



Excluding children

PERHAPS my article about the exclusion of Richard Wilding in *WL* 31 bent the stick a bit too far in supporting the teachers who threatened to strike at Glaisdale school in Nottingham. In which case Chris Reynolds in *WL*

32 was justified in trying to look more sympathetically at pupils who have been or are likely to be excluded. Do we want to be on the side of those right-wing shits who go on about the dangers of the "underclass" — all those curfew-mongers and hit'em-hard merchants?

After that possibly valid response, his case weakens and seems to rest upon a 25 year-old anecdote about a situation he was involved with when he first started teaching. The anecdote will have a familiar ring to it with teachers who are sympathetic to students. It is a situation they come across many times in the school year — that of an unjustifiably persecuted pupil who has to be defended against the prejudices of reactionary teachers. However, this was not the case with regard to Richard Wilding, despite the fact that the threatened strike was by members of the NASUWT, a union hardly known for its enlightened views.

At my school, there were 72 exclusions this year, the majority of them from Year 7 and Year 8, predominantly from Year 7. This is a situation that would have been unheard of 10 years ago. Then the new or less experienced teachers would have been given classes of younger pupils. Now it is the other way around. Many of the exclusions this year were for serious offences such as threatening with weapons like knives or air pistols, violent attacks on staff or pupils, intimidation, and so on. There is a problem here and it needs to be addressed, not in order to give teachers a quiet life, but for the benefit of everybody involved with the school — students, teachers, ancillary workers, support staff.

Perhaps the causes are to be found in pressure created by the National Curriculum, league tables, open enrolment, Standard Assessment Tests and exam performance. Perhaps the causes are to be found in unemployment, pressure of work on parents, in the modalities of a more violent dog-eat-dog society. At the moment, we can only guess at the possible causes. But there is a desperate need to find answers. This is a predominant problem in all mainstream schools, and a

national response is needed. It is not good enough to say, as Chris Reynolds does, that the first resort should be to demand more resources within the individual school to help deal with disruptive students. The case of Richard Wilding showed that the existing resources within the school had been used up. What do we do then? It is true that exclusions cannot provide a long-term, or even a medium-term, answer. At 72 exclusions in a year, it is clear that it is not all that effective in my school. And what happens if it goes up to 150 next year? But in a situation where the local authority pushes a violent and disruptive student back into

a school against the wishes of both staff and other students, what other options in the current situation have the teachers got but to strike? In the meantime, we must also fight against the underlying causes that create such problems.

There is some misunderstanding in Chris Reynolds' article about the nature of exclusions. They do not necessarily mean that "you are branded as permanently unfit for ordinary human society." It can be a way of giving a student a new start and a chance for self-evaluation. As well as excluding students, we also accept into our school many that have been excluded from other schools... The vast majority of them, enjoying a fresh environment, stay in our school until the end of their school life.

This is one of those subjects on which everyone has an opinion — from the hang'em-and-flog'em brigade, with their demand for more school assemblies of a "broadly Christian character" and stiffer punishments, to those who see school solely as a conditioning mechanism for capitalism and therefore bracket all

teachers as agents of oppression. (Which misses out on the most important role of education — to encourage an enthusiasm for learning!) Unfortunately, where there should be a progressive response from the Labour Party leadership they offer just some more reactionary claptrap. Their policies, such as curfews and fast-tracking, will only make our problem worse — much worse.

But Chris Reynolds' approach won't work either: we need to find real solutions that will benefit everyone involved in schools — not propound sentimental nostrums that miss the point and get us nowhere.

William Irons

The USSR was state capitalist!

THE article from Max Shachtman reprinted in *WL* 33 is good on why the "degenerated workers' state" description of the USSR was unsustainable as early as 1940. Its "ridicule" of the idea that the USSR was state-capitalist is, however, facile.

Shachtman appeals to a motley consensus — Trotsky, Hilferding, and "capitalist[s] anywhere in the world". Yet Trotsky argued against "state capitalism" concretely, from the radical divergences (as he saw it) between the USSR's economic development and that of staid capitalism (in Italy, for example), between the anatomy of the USSR's bureaucracy and that of a consolidated state-capitalist class. He never argued that the sham of administered prices had transformed the workers in the USSR into something other than wage-labourers. Hilferding, in contrast, argued that state capitalism was *logically impossible*. Shachtman's other authority, private-capitalist "common sense", would agree.

"No capitalist class, no capitalist private property, no capitalist profit, no production of commodities for the market, no working class more or less free to sell its labour power on the open market", exclaims Shachtman. In any integral state capitalism, such as envisaged as a theoretical possibility by Engels and others, of course there would be no individual capitalist property and no individual capitalist profits, and the workers would be to a considerable extent state slaves as well as wage-slaves. If Shachtman's argument from these points is right, it proves not

that the USSR was not state-capitalist, but that state-capitalism is logically impossible.

As for production of commodities for the market, there was plenty of that in the USSR. There were shops, money, wages! The workers fought for wage rises; the industrial managers offered piece-rates and bonuses, and battled for extra credits from the central authorities; the central bureaucrats wrestled with inflation. It was a stasised economy based on wage labour.

The one conclusion of any political weight from Shachtman's logic-chopping was that the USSR, not being capitalist, must be post-capitalist. Yet after 1989-91, it is plain that the Stalinist USSR was an aberrant episode *within the capitalist era*. That the compounding of wage labour with state-slavery in the USSR did not so transform it as to make it not wage-labour at all, and thus lift the economy out of the capitalist era, is proved not by abstract deduction, but by historical experience, including the development of the working class.

Martin Thomas

Socialists and football

IAN White's letter (*Workers' Liberty* 33) took a position on the development of football that I have not come across before. He makes some important points about the political implications of the closing of the terraces, but in doing so I think the "living collective" of the football terrace is over-glorified.

White says it is a great feeling to be part of a crowd made up of working-class people and this demonstrates what working-class collectivity and feelings of solidarity and unity would be like. He also describes how the football terraces can become places for positive political expression — the example Ian White uses is of Port Vale during the miners' strike.

However, the fact is that a hell of a lot of the political expression from football terraces is anything but positive. When Tottenham fans (and fans from other clubs) sang "you'll never work again" or "on the dole, on the dole, on the dole," to Liverpool fans, it was anything but a show of working-class unity.

At worst, the football terraces can be fascist recruiting grounds and at best they are usually a reflection of reactionary ideas such as racism, sexism and nationalism.

These things are all prevalent in British culture and in working-class culture and so coalesce around a massively popular game such as football. This is not a good thing. I am a football fan (although not as much as some) but I get annoyed when people over-glorify the game and culture that surrounds it, a culture that on the whole acts as a receptacle for reactionary rather than progressive political ideas.

Such a thing happened after a debate on the "politics of Euro-'96" at the recent Work-

ers' Liberty event "Ideas for Freedom". The debate quickly turned into a debate on whether English anti-nationalists should have supported England.

I personally did support England. A lot of people who really like football and follow the game in England would have a hard time supporting another team, because the England players are the ones they follow and know. The alternatives are to pretend to support another team or not to watch the games — both of which are stupid proposals.

However, socialists who were football fans in that debate were so desperate to defend their right to support England at football that ridiculous arguments began to emerge. Nationalism wasn't such a problem since more Europeans play in England. There wasn't then a significant amount of anti-German feeling around Euro-'96? Oh yeah! Sure... All the St. George's Cross hair-dos and flags weren't significant and the Tories' poll increase didn't matter! Okay, there were no riots and a lot of people thought the *Daily Mirror* was over the top (e.g. "We're Making Football War on Germany") but could any German fans really have sat chchering their team in most English pubs?

The nationalism increased the further England progressed in the competition — if they had reached the final it would have been unbearable.

One of the problems highlighted at the "Ideas for Freedom" debate was that England supporters who are socialists aren't immune to nationalism, to feelings of solidarity on the basis of nation rather than class. One person even said to me that in games like football nationalism wasn't always a bad thing! I suppose he meant so long as it was a nice gentle nationalism that shook hands with the Germans after the match.

Socialists can't just shake off ideas that are pervasive throughout society and nationalism affected all England supporters in that debate. We need to accept this and challenge these and other reactionary ideas that are part of the culture around the game. We shouldn't pretend they don't exist in order to defend ourselves for liking football.

Football is a massively popular sport world wide and, more importantly, a massively popular working-class sport. I think what sometimes happens in the debate to which I have referred, and to a greater extent in Ian White's letter, is a glorifying of the culture around the sport simply because it is working class, not because it is working-class socialist or even progressive.

Rosie Woods

Unite Arab and Jewish workers

READ with interest the contributions from Jim Higgins, Sean Matgamna and Ray Challinor on the Israel/Palestine

conflict in the July issue of *Workers' Liberty*. It was refreshing to see the issues clearly debated as opposed to the ritual sloganising which often accompanies debate on this issue.

I think the problem for those who argue for the "Democratic Secular State" position or its variant the "destruction of the Zionist state" is the actual practical alliances they are forced into in the real politics of the Middle East.

For most of the Palestinian nationalist movement until quite recently their version of these demands included the quite specific aim of "repatriation of the Jewish population to their country of origin." In other words, the Palestinian state created would simply offer democratic rights to some tens of thousands of Jews of Palestinian origin.

The idea that this programme could lead to unity of Arab and Jewish workers is clearly nonsense. The overwhelming majority of the Jewish working class in Israel are oriental Jews, descended from the million or so immigrants who came to Israel from Morocco, Iraq, Yemen and other Arab countries. Are they really going to accept repatriation? Isn't it a sign of progress in the thinking of the PLO that this is no longer their position? The position of the Islamists like Hamas can only be interpreted by Jews as a call for extermination, let alone repatriation.

While it cannot be denied that Zionism has allied itself with imperialism against the popular and progressive movements of the Middle East, it is also undeniable to anyone who isn't simply a

Remorse for intemperate speech

I ranted to the knave and fool,
But outgrew that school,
Would transform the part,
Fit audience found, but cannot rule
My fanatic heart.

I sought my betters: though in each
Fine manners, liberal speech,
Turn hatred into sport,
Nothing said or done can reach
My fanatic heart.

Out of Ireland we have come.
Great hatred, little room,
Maimed us at the start.
I carry from my mother's womb
A fanatic heart.

W B Yeats

doctrinaire sloganiser that there is a Jewish-Israeli nation which speaks a different language, has a different culture and religion to the Palestinians. The route to unifying the working class is not to crush the national rights of this group. By the same token only the granting of full self-determination to the Palestinians and the de-coupling of Israel from the influence of imperialism can lead to the sort of voluntary federation which the economics and history of the region demands.

John Laurence

PS. Raymond Challinor's letter is full of irritating factual inaccuracies which make me even less sympathetic to his arguments. Just a few:

1. The Zionists did not rename Jaffa as Haifa as he claims. Jaffa is just outside Tel Aviv and still exists (and still has a significant Arab population). He means Acre not Jaffa.

2. A Palestinian has headed the Israeli government — Yitzhak Navon, a Palestinian Jew, was President. He would have been more accurate to say no Palestinian Moslem or Christian has!

3. Benjamin Disraeli was not a Jew when he became Prime Minister but had long before been baptised in the Church of England. Britain hasn't even had a Catholic Prime Minister!

PPS. Why is Israel-Palestine the only area of the planet where the SWP (and Jim Higgins) call for a national democratic revolution as opposed to a socialist one? How does this square with their allegiance to the theory of Permanent Revolution? After all, in South Africa and Ireland they have for years argued that only socialism can solve the national question, downplaying democratic demands as a means to mobilise the masses.

Is there any possibility of economic assistance coming from somewhere in the Middle East? After all, Jim, didn't you spend quite a while working for the Libyan financed magazine *Events* after Cliff fired you as industrial organiser of the SWP?

It isn't Trotskyism as we know it, Jim.

Labour and Welsh Home Rule

THE Labour Party's recent announcement on devolution for Wales (i.e. an assembly, voted for by first past the post and funded by Westminster) was received with much castigation, but those who follow Welsh politics should not be so surprised by this latest development. Since the process of structuring the policy began, the emphasis has been on doing as little as possible with as much noise.

The Wales Labour Party set up a roving policy commission chaired by Ken Hopkins, a member of the Welsh Executive, and a safe

pair of hands with which to deliver the desired outcome. The debate within the Party had its parameters set by a discussion paper. A series of questions were posed and members were guided by multiple choice answers. Therefore no discussion took place outside the guidelines and the outcome was more or less secured from the beginning. The concession to Welsh nationalists was the smallest possible and had the least impact on WLP unity.

Even this small offering was, however, a step too far for some Welsh Labour MPs and trade unionists. People like Llew Smith, Ted Rowlands, Ray Powell, Kim Howells, Allan Rogers and Roy Hughes have all made anti-devolution rumblings, some on the principle, others on the formula but these few are only the tip of the iceberg and represent a large number of discontents within the WLP.

Whatever Blair's reason for this policy change (and there is no doubt that the decision was his, Ron Davies, the Shadow Secretary for Wales was only informed after the fact) it will open the floodgates for a yes/no debate of the kind we saw in 1979. It is my belief that unless the policy is formulated and fronted by someone who is a true devolutionist and is fully backed by the leadership then the "no" brigade will probably be triumphant. The protagonists on the "anti" side would also be able to count on assistance from the leaders of the newly elected Unitary Authorities. These men (and they are all men) have a real fear that their freshly anointed powers will soon become the prey of an ever-expanding Welsh Assembly hungry for a sense of purpose. People like Russell Goodway, leader of Cardiff Council, and Billy Murphy, leader of the hybrid authority of Rhondda-Cynon-Taff, both have an interest in supporting the status quo. Between them they have a third of the Welsh electorate within their borders and could probably swing the vote either way.

Whatever the motivations behind recent developments, Tony Blair has succeeded in awakening what was previously the loyally dormant dragon of the Wales Labour Party — the burning question must be just who is going to get scorched?

Theelia Wheed

Mistaken about peace

IT seems as if two types of mistake are being made about the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

One is to fail to see what is new, positive and potentially positive in the Israeli-PLO agreement. The other is to want to take some responsibility for what, after all, is a lousy deal.

The first error concentrates too much on what the current situation has in common with the past — continuing Israeli repression and lack of full Palestinian national rights. It downplays or misses what is different and new.

The second type of mistake — an example of which was made by Richard Sutherland in *WL* 32 — is simultaneously

more appealing and worse. Wanting to vote for Peres against Netanyahu is appealing because it is true that Likud may well wreck the 'land for peace' process — and because I also want to see something "practical" done to stop Likud. But it is also a bad mistake to make because it contradicts what should be our consistent advocacy of the need for independent working-class politics. A situation must be particularly desperate and hopeless for us to even consider voting for a straightforwardly bourgeois party like the Israeli Labour Party.

As we said at the time the deal went through (*Socialist Organiser* editorial, 9 September 1993): "the Israel-PLO deal is, despite everything, a breakthrough for the Palestinians" because "this accord can be the thin end of the wedge for an independent Palestinian state" and the "present accord is an enormous breakthrough in principle insofar as it involves mutual recognition by Israel and the PLO — recognition, if not yet of two states, at least of two entities."

The Palestinians are weak and had no real alternative. However given that in the deal the Palestinians got far less than is rightfully theirs, the editorial also rightly said "socialists can not take responsibility for an agreement such as this."

Richard Sutherland asks not just for critical backing for the deal but backing for the capitalist party that made that deal — Labour — in an election.

And that's worse. It means getting caught up with the other awful policies which Labour has been responsible for. It is not true that the only issue in the last Israeli elections was the 'land for peace' process. Labour in government attacked workers' living standards. And that's not surprising, as Israeli Labour is paradoxically the central party of the Israeli bourgeoisie. It's not true that the only issue in Israeli politics is the national question.

So if socialists endorse Labour — however critically — they discredit themselves in front of, for example, the poorest Jewish workers, former residents or descendants of residents in Arab countries, who quite rightly hate the Labour Party for class reasons (and often, unfortunately, vote Likud).

I could understand the position more if there was no labour movement in Israel — no one to appeal to, to work with or to look to. But there is. So there is no compelling, overwhelming reason to abandon the advocacy of independent working-class politics (temporarily, for the duration of the election, perhaps) in favour of the lesser evil.

If socialists like Richard Sutherland advocate that the Israeli far-left should vote for Peres, what he gains is a handful of votes; what he loses is being right (and so diminishes the possibility of substantially affecting the course of working-class politics in Israel in the future).

Dan Katz