School worker activists in the National Education Union (NEU) are busily preparing for the consultative ballot about boycotting high stakes summative testing in primary schools.

The ballot was decided at the union’s conference in April. The NEU says: “There can be no lasting solution to problems of children’s well-being, teacher workload, curriculum narrowness and teaching to the test unless our assessment system changes.

“NEU members have asserted their conviction that assessment must be supportive of learners and must be a matter of teachers’ professional judgment. The days of universal standardised testing, designed more to make judgments about school performance than about pupil learning, are numbered”.

The ballot opens on 4 June and will run until at least 12 July. The union is organising district meetings, representatives’ meetings, and school group meetings, and speaking to members. All reports so far suggest the response of members is positive.

Generally, the union leadership do seem to be preparing to make a serious effort to win the ballot, despite having opposed it at conference. However, some around the leadership seem keen to amplify and embellish the honest concerns of the membership about the ballot: finding problems rather than solving them. Rather than worrying about the exact implementation of the boycott, we should point out that school groups and members emboldened by a big “yes” vote and a vigorous campaign, will understand how to implement it.

Activists in the other school unions, in particular GMB and Unison, should be demanding that they join the boycott. If this is not successful then we must ensure their members do not carry out the work we are boycotting.

The motion passed at conference doesn’t demand a boycott of preparation for tests.

By Duncan Morrison, Assistant District Secretary, Lewisham NEU (personal capacity)

Schools: Learning not Labelling

More on page 5
Alarm bell for Labour

By Rhodri Evans

The local elections on 2 May gave an alarm bell to Labour.

The Tories lost 1303 seats. They had expected to lose a lot. Those seats were last contested in 2015, on the same day that the Tories won the general election. They had not expected to lose so many.

Since the reference point was 2015, Labour had expected to gain. In fact Labour lost 84 council seats. The Lib Dems had expected to gain. 2015 was a low point for them, when they were discredited by their 2010-5 coalition with the Tories. They gained more than they expected (704 seats).

The Greens were up 194 seats. Almost as big a gainer as the Lib Dems were ‘Independents’, up 665 seats. The label covers a wide range. Most usually, perhaps, ‘independents’ are Tory-minded people wanting to dissociate from the official Tories. There were also many ex-Labour ‘independents’.

The latest poll for the European election on 23 May shows Nigel Farage’s new Brexit Party scooping up Tory-minded and UKip-minded protest votes and getting a large lead over Labour, and the Lib Dems doing better at the expense of Chuka Umunna’s Change UK.

There are a lot of different notes in the alarm bell for Labour, and it is difficult to sort them out. At least the following points, though, are indicated:

- Labour’s equivocal efforts to ‘bail out’ the Tories over Brexit (as shadow minister Barry Gardiner put it) are losing left-minded voters, who go to the Greens or Lib Dems (or don’t vote). At the same time, they are not retaining Leave-minded voters, who, even if they might be won over by a clear argument on Europe, resent what they see as stalling and manipulation on Brexit. And they are not winning over waverters.
- Labour’s party political broadcast before the 2 May poll was slickly made, but said nothing at all about what Labour councils would do. In fact Labour councils will continue making cuts as decreed by Tory central government, modifying them at best by gentler administration. Labour voters don’t like that (and are right not to).
- From all we can gather, Labour’s campaign was generally weak. There has been a big increase in Labour membership since 2015, but less of an increase in on-the-streets Labour activism. Of late activism has been declining.
- Thus Labour is not rebuilding its base. For decades now, there has been a trend for party loyalties to decay as, simultaneously, parties’ face-to-face’ operations in communities (and, for Labour, in workplaces, through unionists’ activity) have declined, and politics has become a more atomised affair, mediated through TV, social media, etc.

The increase in Labour membership since 2015 offered a chance to rebuild that base. On the whole it hasn’t happened. In particular, Labour’s youth movement has scarcely rebuilt at all.

Even of those who have actually joined the Labour Party, an academic survey has found 41% who had had no face-to-face (rather than electronic) contact with other Labour Party members (although that survey was done straight after the 2017 general election, which must have mobilised some previously inactive people).

- and union membership and organisation has not been boosted by the ‘Corbyn surge’.
- Socialist politics cannot be built by self-congratulation within a social-media bubble, but only by getting out into the work-places and onto the streets.

Guaidó’s big push fails

By Eduardo Tovar

Nearly four months into the Venezuelan Presidential crisis, it has come the closest so far to a literal coup dynamic.

On the morning of Tuesday 30 April, Juan Guaidó, the self-declared interim President of Venezuela, appeared in a video near a Caracas air base with opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez, who had previously been kept under house arrest. Accompanied by men in military uniforms, Guaidó announced the “final phase of Operation Liberty”, calling on troops and civilians to make a last push to topple the Maduro regime. The vast majority of the Venezuelan top brass remained loyal to Maduro.

Protests erupted in the streets. This time, several national guard units joined the pro-opposition demonstrators, clashing with security forces still loyal to Maduro. That was the first time in the Presidential crisis that military personnel have directly combated each other. Reportedly, one Venezuelan colonel was shot during the confrontation.

In fact, the military element didn’t expand, and the bulk of Guaidó’s operation was civilian protests.

Despite this being the most direct and dramatic challenge to his rule so far, Maduro very much retained the upper hand. Although Guaidó was clearly banking on splitting the Venezuelan armed forces, only a handful of national guard platoons defected to his side. The vast majority of the Venezuelan top brass remained loyal to Maduro.

At least 52 people were injured in Caracas during the protests. Footage that appeared to show armoured vehicles attempting to run down anti-Maduro demonstrators on the highway quickly spread across social media. Venezuelan Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino López condemned Guaidó’s move as a terrorist act that was certain to fail.

President Trump has threatened Cuba, a consistent ally of Maduro’s regime, with an embargo and new sanctions. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has reiterated that military action in Venezuela is ‘possible’.

It is far from clear whether such sabre-rattling will actually become an armed intervention, but it is certainly possible that the White House is considering more drastic moves to topple Maduro after the events of this week.

We commend Guaidó’s attempt to seize control of Venezuela via an armed revolt, his alliances with right-wing demagogues like Trump and Bolsonaro, and the neoliberal and pro-imperialist government his party would almost certainly form if he were to take power.

As always, none of this should be taken as political support for Maduro himself.

Nevertheless, Maduro’sousting at the hands of a rival military faction within the Bonapartist state apparatus or, worse yet, a foreign invasion force, would only deepen an already dire situation for Venezuelan working class.

Nothing to report?

By Keith Road

Since September the CLP (Constituency Labour Party) representatives on Labour’s National Executive Committee (NEC) have all been broadly on the left, 8 of them supported by Momentum and all 9 by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy.

After the September NEC, when they first took their places, they produced a single report of the meeting. They promised they would do that regularly going forward. In principle a joint report reflecting shared views would be a useful complement to individual reports from each member.

But in fact only Pete Willisman and Darren Williams (longer-term NEC CLP reps who already produced reports) have continued (at least mid September).

None of the other reps, all of whom stood on a platform of accountability and giving power to the membership have done so.

Both the joint reports, from September and November, give very little detail. Either the NEC members do not wish to report on matters in any detail, or they found great limits to what they could agree on to report. No ordinary observer can tell.

For a transformative vision of the Labour Party to be realised, members need democracy and that means being informed. The only other NEC member to produce regular reports is Alice Perry, one of two local government representatives.

January and March have been and gone and no joint report has been published. Does this reflect the general tension among the CLP reps. Or is it a conscious decision to stop reporting?

No minutes are circulated of the NEC meetings. The NEC meetings are where no issue of confidentiality could arise.

Momentum chair Jon Lansman has said he is against the NEC having publicly available minutes.

So members must for now rely on reports that have been promised but not produced...
Unionists say "stop Adani"

By Mike Zubrowski

Union leaders in Australia have disentangled from the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU) union’s wider leadership over the construction of a coal mine.

Bob Carnegie is secretary of Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) Queensland, and member of Workers’ Liberty Australia. On 30 April he publicly called on Bob Shorten, the leader of the Australian Labor Party (the main opposition party) to oppose the construction of the Adani coal mine in Queensland due to its environmental impact. MUA in 2018 merged into the CFMMEU to form the CFMMEU, and remains a section within it.

Peter Ong, Queensland secretary of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), has likewise stated opposition to Adani.

In Clermont, Queensland, protestors supporting and opposing the coal mine have clashed, with some supporters waving CFMMEU flags.

Bob Shorten has come under pressure from CFMMEU Queensland’s mining division to “support coal mining jobs”, with Adani, although from other states the union has opposed it. So far, Shorten has equivocated. Carnegie and Ong advocated a just transition to renewables, referring historical struggles such as the “Green Bans” by builders’ unions in the 70s, and the Franklin Dam protests.

They recognise, too, that sometimes wider considerations and the longer good must prevail over immediate job calculations.

Climate
By Mike Zubrowski

Extinction Rebellion, after eleven days of ambitious, disruptive, relatively widespread, and extensively covered actions in their “International Rebellion” (15-25 April), have moved into a “regenerative, resting phase.”

They have been celebrating wins so far: media coverage, politicians seeming receptive, changes in public narratives towards recognising the gravity of the situation; reportedly huge expansions of local XR branches. Socialist environmentalists should continue to get involved, and to push it towards the radical conclusions that its environmental commitments point towards.

They are at pains to draw distinctions between XR and the individual XR members, including their leading strategist, running as candidates in the European Parliament elections as “The Climate and Ecological Emergency Independents”.

A recent Greenpeace-commissioned poll of the UK public, carried out while the “International Rebellion” was happening, found that 63% believe there is a “Climate Emergency”, and 76% say they would “vote differently to protect the planet and climate.” To what extent this is down to XR is not clear.

The 2018 British Social Attitudes survey showed that almost everyone believed in the existence of climate change; that most people were worried by it, think about it a lot, and think that its consequences will be pretty bad. That said, disturbingly, only 36% believed that it was caused entirely or mainly by human activity, while 53% believed it was simply due to weather patterns.

What some may see as the most substantive victory is Parliament agreeing to XR’s first demand, declaring a “climate and environmental emergency”. A motion, tabled by Labour, passed without a vote, as Theresa May did not turn up and reportedly encouraged MPs to go campaigning ahead of the local elections the following day instead of opposing it.

With its passing, the motion (bit.ly/2VcksvP) now means that the House of Commons “calls on the Government to increase the ambition of the UK’s climate change targets under the Climate Change Act 2008 to achieve net zero emissions before 2050, to increase support for and set ambitious, short-term targets for the roll-out of renewable and low carbon energy and transport, and to move swiftly to capture economic opportunities and green jobs in the low carbon economy while managing risks for workers and communities currently reliant on carbon intensive sectors; and further calls on the Government to lay before the House within the next six months urgent proposals to restore the UK’s natural environment and to deliver a circular, zero waste economy.”

Labour’s leadership refused to move the proposed date to 2030, although McDonnell had previously agreed to consider this.

Michael Gove, Conservative Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, stressed the importance of tackling climate change, using left-sounding rhetoric about global justice, and tried to claim a history of environmentalism for his party and political tradition. “The first British politician — in fact, the first world politician — to make it clear that climate change was an emergency was Margaret Thatcher. She was a Conservative and a Christian who believed in the principle of stewardship, but above all she was a scientist who followed the evidence.”

He made further fantastical claims, as the environmental advances of governments since 2010, later even concurring with the Conservative Sir Edward Leigh “that the best way to reduce emissions is to have a vigorous, free-enterprise, low-tax, deregulated economy”, contrasting this to Stalinean command economies.

Stalinean states have an awful environmental record, worse even than most capitalist states. Capitalism’s record is nonetheless indefensible in its own right. Class societies driven by the - usually short-term - interests of their ruling classes, cannot be relied on to tackle climate change. Leigh’s “best solution” stands for little short of putting our borders.

The fact that such anti-environmental policies can be advocated under the banner of supporting this motion highlights its lack of substance. This isn’t fundamentally altered by XR describing Gove’s ramblings as “complex” and “pithy poor” in a members’ newsletter.

Later, without a trace of irony, Corbyn added “It’s too late for tokenistic policies or gimmicks. We have to do more than just ban plastic straws. Individual action is not enough. ... Today we have the opportunity to say, ‘We hear you’.”

Corrections

Through a technical glitch, a chunk of the page 2 article “304 is obfuscated” in Solidarity 304 was obscured by another article. The whole article can be read at bit.ly/504-2

Third runway challenge fails

By Mike Zubrowski

A high court challenge to Heathrow’s third runway has failed. The challenge was brought by five London boroughs, Sadig Khan, local residents, and environmental campaigning groups.

The third runway would see a huge expansion to the number of flights from the UK and nationwide.

Aviation is one of the most polluting sectors in the UK, and until serious technological advances are made, we need to scale it back. Had the case succeeded, it is likely the government would have brought a modified National Policy Statement back to the house of commons, pushing ahead with the third runway anyway.

The runway can still be stopped: it is currently due to be built starting 2021. The first step is to win the Labour Party and labour movement to serious environmentalists, and to hold MPs accountable to these politics. Shamefully, Labour MPs were granted a free vote in the previous Commons motion to construct the third runway, and the proposal passed with a huge majority of 296. That was in part because major unions such as Unite supported it.

While Unite and the Labour leadership on paper oppose climate change, in practice they have opted for conservative policies of accepting proposals which offer prospects of immediate jobs, rather than fighting for the proposals and the jobs that we need.

We must have these arguments within our unions and within Labour.
A bizarre episode occurred on 1 May in Cork, Ireland. Taoiseach [prime minister] Leo Varadkar was due to speak at a 1930s reenactment organised by the ruling Fine Gael party as part of its campaign for directly elected mayors.

The meeting had been adjourned for a period when members of the Connolly Youth Movement (CYM) – the youth wing of the Communist Party of Ireland – disputed proceedings.

Initially, the CYM’s intervention seemed fair enough. A woman stood up and called for Varadkar’s silent condensation of two homeless men who had recently died on Cork streets. That was agreed by the chair.

Some other CYM members denounced Fine Gael and the other main Irish parties for support of what the protesters called “European militarism”.

They described Varadkar’s government as a “ruthless blue-shirt regime”, a reference to the organisation that in the 1930s provided protection to political parties that became Fine Gael. Blue-shirt leader Eoin O’Duffy attended the 1934 Montreux Fascist conference in Switzerland. He then founded the National Corporate Party, and later raised an Irish Brigade that took Franco’s side in the Spanish Civil War.

What exactly “European militarism” has to do with the austerity policies that led to the deaths of homeless men in Cork, was not explained. Nor was the idea that Varadkar’s mainstream centre-right government can seriously be described as “blueshirt” (i.e. fascist).

The incident was reported (with evident approval) in the Morning Star under the headline “Communists blast Varadkar’s blue-shirt regime at stormy Cork meeting.”

The explanation for this strange incident can only be the Communist Party of Ireland’s obsessive opposition to the EU. The CPI has accused the Irish government of “siding with the EU against Britain, which also happens to be our largest trading partner, and against the decision made by its citizens to leave the EU.”

The CPI also echoes the Tory ultra-right and DUP on Ireland. That appeared in the Morning Star on 19 April – the very day that the world learned of the death of Lyra McKee at the hands of the so-called New IRA – a group that boasts of having “capitalised on the opportunity” provided by Brexit.

The fact that the publication of that editorial coincided with such a tragedy just adds to the sadness and anger that those of us who care about peace and unity in Ireland, North and South, are presently feeling.

The Morning Star must be named and shamed over this at every opportunity.

Mike Zubrowski, Bristol

Hegel, Marx, Darwin

Paul Cooper (Solidarity 502, 503, 504) identifies both Aristotle and Hegel, and then also Marx, as asserting that “things change as their essence evolves”.

Paul takes that assertion to be self-evident, “a tautology.”

With Aristotle, “development is a property of real entities”; with Hegel, “of Logic, not actual material entities”. But Hegel has a concept of contradiction, missing in Aristotle. Hegel takes the concept of “contradiction” from Hegel and identifies it within “the real entity”.

For Hegel, however, the Absolute Idea was “the real entity”, and “finite” things like “newts and money” were comparatively unreal.

“The truth is the whole”, Hegel wrote. And thus he developed accounts highlighting interaction and contradiction within that whole.

But Hegel’s expositions, supposedly developed by logical analysis of “the Absolute”, are in fact constructed by collecting a mass of factual knowledge and then shoe-horning it into his general scheme.

How to show that? By presenting it as “the resolution of the Good Fri’s Agreement”

Paul has raised and for which I take issue Paul has raised and for which I have no space here.

Martin Thomas, London

Mind your language

Letters

Sean’s piece in this issue (pages 12-15) is extremely good. His verbal and stylistic licence, and lucidly takes the reader on the historical political journey of our tendency’s thinking, the thinking of Sean himself, but a journey mirrored by many comrades, on Israel, Palestine and antisemitism.

I’d like to pick up on not the content, but some of the language used. Comrades should remember that “anti-semitism” is a conceptual term, to contextualise it. Sean writes that “Secular democratic state” is “the Jewish state that makes it possible to be squarish, dimwits, or people made stupid by politics.” Later, he writes “It was the reduction of their politics to something hard to distinguish from political lunacy.

Comrades should not use terms such as “dimwit” and “lunacy” as attacks in political polemics. Doing so feeds reactionary narra-

Even when feeling intellectually superior to particular individuals or sets of individuals is justified, such snobishness is generally not convincing or attractive. It can cut against building positive democratic cultures of debate.

I imagine some readers would accuse me of nitpicking over this, of being this sympathy of “excessive Political Correctness”, or even try to bring some amateur psychoanalysis as to why I felt combined to write this note. I am striving for a better world, details, detail matter, and cannot be justified simply as stylistic licence, authors’ rights, or their widespread current and historical usage. Sean is a good and creative writer, and could do better.

I know other supporters of Workers’ Liberty feel similar, and I’d like to thank Janine for her insight on the issue.

Mike Zubrowski, Bristol

Email your letters to solidarity@workersliberty.org

Rebuilding Labour’s base

Letters

Let’s be honest. Even if Labour had a good line on Brexit, a better leadership, a PLP not out to sabotage, and all the rest, a majority Labour government will be hard to win.

Unless other fronts are opened in the class struggle to break the barriers.

To counter that, we need organic organise to the point of winning struggles in retail parks and distribution centres etc.

The campaigns need the union move-

Luke Hardy, Leeds

Hard borser: all the fault of the EU?

By Jim Denham

A bizarre episode occurred on 1 May in Cork, Ireland. Taoiseach [prime minister] Leo Varadkar was due to speak at a 1930s reenactment organised by the ruling Fine Gael party as part of its campaign for directly elected mayors.

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The campaigns need the union move-
Schools: Learning not labelling!

continued from page 1

When we have won a significant vote for boycott, school groups (and indeed leaderships) will decide whether preparation for tests that won’t happen is a sensible use of resources. When asked what will replace the test, we respond that school workers constantly assess what children can do and what they need to learn. That is how most assessment was done in Primary school (outside Year 2 and Year 6) up until very recently and still is in many schools. Every Year 2 and Year 6 practitioner I have ever met can tell you in detail what the children they work with can do and what they need to work on, they don’t need tests.

We need to focus on the liberatory opportunity to rid children and school workers of the hated tests, to begin the possibility of teaching what our children need and at a pace appropriate to them, to reclaim control of our work and to stop harming children.

The slogan the national union is pushing is “Too Much Testing!” I would add: “Learning not Labelling”.

- Duncan Morrison is Assistant District Secretary, Lewisham NEU writing in a personal capacity

Don’t bail out Tories on Europe!

From Labour for a Socialist Europe

Responding to Tory Brexit minister James Cleverly on the BBC, on 3 May, Labour’s Shadow International Trade Secretary Barry Gardiner said:

“You as a Brexit Minister should understand that we are in there [in the Labour-Tory talks on Brexit] trying to bail you guys out”.

( bit.ly/bg-bx )

Whether or not this is how the entire Labour leadership and negotiating team views the talks, it must certainly reflect a strong strand of opinion – and in any case it reflects the unfortunate political dynamic. Whatever the risks for the Tories, the risks for Labour if it agrees a deal are greater. It would amount precisely to bailing the Tories out.

These talks, to the degree they are “successful”, mean Labour accepting most of the Tories’ Brexit agenda, including for instance its Immigration Bill. The political logic of this is shown by Rebecca Long-Bailey referring to discussions in the negotiations about workers’ rights as “fantastic” (!).

Concerningly, John McDonnell tweeted “message from local elections – ‘Brexit – sort it’. Message received.” This ambiguous statement is being widely interpreted as leaning further towards making a deal.

The talks are effectively counterposed to Labour taking the fight to the Tories, as the local government election results show. Similarly they are now a risk to Labour’s campaign in the European elections.

Labour members should protest about Gardiner’s comments and, more importantly, demand the party withdraws from the talks. Activists are circulating a statement calling for that (below).

Sixteen pages

This week’s Solidarity has sixteen pages rather than our usual 12, and is organised differently from usual. The debate opened up on Israel-Palestine and the “right of return” will continue, but we wanted to get at least a solid chunk of it into this issue, rather than have it more fragmented and make it harder for readers to understand the continuity.

The Tories want to use Brexit to deregulate the economy, and attack the rights of workers and migrants. Labour policy, adopted unanimously at party conference in September 2018, is to oppose a deal that does not meet Labour’s tests. It is clear that these talks will not produce a deal which meets our tests.

Theresa May and the Conservative Party have no interest in acting in good faith in these negotiations, and they cannot give Labour enough to agree a deal anyway. There has been no progress, and our presence in the room serves no useful purpose, is wasting time, and is doing us damage.

We are therefore writing to you to urge you to withdraw from these talks, and turn the focus to fighting the Tories’ Brexit plans.

Sign at bit.ly/no-bo.

Also on the web:
- L4SE call for a radical Labour manifesto in the Euro-elections, signed by over 500 Labour and trade union activists, including MEPs Julie Ward and Jude Kirton-Darling and MP’s Marsha de Cordova, Ged Killen, Rosie Duffield and Lloyd Russell-Moyle: bit.ly/1se-23M
- Other Labour left statements for the Euro-elections: bit.ly/left-23M.
Left needs clearer Euro-message

By Michael Elms

On 18 April, the European Parliament posted polling projections for the 2019 European elections.

The projections show the European People’s Party (the big alliance of “centre-right” parties, though not including the British Tories) on track to remain the largest party in the Parliament – but by a slimmer majority. The figures had the EPP falling from 271 to 180 seats. The mainstream-social-democratic bloc “Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats” (aka S&D, the European Parliamentary group of the pan-European reformist left Party of European Socialists, of which Labour is a member) was estimated to get 149 seats, down from 186.

Predictions on 25 April had the EPP and S&D on 180 and 161 respectively. The latest poll as we go to press, on 1 May, had the gap at 173-149.

At least before the 2 May local elections, polling in the UK showed Labour doing better than the European survey predicted.

In the 2017 British general election, Labour confounded the polling and made unexpected gains by putting forward the most left-wing manifesto in decades. With a left-wing manifesto that offers a glimmer of hope against the grimness of Brexit xenophobia and austerity, Labour could fatally wound the Tory government.

It could make a decisive contribution to taking the European Presidents, and the plum jobs on the European Commission, out of the hands of the EPP.

But that would take political courage rather than triangulation. It would also mean Labour committing to put Labour MEPs in office and keep them there. Currently the policy promoted by the Leader’s Office is to get rid of all the UK’s MEPs, by carrying out Brexit.

The UK Tory Party is in special difficulties on 25 May because it is not in the mainstream party of European conservatism. New Democracy, for example, the Greek Tories, on 23 May because it is not in the mainstream party of European conservatives. It is also marked more reactionary than the EPP.

After the UK Conservative Party (18 seats), the second-largest component is the Law and Justice (PiS) party, the “national-conservative”, anti-abortion party which rules Poland, whose leaders oppose LGBT people being allowed to be school teachers and are the leading anti-immigrant force in Eastern European politics.

In 2018, UK Conservative MEPs were the only right-wing governing party in Western Europe to vote against sanctions on Viktor Orbán’s far-right government in Hungary in response to attacks on the independence of the judiciary, anti-migrant violence and a high-profile official campaign of antisemitic propaganda centred around the bogeyman figure of George Soros. UK Tory MEPs received letters of thanks from Orbán.

The far-right bloc Europe of Nations and Freedom, bringing together the German AFD, the Austrian Freedom Party, the French Rassemblement National (successor to the Front National) and Italy’s Lega, is predicted to make the biggest gains on 25 May, leaping from 37 seats to 62. The biggest source of growth will be Italy, where Lega is predicted to take 20 additional seats.

The ENF bloc is unlikely to be big enough to have much of an impact on the Commission (yet). But its progress will strengthen the “nationalist international” in its work across the continent, attempting to drag politics as a whole rightwards.

The wipe-outs suffered over recent years by Greece’s Pasok, France’s Parti Socialiste, the Netherlands’ Labour Party, and Italy’s Democratic Party, have been called “Pasokification” – a process whereby those social-democratic parties are become discredited, hegemonised by neoliberal thinking, and hollowed out.

SYRIZA

Greece’s Syriza was often held up as an alternative to Pasokification. Syriza formed a left-wing government in Greece in 2015 and promised defiance before collapsing into administering austerity.

It harked at serious confrontation with Greece and European capital and went into technocratic damage-limitation mode, carrying out austerity and claiming there was suddenly no alternative.

Syriza was the brightest star of its European grouping, the European United Left (GUE). Alongside Germany’s Die Linke and Mélenchon’s La France Insoumise, the larger components of GUE seemed to herald a leftward breakout from the fate of other social-democratic parties.

Now that bloc is faltering. Die Linke has been flirting with calls for stronger immigration controls, at the urging of former leader Sahra Wagenknecht. Mélenchon’s party is relatively populist, and with a nationalist edge: a platform that promises an expansion of the French arms industry, thinly-veiled anti-German protectionism, and a policy of flying tricolours instead of red flags at rallies.

A change of direction on the left is necessary. A new grouping, Maintenant le Peuple (MLP, “Now the People”) is being set up, with Mélenchon at its core, alongside the Spanish Podemos, Portugal’s Left Bloc, the Swedish Vänsterpartiet, and others. But on what political basis? The name of the new bloc junks words like “left” or “socialist”, let alone “worker” or “labour”, and goes instead for “people”. But who are the “people”? And who are the “people” against?

In January 2019, far-right Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán made a chilling speech setting out his vision for Europe. He said: “the conventional division of parties into those of the Right and of the Left will be replaced with a division between those which are pro-immigration and those which are anti-immigration”. The MLP-type left is no better placed to combat that drift than the “centre-left” S&D.

In France and Germany, the siren call of nationalism is tempting many left activists, as opportunistic “socialist” politicians like Mélenchon or Wagenknecht try to harness base prejudice to further their careers, and sell it to their supporters with a lick of red paint.

In the UK, too, there is a “Lexit” constituency of self-promoting labour-movement careerists and ladder-climbing “public intellectuals” (most notably gathered around the Full Brexit project, the Morning Star, and their allies in the Brexit Party).

Unless they are displaced by a Europe-wide revival of working-class, Marxist socialism, these nosy forces on the left threaten to help make Orbán’s sick dream come true.

By M ichael Elm s

The ENF bloc is unlikely to be big enough to have much of an impact on the Commission (yet). But its progress will strengthen the “nationalist international” in its work across the continent, attempting to drag politics as a whole rightwards.

The wipe-outs suffered over recent years by Greece’s Pasok, France’s Parti Socialiste, the Netherlands’ Labour Party, and Italy’s Democratic Party, have been called “Pasokification” – a process whereby those social-democratic parties are become discredited, hegemonised by neoliberal thinking, and hollowed out.

SYRIZA

Greece’s Syriza was often held up as an alternative to Pasokification. Syriza formed a left-wing government in Greece in 2015 and promised defiance before collapsing into administering austerity.

It harked at serious confrontation with Greece and European capital and went into technocratic damage-limitation mode, carrying out austerity and claiming there was suddenly no alternative.

Syriza was the brightest star of its European grouping, the European United Left (GUE). Alongside Germany’s Die Linke and Mélenchon’s La France Insoumise, the larger components of GUE seemed to herald a leftward breakout from the fate of other social-democratic parties.

Now that bloc is faltering. Die Linke has been flirting with calls for stronger immigration controls, at the urging of former leader Sahra Wagenknecht. Mélenchon’s party is relatively populist, and with a nationalist edge: a platform that promises an expansion of the French arms industry, thinly-veiled anti-German protectionism, and a policy of flying tricolours instead of red flags at rallies.

A change of direction on the left is necessary. A new grouping, Maintenant le Peuple (MLP, “Now the People”) is being set up, with Mélenchon at its core, alongside the Spanish Podemos, Portugal’s Left Bloc, the Swedish Vänsterpartiet, and others. But on what political basis? The name of the new bloc junks words like “left” or “socialist”, let alone “worker” or “labour”, and goes instead for “people”. But who are the “people”? And who are the “people” against?

In January 2019, far-right Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán made a chilling speech setting out his vision for Europe. He said: “the conventional division of parties into those of the Right and of the Left will be replaced with a division between those which are pro-immigration and those which are anti-immigration”. The MLP-type left is no better placed to combat that drift than the “centre-left” S&D.

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CWU faces change

By Rosalind Robson

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) met for its conference on 29 April-3 May.

It took place as the union finalised reorganisation plans ("Redesign"), to tackle declining membership, in the context of industrial change in both the telecommunications/financial services and postal/courier sectors.

An emergency motion from the National Executive on Brexit passed at the union’s general conference (attended by delegates from both sides of the union) was widely reported in the press. The conference voted decisively for a Brexit deal that prioritises jobs and financial services and public ownership and investment. Unfortu­nately no democratic socialist transformation of the UK economy in relation to competition, the undercutting of workers and public ownership and investment." Unfortu­nately no democratic socialist transforma­tion is consistent with any version of Brexit.

A motion on supporting CWU members from the EU, and campaigning against discrimination, post-Brexit was also passed.

The issue of industrial change is important. Whilst employment in both post, courier and financial services has remained steady, membership of the union has declined as markets, businesses and technology has changed. Membership was 217,807 at the end of 2009. It is now 176,975.

The CWU has had some success in recruiting outside BT in the telecommunications/financial services sector, and importantly, the union has now won recognition in EE (formerly owned by Orange and O2, taken over by BT in 2016). One casualty of the reorganisation has been the CWU’s equality structures.

Annual separate Equality conferences (Women, BAME, LGBT, Disability) have been replaced by a single one day biennial Equality conference alongside repre­sentatives on new regional committees.

By Zack, IWGB National Deliveroo Committee chair

On Tuesday 30 April, Deliveroo responded to the Nottingham Rider Network - IWGB’s demand letter.

Beyond a load of the usual fluff, it became clear that NRN-IWGB had made steps forward: winning a hiring freeze, and an agreement to meet.

Unsure as to whether to continue with a strike, the committee took the decision to rid­ers more widely. The response was a decision to call off a strike.

The limited victory is good and must be celebrated. But the lesson time and again from Deliveroo, and from employers more generally, is that you win improvements, that you negotiate from a stronger position, by striking, and continuing to strike. When the pressure cases, so will progress, and eventual­ly they will try to roll the gains back. Couriers in Nottingham and elsewhere should not let themselves get too demoralised by this decision by Nottingham court­ers. Nationally, and in Nottingham, Bristol, York, Horsham, London, and elsewhere, we are more organised than we were a few months ago. In many of those places we have won small victories.

We can build from this to more sus­tained and impactful strikes, winning yet more gains, winning our bigger demands. The second issue of our bulletin, Punc­tion, should be out before mid-May.

Success for Nottingham Rider Network

By Ollie Moore

Three strikes took place this May Day. 1 May: Addison Lee cab drivers at Luton Airport, organised by the IWGB; out­sourced workers at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, organised by PCS; and drivers on the London Tramlink, organised by Aslef.

May Day, International Workers’ Day, has historically been a celebration of work­ers’ struggle. Unfortunately, the London May Day parade has shrunk to a small, desultory gathering mainly attended by ultra-Stalinist sects and cults, who march behind enormous banners of dictators.

The limited victory of unions organising strikes on May Day continues, this could represent an opportunity to reinvigorate May Day as a celebration of struggle, rather than a day out for gulag fantas­ists.

Tube workers strike on jobs and safety

By Tom Saff

Train maintenance workers on London Underground will strike from 7am on 17 May to 7am on 20 May, to demand their bosses abandon a plan to extend train preparation schedules.

London Underground trains are currently "prepped" (i.e., have full safety checks performed) on a 24-hourly basis. Tube bosses want to extend this schedule by varying degrees across different lines - some to 96 hours, some to 28 days, and some to an "MOT"-style system that could see trains go months without being fully prepped.

The German Revolution

Our new pamphlet has Luxemburg’s major articles from 1918-9; from the German revolution beginning to her murder.


Audio and e-reader versions

Many thanks to the volunteers who have enabled us to produce an audio version of the paper. Links to the audio version on SoundCloud are at www.workersliberty.org/audio.

To be sent our e-reader version of Solidarity, email awl@workersliberty.org. This may be helpful for dyslexic readers. E-readers enable you to choose the font, type size, and line-spacing you prefer, in a completely uncluttered layout.

Please give feedback so that we can find out whether these efforts are worthwhile, and, if they are, improve them.

PCS step back and think

By a civil servant

Our union, PCS, announced on 30 April that our pay ballot had failed to get the 50% turnout required by law.

Since then the union leadership has announced its next step as "to hold a further statutory ballot for industrial action over pay at the earliest appropriate time".

That proposal will go as an emergency motion to our conference on 21-23 May.

To go for another push as soon as possible to edge us up over the 50% mark would be wrong. We need to step back and think why we couldn’t get even 50% of our members to open an envelope, tick a box, and send back the form.

The problems are not just organisation. The way the pay demand was constructed was part of it. Just plucking a 10% figure out of the air hasn’t gripped the membership.

TACTICS

Obviously the claim should include a general increase for all members. But it should also include equalisation of pay across departments - which members can easily understand - and a national system of pay.

It should include a demand for progression pay. In most government departments you can’t get to the maximum, or only with great difficulty.

If we’re going to win over members, we also need to explain more what the tactics will be. The union needs to explain that there would be a different approach, not just one-day strikes, but it didn’t hammer this message home.

WIN

Fundamentally, the union over the last few years has given people no indication of how we’re going to win.

The union has become an affair of top-down campaign messages, and that’s it, with no effective support for local initia­tive.

Before the next ballot we must have a clear plan with a mixture of mass actions, selective strikes, rolling strikes, and effective action short of strike action.

We need a proper discussion about dis­aggregated ballots. If HMBC [Revenue and Customs], say, got over the 50% and took effective action on pay, that could pull other departments along.

But we need a serious debate about why we lost. Not a sterile debate in which we say we were magnificent and if only we’d make a few more phone calls then we’d get over the 50%. We don’t just want to get to 50% plus one, but to 60%, 70% etc.

To do this we need to take a bottom-to-top look at ourselves, and build a union one where activists and members have the decisive say in what to do.
The Right of Return and the One

By Barry Finger

“Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.”

“Since its violent establishment in 1948 through the ethnic cleansing of more than half of the indigenous people of Palestine, Israel has set out to control as much land and uproot as many Palestinians as it can. As a result of this systematic, forced displacement, there are now more than 7.25 million Palestinian refugees. They are denied their right to return to their homes simply because they are not Jewish.”

https://bdsmovement.net

How many distortions and misdirections can be packed into one proposition and three sentences?

Let’s unravel this: UN resolution 194 “stipulates” a Palestinian “right of return.” Israel was never “established” through the “ethnic cleansing” of “indigenous people” resulting in “7.25 million Palestinian refugees.”

It is surely safe to say that these uncynonized propositions represent the overwhelming political framework around which the far left builds its politics. Each one of these contested points would require a separate essay. A little background information first. UN Resolution 194 is a recommendation of the UN General Assembly, not a binding resolution of the Security Council. All the Arab nations rejected the resolution when it came up for a vote, because it included recognition of the Jewish nation of Israel. And, in fact, the resolution only refers to a right of return for those “who wish to live at peace with their neighbors.” It therefore involves a political vetting process on the part of a state whose legitimacy no Arab nation at the time endorsed and with whose process no Arab state would have collaborated.

Moreover – and this refers to the BDS proposition, rather than the UN resolution, a refugee is one who directly experiences expulsion, not one related to others who experience. And the expulsion needs to be from one’s homeland, not from one’s home. Being displaced 30 miles within the territory of a state does not make you a refugee. But without the right to self-determination, it does make you stateless, which is the immediate and pressing cause of Palestinian oppression.

Marxists have classically approached the national question from two broadly distinct perspectives. Marxist internationalists, at one end, tended to favor large multinational viable states as laying the capitalist predicate to a socialist order. At the Leninist pole, the national question is treated as a political prerequisite to the success of the working-class movement temporarily serves as a necessary interim step before reunification under socialism.

The national question, and the divisions within the socialist movement arising from that question, originated not primarily from the decolonisation struggles of overseas holdings, but from the need for socialists to engage with nationalist movements that threatened the breakup of multinational European or peripherally European empires—Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Czarist. These incipient divisions over national via –

The debate in pages 6-15 have been prompted by recent articles discussing the “Right of Return”, and related topics. For all articles in this debate see workersliberty.org/ror


dility were compounded to the breaking point by the struggles for a fundamental reorientation in the face of overseas decolonisation. The exercise of democratic rights to self-government, as the Leninists argued, was a precondition for the development of class differentiation and working class socialism in the distant colonies.

For it is here – where the dimension of viability, both in its economic and political aspects, gets thorny. Neither revolutionaries nor reformists denied that capitalism both suffocated and developed the third world. But evaluations from on high of sustainability – in modern terms of whether such newly freed states would fail – became in practice a bad-faith excuse for the retention of colonies under “socialist” tutelage. The viability that reformist socialists were defending was primarily their own, which resided in the enlarged prospects of extracting capitalist concessions realizable by the extra layer of fat arising from colonial exploitation.

The Right of Return and the One

The one-state solution in all its ingestible aspects reached its prior crescendo in the historically discredited post-war response of Guy Mollet’s social-democrats aligned with the French Stalinists, to maintain Algeria, and all overseas territories, as part of the Union française.

The PFC endorsed associated territorial status for Algeria with the ultimate aim of creating an Algerian republic enjoying internal autonomy.

The Israel-Palestine conflict, revisited and deepens all these difficulties. The one-state solution offered by Israeli rightwingers, including Netanyahu— with its suggestion of internal self-government within a large metropolitan Israeli state—is largely a prescription for Palestinian bantustans. Its purpose is to maintain all of historic Palestine, while withholding, or overhanging, subordinating the conditions needed for Palestinian economic and political viability as an independent entity. It promises neither full civic nor national equality.

From the Israeli left and much of the international left, the single-state solution is a pro- posal for a supranational, rather than a binational, state. Failure to recognize this distinction has been the cause of much confusion. The single-state solution is called for the fusion and dissolution of two nationalities, for not only the political, but also the social elimination of both the Hebrew-Israeli and Palestinian/Arab identities and its replacement with a new, previously nonexistent and unknown, nationality. This state may be bilingual, but it is not binational. It would be a federal state of its citizens—a state modeled on the US, rather than a confederal state, such as Belgium or Yugoslavia or even Canada. It is a sanitized, revived call for a version of the secular, democratic state, where clerical hierarchies and discreet histories and scars of op- pression, dhimmitude, and domination are wished away by a concerted leap of collective amnesia. It is a noble utopia.

But even this, in all its unreality, bears only superficial resemblance to that which the Palestinian nationalist and resistance moves- ment have in mind. They understood, and still fashion their orientation, around a secular-democratic Arab state. That is, the Pales- tinian solidarity movement fancies itself not merely an anti-colonial movement, seeking to free the occupied territories and Gaza. It is a movement that foundationally sees Israel as an illegitimate, hijack, imperialist imposition—a crusader state.

The only case for denying Israelis the right to self-determination is by denying that they are a nation. That is not merely the viewpoint of Hamas, of the “Palestine will be free from the river to the sea” crowd. The objective was restated clearly by Omar Barghouti, a founder of the BDS movement. “B-nationalism today, despite its variations, still upholds this ahistorical and morally untenable national right of the colonial-settlers.” Where the modern resistance movement of Barghouti differs from its previous incarnations and Hamas is in its expansiveness and its purported renunciation of violence. BDS no longer actively desires the expulsion of Israelis whose antecedents arrived before the Balfour Declaration. But it still envisages a future state in which Israeli-Jews have equal civic, religious and political rights as individ- uals, but no rights to national self-expression as a collectivity.

According to the lies with which people justify themselves, the loss of sovereignty and the would-be vulnerability of Jews, once again dependent on the tender mercies and good-will of their neighbors, involves nothing more substantial than the loss of their colonial privileges. That millennia of Jewish oppression, subjugation, powerlessness and slaughter—European and Middle Eastern—can be so simplistically and imperialistically dismissed as unworthy of consideration reveals how insignificant the Jews are to the concerns of rev- olutionary movements.

It is high time the socialist movement came clean with itself. The Trotskyist movement (the American SWP) in particular took the lead in championing a novel theory in the early 1970s that took root throughout the far-left, that the right of the oppressed to deter- mine the form of their liberation may include separation or unity with their oppressor under conditions by which they and they alone judges as necessary. The SWP then stretched this proposition in the most shock- ing direction: that the nationalism of the weaker nation in its struggle against the stronger may justifiably invalidate the latter’s claim to sovereignty itself, if those are the conditions the oppressed so choose. And it was the left’s internationalist obligation to defend that choice with unconditional soli- darity. They thus buried any politics rooted in the pursuit of national reconciliation through a program of consistent democracy in an impenetrable haze of ravanchism and irredentism.

What this denied should have been obvi- ous. While the nationalism of the oppressed cannot be equated with the nationalism of the oppressor, the political aspirations of the oppressed and the politics that embodies those aspirations can still be inconsistent with a principled socialist position.

The secular democratic state of their imag- ination—the imagination of the Palestinian resistance—is an Arab chauvinist state, the chauvinism of the oppressor, in Lenin’s language, in all the same ways that a Zionist Israel, with a large Arab minority, is a chauvinist state, save one. Zionist two-staters recognize the Palestinian right to self-deter- mination on territories exterior to the 1967 Is- raeli state. Palestinian nationalism accepts no such room for Israeli (Jewish) self-determina- tion on any part of historic Palestine.

As Barghouti states elsewhere, “If the refugees were to return, you would not have a two-state solution, you’d have a Palestine next to a Palestine.” And it is as a Trojan horse that this demand for the “right to return”—to politically overwhelm the Jewish population and return Israel to the Arab fold, remains a non-negotiable aspect of the Palesti- nian solidarity movement in all its forms.

The left now defers to the consensus view- point of the Arab people—a people whose roots are in the Arabian peninsula, not the Levant—whose fourteen hundred year old conquest and colonization of the Marshreq and Maghrebb is seen as their manifest des-tiny, challenged by the upstart return of an indigenous and marginalised people to the land that gave birth to them as a nation, to their language and to their religion. From a Jewish nationalist perspective, it would be like accusing the Lakota or the Cherokee na- tions—if they were to seize back land stolen from them by Europeans—of being racists and colonialists for daring to challenge “American” sovereignty, of being “ethnic cleansers” if they were to eject those recruited

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State Solution to a genocidally-imbued war against their return and for being imperialist and nonrepentant in their refusal to abandon their "tale" claim to nationhood. And, then the ultimate affront for them and their supporters to be taunted, here and around the world, by left-wing Jews quaring their nationalism to that of Andrew Jackson’s, and their expulsion of those who fought against their return as creating a new "trail of tears."

Zionism, in contemporary terms, is not the "national liberation movement" of the Jews. The Jews were and are not oppressed as a colony, were not exploited as a captive nation, and did not have their resources plundered to enrich a colonial overlord. Jews experienced their oppression in exile and dis ease as a racialized "other": hated, hunted, slaughtered and finally driven back to Palestine, the only corner of the earth they could possibly retreat to. Zionism did not create Israel, history did. Zionism kicked the door open. And it is Israel—not Gaza, not the West Bank—that remains the largest refugee camp in the world. What Zionism prematurely invoked, and what it had the desperate right to invoke, was a form of Jewish nationalism based in indigenous rights that is the theoretical theory that Palestinians now so obviously subvert to the frothy joy of their left-wing mentors.

But even if there were no Jewish claim to indigenous status in Palestine—even if we remain uncommitted to whether worldwide Jewishness constitutes a nation—there is arguably a Jewish-speaking, fully complex differentiated people whose Jewishness is part of their national patrimony that exists in a portion of national questioned homeland. Is there not a demand for three camp socialists—and believers in national self-determination as a principal, that should be enough to settle the question as to whether Israel has a "right to exist."

SOLIDARITY

Either way, does this mean that socialists need bow down before any movement or any peoples' national rights?

The higher forms of human solidarity: ones that arise out of the quest for an equal application of democracy and justice among nations; that are based on national reconciliation and class solidarity. National peoples, who once included socialists among their ranks, understand that the attainment of these higher democratic rights necessitates a reinving of internationalism, of isolating humanity from its poisonous extremes. No nation can exercise their right to self-determination beyond the point where it precludes another nation's equal right to self-determination. Zionism as an indigenous rights rationale for Jewish self-determination as precluding democratic grounds, regardless of whether it is also a necessary justification for Israel's existence. But the justification for self-determination and the arrangement of the state that embodies that right are two different propositions.

The 1947 Israel consists of two nations: a majority Jewish and minority Arab nation. A Jewish democratic state—even if it were honestly implemented (which it never was) would grant Arabs as individuals complete equality, but Arabs as a collectivity no comparable rights to self-expression. A democratic Jewish state is no more equal for the secular, democratic Arab state envisioned by Palestinians. It is one of the same principal, with only the power axes reversed. A revolutionary and demonstrative demand of the day is the socialist call for Hebrew and Arabic self-determination within a de-Zionized Israeli state: to advocate, in other words, a state that grants Israeli Arabs an equitable distribution of state resources not only for its cultural and economic development, but also to implement their full right of secession with an independent and liberal Palestinian state in the occupied territories, if they so choose.

That is, our tradition has counter posed a non-Zionist binational Israel, not only to the Israel that exists today, but also to the liberal democratic Jewish state that today's leftwing Zionists sincerely envision and desire. A Zionist Israel, even with robustly enforced anti-discrimination protections that it now so sorely lacks, would, of course, be a welcome civilization upgrade. But it would still be a racist Jewish chauvinist Israel.

Now is Israel the only state in the Middle East that practices national chauvinism? Let's take the case of revolutionary Algeria. How did Algerian revolutionaries in power define citizenship? They granted citizenship only to Muslims, requiring that only those individuals whose father and paternal grandfather were Muslims could become citizens of the new state. Nationality by birth, rather that descent was not granted to children. By a stroke of the pen, it excluded Christians who, one might argue, had ties with France and other European nations and Jews, who pre-dated the Muslim and Arab conquests by centuries and had no prior association with any other state. Neither individual equality nor national equality was offered to Algerian and non-Arab resettlement workers from the West.

Is there any debate between revolutionary Algeria and Zionist Israel? Algeria is considered a legitimate state and Hebrew self-determination in any form is considered a crime. And Algeria is the tip of the iceberg. Every Arab and Muslim majority nation withholds national rights to the minority population within their midst—Kuwait, Libia, Syria, Iraq, the Sudan, Iran, Yemen. The non-Arab state of Iran subjugates a huge Ahwazi Arab minority that it regards as harmfully slatternly, despoilers and treats as an oppressed colony.

There is no part of the "Arab" and Muslim homelands where the Left, Left-wing and socialist nations have the slightest experience of being equal among equals. And the millions of Mizrah Jew expelled or descended from expellees, who now constitute Israel's minority are fully aware of that. As long as the Israeli left—revolutionary and moderate—are committed to peace predicated on some level of collective equality within historic Palestine, of de-colonisation of the occupied territories and Gaza as a first step, consistent revolutionary movements will fall on a platform from which we can advocate a more robust multi-national movement to deepen and extend democracy.

Revolutionary politics consists in mobilizing all the internationalist forces, minority nations, Israeli dissidents and Arab progressives, for the goal of achieving Palestinian autonomy as a first step; and for broadening that struggle to revive the Arab Spring and liberate the Arab peoples and minority nations within its midst.

BDS, despite its militant character, practises the politics of delegitimation over solidarity, of isolation over dialogue. It is the false liberal and Palestinian on both sides of the Arab-Israeli divide.

Revisiting Uri Avnery

By Barry Finger

There is a real dispute in our camp over "socialists orient to the "right of return."

It derives from comrades who view that purported right through the lens of the Israeli peace movement and those who peer through the other end of the telescope, that of the BDS anti-peace movement.

Those, such as myself — and perhaps Daniel Randall, though I wouldn't presume to speak for him — have been educated and informed on this subject by the literature of Gush Shalom, for many decades the most militant wing of the Israeli anti-occupation movement.

Its spokesperson and leading personality, Uri Avnery, argued that no progress towards a two-state solution would make headway, if some token face-saving concession were not offered to Palestinian and Arab leaders on this issue. It would be impossible, he felt, to bypass the feeling of injustice and brutalization of the Palestinian cause that a humiliating public renunciation of that "right" would entail.

And so, Avnery concluded, progress towards a two-state solution would self-sabotage if it were perceived as a diktat to a defeated people. He advocated instead a limited, face-saving return and the acceptability of responsibility on the part of Israel, noting that Ben-Gurion and Sharett offered to take back 100,000 Arabs in 1949, the equivalent of 500,000 in comparison to the Jewish population of today. He himself proposed an annual quota of 50,000 for ten years. This, he continued, would not disturb the demographic balance, since Israel was absorbing 50,000 Jews per year.

No right can be exercised unequivocally. The right to free speech does not secure the freedom to foment a lynching mob. And any honestly advocated "right to return" invalidates itself if exercised to the degree necessary to imperil the right to Israeli self-determination. Doubly so, since the right to return is unnecessary to the exercise of Palestinian self-determination.

But—and this is crucial — such a limited return as Avnery advocated would only be adopted in conjunction with a comprehensive peace plan between Israel and the entire Arab world. Some Palestinians might choose to return to their divided families and communities within Israel, others would be inclined to live in a state with a different national and cultural background, after seeing the reality with their own eyes.

But, Avnery argued, the overwhelming majority of Palestinians would seek participation in the project of Palestinian state building where they would finally enjoy the freedom of undisputed and untrammeled sovereignty. In the end, reality would trump ideology: the prospects of advancing to a promising future would outweigh the stagnant need to nurture injustices, real and in many respects self-inflicted.

The problem resides in this. BDS is not the Palestinian equivalent of Gush Shalom and their supporters do not seek national reconciliation. They seek Israel’s national obliteration.

Avnery’s perspective may have seemed reasonable yesterday, and may again seem reasonable in some future tomorrow. But for now, the “right of return” is a self-proclaimed Trojan horse, advocated as a ruse to destroy the two-state solution and to permanently deprive Israeli Jews of any right to self-determination. That is precisely why BDS did not see Avnery as their partner (bit.ly/3yvavn).

Tactically flexible as Avnery was, he was ultimately unwilling to capitulate to the Palestinian chauvinist perspective that Israel itself is occupied Arab territory. But that's also why it's worth revisiting Avnery’s perspective. BDS is an enormous counterweight to any progress towards a democratic future for both peoples. Any prospective Palestinian partner would face an enormous revanchist backlash from their supporters do not seek national reconciliation but that's precisely why BDS did not see Avnery as their partner (bit.ly/3yvavn).

Avnery (left) with Yasser Arafat
Patently explain, don’t

By Daniel Randall

Sean Matgamna’s reply to me in Solidarity 504 (bit.ly/sm-504) begins with a bizarre, lurid analogy about a man stalking his partner.

The imagery is frankly sexist, the meaning unclear. I think the character of the stalker in the analogy, in denial about his partner’s infidelity, is supposed to represent me. I’m not sure who the character of the partner is supposed to be. Reading it, I thought - well, this has started badly, but perhaps it’ll improve as it goes on. Sadly, I was largely disappointed.

Maintaining ideological steadfastness and clarity without succumbing to a kind of inchoate, despising denunciation of one’s opponent altogether (especially when it is an embattled minority, as Workers’ Liberty is within the ranks of the revolutionary left on some issues. Despising denunciation might work as a catharsis; it will not win us any arguments.

That’s why I take issue with Sean’s approach to the debate on the far left about national self-determination in Israel/Palestine, which imagines that simply repeating one’s revolution, in increasingly horrifying terms, with the existing common sense of the far left will be sufficient to persuade those currently conditioned by it to change their minds. It won’t. Patient explanation, and engaging with when people actually care, even when that place is a confused admixture of different ideas, is necessary. And only someone incapable of patient explanation believes that this requires, or equates to, ideological slippage.

Since the debate began there has been flare-up of violence in and near Gaza; the IDF has assaulted the area, and shot protesters on the borders. 23 Palestinians have been killed. Is- lamist militants have fired hundreds of rockets into Israel, killing four Israelis. This is part of the real-world context that any debate on the left about Israel/Palestine must maintain contact with. Against a backdrop of despair, and the apparent remoteness of any immediate progress, revanchist politics have asserted themselves. The demand in Gaza for freer movement, for an end to the blockade and bombardment of the area, has become tied to a generalised demand for “return”.

Yahya Sinwar - a leader of Hamas, surely the central, organised political element in pushing the tying together of immediate aspirations with the generalised demand for “return” - describes “return” as “refusing to concede a single inch of the land of Palestine”. This radical pose may help Hamas shield its own domestic power, recently threatened by social protest against the inequality and authoritarianism characteristic of its rule, behind an impossible, maximalist demand that it knows is unachievable.

“Refusing to concede a single inch of the land of Palestine” would require a bloody war to reverse at least the last 71 years of history. Neither supplanting this, nor support for an absolute “right of return” for all descendants of the 1948 refugees, is compatible with a belief that the antagonism currently living in Israel/Palestine has an equal entitlement to national rights. The prominent Palestinian nationalist Omar Barghouti makes this clear when he says that the right of return granted and claimed, “there would be no two-state solution, you’d have a Palestine next to a Palestine.”

Nor is the policy, as some claim, merely another way of advocating for free movement of open borders in Israel/Palestine. Free movement and open borders would afford no special, privileged right of return to anyone; that right would be automatically free, a right of any national or cultural origin, from Los Angeles or Lagos or Tokyo would have as much right to move to Israel, or a future Palestinian state, as a Palestinian would.

For consistent democrats, national rights are not something afforded depending on the historical length of one’s connection to a physical territory, but are rather dependent on whether a community has a national character and wishes to self-determine on a national basis.

I am as clear about all that now as I was before I wrote my reply to Sean. I am also clear much clearer, I think, than Sean is, about the content of contemporary left anti-semitism, and antisemitism in wider society, including from the far right. I have spent no small amount of time writing and speaking about both, attempting to analyse and understand the dynamics, and develop responses.

Sean accuses me, variously, of “taking the edge off” or “shying away from” confrontation with left antisemitism, or “soften our conflict” with it. He stops short of straightforwardly accusing me of being a racist, but who knows what joys Solidarity 506 will bring? I think my record speaks for itself; other readers of Solidarity can make their own evaluation of the specific concerns that lie at the heart of the claim, that my advocacy of political education against all forms of antisemitism encountered on the left is “smug”, disapproving, wildly off-beam, or merely risible.

Understanding in which ways the strain of left antisemitism descending from the post-1950s Stalinist anti-Zionist interwines with the older, “primitive” left antisemitism (“socialism-of-fools” inveighing against “Jewish bankers”, and so on) is a matter of understanding the interrelationship between two threads of distinctly left-wing antisemitism, one more “primitive” and another more recent, with the latter drawing on the former. The general growth of conspiracy-theorist modes of thinking in left-wing politics is also an important accompanying context. If Sean wishes to dismiss all this, and continue obstinately and monomanically insisting that only the “right of return” policy matters, and that the best way to combat its hegemony is simply to repeat that its advocates are “racist”, that is his prerogative. It will not clarify anyone’s understanding, nor aid anyone’s education, nor change anyone’s mind.

It is hardly surprising that a nationalist-revanchist policy is hegemonic amongst a stateless people who, in the territories where they are the majority, are the colonial subjects of an powerful oppressor. Such conditions dis- talise national self-determination to the point that we endorse, or censor criticism of, reactionary ideas developed as a response to oppression, but it does require that we understand their origins. It requires, in other words, that we understand the relationship between the objective and the subjective, rather than treating the latter as something that exists entirely abstracted from the former.

To acknowledge that Hamas would be significantly politically undermined if Israel ended the blockade of Gaza, withdrew from the West Bank, and acknowledged a viable Palestinian state which it supported with reparations and aid, is not to “blame” Israel, still less “the Jews”, for the reactionary politics of Hamas, which is an independent force with its own project; it is to understand the fundamental reality that conditions of colonial subjugation and immiseration are a better breeding ground for reactionary ideas than conditions of self-determination and democratic security.

JEEK-NEER

A great many of those who will march on 11 May, on a Palestine Solidarity Campaign demonstration called explicitly in support of the right of return demand, will do so out of a simple, knee-jerk solidarity with the oppressed.

Screaming at them that they are racists and cheerleaders for genocide is unlikely to change many minds. Sean now claims he “didn’t say [advocates of the “right of return”] are racists”. I quote from his article in Solidar- ity 497: “The absolute anti-Zionists are racists. [...]. Hamas is the single most important factor in stigmatising and bringing the equivalent of a swearword, expressing detestation and moral repugnance. It serves to obliterate all distinction and gradations. Here it is precise, lit- eral.”

Here I tend to agree with Martin in thinking that “racism” is a useful descriptor for the politically-conceived “brutalising” of all Palestinians waiting to be politically exposed. All sorts of gradations exist, with some people assimilating aspects of Stalinist-influenced absolute anti-Zionism but not others. But we can only hope to move people politically by engaging with the specificities and the full complexity of the “distinctions and gradations”.

Martin’s adage that a national people “that opposes another forges its own chains” is a useful educational tool here. Applied to Is- rael/Palestine, this means, in the first instance, that the Israeli Jewish national community will never have peace and security while its state stands as the colonial oppres sor of the Palestinians. But it also means that Palestinian national liberation cannot be realised via a framework which denies na- tional rights to Israeli Jews. Patient explanation of the basic principles of consistent democracy, national self-determination, and workers’ unity across national divides can present a concrete alternative to a knee-jerk vicarious nationalism.

Ironically, Sean’s approach shares, in an in-
The return of old formulas

By Martin Thomas

There are about 13 million Palestinians across the world. They do not have a state of their own.

They are advantaged in all the countries where they are mainly concentrated, though in different ways from country to country.

About 2.9 million live in the West Bank, mostly in over 160 patches of land where the Palestinian Authority has limited autonomy, capable of sharing the immense natural riches now confiscated by a few. The Palestinian refugees have very little in the way of rights. About 2.9 million are in Jordan, and 1.9 million in Israel; in both those countries they are disadvantaged. [1]

The statistics indicate about 500,000 in Lebanon and about 500,000 in Syria. A large number of those from Syria will have fled from the civil war there to Lebanon or Jordan.

Most of those in Lebanon and Syria are in official or unofficial refugee camps.

In Lebanon they are denied access to public services and to many categories of jobs; in Syria they are disfranchised.

The other 2 million are scattered across many countries, with the largest groups in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states; the USA; and Latin America.

For every oppressed nation, the first democratic remedy is national self-determination: the right to form an independent state. The compact core of the Palestinian population is in the West Bank and Gaza, where almost 90% of the population is Palestinian. An independent Palestinian state there would allow real self-rule and enable all the scattered Palestinians to have a citizenship to which they are entitled. It would be a lever to help the Palestinians in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq in their struggles.

It would also improve the economic prospects of the people.

A thorough transformation of those prospects requires a socialist federation of the region, capable of sharing the immense natural riches now confiscated by a few.

To make a socialist federation requires a working class united across borders. And that requires both a common democratic policy of mutually-recognized rights, and a framework at that level minimally to allow industrial and working-class development.

Bit by bit from the 1970s - and decisively since the first mass mobilisation of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and the 1988-9 - the democratic program of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel ("two nations, two states") was moved from being a way-out proposal of the Palestinian and Israeli left to being the subject of diplomatic negotiations.

To be using a "consensus" - in words. Not in fact. In the early 1990s a precarious path to "two states" looked open. An upsurge of right-wing chauvinist forces both in Israel and among the Palestinians, and the force of inertia, blocked it.
The development of Workers' Liberty's ideas on Israel and Palestine

By Sean Matgamna

Here I will give a brief account of the evolution of the ideas of what is now AWL on the Israeli-Arab conflict, and of those of us whose ideas these were.

Before Stalinism took root in the USSR, communists rejected the Zionist project on three main grounds. It was a "utopian nationalism". It misdirected Jews away from the increased social inequality in Israel in the 1930s, when the Zionist project became linked to the urgent need for a Jewish refugee from the Nazis, Trotsky and his comrades argued that Jews in general, if for no other reason, small and underdeveloped Palestine simply could not provide a refuge for all the Jews who now needed it. The fate of the Jews of Europe would be decided by the class struggle in Europe; it was inseparable from the fate of the revolutionary workers' movement.

By the time of his death in August 1940, Trotsky was studying the Jewish labour movement in Palestine. Pamphlets and books by Yosef Alkalay and Dr. Leo Pfeffer, for example, were written in 1932-3 seemingly in support of Jewish migration into Palestine. "There is no such thing on this planet as the idea that one people or another can "forever" be kept out of Palestine and desperately in need of a place to go. The Communist International's demagogy of Zionism - as distinct from politically opposing and fighting it - began with the pogrom that broke out in Palestine in 1929. The small and mainly Jewish Communist Party of Palestine and the Communist national first defined it as the anti-Jewish pogrom movement it was. Then the Stalinist Communist International decreed that it was in fact an anti-imperialist movement and should be endorsed and supported. It was decreed that the leadership of the Communist Party of Palestine had to be replaced by those who endorsed it.

The Stalinites were now against free Jewish migration to Palestine. In parallel, at the same conference they virtually limited Jewish land purchases, and continued a process that incrementally rescinded the Balfour declaration. In the late 1930s, strict limits were placed on Jewish immigration to Palestine, to 75,000 over five years. The British authorities imposed those limits rigidly during the war, and the great massacre of Jews by the Nazis and local anti-Semites, cites in the Nazi-occu...
The Militant, 1 October 1929: “Not every movement led by spokesmen of an oppressed nationality is a revolutionary movement. It is a lamentable fact that at the present time the Arab movement is directed by idealised reactionaries... They are against all Jews as Jews. They set up the re-actionary demand for the ‘restriction of the Jewish immigration into Palestine’...”

Trotsky pointed to anti-Semitism in the Moscow Trials of 1936-8, in which men like Gregory Zinoviev and Karl Radek, who had been known by such names for decades, were given their original Jewish names. The Trotskyists remained in favour of free Jewish migration until the mid 1940s. In the 1930s, throughout World War 2, and after the US Trotskyists advocated that the US open its doors wide to Jews who needed refuge.

On the Jewish movement for independence at the end of World War II, the two main currents into which Trotskyism had split in 1940 developed important differences. The self-named “Orthodox” - those who would go on to see the expansion of Russian Stalinism in the war (though they criticised it severely) as positive and progressive - and the Heterodox, those who saw Russian and its replicas in many countries as a horrendous new form of exploitative class society, had differences in their approach to the “Jewish Question” after the war.

Both advocated opening the gates of the US to the Jewish survivors then confined in displaced persons’ camps in Europe, some of them made-over old concentration camps. The Orthodox did not now advocate free Jewish migration to Palestine, and they did not support the Jewish guerillas fighting the British in Palestine. The Heterodox did both.

In the 1948 war, neither current backed the Arab nationalists. The Heterodox advocated the partition of Palestine, but defended the right of the Palestinian Jews to have a state of their own, and their right to defend that state, i.e. themselves.

Thereafter there was de facto recognition of Israel by the Orthodox. The formula of a Socialist United States of the Middle East, which in the 1940s for many means such as Jews and Kurds, came into use among the Orthodox. The Orthodox wrote very little about Israel or the Palestinians; the Heterodox a lot more, much of it very critical, as in Hal Draper’s articles on the ill-treatment of Israel’s Arab minority (1956-7).

What is now the common coin of most would-be Trotskyists, the equation of Zionism with Nazi and hyper-imperialism, is found in the work of the New Statesman and political siblings and offspring. It first took shape as a deluge of Stalinist propaganda between 1949 and 1953. That was spread in the Stalinist press across the world - in Britain by the Daily Worker – then called Daily Worker - from the USSR and Eastern Europe.

From 1949 to Stalin’s death in 1953, shows trials of leading Stalinists mainly of Jewish origin were held in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland indicting them as Zionist-imperialists. “Zionists” (in fact, long-time leading Stalinists) were hanged in Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

At his death Stalin was preparing a big anti-Zionist show trial in Russia. There would have been the visible part of a mass purge and rounding-up of Jews, and the killing of we can’t know how many of them. Stalin’s successors stopped it. It could have been among the crimes for which his re-forming successor Nikita Khrushchev was himself indirectly indicted.

All the Trotskyists in 1949-53 identified the anti-Zionism of the Stalinists for the anti-semitism it was, and condemned it.

In Israel the picture was different. France in invading Egypt, which had nationalised the Suez Canal. The Trotskyists condemned the invasion and helped mobilise people against it. Notably said Israel had won the right to exist because of it.

In the 1950s and 60s, the Trotskyists looked on the Egyptian-controlled PLO leader Ahmed Shukeiri’s recognitions of the slogan under which Egyptian armies had entered Palestine in 1948 - “drive the Jews into the sea” - as re-actionary ravings with which they had nothing in common. [1]

In 1967 Israel defeated Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in the Six Day War. The West Bank, designated for the territory of a Palestinian state alongside Jewish Israel in the UN’s 1947 partition plan, had been annexed by Jordan, and Gaza had been under Egyptian rule. Israel conquered them in 1967, reuniting 1948 Palestine, but under Israeli rule.

An Israeli offer of those territories in exchange for normal relations was rejected by the Arab states, none of which at that point recognised Israel. (Egypt and Jordan would, years later). Israel for the first time entered into close alliance with the USA.

The shift to what is now the common left-wing position did not happen at all once. The main movement was towards acceptance of a formula adopted by the PLO to replace “drive the Jews into the sea”: a secular democratic state. It did not offer justice to both Palestinians and Jews.

The idea that it did was deeply stupid, but it was a stupidity that quickly conquered most of the revolutionary Marxist left. And, once adopted, it had an anti-Israeli logic of its own. It delegitimised Israel. It preached a seemingly benign alternative to Israel. The benignity was only seeming. Delegitimising Israel was the political reality.

When people in politics are being a lot more stupid on some issue than usual, you ask the question: what political and psychological function does this advanced level of stupidity serve for them? Here, it served to shift in the moving consensus of the left, in response to Israeli rule in the West Bank and Gaza, to acceptance of the new PLO slogan, secular democratic state. It allowed us to side with the beaten and oppressed Palestinians and anti-imperialist Arabs and at the same time do something like justice to the Jews, who would (we persuaded ourselves) have equal rights in a secular democratic state. The Jews would not have national rights; but neither would the Palestinians. It seemed a just compromise. A liveable solution.

But how do you get to that? We didn’t examine it too closely. We were content to fudge and go on fudging, our whole complex of thinking set and fixed in place by hostility to what came to be Israel’s colonial rule in the Palestinian majority territories in the West Bank and Gaza. We chose to inhabit a culpable delusion, a political fiction. We were for the defeat of Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur war.

I had been religious, but I have no memory of direct animosity to Jews. I’d read a Catholic re-telling of the Old Testament and thus had some vague idea of ancient Jewish “history”.

I had had to persuade Rachel Lever - who had been a five year old child in Jerusalem during the Arab siege of 1948 - to the view we took on the 1967 war. Later, “secular democratic state” made most sense to us as the solution to a complex conflict. I was no less, and possibly more, vehemently hostile to Israel than the other comrades.

Politics had to rule; but on a certain level I was unhappy to be thus in conflict with most Jewish people.

Midway between 12 and 13 years old, I had moved with my family from the town of Ennis in the west of Ireland to Manchester. For 15 years I lived in the Cheetham Hill Road area, which then had a large Jewish population. In 1947 a pogromist crowd, triggered by the British-Jewish conflict in Palestine and led by Mosley fascists, had surged up Cheetham Hill Road from the nearby city centre, throwing stones, breaking windows and attacking people they thought were Jewish. Similar things happened in Leeds and Liverpool at that time.

My arrival in England involved me in a precarious instant politicisation as an “anti-imperialist”. I was in the land of the ancient enemy. I had in my head the story of Ireland’s long history of oppression and resistance to it. I had heard my mother’s and father’s stories of the Irish war of independence, the Black and Tan war. My mother had been in her late teens then, and living on the west coast of Clare (The Hand, Milltown Malbay), in one of the flashpoint areas of the conflict. I had learned to share my mother’s love of the old songs, many of them nationalist.

I remember only one notable incident from that time in my life, when I refused to stand for “God Save The Queen” at a Hall Orches- tra concert at the Manchester Free Trade Hall. I generalised from Irish history. The world was divided into oppressed people and opp-pressors, and I identified with the oppressed. “We” were of the oppressed, and the oppressed were of “us”. For instance, I picked up that there was a war in Algeria against French rule, and knew exactly where right
and wrong was there, which side I was on, though they left me out of it and had difficulty finding the information about it which I sought. I was 15 at the time when British invaded Egypt and occupied Port Said over the nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956.

I was not yet a communist: it would be the better part of a year before I learned to see communism as the liberating Russian Revolution and not as the pitiful, old, muddled-up horror old men ruling Russia. But I sided with Egypt. I remember how someone at work summed up what I was arguing for, to a third person who had just joined us: “He thinks that if he agrees Eden [the British prime minister] has a right to invade Egypt, then he will be saying that England was right in Ireland”. The Irish paradigm of national oppression of peoples and resistance was a serviceable one.

It didn’t misdirect me about the “Jews”, either, then or now. I learned in some detail about Hitler’s massacres of Jews. Excerpts from early days of what became The Scourge of the Swastika, by Lord Rüssel of Liverpoo, were serialised in the Daily Express in mid 1954. [2] “The Jews” were oppressed people. They required a deep fissure in the human conscience.

Jewish migration north from Cheetham was continuous with that of every year I became involved in as a teenager, the Young Communist League, the local Labour Party youth organisation, the clothing industry, was heavily Jewish. The conversion of oldtimers in the CP’ers and garment workers’ union group, for instance, would often centre on what some of their rivals and sparring partners in the Association of Jewish Ex-Serviceemen, Ajex, had said or done. The local leaders of the small Trotskyist group I would join, Harry Ratner and Bert and Greta Karpin, were of Jewish background.[5]

My first job after leaving school was in a small furniture factory, and my first adult partner was living around the corner from me as we had led timber back and forth through a sawing machine to make planks, was a Polish Jew whom we called John. He was a survivor whom I’d been moved on to serve told me we were of Jewish background.

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In a letter to our paper, Workers’ Action, in 1974, a comrade, Neil Smith, had advocated that the PLO military forces there. Lebanon was an unstable confessional state set up in 1943, based on rules for power-sharing between Maronites, Druze, Muslims and Christians. The contradiction between the two versions of “secular democratic state” would be the locomotive of radical change in the Middle East.

So it was with the Trotskyites adherents of the “secular democratic state”. Some of them even proposed the slogan: “Drive the Zionists out of the labour movement”. This very soon became obvious. I used the open and incipient clash to get people to think about the contradictions and about our position on it. The contradiction between the two versions of “secular democratic state” would be the locomotive of radical change in the Middle East.

In June 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon to get Ariel Sharon. An Israeli enquiry would later exonerate him. In August 1982 they massacred the Maronites, still bloodied, still embittered, still unable to forgive or forget, and now able to forgive or forget. It was a sordid and degrading experience. The Socialists and Communists were no different. It was a sordid and degrading experience. The Socialists and Communists were no different.

More online at www.workersliberty.org
his colleagues. The anti-Zionist left instantly gave up all the responsibility and blame to Israel.

The Russian invasion of Afghanistan at Christmas 1979 had triggered what came to be called the Second Cold War, and that finally gave the international background to the conflict in Lebanon and to how the left perceived it. A tremendous hysteria gripped the pro-Palestinian, anti-Israeli left. Our organisation, too, could be argued, I think, that Socialist Organiser was the worst of the left press in the years then, on Israel and the Middle East. Part of it was style. Alan Clinton, who was by this time Chief Whip of the ruling Labour government on Islington council, under Margaret Thatcher, suggested - in the paper - that Israel should never be referred to as Israel. So it was screaming headlines about “the Zionists”. Another problem was that John Lister, joint editor of the paper, a thoughtless and conscienceless hack who saw his place in the political world as that of Alan Thornett’s amanuensis, wrote most of the stuff on “the Zionists”. It was very unpleasant, and more than a little crazed.[5]

Less than a year after the fusion, the organisation had begun to split. One group was united in opposing Thatcher’s Falklands War (April-June 1982), and for the first six weeks also largely united in rejecting any support for Argentina, which had invaded the Falkland Islands, 400 miles from Argentina and with a British population.

Then the Thornettes discovered that the Falklands War was a major event in the world struggle against imperialism, and that the fascist military junta ruling Argentina was now “in our class camp” (alongside Russia). Siding with Argentina was the common Orthodox Trotskyist response (of the Manchester fourth international, for instance). Our side refused to accept what we saw as a ridiculous fantasy politics.

The hysteria about Israel in Lebanon merged into that anti-imperialist “high”. De-nunciation of “the Zionists” at meetings came even less inhibited and more of a gut-level hostility to “the Zionists” than a pro-Palestinian position.

The organisation came very close to imploding. It didn’t, but we had reached the po-litical turning point on the Middle East.

The National Committee, formed by amalgamating the committees of the two previous organisations, was big, about 40 members. Into this committee, with the Middle East on the agenda, Alan Clinton bought an Israeli Jewish socialist, a member of the Workers’ League in Israel. He spoke for the outright destruction of Israel. He himself had, like Tony Cribb, who spoke before him, done the logical thing and left.

Everybody in that room, except for one other comrade (Clive Bradley) and I, was for a “two states” solution. I felt the rooms were halved into which the meeting divided faced each other across a great political chasm. I said, speaking for the Trotskyists close to the front of the meeting, one of my comrades against the “ban Zionists” kitsch-left in the community who live there, comes down to Stalinist ideas in the 1930s). Events and the passage of time have moved the ostensible antisemitism too. I wrote about the slogan “right of return”, the superior claim over the whole of Israel of historical legitimacy and makes the case that those born and living in Israel forever inferior to the claims of generations born elsewhere.

Those who now get gratification and joy out of uninhibitedly crusading against the credibility of the people who, in the history of demagogic campaigning and spurious self-righteousness and hate-blinded antisemitism.

Footnote
[1] One measure of how things stood in the 1980s was when another member of the Labour Party youth organisation in Cheetham, Manchester. My main argument, I remember, was that the kibbutzim were utopian socialist colonies and that therefore Israel offered no viable socialist model.

Irish in background, and therefore “anti-imperialist”, I would have been more aware than average, not less so, of the sort of “colonial” question that would dominate discussions then. “And the continuity of this continuity of the left’s language and its(q) e.

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DEBATE

The Zionists connection

A WRP editorial standing our predecessor

VI

The present-day antisemitism, or absolute anti-Zionism, of the left, is not of course exist in a vacuum, and it is not the start of something new in history.

Uninhibited Nazi-style and simply Nazi antisemitism has been built into Israel’s Arab countries, without a break as far as I know, after the crushing defeat of the Nazis in 1945. Across the world antisemitism has become “anti-Zionism”. The left has inherited and developed the Stalinist “anti-Zionist” antisemitism of the 1930s, which can be compared with the Stalinist ideas in the 1930s. Events and the passage of time have moved the ostensible antisemitism too. I wrote about the slogans “right of return”, the superior claim over the whole of Israel of historical legitimacy and makes the case that those born and living in Israel forever inferior to the claims of generations born elsewhere.

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Protest for “two states”

By Martin Thomas

Workers’ Liberty, the Worker-communist Party of Kurdistan, the Worker-communist Party of Iran (Hekmatist - Official Line), and others, will be demonstrating for a democratic “two states” settlement, peace, and workers’ unity in Israel-Palestine on Saturday 11 May.

We will meet at noon at the BBC, Portland Place, London W1. That is near where the Palestine Solidarity Campaign has called a march.

The PSC protest is widely sponsored, but the message from Unite union general secretary Len McCluskey backing it (bit.ly/mc-c-11m) makes no reference to its actual demands.

Our protest calls for Israel to withdraw from the West Bank, the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, and an end to the blockade of Gaza.

The PSC calls for the “right of return” to what is now Israel of the six million Palestinians who have inherited refugee status, and links its protest to Hamas’s “Great March of Return” actions in Gaza. “Right of return” may sound like a call for individual rights, but collective repossession of the territory by six million people is a different matter.

As Omar Barghouti, one of the chief figures in the boycott-Israel movement, explains: “You cannot reconcile the right of return for refugees with a two-state solution.

That is the big white elephant in the room and people are ignoring it - a return for refugees would end Israel’s existence as a Jewish state” (bit.ly/ob-09).

It is a recycled “smash Israel” slogan. It won’t happen, any time short of an epochal shift in the military balance - so it offers no practical improvement for the Palestinians - and if it did happen it would be only through a terrible war.

On 7 May there is an event of a different sort in Israel - the 14th annual “alternative Memorial Day”, organised by Combatants for Peace, which brings Israeli Jews and Palestinians together to mourn all those killed in the conflict. As in 2018, the Netanyahu government tried to ban Palestinians from the West Bank from attending. As in 2018 the Supreme Court finally overruled the government.

On 6 May Israel and Hamas agreed a ceasefire on the Gaza border. Since 3 May Hamas and Islamic Jihad had fired 690 rockets into Israel, killing four people. Israel had bombed Gaza, killing 25 and destroying 130 homes.

The battle began on 3 May with Islamic Jihad sniper fire from Gaza that wounded two Israeli soldiers. At one point Hamas blustered that its next step would be to “blow up Tel Aviv”, and the ceasefire brokered by Egypt and Qatar could break down when the Eurovision song contest in Tel Aviv (14-18 May) provides a “soft” target.

Behind it was tension over the implementation of deals made in constant haggling between the Israeli government and Hamas over slight easings of the Israeli-Egyptian blockade on Gaza and over the transfer through Israel of money from Qatar to Hamas. The answer is a peace deal giving self-determination to the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and recognition to Israel.

In the West Bank, tension is rising in the run-up to the promised publication in early June of Trump’s plan for the Middle East which has been trailed as aban-doning even nominal commitment to “two states”.

Since 17 February Israel has deducted from the tax revenues which it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, and then re-mits, an amount equivalent to what the PA then pays out to Palestinians in Israeli jails. The PA, in response, has refused to accept the reduced remittance, wagering that Israel will not want to see the PA collapse and have to take direct responsibility for the Palestinian cities and towns in the West Bank. EU efforts to broker a deal have so far failed.

The whole Israeli occupation regime in the West Bank is untenable, and will become only more untenable if Netanyahu goes ahead with his plans to annex to Israel “Area C”, the 60%-plus of the area of the West Bank already under direct Israeli control. “Area C” includes the Jewish settlements and the Israeli military roads, and surrounds the 160-plus patches of the PA-administered Areas A and B.

Our protest on 11 May will call for Israel to withdraw from the West Bank and negotiate “two states”.

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