

# I am an anti-Zionist because I am an anti-racist!

**Jim Higgins** continues a debate on Israel and Palestine.

**A**RGUING with Sean Matgamna is rather like wrestling with a warm jelly and, despite my long-term experience with the gelatinous character of his political method, I was foolhardy enough to agree to his request to enter the debate flowing from his article: Paul Foot: Philo-Semite (if I am not mistaken this means a lover of Jews). This I did, under the proposed headline: Sean Matgamna: Philo-Pede which means lover of feet. The article actually appeared with another, quite inappropriate headline: A Secular Democratic State says Jim Higgins.

This is inappropriate for two reasons. 1. Nowhere in my article do I call for a secular-democratic state. 2. I do not believe in a secular-democratic state. The reason for the headline is presumably to justify such absurdities as Sean's accusation that I am, along with Foot and Cliff, a sufferer from "vicarious Arab chauvinism."

It would seem that if the PLO has the demand inscribed on its banner then, according to Sean's brand of chop-logic, anti-Zionists must adhere to it as well. I do not know if Tony Cliff or Paul Foot subscribe to the secular-democratic formulation. If Cliff does I would lay a fair shade of odds that Foot does too, but what either of them think is a matter of supreme indifference to me. I am, though, virtually certain that Cliff and Foot are not anti-semitic and I know for sure that I am not and I take strong exception to Sean suggesting that this is the case. One of the reasons I have agreed, after further urgent representations from Sean Matgamna, to write this piece is to take the opportunity to protest at his inability to debate without characterising his opponents as racists. I am an anti-racist and that is the primary reason why I am also anti-Zionist.

I was not seeking in my piece in *Workers' Liberty* to write a history of Arab-Jewish relations in the Middle East, merely responding to various dubious statements by Sean. He wrote in *Workers' Liberty* 32: "In fact Israel was proclaimed in May 1948, in territory allotted by the UN, without any Arabs being expelled. Hundreds of thousands of Arabs did flee — the great majority not expelled — after Arab states, with the backing naturally enough of the Palestinian Arabs, invaded Israel."

In my reply I pointed out that in April

1948, according to a strategy worked out in January of that year, the Irgun bombarded Jaffa for three days, Haganah attacked the Arabs in Jerusalem, and the Irgun and the Stern Gang carried out the massacre at Deir Yassin. It was these three events that set in motion, as was the intention, the Palestinian refugees. Sean does not dispute the facts that make nonsense of his original assertion, his response to his mildly expressed correction is pure bluster: "Jim offers us only tales of Haganah attacking the Arab community in Palestine... Tell me Jim," he says, "should the Jews in 1948 have surrendered?" How about that for a piece of bare-faced impudence. In April Israeli forces attack and Sean thinks their only alternative was to surrender. How about the alternative of not attacking the Arab community in Jerusalem? How about not shelling Jaffa? What say you to not killing 250 men, women and children in Deir Yassin?

Why, readers of *Workers' Liberty* might as, do people go on about Deir Yassin? After all, they might say, 250 dead Arabs is terrible enough, but it is a mere drop in the ocean compared to the millions of Jews lost in the Holocaust? The reason why Deir Yassin is so important and why the deaths should not be forgotten, or brushed aside as a matter of little consequence is that these people died because they were Arabs. They had done nothing to offend the Zionists. Nothing at all. The villagers had refused to allow Arab irregulars to fortify the place. They had a non-aggression agreement with Jewish settlers in the area. An agreement they faithfully carried out.

It was precisely because of this, because they were Arabs living at peace with their Jewish neighbours, that they were killed and their houses reduced to rubble. It is worth repeating, they died because they were Arabs. The few pathetic survivors of Deir Yassin were paraded in triumph through Jerusalem, what any survivors of Hitler's death camps thought about this one can only speculate. (For those interested in a fuller discussion of the Deir Yassin massacre there is a wealth of documentation, but the one that may be most authoritative for WL adherents is by Hal Draper in Israel's Arab Minority: The Beginning of a Tragedy, *New Internationalist* Vol XXII No2 1956 from which this account is taken.)

It is absurd, but apparently necessary, to have to tell Sean that racism is indivisible. Just one dead child because he or she is an Arab, or a Jew, or Irish or a Red Indian is exactly one more than any self-respecting socialist can countenance and is quite enough to condemn the perpetrators. If Sean thinks that Deutscher's analogy, of the man jumping out of a burning building and landing on some innocent pedestrian, is appropriate to Deir Yassin, or any of the actions of April 1948, then I can only suggest that he seeks urgent advice about the moral vacuum in his consciousness. The analogy would be better if it involved a man burning down another man's house and when the owner rushed out to avoid the flames, directing him to a tent on the other side of the Jordan.

I have neither the time nor the inclination to follow Sean through every irrelevancy with which he chooses to pad out his reply. Nevertheless, I would like to take up a couple of his additional attempts to rewrite history included in his two nations piece. The Comintern he suggests, in its brave days, was not opposed to Jewish immigration into Palestine. Wrong. At the second congress of the Comintern, *The Theses on the National and Colonial Question*, drafted and introduced by Lenin, says in part: "...Zionism as a whole, which, under the pretence of creating a Jewish state in Palestine in fact surrenders the Arab working people of Palestine, where the Jewish workers form only a small minority, to exploitation by England." Or the ECCI statement of July 1922 on the question of Poale Zion: "...the attempt to divert the Jewish working masses from the class struggle by propaganda in favour of large scale settlement in Palestine is not only nationalist and petty bourgeois but counter-revolutionary..." (Degras Vol I p144 and p366). In late 1923 the Palestine Communist Party was formed, and admitted as a section of the CI, on a programme of opposition to the "Anglo-Zionist occupation." Where Sean gets the idea that the CI was not opposed to Jewish settlement in Palestine is a mystery.

Next we have Sean co-opting Trotsky as one of those not opposed to Jewish immigration to Palestine. Wrong again, Sean. All his life Trotsky was firmly opposed to Zionism and on occasion wrote and spoke against it with some

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vigour. Around the beginning of 1937 he reformulated his ideas after seeing the extent of anti-semitism in Germany and Russia. He came to the view that the Jews, even under socialism, would require a "territorial solution." According to Deutscher: "He did not believe, however, that this would be in Palestine, that Zionism would be able to solve the problem, or that it could be solved under capitalism. The longer decaying bourgeois society survives, he argued, the more vicious and barbarous will anti-semitism grow all over the world." (Deutscher *The Prophet Outcast*, footnote p369).

Sean does not even acknowledge the

client status that Zionism gladly performed for first British and then American imperialism, a fairly serious omission for a socialist you might think. He ignores the fact that Israel's existence has had a profoundly reactionary effect on the region and that is one of the reasons that the major powers conspired in its founding. The Arab revolution has been put back and the Arab masses have suffered every kind of repressive regime, from the pre-feudal primitives of the House of Saud to the murderous tyranny of Saddam Hussein, taking in on the way the clownish Arafat whose tiny statelet requires several police forces and where

even the fire brigade maintains its own jail. All this, one assumes, should be of concern to socialists, even those of the bureaucratic collectivist persuasion. This legacy of 1948 and the previous 50 years of Zionist endeavour have destabilised the region in which Israel has pursued an aggressive and expansive nationalism and where Israelis live in neurotic insecurity that is in no way strengthened by possession of nuclear weaponry.

In July 1940 Trotsky wrote that: "...the salvation of the Jewish people is bound up inseparably with the overthrow of the capitalist system." It is just as true today as it was 56 years ago.