

Boycott "apartheid Israel"?

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A Workers' Liberty Pamphlet

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Introduction

This article, first published in *Workers' Liberty* 3/15: *How can we best help the Palestinians*, charts the Stalinist history of the Israeli boycott movement and the anti-Semitic roots of the ideas behind it.

The University and College Union's 2008 congress passed a motion calling for members to "consider" and "discuss" links with Israeli institutions - that is, "consider" a boycott of Israeli universities.

Workers' Liberty is opposed to a boycott of Israel but thinks that the issues should be debated in open and to the full. We hope this pamphlet will contribute to the debate. We encourage UCU branches to arrange a thorough discussion of the boycott and ask that you invite one of our UCU members along.

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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

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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 labourite reformist socialism."

The parallels between Zionism and the founders of the future apartheid regime continued in the years following the First

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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

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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

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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."

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

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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 decision 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

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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).

The motion 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

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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.

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The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) – the largest organization 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 organization 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 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

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encourage the tactic of a boycott, and counterpoise 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 organization 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)

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 organizations 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

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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 organizations are split over the question of a boycott, so too are leftist Jewish organizations 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 organization 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

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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 organization, takes the opposite position, dismissing the call for a boycott as “ridiculous and divisive, ... destructive and ignorant” (25) and advocating support for the

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“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

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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 “generalized” 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

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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.

Thus, for example, the BIG campaign declares: “Israel operates

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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 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 colonization 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)

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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)

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When 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

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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

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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 goals (50)), 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 Averbury put it in 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

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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)

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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 (emphasis added) 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 to delete from the motion specifically those words was defeated (64).) 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 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-

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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

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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” (72)).

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 Hizbullah, 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 “hi-jack 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 (73)), 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” (74)), and the “cancerous Zionist entity (which) has got its tentacles hooked into numerous markets and economies - sucking each one to nourish itself” (Innovative Minds (75)).

Then, having created a political universe of its own, it hermetically seals itself from the charge of anti-semitism by

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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" (76), 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 definition 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

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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, is currently targeted at a forthcoming England-Israel football game. The campaign's leaflet for the event refers 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

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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.

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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 Sainsbury, ("stocks the give-away Zionist paper 'Jewish News'") and Tesco, ("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

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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 specialize in recreational drugs have mushroomed in the Israeli secret service”), Estee Lauder (“the chairman of Estee 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 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 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-

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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

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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'

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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 celebre' of the 'successful' boycott of the South African academy, it is well known that it mainly damaged the progressive forces within South Africa and probably hindered its democratization 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

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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

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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.

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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.

Stan Crooke, August 2007.

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,

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“We Are All Hizbullah – Boycott Israel”, on the July 2006 demonstration in London against Israel’s invasion of the Lebanon, see:

http://moonbatmedia.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?docid=1072>

11) Full wording of motion (number 53) is at:

<http://www.unison.org.uk/file/M%2053%20Palestine.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) <http://www.workersliberty.org/taxonomy/term/597>

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- 21) "Tribune", 24th June 2005.
- 22) "Jewish Chronicle", 22nd June 2007.
- 23) <http://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 http://www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/resolutions_2005.htm
- 27) *ibid.*
- 28) *ibid.*
- 29) Motion on Anti-semitism, at http://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) http://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 footnote (4) above.
- 36) http://www.pacbi.org/campaign_statement.htm

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- 37) <http://www.ihrc.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) http://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:
<http://www.engageonline.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:
http://www.palestinecampaign.org/psc_news.asp?d=y&id=166

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- 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=527> 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.

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- 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: <http://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.

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89) The full NUJ statement is at:

<http://www.nuj.org.uk/inner.php?docid=1790>

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

91) "Jerusalem Post", 21st June 2007.