensation for others. All such things would be for us to welcome. What supporters of two states should not do is turn themselves into advocates of an

unqualified right of “return” for up to six million people, very few of whom now were born in the territory of pre-1967 Israel.

There is another issue here too. You say rightly that Palestinian self-determination is the precondition for progress on any level, and I agree wholeheartedly. “*An authentic peace agreement, and above all as a choice made freely and with the nation's dignity intact*” (italics yours). Who would disagree? You then say that “Palestinian recognition of Israel and renunciation of violence would be altogether positive”.

“But such ‘recognition’ has no progressive meaning at all if imposed on imperialist terms, as an act of Palestinian defeat and ultimate humiliation. Not only wouldn't it bring peace, but it couldn't be considered morally or politically binding on a future movement. The delusion of ‘peace’ imposed by overwhelming fire-power is no peace at all”.

The sentiments are good, and the feeling in what you write is good too. But I don't quite know what all this can possibly mean in relation to Israel-Palestine. What do you think are the chances of all or most Palestinians seeing an agreement, even one that gives them a genuinely independent state, as an absolutely voluntary agreement, free of defeat and “imperialist” and “Zionist” diktat?

A non-triumphalist style in which an agreement is “processed”, face-saving elements, are of course possible and desirable. But the issue here is more than pious hopes and wishful thinking and “nice-mindedness” in your letter. What you define as essential is, however tactful Israel or the USA might be, impossible — except to self-deluding or simply stupid Palestinians and their supporters.

Nothing is more certain than that there will be dissidents, irreconcilables, Islamists, who will denounce any agreement that leaves Israel in being as a sell-out, a humiliation, a degradation, etc. The long experience of Irish republicanism and its irreconcilables has a lot to say to the prospects in the Middle East.

SOME of the irreconcilables will use terrorism, or support those who do. Even token recognition of the “right of return” will encourage such people to fight to give it their own meaning. Socialists should not make ourselves ideological outriders for the future irreconcilables.

It may well be that, just as our emphases are shaped by our circumstances in Britain, so also yours are determined by your circumstances in the USA — with the Christian Zionists, and the broad sanctification of Israel. But that can in the medium and long term be fought only on the basis of realism and of working-class political independent towards all nationalisms, including Palestinian nationalism and the much broader Arab-Islamist nationalism and chauvinism of which it is indissolubly a part. Future “population transfers” by Israel cannot be fought by rendering your advocacy of two states incoherent and oxymoronic, as you here.

Yours fraternally, Sean Matgamna

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