

Soft on the Israel peace process

ITHINK *Workers' Liberty* has been too soft on the Middle East "peace process". Faced with Netanyahu's flagrant disregard for the accords between Israel and the Palestinians, it is tempting to see the days of Rabin and Peres as a golden age of progress towards peace. Indeed, when Rabin was assassinated, *Workers' Liberty* referred to "immense progress." But from its inception, the deal between Arafat and Rabin, the 1993 Oslo Agreement, was largely fraudulent. It was a long way short of genuine independence and democracy for the Palestinians. *WL* has said as much; but the whole thing has been much worse than the magazine's editorials have suggested.

No doubt what is needed now is a united front of those opposed to Netanyahu, and prepared to defend even the limited gains the Palestinians have made. But a socialist policy must go much further.

Under the Agreement, Israel kept control of everything it wanted. Most of the West Bank and a sizeable chunk of Gaza remain under Israeli control. Security and foreign policy is under Israeli control. The agreement gave Israel control over the borders of the 'limited autonomous' areas, control which has been regularly used to close them to Palestinians who work in Israel — causing terrible economic hardships.

The agreement guaranteed Israeli security (although not Palestinian), effectively giving Israel the right to continue collective punishments — i.e., to demolish the homes of suspected terrorists, send in troops to round up "suspects", and so on (sometimes resulting in the deaths of innocent civilians), even in supposedly Palestinian-run areas, although they preferred Arafat to do the job. Roads crossing the West Bank and connecting it to Gaza stayed under Israeli military control; and Israel maintained its control over water, an essential issue in a country with large arid areas.

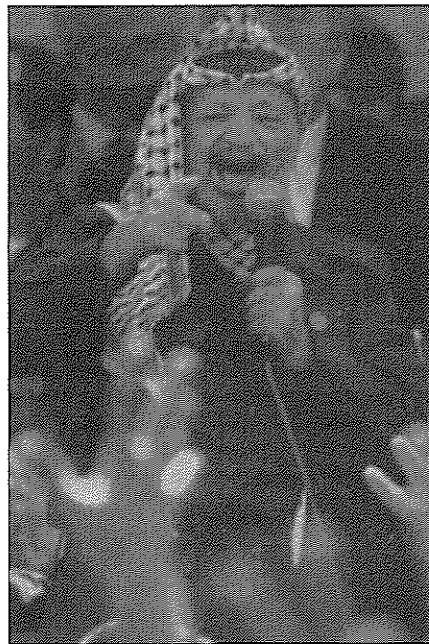
The Palestinian police and security forces largely carried out Israeli dirty work in areas it was hard for them to police directly, especially Gaza (in addition to carrying out dirty work entirely of Arafat's own) — until Netanyahu's aggressive posturing forced Palestinian police into conflict with the Israeli army. The largest death toll in a single day in Gaza since Israeli occupation began in 1967 was at the hands of Arafat's security forces.

Nothing whatever has been discussed in the way of reparations for Palestinians who have lost their homes since 1948, whether by

eviction, or compulsory land seizure.

Crucial issues were either not addressed, or status quo continued, awaiting "final status" talks, supposedly before 1998, although Israel under Labour regarded the timetable as flexible. These include, most importantly, the matter of Jewish settlement on the West Bank and Gaza.

There are more settlers now than before the agreement; they are as armed and militaristic as ever, and the Israeli army has been at hand to defend them. Israel maintains jurisdiction over the settlements, and land requisitioned for "security purposes" since 1967; in 1993 these lands comprised 65% of the West Bank and 42% of Gaza. Israel's policy, after Oslo, was to increase the areas under its direct control. Other issues yet to be discussed were the status of East Jerusalem, conquered in 1967, and the plight of the refugees.



The Palestinian economy is, if anything, even more dependent on Israel than before. The 1994 Paris Accords on economic relations tie the Palestinian economy close to Israel, and effectively make it difficult for the Palestinian authority to have economic relations elsewhere, for example with the Arab world. As Israeli journalist Asher Davidi put it in the *Davar* newspaper: "there is a consensus in the elites of Israel — the bourgeoisie and the security establishment — that if we cannot attach the economy of the occupied territories by military law, then we will do it by economic neo-colonialism." It isn't hard to do: Israel has a GNP of about \$64 billion; the West Bank and Gaza \$2 billion.

The Palestinian "Authority" has been

starved of the funds needed even to pay its repressive policemen (numbering 30,000 or so) and various intelligence forces (estimated as between six and nine separate organisations), its teachers (somewhat fewer in number than its police), its hospital staff, or provide its hospitals with medicine.

While the United States swiftly rewarded Israel with \$180 million in addition to the \$5 billion it gets annually, Yasser Arafat's hopes of foreign aid flooding in to help Palestinian reconstruction have been sadly dashed: Gaza will not, as he gleefully promised, become a "new Singapore". Israel was in any case happy to give up direct control of Gaza: it had become a security nightmare; it has suffered so much under Israeli occupation that it is one of the most poverty stricken places in the world, with a GNP that has been steadily falling (\$600 per capita in 1992); Rabin was on record saying he "wished it would sink into the sea".

The larger game plan behind Oslo was Israel's desire to normalise its own economic relations with the Arab states (which apart from with Egypt, were virtually non-existent before the last couple of years.) The Israeli government estimates that the Arab "secondary boycott" alone (the ban on companies who do business with Israel) costs it \$400m a year. Shimon Peres' recent book, *The New Middle East*, advocates regional economic integration modelled on the EC. (It also advocates that Israel join the EC). The United States also, of course, would like a more stable Middle East for its own investments, and is therefore unhappy with how things are going now.

The belief, widely held in Israel as well as outside, that Rabin's rapprochement with Arafat represented a huge policy shift (winning him and Peres, with Arafat, the Nobel Peace Prize), a break with the hawkish past, and a triumph for peacemakers, is therefore hard to sustain. In effect, Israel barely changed its policy towards the Palestinians at all. What they got from Arafat was much in line with what Israeli governments proposed in the past, but was rejected by the PLO.

Why such ferocious opposition from the Israeli right — giving Netanyahu a small majority in the elections — if everything has moved so much in Israel's favour? The simple answer is that the Israeli right is so right wing that they see anything short of driving the Arabs out as a sell-out. Gush Emunim, the organisation to which most of the militant settlers belong, is at least as fanatically extremist as the Islamist groups; they believe, among other things, that the murder of an Arab by a Jew should not be punished, as it is not a crime. (Their profoundly reactionary messianism is as hostile to secular Jews as to non-Jews, making

them unpopular in wide layers of Israeli society. But Rabin, at least, counted Gush members among his personal friends).

The fact remains that Oslo was in accord with the policy of the Israeli Establishment, Labour and Likud (it was after all Begin who made peace with Egypt on pretty similar terms regarding the Palestinians, but rejected at the time by the PLO) since the 1970s.

I am not arguing that Netanyahu does not represent a significant shift. Certainly, he does. But socialists must insist that simply reversing the trend of the last few months is not enough. Either a return to a Labour government, or a return to Labour policy, would still leave the Palestinians without their democratic and national rights.

Critical defence of Oslo — and this has been the basic view of *Workers' Liberty* — is usually on the grounds that the existing alternative is far worse: the change under Netanyahu would be evidence for the truth of this. But why should socialists passively accept the existing alternatives? The point to our programme is to intervene in the situation to create new alternatives. We can vigorously oppose Netanyahu without endorsing, or taking any responsibility for, either Peres or Arafat.

Oslo paved the way for Netanyahu. Clearly, no agreement could guarantee that nothing would change, a future Israeli government wouldn't try to tear it up, and so on. In the last analysis, force is what counts. But Oslo left so much power in Israeli hands, and legitimated so much use of that power, that Netanyahu's task was made a lot easier — if, indeed, tearing the agreement up is his project: he is so ridiculously demagogic that it's hard to know what his real intentions are.

Workers' Liberty has argued for two states in Israel/Palestine for over a decade, and I have always wholeheartedly supported that policy. It is, if anything, even more relevant now. It means rejecting the hawkishness of Netanyahu, and the more subtle Israeli imperialism of the Labour establishment, and Arafat's miserable prostration before it.

Clive Bradley

The issue is sectarian privilege

HOW can *Workers' Liberty* expect to conduct debate with anyone if they can't get basic facts right?

Jim Denham (WZ34) claims the initial cause of debate with myself was a letter from Billy Hutchinson. This is factually incorrect. The initial dispute began when one of your supporters, Annie O'Keeffe, intervened in a dispute between my organisation, Socialist Democracy, and Irish Militant Labour over their support for Hutchinson and the loyalist PUP's "socialism."

This is no small point. Annie O'Ke-

ffe posed a question: "Can socialists forgive paramilitaries? Can they convert to socialism?"

Now, a year later, with many a twist and turn through republicanism, the national question and imperialism, we find out from Jim Denham that the answer doesn't really matter! Hutchinson can be a fraud or a left-wing Nazi — all that really matters is the apparently more conciliatory attitude of Loyalist paramilitaries since the IRA ceasefire!

Having shown his respect for fact and political consistency, Denham goes on to make a series of howlers that would be more in place in a comic.

He announces that imperialism is dead in Ireland. Why? Because the imperialists can't turn a profit in the North!

After this exercise in Marxism as bookkeeping he asserts: "If anti-imperialism is the ability to twist the designs of an imperialist power then the Loyalists are the most effective anti-imperialist force."

It isn't and they're not.

There's nothing more common than having a popular base for imperialism that's more reactionary than the imperialists themselves and proves a block to the "logical" development of strategy. Drum-cree was a perfect example of this. The mass support for the peace process within the nationalist community fits much more closely with imperialism's plans for a settlement than the Orange "not an inch" reaction. Yet imperialism capitulated to the right with only the most token resistance and then launched a no holds barred attack on the nationalists. No matter how conciliatory nationalism becomes it is not the base of the British occupation. Mayhew and Major made it perfectly clear that their policy was that there would not be any direct mass confrontation with the Orange mob.

Denham attempts to escape unto higher ground by lecturing me about Leninism. According to *Workers' Liberty* this means "utter rejection of the idea that the socialist working class has any concern, or anything but contempt for the integrity of states."

Dead wrong, Jim — that's not Leninism, that's its antithesis. Your saying that the working class has no concern about the conditions under which it struggles — absolutism, military occupation, colonialism, semi-colonialism — it's all the same to the working class! What rubbish!

If I follow his advice and re-read Lenin I find: "The bourgeois nationalism of an oppressed nation has a generally democratic content that is directed against oppression and it is this content that we unconditionally support", and "finance capital does not in the least nullify the significance of political democracy as a freer, wider and clearer form of class oppression and class struggle."

If there were a united Ireland which oppressed a northern minority I might

find myself prioritising the rights of a Protestant minority. If that minority demanded separation I might support that demand. I don't know for certain because it's a totally abstract question with no connection with the real world.

In the real world we have partition based on British guns and supported by a section of the population who receive sectarian privilege and who regularly rebel whenever that privilege is threatened. Only a minute section of the population support self-determination for the North. The demand of most Protestants is for the right to continue the British occupation and prevent the completion of the Irish national revolution. We say that no such right exists.

We say that partition is the motor of sectarian division. It splits Protestant from Catholic, North from South and wedds Protestant worker to Unionism and Catholic worker to nationalism. Protestantism is not some monolith but composed of many different identities, one of which is membership of the Irish working class — which has an organisational form in a 32-county trade union movement.

Rather than having nothing to say to Protestant workers we say to them exactly what we say to Catholic workers — that it is in their interests as a class to end the carnival of reaction and division that partition represents.

When Annie O'Keeffe wrote her original letter I accused her of a fatuous idealism. I have no hesitation in repeating that charge against Jim Denham and *Workers' Liberty*. This isn't the dewy idealism of the novice, but the expression of a deep dishonesty.

This dishonesty is very evident in Jim Denham's letter. He begins by not knowing if Hutchinson's socialism is genuine or not, but by the end of the letter his inversion of Leninism has enabled him to make his mind up and identify Hutchinson as a representative of Protestant workers.

This is a fundamental betrayal of both Catholic and Protestant workers. To hand to the death squads leadership of the working class is to negate even the possibility of socialism.

John McNulty

Exclusions: a dead end

NOT every area of social life can be changed at the same speed. Even after a socialist revolution, we should not aim to raze the bourgeois education system to the ground and replace it all at once with a ready-made ideal socialist education system, but rather to reform and improve.

When, as at present, capitalism is pushing

its education system back towards barbarism, we defend its positive elements and continue to battle for improvements. Violently disruptive students are generally not proto-socialist rebels, but demoralised children who obstruct an education which their classmates need and want.

Thus far I agree with William Irons (*WL* 35). Since any functioning community must have some limits, norms, and rules, some exclusions of students from schools are probably unavoidable.

Today, however, we have a huge increase in exclusions, driven by schools' desire to do well in league tables and by teachers' exasperation under increased stress, and accelerated by the political climate in which "New Labour" chooses double-quick punishment for "young offenders" as a prime election slogan.

Whatever about this or that individual exclusion, the wave of exclusions is no answer at all to the problems in schools, not even a short-term one. Children who are violent and disruptive because they are alienated and embittered are not made less alienated and embittered by being excluded. If students do better in a new school, that must be due mostly to what the new school does to *include* them; it points to something wrong with their previous school, a problem which the school has ducked, rather than tackled, by exclusion.

To channel the energy from the frustration of teachers — and students and parents — into a battle for more resources, improved training, and better schooling methods, is not merely a "long-term" aim, but the only immediate answer. "More resources" in the abstract are not a sufficient answer — the resources have to be deployed so that they do not act as a perverse incentive to students to be more disruptive as the best way to get more care and attention, and also so that they are not purely reactive, like the metal detectors and armed guards in US schools — but more resources are necessary.

The anger and energy generated by the crisis in schools should be directed against the government and the ruling class, not against a few unhappy students. As long as the rule is

all-out strikes for exclusions, but only petitions, demonstrations and one-day strikes for more resources and better methods, we are caught in a dead end.

Chris Reynolds

Alf Marks joins the SWP

A FEW union branches supported the Socialist Workers' Party summer school, Marxism '96. Members of those branches might be interested to know that the atmosphere there was, at times, less democratic than a typical right-wing-controlled trade union conference.

Members of the SWP might want to ask themselves what exactly they're up to letting things degenerate to that level.

Workers' Liberty, like many other groups on the left, ran a stall outside Marxism, and intervened in the odd meeting. Not a big deal, you might think. No? The SWP found it so outrageous that within a couple of hours of our arrival on the Saturday they threatened to call the police to move us on!

They didn't go through with their threat to set the police on fellow socialists, but when one of our comrades leafleted — yes, *leafleted* — outside one session, they got the college authorities to remove him from the building. And then from the steps outside. Twice.

On the Sunday, SWP organisers told us that we couldn't sell *Workers' Liberty* on the steps outside the University of London Union. Why? Marxism is an SWP event! So there, presumably. They tried this on each time we did a sale on the steps, and of course we asserted our right to sell where we liked. We suggested to them that if even the bourgeoisie in Britain allowed free speech and free assembly, then socialists should be able to do so too.

Oh yes? Rotten liberalism! On the first occasion, after a bit of good old-fashioned shouting didn't work, a sizeable number of SWP comrades formed a circle around one of our people, selling *Socialist Worker* loudly to drown out what he was saying.

We continued selling, and when SWP organisers saw that their newer or less hack-ish comrades and periphery were becoming interested in what we were saying, they stopped playing ring-a-ring-a-rosy with us.

This was a victory of sorts, but a hollow one. It's pretty sad to have to defend free speech and free assembly from socialists.

Later that day the SWP got more aggressive. Hacks stood in front of us, to stop us selling or talking to people. We jiggled from side to side a bit to show how ridiculous they were being — and, yes, they just jiggled from side to side in time

with us.

Gradually they became more aggressive. One of them — a young man with a subtle grasp of both the English language and the art of the polemic — pushed his face into mine: 'Fuck off,' he said.

It was put to him if socialism is about freedom and human liberation, this kind of intimidation has no place in relations between socialists. His brain clunking into gear, the SWP comrade's eyes flashed with liberating insight: 'You lot haven't got anything to do with human liberation. You're just scum.'

Impressed by the level of political education, openness to debate and manifest confidence in the ideas of their organisation thus displayed by the SWP organisers, I decided to "make a commitment" to it and join the party.

When an SWPer came over to me in a bar waving membership forms in my face, I said, "yes" and "Alfred Marks" joined "the socialists". An AWLer with whom I was sitting asked the SWPer why she didn't ask me if I agreed with the SWP's politics, what I thought about the world, who I was, etc. She looked blank, trying to work out if this was rotten liberalism, Menshevik dilettantism or plain Zionist sabotage. She asked me nothing at all. While I filled in the form my comrades explained that I don't agree with the SWP. She didn't care. They told her that I am a member of another organisation, that I am even a member of the Labour Party. But nobody's perfect! They said I was only joining to prove a point. That didn't faze her either. I wanted to build the Party didn't I? Absolutely.

Right. This couldn't-care-less tolerance when recruiting members makes a strange contrast with the police-mindedness with which they try to repress other socialists at their events. There is a connection though: raw people thus recruited are political blanks for the leaders of the SWP to educate into the authoritarian know-nothing intolerance displayed by the hacks on the steps outside Marxism '96.

How the SWP recruits is up to them. What shouldn't be left up to them is how they behave to other socialists. The labour movement should say that the sort of behaviour exhibited at Marxism '96 is simply not acceptable.

Members of the SWP should stop and think. After all, what would your reaction be if you were told you couldn't sell outside a Labour Party or trade union event? The labour bureaucracy's role is to screw down on working class activity and debate, to stifle opposition to the system; yet they let us sell this magazine outside their conferences this year, and the SWP did not.

Andrew Woods

The second part of Max Shachtman's article on "Trotsky's contribution to Marxism" will be in *Workers' Liberty* 36.

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AT THE end of October James D. Young's book *The Very Bastards of Creation: Scottish-International Radicalism, 1688-1995, a Biographical Study* will be published by Clydeside Press. It is the first sustained Marxist analysis of the history of Scottish radical culture and politics from the Union of 1707 (with flashbacks to 1688) until 1995.

Challenging English cultural imperialism and the Brit propaganda of historians like Linda Colley, it will make a big impact on the Left. As a critique of those who have turned genuine internationalism into a 'sort of international jingoism', Young's argument for a Scottish workers' republic are supported in I. Meszaros' latest and most brilliant book *Beyond Capital*.