



Holocaust denial

Bureaucratic anti-fascism backfires

MIKE Gapes' comments (WL39) are typical of a particular type of anti-fascism. He isn't trying to develop a movement against fascism. He isn't interested in discussing the type of slogans and ideas that can organise and mobilise the big majority who are currently passive or unconvinced. His aim is to give the police more powers. The people he is trying to convince are members of the establishment. The state must act! — apparently the reason it hasn't so far is the lack of a Holocaust Denial Act.

It's not that socialists have some principled objection to state action. We demand — for example — that the NHS is rebuilt, health and safety regulations are enforced, a minimum wage is imposed on employers.

But even in the best of circumstances the state is hardly a reliable ally. Have the inspectors ended dangerous conditions on Britain's building sites? Of course not. Nor will they.

Faith in the impartiality of the state, or belief in its ability to sort out our problems without our involvement — these are ideas which we do object to.

And we also object to state action which is counterproductive. The issues of banning the British National Party (or its election broadcasts) and Holocaust Denial have already been commented on in *Workers' Liberty*. However there is one connected issue which has not been mentioned: the issue of War Crimes Trials, where various old people are to stand (or have stood) trial for their (alleged) participation in the Holocaust.

The obvious case against such trials is: how, over 50 years after the events took place in which these people allegedly took part, can the accused get a fair trial? How, for example, can witnesses be reliable after that length of time? After all, there is good reason for British law placing a time limit on prosecutions. Now the law is to be bent for these old, alleged, murderers. An exception is to be made for these old people.

The only possible reply is: we do not care whether these people have a fair trial or not; they are bastards; we want them jailed. Fair trials are only for our preferred type of criminal.

It's here that the parallel with banning the BNP or denial of the Holocaust becomes apparent. And the problems: more state action; a focus on the state; more scope for a pro-democracy backlash against anti-fascists.

Moreover, at least banning the BNP is an attempt to deal with a real, current threat. Assume these old people are actually guilty of the crimes they are charged with. Will jailing them stop anti-semitism, or limit anti-semitism in any way? Will it stop the resurgence of an anti-semitic movement?

Perhaps such trials act as a statement to society: anti-semitism will not be tolerated; officialdom and the establishment take the Holocaust seriously and want to make a state-

ment against it. If so it is an act of whitewashing. The British ruling class do not give a damn about the Jews.

This is the same class which tried to come to terms with the German Nazi regime during the last half of the '30s, only fighting when it had its back against the wall; which fought for Egypt, India and the Empire, not the Jews; which closed Britain to Jews fleeing the Holocaust; which closed Palestine too; which left boat-loads of Jewish refugees stranded (some drowned, some returned to Europe and were murdered in the Nazi camps); which refused to bomb the rail lines to the death camps; which covered up the emerging truth about the Holocaust during the war; which refused to purge the German state of fascists after the war.

The British state? A pity it's 50 or 60 years too late.

The final piece of hypocrisy is this: assume these old people are guilty. Then, presumably, some officials, some part of the British state, some agency or set of agencies, has known of their existence for decades and decades...

More generally there is an issue about all such trials. I can see the point of laws against burglary or murder. Generally I can see the point of jailing some gangster who has killed a clerk during a bank robbery.

But war crimes trials are a bit different.

What happens here is that the dominant force, the victor, allows itself the right of reinforcing its version of history, its impeccable moral credentials — in this case the credentials of the British ruling class who claim they fought a war for democracy, an anti-fascist crusade, during World War Two.

The people who tried to bomb Iraq into the Stone Age and who are now starving its people (not Saddam, who remains well-fed) take it upon themselves to prosecute some young Serb at the Hague (while the British Ambassador in Belgrade continues to give political support to Milosevic — the organiser of genocide — against charges of ballot rigging).

Proving what, exactly? Britain's impeccable democratic credentials?

Dan Katz

Police measures don't solve political problems

MIKE Gapes' proposal to outlaw Holocaust deniers and revisionists (WL39) is doomed to have the opposite effect of the one he intends.

Like all attempts to solve a political problem with police measures it can only make heroes and martyrs out of its targets. What such legislation in effect says is: we have no answer to the claims of the deniers and revisionists; we cannot counter their arguments; all we can do is shut them up.

There are difficult cases where the line between protected speech and illegal acts becomes thin. When the American Civil Liberties Union defends the rights of the Nazis or the Klan to march and rally, as it has in several well-publicised instances, one of the issues involved is the

"clear and present danger" to the rights of others.

A march or rally, after all, is, like a picket line, an implicit call to action. But we are talking here about books and articles on an historical topic which do not usually even propose any course of action.

To ban such books, and that is what is being proposed, not only sets dangerous precedents which can be used against all sorts of dissent, it also scores political points for the people whose political views are banned.

Fascism is a threat today for the same reason it was a threat in the '30s. Large numbers of people have lost confidence in the traditional political parties and the labour movement is disoriented and in retreat. People are looking for a party or movement that will reflect their anger not try to defuse it. In such circumstances small numbers of disturbed individuals who in more peaceful times would spend their miserable lives ranting on street corners can achieve a mass following very quickly.

To respond to this political threat by appealing to the traditional authorities can only lend credence to the charge that the left and its parties are themselves part of "the system".

That is the trap the German Social Democracy fell into in the '20s. They too tried to suppress the Nazis while propping up the economic, social and political order whose corruption and brutality provided the Nazis with their supporters. We know how that experiment ended.

Ernie Haberkern

Drugs debate

Science, not myths!

IHAD hoped in contributing an article on the question of drugs (WL38) that I would be taking part in a serious debate based on a materialist conception of society. Apparently I was wrong. Sue Hamilton (WL39) fails to contradict even one of the pieces of evidence I presented, or to present new evidence of her own. Instead I am denounced as a "soggy liberal" and "hard-right libertarian Tory".

John Bryn-Jones (WL39) also slips into dubious arguments. A trend towards increasing use of bans and state coercion is hardly a case for such coercion — especially since it is a result of acceptance of a reactionary Tory agenda on "crime". There is little comparability between car safety laws and anti-drug laws — the former only restrict use, where the latter actually bans the commodity.

There is no evidence that legalising drugs would make life easier for "drug barons". Legalisation would eliminate the "baron" completely, turning drugs into the concern of "legitimate" businesspeople. Drug sellers would be forced to cope with whatever restrictions the state imposed — licensing laws, restrictive taxation, limits on where drugs could be sold, and so on. From what I can tell, most drug

barons are quite happy in their fortified mansions in Columbia — far happier than the legal tobacco capitalists facing lawsuits over cancer deaths.

Legalising drugs would not “promote” the drug barons into the “body politic” of society — the fact is, they are already there. Chambliss’s study has demonstrated that, in fact, organised criminals are not some aloof group but intrinsically connected to and often the same individuals as the legal ruling class.

The argument about legitimating “dirty money” does not stand up. Under capitalism, all money is dirty money, gained by exploiting workers. Ultimately, we call for the abolition of this system. In the meantime, we need to fight to alleviate its effects and prepare the workers for power.

Both Sue and John mistake my reasons for supporting legalisation. I do not believe bans are wrong because they restrict free trade. This would be reactionary and pro-capitalist. Nor do I oppose bans because of faith in the ability of individuals exercising rational choice to avoid harm, or because I defend their right to free choice regardless. This is utopian-liberal nonsense. Free choice and rational choice in capitalist society are bourgeois myths. People do not, on the whole, act rationally or protect themselves from harm. The millions of working class Tory voters demonstrate this.

A case could be put that people have an absolute right to experiment with drugs (J S Mill argued something like this), but it would be based on an abstract, metaphysical approach to reality, not a dialectical materialist conception. My own approach is based on evidence, not philosophical nonsense.

Nor do I misunderstand the harmful nature of most drugs.

However, I do not think harmfulness is in itself a case for banning drugs. We have to ask: does a ban achieve the desired effect? Does it prevent people harming themselves through drug use? Does it stop drug-related crime? The answer is no, it does not. I rely here on evidence.

Prohibition did not end alcohol use in America — it increased it. Legalisation and “tolerance” in Holland has not increased hard-drug abuse — it has cut the number of young people using heroin.

A more serious strategy to cut the health costs of drugs would be, first, increased education about the effects of drug use, and, second, improving health care for users, including treatment for side effects and easily available help to end addiction.

Effective discouragement of drug use and minimisation of harm are incompatible with a coercive approach which prevents rational discussion of drug effects and deters users from seeking help, and the state from providing it.

In addition to being ineffective, bans drive users into the criminal community. They strengthen the state machine which is used to victimise young people, and ethnic and working-class communities.

Banning means subjecting users to the force of the bourgeois state if they are caught with drugs. The state will either fine them (hence making them even poorer and more likely to turn to crime to fund their habit), or imprison them. The latter is counterproductive — users have plenty of access to drugs in prison. Even drug-free prisons would not solve the problem — most psychologists now agreed that “cold turkey” is not an effective way of curing drug addiction.

I support legalisation because all the evidence suggests it reduces the harmful effects

of drug abuse. It will not end drug-related crime. I never said this. But by removing the intrinsic link between drug use and the criminal community it will reduce it.

I suspect Sue is overestimating the significance of drugs as a motivating factor on criminal behaviour. People steal to fund a whole variety of needs and desires. A recent police report suggested only a tiny proportion of thefts were drug-related. People stealing to fund drug habits, like most stealing, is a consequence of poverty — low wages, low benefits, and so on. If users had a decent amount of money to start with, they would not steal to fund their habit.

Drug use does not in itself lead to association with criminal subculture. This is a result of the illegalisation of drugs. Use of legal drugs such as alcohol and tobacco does not lead to involvement with the criminal community.

The idea that banning something and imposing punishments deters its use is widespread but unfounded. The deterrence effect is not demonstrated by any evidence so far as I know, and is contradicted by a good deal of evidence on comparative levels of crime between societies. In the case of drugs, illegality may actually encourage use by rebellious youth.

Sue accuses me of supporting Tory policies. Has Howard been telling us how he’s going to legalise drugs? No, his response is similar to Sue’s — these drug-running criminals are despicable, let’s take “tough” action against them.

More importantly, Sue accepts the implicit Tory agenda that the way to deal with social problems is repression and coercion.

If we adopt support for vigilante “justice”, where will it lead? If people attack drug dealers, who else should be treated in this way? How are drug dealers different from other “criminals”?

What is to stop the innocent being targeted? What is to stop vigilantes extending their persecution from drug dealers and criminals to black people, lesbians, gays, the “mentally ill” — maybe even “subversive” Trotskyists? In the Irish case the vigilante campaigns have quickly degenerated — many addicts have been burnt out of their homes, and at least one has been murdered. Surely socialists can’t condone this kind of barbarism?

Drug use may divide the working class, but vigilante action divides it more. Vigilante “community” groups (and the IRA “community” movements are a classic example) are not an expression of proletarian self-emancipation. They rely on communal, not class, identity, and tend to fall under bourgeois or petty-bourgeois leadership. They turn one section of the working class on another, which in turn hits back, instead of uniting the working class against its common enemy, the ruling class.

Community action only becomes progressive when led by the organised working class, fighting for proletarian demands.

Gramsci did not take Sue’s sectarian position with regard to liberal demands. He called for proletarian action in favour of “popular-democratic” struggles in order to prevent a “passive revolution” and the subordination of the working class within ruling-class hegemonic ideology.

I believe legalisation is one example of a “popular-democratic” struggle, vital to breaking the hegemony of ruling-class views on crime.

Socialists who ignore the real evidence, drawn from a wealth of social-scientific research, and instead rely on a gut reaction in favour of bans and persecution, solely because of the indisputable fact that drugs are harmful

and the illogical concomitant that they should therefore be illegal, are very foolish and ultimately play into the hands of capital.

Andy Robinson

Larkin’s Catholicism

IN “The apostle of labour solidarity: Jim Larkin and his message for workers today” (WL39) you wrote that Jim Larkin was “a man of contradictions. He was both a practising Catholic and a member of the executive of the Communist International”

It was no contradiction for James Connolly. In his “Labour, nationality and religion” he vigorously asserted:

“... that a man cannot worship God unless he concedes the right of a capitalist to three fourths or more of the fruits of his labour? Or that a people cannot love their country if they own it as their common property? Or that a nation would commit suicide if it refused to allow a small class to monopolise all its natural resources and means of life? Or that the nation which refused to allow a class to use the governmental machinery for personal aggrandisement, to stir up wars and slaughter thousands of men ‘made in the image of God’ for the sake of more profits for a few, that the nation which should refuse to allow this would be ‘powerless in the moral order’, and hastening on to decay?”

This work was in response to a series of Lenten discourses by one Father Kane SJ, in Dublin, in 1910.

Kane argued clumsily that Communism and Catholicism are mutually incompatible doctrines. Indeed, that Catholics should be automatically hostile to socialism per se.

Connolly was surely right in arguing the opposite. He concluded his article on this rousing note: “The day has passed for patching up the capitalist system; it must go. And in the work of abolishing it the Catholic and the Protestant, the Catholic and the Jew, the Catholic and the Freethinker, the Catholic and the Buddhist, the Catholic and the Mahometan will co-operate together, knowing no rivalry but the rivalry of endeavour towards an end beneficial to all. For, as we have said elsewhere, Socialism is neither Protestant nor Catholic, Christian nor Freethinker, Buddhist, Mahometan, nor Jew; it is only HUMAN. *We of the Socialist working class realise that as we suffer together we must work together that we may enjoy together.* We reject the firebrand of capitalist warfare and offer you the olive branch of brotherhood and justice for all.”

I don’t see how anyone can disagree. If being a socialist and a Catholic was no contradiction for James Connolly, why should it be read as a ‘problem’ in relation to Jim Larkin? Or anyone else in the revolutionary tradition, either then or since?

Alex Simpson

Note: our featured debate on the US Labour Party will continue in the June issue of Workers’ Liberty.



Books:

Socialism or nationalism?

JAMES D Young's book* reminds me of a heated argument I had with a Jewish friend during the Israel-Arab Six Day War in 1967.

As a child she had been in Jewish Jerusalem during the Arab siege of 1948, and had spent some of her formative years in Israel. She had a strong identification with the country. Normally a doctrinaire Marxist, much given to system-building and intellectualising, she found herself in this case unable to go along, though she shared our premises, with the anti-imperialist schematism of those who deduced Israeli defeatism from Israel's connections with the USA. She insisted that socialists should not desire Israel's defeat. I am sure, now, that she was right. My own schematism may have blinded me to the force of her arguments at the time.

She was an honest and candid person. Arguments and reasons aside, she knew very well that *feeling* was predominant in shaping her attitude. She did not deny it.

Angry, and perhaps feeling beleaguered — most of her usual political associates were Israeli defeatists — she shouted at me: "It's alright for you! It's politically virtuous to have the feelings of an Irish nationalist, but a crime against international socialism to identify with Israel. Some nationalisms are 'more equal' than others!"

What she said was — though I was no nationalist — plainly true. I saw that as soon as she said it. Some nationalisms were acceptable and respectable on the left. If I displayed national feeling, it was most likely to be construed as — and could, certainly, be easily passed off as — militant "anti-imperialism". I knew — so did she — some Irish socialists who polluted the London left with displays of self-righteous, stage-Irish chauvinism, which their British comrades tolerated as good, respectable, "anti-imperialist" feeling.

James D Young, a Marxist for 40 years, is a socialist who insists on his right to be also a Scottish nationalist. He would deny the *possibility* of a contradiction between his nationalism and his socialism. But others would. I would.

Marxists champion national freedom for those who claim and

are denied national rights, but Marxists are never nationalists.

Young would not — as *Workers' Liberty* does — just go along with the Scots hankering for self-determination: "If they want it, let them have it". He is and has long been a positive *advocate* of it. It is a good and desirable thing in itself. He holds, it seems to me — and writes books like this to help develop — a nationalism of pure sentiment.

There is nothing of a struggle against national oppression in a Marxist *advocating* Scottish separation from England and Wales, because Scotland is not, and has not been, an oppressed nation in modern history.

You would have to do a great deal of violence to history — or identify the 18th and 19th century Gaelic highlands with mainstream Scotland, which is the same thing — to classify Scotland as an oppressed nation which needs separation to achieve liberation. Scotland has, on the contrary, been the partner with England in everything — including the crimes — the British empire has done in the last 300 years.

Young lacks even the occasion that brought my Jewish friend's latent feelings to the surface — a justified feeling of mortal threat. Even so — and this is the question that dredged up the memory of that old argument — what is wrong with James D Young having and expressing positive feelings for his own Scottish people?

There is nothing wrong with *the feeling*. I would suspect someone who denies special feeling of affinity with his own people, whoever they are, of lying or posturing. I know I would have found it impossible to make the jump from nationalism to internationalism if I had not believed that socialist internationalism subsumes what was positive in democratic, Irish nationalism, and takes the democratic rights of nations as part of its groundwork.

It is not positive feelings about your own sub-species of humankind that is wrong, and contrary to internationalism, *but the translation of this into politics*, into nationalism.

In socialist politics, *no* nationalism is good. As Lenin rightly put it: the socialists of an oppressed nation must fight nationalism and chauvinism *in their own people* even when participating with them in a struggle for national liberation. The socialists of a nation with Scotland's modern history surely have

an extra duty to fight Scottish nationalism, even if they bow to what is now plainly the majority Scottish sentiment for home rule.

Before the Socialist International collapsed on the outbreak of the First World War, some thought that socialist internationalism was just the sum total of all the nationalisms, each of which recognised the rights of the others. When they found themselves in a world war, most of them chose to be nationalists. Those who remained revolutionary socialists — Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky, and the others — could do so because they had learned to look at the national issues from an international viewpoint, not the other way round.

Despite what James D Young would like, there is politically an unbridgeable gap between nationalism and socialist internationalism — all nationalism, even the nationalism of nations oppressed as Scotland has not been since the Middle Ages.

That does not necessarily mean that his studies such as those here — on Keir Hardie, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, A S Neill, and less well-known Scottish 18th and 19th century figures — stimulated, as most of them are, by national feeling, do not shed valuable light on his subjects. It does mean that his entire framework is wrong from a consistently socialist point of view.

Patrick Avakum

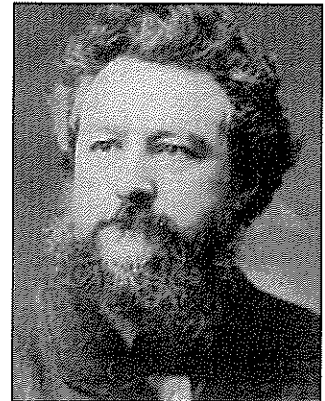
* *The Very Bastards of Creation: Scottish International Radicalism 1707-1995.*

A biographical study by James D Young. Published by Clydeside Press. Copies can be purchased from the author, price including post and packaging £9.95, at 8 Tarbet Place, Polmont, Falkirk, Stirlingshire, Scotland.

Morris, reddest of the red

WILLIAM Morris is no longer "the unknown socialist" he was for decades. Today lots of people know that this immensely popular figure was a socialist. Yet Morris is, even now, still very much the "unknown *revolutionary* socialist".

Most of those who go to see exhibitions of his designs in Japan, Australia, Germany or the USA probably have no idea that Morris was amongst the reddest of the red, that he was a full-blooded Marxist



socialist, dedicated to freeing the working class from wage-slavery, and humankind from philistinism, waste and the peculiarly frenetic boredom of a market-ruled, bourgeois world.

Morris's socialist journalism in *Justice* and in *Commonweal*, the paper he edited for over five years, was omitted from his daughter's edition of his collected works, on the grounds that such stuff would not do his reputation much good! Nick Solomon's work in collecting and publishing this journalism is a splendid enterprise, long overdue. He has already published a big collection, *Political Writings: Contributions to Justice and Commonweal, 1883-90*.

In this volume, he brings together the comments and reflections Morris published in *Commonweal* between 1885 and 1890, when he was ousted from the editorship of *Commonweal* by anarchists.

Week after week, Morris flayed the capitalists and their system for senselessness, cruelty, slavedriving, venality and the paucity of their civilisation. Each week, from a dozen angles, he championed the socialist civilisation he knew workers are capable of creating. It is great stuff.

You get a feel here, that can not be got from the more formal essays, of Morris the socialist activist, reacting with heart, nerves and brain to the day-to-day workings of a system he found not less but more intolerable as he grew older.

This is a precious resource for socialists striving to rebuild the movement. The lack of an index makes it difficult to find your way around the book, but it repays the effort.

Annie O'Keeffe

Journalism: Contributions to Commonweal, 1885-90, edited and introduced by Nicholas Solomon. Published by Thoemmes.