



Two nations Two states

Socialists and Israel/Palestine

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Two nations,two states

**By Clive Bradley, Stan Crooke, Sean Matgamna
and Michel Warshawski**

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war" is by Michel Warshawski; the other articles are by Sean Matgamna

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Introduction

THE Israeli-Palestinian peace talks broke down in late 2000 and had ended by February 2001. The Palestinian *intifada* erupted in late September 2001. A right wing, chauvinist government was installed early in 2001 by an Israeli electorate bitterly disappointed that what they saw as major concessions to the Palestinians in the peace talks had not brought settlement, and alarmed by the intensifying conflict.

The Palestinian suicide-bomb offensive against Jewish civilians pushed large numbers of Israelis, seeking safety, to back or tolerate Prime Minister Sharon's militarism against the Palestinians; the Sharon Government's brutally out-of-proportion responses to the suicide bombings and its drive to destroy the Palestinian Authority, pushed many Palestinians into support or tolerance of the suicide bombers.

George Bush's international "war on terrorism", since September 11, 2001, has given the Israeli government a free hand in their dealings with the Palestinians.

Sharon and Hamas have acted as if in tacit collusion to escalate the slaughter and make a just settlement impossible. Many of the structures of a Palestinian state that were erected in the 1990s have been destroyed.

Israel pursues tactics typical of a modern, rich, democratic "First World" state, able to use its military power to minimise politically costly casualties on its own side, while inflicting massive carnage on its qualitatively less well-equipped adversary.

Palestinian suicide-bombers, young men and occasionally women, who blow themselves up in places and at times calculated to take with them as many Jews as possible, believing that the explosion will instantly transport themselves to Paradise and "the Zionists" straight to Hell, mercilessly slaughter civilians on Israel's streets.

THESE are the elements of the worst phase of Jewish-Arab conflict in the Middle East for twenty years.

The situation is grim. It may become a great deal worse as a result of a new American-British war against Iraq.

What in this situation should consistent democrats and socialists do?

- Back Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation where Palestinians are the majority.

- Demand Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. Essentially, perhaps with minor modifications, that means to the pre-1967 borders.

- Support those in Israel who oppose the occupation, and those who refuse to serve in the Israeli army in the Occupied Territories.

- Demand justice for the Palestinian nation – their immediate right to set up

an independent Palestinian state, side by side with Israel, and the provision of sufficient aid and compensation to allow the Palestinians, who now live in Third World conditions side by side with First World Israel, a chance to develop their society. Those border areas of pre-1967 Israel where Palestinians are the more numerous should have the right to secede to the Palestinian state if the people there wish it.

- Argue for an overall settlement, a "historic compromise", between the surrounding Arab world and Israel, in which Israel's right to exist within secure borders is recognised by the Arab states, and its relationship with the surrounding Arab states is "normalised" – something like the proposals of the Arab Summit of March 2002.

- Champion Jewish and Arab working-class unity in the area, on the only possible basis, namely, mutual recognition of both nations' rights.

- Reject and oppose both Jewish and Arab chauvinist approaches to the conflict.

- Counter with fact, argument and historical perspective the vicarious Arab chauvinism dominant on the British pseudo-left (people who talk left but mimic the politics of non-socialist and non-working class political and religious formations), and beyond the left.

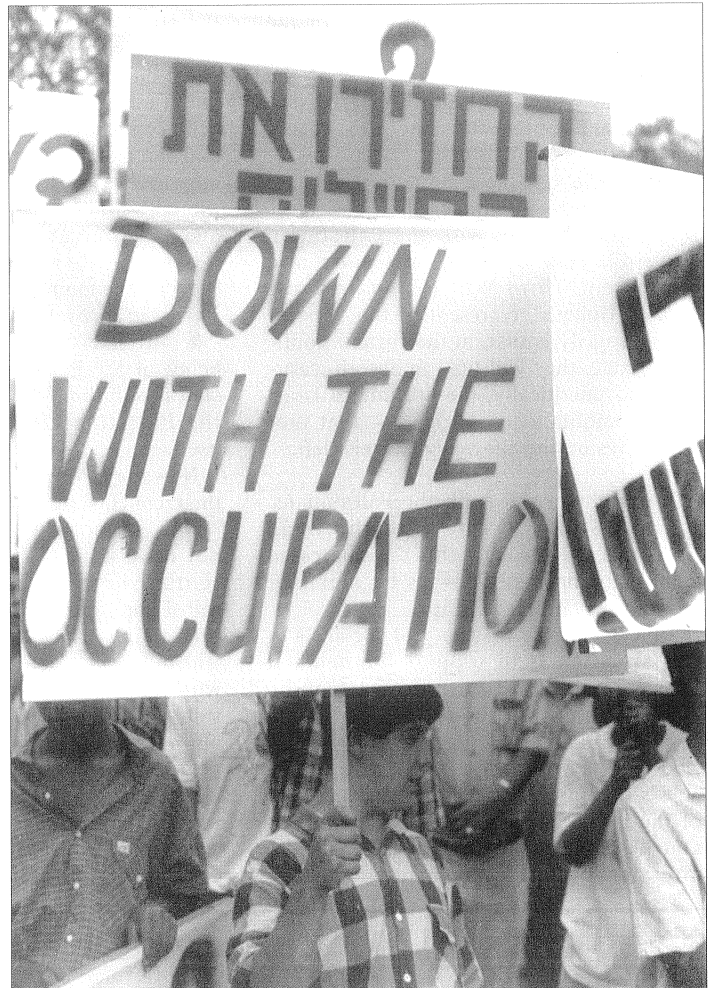
- Combat the demonisation of Israel as a uniquely bad and vicious state which expresses that Arab chauvinism and the traditional European hostility to Jews.

- Expose and fight the anti-semitism which finds "respectable" expression under cover of Israelophobia and is its inescapable subliminal message.

- Argue in the labour movement and in the left for historical understanding and an international socialist, consistently democratic approach to the question.

- Seek to establish British trade union contact and exchanges of opinion with labour movement bodies in Israel and Palestine.

- Build a mass movement in solidarity with the Palestinians around the demand



Jewish-Arab peace demonstration

that Israel must withdraw from the Occupied Territories and allow the Palestinians to set up an independent state.

- Help the left put its house in order. Insist that those who claim to speak in the name of socialism and Marxism and nonetheless preach national hatred justify themselves in the light of the real history of the conflict, the real alternatives now and the socialist principles in relation to national conflicts established by Marx and Lenin.

THE conflict between Israel and Palestine has come to be seen by much of the world, and especially by the left and the pseudo-left, as a concentrated, dramatic, superabundantly violent rendition of the relationship between, on one side, the rich and oppressive "First World", and, on the other, the whole of the poorer, oppressed "Third World". Israel is "imperialism", the unmasked face of imperialist brutality and of racist disregard for human rights.

Israel is the USA writ small. The struggle against Israel is the struggle against imperialism.

If, in the 19th and 20th centuries, before Israel came into existence, Jews – and, preposterously, even poor and working-class Jews, the overwhelming majority – came to be widely seen as the personification of money-power, today, many millions see Israel – even those Israeli Jews

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who oppose their state's treatment of the Palestinians and fight for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories – as the quintessence of "First World" imperialism.

Young people who become active against the exploitation in sweatshops of Third World child workers, and who are anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-war, naturally side with the Palestinian "David", representing the poor and oppressed "Third World", against the Jewish "Goliath", representing the "First".

The tragedy is that, in the current political climate, they will tend to absorb, casually and uncritically, the attitude to Israel – and, subliminally, to Jews – that predominates on the avowedly-Marxist left.

IT is right to side with the Palestinians. The instinct to side with the weak against the strong, with the oppressed against the oppressors, is the beginning of wisdom for all decent people.

That is why the first duty of socialists in this situation is to support the demand that Israel should withdraw from the Palestinian majority territories and allow the Palestinians to set up their own state side-by-side with Israel.

It is the only solution that takes account of the rights of both sides in the conflict, and therefore it is the only rational, just and progressive solution to the

Palestinian-Israeli conflict: – Two states for the two peoples, combined with fully equal citizenship for Palestinians in Israel, and for Jews in a Palestinian state.

Rejecting the chauvinism of both sides, and the demonisation of either side by its opponents and their sympathisers, this is the only programme around which Jewish and Arab workers could ever unite.

YET the main forces on the British left, while presenting themselves as intensely concerned for the well-being of the Palestinians, reject this "two states" solution, the policy since 1988 of the Palestine Liberation Organisation itself.

Nowadays they do not often spell out their conclusions forthrightly and clearly, but in essence they hold that Israel does not have a right to exist; that the 20th century history of Palestine should be rolled back and undone; and that the territory that is now Israel, inhabited overwhelmingly by Jews, should be combined with the West Bank and Gaza in one Arab state in which Jews would have religious but not national rights.

Fourteen years after the Palestine Liberation Organisation formally adopted it, they continue to reject the policy of "two states".

How this dogmatic "anti-Zionism"

undermines the work of building a rational, just and democratic movement of solidarity with the Palestinians came out clearly at the Executive Committee of the Socialist Alliance, when the Socialist Workers' Party-led majority there voted down a proposal from supporters of Workers' Liberty to focus the Alliance's campaign on the Middle East conflict around the demands for Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian majority territory and for the right of the Palestinians immediately to set up their own independent state alongside Israel.

The Socialist Alliance majority preferred vaguer slogans: "Victory to the intifada", and, "Free Palestine" Why? Why do they prefer the vague to the concrete and precise slogans? What do they think they mean?

For the majority of the Socialist Alliance, as for Hamas and similar Islamic-Arab chauvinists, these slogans mean not only Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian majority territory back to the 1967 borders, but Arab-Islamic conquest of the whole of pre-1948 Palestine. This "liberation of Palestine" is understood to mean the destruction of Israel and the subjugation of its people.

Though not explicitly, or courageously or candidly, these vaguer slogans of the Socialist Alliance majority express the "smash Israel" obsession of the SWP.

THERE is more here than a proper siding with the weak against the oppressor.

When other states – Britain, France, Germany, the USA, Italy, for example – have been oppressors, it has been considered sufficient for socialists and democrats to champion the self-determination and independence of their victims.

Uniquely in the case of Israel, opposition to its oppression of the Palestinians and support for Palestinian rights, is linked with a denial of the right of the Israeli state and of the Jewish nation to exist.

Not only do Jews have no right to rule Palestinian-majority territory by military occupation, as they surely do not; they have no right to be in the region at all.

Jews in the Middle East have no rights, other than the right – voluntarily or under compulsion – to dismantle their state and, for those who survive and remain in what is now Israel, the right to continue practising their religion. (If they are religious; many are not).

The relationship between Jews and Arabs which now exists in the West Bank and Gaza, say these "anti-Zionists", should simply be reversed in the whole territory of pre-1948 Palestine.

Israelis, they insist, do not even have the moral right to defend themselves. And since they refuse to dismantle their state, it is the duty of "anti-imperialists" to side with those who make war to destroy Israel – with a bin Laden or a Saddam Hussein. For example, in 1991, the SWP supported Iraq's rocket attacks on Israel and praised Saddam's fervent "anti-Zionism".

Thus, instead of rational working-class

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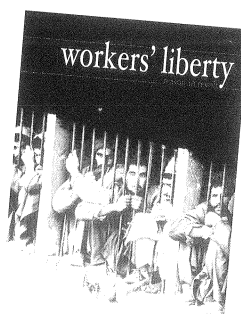
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socialist politics, instead of democratic proposals for Arab-Jewish accommodation and co-existence that might in time allow Arab and Jewish workers to unite, the pseudo left offers all-out demonisation of Israel and endorsement of the politics of the worst and most irreconcilable of the Arab and Islamic chauvinists. From a safe distance, they are more Arab-chauvinist than the PLO!

There is nothing socialist, Marxist or "anti-imperialist" in such an approach to this tragic conflict, where there is right on both sides. Humanitarian outrage for the Palestinians in the mouths of those who advocate such politics is the sheerest hypocrisy: they want not peace and the coexistence of Jew and Arab, and the equality and unity of Arab and Jewish workers, but that the terrible cycle should continue, with the Israelis, including the Israeli working class, as victims.

In the days of rampant and unabashed anti-Jewish outcry in late 19th century Europe, there were socialists who thought that anti-Jewish agitation focused on the Jews' alleged identity with money-power, agitation against millionaires like "the Rothschilds", could advance the working class cause. The German socialist August Bebel memorably said of them that they subscribed to a "socialism of the fools". The truth is that those on the left who today preach opposition to Israel's right to exist as serious anti-imperialism, stand in the direct line of descent from those whom Bebel denounced. They subscribe to an anti-imperialism of the fools!

IF by "imperialism" here we mean advanced capitalism in the USA and Europe – and that is effectively what it has come to mean to the pseudo-left – then the Arab ruling classes have as much connection with "imperialism" as Israel has. They are as much its creatures as the Israeli ruling class is (indeed, often more so). Destroying Israel would not eliminate foreign capitalist involvement in the area.

US subsidies do not give the USA control over Israel. There is no sense in which

Israel functions to secure US or European Union influence or power over the Arab states. On the contrary, Israel has habitually strained and sometimes disrupted US/EU-Arab relations. The disappearance of Israel would probably make it easier for the big powers to strengthen their links with the Arab bourgeoisies.

The point is that much more is involved in the Israel-Palestine conflict than can be understood from a raw "side with the oppressed" reaction to the TV and newspaper images of the Palestinian David fighting the Jewish Goliath in the second intifada. The Arab-Jewish conflict has a long and complicated history.

A MAJOR reason why the festering conflict that is now being bloodily fought out on the West Bank of the Jordan, in the Gaza Strip, and on the streets of Israel's cities, has gone on for so long has been the refusal of the Arab states to arrive at a *modus vivendi* with the Israeli Jewish nation.

Israel was set up on 14 May 1948, on a United Nations mandate, in areas where Jews were the majority. Immediately after the Jewish state was proclaimed, Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq (led by British officers) and Syria and Lebanon, invaded Israel, with the intention, as an Egyptian proclamation put it, to "drive the Jews into the sea".

In the course of the war that followed, 750,000 Arab refugees fled or were driven out. (In the following years, 600,000 Jews fled or were driven out of the Arab countries and went to Israel.) Defeated, the Arab states thereafter refused to make peace with Israel or recognise its right to exist.

The Palestinian state which the UN had intended to exist side by side with Israel had most of its territory taken by Jordan and Egypt and disappeared from history.

The prolonged Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza – from 1967 until today – is itself in part a by-product of the Arab states' refusal to recognise Israel. Egypt eventually did recognise Israel, in

1977. Immediately after the 1967 war, when Israel offered to withdraw from the Occupied Territories in return for recognition and peace, the Arab states refused, collectively, at a meeting in September 1967, to negotiate with, recognise, or make peace with Israel. They continued to proclaim their goal to be the destruction of Israel.

Refusal to accept Israel's right to exist, and policies based on that refusal – a refusal which the pseudo-left wants to continue even after the PLO has abandoned it and the March 2002 Arab Summit have offered to abandon it – have played a deadly role down through the decades of this tragic conflict.

Again and again, they have brought avoidable catastrophe on the Palestinian people. The story is told in detail in the body of this pamphlet.

THUS, though it is indeed the beginning of wisdom to side with the weak and the oppressed Palestinians facing the Israeli army, to support the Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation and demand the immediate setting up of an independent Palestinian state, more than that is necessary.

If we are to understand the present stage of the conflict, and avoid falling into "the anti-imperialism of the fools", then an understanding of the history is essential.

The account most widely accepted on the left of the Arab-Jewish conflict and of how and why Israel came into existence, and of why the conflict has dragged on for decades, is, in fact, not history, but envenomed scapegoat-making mythology. On this, much of the British left has for decades followed the line of argument laid down by the Stalinist USSR fifty years ago when it fell out with Israel, purveying not only pseudo anti-imperialism, but a real and malignant anti-Semitism too.

It is not racist anti-semitism, of course – there are many strands of anti-semitism in history – but it is a comprehensive hostility to most Jews alive, branded as "racists" if they refuse to support the destruction of Israel.

The vicarious Arab chauvinism of the pseudo-left on this issue can not but repel fair-minded, thinking people who side with the Palestinians, in the sense that this pamphlet does. Thereby, it works against the creation of the mass solidarity movement which the Palestinians need.

This pamphlet, an expanded edition of the one published under the same name a year ago, consists of pieces that have appeared in *Socialist Organiser*, *Workers' Liberty* and *Solidarity*. It offers an account of the history of the Jewish-Arab conflict, and a critical examination of the politics of the left on this question

Sean Matgamna, 21 August 2002

The case for a Palestinian state

FOR DECADES now, the Palestinian Arabs in Gaza and the West Bank have taught the people of Israel that Karl Marx was right when he wrote that “a nation which enslaves another can never itself be free”.

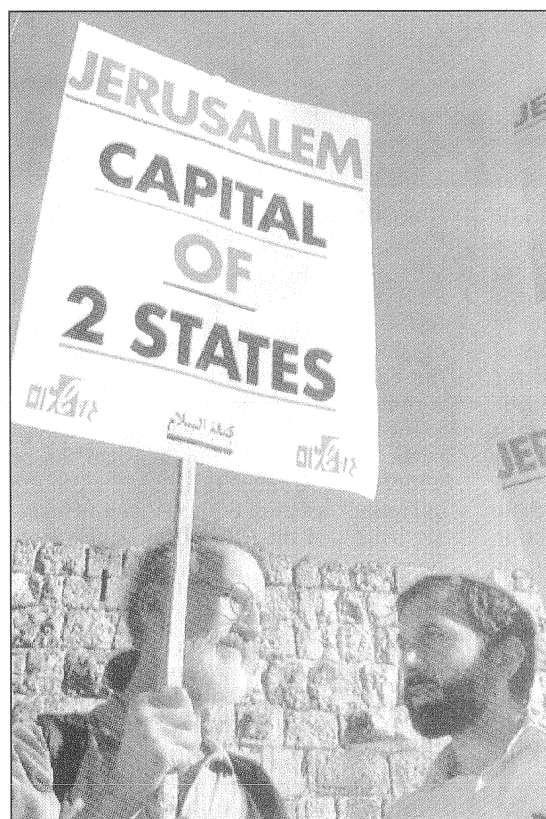
Israel's victory in the Six Day War of June 1967 recreated the political unit of pre-1948 Palestine, but under Jewish control and with the West Bank and Gaza as “occupied territories”. The Arabs there have been treated as a conquered people. For over 30 years Israel has held the Arabs of the West Bank and Gaza under a brutal colonial-style regime of the iron heel and the bloody fist. In recent years, since the Oslo accord of 1993, Israel's grip on the occupied territories has loosened – but too little, too inconsistently, to do much but raise expectations and then frustrate them again. Now, in 2001, even the little progress made since 1993 is fast being annulled.

It is no use arguing, as apologists for Israel do, that there are worse and more brutal regimes in the Middle East than the Israeli administration in the occupied territories. That is true, but no excuse. Jewish colonists, aiming to displace the Arabs and expand the Jewish-majority area, have been allowed to settle there, indeed encouraged. The Israeli government systematically deported Arab leaders in a deliberate policy of beheading the Palestinian Arab nation – and now assassinates them. Arab children who dare throw stones at the occupying army are shot dead. Arab houses and villages have been destroyed by the Israeli army.

For a long time this policy worked. The Arabs remained mostly quiescent and cowed. Resistance was sporadic and easily controlled. Within Israel and in the settlements, the poison of Jewish chauvinism and racism spread in the Jewish population. The victory of the Likud coalition in 1977 shifted the Israeli polity to the right. Open racists who advocate the expulsion of millions of Arabs from the occupied territories and Israel itself have moved in from the outer lunatic fringes of Israeli political life to become a power in the Knesset (parliament).

Over 20 years and more now, Israeli society has been polarising between those willing to follow people like the current prime minister, Ariel Sharon, and those who held to a different hope for what Israel should be.

Yet those who want to get Israel out of its chauvinist trajectory have been caught in the logic of recent Israeli history. That is sym-



bolised by the Israeli Labour Party's participation in the current coalition government under Ariel Sharon.

For 14 years now, Israel has been struggling to respond to a revolt by the Arabs in the occupied territories which started in December 1987 (the “intifada”). The start of the intifada was the third stage of Palestinian response to their defeat in the Jewish-Arab war of 1948.

For the first 20 years the Palestinian Arabs were stunned and dispersed. They looked to the Arab governments, rather than to themselves, for redress. The Arab defeat in 1967 freed them and led the PLO to a far more active and independent policy. They combined international political campaigning with small-scale military or terrorist action against Israel. They set up bases first in Jordan, then in Lebanon.

They were massacred and driven out of both bases – in Lebanon, partly by Israel. The third stage of the Palestinian Arab response has been the stage of mass resistance in the occupied territories themselves.

Israel is at a crossroads of its history. It has a choice between two alternatives. Either

Israel makes peace, or it imposes some form of “unilateral separation”, fencing the Palestinians into a series of “bantustans” surrounded by heavy military defences, and possibly driving out Palestinians from other areas. The second alternative would poison both Palestinian and Israeli society, and soon lead to renewed war.

Peace with the Palestinian Arabs and the surrounding Arab peoples means recognition of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian Arabs, by way of the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories and negotiations with the PLO for the setting-up of a fully independent Arab Palestinian state side-by-side with Israel. It means mutual recognition of Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. It means two states for the two Palestinian nations, Jewish and Arab.

It is true that such a settlement does not depend on Israel alone. The Palestinian Arabs are today the oppressed, but the war that has shaped the last 50 years was launched in 1948 by the Arab states – with armies led by British officers – to destroy the new Jewish state. Israel is mainly surrounded by hostile Arab states. Even if the PLO now explicitly recognises Israel's right to exist, many Palestinian factions do not. The Islamic fundamentalists now strong in the occupied territories certainly do not. If Israel were to just get out of the occupied territories without a general political settlement, then there is no doubt that the territories would be used as military or terrorist bases against Israel.

But it cannot follow that Israel has a right to continue repressing the Palestinian Arabs. The solution is not indefinite Israeli occupation which deprives the Palestinian Arabs of their basic rights of self-control and self-direction. The solution is a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs.

Israel should get out of the occupied territories, and agree to the setting-up of an independent Palestinian Arab state there. That is the programme on which Arab and Jewish workers can begin to unite, to fight for a Socialist United States of the Middle East which uses the huge natural wealth of the region to guarantee a decent life for all and recognises the right of self-determination for all nationalities in the region.



Socialists and the intifada

Israel confronts the Palestinians on the West Bank as a brutal colonialist oppressor. But the Jewish-Arab conflict is also a conflict of right against right – the right of the Palestinians to have an independent state and the right of Israel to exist in security. Here an attempt is made to untangle the issues.

Support for the Palestinians' struggle for an independent state should come first surely?

YES. We support the oppressed. Those who refuse to do that inevitably help the oppressor. As the Irish socialist James Connolly rightly said: "To side with the strong against the weak is the virtue of the slave".

But we also have to keep an overview. The right of the Israeli state to exist and defend itself is not accepted by most Arabs, except maybe as something that has to be accepted because they do not have the forces to deny it. The Palestine Liberation Organisation accepts it, but, for

example, Hamas, which pioneered the suicide bombings and remains their most prolific practitioner, does not.

How can the Jews have rights in Palestine? What is now called "Israel" was stolen from the Arabs.

THIS account has more to it of one-sided Arab, or western anti-Jewish, propaganda than of history.

There was always, over the centuries, a Jewish minority in Palestine, though not a big one. For example, in 1900, before serious Jewish immigration began, there was a Jewish majority in Jerusalem. (Similarly, 60 years ago, Jews were perhaps 40% of the population of Iraq's capital, Baghdad.)

Take the story from 1900. What is now Israel-Palestine was part of the Turkish Empire. All the Arab lands of the Middle East, except Egypt, were part of that great, sprawling, backward Islamic empire, loosely ruled from Istanbul. "Palestine" was "south Syria".

Nations are formed by history. A Palestinian nation, distinct from other Arabs, was formed only in the 20th century. It was heavily shaped by Arab interaction with the Jewish colonists. In fact, not only Jewish colonists moved into Palestine. At least 40,000 Arabs migrated into Palestine between 1922 and 1945, drawn there from the surrounding territories by the increased economic life resulting from the Zionist colonisation.

Why did Jews come at all? Much of present-day Israel was then a semi-wilderness. Tel Aviv was built on a former

swamp. Where did Zionism come from?

Modern Zionism began at the end of the 19th century as a response to a growth of anti-semitism in Europe. That convinced Theodor Herzl and others that Jews would never be secure until they had their own state. A movement to persuade Jews to colonise their biblical homeland was founded. It had only very limited success. Very few Jews wanted to uproot themselves and go pioneering in the wilderness. When persecution and systematic harassment of Jews in Tsarist Russia intensified, most of those who fled moved west, to central and western Europe and America, and to South Africa, not to Palestine.

It would take half a century of increasingly lethal anti-semitism in Europe to convert large numbers of Jews to Zionism and persuade them to go to Palestine. It would also take the closing-off of all possible alternatives.

By the time Hitler came to power in Germany, in 1933, the USA no longer allowed free immigration (since 1921), and European states would let in only a trickle of Jews. Increasingly the Zionists who went to Palestine were refugees from persecution who had nowhere else to go.

By the late 1930s and in the early 1940s, Jews going from Europe to Palestine were literally fleeing for their lives. In the early 1940s, in the middle of the war, whole boatloads of Jewish refugees drowned when they attempted the journey in unseaworthy craft, desperate to escape the Nazi death trap that Europe had become for them.

Thus the Jewish national minority in

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Palestine was augmented by an increasing migration of desperate people.

You forget imperialism! Didn't British imperialism sponsor the Jewish occupation of Arab land, and help them drive out the Arabs?

YES, but also no. It is a much more complicated story than myth would have it.

In late 1917, a British Secretary of State, Arthur Balfour, wrote a letter to the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann pledging British support for the establishment of a "Jewish homeland". Simultaneously Britain promised to support independence for the Arabs after they had helped Britain defeat Turkey, under whose rule they had been for centuries.

At the end of the First World War, British and France partitioned the Arab part of the collapsed Turkish Empire into more or less artificial states. France controlled Syria and Lebanon. Britain gained Transjordan (now Jordan), Iraq, Palestine, and influence in Saudi Arabia. It already had Egypt as a protectorate, since 1882.

From the beginning, sections of the British ruling class had second thoughts about the "Jewish homeland". The oil riches of the Arab lands were beginning to be developed by British capital, and counted for much more than promises to the Jews. In Palestine, anti-Jewish riots erupted in 1919. Britain would spend the next two decades trying to square commitment to the "Jewish homeland" with placating the Arab parts of its Middle East empire. It would in 1939 turn savagely against the Jews.

In 1930, the Labour Colonial Secretary, Lord Passfield (the Fabian, Sydney Webb), made tentative efforts to halt Jewish migration to Palestine. In 1937, a British investigation into new Jewish-Arab clashes, the Peel Commission, recommended the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab territories. The Zionists accepted the idea; the Arabs rejected it.

In 1939, in an effort to placate Arab discontent which the Nazis could use against Britain and France in World War Two, Britain decided to end all Jewish immigration within five years, and to limit it to 75,000 over those five years.

Britain did this on the eve of the Nazi slaughter of two out of every three of Europe's Jews – six million of them. From 1939 onwards, Britain rigidly policed access to Palestine against Jews fleeing for their lives, refusing entry to boatloads of Jews who got to the coast and locking up would-be illegal immigrants in internment camps in Cyprus. It continued to do that up to the last moments – May, 1948 – of its power in Palestine.

Marxists had warned Jewish workers against the Zionist project, telling them that they were foolish to place their trust in an alliance with imperialism. Even they could not imagine the spectacular treachery to its Zionist "ally" which the British Empire would thus commit, helping to corral European Jews for Hitler's butchers.

But without British rule in Palestine in the 1920s and 30s, there would have been no Jewish immigration. An independent Arab state would not have allowed it.

TRUE. And then some additional hundreds of thousands of European Jews would probably have died in the Holocaust. But socialists are in favour of free immigration, aren't we? Those who denounce the entry over two decades of 341,000 Jews, many fleeing for their lives, who built up their own economy and society in parallel to that of the Arabs, now advocate the mass, collective resettlement ("right of return") of 3.7 million Palestinians in present-day Israel, and the destruction of Israel by some Saddam Hussein or other if it will not accept that "return". Such are the double standards that result from the demonisation of Israel and the replacement of real history with Arab chauvinist and anti-semitic myths.

Both the Communist International of the 1920s, and the Trotskyists, supported free Jewish migration into Palestine as into other countries, though they opposed the Zionist project and British imperialism in Palestine.

The early Jewish settlers evicted the Arabs from their land, as the first step towards driving them out altogether in 1948

HERE it is difficult to trace the truth on terrain dominated on one side by Zionist heroic myths of nation-building and Arab "blameless victim" myths on the other.

The most important of the Zionist colonists were utopian socialists, determined to be neither exploiter nor exploited. They set up communistic agrarian communities, kibbutzim. They did not seize the land from the Arabs. They bought land from Arab landlords, at very high prices, reclaimed wasteland, and drained swamps. The Zionists built up their own society in parallel with the Arab society they found there.

Zionist colonists drove Arab peasants off land which they had bought over the peasants' heads from their Arab feudal overlords. Socialists are not in favour of anyone being evicted to make way for somebody else; however, the fact of evictions tells us not that the Zionists were especially evil but that it was a bourgeois and feudal, not socialist, world.

In the whole 60 years before 1948, only some thousands – not hundreds of thousands, or tens of thousands – of Arab families were evicted following land sales to Jews. Those who in their capacity as landlords privately sold the land often then publicly, in their capacity as traditional aristocratic and religious leaders, agitated against the Jewish infidel invaders, inflating the peasants' alarm and raising land prices.

Arab-Jewish conflict had many dimensions. No doubt there was white European arrogance among the Jewish settlers. There

was a very powerful cultural conflict between traditional Arab society and the Zionist utopian socialists – people rooted in modern European culture, who were often atheists hostile to all religion and certainly, in the eyes of Muslims, infidels. The freer ways and knee length trousers of the kibbutz women caused particular scandal and outrage.

It is a myth that there was no anti-Jewish prejudice in the Arab countries before Zionism. Jews were tolerated there, as they often were not in Europe – but as inferior subjects, paying special taxes. Conventional Arab and Muslim resentment at Jews who were not subservient was part of the conflict, too – attitudes expressed in such slogans as "the Jews are our dogs".

Overall, the anti-Jewish movement was communalist, traditionalist and pogromist. (And it was not confined to Palestine. In 1941 there was a major pogrom of Jews in Baghdad.) The first big anti-Jewish movement in Palestine, in 1929, included the massacre of 60 teachers and students at a non-political traditionalist Jewish college in Hebron. It was not anti-imperialist, but avowedly pro-British; one of its mobilising slogans to get Arabs to attack Jews was "the British are with us".

The Palestinian leaders were thorough-going reactionaries. The top leader, Haj Amin al-Husseini, went to Europe in World War Two and tried to raise a Muslim army in Bosnia to fight for the Nazis.

What do you expect the Palestinians to do? Welcome the Jews?

WELL, yes. What do you expect "us" to do, faced with invasion by people alien in race, culture and religion, taking over whole areas of "our" cities? Asians are, or soon will be, the majority in that fine British city, Leicester. Why shouldn't "we" find that intolerable? You hear arguments like that – arguments from xenophobia, bigotry, cultural intolerance and ignorant scapegoating – but not usually from people calling themselves socialists, or even liberals.

Yes, but the Zionists were part of a white European movement for colonising and exploiting and ultimately displacing the existing population

THEY were a movement of European people to make a homeland. Their unique characteristic, among white colonisers, is that they did not have the power and wealth of a "home-country" state behind them; and that they neither exploited the labour of the indigenous population, nor sought to exterminate them. They built up a self-contained Jewish society, most of it on previously unused land.

When a right-wing "Revisionist" Zionist movement emerged in the 1920s, led by Vladimir Jabotinsky and insisting on an

explicitly hostile attitude to the Arabs, it was repudiated by the mainstream Zionists.

The development of the Palestinian Jewish community's relationship with the Arabs was not predetermined by the mere fact of the Jews wanting to settle there. And their wanting to settle there was not primarily a matter of Europeans wanting to exploit a less-developed land. By the time of the decisive influx of Jews, Palestine was the only place on earth that any sizeable numbers of such people could go to. Why did the existing Jewish national minority in Palestine not have the right to receive those it considered its own who were fleeing for their lives?

Of course the Palestinian Arabs had a right to defend their interests. Between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine, it was a conflict of right against right. It might have been resolved by adjustment and compromise. In fact it has been played out and made worse by war – and not by choice of the Jews alone.

The Arabs wound up being driven out in 1947–8. Millions of Palestinians were driven out. It is a unique event in modern history. That is why Israel is rightly regarded as a uniquely evil state.

TODAY we see the obscenity of an Israeli state with immense military power trampling on the Palestinians. In response to the suicide bombings, it has the power to smash Palestinian society.

It is utterly misleading to read the present balance of power between Israel and the Palestinians back onto the events of 1947–9. Militarily the Israelis started as the underdogs.

Israel was created as a result of a United Nations resolution in November 1947, which also provided for the creation of a Palestinian Arab state alongside it. Guerrilla war started between Jews and Arabs. On 14 May 1948 Israel proclaimed itself a state. On 15 May, five Arab states attacked it, with the explicit, publicly proclaimed (by Egypt) aim of “driving the Jews into the sea”.

The big capitalist powers, including the USA, imposed an arms embargo calculated to favour the Arabs' established and already-equipped armies against the Jews, who were hastily constructing an army out of community militias. The Arab attack was to a considerable extent fomented by Britain, which was still the dominant power in Egypt, Iraq and Jordan. Some of the invading armies were led by British officers. Britain expected that the Jewish forces would collapse and it could then return to occupy Palestine as a “peace-keeper”, separating Jews and Arabs.

But Israel did not collapse. It was able to nullify the embargo by smuggling and by imports from Stalinist Czechoslovakia. (Stalin wanted to make mischief for Britain and its Arab client states). Israel won the war and gained new territory.

Not millions, but perhaps 750,000,

Arabs were driven out or fled during the war. The millions of Palestinian “refugees” today, over half a century later, are children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of that 750,000. “Refugee” here is a political designation.

And it is only half the picture. In the years following the 1948 war, perhaps 600,000 Jews fled from or were driven out of Arab countries and settled in Israel. Their numerous children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren are citizens of Israel. In the eyes of vicarious Arab chauvinists on the pseudo-left, these “refugees” are among those who are not entitled to national rights in Israel!

Does saying this mean justifying the displacement of the Palestinian Arabs in 1947–8? No! If international socialists had had the military forces on the ground, we would have defended both Arab and Jewish communities from military aggression. We can't hope to go back into history to do that. We have a responsibility to see history whole, not to be demonisers and revanchist propagandists. The alternative to seeing history whole is to lapse into the chauvinism of one of the embattled peoples and into a demonisation of Israel and “Zionism”, which is implicitly the proclamation that there are good and bad peoples in history, and people with rights and without them, and that in this case, the Jews are a “bad people”, who did not have the right to their existence against the invading Arab armies. This approach, which is the dominant on the British left, has nothing in common with international socialism or with Marxism.

But many of the Palestinian refugees still live in refugee camps.

IT is indeed horrible that so many human beings remain in conditions where they can plausibly be called refugees. To blame only Israel for that, however, is to let the Arab ruling classes off the hook. The Arab ruling classes have refused to absorb and integrate the Palestinian refugees, denying them the right to become citizens, or sometimes even to get jobs, in other Arab countries. Remember: it was Egypt and Jordan that snuffed out the Palestinian state promised by the 1947 UN decision; and the most spectacular massacres of the Palestinians have been committed by Jordan (September 1970), by Syria in Lebanon (mid-1970s), and by Christian Arab Lebanese (1982).

So long as the Arab refugees are denied the right to return home, Israel can have no right to exist.

SO long as the Arab refugees continue to have to live as refugees, Israel will surely not have a peaceful existence. Their plight must be remedied as part of a comprehensive settlement of the prolonged national conflict.

Look at what the Israeli army has been doing in the West Bank. If

their attitude to the Palestinians is not that of a “master race”, what is it?

IT is the attitude of people driven to desperation, who also have immense military power compared to the Palestinians.

Compare Yugoslavia. Before it broke down, a big majority across its peoples favoured the maintenance of the Yugoslav federation. They had some inkling of what its dissolution would mean.

In fact what happened was determined not by the reasonable majority, but by the chauvinists of the various nationalities, who were originally in a minority. If people will kill you for your ethnic identity, skin colour, language or nationality, then you are driven back into your own group for self-defence. You will think in terms of that group, of its defence and your own. You will have no choice. You will begin to think of the “others”, whose chauvinists are gunning for you, as of an undifferentiated bloc...

In this way the chauvinists set the pace, control events, destroy more reasonable and – in a poll before the Yugoslav state's breakdown – more widely accepted common arrangements.

That is what you have in Israel-Palestine right now. The suicide bombers have created a tremendous bloc behind Sharon. What Israel is doing forces all the Palestinians behind the warriors against Israel, and tends to force them behind the most militant warriors, the suicide-bombers.

Too even-handed! There are not two equally-matched sides here.

NOR were there in Yugoslavia. Socialists could side with the smaller nationalities against Milosevic's drive for a Greater Serbia, and at the same time explain the two-sided character of the spiral into chauvinism.

To try to understand and explain Israeli reactions is not to endorse or be an apologist for them. To understand and explain nothing except that Israel is uniquely vicious and evil and, implicitly, that the Jews are a bad people – has you starting with humanitarian outrage against Israeli atrocities in the West Bank and ending with support for suicide bombings against Israeli kids in a disco.

The Palestinians are fighting for their liberation and the Israelis are colonial oppressors.

YES, but again it is not quite so simple. The pioneers in suicide-bombing, and its most effective practitioners, like Hamas, fight not for Palestinian liberation alone but to destroy Israel. There is a connection between their politics and their tactics. Israel does not have the right to exist, and neither do Jews.

In a plain war of liberation, socialists would need to say little more about the suicide bombings than that they would end if the oppressor state would just get

8 Two nations, two states

out. Israel should indeed get out of the Occupied Territories. The Arab and Islamic chauvinists want the Israeli Jews to get out of pre-67 Israel... The Israelis have no guarantee that withdrawal would end the suicide bombings. They respond accordingly. That is how decent Israelis, who want peace and a just settlement with the Palestinians, can come to back Sharon's brutal militarism.

Why should socialists bother about Israel's rights? Israel is in no danger of being overrun, and the Palestinians are being overrun right now.

INDEED. But the Jews and Arabs are tied together. There will be no peace for Israel until Palestinians have the same rights as Israelis; there will not be peace and freedom for the Palestinians until there is a settlement between Palestine and Israel. There will be no peace until there is an overall settlement. That is why the March 2002 proposal by the Arab League for general Arab-Israeli peace in return for Israeli withdrawal to its 1967 borders is cause for hope.

The problem is that most of the pseudo-left is not just pro-Palestinian, but root-and branch anti-Israel. On this they are with the worst Arab and Islamic chauvinists, and to the right of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, which advocates two states.

This stance is no help to the Palestinians. General outrage against Israel is now at such a pitch that this is obscured; but in any medium term, most reasonable people of goodwill, will be repelled by a pro-Palestinian case that implies or demands the destruction of Israel. No broad movement of solidarity with the Palestinians and support for their reasonable and just demands can be built on such a basis.

The horrors of the current Israeli occupation and oppression in the West Bank and Gaza have not come about only because of gratuitous choices made by Israel. A central factor in the fate of the Palestinians has been the stance of open or latent war which the surrounding Arab states have maintained against Israel in the 54 years of its existence.

If today, after 54 years, only two of the Arab states, Jordan and Egypt, recognise Israel's right to exist, that is one measure of Arab ruling class responsibility for the tragic events in Palestine. Arab states have attacked Israel not only in 1948 but also in 1973. The war of June 1967, in which Israel struck first, destroying the Arab air forces on the ground, was triggered by open Egyptian preparations for war (expulsion of a UN peacekeeping force from Sinai and blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba). In 1991 Iraq made missile attacks on Israel.

Your whole argument is Zionist apologetics.

IS it? The unusual thing here is not the

attempt to understand and explain the Israel-Palestine conflict in terms of real history, and the rejection of the idea that "the Zionists" are a bad people, without normal rights, but the special standards employed by those who take the opposite approach. Contrast the case of the 10 million Germans driven out of what is now western and north-eastern Poland at the end of World War Two into a ruined, half-starved Germany. Tens of thousands of them died in the course of expulsion. The demonisation of Israel and Zionism began with the Stalinist Communist Parties. In the 1960s those same Communist Parties who demonised Israel on the grounds of the plight of the Palestinian refugees, simultaneously denounced the "West German revanchists" who refused to accept the Oder-Neisse line as Germany's eastern border. Why was German revanchism bad and Arab revanchism good?

German revanchism shrank down to a fringe right-wing cause because Germany did not, like the Arab states with the Palestinian refugees, persecute and refuse to integrate the thirteen million refugees from the East, and therefore they were able to build up new lives; and because of power politics. Russia, standing behind the Polish and the Czechoslovak expulsions, was a great and seemingly stable power. World war would have been needed to reclaim the eastern territories for Germans. The balance between Israel and the Arabs, however, looked as if it might easily be reversed by more vigorous leadership in the Arab world.

That is the core meaning of radical anti-Zionism: a hope and desire to re-run the 1948 war with the reverse outcome. To reject that is "Zionist apologetics"? Only if any attempt to understand, any account of events that does not have built into it the idea that the original sin was the very existence of the Zionists and the Palestinian Jewish community, is "Zionist apologetics". Only if rejecting a programme of re-Germanising west and north-east Poland is "Polish nationalist apologetics".

Are you not sinking the immediate priorities of support and solidarity with the Palestinians under a mass of qualifications and special pleadings?

LENIN says somewhere to his comrades: "Argue amongst yourselves, gentlemen, but give clear slogans". The "clear slogans" here are: Israel out of the occupied territories, an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. As well as that, explanation, elucidation of the issue and the counterposing of Marxist historical analysis to Arab chauvinism and Stalinist myth is essential. In Britain, the "revolutionary" left has for decades – in the old Communist Party, the Socialist Labour League/Workers Revolutionary Party the International Socialists/Socialist Workers Party – poisoned itself on this question with Arab chauvinist myth and anti-semi-

tism recycled as "anti-Zionism". That is why honest socialists can't confine themselves to shouting "Israel out of the Palestinian-majority territories."

The rest is irrelevant waffle! So what if there is some exaggeration in the denunciation of Israel?

THE account we have given of some of the background issues is either true or untrue. It is not irrelevant. The left, or rather, the pseudo-left, demonises Israel in a way it demonises no other state.

France fought a bloody and terrible war for eight years against the Algerian independence movement. We campaigned against that war. We circulated exposures of the systematic torture the French used. But nobody demonised France or the French.

We campaigned against the US war in Indochina. We did not denounce the American people. In the late 1950s and the early 1960s the Stalinist Communist Party of Great Britain did indulge in comparatively mild anti-Americanism (shouting, against US military bases, such good communist slogans as "Yankee bastards, go home") – until the growth of the American movement against America's war shamed them into dropping this chauvinist filth. The Trotskyists denounced as shameful and anti-socialist the anti-Americanism which the Stalinists brought into the early anti-Vietnam war movement.

The CPGB also indulged in vicious nonsense against Germany, in which all West Germans were dismissed as "Nazis" (for example, the slogan, "No Nazi H-Bomb!", 14 or 15 years after Hitler moved from Berlin to Valhalla).

The Trotskyist left then opposed and fought anti-Americanism and anti-German chauvinism in the name of working-class internationalism. Today, the degenerate kitsch-Trotskyist left picks up and continues the foul method of national scapegoating then used by the Stalinist CPs. It spreads poisonous Arab and Islamic chauvinist denunciation of Israel – politics that are, I repeat, to the right of the PLO.

By its demonisation of Israel, by teaching those they reach to think of national conflicts in terms of good and bad peoples (and thus, subliminally, to think of evil Jews), the left is helping build up the ideological raw material for a right wing or fascist movement in this country.

That, of course, is not what these idiots think they are doing, or want to do. Nonetheless, it is what they are doing.

For socialists, there are no bad peoples. Where there is conflict of right against right, of the rights of Palestinians and the rights of Israelis, then we seek a solution that will allow both peoples, and in the first place the working classes of both peoples, to reach accommodation:

- two states for the two peoples;
- an independent Palestinian state side by side with Israel;
- Israel out of the Occupied Territories!

The origins of the conflict

WE SIDE politically with the losers so far in the Arab-Jewish conflict, the Palestinian Arabs and their descendants. We support their struggle against intolerable conditions and Israeli occupation of the territories where they are the majority. We support the PLO aspiration to have an independent Palestinian state — where the Palestinian Arabs are a majority.

The Palestinians have our sympathy, and in general our support for their legitimate national demands. But then what? What do we say about Israel? How did it happen that in the middle of the 20th century a Jewish state reappeared after 2,000 years? From where did the ideologists of “Zionism” suddenly derive such power over the minds of so many Jews, people of many classes scattered across many lands, as to induce hundreds of thousands of them to be pioneer settlers and workers in Palestine?

The story is often told as if this were a Zionist or an imperialist conspiracy. That is not history, but malign mythology. The real history is more complex.

I

Zionism, the project of creating a Jewish state, gripped Jewish minds because of the alarming growth of anti-semitism in the late 19th century. After 1881, there was the start of systematic pogroms in the Russian empire, including Poland, whence many of those who went to Palestine would come. In France, where the great revolution had long ago raised the Jews to equal citizenship, anti-semitism became a powerful rallying cry for the right. (And not only for the right. There was left anti-semitism too: what was well named as “the socialism of the fools”).

Everywhere there were stirrings of anti-semitism. Jews became the victims of the international plague of nationalism and chauvinism, and the widespread post-Darwin pseudo-scientific racist nationalism.

Zionism, initially a minority among Jews, gained force and strength from these events until, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, the big majority of Jews were Zionists.

Real persecution, and the uneasy sense of mortal danger, gave Zionism much of its energy. There are recorded statements of astonishing accuracy predicting large-scale massacres of the Jews — by Chaim



Concentration camp victims in Auschwitz. The Nazi Holocaust, coming after decades of increased anti-semitism, gave immense emotional impetus to the drive for a Jewish state

Weizmann in 1919, for example. During the Russian civil war, there were, two decades before the Holocaust, great massacres of Jews by the anti-Bolshevik armies in the Ukraine.

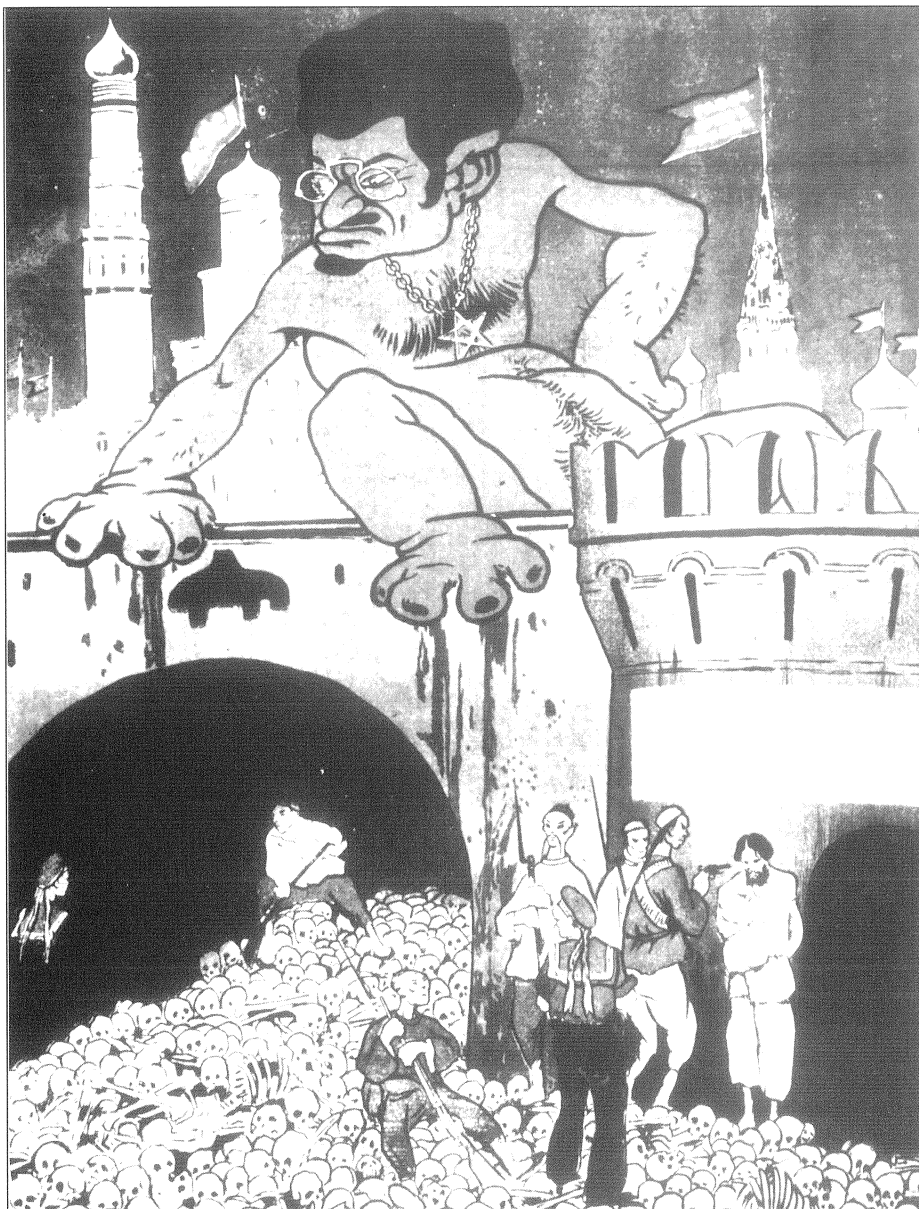
There had been, over the ages, a continued Jewish focus on Jerusalem — and always a small Jewish element in Palestine. The majority of the population of Jerusalem was Jewish in 1900, way before mass Zionist settlement.

The first Zionist congress met in Switzerland in 1897, and the first wave of modern Zionist settlement began in 1904. At that time, “Palestine did not exist as a distinct political entity. The territory which corresponded to this name was composed, roughly speaking, of the western provinces of the region which was traditionally known as ‘Syria’... Until the beginning of the 20th century Palestine remained an obscure recess of the [decaying] Ottoman Empire, an underdeveloped and thinly

populated country whose economy rested on fairly backward agriculture” (Nathan Weinstock, *Zionism: False Messiah*, p.51).

The Jewish population built up slowly. Inevitably, most of the early Jewish settlers “looked down on” the Arab people of Palestine in the way that almost all Europeans, except a small minority of the revolutionary left, then tended to “look down on” the peoples of Africa and Asia. In Europe, Marxists disputed with the Zionists, arguing that Jews should unite with non-Jewish workers in the countries where they lived, in order to fight for democracy and socialism, instead of opting out of the class struggle there.

But, in principle, the Marxists saw no reason why large numbers of Jews should not go to Palestine. It is not just Zionist myth that desert and swamp and uncultivated land made up the greater part of the areas settled by Jews. In 1895, only 10% of Palestine’s land surface was under culti-



A White (counter-revolutionary) poster uses anti-semitism to attack Trotsky and the Bolsheviks after the 1917 workers' revolution in Russia

vation.

The gathering poison gas of Judaeophobia drove the Zionist enthusiasts of the first and second waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine, from Tsarist Russia and Poland. In the mid 1920s, long before Hitler came to power, a great wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine came from Poland, a direct result of anti-Jewish measures taken by the regime there. Already, the alternative escape routes were closing. The USA had ended its open doors immigration policy in 1921.

What did the Communist International say about Jewish migration to Palestine?

When it was a communist movement, it did not oppose Jewish immigration into Palestine, though it did oppose the Zionist project and called on Jewish and Arab workers and farmers to unite and drive out the British rulers. It raised no alarms that if enough Jews went to Palestine they would eventually be the majority, or that the steady influx was greatly augmenting the Jewish national minority, with enormous implications for the future. The shift to "Arabism" came only after the

Communist International was thoroughly Stalinist, in 1929-30.

The next great wave of Jewish migration to Palestine, in the 1930s, was a direct response to Hitler. Even before the Holocaust, mass Zionism as an idea, and migration to Palestine as the best option in a world closing in on the Jews, were inextricably bound together as effect and cause.

Just before World War Two a shipload of Jewish refugees — the *St Louis* — sailed around the coasts of the Americas and, refused the right to unload its human cargo anywhere, had to go back to Europe. Most of those people perished.

On the eve of the Holocaust, Britain closed the ports of Palestine to Jews fleeing Nazi Europe. It announced that Jewish immigration to Palestine would be cut to 15,000 a year and stop completely after five years.

Jewish "boat-people" tried to get into Palestine illegally by crossing the sea in unseaworthy craft. If they got to Palestine they were refused the right to land, or interned. In 1942, one unseaworthy boat,

the *Struma*, which was driven out from a Turkish port and refused the right to land in Palestine, sank, killing 768 people, including children.

Six million Jews were killed by the Nazis. But, even in 1945, anti-semitic feeling did not hide its head for shame.

Tens of thousands of Jewish survivors of the death camps languished for years in Displaced Person Camps, some of them made-over former concentration camps.

In the USA, at about the same time that the cinema newsreels were showing pictures of the Nazi death camps, there was a spate of attacks on Jews and even on Jewish children in American city streets; in Minneapolis to take an example reported in the US Trotskyist press of that time.

Another example from the same source: asked in 1945 by the US Department of Education in a questionnaire what they thought of educational provision and training for their profession, the official association of US dentists made the formal and official reply: everything is fine except that there are too many Jews in the dental colleges.

Deported Jews returning to Poland met with pogroms and murder. In Paris, as the late Isaac Deutscher reported in the *Observer*, there were riots against Jews returning to reclaim property confiscated under the Nazi occupation.

In an opinion poll taken amongst Jewish Displaced Persons in camps in Europe the big majority gave Palestine as their first choice of refuge. They wanted to be with their own. After their experience since the 1930s, they couldn't trust strangers.

II

The Arabs of Palestine were naturally apprehensive about the influx of Jews. Britain heightened the tension. During World War 1, it simultaneously promised to sponsor a "Jewish national home" in Palestine, and to support independence for the Arabs, who had been ruled by the moribund Ottoman Empire centred in Constantinople/Istanbul.

After World War One, Britain and France divided up between them the former Arab territories of the Ottomans in the Middle East. France ruled Lebanon and Syria; Britain took Palestine and what is now Jordan and Iraq.

Ronald Storrs, British Military Governor of Jerusalem in 1917-21, talked of the Jewish colonists as creating a "little loyal Jewish Ulster" that would be England's outpost. Pretty quickly, however, Britain concluded that the little loyal Jewish Ulster was more trouble than it was worth. By 1930, after Arab riots and pogroms in 1929, the Labour minister Lord Passfield (Sydney Webb), with the initial backing of Prime Minister J R MacDonald, was trying to kill off the idea of the Jewish National Home.

Three hundred and forty one thousand Jews migrated to Palestine between 1922 and 1945. They set about building a largely self-contained Jewish economy and society there. Forty thousand Arabs also migrated into Palestine between 1922 and

1945, drawn there from the surrounding territories as a result of the increased economic life attendant on the Zionist colonisation.

From the start Arabs resented the fact that Britain had cheated them on its promises of support for Arab independence, and designated Palestine as a Jewish national home. Conflict between Arabs and Jews also erupted for cultural and religious reasons. There were major elements in this of Arab landlords and clerics rousing the backward countryside against the urban, heretical Jews. The Arab reaction was highly understandable; but does it mean that socialists should damn the growing Jewish national minority in Palestine, who were in the grip of their own nationalist egotism, for not bowing down to Arab or Muslim national, cultural or religious egotism?

The communal/national conflict gave a great emotional charge to evictions of Arab peasants consequent on Jewish purchases of land.

According to a prominent anti-Zionist: "When the question of the acquisition of land by the Zionist organisations in Palestine is broached, it is usually not stated that these land transactions are to be explained by the big Arab landowners' eagerness to sell their property... These purchases led to an extremely lucrative wave of property speculation... The Zionists certainly paid dearly for their Holy Land. The high-prices sales, which brought a fortune to the usurious, parasitic effendi class, proved disastrous for the fellahin [peasants] who were expelled from the estates they had worked on... Whilst in public the [Arab] leaders stepped up their incendiary attacks on Zionism, denouncing any transfer of ancestral soil to the Jews as a betrayal, they secretly enriched themselves by means of the very operations they so furiously attacked. The fanatical braggadocio was designed for the gallery... hyper-nationalist propaganda became a lucrative industry, indeed even an American-style racket, for the Arab gentry" (Nathan Weinstock, *Zionism: False Messiah*, p.161-2).

By 1948 about six per cent of the land of Palestine, and 12% of the cultivated land, was Jewish-owned. Arab agriculture had expanded alongside, though not as fast as, Jewish agriculture. Arab peasants were evicted after Zionist land purchases, but in fact the numbers were smaller than those of peasant evictions in some other countries driven by the "normal" cruelties of capitalist market forces. According to Benny Morris, "several thousand families were displaced following land sales to Jews between the 1880s and the late 1930s" (*Righteous Victims*, p.123). More families were evicted by landlords in Ireland in any single year, of a number of years around 1848 and around 1880 – 104,000 people evicted in 1850 alone, for example – than as a result of Jewish land purchases in Palestine over that whole half-century before 1948.

There was an Arab uprising in 1936-8, demanding an end to Jewish immigration, a ban on the sale of land to Jews, and a



Jewish graves defaced by fascists: anti-semitism did not end in 1945

pledge by Britain to introduce a government representing the Arab majority in Palestine.

Britain first responded by coming out for Partition (1937). The Zionists supported partition, but Britain then retreated from it under Arab pressure. In 1939 Britain turned sharply against the Jews, banning almost all Jewish immigration and almost all further land sales to Jews. This was on the eve of the Holocaust. The strategists of the British feared an Arab-Nazi alliance in which Germany would use the Arabs against Britain as Britain had used the Arabs against the Turks in World War One. Until it withdrew from Palestine in 1948, Britain maintained a hostile stance towards the Jews – and, in its relentless war against Jewish refugees trying to enter the country, a savagely vindictive one.

In the 1940s some Jewish factions supported the idea of a bi-national state as the alternative to partition. That, however, presupposed a mass willingness to dissolve existing national identities which did not exist on either side.

By then there were 600,000 Jews in Palestine, about one in three of the population. Why, from a socialist and consistently-democratic point of view – as distinct from an Arab-chauvinist one – did they not have national rights?

III

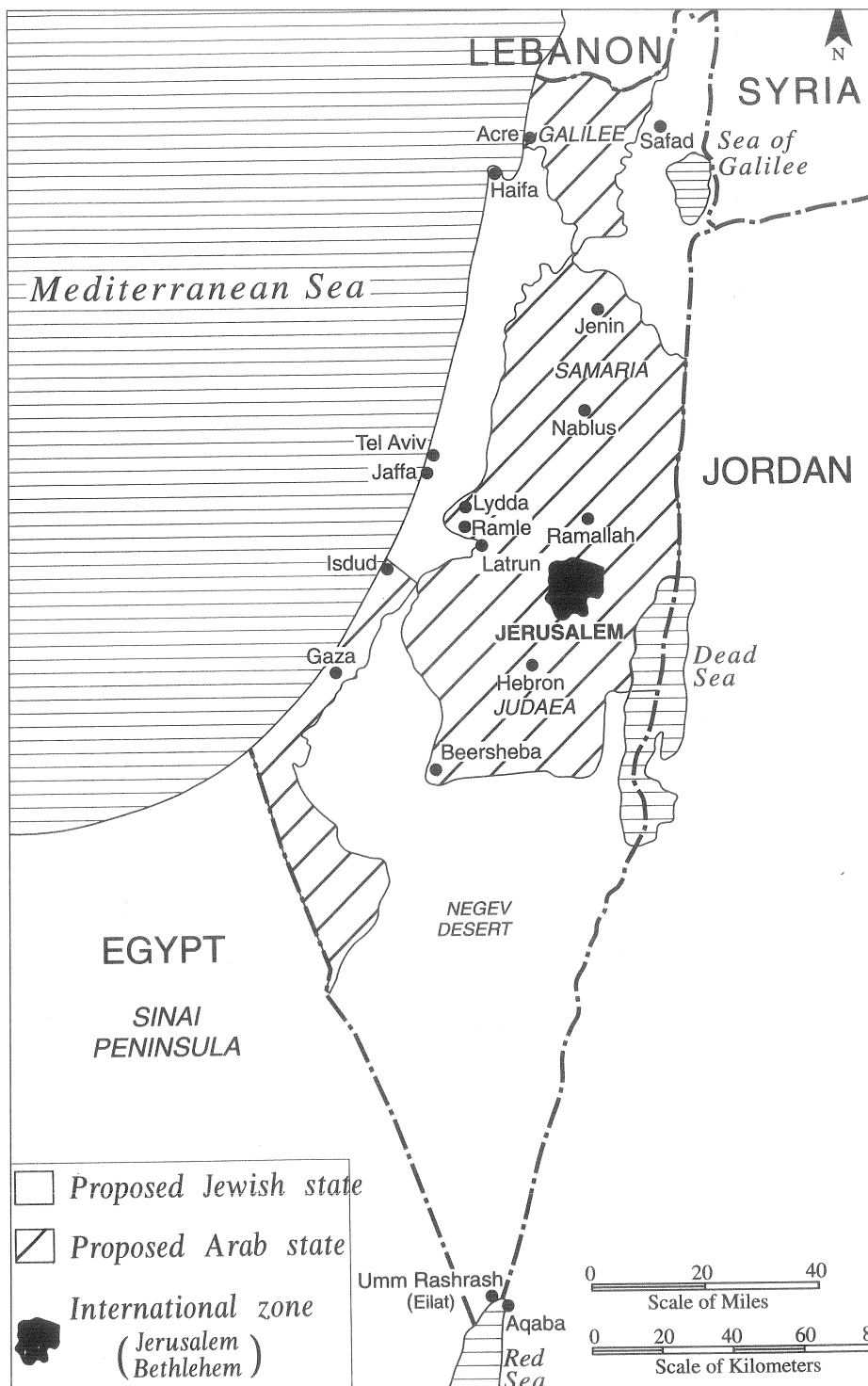
As World War Two ended, Jewish groups started large-scale guerrilla war against the British, trying to drive them out. Fringe groups had already started such activity during the war. With the oil industry developing, Britain was more than ever concerned to maintain an alliance with the dominant classes in the Arab countries. In November 1947 the United Nations declared for partition of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. Britain effectively abdicated the state power from that point on. Its calculation was that Jewish-Arab war would show that it was essential for Britain to reassert control as a "mediator" and "peacekeeper".

Communal/national warfare broke out, with Jews and Arabs jockeying for control of strategic hills and roads. Jewish Jerusalem suffered a long siege and the Jewish quarter of the old city fell to the Arabs. The Jewish militias seized other areas. In the village of Deir Yassin, near Jerusalem, a Jewish-chauvinist militia massacred perhaps 254 Arabs (though some authorities give lower figures, maybe 100 to 110: Morris, *Righteous Victims*, p.209). That atrocity was immediately condemned by the mainstream Jewish forces. The very next day 60 Jewish medical personnel were ambushed and massacred. In other words it was a horrible communal/national war between peoples living close by each other.

Outside Arab volunteers joined the Palestinian Arabs.

On the authority of the United Nations decision, the Jews declared an independent state on 14 May 1948. They immediately faced invasion and attempted invasion by the armies of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and a task force from Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Azzam Pasha, secretary of the Arab League set up with British sponsorship in 1945, declared that it would be "a war of extermination and a momentous massacre" and promised that the Arab forces would "sweep the Jews into the sea".

The Jews were less numerous, and had weaker international support. Israel was not a creation of the western imperialist powers. Britain encouraged and helped organise the Arab invasion, intending to reoccupy the territory as an indispensable "peacekeeper" between Jews and Arabs. The invading Arab forces had many more tanks, armoured cars, planes, etc., and British officers; both Britain and the USA imposed an arms embargo on the Israeli state fighting for its life; Israel depended for arms supplies on smuggling and on Stalinist Czechoslovakia (thanks to a calculation by Stalin that by support for the Jews he could strike a blow against the British Empire). But the Jews, fighting for their existence, won the war.



The United Nations Partition Plan of 1947

Over 700,000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were driven out. The new state of Israel would not let them back in; the Arab states would not integrate them economically, or conclude negotiations with Israel which might allow at least some of them to go back, and perhaps get them a livable settlement. All Arab states refused to recognise Israel, or formally to make peace. They regarded the cessation of war as an armistice, until the next round, not as "peace"; they proclaimed, some more loudly and insistently than others, the goal of destroying Israel.

Between 1949 and 1954 there were negotiations, on and off, about taking maybe 100,000 refugees back into Israel and integrating others into neighbouring

Arab countries; but obduracy on both sides meant that none of the offers or agreements came to anything.

About 600,000 Jews fled or were driven out from the Arab or Muslim states and into Israel over the following years – about 330,000 in 1948–51, and further numbers, mainly from Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, up to the 1960s. The Arabs remaining in Israel after the 1948 war were harassed and deprived of their land, though they were not driven out.

It was an enormous tragedy for the Palestinian Arabs. Socialists must condemn and did condemn much in what the Jewish forces did. But the conflict and the tragedy can be blamed on the Jews alone only if you deny them the right to defend them-

selves against armed attack – and only if you blame one side, the materially weaker side, and the one marked down by the British Empire and its half-puppet Arab armies for subjugation, for the conflict – that is, for the way the world was organised. In other words, only if you blame the Israeli Jews for not letting themselves be victims again. The Trotskyists in 1948 did not do that. They did not support the Arab armies! None of them, as far as can be told, did – in Palestine, or anywhere else. That sort of stuff came later.

IV

Whether the Palestinian Arabs were, before this point in their history, a distinct nation, clearly different from other Arabs, from Syrians for example, is highly debatable. However, they became a nation, shaped by "1948" and subsequent experiences.

The 1947 United Nations resolution on the partition of Palestine had stipulated that there should be a Palestinian Arab state side-by-side with Israel. That promised state was a victim of the turmoil unleashed by the invasion of Israel by Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Jordan (then called Transjordan). Most of the Palestinian Arabs' allotted territory was incorporated into Jordan in 1949. The Palestinians would be tightly-controlled dependents of Arab governments for almost 20 years, until after the defeat of those governments by Israel in the Six Day war of 1967. The Arab states tantalised the Palestinian refugees with promises that they, the Arab states, would soon "drive the Jews into the sea" and "return" the Palestinians to their land. From those promises came only further catastrophes.

In 1952, in Egypt, and 1958, in Iraq, military coups overthrew pro-British monarchies. The new Egyptian regime pursued radical land reforms. In 1956 it nationalised the country's major economic asset, the Suez Canal.

Britain and France went to war against Egypt over the Canal, and Israel helped them. The attack failed; the USA – wanting a world open to its big corporations, rather than a continuation of the old European colonial and semi-colonial empires – objected, and put sufficient economic pressure on Britain and France to force them to withdraw. Egypt's president Nasser received a tremendous boost in prestige, and "Nasserist" pan-Arab nationalism swept the Arab world.

It pursued land reforms, nationalisation of industry, Arab unity, hostility to feudal states like Saudi Arabia – and vehement agitation against the very existence of "the Zionist entity".

In 1967 Egypt blockaded the important Israeli port of Eilat and expelled a UN peacekeeping force from Sinai, where it had been since 1956, at the end of the Suez war. It seemed to be preparing for actual war to go with the perennial war rhetoric, which was stepped up. Whether or not Egypt and other Arab states would in fact have started a war like the "Yom Kippur" war they launched in October 1973 can not be known. Israel struck first, destroying the Egyptian and Syrian air forces on the

ground and, within six days, occupying the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza, Sinai, and the Golan Heights. Between 200,000 and 300,000 West Bank Arabs became refugees, fleeing from the Israeli advance into Jordan.

In the period after the 1967 war, the Israeli government favoured trading "land for peace" – withdrawal from the occupied territories in return for recognition of Israel by the Arab states. Nothing like that was forthcoming. The Arab states continued to proclaim their goal to be the destruction of Israel.

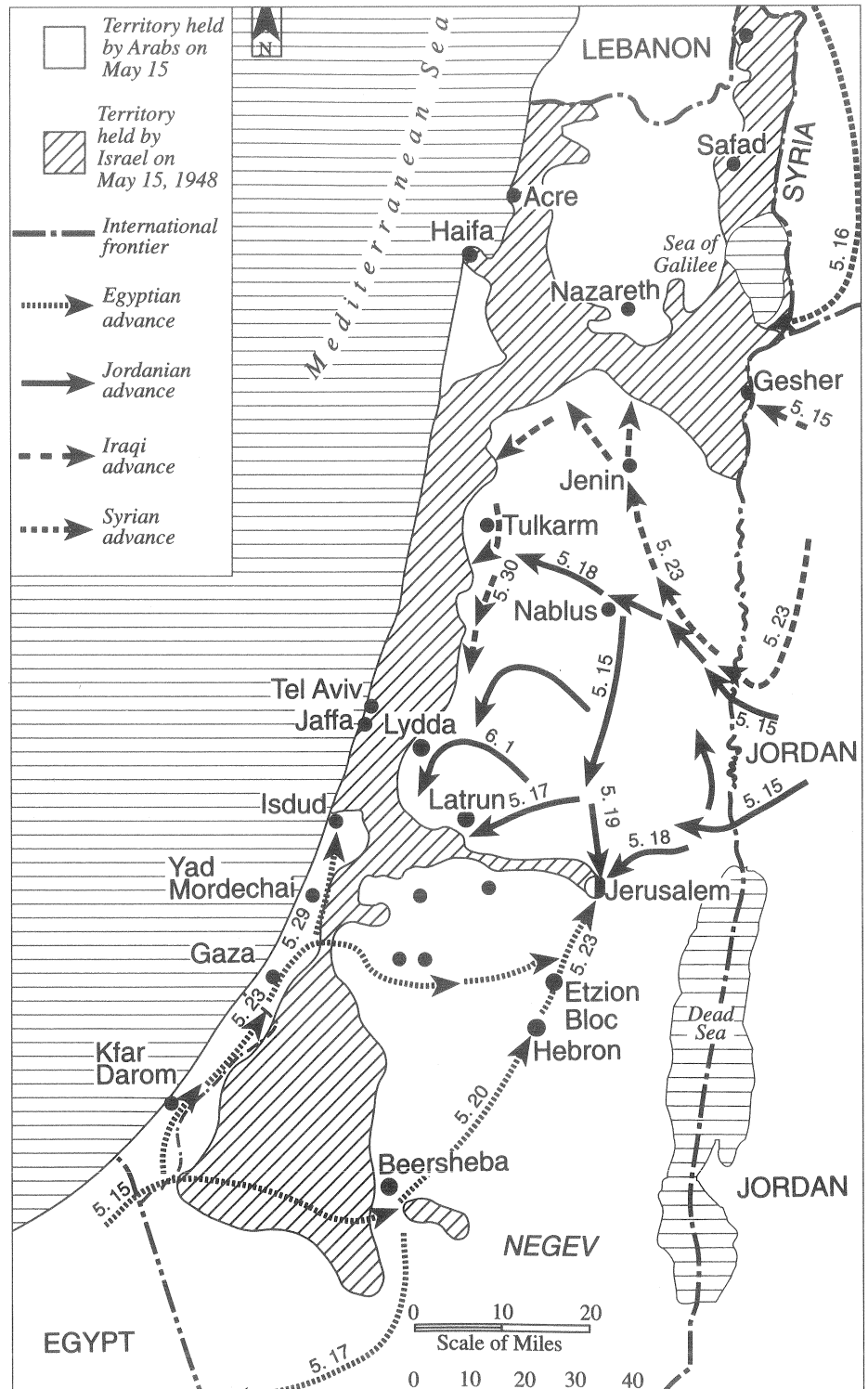
Israel eventually handed back the sparsely populated Sinai, in return for recognition by Egypt, but its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza became long-term. Over time, it acquired a colonial-settler dimension. Jewish settlements were established, implying a move towards permanent Israeli annexation of at least part of the territories.

Until then the Palestine Liberation Organisation had been a puppet of the Arab governments. The defeat of the Arab states spurred it to become relatively independent. From 1969 it launched a guerrilla and terrorist campaign against Israel, and simultaneously tried to present itself to the world in a more reasonable political guise. Where his predecessor Ahmed Shukhairy had baldly repeated the slogan of the 1948 war and advocated "driving the Jews into the sea", the new PLO leader Yasser Arafat called for pre-1948 Palestine to become a "secular democratic state" in which Jews would have the rights of a religious minority.

The "Six Day War" of June 1967 was a disaster for Nasser and the other Arab regimes. Their secular nationalism suffered a blow from which it never recovered. A second war, in October 1973, ended more evenly, but without the Arabs winning back lost territory. A third war followed in 1982, when Israel invaded Lebanon, which had become the main base for Palestinian guerrillas attacking Israel. That war ended in a long, costly and bloody occupation of southern Lebanon by Israeli forces.

These political blows to secular Arab nationalism, together with the disruptions and disappointments of the capitalist development spurred on by the oil industry, helped create the conditions for the rise of reactionary Islamic-fundamentalist politics in the Middle East. The Islamicists gained ground in Egypt, Sudan, Iran, Algeria, and elsewhere before they won strength among the Palestinians, but the infection would eventually spread to the Palestinians, too.

In 1988, the secular nationalists launched an uprising in the territories which Israel had seized in 1967. The Palestine Liberation Organisation formally abandoned the policy of looking to the Arab states to overwhelm Israel, and accepted for the first time the programme of establishing a Palestinian state side by side with Israel on the territory where Palestinians are the majority. In other words – two states for the two nations, Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews. Israel had long refused to recognise the PLO, but



The Arab invasion of 1948

finally negotiated an ambiguous deal with it in 1993.

Since 1967, Israel has had heavy support from the USA. However, the idea that American imperialism depends on Israel for "control of the Arabs" is false. The USA has friendly links with Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

In fact the USA's relationship to Israel owes more to the power of the pro-Israeli lobby in the USA than to anything else. That lobby consists of American Jews, in a political world where "ethnic politics" – Irish, Italian, etc. – predominate, but also, and perhaps more importantly (and in the light of history, ironically) of the powerful fundamentalist Christian churches for which the resurrection of Israel has "Bible-

based" significance. Arguably, it has hindered US capital in pursuing its real interests in the area – centred around its oil wealth – more than it has helped it.

Equally, Israel has pursued its own interests, playing states off against each other.

History is a messy business. Isaac Deutscher's image for Jewish-Arab relations of the Jews as a man jumping out of the window of a burning building and accidentally injuring an innocent civilian down below, captures it, I think.

V

After 1993, Israel ceded patches of the West Bank and Gaza to autonomous Palestinian control, while keeping a firm

overall grip on the occupied territories and continuing to establish more Jewish settlements there. In September 2000, peace talks on extending the area of Palestinian control broke down. After a probably deliberate provocative visit by Ariel Sharon, with a large armed escort, to Muslim sites in East Jerusalem, a new, tragic and savage war erupted in the half-independent territory of Israeli-occupied Palestine and inside Israel. The peace-seeking Israeli government fell victim to the fact that its efforts had ended in war, not peace, and a right-wing Israeli government came to power, led by Ariel Sharon. A general political regression followed.

The advances towards a Palestinian state made during the 1990s were one by one cancelled and reversed; so were the advances in the direction of rational politics.

The breakdown of the "peace process" has discredited the Israeli advocates of peace and of conciliating the Palestinians, and swung Israeli public opinion sharply to the right. The Islamic-fundamentalist Hamas, which has never accepted the PLO policy of building a Palestinian state side by side with Israel, was able to set the pace among the Palestinians.

Disappointment on the part of the Palestinian people with what was achieved in the way of independence between the Oslo Agreement of 1993 and the intifada

of 2000; no less bitter disappointment with the realities of the Palestinian semi-state ruled by Yasser Arafat, a poor and squalid Palestinian police state; and continued Israeli control and harassment of autonomous Palestine, have fuelled a new explosion of conflict.

Hamas denies the right of Israel to exist, and advocates a Muslim holy war to destroy it. Its bombs, set off by suicidal young men who believe that their death will transport them instantly to a lubricious *Playboy*-magazine version of Paradise where they will be granted the ministrations of troupes of virgins, are understood to be part of that war. Hamas does not make war to liberate the Palestinian-majority areas from Israeli occupation, but to destroy Israel. Others have followed Hamas into suicide bombing.

Before 1988, the worst victims of the attitude that "Israel must be destroyed before there can be any progress" were the Palestinians themselves. That attitude strengthened the position of the Israeli right; and now the new political regression, since 2000, has strengthened the Israeli chauvinists again.

As part of the regression on both sides, the Arab demand for the "right of return" became central again. This means a collective right to "return" to what is now Israel by nearly four million Palestinians classified as refugees. Implicitly the PLO deci-

sion of 1988 meant abandoning the "right of return", and replacing it by negotiations for an agreed programme to resettle some refugees and descendants, over time, in Israel.

"Refugee" here is a primarily political concept, although some 1.2 million Palestinians still live in refugee camps administered by the United Nations. Very few of the people involved are refugees. Most are the descendants of the 700,000 Arabs who were driven out, or fled, during the Israeli war of independence in 1948. The Palestinian refugees remain "refugees" primarily because Arab governments have needed them as a political argument against Israel's right to exist.

Large numbers of Israeli Jews are descendants of the 600,000 Jews who fled or were driven out from the Arab countries in the aftermath of that 1948 war. They are as much "refugees" as the Arabs are. Their fate has been better than that of their Arab counterparts, thanks to Israeli policy; for the sufferings of the Arab refugees, both Israel and the Arab states are responsible.

Many such population exchanges as that of the 700,000 Arabs and 600,000 Jews took place after World War 2. In Europe, thirteen million ethnic Germans were driven west in 1945. A sizeable part of what is now western and north-eastern Poland was formerly German. A question already asked about the pre-1948 Jewish

1881-1947

1881

Wave of pogroms in the Tsarist Empire, followed by a series of laws discriminating against Jews.

1894-5

Start of Dreyfus affair: a Jewish officer in the French army is falsely convicted of treason.

1897

First congress of the Zionist movement.

1903-6

New wave of pogroms in the Tsarist Empire. Start of systematic efforts to build up Zionist settlements in Palestine (then ruled by the Ottoman Empire) on the basis of "Jewish labour only".

1905

Aliens Act bans Jews fleeing Tsarist pogroms from settling in Britain.

1908

"Young Turk" revolution in Ottoman Empire, which triggers a rise of Arab national consciousness.

1914

Ottoman Empire joins World War 1 on the side of Germany.

1916

Britain and France make a secret agreement to carve up the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire between them in the event of victory in the war. Simultaneously Britain promises the Arabs that it will support their claims for independence; and, in 1917, promises the Zionists that it will support a "Jewish national home" in Palestine. After World War 1 Britain and France carry through their carve-up deal. The League of Nations (a forerunner of the UN) endorses the British "Mandate" for Palestine in 1922.

1920-1

Anti-Jewish riots by Palestinian Arabs, reaching a peak in May 1921, when 47 Jews and 48 Arabs are killed. Arab slogans include "Down with Zionism", "Death to the Jews", and "The Government is with us". The Jewish colonists establish a militia, the Haganah. The British administration responds by limiting Jewish immigration and setting up a Supreme Muslim Council with the arch-reactionary Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, at its head.

1929

Renewed anti-Jewish riots. 133 Jews and 116 Arabs killed. The British government at first responds (1930) by proposing virtually to ban further

Jewish immigration or land purchases, but backs down.

1933

Hitler comes to power in Germany. Flood of Jewish migrants to Palestine.

1936-9

Mass Arab revolt in Palestine, with large strikes and guerrilla warfare. Between 3000 and 6000 Arabs killed as the British repress the revolt.

1937

A British Royal Commission proposes to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. Arab leaders reject this and Britain drops the proposal.

1938

USA convenes an international conference, supposedly to help Jewish refugees from Nazism: only the Dominican Republic says it will have an open door for the refugees.

1939-40

Britain limits Jewish immigration to Palestine to 75,000 over five years, and bans almost all land sales to Jews.

1944

Radical Zionist groups start armed struggle against British administration in Palestine; the mainstream Haganah joins in from late 1945.

1947

Britain refers the Palestine question to the United Nations.

national minority in Palestine needs to be repeated in relation to the 600,000 Israeli Jews who fled or were driven out from Arab countries, and their descendants: why do they not have national rights – the right, together with the other Israeli Jews, to form a nation-state?

The “right of return” in its straightforward and traditional sense is the demand that the events of the 20th century in Palestine which led to the creation of Israel be undone, that the film of history be rolled backwards. It is inconceivable that the Israelis would voluntarily agree to this. The demand that it should is at best the demand that the Jewish state should cease to conceive of itself as a Jewish state – not just get out of the West Bank and Gaza, and cease discriminatory or chauvinist practices, but cease to be a state of the distinct Israeli-Jewish nation.

It is no more realistic than the call that the British, French, German, or Irish states should cease to be British, French, German or Irish, a call quite distinct from the justified one that they should let in far more refugees and migrants. The “right of return” therefore, in practice, comes down to the “demand” for the conquest and destruction of Israel. Its straightforward advocates, like Abu Ali Mustafa of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, who was assassinated by the Israeli armed forces on 27 August 2001, have been candid about that: “he acknowledged to the *Al Ahram* paper that the return of four million refugees... would presage the disappearance of Israel” (*Guardian*, 28 August 2001). The “right of return” never made any sense except when coupled – as in the past it was – with Ahmed Shukhairi’s call to drive the Jews into the sea.

Socialists and democrats cannot want that to happen; and in any case it is not going to happen in the definable future. The consequence of raising this “demand” is therefore to push back a solution to the conflict based on Jewish-Arab mutual recognition and the creation of a Palestinian state.

The bitter truth is that the Palestinians are trapped in a horrible series of conflicts and contradictions. Even the best official Israeli attitude to them is shot through with predatory hostility. Through all the years of the “peace process” settlements by Jewish chauvinists continued to be built on Palestinian territory. Even the most conciliatory Israeli governments encouraged and defended the settlements.

And the Palestinians live in Third World conditions, side by side with a Jewish society that is prosperous, modern, and

1947–1982

1947

29 November: The UN General Assembly adopts a plan to partition Palestine, then under British rule. The Arabs reject it. The British withdraw. Fighting develops between Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine.

1948

14 May: Proclamation of the State of Israel. Arab armies enter Palestine (15th). The war ends with Israeli victory; Jordan annexing the West Bank; and Egypt taking control of Gaza.

1956

October–November: Israel, France and Britain attack Egypt, in response to Nasser’s nationalisation of the Suez Canal on 26 July, but soon withdraw under US pressure.

1964

January: First Arab League summit held in Cairo. May: Creation of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

1967

June: Six-day war between Israel and Arab states. Israel occupies Sinai, the Golan, the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. It then offers “land for peace”, but the Arab states refuse.

1969

Yasser Arafat becomes chairman of the PLO’s executive committee. PLO adopts programme of “secular democratic state”.

1970

September: Jordanian army attacks PLO guerrillas (“Black September”). A year later the PLO is expelled from Jordan and its leadership moves to Lebanon.

1972

September: At the Munich Olympic Games, a Palestinian group called “Black September” kills eleven Israeli athletes and coaches.

1973

October: Egyptian and Syrian armies launch attack to recover the territories occupied by Israel in 1967, but fail.

1974

June: PLO makes its first move to “two states” by accepting the idea of a “national authority” over “any liberated part of Palestine”.

1975

April: Start of Muslim–Christian civil war in Lebanon.

1977

May: The right wins the Israeli elections for the first time. Menachem Begin becomes prime minister. November: President Anwar Sadat of Egypt goes to Jerusalem, first visit by an Arab leader since 1948.

1978

September: Egypt and Israel sign a peace deal.

1982

April: Israel completes withdrawal from Sinai. June: Start of Israeli invasion of Lebanon, followed by siege of Beirut. September: Israeli troops enter West Beirut. Lebanese Christian forces massacre Palestinians in the Sabra and Chatila camps, in an area under Israeli control.

“Western”. Israel’s repeated closures of the border, in the fighting since September 2000, have cut many Palestinians off from their jobs in Israel, and greatly increased their pauperisation. This is not unconnected with indefensible suicide-bomb slaughter perpetrated by Palestinian Arabs against Israeli civilians, but it is a vicious circle in which Israeli action creates and recreates the social conditions in which Hamas thrives.

Even the most favourable immediate outcome, a politically independent

Palestinian state, would do no more than remove the immediate source of conflict, Israeli control. Even with substantial foreign aid to that Palestinian state, it would not abolish the material inequality between the Palestinians and the “Western” society of Israel.

Hamas, with its mystical belief in an afterlife paradise combined with Islamic-fundamentalist bigotry and rejection of the modern world of which Israeli society is seen as a representative, grew up on the terrain prepared by the political impasse. It

The populations

Israel has about 6.2 million people. About one-fifth – 1.2 million – are Arabs. 63% of Israeli Jews were born in Israel, though immigration increased sharply in the early 1990s, with large numbers arriving from the former Stalinist states of the USSR and Eastern Europe.

There are about 8.6 million Palestinian Arabs. About 1.2 million

live in Israel; 1.9 million in the West Bank, and 1.2 million in Gaza. About two million live in Jordan. The remaining 2.3 million are scattered around the world, with the largest concentrations in Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, and the USA. 3.7 million Palestinians were registered as refugees with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, as of June 2000. Of those, 1.2 million live in refugee camps administered by UNRWA. There are 1.4 million registered as refugees in the West Bank and Gaza, and 1.6 million in Jordan, the rest being in Lebanon and Syria. (Figures for 1999 or 2000).

is now a factor in its own right: no political solution can remove its grievances.

In this tragic conflict, socialists and consistent democrats stand for the immediate solution that will achieve the minimum of justice for both Arabs and Jews. They advocate Jewish and Arab mutual recognition and conciliation. That advocacy can lay the basis for working-class unity; and working-class unity can bring the fundamental solution to the dilemma of the Palestinians – a transformation of the whole region, including the Arab countries which have huge natural wealth and large working classes, by way of a socialist revolution, and the creation of a Middle East federation which guarantees the national self-determination of minorities in the region such as the Kurds and the Israeli Jews.

VI

In response to the tragic fate of the Palestinian Arabs, too many socialists in

effect propose that we abandon a class interpretation of history in favour of an account in terms of good and bad peoples and the malignity of demonic forces like "Zionism". They abandon any attempt at an objective overall Marxist assessment of the history of the Arab-Jewish conflict, including factual accounts of what really happens and why. They settle uncritically into repeating the hurt account of the losers in a national conflict in which, had their side won in the past, they would have done to the other side everything that was done to them or worse.

Because they are indignant at Israeli treatment of those they defeated, they demonise the Jews, or "Zionists", backwards in time for generations, and forwards in time to the hoped-for day when the forces of progress, enlightenment, justice and righteousness – which just happen to include Saddam Hussein, the King of Saudi Arabia and Osama bin Laden! – will triumph and conquer Israel.

They stigmatise Israel, surrounded by enemies, for its collaboration with "imperialism", and ignore the connections of the Arab states with imperialism – now, and right back to British-Arab collaboration during World War 2 to stop the Jewish national minority opening the gates of Palestine to Jews who otherwise faced annihilation.

They pardon with a benign shrug of complacent shoulders the 1940s collaboration of Palestinian Arabs and, in the first place their leader, Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, with the Nazis for the specific purposes of a common programme of wiping out the Jews. They demonise the Jewish leaders and forgive the Mufti, who tried to organise a Muslim brigade to fight for Hitler and whose supporters organised a sizeable anti-Jewish pogrom in Baghdad in 1941 during the anti-British, pro-Nazi Iraq coup of Rashid Ali.

This viewpoint is shaped and determined mechanically and comprehensively by the taking of sides with the defeated side – the "oppressed". Its incoherent "anti-imperialism" becomes an entirely negative anti-capitalism of such blindness that it loses sight of the positive, liberating socialist alternative, and sees allies in people such as Osama bin Laden, who counterpose to modern capitalism the social, political and religious outlook of an imagined centuries-old past.

But suppose the other side had won: suppose, to tell the shortest version of the story, that the Nazis and their despised Arab clients had won – even temporarily, as they might have in the Middle East in 1941-2 – and that the half million Palestinian Jews had gone the way of the six million in Europe? Why then, our sympathy would now be on the other side – with "the poor, poor Jews."

The Jews are on the other side of the Zionophobes' good people/bad people divide because they did not let themselves be crushed – because, in a limited sphere, they prevailed, in a world where two-thirds of Europe's Jews, six million people, failed even to survive.

The standpoint which bases itself on identifying "good" and "bad" peoples has no point of contact with Marxism or even with the old-fashioned liberal belief in the equality of peoples. For us, there are no bad peoples. We look to working-class unity and reconciliation. In national/municipal conflicts like those of the Middle East (or Northern Ireland), we look for rational, democratic compromise.

Socialists support the Palestinian Arab demand for liberation and justice – that is, for self-determination in an independent state on the territory where they now constitute a majority. But we do not demonise one people, or erect Zionism into a demon-ex-machina force above history. We see it within history. We look at the real history. That is the only basis on which to prepare the minds of the working class, in the first place of Arab and Jewish workers, for the fundamental solution to the conflict: consistent democracy and socialism.

1987-2002

1987

December: The Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories ("the intifada") begins in Gaza and then in the West Bank.

1988

PLO moves to "two states" policy.

1990

Big influx of Jews from USSR to Israel.
August: Iraq invades Kuwait.

1991

Gulf war: US-led coalition drives Iraq out of Kuwait, with heavy Iraqi casualties.

1993

September: Mutual recognition by Israel and the PLO. The PLO and Israel sign a peace document. Israel will concede Palestinian control of increasing areas of the West Bank and Gaza. This process continues slowly and falteringly over the next eight years, but simultaneously Israel builds more settlements in the occupied territories.

1994

October: Peace treaty between Israel and Jordan.

1995

September: "Oslo II" agreement signed in Washington.
November-December: Israel completes its withdrawal from West Bank towns, except Hebron.

2000

September: Breakdown of Israeli-PLO talks, and provocative visit by right-wing Israeli leader Ariel Sharon to the Al-Aqsa precinct in Jerusalem, spark Palestinian demonstrations. Beginning of the "new intifada".

2001:

January. Talks between the Palestinians and

the Israeli government of Ehud Barak, which have continued on and off since September and apparently yielded new concessions by Israel, break down.

February. Ariel Sharon wins Israeli elections.

Israeli Labour Party joins a coalition government under his leadership. Israel imposes complete blockade on the Occupied Territories.

March. Suicide bombings of Israeli civilians by Palestinian Islamists. In 2002, the suicide bombings will become the main activity of the "intifada".

April. Israel moves to reassert its control over territory previously ceded to the Palestinian Authority, eventually effectively reoccupying the whole of West Bank except Jericho.

September. Al-Qaeda attacks in USA. US responds by launching "war against terrorism", targeting Islamist groups which it has previously tolerated or even aided.

October. USA makes its first official statement backing an independent Palestinian state.

Over the coming months, however, the USA will condone or endorse what Sharon does.

December. Sharon officially breaks all Israeli links with Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority.

2002

March. The Arab League adopts a peace plan – "two states" with the 1967 borders, Arab recognition of Israel. (They also make a blurred and ambiguous call for the "right of return").

May. 100,000 Israelis demonstrate in Tel Aviv in favour of Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. This is the biggest show of strength by Israel's peace movement, generally marginalised in this period. Also, some hundreds of Israeli soldiers refuse to serve in the occupied territories.

June. President George W Bush says that the USA requires the ousting of Yasser Arafat as a precondition for peace in the Middle East.

Unravelling the issues

Why a Palestinian Arab state?

THE Palestinian Arabs are a defeated people, the main victims of the Jewish-Arab war of 1948.

The root problem of the Palestinian Arabs is their dispossession by the Israeli Jews. However, their condition today is not just Israel's responsibility, and it cannot be mended by seeking revenge on Israel.

The fact that many Palestinians continue today as refugees is also to be explained by intra-Arab politics, and by the desire of various Arab states to have them as a living indictment of Israel. The remnant of Palestine allotted to the Arabs by the UN in 1947 was not unilaterally taken over by Israel, but divided by agreement between Israel and Jordan, most of it going to Jordan. Palestinians have suffered discrimination in the Arab states where they live, and massacres at the hands of Jordan, Syria, and Christian Arabs in Lebanon.

The Palestinians desperately need to establish their own state. The PLO wants a fully independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, territories occupied by Israel.

Israel will not easily agree to this. The large number of Israeli settlements built in the West Bank and Gaza since 1967 – in a deliberate political effort to establish claims to permanent Israeli control – stand as an obstacle. But while merging the Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish nations by decree in a “secular democratic state” is impossible, an independent Palestinian state can be won by struggle on the basis of justice for both Jews and Arabs. Those who want to help the Palestinians should argue for it.

Is a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza viable?

NO small state is viable on its own in the modern world economy. In fact, not even large

states are viable as sealed-off units, except on a much lower economic level than capitalism has so far achieved.

But small nations can and should have the right to political independence. If the Irish, why not the Palestinians?

An independent Palestinian state would be much weaker and poorer economically than Israel. Socialists and consistent democrats are in favour of reparations and aid to an independent Palestinian state from Israel, from the US, from Europe, and from the wealthy Arab states.

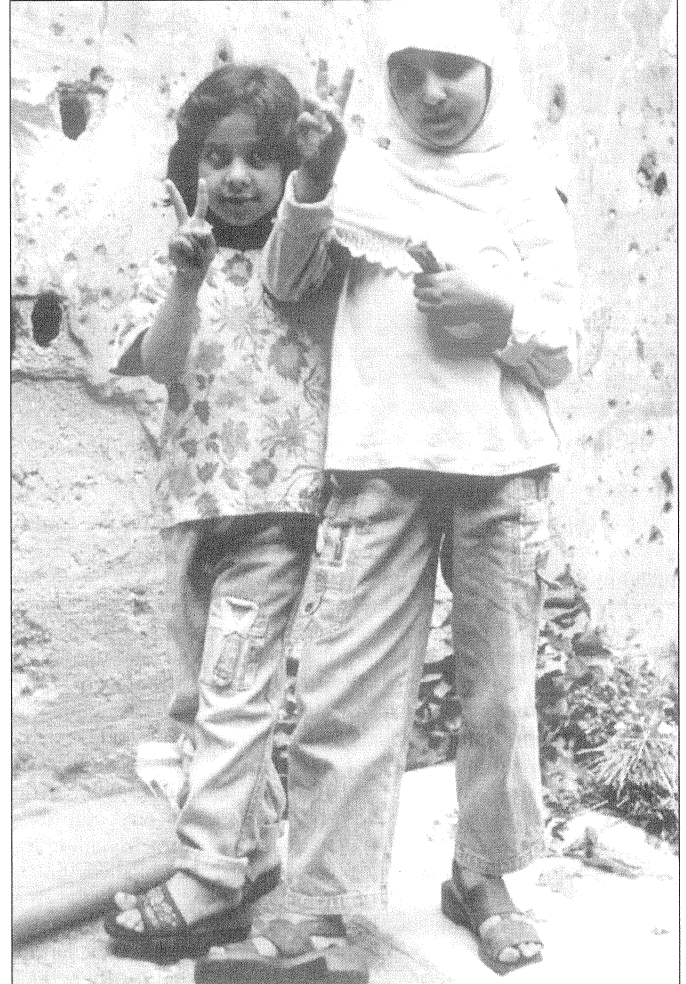
But there is no way, under capitalism, to equalise all nations economically. Even the best democratic settlement will not end inequality, exploitation and misery. Socialists argue for a democratic settlement, not as a self-sufficient “stage” which must be completed before any struggle for socialism starts, but as part of a programme for uniting Arab and Jewish workers to fight simultaneously for democracy and for socialism.

The Middle East's huge oil wealth should be used rationally, to enable a good life for all rather than to bloat some and to tantalise others. That can be done only through a socialist federation of the Middle East, with full rights to self-determination for all national minorities.

Support for the oppressed

SOCIALISTS must side with the oppressed against their oppressors.

For that reason, in general, we side with the Palestinian Arabs against Israeli oppression. However, to side with an oppressed people should not mean that we adopt all the views of their majority, which may well be one-sided or even



chauvinist.

The Jews were oppressed in the 20th century more than any other people. Yet socialists could not subscribe to the chauvinist attitudes towards the Palestinian Arabs which the majority of Jews in Israel/Palestine developed in their search to escape from and build guarantees against oppression.

Nor can we support the views of Palestinian Arabs who argue for the destruction of Israel. As Lenin put it: “We fight against the privileges and violence of the oppressor nation, and do not in any way condone strivings for privilege on the part of the oppressed nation”.

Self-determination

MANY good left-wing slogans and concepts are abused and turned back-to-front and inside-out when used in discussions about Israel.

“Self-determination” is one of those. For Marxists, it means that every nation, or fragment of a nation, should have the democratic right of determining what state



it should adhere to – its own, or some other one. It is one practical application of the basic Marxist idea which Lenin called “consistent democracy”.

“Self-determination” can be a way of demanding that the Palestinian Arabs have a right to their own state, side by side with Israel. But it has also been used (and still is) by those who deny the right of the Israeli Jews to have a state at all.

It thus becomes a way of advocating, not the democratic rights of all nations to self-determination, but that the Palestinian Arabs should have the sole right to determine what happens in all of pre-1948 Palestine – including what happens to the Jews. It is turned into its opposite – from a profoundly democratic demand, to a claim that one nation should determine what happens to another, and an assertion that one of the two nations in conflict has no rights at all.

A secular democratic state?

IN 1969 the Palestine Liberation Organisation proposed the scheme of reuniting Palestine in a “secular democratic state” where the Arabs who were expelled or fled Israeli territory in the war of 1948 would exercise their collective “right of return”, but Jews would have the rights of a religious minority.

In 1988 the PLO dropped that policy in favour of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. But some people on the left still continue to advocate the old PLO programme. What is wrong with it?

Socialists want every state to be secular and democratic. What is special about the “secular, democratic state” slogan for Israel-Palestine is the proposal to merge the two nations in one state, and the idea that religious-minority rights should be sufficient to satisfy the Israeli Jews’ desire for collective guarantees.

We are for a free socialist federation of

the Middle East. We are for the maximum unity between nations.

But the idea that you could integrate, say, France and Germany, on the territory occupied by one of them, just by promising that the united state would be “secular and democratic”, is self-evidently ludicrous. In Palestine the proposal for a joint “secular democratic state” amounts to a scheme for immediately merging two nations who have related to each other through repeated bitter war for more than half a century. It is an utopian absurdity. National identities and conflicts will not be overcome or superseded by decree. A joint “secular democratic state” could be established only after – long after – the conflict between the two nations had been resolved and allowed to fade by some other settlement.

More than that. It is inconceivable that the Israeli Jews would agree to dismantle their state in return for a promise of equal citizenship within an Arab state, let alone mere “religious minority rights”. So the road to a “secular democratic state” would have to lie through war and full-scale conquest of the Jews.

And then what? Then the victorious armies (of Iraq, Syria, Iran?) will gallantly establish and protect the rights of the Jews as individuals in an Arab state?

In reality such a conquest would be resisted to the death by the Jews. It could not happen without driving the Jews out or massacring them.

The “secular democratic state” slogan was much more attractive and internationally “saleable” than the programme of “driving the Jews into the sea” that Yasser Arafat’s predecessor Ahmed Shukhairy used to advocate in the 1960s. For many people, the “secular democratic state” slogan seemed also to represent a different intention and aspiration.

But it cannot be taken at face value. Its only practical political meaning is as an ultimatum behind which is posed a fear-some “or else”.

Immediately it is refused by Israel and

“the Zionists”, it translates into a moralistic-political denunciation of those who refuse. They are “exposed”. That “exposure” then becomes a warrant for the military destruction of the Israeli state, the subjugation of the citizens of Israel, and the forcible removal from those who survive conquest of all national rights – and, most likely, in order to sustain that removal of national rights, the removal of civil liberties too.

Internationalism

SOCIALIST internationalism means that the working class has no fatherland, and that workers in every country have more in common with each other than with their own capitalists and landlords. It is the opposite of chauvinism and national exclusiveness. Yet this idea, too, is misused.

Some people, rightly condemning Israeli Jewish chauvinism, wrongly draw the conclusion that the Israeli Jewish nation has no right to exist. Marxists should indeed condemn all chauvinism, Jewish and Arab alike. The problem here is that Arab chauvinism is dealt with on the left very differently. It is merely condemned as a bad set of ideas, not taken as a proof that no Arab state should exist.

Thus internationalism is used as a weapon in support of one of the competing nationalisms or chauvinisms against the other – for the Arabs, and against the Jewish nation.

The very idea of the Israeli Jews wanting their own nation-state is hypocritically condemned on the grounds that we should not be concerned with national identities. Yet the Palestinian Arabs’ desire for a state is applauded on the grounds of the right of nations to self-determination.

Internationalism is turned into the servant of an Arab-nationalist or Islamicist programme of revenge and conquest. It is used to justify the project of destroying the existing Israeli Jewish state and subju-

gating the Israeli Jewish nation. Internationalism is turned upside down, into a justification for chauvinism.

The Arab workers

SOME socialists say that they are for the destruction of Israel, but by the Arab workers, in the course of a socialist revolution, and not by the existing Arab states.

But how will the workers in the Arab states unite, without a democratic programme that recognises the rights of the minorities in their region? If they did unite, and seized ownership and control of the vast wealth in the Arab world, notably the oil industry, what reason other than Islamist or Arab chauvinism could they have to want to conquer the small part of the region, relatively poor in resources, which is occupied by the Israeli Jews? What reason do these socialists have for preaching hostility to Israel now (as they do) when there is no united, revolutionary, and socialist Arab working class confronting it?

Socialism is the answer?

YES, socialism is the answer. But this phrase is sometimes used to evade the issues.

Socialism can only be made by the working class. And the working class can make socialism only if the workers of different nations can find a common answer to national conflicts. Socialism will not automatically dissolve national conflicts.

The Russian Marxists in 1917 did not suppose that once they had made a socialist revolution they no longer needed to say anything about national conflicts. They argued for workers of different nationalities to adopt a common formula to resolve the national conflicts that rent the old Russian Empire. A central part of that formula was the right of nations to self-determination.

Wherever a people, or a fragment of a people, was oppressed or feared oppression, the socialist policy was for the workers of all nations concerned to unite on the basis of the right of that community to join whatever neighbouring state they wished, or to have their own state.

Such a policy is needed, as well as the direct socialist programme, in the Middle East. We propose a free socialist federation of the Middle East with full rights for all national minorities, including the Jews.

The Israeli workers

IMPLICIT in the argument that "the answer" in the Middle East is a socialist revolution made by the Arab workers is the idea that the Israeli workers can play no positive role.

A quarter of a million Israelis demonstrated — the comparable figure, proportional to population, in Britain would be

six million — in 1982 to protest at the massacre carried out by Lebanese Christians in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Chatila, in an area under Israeli army control. Within Israel, there is a peace movement pushing for compromise with the Arabs. It wins more support at some times and less at others. Some sections of it are more consistent than others. Right now it is marginalised by the failure of the peace negotiations in 2000. But nevertheless it is always vocal.

Not all the peace activists are workers, by any means, but some are. Israel has an independent trade union movement and Israeli workers have organised large strikes. The trade unions organise Israeli Arab workers too.

Despite all this, many on the left refuse to see any good in any Israeli Jew except perhaps the very exceptional one who will agree that Israel should dissolve itself — who, in other words, is prepared to become an honorary Arab, or to emigrate.

At the root of the inability to see any good in any Israeli is the refusal to recognise the right of the Israeli Jewish nation to exist. If you do not recognise the right of the nation to exist, then you can hardly see any role for its working class.

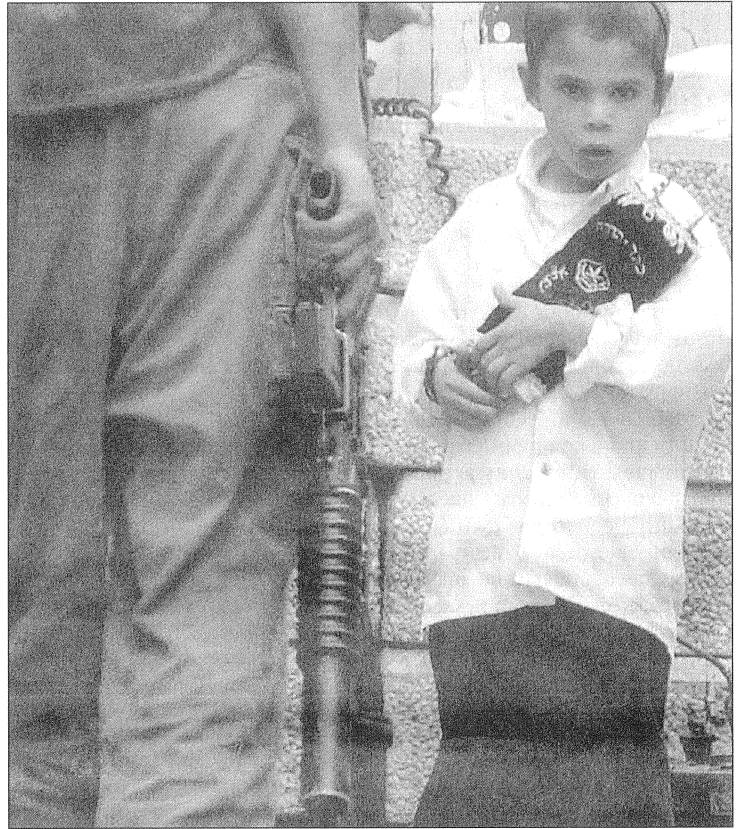
The "right of return"

CONDEMNATION of the Israeli law under which Jews throughout the world have the right to come and claim citizenship in Israel is an article of faith among most anti-Zionists. It is outrageous, they say, that people with no direct connection with Palestine should have the right to come to Israel while the Palestinian Arabs do not.

The same anti-Zionists advocate the collective right of the Palestinian Arabs to "return", and claim that this return, rather than some agreed division of the disputed territory, is the only solution.

Yet think what is involved here. In 1948, about 700,000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were driven out of what became Israel. In the following years, over half a million Jews fled, or were driven out from, Arab states, and came to Israel. There was a substantial population exchange.

Today there are 8.6 million Palestinian Arabs scattered across the world, 3.7 mil-



lion of them registered as refugees. Most of them were not born in Israel. Many of their parents weren't. Only a small proportion could "return". The others have never been there.

On the other side, the majority of the Jews of Israel were born there, many of them from parents driven from the Arab countries.

So the proposal for the Arab "right of return" is a proposal for people who have never lived there to "repossess" Israel from people born there.

Is "right of return" just free immigration?

IN parts of the British left, support for the collective "right" of 3.7 million Palestinians to "return" is presented as if it were the same sort of question as our opposition to the racist immigration laws we have in Britain, laws which discriminate with a relentless viciousness against black and brown-skinned people. Examples of Israeli racism are cited to back up this equation.

In fact, the idea that those who fled or were expelled in 1948 — of those 750,000 people how many are still alive? — and their children, grand-children and great-grandchildren have a collective "right of return" has been understood by both Arabs and Israelis as implying the replacement of Israel — as one of many coded ways of proposing the destruction of Israel.

Now, populations shift and change over time, naturally and, so to speak, organically. Socialists are in favour of the free movement of people. That is one thing.

Under “right of return” we are talking about the collective migration into what is now Israel of two-thirds as many people as are already there. This is something other than what “free immigration” into Britain means now.

In fact, it is a fantastic idea. It could not conceivably happen except in the aftermath of the complete conquest and subjugation of Israel.

Even if it is conceived of as something that could be done with the agreement of the Israelis, peacefully, it would nonetheless be incompatible with the continued existence of the Israeli Jews as a nation, a compact mass of people with a common identity and a common territory.

You may think that a good or a bad thing, but be clear that that is what “right of return”, collective resettlement, for millions of Palestinians means. This idea has always been understood on both sides as code for the end of the Israeli Jewish state.

The real equivalent of the demand for the collective migration of three or four million into Israel would be if many tens of millions of people – say 40 million – just across the Channel, were claiming a collective right to “repossess” Britain. In such a situation, whether you supported their right to come in or not, it would be plain silly to pretend that it was the same thing as the entry over time of some hundreds of thousands, or millions, of immigrants from Asia or eastern and south-eastern Europe.

The national conflict between the Israeli Jews and the Palestinian Arabs cannot be dealt with by pretending that it is a question of individual rights. If the Palestinians win the right to have their own state, and Israel-Arab relations are normalised, that will create conditions favourable to a great increase in free movement of *individuals* between Palestine and Israel. Of course we are for that.

Schemes have been put forward by the Israeli left and by Palestinian negotiators for negotiated numbers of Palestinians with family backgrounds in what is now Israel to be resettled there. Such measures are surely desirable, and they should involve as many people as possible.

But that is a different matter from a collective “right of return” of 3.7 million Palestinians *en masse* – behind the demand for which has for decades stood the threat of a war of conquest to enforce it.

Acceptance of the “right of return” for Israel would not be a matter of that nation doing as every nation should, and abandoning racist and chauvinist attitudes to minorities in its midst or to migrants. It would mean the Israeli Jews opting for national self-destruction in deference to the claims of another nation.

Not only does such a thing not happen in real history; no reasonable person would demand that it should happen, or think that Israel’s refusal to do it justifies a war of conquest by the Arab states.

Here, as elsewhere, the underlying assumption is that the Israeli Jewish nation is an illegitimate nation, and therefore does not have the same rights as other nations.

Accept “right of return” only in principle?

THE argument that all the Arabs “really” want is that Israel in principle should accept the right of return, but in practice not many Palestinians would use it, is either confused or disingenuous.

It is a demand that Israel should acknowledge its own historical illegitimacy. That is something else nations do not do.

It is the demand that Israel concede the moral case of those who, even if the Arab states should normalise relations with Israel, will, by terrorism, try to continue the war to destroy Israel.

In reality, the demand that Israel acknowledge “in principle” the “right of return” works against easy movement between Israel and the Arab states. It is part of the old antagonistic relationship in which it served as an ideological artefact in a war whose – admitted – goal was to destroy Israel. Its abandonment as part of “normalisation” of Arab-Israeli relations would in fact serve to facilitate the “return” of larger numbers of Palestinians – or entry by those whose grandparents were not born in what is now Israel: why should they have fewer rights?

Palestinians who go to work in Israel are entitled to citizenship there. Who knows what in decades the natural demographic shifts arising from free or freer movement of Arabs and Jews will produce? Who, other than nationalists and racists, should care?

In sum: right now, the call for collective “right of return” is still either the demand that Israel surrender the character its Jewish people want it to have, or minimally, that it “in principle” proclaims itself historically illegitimate, while continuing to maintain its Jewish character.

Anybody who is for a two state settlement cannot logically also be for collective “right of return”, without thereby implicitly proclaiming that they take neither “two states”, nor “right of return” seriously.

Fighting racism

THE fight to destroy Israel is said to be the fight against racism. Israel symbolises and represents racism.

There are laws and practices in Israel which deserve to be opposed. But it is malignant propaganda – in fact, an expression of Arab or Islamicist chauvinism – to equate Israeli nationalism, the desire of the Israeli Jews to have and to protect their own compact Jewish population, within a Jewish state, with racism.

Otherwise every nation on earth has to be called racist. No good, and certainly no political clarity, can come from such a blanket equation of nationalism with racism.

If the Arab states should destroy Israel, that would not be “anti-racist”. It would lead to the comprehensive ill-treatment of

all those Jews in the conquered territory who refused to stop being “Zionist”, or what their conquerors chose to define as “Zionist”. Here, opposition to Israel’s “racism” is part of a propaganda war on behalf of those who would, if they could, inflict their own “racism” on the whole Jewish people of Israel!

Fighting imperialism

THE destruction of Israel is said to be necessary in the cause of defeating imperialism in the Middle East. But Israel is an independent nation state. It is surrounded by hostile Arab countries, with much larger populations. They are independent states, too, most of them with their own ruling-class ties with the “imperialist” West. Syria’s population is 15 million, Jordan’s five million, Iraq’s 23 million, Egypt’s 61 million, and Lebanon’s four million. Israel’s is six million. Israel is more prosperous than the surrounding Arab countries, but not because it rules them or draws super-profits from them.

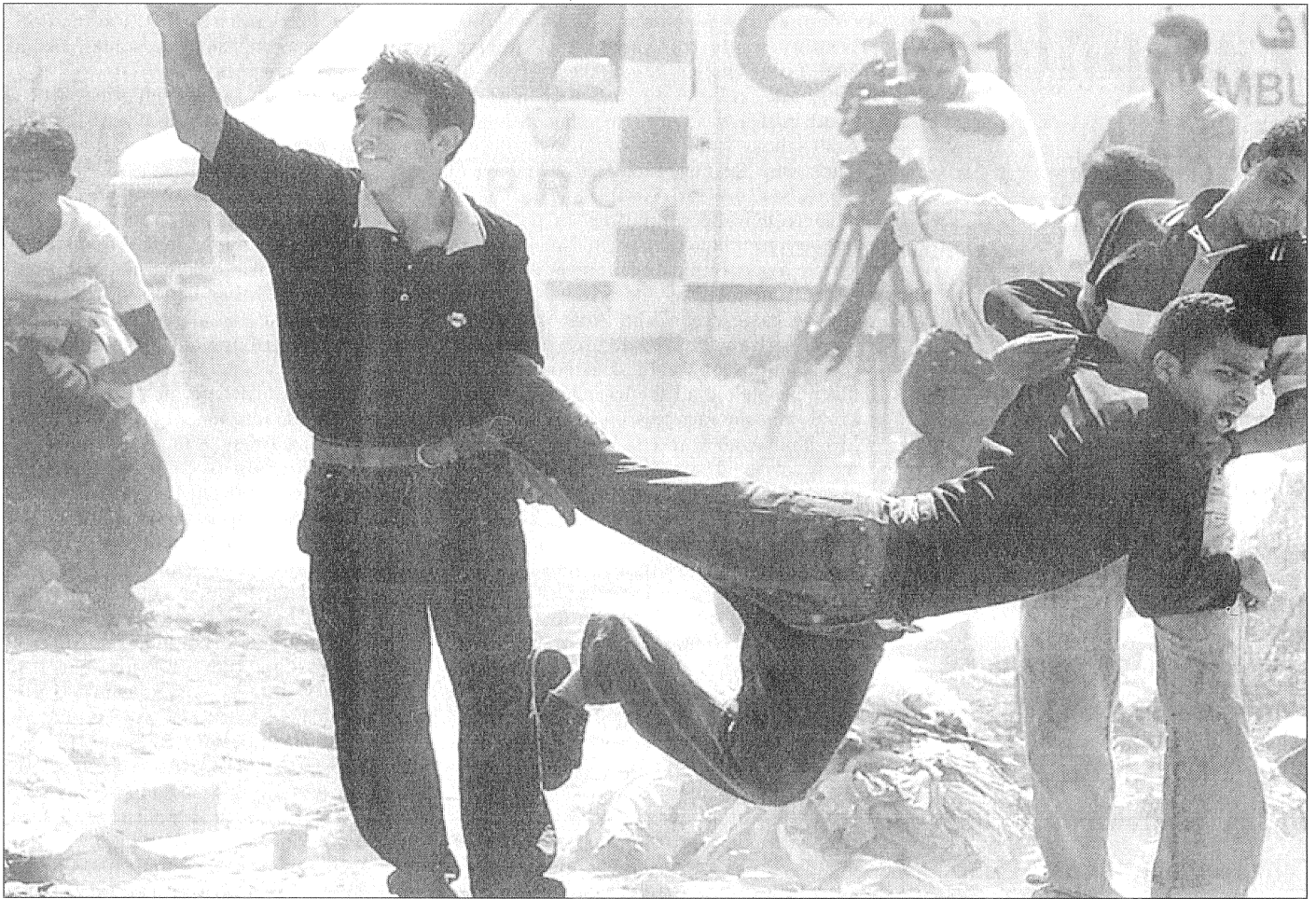
Since 1967 Israel has developed close ties with the USA. But the Israeli state existed before those links existed, and could continue to exist after they were broken.

To identify Israel as the arch-imperialist, or as the prime tool of imperialism, in the area, is to be an apologist for the Arab ruling classes. Throughout the area, those ruling classes use denunciation of Israel and “Zionism” in order to divert workers’ and peasants’ class resentment towards a distant target. The Palestinian-Arab landlord ruling class used “anti-Zionism” in that diversionary way in the 1920s and ‘30s, and there is even an element of it in the present intifada, in so far as some of its energy comes from dissatisfaction with the corruption and repression of Yasser Arafat’s Palestinian semi-state. The only authentic anti-imperialism in the area is the fight for working-class socialist democracy.

Anti-Zionism and anti-semitism

IN the earlier part of the 20th century, Zionism was a minority political current among Jews. Many Jews opposed Zionism, for many different reasons. Marxists argued that Jews should unite with non-Jewish workers for the class struggle in the country where they lived, rather than going off to create Zionist colonies. Conservative and well-established Jews thought that the Zionists would give Jews a bad name for not being loyal citizens of the countries where they lived. Most religious Jews also objected to Zionism.

But now the establishment of a Jewish state is no longer a scheme for the future. It is a fact over 50 years old. Most Israelis live there because they were born there. The meaning of “Zionism” is not so clear. Usually it is taken to mean any sort of sympathy or identification with Israel, however critical – in other words, the



reflex response of most Jews worldwide.

But then "Zionism" is denounced as something akin to racism. This is ideological terrorism, used to prevent any consideration of the issues that does not start with root-and-branch condemnation of Israel.

The "anti-Zionist" demand that "Zionism" should be undone – i.e. that the Israeli Jewish state should cease to exist, and that the Jewish nation should instead dissolve into an Arab state – is not necessarily racist, but it is inescapably anti-semitic. It demands of the Israeli Jews something – self-submergence into another, and hostile, nation – which it demands of no other nation. It implies hostility to the Israeli Jews, and hostility to that big majority of Jews worldwide, the "Zionists", who instinctively identify with Israel.

In the 1980s student Jewish societies at a number of British universities were banned by the socialist-led university student unions because the Jewish students refused to denounce "Zionism". Much of the left supported those bans. That shows the anti-semitic logic of denying Israel's national rights.

Should we boycott Israeli goods?

No. Boycotts, particularly organised trade-union boycotts, can be valuable methods of struggle to force a government to change policy; and the Israeli government

has many policies that socialists would wish to change. For socialists to boycott Israeli goods would however make us just extra voices in the loud, long-standing chorus of the Arab states. It would be a gesture having no plausible positive practical effect but a very large negative ideological effect on our ability to establish an independent working-class stance against both Israeli and Arab chauvinism.

Boycott activity would also feed into, and in practice quickly become, anti-semitism, targeting not Israel but non-Israeli Jews. Marks and Spencer has been a big target of "anti-Zionist" boycott campaigns – not because it is Israeli, but because it is a firm with Jewish owners who, like almost all Jews, sympathise with Israel.

Is Israel a "religious" state?

Socialists oppose exclusivist, chauvinist, or racist policies and practices in Israel as in every state. But for no other state – however chauvinist or religious-sectarian its laws – do sane socialists propose the suppression of the people who make up the state. We propose instead to replace chauvinism or religious sectarianism by consistent democracy. The same should go for Israel.

Israeli Jews' collective identity is fundamentally national; many of them are not religious. Zionism in its pioneer period was mostly a secular movement, opposed by

the Jewish religious establishment.

In Israel, minority religious parties have been able, as the price for their support for coalition governments, to impose measures which all socialists and democrats would oppose. Nevertheless, Israel is far from the worst of the world's states in its taint of religious sectarianism.

The argument that Israel must be over-run by the neighbouring states – including self-avowed "Islamic" states – unless it first manages to free itself of all sectarianism or chauvinism embodies scandalous double standards. Which other nation could make good its right to self-determination if, in order to claim it, it had first to prove itself fully democratic and internationalist?

Israel = South Africa?

Israel is said to be the same sort of "settler state" as South Africa was before 1994, when rigid legal divisions gave the white people vast privileges over the black. A common political programme is advocated for both: smash the settler state.

But even if the "settler state" tag fits both South Africa and Israel, these societies are so vastly different that the tag alone is inadequate to base any political conclusions on. More important is what differentiates Israel and South Africa.

Israel was given its character by the Zionists' resolute refusal to use Arab labour. Instead they insisted on Jewish labour, as part of their drive to build up a

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compact Jewish society in Palestine. Whatever one thinks of that "Jewish labour only" policy, it was the opposite of the mass exploitation on which modern South Africa was built. The exploitation of Arab labour from the occupied territories since 1967 has not fundamentally changed the character of Israel in this respect.

There may be similarities in political-military techniques between Israeli policy in the West Bank and apartheid South Africa; but in Israel there is not a ruling Jewish caste exploiting Arab helots. In South Africa white people used to hold all the positions of wealth and power while black people did all the basic labour in the mines and the factories. In Israel there are low-paid Arab workers, and increasingly many low-paid non-Jewish migrant workers from other origins, but 86% of all people employed are Jewish.

"Smash the settler state" in South Africa meant: abolish the monopoly of power and the caste privileges of the white minority. Let the majority rule. It meant the same in colonial Algeria, where before 1962 a small minority of European settlers lorded it over the Arabs and Berbers.

But what would "smash the settler state" mean for Israel? It is a state which is extremely democratic for its Jewish majority. Its army is pretty close to being a citizen army. For an external force to "smash" this state would not be a matter of destroying a repressive apparatus, or defeating it in war, but of overrunning Israel and forcibly destroying or suppressing the Jewish nation. It could only be done by slaughter, expropriation, terror, and, pretty certainly, the driving out of large parts of the population.

The programme of "destroying Israel" was long made to appear something other than the expression of a special hostility to the Israeli Jews by identifying Israel with South Africa. But that is an utterly false comparison. In Israel there are Jewish bosses — and mostly Jewish workers. In South Africa there were white bosses (and supervisors, and holders of better-paid jobs) — and black workers.

Where does the left's "Zionophobia" come from?

There was a Zionist unit in the Red Army with which the Russian workers and peasants, led by the Bolsheviks, fought the counter-revolutionaries and the invading armies after the 1917 workers' revolution. Left-wing Zionists were represented at the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920. Left Zionist groups remained legal in the USSR until the Stalinist ice-age set in, in 1927, with the deportation of the Bolshevik-Leninist (Trotskyist) opposition — six years after the main opposition groups were banned.

In short, in the earlier part of the 20th century Zionism was generally considered to be a left-wing cause; and even those

Marxists who criticised the Zionists, criticised them as mistaken comrades, not as out-and-out enemies.

In Britain, the Labour left was particularly friendly to Zionism until well into the 1970s. "Arabism" was generally a Tory cause.

How, then, did most of the left come to be so hostile to Zionism?

Much of the Labour left's affection for Zionism was based on the delusion, long since shattered, that Israel was socialist. And then the colonial regime that Israel ran in the West Bank and Gaza after 1967 progressively alienated left-wing sympathies. In a world where the "new" left was formed in response to struggles such as the Vietnam war, Israel seemed very unattractive. The brutality of the Israeli army against stone-throwing Palestinian youths today continues this pattern.

But that is only part of the story. It explains why the left should be hostile to Israeli government policy, but not why the left should be so radically hostile to the whole Israeli Jewish nation. The Stalinist movement, and the USSR and the East European states, have also been powerful factors in shaping left anti-Zionism.

The Russian dictator Stalin supported Israel in the 1948 war for reasons of his own power-politics calculations, but soon turned against it. He launched a full-scale purge of "Zionists" — meaning Jews — in the East European Communist Parties which the Russian army had placed in power at the end of World War 2.

The "anti-Zionist" campaign spread through the CPs of the world. There were good Jews still. But "the Zionists" were bad Jews, and by now that meant that most Jews were bad Jews.

As late as 1968-9, there was a full-scale purge of the pitiful remnants of Poland's Jewish community, especially those who were members of the ruling party.

Against the background of "left Zionophobe" culture created by the great volume of official Communist Party propaganda, it was easy for the left that took shape in the 1960s in solidarity with Third World struggles to line up solidly with the left-talking and vociferously "anti-imperialist" Arab bourgeois regimes — and to adopt their vision of Israel as the main enemy.

Instead of independent working-class politics, the left adopted the politics of demonising Israel and identifying Arab nationalism as *the* revolutionary force in the area ("the Arab revolution"). The left thus broke with the basic ideas of Lenin: where there is national conflict, socialists advocate working-class unity as the first principle, and conciliation of the national conflicts as the means to promote working-class unity across the national divisions.

The position of the left-wing "anti-Zionist" who fervently and often denies being an anti-semitic might be summed up thus:

*Why do you misconstrue my views?
Believe me, I don't hate no Jews;
For seeing what pure love will do,
What need have I for hatred too?*

Boycott? A Jew-hunt won't help the Palestinians



Boycotts motivated by the desire to "do something" to help the Palestinians actually lead into a blind alley

THE boycotting of nations and states is a crude, undifferentiating and normally ineffectual weapon. Typically, it has more to do with the taking of a political and moral stand by the boycotter than with effective political action. That said, boycotts are, nonetheless, sometimes useful.

A boycott of Israeli academics and scientific institutions is advocated by, amongst others, Hilary and Steven Rose. Sections of the left are trying to organise a boycott of Israeli goods. The most bedrock argument, though not a conclusive one, against these boycotts is attempting to organise, is that boycotting Israel (in unison with most of the Arab states) implies that only Israel is responsible for the present tragic conflict. That is not true.

Much blame does indeed attach itself to Israel and Israel is the oppressor of the people of the Occupied Territories. However, this conflict has been shaped over many decades within a framework determined not by Israel but by the Arab states' refusal to recognise Israel's right

to exist — of 22 Arab states, only two, Jordan and Egypt, recognise Israel in this, its 55th year of existence — and by their determination, sometimes proclaimed, always implied, to wipe out Israel if they can and as soon as they can.

The catastrophe that befell the Palestinians in 1948 could not have happened had not a coalition of Arab states invaded Israel. In that war, Egypt proclaimed its war aim to be to "drive the Jews into the sea".

The June 1967 war — which led to Israeli occupation of the West Bank and other territory — was precipitated by Egyptian war moves against Israel.

It is fundamental to the demonisation of Israel and "the Zionists" by much of the pseudo-left that Israel alone is blamed for the conflict, and serious people should not go along with this venomous historical myth-making.

But that objection to the proposal of boycott is not necessarily decisive. Whatever about the history of the Jewish-Arab conflict, Israel's existence is not now threatened. It is the very existence of

the Palestinian entity on the West Bank, and maybe the potential for a Palestinian state, that is threatened.

If boycott will help the Palestinians escape from the trap which their Israeli chauvinist-enemies and their own wretched leaders have boxed them into, then the case for boycott is overwhelming. The decisive argument against boycott is that though it may answer the creditable need felt by individuals in Britain to "do something" it will not help the Palestinians. It will in practice, whatever people like Hilary and Steven Rose intend, be not an anti-Israeli-chauvinist but an anti-Jewish movement. That will not help the Palestinians.

The first fruit of the academic boycott initiative shows, and at the very beginning, what is wrong with it. At the beginning of July 2002, a Manchester professor, Mona Baker, removed two Israeli colleagues from the boards of two journals she edits on the grounds that she no longer wanted any "official association with an Israeli". One of the people sacked, Miriam Shlesinger, is the former head of

Israel's branch of Amnesty International – a group which makes de facto solidarity with the Palestinians!

What Shlesinger thinks, what this person is politically, is of no account. The former head of Israel's Amnesty is as much an Israeli as Prime Minister Sharon is. All Israelis, even those on whom an eventual agreement with the Palestinians would depend, are to be targeted.

Equally illuminating in a different way is the article in the *Guardian* on 15 July, 2002, by Hilary and Steven Rose, where they defend the idea of academic boycott. They massively exaggerate the efficacy of the various boycotts of South Africa. The South Africa boycott movement started in response to the February 1960 massacre of 67 peaceful demonstrators and the wounding of 200 more, in Sharpeville, South Africa. Its effect – over nearly four decades! – was not great. Other things determined the outcome in South Africa, four decades after Sharpeville – not least the power of black working-class militancy. Identification of Israel with apartheid South Africa is part of the demonisation of Israel. It is nonsense. Israel does not exploit the Palestinians as the South African white caste exploited the South African black majority. Israel's existence is entirely separable from the things consistent democrats and socialists object to in its dealings with the Palestinians: Israel is nothing like apartheid South Africa.

The Roses' evocation of the precedent of the South Africa boycott does not necessarily imply that they equate Israel with South Africa. They say: "Every rational person knows that the only prospect of a just and lasting peace lies in Israel's recognition of the legitimacy of a Palestinian state and the Arab world's acceptance of a secure Israel behind its 1967 borders. But how to get from here to there? Is there anything that ordinary citizens, that is civil society, can do to bring pressure to bear to compel our governments and international institutions to

move the peace process forward?"

The problem with this is that, in Britain anyway, those who will promote the academic boycott – and are already promoting the boycott of Israeli goods – do not share the Roses' "rational" political programme, "two states": a Palestinian state side by side with Israel. The numerically larger forces on the British left share Hamas' programme: for them sympathy and humanitarian concern for the Palestinians is a chance to agitate for the destruction of Israel.

Their idea of "liberating" "Palestine" demands the destruction of Israel. It implies support for Arab states who still think they can destroy Israel. If, in the course of a new US war on Iraq, a cornered Saddam Hussein decides to go down in history as the destroyer of Israel – with germ warfare, nuclear bombs, or whatever – they will see that as progressive work. Slander? In 1991, during the Gulf War, the SWP backed Saddam Hussein's rocket attacks on Israel.

The plain and simple "demands" for "rational" friends of the Palestinians – those who are also fundamentally friendly to the Israelis' right to maintain a Jewish national state – is surely, "Israel out of the Occupied Territories, back to the 1967 borders, let the Palestinians form an independent state".

Yet the SWP and its allies on the National Executive of the Socialist Alliance rejected a motion from supporters of *Solidarity* and *Workers' Liberty* to campaign for solidarity with the Palestinians around this proposal. Why? Because it implies the right of the Israelis to go on "occupying" Israel.

The people who will "run" with the boycott idea belong to this spectrum. They are locked into the "anti-Zionist" mindset according to which opposition to Israel and "Zionism" is more or less identical with opposition to racism.

The record of this spectrum, over decades, is one in which their anti-Zionist campaigns have targeted Jews – in the

National Union of Students for example, where Jewish youngsters who would not denounce Israel and "Zionism" as "racist", were routinely persecuted in the 1980s.

Hilary and Steven Rose say the sacking of the two Israeli academics is only a "mote", a dot as distinct from a beam, a freak episode unlikely to be typical. In fact it is not an aberration, or something atypical and freakish, but this campaign beginning as it is likely to go on.

Israel came into being as a result of the greatest single crime in human history, the Holocaust of six million Jews at the hands of the Nazis. It was this crime, the preparation for it, and its aftermath, that, in the 30s and 40s, led to large scale Jewish migration to Palestine, and turned Jews throughout the world into Zionists. It is typical Jews – people reluctant even when they loathe Sharon's policies to distinguish themselves from Israel, whose foundations they see as threatened – that the boycott will inescapably target. It is Jewish businesses, not "Israeli goods" that will be the prime target of an economic boycott.

It is Jewish academics who will come under special pressure and be denounced for not supporting the boycott. Jews who are bitterly unhappy with the Israeli government but do not, for a large number of possible reasons, back the boycott, will find themselves classified as "the Zionist enemy" within reach. Some of them will thereby be pushed towards Sharon and the Israeli government.

So will academics and scientists in Israel, including those who, though they are Israelis by birth and Zionists – supporters of the Jewish state – by conviction, are opponents of Sharon and his policy in the West Bank and supporters of what the Roses rightly say is the only "rational" solution – a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Because this boycott, economic or academic, will, despite anybody's good intentions, be a recipe for a campaign against all Israeli and pro-Israeli Jewish academics and business people, it will do a great deal more harm – not to speak of injustice – than any good it could possibly do to the Palestinians. The urge to "do something" is an understandable and a good urge. But what we do politically must be in line with the goal which the Roses say is the only "rational" one, two states. It must be compatible with the opposition to racist scapegoating which the Roses and others of the boycotters share with us.

The demonisation of Israel, not to speak of the demonisation and victimisation of anti-chauvinist Israelis and of Jews not prepared to boycott Israel, cuts in the other direction to the only "sane" political programme for a resolution of the Jewish-Arab conflict.

Professor Baker is the true and proper embodiment of the inescapable logic of the "boycott Israel" campaign. Those who want justice for Palestinians and are also for the legitimate interests of Israeli Jews will have no part of it.

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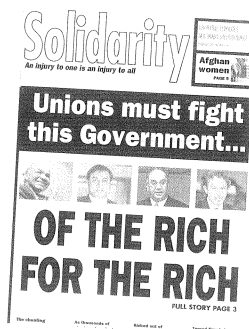
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Leon Trotsky, 15 June 1940*

IT IS ONE of the ironies of politics. Trotskyism, in most of its post-Trotsky mutations, embraces an "anti-Zionism" that in practice is nothing less than a comprehensive hostility to most Jews alive; yet Trotskyism in Trotsky's time and after was a movement in which people of Jewish origin played – and play – a massive part.

It is not right-wing myth, but plain truth, that Jews have always played a very large part in the socialist and communist movement. Lenin once commented on the splendid vanguard role of Jews in our movement. Karl Kautsky, ceremoniously addressing a small Yiddish socialist journal in Britain early in the 20th century, urged Jewish socialists to work at bringing overall socialist theory, revolutionary determination, and an internationalist outlook to the British labour movement – to be the leaven that they, indeed, often were. The role Jews played had nothing to do with innate Jewish characteristics, but with the historical and social experiences of the Jews.

In the first half of the 20th century, Jewish workers lived in a world that stigmatised, scapegoated and persecuted Jews. The pervasive Christian culture branded them in age-old sectarian terms as the accursed people, the God-killers who had rejected and then crucified Christ; the newer nationalist culture that increasingly gripped Europe's sundered nations before and after the First World War branded them as "aliens"; its racist sub-culture depicted them as human vermin fit only for extirpation.

For decades the hounding and harrying would continue, now abating, now rising to a crescendo, until it would attain the mad paroxysm of the Holocaust, in which six million Jews, two-thirds of European Jewry, were systematically slaughtered in factories specially designed for the mass extermination of human beings.

In these conditions many Jews had the

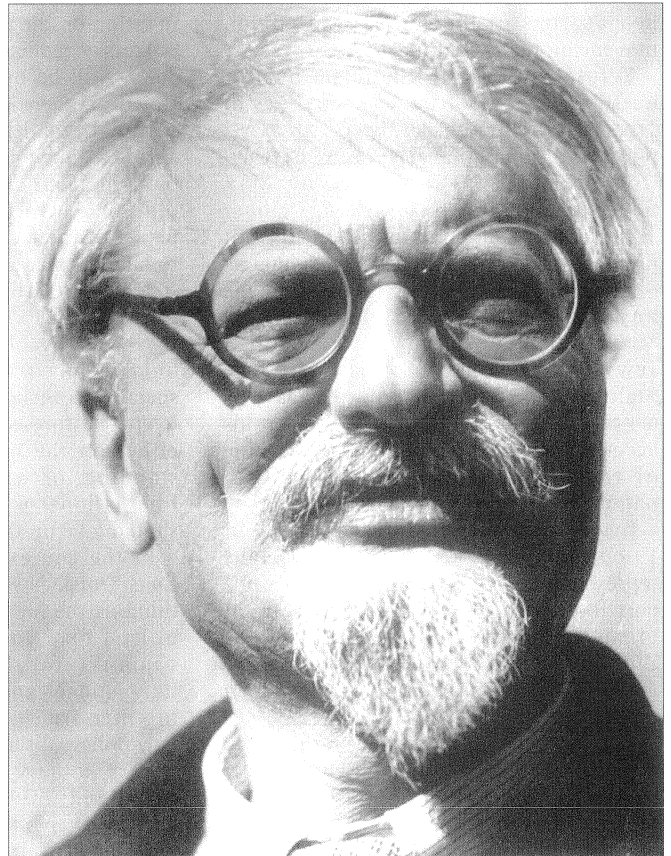
dearly-paid-for privilege of being able to see capitalism whole, in all its raw cannibalistic savagery, without the layered masks of conventional civilisation. So, naturally, they came to make up a large part of the socialist army gathering its forces for an attempt to remake the world and create a civilisation in which there would no longer be class, or race, or national oppression.

But while some Jews became revolutionary socialists, other Jews became nationalists, committed to building up a Jewish nation in Palestine, where at the start of the 20th century resident Jews were still only a small community. Some nationalists – the most effective ones, in fact – were also socialists. Rivalry between "assimilationist" Jewish socialists and Zionists was often bitter, but the demonisation of Zionism that characterises much of modern Trotskyism was unknown. Zionists fought alongside the Red Army to defend the workers' republic after the Russian Revolution of 1917.

In Palestine, the tiny Communist Party emerged from the left-Zionist Poale Zion. Arguing for international socialist revolution as the road to salvation for the Jews, and against the Zionist project, the communists nevertheless had an approach very different from the latter-day pseudo-left demonisation of Zionism.

Should as many Jews as wanted to go there be allowed into Palestine? Of course they should, answered the Communist International and the Communist Party of Palestine, advocating Jewish-Arab unity within Palestine and opposition to British imperialism there.

The shift to modern left "anti-Zionism" emerged as part of the Stalinisation of the Communist International. When in 1929 Palestinian Arab chauvinists mounted



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widespread attacks on Jews – all the teachers and students at a religious college in Hebron, for example, were massacred – the Communist Party of Palestine at first called the attacks by their proper name, pogrom, as did the Russian and Comintern press. Then the international Stalinist leaders decided that it was an "anti-imperialist uprising", and that became the Comintern "line".

In fact, one of the Arabs' mobilising slogans was "The British are with us" (Britain then ruled Palestine, and British forces had clashed with Jews). But this was the "Third Period" of Stalinism. Everything – even a pogrom – could be and was construed as evidence that revolution was imminent.

After 1930, a Comintern drive "Arabised" the heavily-Jewish CP. The leaders of the party had to be Arab, and the Jewish majority were thus second-class members.

* *Writings 1939–40*, p.287

Breaking with the old Communist International policy, the CP became bitter enemies of Jewish immigration. German refugees from Hitler were met off the boat by German-speaking Jewish CPers with leaflets telling them to go back home.

By 1936, when a serious Arab movement began in Syria and Palestine, this time having some anti-imperialist content, but in Palestine being essentially a pogrom movement against Jewish civilians, the CP was an active part of the campaign. Jewish CPers were assigned to plant bombs among Jews. For example, as the American CPer Malech Epstein discovered when he visited Palestine, young Jewish CPers were assigned to blow up the headquarters of the Jewish trade union movement, the Histadrut.

Refusal to go with Stalinism on this question was one of the characteristics of Trotskyism while Trotsky lived. Trotskyists rejected the malignant fantasies of 1929 (for example, in an article by Max Shachtman in the US *Militant*, October 1929). Their comments on 1936 did not pretend that it was purely an anti-imperialist movement, or that there could be anything "progressive" about Arab-Muslim chauvinism against Palestinian Jews. After Epstein broke with the Stalinists, the *Militant* reported, as evidence of the degeneracy of Stalinism, his account of what he had seen in Palestine of the CP's collaboration with Arab nationalists in terrorist attacks on Jews.

In this they reflected Trotsky himself. Throughout the 1930s Trotsky stood as the representative of the old attitude – support for Jewish rights, including the right to migrate to Palestine, while rejecting the Zionist project – and of sympathetic awareness that the world was closing in murderously on the Jews.

Born in October 1879, and murdered by a Stalinist agent in August 1940, Trotsky lived a life which almost exactly spanned the period from the beginning of systematic pogroms in Russia (1881) to the eve of the Holocaust. A Ukrainian Jew, he saw the westward migration of millions of Jews, stirred up by the Russian pogroms, across Europe and to the USA. He saw the growth of Jewish self-awareness in Europe in the later 19th and early 20th centuries.

Always an opponent of the Zionist movement, he warned in the '30s that Palestine could turn out to be a giant ghetto in which the Jews who had fled there might be trapped and massacred.

Yet it is plain from his writings in the 1930s that the experience of anti-semitism in the 20th century, not only in Nazi Germany and Poland, but also in the USSR under Stalin, radically changed Trotsky's views.

By the end of his life he believed that the persecution of the Jews and the effect of that persecution on the consciousness of the Jewish people had made the creation of some sort of Jewish state an inescapable necessity. Rightly, he rejected the idea that the Palestine programme of the Zionists could provide an immediate refuge for Jews facing the Hitlerites. The only conceivable immediate solution was

socialist revolution. But he viewed the demand for a separate Jewish state with growing sympathy. He asserted more than once that after a socialist revolution the Jews would have to have a state of their own if they still wanted it; and it is plain that he believed that they would.

II

In 1932-3, Trotsky discussed the "Jewish problem" with *Class Struggle*, an American Marxist publication. He was asked: "What is your attitude to Palestine as a possible Jewish 'homeland' and about a land for the Jews generally? Don't you believe that the anti-semitism of German fascism compels a different attitude to the Jewish question on the part of Communists?"

Trotsky replied: "I do not know whether Jewry will be built up again as a nation. However, there can be no doubt that the material conditions for the existence of Jewry as an independent nation could be brought about only by the proletarian revolution. There is no such thing on this planet as the idea that one has more claim to land than another.

"The establishment of a territorial base for Jewry in Palestine or any other country is conceivable only with the migration of large human masses. Only a triumphant socialism can take upon itself such tasks. It can be foreseen that it may take place either on the basis of a mutual understanding, or with the aid of a kind of international proletarian tribunal which should take up this question and solve it."

In the context of the debates of that time, Trotsky's statement "there is no such thing as the idea that one has more claim to land than another" was, I think, plain support for the old Communist International policy for the right of Jews to enter Palestine, in opposition to the new policy of the Comintern after 1929.

In a January 1937 interview, Trotsky explained: "During my youth I rather leaned towards the prognosis that the Jews of different countries would be assimilated and that the Jewish question would thus disappear in a quasi-automatic fashion.

"The historical development of the last quarter of a century has not confirmed this perspective. Decaying capitalism has everywhere swung over to and exacerbated every national, one part of which is anti-semitism. The Jewish question has loomed largest in the most highly developed capitalist country of Europe, in Germany.

"On the other hand the Jews of different countries have created their press and developed the Yiddish language as an instrument adapted to modern culture. One must therefore reckon with the fact that the Jewish nation will maintain itself for an entire epoch to come.

"Now the nation cannot normally exist without a common territory. Zionism springs from this very idea. But the facts of every passing day demonstrate to us that Zionism is incapable of resolving the Jewish question. The conflict between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine acquires a more and more tragic and more and more menacing character.

"I do not at all believe that the Jewish

question can be resolved within the framework of rotting capitalism and under the control of British imperialism.

"And how, you ask me, can socialism solve this question? On this point I can but offer hypotheses.

"Once socialism has become master of our planet or at least of its most important sections, it will have unimaginable resources in all domains. Human history has witnessed the epoch of great migrations on the basis of barbarism. Socialism will open the possibility of great migrations on the basis of the most developed technique and culture.

"It goes without saying that what is here involved is not compulsory displacements, that is, the creation of new ghettos for certain nationalities, but displacements freely consented to, or rather demanded by, certain nationalities or parts of nationalities.

"The dispersed Jews who would want to be reassembled in the same community will find a sufficiently extensive and rich spot under the sun. The same possibility will be opened for the Arabs, as for all other scattered nations."

In subsequent history, the tragic conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine would not be adjudicated by a benign proletarian socialist tribunal but by the United Nations which the victors of World War 2 set up. And it would be worked out by way of a series of Jewish-Arab wars.

In an article on anti-semitism in Stalin's USSR (22 February 1937) Trotsky developed his reappraisal of the Jewish question in the light of early 20th century experience. He speaks of a future socialist version of the Zionist "methods of solving the Jewish question", methods "which under decaying capitalism have a utopian and reactionary character".

"Are we not correct in saying that a world socialist federation would have to make possible the creation of a 'Birobidjan' [an equivalent of the official, though in fact token, autonomous Jewish republic within the USSR] for Jews who wish to have their own autonomous republic as the arena for their own culture?"

One of the most maliciously stupid ideas put into circulation by the Stalinists and adopted by post-Trotsky "Trotskyists" is that because Zionism proposed to create a Jewish nation-state it thereby "capitulated" to Nazi and other anti-semitism. If so, then evidently Trotsky too was guilty of this "capitulation".

Of course it is impossible to know in detail what Trotsky would have said once the Jewish state was established in 1948. It is plain however that there would have been no place in his thought for the anti-Zionist demonology and international conspiracy theories which dominate much of the left today.

Trotsky's very loose use of the term nation to describe the Jews of the world may perhaps be explained as an unconscious by-product of his acceptance of the need for a territorial solution to the problem of the people "without a land" – the very idea he had scoffed at and fought

against for most of his life as a reactionary utopia. He still says it is a reactionary utopia and a mirage in its bourgeois Zionist form. But now he counterposes to it not assimilation but a socialist version of the Zionist territorial state-creating solution.

What, for Trotsky, makes the Zionist project utopian and reactionary? The methods which flow inescapably from pursuing that project under capitalism and British rule in Palestine. The unpostponable task, for Trotsky, is the overthrow of capitalism, not a project for a tranquil corner in which to gather in the Jews and build a nation. With tragic accuracy, he says that such a project cannot save the Jews in the time available. After the socialist revolution, however, the Jewish people will need and be entitled to "a Birobidjan" because it is no longer reasonable to look to assimilation alone as the solution, or to have anything other than a supportive sympathy for Jews who cannot believe in assimilation. Trotsky finishes the February 1937 article: "How could any Marxist, or even any consistent democrat, object to that?"

On the left, it was not Marxists and consistent democrats who developed the ideological objection to it, but Stalinists and, after Trotsky's death, those "Trotskyists" who from incoherent anti-imperialist zeal absorbed Stalinistic politics on the question.

III

But the revolutionary workers were defeated time after time throughout the 1920s and 30s — in the USSR, Germany, Austria, France, Spain. The socialist revolution did not happen — not in time to save Europe's massacred Jews, to save the sixty million people who died in the Second World War, or to prevent Germany being pulverised and partitioned and having 13 million of its people driven out of Eastern Europe. Not in time to stop the atom-bombing of Japan, or the expansion of Stalinist totalitarianism to engulf ninety million people in Eastern Europe.

And history did not stop. The Zionists continued with their project and carved out the state of Israel in tragic conflict with the Palestinian Arabs.

The "reactionary utopian" solution to the Jewish question received an immense boost from the events of the world war.



These cartoons portrayed Jews in traditional anti-semitic images, down to the bags of money decorated with the star of David blazoned with money signs. They were not published in the Nazi but the Stalinist press — in fact in the Jewish Stalinist press! Drawn by William Gropper, they appeared in the Communist Party of the USA's Yiddish daily, the morning Freiheit of New York, on 4 September and 3 October 1929. This was the time of the anti-Jewish pogroms in Palestine, which the Stalinists, after first rightly calling them "pogroms", then re-named and "re-conceptualised" as an upsurge of revolutionary anti-imperialism. It was a major turning point for the left on this question (see the text of the article). The words on one read: "He isn't a cripple — he only makes believe — he is an Arab — Jews beat him up!"; and the other: "The mask behind which he shoots."

The need which Trotsky reluctantly came to realise for a Jewish national territory as part of the solution to the Jewish question was now felt with immense urgency by the majority of Jews. And it was made reality not in a benign socialist world after a workers' revolution, but in a world dominated by imperialism and Stalinism, realised by way of bitter communal and national conflict and within the framework of a Zionist-Kremlin, and then a Zionist-US, alliance.

The Jewish state was established in a world which was not socialist but still capitalist dog-eat-dog. In Palestine it was not mainly the Palestinian Jews who decreed that. In 1948, the territory allotted to the Jews by the United Nations was attacked by the armies of the surrounding Arab states, armies under the control of seconded officers of the British imperialist army. If the Jews had lost, they would have been massacred, driven out, or put back under the control of a Britain returning as "peacekeeper". The Jews won the 1948 war, and three-quarters of a million Palestinian Arabs fled or were driven out. About 600,000 Jews were driven out of Arab countries in following years, though they would be assimilated in Israel, not, like the Palestinian Arabs, allowed to languish in refugee camps and even legally forbidden to work by some Arab governments.

That is how things worked in a world still dominated by capitalism and Stalinism.

IV

On this, as on other questions, Trotsky's would-be followers did not after his death pursue his line of thought. In the 1940s, they were caught up in a world view akin to that of the Stalinism of the "Third Period" (1929-33) — the world socialist revolution was on the immediate agenda, and everything had to be interpreted as part of it. Among the forces seen as part of the great sweep of Revolution and anti-imperialism was rising Arab nationalism — the "Arab Revolution".

Trotskyists stated plainly in documents of the 1940s (by Tony Cliff, for example) that anything other than support for the "Arab Revolution" against the Jews of Palestine/Israel would make it impossible for them to "integrate" into that "sector of the world revolution". There was dissent.

Some French Trotskyists backed the Zionist guerrillas against Britain. The Shachtman group, the Workers Party USA, resisted the "Third Period" delusions, including the delusion that the expansion of Stalinism was a deformed variant of working-class revolution. They rejected the vicarious Arab chauvinism of the "orthodox Trotskyists".

The Mandel-Pablo core group of "orthodox Trotskyism" came out for rights for Jews within a Middle East federation.

But the overall drift was towards the operation of gross double standards as between Jews and Arabs, and a compre-

hensive demonisation of Israel and of Zionism. As a rule, "Trotskyists" were vicarious Arab nationalists.*

In the 1940s the "orthodox Trotskyists" were not entirely uninhibited in their "Arabism". They did not back the Arabs in the 1948 war. For 19 years after 1948 the Trotskyist attitude generally included a *de facto* acceptance of Israel. For most of them that changed after the Six Day War of June 1967. After the Six Day War Israel became an often very brutal colonial power ruling a large Arab population in the West Bank and Gaza. It was the time of the great movement against the Vietnam war and imperialism. Most of the "orthodox Trotskyists" drifted towards a root-and-branch "anti-Zionism" – that is towards the politics of post-1929 Stalinism on this question.

And worse. Now anti-Zionism meant not advocacy of Jewish-Arab working-class unity and opposition to the Zionist project of a Jewish state, but support for the destruction of the existing Jewish state in the name of Arab or Palestinian "liberation". It meant siding with murderous, repressive Arab states against Israel. The "Trotskyist" movement had moved a long way from what it had been even in the 1940s. As someone once observed of religious denominations: sects change their doctrines more readily than their names.

"Zionism" – meaning anything other than support for the destruction of Israel – came to carry the same odium as "racism" and "fascism". Israel ("Zionism") came to be seen as the arch-representative of imperialism. Real history was faded out. "Anti-Zionism" was used as a bludgeon to intimidate and stigmatise and prevent thought about the issue.

V

THE horrors of Nazism had driven the great majority of surviving Jews behind the Zionist project. And in response to the establishment of Israel views came to be established on the pseudo-left which pictured the Zionists as powerful conspirators pulling strings in the era of Hitler, and sharing in responsibility for the Holocaust. The idea of a Zionist-Nazi conspiracy originated in the Soviet Union in Stalin's last years, but in the 1970s acceptance of it came to be a hallmark of most of those who thought they were disciples of Trotsky.

You cannot get a more crazy version of the "world Jewish conspiracy" propounded by the old anti-semites than the one which sees "the Zionists" manipulating for their own ends the Holocaust, that is, manipulating Hitler and the Nazis even as they killed six million Jews. A clear and logical version of these ideas would have to characterise Hitler as a blind

tool of the "Jewish conspiracy". Yet such ideas, half-hidden but implicit, are articles of faith in wide layers of the Trotskyist left. They are expounded in erudite, albeit crazy, books by Lenni Brenner and in the original version of Jim Allen's play *Perdition* (the book version has been bowdlerised).

The German socialist leader August Bebel once memorably defined left-wing anti-semitism as "the socialism of idiots". Much of the Trotskyist movement has fallen into an anti-Zionism which is "the anti-imperialism of idiots". In fact, into anti-semitism. Its stance is not, of course, racist, but it means comprehensive hostility to most Jews alive, in whose post-Holocaust Jewish identity Israel has a central place.

All of this has nothing to do with Trotsky's politics, or with his developing position on the question. It is "the Trotskyism of idiots"! Bits and pieces of Trotskyist politics are deployed one-sidedly and used in the service of vicarious Arab chauvinism.

VI

INTERNATIONALISM is essential to socialism. It goes without saying that socialists are against Israeli nationalism, and that we condemn Jewish chauvinism and all its manifestations. But Israeli nationalism and Jewish chauvinism do not exist in a vacuum. They are part of a network of interlocking nationalisms, chauvinisms and national antagonisms. They are confronted by Arab and Muslim chauvinism which has taken as its goal the destruction of the Israeli state and nation. Any fair account of Israeli nationalism would therefore put it in its framework. The demurrals and condemnations would take account of the counter-nationalisms and condemn them also.

Yet the typical post-Trotsky Trotskyist's conclusion, from sometimes justified complaints about Israeli nationalism and chauvinism, is that the Israeli Jewish nation itself does not have a right to exist. No such conclusions are made from the facts of Arab or Palestinian – or any other – nationalism or chauvinism.

The "internationalism" is unequal because the condemnation of Israel is absolute and mortal, while condemnation of Arab chauvinism when it is forthcoming at all is only a moral stricture, and a series of admonitions. Support for Arab (or Palestinian) rights is not made conditional on them not being nationalists or chauvinists. They are the legitimate nation. The Jewish is the illegitimate nation. One lot of nationalists have positive rights; the other, only the right to surrender and submit to the nationalism and religious chauvinism

of others.

For a long time, the PLO's old commitment to a "secular democratic Palestine" was used as a mechanism for disguising the double standards involved here. The Trotskyists accepted the disguise of one of the competing nationalisms.

For, in fact, the call for a "secular democratic Palestine" was a disguised and mystified version of the demand for an Arab Palestine – an Arab state in which Jews would have religious but not national rights; and its prerequisite was that the Israeli nation and the Israeli state should disarm and surrender to their enemies.

It was in fact inconceivable that they would do that. Therefore? Therefore it was reasonable for the Arab states to enforce it in the only way possible – by conquering Israel. The reasonable proposal with its promise of a just solution in practice became a rationale for supporting someone like Saddam Hussein in the attempt to conquer Israel.

For those Marxists who went along with this, internationalism became a vehicle for expressing an Arab-nationalist ultimatum against the Israeli Jews: be "internationalist", accept being a religious minority in an Arab Palestine, dismantle your national state, or deserve to be conquered!

That is not working-class internationalism, but pseudo-internationalism in the service of nationalism. A mystified political programme which implied the bloody subjugation or destruction of an entire nation, dressed up and presented in terms of anti-nationalism and anti-racism: such is the measure of the political decay of post-Trotsky Trotskyism!

And for what reason were Israeli Jews to be denied the rights of a nation? Because, as a national minority in Palestine in the 1940s, they fought and won, rather than bowing down to Arab nationalism, which would have subjugated them and driven them out if it could. No Trotskyist supports the collective mass "return" of the 13 million Germans driven out of Eastern Europe after World War Two.

The only Trotsky-consistent programme for the Israel/Palestine conflict is one that advocates Jewish-Arab working-class unity, defending both Israel's right to exist and the right of the Palestinian Arabs to have an independent state in the area where they are the majority – two states for the two peoples.

The writings of Trotsky are a blast of clean air through the swamps of hysteria, ultra-left fantasy, vicarious Arab chauvinism – and, I think, elements of age-old anti-semitism, recycled as "anti-Zionism" – into which much of post-Trotsky Trotskyism has disintegrated on this question.

* A startling example of this is to be found in a small pamphlet published by the main British Trotskyist group (later the Socialist Labour League and then the Workers' Revolutionary Party) at the time of the Suez Crisis in 1956, when Israel, Britain and France invaded Egypt. It is called "Stop the War! Hands off the Arab People!" by Gerry Healy. Under a sub-heading, "Imperialism Traps the Jews", Healy wrote: "The Arabs instinctively fear Israel because it is a capitalist state which they feel is a threat to their desire for freedom. Precisely because it is a capitalist state run by men whose main object is to preserve capital-

ism...

"After the ghettos of Europe which were forced upon the Jewish people by capitalism and which became under fascist terror, the venues for the most horrible massacres, the Imperialists have in Israel, succeeded in the creation of a state which can lead to a bloody holocaust that will make Hitler's crimes seem like a tea party."

And what exactly could be done to the three million or so Jews in Israel then that would "make Hitler's crimes seem like a tea party?" Healy was the central leader of the organisation and had been about 25 years in socialist pol-

itics when he wrote that. He is drunk on the delusion that "the Arab Revolution", early Nasserite Egypt, is part of an unfolding world socialist revolution.

In 1956, Healy was an honest fool and ignoramus. He would live to sell the organisation in the 70s to Libya and Iraq, as an agency for propaganda and for spying on dissident Arabs and prominent Jews in Britain. He ended his political life making propaganda about a 'world Zionist conspiracy' – "the Zionist connection... from Socialist Organiser to Thatcher and Reagan" (*Newsline* editorial, 9 April 1983).

What is Islamic fundamentalism?

THE TERM "Islamic fundamentalism" first became common during the Iranian revolution of 1978-79. The Western-backed Shah (who had been put in power by the CIA) was overthrown by an enormous popular revolt, one element in which, led by the Ayatollah Khomeini, expressed itself through the largest traditional religion in the country, Shi'a Islam.

In fact, political movements inspired by Islam, calling for a return to "Islamic values", go back much further. In Egypt they go back to the 1930s at least, with the formation of the Moslem Brotherhood.

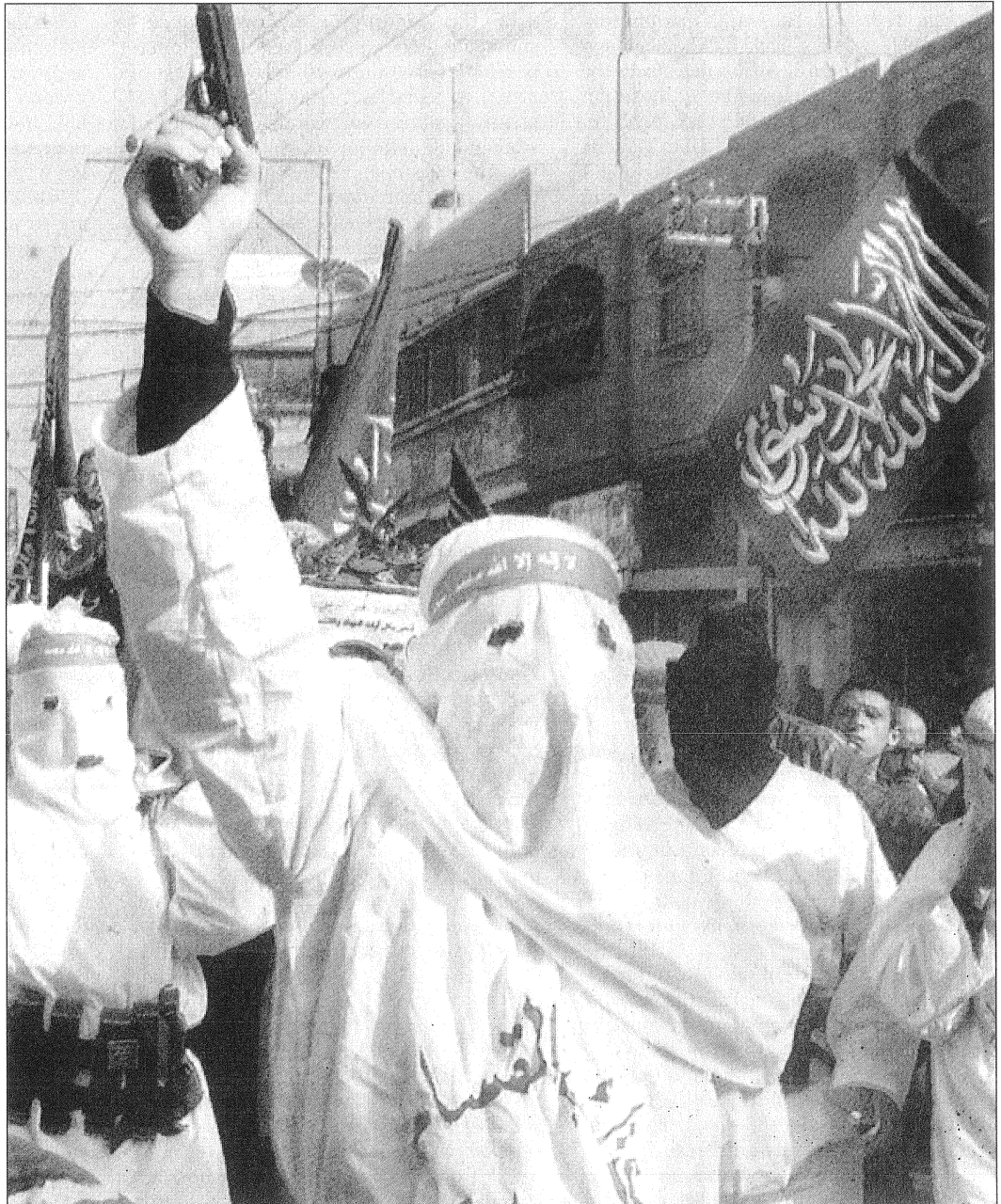
But throughout the Moslem world — from north-west Africa to Indonesia — radical political movements which look to Islam have flourished in the last two decades. They are not a uniform phenomenon: there are different "Islamist" groups, distinguished both by the particular Moslem sect from which they draw inspiration (the Moslem Brothers, for instance, are Sunnis), and by more modern ideological features. The largest Islamist groups are in Algeria — where a raging civil war has left thousands dead, and where the "fundamentalist" party won an election in the 1990s only to have the results disallowed by the government; Egypt where Islamists assassinated President Sadat in 1981, and more recently murdered tourists in Luxor; and Palestine where the hard Islamic groups, especially Hamas, have been rivals to Yasser Arafat for some years. In Lebanon, too, "fundamentalist" groups, sometimes backed by Iran, have been a major factor, including in forcing Israel to withdraw from the south of the country.

It is important to distinguish these groups from more general religious feeling in Moslem countries. Not all Moslems are "fundamentalists", by any means. In some Middle Eastern countries, traditional representatives of the mosque have been prominent opponents of the hard-line groups. Many writers prefer to use the terms "polit-

ical Islam", "Islamist", or "Islamic revivalist" to refer to the modern phenomenon of political, militant groups which are prepared to use violence to achieve their ends.

The Islamist groups have grown up in countries which in the 1950s and 1960s experienced waves of radical but secular nationalism. Arab nationalist governments, most prominently that of Gamal Abdul

Nasser in Egypt, seized power, usually from the old colonial authorities, and carried out radical reforms — like redistributing land and nationalising foreign companies. A similar movement briefly flowered in Iran in the early 1950s under Mossadeq, but was overthrown with American insistence — installing the Shah. Even the Shah, however, attempted serious land reform and a programme of



industrialisation. In Algeria, a long and brutal war against French colonialism brought radical, secular nationalists to power. These nationalist movements inspired the emergence of a distinct Palestinian nationalism after 1967, which coalesced around the Arafat-led PLO.

But in one way or another, the nationalism of the post-war period failed. Frustrated, the masses began to look to alternatives. Strong Islamist movements vied for influence with Stalinist parties, in some countries – for instance in the Sudan – long before the Iranian revolution. But when the Shah was overthrown, it was as if the genie was fully released from the bottle.

In none of the countries where Islamic parties have been strong was it simply, as the media often suggests, that the masses flocked to them in droves. The Iranian revolution, for example, was not made by Khomeini and the mullahs alone. The Shah's defeat was the result of a powerful movement of the urban poor on the one hand, and other forces on the other, principally would-be Marxist guerrillas, the so-called Fedayin, who fought pitched battles with the Shah's troops, and an enormous, paralysing general strike of the working class, especially in the oil fields. Khomeini's domination, and the consolidation of his Islamic Republic, was not a foregone conclusion, and was not created easily. Khomeini first had to defeat the left and the militant working class.

That he was able to defeat both was in no small part because the organisations of the Iranian Left misunderstood what they were dealing with. They saw Khomeini and the Islamist movement as allies against "imperialism" who could be supported. They did not recognise Khomeini's forces as another, reactionary movement which was their embittered enemy. In effect, groups like the Fedayin handed Khomeini the rope with which he could hang them.

Mass support for the Iranian mullahs came from the dispossessed poor. But the leadership of the movement came from traditional ruling classes – in the bazaar, and from the mosque itself – whose privileges had been undermined by the Shah's attempts at modernisation. The victory of the Khomeini faction in the Iranian revolution represented the revenge of the traditional ruling class – over the new bourgeoisie represented by the Shah, but also over the working class.

Elsewhere, the pattern is a little different. In Lebanon, and among the Palestinians, support for, and the personnel of, the militant groups, comes especially from poverty-stricken youth living in squalid refugee camps, disillusioned with the failures of their secular political leadership. In Lebanon, from the mid 1970s onwards, society came close to collapse as a terrible sectarian war escalated out of control, fed and exacerbated by outside influence, mainly from Israel and Syria, both of whom financed and supported internal allies.

In Algeria, the fundamentalist movement grew from hatred of the bureaucratic dictatorship of the regime which had come to power after defeating the French. As independence failed to deliver what the masses wanted, religion was offered as a plau-

sible alternative.

The growth of these backward-looking, reactionary movements was fostered by the contradictions and disappointments of capitalist development, and the corruption and brutality of the old powers that be, domestic and foreign. Sometimes, indeed, there was an extra twist: Sadat in Egypt encouraged the growth of fundamentalist groups, believing they could act as a counterbalance to the left. He paid for this stupidity quite literally with his life.

Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad gain strength from the intransigence of Israel. The more resolutely Israel resists the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people, the more fertile the soil for Hamas – and the more distant real peace and reconciliation will become.

But the Islamist groups, however understandable their support, are a frighteningly reactionary outgrowth of the defeats of an earlier age. The Islamic Republic in Iran meant terrible repression, especially of women and national and religious minorities. The Palestinian Islamist groups view the crisis and their oppression through religious spectacles, seeing "the Jews", not the Israeli state, as their enemy, and advocating a solution which would "crush" or drive out "the Jews". Democracy would play no role.

Indeed, one of the features of Islamist groups is that, unlike old-fashioned nationalists, they make no claim to be fighting for "democracy", unless it's a vaguely defined Islamic one. Their political programme allows no space for those who disagree, little but – in the most benevolent versions – toleration for minority religions (still less atheists!), or women who don't want to wear the veil, or homosexuals, for example. Again, it's important to understand that these objections to the Islamist programme are not just "Western" prejudices, or some kind of cultural imperialism. Within these societies, there are many militant activists who oppose, at the risk of their lives, the bigoted excesses of the fundamentalist movements. Many opponents of the Algerian Islamists, for instance, are radicals, feminists and socialists equally opposed to the government; many of those have had to flee to exile.

Just as in 1979 many on the Iranian and international left saw Khomeini as an ally, there are those today who think a common struggle with Islamists, against "imperialism" or "Zionism", is possible. But this idea reflects a sort of inverse-racist romanticism, rather than a realistic assessment.

The Islamists' goals are quite different to ours, and as Iran tragically showed, socialist, feminist and working class militants are among their first victims.

The train of thought of those who want to side with the Islamists today – while criticising their "tactics" – seems to be that if we see thousands of people militantly demonstrating against "imperialism", or – more concretely – the brutality of the Israeli state, those demonstrators must be "on our side".

It is of course painful for socialists to think that they are not. But that there are lots of them and that they have suffered is

no guarantee of their progressive or democratic nature.

Fascism in its full-blown form is a mass movement which draws its mass support from victims of oppression. That is what makes fascism particularly dangerous.

Is Islamism fascist? It is not the same as the fascists in advanced capitalist countries with powerful labour movements, like Germany or Italy, in the inter-war years. But reactionary movements which have much in common with fascism, or might be termed "fascistic", are possible in the "third world". In terms of their programme and the social forces they represent, the Islamist groups are indeed fascistic. (Of course, there are different Islamist groups; the old-style Muslim Brothers in Egypt and Sudan are positively moderate in comparison to the new types).

But they are "against imperialism"? Khomeini in Iran said he was "against imperialism" as he was using his shock-troops on the ground (very fascistically) to slaughter the left. Indeed, the Left was identified with imperialism, because socialism was a product of godless western culture.

Whether we call it fascism or not, there are strong parallels between modern "fundamentalist" Islamism and fascism. They are mass movements on a reactionary basis, whose programme is to destroy democratic rights. In some cases, such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, they suppress individual liberties more broadly and more ferociously than any fascist movement ever has. In the case of Israel, the Islamists seek to suppress a whole nation.

Old-style Palestinian nationalism, the generation that produced Arafat, whatever its deficiencies, at least attempted to distinguish between Israel and Jews. The "secular democratic state" was a bad slogan. But it at least went some way to saying Jews had a place in Palestine. The programme of the Islamists is relentlessly opposed to all Jews.

To suppose that any mass movement which appropriates some of the symbols and language of radicals and socialists is necessarily "progressive" is ignorant, romantic – in fact, a kind of inverse racism.

Of course it is depressing that such movements are reactionary. Of course we want to understand why so many oppressed people, especially young people, might want to sign up with them. Socialists want to win those people away from the Islamists.

But equally, socialists wanted to win the oppressed people in Germany who were attracted to the Nazis away from Hitler. They couldn't do it by pretending the Nazis were somehow progressive because of their mass base or their agitation against the imperialist Treaty of Versailles – still less by pandering to the prejudices the Nazis appealed to.

The notion that the reactionary Islamist movements are somehow "on our side", or that the suicide attacks on America somehow represent the "oppressed", is an insult to the many socialists and democrats in those countries who are fighting both oppression and the Islamists, and who understand rather more clearly than most British leftists what the Islamists represent. Those socialists and democrats need our solidarity, now more than ever.

A mirror for anti-Zionists

WALKING from Westminster to Trafalgar Square one afternoon in May or June 2002, I came upon a small picket-demonstration – a dozen people perhaps – waving Palestinian flags and placards on the pavement across the road from the entrance to the Prime Minister's residence in Downing Street. I saw from a distance, and wondered at it, that half the demonstrators were dressed in the black hats and clothes and the beards that identified them as some sort of especially religious Jews.

I had known, of course, that some devout Jews believe that the creation of the state of Israel is a monstrous act of impiety and defiance against the God whose will it was that the Jews scatter across the world. I had never encountered such people before, so I stopped to talk.

An intelligent, alert man of about 30 explained their point of view. Those Jews who created Israel were rebels against God, criminals. Israel has no right to exist.

What, I asked, would he replace Israel by?

"A Palestinian state, of course!"

"The Israelis will not agree to that."

"They should get out, give Palestine back to the Palestinians."

"Where would they go?"

"Oh, there are many countries that would have them."

So I said that for the generation that founded Israel, nobody would have them. And what should they have done in face of Hitler?

"It was their own fault – Hitler only made war on the Jews because they made war on him. He said so!"

"So they shouldn't have fought back?"

"No! Jews were meant to suffer."

And so it went on.

To resist, fight back, struggle to shape their destiny – that was impious. He was very indignant with Israel and, I think, sincerely sympathetic to the Palestinians.

I WAS concerned to question and listen – to understand. My theological wits being blunt from lack of use, I didn't in time think to ask him how he knew that his God had decreed the Diaspora but not the Jewish "ingathering" in Israel.

After all, many fundamentalist Christians in the US and elsewhere – Ian Paisley, for instance – see the re-emergence of Israel as God's will, as proof that the world is being prepared for the "Second Coming" of Christ (such people, I understand, are a major part of the pro-Israel lobby in US politics).

I regretted afterwards also not thinking to ask what he and his friends would have done in the Warsaw ghetto in 1943, when those marked for systematic destruction by the Nazis rose in arms against impossible odds to write one of the great chapters in humankind's long struggle against predatory tyrants. But I have no doubt at all what the answer would have been.

I may, through lack of theological subtlety,

be crudifying his arguments a bit here. I don't think so; but if I am, I do not do it knowingly, for effect.

CONTINUING my journey, it occurred to me that, apart from the small number of Jewish theological anti-Zionists, the only other group of people of Jewish background who are outrightly anti-Israel – wanting the destruction of the Israeli state, as distinct from being critical of Israel or opponents of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian-majority territories – are people influenced by "anti-Zionist" "Marxism", that special "Marxism" created by the Stalinists and taken over by post-Trotsky "Trotskyism".

Of proponents of this "Marxism", the most influential in the last 30 years was the late Tony Cliff, a Palestinian Jew in origin – he came to Europe in 1946 – and a vicarious Arab nationalist by conviction. Cliff could get away with preaching attitudes to Israel, and implicitly to Jews, that would, in someone who did not look and sound like Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, have been easily identified as virulent anti-semitism.

By this I mean not "racism", but comprehensive hostility to most Jews alive, who to one degree or another give their support – often reluctant and critical support – to Israel; who are heirs to the identity stamped on Jews by the murderous anti-semitism of the 20th century.

The events of the first half of the 20th century turned Zionism – which fundamentally means commitment to a Jewish state, and then to Israel – from a minority movement amongst Jews to something that is part of the identity of almost all Jewish people. Critically or mindlessly, unreservedly or grudgingly, to one degree or another, Jews identify with Israel. Why shouldn't they? How could they not?

Knowing something of the history as distinct from the poisoned mythology of how and why Israel came into existence, how could any person of average goodwill find this unreasonable? How could it be otherwise? Unless you share the viewpoint of the Jewish sectaries demonstrating in Whitehall, that Jews must eternally suffer, must humbly submit to ill-treatment, never by their actions try to influence the destiny which God, left to his own inclinations, would inflict on them, how could you argue that the Israelis in 1948 should not have defended themselves? Not that this or that should have been done differently, but that they should have meekly submitted to the invading Arab armies, which was the only alternative to fighting and prevailing. Or that they should now dismantle their national state and put themselves at the mercy of the surrounding states?

No people, no state in history, has ever done that. Why should anyone who does not have a "special" attitude to Israel and to Jews demand it of them? (As distinct from seeking a solution that would do

something like justice to both Palestinians and Jews.)

This viewpoint in an anti-Israel religious Jew is one thing – eccentric, strange, bizarre, whatever you like. But when a socialist who is not a consistent pacifist adopts the attitude to the Jews expressed by the demonstrator I talked to in Whitehall, then it is not masochism of the Jewish mystics, but its exact opposite. It becomes a "special" attitude to Jews.

SUPPORT for any solution other than two states – Israel side by side with a Palestinian state – inescapably implies a "special" attitude to Israel. Unless you are an Israeli chauvinist opposed to a Palestinian state, it implies, logically and organically, a comprehensive hostility to most Jews alive because they will rightly resist the equation of Israeli nationalism with anti-Arab "racism", reject calls on the Israel nation to commit suicide by way of voluntarily dismantling its state, and refuse to find anything "progressive" in rocket attacks on Israel such as Saddam Hussein made in 1991 during the Gulf war (and some British pseudo-lefts accepted as useful "anti-Zionism"). In short, they reject the attitudes of my abnegating, self-denying mystic in Whitehall.

It is of course possible to argue that Zionism and Israel are such an evil that the neo-anti-semitic implications of advocating Israel's destruction are an acceptable "overhead cost" of necessary political activity. That attitude is in fact implied in much of what the British pseudo-left says and does, and in what it does not say and do. But who would go so far as to state that and argue for it openly?

It is a precondition of rational discussion of the issues that these implications are brought into the light of scrutiny and rational assessment.

The arguments which the man I met in Whitehall stated bluntly and with religious fervour closely parallel those which the pseudo-left uses, less candidly (and his attitude may, indeed, form the psychological and emotional substratum of the attitudes of a certain section of the "anti-Zionist" pseudo-left – some of the vociferous "anti-Zionists" in the SWP for example – who contribute no small part of the implicitly anti-semitic confusion which poisons both themselves and those who listen to them). For the left, of course, the Israeli Jews are rebels not against God, but against "History", against the "Arab Revolution", against the perennial role of fatalistic, submissive victim...

The other-worldly Jews are entitled to those views. The international socialist left is not – not unless it applies such views comprehensively and consistently.

The point is that, except where the Israeli Jews are concerned, normally the revolutionary left scorns such attitudes.

Sean Matgamna

The Stalinist roots of left "anti-Zionism"

IN THE 1970s the rulers of the USSR launched a sustained "anti-Zionist" campaign, in fact anti-semitic. No surprise. But an examination of the publications from that campaign shows something much more shocking than the fact that the old Stalinist despots were ready to use any sort of reactionary prejudice for their own ends. It demonstrates that much of what many British and international leftists – even Trotskyists – say about Israel is an indirect and unwitting copy of the Stalinists' efforts at constructing a Marxist-sounding gloss on old anti-semitic themes.

Zionism equals racism; Zionism equals imperialism; Zionism equals South African apartheid; Israel is the USA's "watchdog" in the Middle East; Zionism is complicit with, or even promotes, anti-semitism – all these themes, now commonplace on the left, were pioneered by the Stalinists.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s the Stalinists had had an "anti-Zionist" campaign which figured prominently in the show-trials of Rudolf Slansky and others in Eastern Europe in these years. Mordekhai Oren quotes the following interchange with the prosecutor at his own trial:

"Would you be ready to confess that in 1948, after Tito's betrayal, you met Moshe Pijade as well as Dr. Bebler in Belgrade?"

"I didn't meet Pijade in 1948, and even if I had, that would have been no crime. Nor was it a crime to meet Bebler."

"He's a Jew, and you too, and both of you are Zionists."¹

By 1953 the stage had been set for the mass deportation of the surviving Jews of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; an anti-semitic show-trial was due to be staged, in which five Jewish doctors from the Kremlin's own hospital were to face charges of poisoning and plotting. As with the Crimean Tatars after the war, such a mass deportation would have cost the lives of countless tens of thousands. Stalin died before the trial could be held and his successors dropped it.

In the late 1960s a new official "anti-Zionist" campaign was launched in the Soviet Union, in the aftermath of Israel's victory in the Six Days' War over Arab states friendly to the Soviet Union. It increased in the 1970s, as Israel inflicted another defeat on Arab states in the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and Jewish organisations internationally stepped up their campaign for Soviet Jews.

II

THE CORE of the Stalinist argument was their old technique of "the amalgam". Zionism, so the Stalinists claimed, was tied up with, allied to, linked with, or responsible for, every reactionary force that right-minded people might detest – capitalism, imperial-

ism, even anti-semitism and Nazism.

"Political Zionism emerged at the close of the nineteenth century as the ideology, and then the practice, of the reactionary Jewish bourgeoisie, fearful of the awakening of the heroic self-consciousness amongst the Jewish proletariat"². Jewish workers in European countries were participating ever more actively in the class struggle and revolutionary movements. Hence, "to tear them away from this struggle, to confined them to a new but this time spiritual ghetto – such as the social instruction given to Zionism by the bourgeoisie which created it"³.

The creation of a national home for Jews was the means whereby Jewish-bourgeois hegemony over Jewish workers was to be maintained. "The powerful Jewish bourgeoisie, allied with imperialism, needed the creation of a 'national home'... first and foremost in order to keep under its influence the mass of Jewish workers"⁴.

Moreover: "In the West Jewish capital became such a powerful force that it was able to participate independently in the colonial division of the world"⁵.

In another version, Jewish capital was maybe not able to compete independently with the biggest capitalist powers. But it was nevertheless a central agent of theirs – indeed, miraculously, simultaneously a central agent of all the competing powers!

"The capitalists of England, the USA, France, Germany, and other countries, amongst them millionaires and multi-millionaires of Jewish origin, who had their eyes on the wealth of the Near East, helped the creation of the Zionist idea. From the very outset it was linked with the project of the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish state as a Jewish fortress, a barrier against Asia."⁶.

"It is claimed" – so the Stalinists admitted, "that Zionism is nothing but a reaction against anti-semitism."⁷ But only "Zionist ideologues" could suggest that. For the Stalinists, it was not the anti-semites but the Zionists who exploited the notorious Dreyfus affair of anti-semitic persecution in late 19th century France. "The Dreyfus affair was used by the Jewish bourgeoisie of Western Europe for the consolidation of nationalist political forces in the united World Zionist Organisation, set up in 1897 in Basle."⁸

According to the Stalinists: "Zionism and anti-semitism are two sides of the same coin – racism. Zionists greeted the anti-semitic policies of Tsarism in its time and also the monstrous policies of genocide at the time of Hitler."⁹

Indeed, so the Stalinists claimed: "Zionist ideologues have never concealed their positive attitude towards anti-semitism, in which the powerful Jewish bourgeoisie and Judaic clericalism saw a convenient way of main-

taining their influence over the Jewish communities"¹⁰. Anti-Semitism is "a form of national and religious intolerance which expresses itself in a hostile attitude towards Jews," but at the same time, "this reactionary, antihuman phenomenon has been used (and still is used today) in a speculative manner by Zionists and rabbis as a bugaboo with the help of which it was intended to achieve a consolidation of the crumbling Jewish communities."¹¹

Thus, the Jewish bourgeoisie and its ideologues have shown, and continue to show today, "great interest in the existence of anti-semitic attitudes, in the whipping up of anti-semitism at the level of state policies"¹². The idea that Zionism was a response to anti-semitism had gained ground merely because of the "efforts of the Jewish bourgeoisie and of the press which it has bought"¹³.

In Russia, the Zionists "covertly did their utmost in cooperation with reactionary monarchists to tear away workers of Jewish nationality from unity with the workers of Russia."¹⁴ Such was the relationship between Zionism and Tsarism that "[the Zionist leader] Herzl himself met with the Tsarist Minister of the Interior, von Plehve"¹⁵. (That the meeting caused outrage, and nearly led to a split, in the Zionist movement in Russia, was not mentioned).

Then Zionist "anti-Soviet activities" began "in the very first days of the existence of Soviet power"¹⁶. In the civil war "they acted as allies of the counter-revolution... They created Zionist military units which conducted an armed struggle against the Soviet republic"¹⁷. No mention of the Zionist units which fought in the Red Army alongside the Bolsheviks.

The Soviet "anti-Zionist" campaign moved on to accuse Zionists of not merely using or welcoming, but actively promoting anti-semitism, financing anti-semitic organisations, and inciting anti-semitic pogroms:

"In 1930, at the time of a crisis in the United States, there emerged more than a hundred organisations, the time and resources of which were spent on propaganda of hatred towards Jews. (It is important to note that many of them were covertly financed by secret Zionist funds)."¹⁸

In the late 1940s and early 1950s: "Secret agents of Zionism whipped up feelings of fear amongst the Jews of Syria, Libya, Tunisia, the Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, and Egypt, from where entire city communities departed [for Israel]... In the course of several years Zionists stoked up and provoked in every way possible 'useful anti-semitic activities' which helped promote the mass exit of hundreds of thousands of believers in Judaism from Arabic countries."¹⁹

Zionists did bomb a synagogue in Iraq to



Stalin meets US diplomats at the end of World War 2. Stalin supported Israel in 1948 to strike a blow at the British Empire, but soon found anti-semitism useful both to purge the Communist Parties and to make alliances with Arab states.

promote Jewish emigration; but the Stalinist campaign extrapolated from such episodes to present the whole wave of anti-Jewish persecution in the Arab countries which followed 1948 as a conspiracy by Zionists.

In Western Europe: "As early as 1950 hatred towards Jews was already very widespread in the West. The powerful Jewish bourgeoisie was far from being the least responsible for this. The many anti-semitic organisations which it created, the state machines in a series of imperialist countries which bowed down before powerful [read: Jewish] capital, and, finally, the ruling Zionist camarilla of Israel used anti-semitism in their class interests."²⁰

And in the 1970s: "The propaganda of anti-semitic views in many capitalist states has kept its importance as a tool of reaction... The Jewish bourgeoisie itself and the many groups and parties which it has created in the service of powerful capital play their role in this... Anti-semitic organisations have been set up with the resources dispensed from the secret funds of Zionism."²¹

These (unspecified) anti-semitic organisations then became a further means whereby the Zionists could maintain their influence over Jewish communities: "These organisations committed provocative actions, the object of which were poor Jews and the Jewish middle strata. The highest stratum of the Jewish bourgeoisie, the finance and finance-industrial magnates, who constitute the core and the leadership of the entire system of international Zionism... had the pos-

sibility of presenting themselves as the 'sole defenders' of the Jewish population... and of demonstrating on more than one occasion 'Jewish solidarity' with the victims of anti-semitism."²²

III

THE USSR's "anti-Zionist" campaign took shreds of fact about some Zionists resigning themselves to accept European anti-semitism as a reality they could not change, and blew them up into a conspiracy theory. It went on to blame "the Zionists" even for the Nazi Holocaust.

"The Zionists welcomed the arrival in power of the fascists in Germany."²³ "What saved the Zionists? Fascism! It sounds paradoxical, but it was exactly thus."²⁴ The Zionists wanted Jews to leave Germany, and so too did the Nazis: "The plans of the fascist and Zionist leaders coincided: the fascists planned to drive the Jews out of German 'living space', and the Zionists wanted to realise their goal at the expense of those Jews driven out."²⁵

"We know that Zionism always saw in anti-semitism an ally in the achievement of its goals. It was no coincidence that a mutual understanding emerged between the Nazis, who horribly persecuted Jews, and the Zionists, who played the role of 'saviours' of the Jews."²⁶ Hence it came about that Zionists "co-operated with Hitlerites and helped them to destroy millions of Jewish lives, attempting to save only the capitalists. The

Zionists always regarded anti-semitism, and still do so, as an important means of forcing all Jews to leave their countries and escape to the 'Promised Land' in Israel."²⁷

There was, moreover, an overlap between the theories of Zionism and fascism: "As regards the theory of 'racial purity', the treatises on 'lower' and 'higher' peoples, the concepts of the 'Aryan' and the 'superman', here there is really not a little in common between the Zionists and the fascists."²⁸ The theories of various "Zionist ideologues" did not differ "at all from the views on racial exclusiveness to be found in the 'collected works' of Hitler, Rosenberg, and other fascist theoreticians."²⁹ "Zionism is akin to Nazism"³⁰ because "the ideologues of Zionism and apartheid are related to it (Nazism), (and) are merely contemporary variations of the myth about the supposedly innate inequality of people and races"³¹.

Thus it was that Zionism and fascism ended up collaborating with one another: "The monstrous plans of the fascist animals, based on the inhuman and racist ideology of Hitlerism, met with the cooperation and support of other racists — Zionists."³² "Co-operation between the Zionists and Hit-

lerites spread to the occupied territories of the USSR. The Zionists helped uncover those of Jewish origin who were hiding from the Gestapo and the police, handed them over to the fascists, and took part in the mass slaughter of Jews."³³ "It has become known that Polish Zionists who have now fled to Israel worked side-by-side with the Gestapo and the Nazi military intelligence service during the war."³⁴

Writing as if "the Zionists" were not Jews themselves, many of them fated to be killed by the Nazis, the Stalinists stated that "the Zionists" were not concerned about the fate of Jews living (and dying) in Germany under Nazi rule: "The Zionists were completely unconcerned with the interests of the German Jews."³⁵ The fate of the Jews in Nazi Germany "did not at all alarm the Zionists during the years of the war against fascism. And this in a situation where the Jews were the victims of atrocious terror and persecution."³⁶ For the Zionists, creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine was more important than saving Jewish lives: "The Zionists reconciled themselves to the camps and the ghettos, to the extermination of millions of Jews... The Zionists needed the corpses of these Jews because across them lay the road out of the occupied countries and into Palestine. The Jews who were allowed to be victims of fascism were 'proof'... of the necessity of the creation of a Jewish state."³⁷ The attitude of the Zionists was: "let millions (of Jews) drown in blood if there remains one road open for hundreds of

thousands—to Palestine.”³⁸

The only Jews whom the Zionists were concerned to save from fascism were the wealthy — they cared nothing for German Jews “with the exception of German Jew capitalists, who, as soon as Hitler came to power, transferred their capital to Swiss and German banks.”³⁹

The Zionists were prepared to let the weak go to their deaths so that only the strong would be left to inhabit Israel: “With the assistance of the Nazis, the so-called ‘selection’ of the settlers was achieved, the citizens of the future Israel. ‘The dust of the old world’ was turned into ashes of the concentration camps.”⁴⁰

Without the assistance of the Zionists, the Nazis could not have carried out their extermination programme: “Could the fascists have managed without their Zionist assistants? This question can be answered only by clarifying the role of the Zionist leaders in the extermination of the Jews of Europe. Their assistance gave the fascists the possibility of exterminating hundreds of thousands of Jews at the hands of dozens or a few hundred selected killers.”⁴¹

“The Judenrate [Jewish councils] sincerely and exactly carried out all the orders of the fascists, even orders about the physical mass elimination of the Jewish population... In the shape of the Judenrate the activities of the Zionists were legalised and their leaders became loyal executors of fascist policies.”⁴²

The Zionists also attempted to prevent any opposition to the Nazi policies: “Wherever the inhabitants of the ghettos who were condemned to death succeeded in organising uprisings against the fascists, especially in Warsaw in 1943, the Zionists helped the Germans frustrate the uprisings, or crush them where they occurred”⁴³. In fact the Warsaw uprising was led by a Zionist!

The central message of the Soviet “anti-Zionist” campaign in relation to the alleged Zionist-Nazi collaboration was clear: “The Zionist crimes in the ghettos and the death camps must be completely uncovered, so that it can be recognised at what price it was that the state of Israel was created... That the state of Israel was created by hands warmed in Jewish blood is indisputable.”⁴⁴

IV

THUS, THE rise of Zionism and of Israel had nothing to do with reflex responses to Nazi or more general anti-semitic persecution. It was a gratuitous act of evil.

Immediately upon the creation of the state of Israel, “Zionism, a dangerous, fascist force reminiscent of the Black Hundreds, a doctrine which is reactionary and expansionist by its very nature, became the ideology of its ruling circles.”⁴⁵ “Such is the irony of history: the Zionist rulers of Israel carry out the very same policies of genocide in relation to the Arabs as those which were carried out by the Hitlerites in relation to the Jews.”⁴⁶

The factors which official USSR “anti-Zionism” had discovered behind the emergence of Zionism — the devilish cunning of the Jewish bourgeoisie in its efforts to maintain control over the Jewish working class, and the

enormous secret and concentrated power of Jewish bourgeoisie, which enabled it to take part as an independent force in the scramble by European empires to divide up the world, or somehow to act as the vanguard of imperialism in general — likewise lay behind the creation of the state of Israel: “The monopoly Jewish bourgeoisie established control over Jewish workers in different countries of the world, strengthened its positions in the major capitalist countries, and achieved an extension of colonial expansion in Asia and Africa. The most important instrument in the realisation of these tasks of the Jewish monopoly bourgeoisie in contemporary conditions is the state of Israel, which is ruled by Zionists — an inseparable part of international Zionism.”⁴⁷

“In a situation where the colonial system was collapsing, imperialism began feverishly to search after and work out new forms and methods for the achievement of expansionist policies. The state of Israel was created just at the time when the waves of the rising national liberation movement in Asia and Africa began to destroy the colonial empire”⁴⁸. The creation of Israel was thus “the creation of a strategic ‘buffer’ between Europe and Asia, an advance outpost of the struggle against communism and the national liberation movement.”⁴⁹

In fact Israel got its weapons for the 1948 war in which it was established by smuggling and from USSR-controlled Czechoslovakia. The USSR, then keen to seize what seemed to be a chance to strike a blow at the British Empire, was the first state to recognise Israel. The left-Zionist group Mapam, very influential in the Zionist armed forces in 1948, ardently supported the Soviet Union. The CIA was extremely worried about what it saw as the leftist and pro-USSR tinge of Israeli politics after 1948. And the British Empire, through Arab armies largely controlled by Britain, made war on Israel in 1948.

But for the USSR’s hack writers: “Israel was and remains so today an important tool in the hands of imperialism in the struggle against the national liberation movement of the Arab countries, in the struggle for control over the oil of the Arab East.”⁵⁰ It is “an advance outpost of the imperialism of the United States in the Near East... To this state has been allotted the role of being a co-participant in carrying out the neo-colonial policies of the imperialist powers in the countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.”⁵¹ It has the job of “acting as a gendarme in armed conflict against the Arab peoples”.

Where and how Israel had been of any practical assistance to the USA or any other big capitalist power in securing their oil or other interests in the Middle East, the Stalinists did not specify. They pressed on with their picture of “Zionism” as the spearhead of imperialism, especially US imperialism: “The financial-economic support of Israel on the part of internationalist Zionist circles transforms it into a parasite-state.”⁵² This economic backing also means that “the economy of Israel is in reality controlled by the internationalist Zionist corporation, by Zionist capital of the USA, England, France, and a series of other countries.”⁵³ Thus,

“the nationalistic ruling stratum of Israel is in fact part of the international Zionist concern, based in New York and controlled from the United States.”⁵⁴

V

FOR THE Stalinist writers, Israel was not only a sort of offshoot or outpost of the USA. It was, with fiendish cunning, simultaneously an offshoot or outpost of South Africa as it was before 1994, under the system of apartheid.

“Israel has a special relationship of the closest kind with South Africa. Israel and South Africa are linked to one another by economic, political, military, and ideological ties... Israel and South Africa are linked by a common racist ideology and practice, and by reactionary domestic and foreign policies... The union of the racists of Israel and South Africa is a massive threat to the African peoples and to the whole of humanity.”⁵⁵

Facile analogies, now prevalent on the British left, featured constantly in the Soviet campaign. Zionism and apartheid possessed “common ideological roots”.⁵⁶ “In the South of Africa, in the Republic of South Africa, and in Palestine, close to the Suez Canal, there arose two platforms of world imperialism, summoned... to put a check to the national-liberation movement of the peoples.”⁵⁷

In both Israel and South Africa, “racial-biological doctrines have been raised to the level of an official ideology and of state policies, in accordance with which people are divided into the ‘elect’ and the banished.”⁵⁸

The Soviet “anti-Zionist” campaign did differ from the contemporary British leftists’ frequent equating of Israel and apartheid South Africa in that it was rather more imaginative in discovering supposed parallels. It was, after all, no coincidence that “the entire history of South Africa and Palestine reveals very many identical events and common traits,” the most notable ones being⁵⁹:

- In 1880, in the Cape Colony, the first South African nationalist party had been founded; in the same year the first Zionist organisation was set up in Russia; the former advocated separate development for Blacks; the latter opposed assimilation.

- The turn of the 19th/20th century was a period of conflict between the Boers and the British, resulting in the Boer War; at the same time inter-imperialist rivalries for colonies became more acute, “above all between British imperial capital and international Jewish capital.”

- In the opening years of the century both Zionism and South African nationalism used social demagoguery to attract support: “all possible variants of petty-bourgeois socialism became common in Zionism, just as in South Africa there was national socialism and labourite reformist socialism.”

- Both the Zionists and the Afrikaner nationalists exploited the 1914-18 war, the former obtaining the Balfour Declaration (in which Britain promised to support a “Jewish homeland” in Palestine), and the latter being prepared to organised armed revolt against Britain in order to obtain concessions.

• After the war, “both Afrikaner nationalism and Zionists ever more overtly became the right flank of imperialism, together with fascism.”

• In the inter-war years “the Afrikaner bourgeoisie and international Jewish capital created a series of secret organisations, in their own way centralised Mafias.”

• In the 1939–45 war both the Zionists and the South African nationalists were “close in spirit to Hitler”. While “English soldiers died on the battlefields, fighting against the Nazis who had set themselves the goal of exterminating the Jews, Zionist extremists did not stop even at the use of terror against the English authorities”; the South African nationalists “attempted in an analogous manner to use the war situation to pursue anti-English goals, in order to strengthen their position in the country.”

• Immediately after the close of the war Zionism allied itself with American imperialism, and so too did the South African nationalists, in order to “break free of dependence on the British Empire. The Empire lost control over the Palestine problem, and its influence over South Africa fell sharply.”

• The state of Israel was proclaimed on 14 May 1948; on 26 May 1948, the Nationalist Party came to power in South Africa. In South Africa, however, the leading role belonged as ever to the Zionist conspiracy. “By 1945... Jewish immigrants (to South Africa), with the support of international Zionist capital, had rapidly occupied the key positions in the economy and trade, and had begun to extract profits from the system of racial inequality dominant in the country.”

Within a matter of years “the racists (of South Africa) in reality collapsed into economic dependence on the Zionists.”⁶⁰

One last piece of evidence adduced by the Soviet campaign as proof of the evils of Zionism was its alleged record of collaboration with Trotskyism. In the late 1920s, “the Zionists looked for support amongst the defeated anti-Leninist factional groupings amongst the Trotskyite oppositionists.”⁶¹ It was therefore “far from being a coincidence that the Zionist newspaper *Tayit* addressed itself to Trotsky in 1927, calling him ‘our brother’, and inviting the Trotskyites to ‘unity of action’.”⁶² In “the attempts to undermine socialism in Czechoslovakia” (i.e. the 1968 reform movement, eventually crushed by a Russian invasion) Zionists worked hand-in-glove with the Trotskyites: “... with the remnants of bourgeois parties which emerged from the underground, with right-wing social democracy, with ‘national-communists’, with Trotskyites.”⁶³ Contemporary Zionism continues to co-operate with “extremists and openly fascist forces, and to maintain at the same time contacts and close links with Trotskyites and revisionists of all shades.”⁶⁴ Today, “Zionism closely co-operates with many other battalions of anti-communism – neo-fascists, Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists, Horthyite, Ustashi, South African racists, Trotskyites, and Maoists.”⁶⁵

Even this kind of cant finds an echo on the British far left. It was, after all, the Workers’ Revolutionary Party, backed up by some sympathetic Labour Party members, which declared with editorial authority:

“The Zionist connection between these so-called ‘lefts’ in the Labour Party [i.e. Socialist Organiser, a forerunner of Workers’ Liberty] right through to Thatcher and Reagan’s White House is there for all to see in its unprincipled nakedness.”⁶⁶

VI

TSARISM, British imperialism, Hitlerism, Afrikaner nationalism, Trotskyism... according to the Stalinists, “the Zionists” were also the shock-troops of US imperialism. Either Israel was an outpost of the USA, or “the Zionists” controlled the USA, or both.

The Kremlin argued: “The real masters of international Zionism who finance and inspire the aggression of Israel against Arab countries and the anti-communist, anti-Soviet activity of Zionist organisations, are the most powerful monopolies and banks of the USA and other countries, that is, the driving forces of contemporary imperialism.”⁶⁷ But this begs the question of who exerts the major influence and control over “the most powerful monopolies and banks of the USA”.

“The existence in the United States of the most numerous grouping in the world of capitalists of Jewish origin... is the most important factor determining the specific nature of American Zionism... About 20% of American millionaires are Jews, although, as is well known, the proportion of Americans of Jewish origin does not exceed 3% of the entire population of the USA.”⁶⁸ American Zionism, therefore, constitutes

“a mighty and powerful detachment of international Zionism, by virtue of both its numbers and also its financial-political possibilities.”⁶⁹ In the American political arena it thus performs a dual function: “as spokesperson of the interests of one of the groupings of the bourgeoisie of the USA, playing no small role in circles which determine the policies of Washington, and as part of international Zionism, closely connected with its other groupings.”⁷⁰

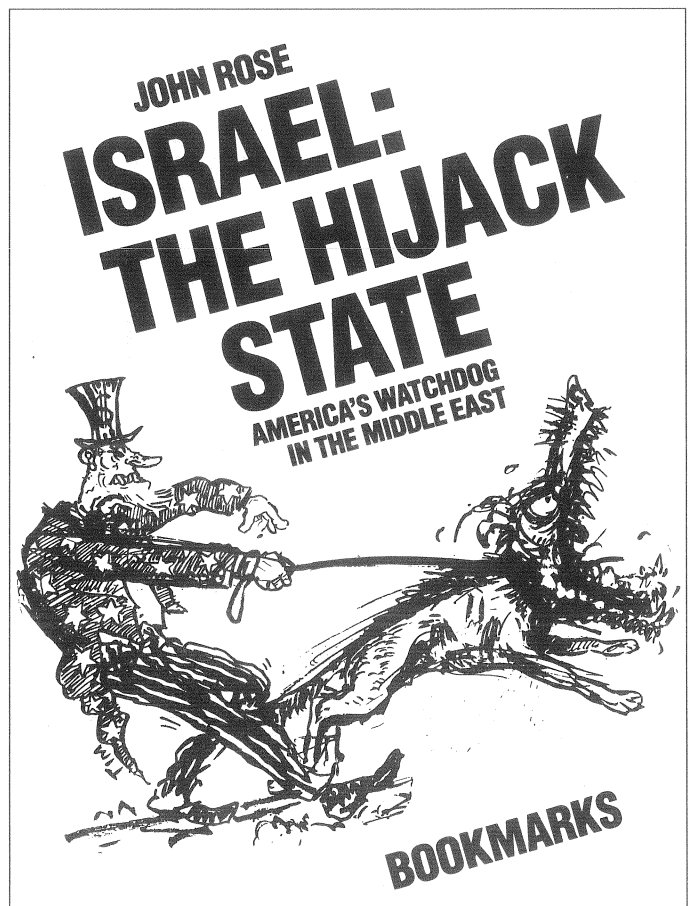
“The powerful Jewish bourgeoisie is far from occupying the lowest position in the financial oligarchy of the USA.”⁷¹ “The position of the middle-man in relation to the organisation of major long-term loans is in reality monopolised by seventeen of the most powerful Wall Street firms. The majority of them belong either partially or entirely to the powerful Jewish bourgeoisie.”⁷² “A series of monopolies which

have contracts with the Pentagon are controlled by the Zionists. The Lazard brothers, for example, who are members of the American Jewish Committee, control the aviation company Lockheed, 90% of the work of which is for the Pentagon. Zionists have an entrenched position in the General Dynamics corporation as well... It is necessary to say that these and other firms with contracts with the Pentagon are the main suppliers of weapons to Israel.”⁷³

“American Zionists dispose of massive financial resources and a far-reaching network of organisations. They possess a powerful propaganda apparatus and control a significant share of the means of mass communication in the country.”⁷⁴

Other spheres of influence of Zionism in America include the CIA (“The interests of the powerful Jewish bourgeoisie and other groupings of finance capital are interlaced in the secret service just as in other spheres of politics, economics and ideology”⁷⁵), primaries for the selection of Presidential candidates (“The participation of Zionist capital in the financing of the primary campaigns and in working out the platforms in the primaries of the candidates for President – this phenomenon is characteristic of political life in the USA”⁷⁶), and the Mafia (“The leadership of the Mafia was [at the time of Al Capone] closely linked with Zionists and international Zionism, and some Zionists... became its leaders.”⁷⁷

It is therefore far from clear who is the tail and who is the dog. Zionism is simultaneously an agency of American imperi-



A would-be Trotskyist pamphlet takes up one of the Stalinist themes: Israel as both the “watchdog” or servant of the USA, and as the ultra-aggressive mad dog dragging the USA into imperialist behaviour.

alism, and at the same time the driving force behind it: "Zionism has now become one of the most influential forces in the American political arena... The union of the Zionists with different political forces in the USA, expressing the interests of the entire American ruling class, significantly strengthens the possibilities of Zionism exerting an influence on the policies of Washington."⁷⁸

VII

THE STALINIST account sought to mobilise every sort of sentiment it could plausibly appeal to under "Marxist" colours – anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, anti-racism, anti-Nazism, and even opposition to anti-semitism – against "the Zionists", by way of portraying "the Zionists" as in cahoots with, or as pulling the strings of, those responsible for all the evils appealed against.

It was in fact tantamount to an updated and Marxist version of the notorious Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a forgery concocted by the Tsarist secret police in order to portray Jews as secretly working for, and near achieving, world domination.

The original version of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion was published in Russia in 1903 by Pavel Krushevan. Supposedly the record of a meeting held in Basle in 1897 at the time of the first Zionist Congress in which the participants plotted to achieve world domination, this piece of fiction quickly became a warrant for anti-semitic pogroms, often organised directly by the Tsarist secret police.

The major themes of the forgery were: Jews controlled and manipulated the media in order to gain in power; Jews used cunning and guile to strengthen their position in society; international finance and banking were under Jewish control; Jews aspired to world domination, using these methods of control of the media, cunning and deceit, and control over international finance; this aim was to be achieved in partnership with the Freemasons.

According to the Stalinists, the Tsarist secret police were quite right to think that Jews were establishing a sinister grip on the media. "In many bourgeois countries, Zionist organisations have implanted their 'cadres' and 'sympathisers' into the central press agencies, the editorial offices of radio and television, into the cinema, the sciences, arts, and literature. Using these powerful levers, the Zionists influence public opinion, overtly or covertly preaching their ideas, skirting round in silence or distorting anything which contradicts their ideology in the slightest."⁷⁹

Zionism exerts "major, sometimes overwhelming, influence on means of mass communication, culture, and the state-administrative apparatus of the major capitalist states." It focuses its attention "in particular on the cinema, television, radio and daily newspapers."⁸⁰ As a result of this control over "means of mass communication, the "intellectual industries" and cultural institutions... "Zionism is an indispensable part of the capitalist world, in which 'mass culture' fulfils precisely expressed functions of the ideological armoury of the bourgeoisie."⁸¹

The earnest researcher should not be bamboozled by the superficial facts of Jews being a small minority in all major countries, politically divided among themselves, and often not keen to be stridently "Zionist". "Analysing the organisational labyrinth of international Zionism is very complicated. This is to be explained by several factors. Firstly, the secret of the organisational structure is carefully concealed from the uninitiated."⁸² Another factor lies in the fact that "many Zionist organisations... prefer to appear in the guise of 'Jewish', 'religious', 'socialist', 'benevolent', 'cultural', 'educational', 'scientific' leagues, funds, unions, groups, and parties"⁸³. That they do not call themselves "Zionist" is merely a matter of "tactics, of the means whereby to realise the policies of the Jewish nationalist bourgeoisie."⁸⁴

Synagogues are one example of institutions used as a cover for Zionist activities: "Where Zionist political organisations are unable to exist legally, such as in the countries of socialism, they (the Zionists) come running to the services of the synagogues and the rabbis for the purpose of pursuing their subversive activities and recruiting supporters from amongst the believers."⁸⁵ Cultural activities can also be another cover for Zionist subversion: "The events in Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1967-8 and also the trials in Leningrad, Riga and Kishinev in 1970 and 1971 bear witness to the fact that the 'cultural' activity of Zionists is far from being the harmless affair that they would like to present it as."⁸⁶ Literature is likewise used for the propagation of Zionism: "Zionist and pro-Zionist writers attempt to impose upon people false, anti-scientific and anti-historical conceptions which are of benefit to Zionism. As fairly typical examples it is possible to name such writers as Kingsley Amis, Bernard Malamud, Eugene Ionesco, and many others."⁸⁷

Zionism, in short, is prepared to resort to any form of duplicity in pursuit of its goals: "Zionism uses particularly dirty and provocative methods in this struggle for people's minds. Deception, diversions, espionage, terror, blackmail, bribery, intimidation, falsification, playing on family and national sentiments, unbridled chauvinism – this is a far from complete list of the methods of Zionist propaganda and practice."⁸⁸

Also: "Over the years, Zionism changed into a powerful international concern. The international Zionist corporation... its countless branches and subsidiaries... is one of the most powerful units of finance capital."⁸⁹ The economic basis of Zionism is "the most powerful financial industrial-monopolies of the West... Economic conferences of Jewish millionaires are capital united on a world scale, used to exert pressure on states and governments in a series of capitalist countries in pursuit of political goals"⁹⁰. The Zionist organisations are controlled by the powerful Jewish bourgeoisie: "in the leadership of the Zionist organisations there has never been, nor is there now, a single worker or peasant; instead, at all levels of the Zionist hierarchy are rabbis, millionaires, bankers, stock-brokers, speculators representatives of monopolies, etc."⁹¹

The same principle also applies to Judaism,

from which according to the "anti-Zionist" campaign, the racist Zionist concept of "the chosen people" is derived⁹²: "Wherever the rabbis rule together with the Zionists, everything is subordinate to one goal – serving the interests of capital. Therefore, as a rule, the leading roles in religious communities not only in Israel but also in the USA and other capitalist countries are played by wealthy people: businessmen, directors of companies, financial bosses."⁹³

Zionism, which was "called into life at the will of the Jewish bourgeoisie"⁹⁴, knows of "ways in and out of the corridors of power of which the uninitiated are ignorant."⁹⁵ Apart from its influential position in the politics and economies of the United States and Western Europe, and its subversive activities in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, "the powerful Jewish bourgeoisie is firmly entrenched in Spain and Portugal, in the economies of a series of Latin American countries, in Australia and New Zealand. Its sphere of influence extends to the countries of Asia as well, including Singapore, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, and Malaysia. As a rule, this involves representatives of families which are involved in a series of countries and also in several continents."⁹⁶ In Latin America, for example, where "the Jewish bourgeoisie is encouraged by foreign capital, which has transformed it into its base in line with not only its economic but also its political plan"⁹⁷, "banks and also securities in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Columbia, Venezuela, and also other countries as well belong to pro-Zionist capital... The powerful Zionist bourgeoisie of the USA plays the role in Latin America of the most aggressive detachment of North American imperialism."⁹⁸

The organisational structure of international Zionism is based on "subsidies of Zionist bankers and other capitalists, (through which) was created an extensive extra-state and even supra-state system of organisations entangling, like a cobweb, many capitalist states which spread out their tentacles into the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. To this system belongs first and foremost the World Zionist Organisation and the World Jewish Congress."⁹⁹

It is therefore "no exaggeration to say that the system of organisations of international Zionism (which extends throughout the entire world and, at the same time, is strongly centralised) united with a powerful financial-economic base in the shape of the monopoly bourgeoisie of Jewish origin... is the main source of strength and activity of Zionist influence on the politics of a series of leading capitalist states. At present, international Zionism... given the depth of its penetration into the most variegated spheres of political, economic, and social life of the capitalist countries, has no equal amongst the other bourgeois-nationalist and anticommunist currents and detachments of world reaction."¹⁰⁰

International Zionism is not satisfied with merely having no equal in the imperialist world. It strives for world power, in the traditions of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion: "The representatives of international Zionist capital openly aspire to world domination, although they mask their ambi-



The Stalinists exploited Arab anger against Israeli policy in order to secure diplomatic advantage in the Middle East — and, by fabricating a Marxist gloss on the crudest anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli prejudices, gave those prejudices currency on the left

tions of world conquest by way of vague phrases about 'ethical socialism'.¹⁰¹ Going beyond the original version of the Protocols however, the 1970s USSR version suggested that that goal had already been achieved, at least outside the borders of the vigilantly "anti-Zionist" Stalinist states: "Too much

bears witness to the fact that in the sum of various factors — economic, political, ideological, social, religious, societal, etc. — which determine the course of action of the ruling circles of the leading capitalist states, the cosmopolitan Jewish bourgeoisie, and Zionist capital (closely linked with Judaic

clericalism) emerge as significantly more organised, more ambitious, and more powerful than any other influential monopoly (family, banking, regional) groups and groupings of the financial oligarchy."¹⁰²

None of this, of course was anti-semitism. It was simply "anti-Zionism."

FOOTNOTES

- V. Bolshakov (1972): *Zionism in the Service of Anti-Communism*.
- M. Davydov et al. (1973): *We Pass Judgement on Zionism*.
- I. Mints et al. (1973): *Zionism: Theory and Practice*.
- V. Skurlatov (1975): *Zionism and Apartheid*.
- R. Brodsky/ Y. Shulmeister (1976): *Zionism — A Tool of Reaction*.
- V. Kiselev et al. (1977): *International Zionism: History and Politics*.
1. *Prisonnier Politique à Prague*, Mordekhai Oren
2. Soifer, p.5
3. Bolshakov, p.8
4. Bolshakov, p.8
5. Skurlatov, p.39
6. Soifer, p.5
7. Mitin, p.54
8. Mitin, p.58, footnote
9. Soifer, p.21
10. Mitin, p.58
11. Mitin, p.19
12. Mitin, p.59
13. Mitin, p.59
14. Davydov, p.12
15. Davydov p.13
16. Mitin, p.218
17. Davydov, p.4
18. Mitin, p.62
19. Mints, p.169
20. Mints, p.169
21. Mitin, p.62
22. Mitin, p.224
23. Soifer, p.42
24. Brodsky, p.75
25. Brodsky, p.82
26. Mitin, p.224
27. Soifer, p.38
28. Bolshakov, p.27
29. Brodsky, p.33
30. Davydov, p.7
31. Skurlatov, p.4
32. Soifer, p.43
33. Soifer, p.49
34. Bolshakov p.39
35. Soifer, p.42
36. Bolshakov, p.25
37. Brodsky, p.78
38. Brodsky, p.84
39. Soifer, p.42
40. Bolshakov p.43
41. Brodsky, p.89
42. Brodsky, p.90
43. Soifer, p.46
44. Brodsky, p.117
45. Mitin, p.83
46. Soifer, p.22
47. Kiselev, p.12
48. Mints, p.180
49. Soifer, p.34
50. Soifer, p.123
50. Mitin, p.83
51. Mitin, p.83
52. Mints, p.95
53. Bolshakov, p.96
54. Kiselev, p.75
55. Soifer, p.127
56. Skurlatov, p.43
57. Skurlatov, p.47
58. Skurlatov, p.4
59. Skurlatov pp.21, 46, 51, 55, 55, 58, 57, 58, 59, 84
60. Skurlatov p.112
61. Mitin, p.218
62. Mitin, p.223
63. Mitin, p.115
64. Mitin, p.266
65. Soifer, p.50
66. *Newslines*, 9.4.1983
67. Bolshakov, p.58
68. Kiselev, p.113
69. Kiselev p.113
70. Kiselev p.114
71. Bolshakov p.48
72. Bolshakov p.51
73. Soifer, p.65
74. Kiselev, p.148
75. Bolshakov, p.173
76. Bolshakov p.80
77. Bolshakov p.162
78. Kiselev, p.130
79. Mitin, p.98
80. Kiselev, p.15
81. Mitin, p.95
82. Bolshakov, p.90
83. Bolshakov p.90
84. Kiselev, p.123
85. Mitin, p.128
86. Mitin, p.85
87. Mitin, p.93
88. Soifer, p.183
89. Bolshakov, p.5
90. Soifer, p.59
91. Mitin, p.245, footnote
92. See Mitin, chapter 3, "Judaism and Zionism"
93. Mitin, p.31
94. Bolshakov p.5
95. Bolshakov, p.5
96. Bolshakov p.72
97. Kiselev, p.163
98. Kiselev, p.164
99. Mitin, p.188
100. Kiselev, p.15
101. Skurlatov p.118
102. Mitin, p.127

Letter to an advocate of the "secular democratic state"

There is no "democratic" way to wipe out Israel

Dear Andrew

It seems to me that the terms of the only just solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are clear and unmistakeable.

Unless you think the interests of one side should be entirely sacrificed to the other – that is, unless you are either an Arab or an Israeli chauvinist – there is only one acceptable solution.

Each nation should have self-determination in the territory where it is the majority. I understand that to mean, essentially, the 1967 border.

There should be full equality for members of each nationality in the other's state.

WHEN I asked you why you reject "two states" you replied that you thought we could get something "better than that".

You want a "secular democratic state" in all of pre-1948 Palestine, where Israeli Jews would be equal citizens with the Palestinians. You insist that it is possible. For you, "two states" is intolerable because it falls short of that benign ideal. *Socialist Organiser*, the forerunner of *Workers' Liberty*, used to agree until the mid-1980s (though some of us had started to think differently from the late 1970s).

Your central premise is that Israel does not have the right to exist. This was not necessarily your starting point. But in fact it is the pillar on which are erected all schemes to "start again" with Palestine as it was before partition in 1948 – to make that territory our basic political dogma, though it existed as a political unit only for the 30 years 1918-48.

The outcome of the 1948 war in which Israel won the right to exist, and the coming into being of the Jewish state – that is the historical "error", "wrong turning", "anomaly", "crime", at the core of what you want to rearrange.

NOW OF course there is much that is intolerable and tragic about Israeli-Arab relations. It is tempting to backtrack and write an "alternative history" of the Middle East.

That "alternative history", in turn, breeds a confusion of historical perspective and fosters the delusion that the facts of modern history can at will be annulled,

that the 20th-century history of the Middle East can be rerun.

It is easy to write, the alternative history. You take the elements in the story and – in your head – re-combine them to your satisfaction.

Would a secular democratic state in which Jews and Arabs would have had equal citizenship have been better? Then why not rerun the film of history to get that? Abolish Israel! Create a secular democratic state! You turn your alternative history into a political programme.

YOUR FIRST problem is this: how is the rearrangement of the elements that you have so easily accomplished inside your head, going to be accomplished in reality? Where is the lever to be placed that will move the heavy stones of history? What will be, could be, its agency? Who will do it?

The secular democratic state necessarily involves replacing the Jewish state of Israel with another arrangement in which Jews will not have a state. The goal is not only to secure Palestinian rights by putting an end to Israeli colonial rule in the Palestinian territories, but to deprive Israeli Jews of their national rights.

How is that to be achieved?

What are the chances that the Israelis will agree voluntarily to dismantle their state? Zero!

You can hope to win Israeli agreement or majority agreement, reluctant or otherwise, for a Palestinian state and, as relations between Israel and the surrounding Arab states become "normalised", for full equality for Israeli Arabs in the Jewish state. After "two states" may come federation (though that, I guess, in terms of political time, is a long way off). But there is absolutely no chance that the Israeli Jews can be persuaded simply to disarm, to dismantle their state and to place themselves at the mercy of their enemies of many decades.

No people in history has ever done anything like what is demanded of the Israeli Jews.

Those who look back on a history of persecution, pogrom and in the mid-twentieth century, the systematic massacre of six million European Jews, in other peo-

ples' states, are unlikely to be world pioneers in such a course.

The "benign", utopian idea that Israel will politely agree to commit suicide in the hope of creating a united Jewish-Arab secular democratic state is not and never could be part of the real world.

The modern left – in contrast to the right – has never before demanded self-dissolution, or anything like it, of any nation. That the left should demand it of Israel is an abomination; and there is really nothing "left" about it. In any case, Israel will not dissolve itself.

IF THE voluntary, benign rearrangement is ruled out, what then?

The answer is already implicit in your starting point: the denial of Israel's right to exist.

At first you rejected Israel in the name of a benign rerunning of history. But when rearrangement by way of voluntary agreement by the Israelis to liquidate their nation and their state is ruled out, proponents of all schemes to rerun 20th century Middle-Eastern history are left with only one conceivable way to remedy the historical "error": the conquest and overpowering of the Jews and their state, so that they have no choice.

IF NOT by agreement, then by coercion! And if coercion is your road, the only forces that can do the job are the Arab states.

So, starting from a desire for greater unity and harmony than "two states" seems to offer, you go along with, or avoid falling out with, those of your friends and comrades who, while they talk out of one side of their mouths about a secular democratic state, say out of the other that Syria, Iraq and other Arab states would do good work for progress if they were to overrun Israel.

You start out seeking a just, humane solution that caters for the legitimate rights of both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, and find yourself supporting, or eloquently not condemning, proposals for war by the Arab states to subjugate Israel.

You reject the "two states" programme in the name of a solution where the Arab-Jewish conflict would magically disappear

into a common Arab-Jewish state, and by an inexorable logic wind up aligning yourself with those on the left who reject "two states" in the name of an Arab conquest of Israel.

If we once take the initial step of asserting that Israel should not exist, that it does not have the right to go on existing, then the pressure of Middle East reality and the real options in the situation push us relentlessly into support for coercion. The imaginary benign alternative serves only to soften us up.

Israel's rejection of the moralistic ultimatum to disarm, dismantle itself and sink itself into a mainly-Arab state leaves us only two choices: to abandon the "alternative history" and the secular democratic state, or to support war to compel Israel to cease to exist.

Israel's refusal eases and rationalises, and morally justifies support for the subjugation of Israel, in the name of the secular democratic state. The moral ultimatum becomes a military ultimatum to Israel.

If Israel will not dissolve voluntarily into the desired secular, democratic, all-1948-Palestine state, then it must be dissolved by compulsion.

So what if the voice in which this military version of what starts as a moralistic ultimatum to Israel is given is Nasser's, Assad's, Saddam Hussein's, Osama bin Laden's? Why not? For the left, after the June war of 1967 especially, it has been presented or passed off as "revolutionary anti-imperialist" politics.

Militarism in a just cause can be a good thing! Progress must be served; injustice must be undone. If not voluntarily, then the other way! A secular democratic state "by any means necessary". All perfectly reasonable, and with a healthy, invigorating smack of no-nonsense revolutionary clarity about it.

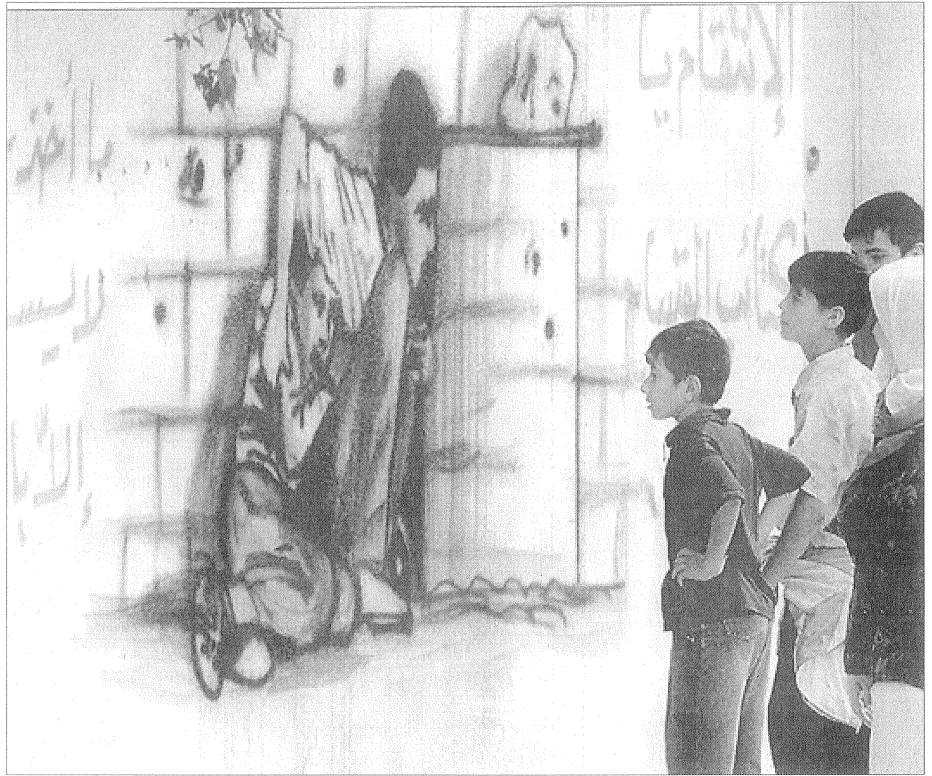
FOR YOU, who advocate the destruction of Israel in the name of "something better", the secular democratic state, there is a problem here. That end is utterly incompatible with these, its only conceivable means, and this, its only conceivable first act: the conquest of Israel.

If the means are Arab conquest, the subjugation and overpowering of Israel's Jews and the forcible destruction and suppression from outside of their state, then the goal of a more benign, better arrangement than history has so far provided vanishes in the maelstrom.

That a secular democratic state with full Jewish equality (or for that matter a binational state) would be the result of an Arab overpowering of Israel is utterly inconceivable. Ask the Kurds...

This instrument — the Arab states (or the Palestinian Arabs, if that were possible, though, of course, it is not) as conqueror — and these means — war, conquest, reduction of the Israeli Jews to statelessness and helplessness — cannot produce the benign result which you started out to seek.

The Arab states are, almost all of them, quasi-fascist regimes loaded with crimes



The mural depicts Mohammed al-Durra, a Palestinian child killed by Israeli army bullets. The way to peace is through recognising the rights of both nations, not by proposing an Arab conquest of Israel which would see many Jewish children share Mohammed's fate.

against the people of their own countries, or, in the case of Syria, Jordan and the Christian Arabs in Lebanon, perpetrators of great massacres of Palestinian Arabs. Their conquest of Israel would produce not democracy but only different (and more) victims. Even if the Arab states were to become more democratic, a conquest by them of Israel would still be the subjugation of a small nation by another, hostile, nation or alliance of nations.

And worse. Starting from things as they are now, Israel can be compelled to get out of the Occupied Territories and be forced to accept a Palestinian Arab state. But if Israel were to be overrun or destroyed, then the possibility of two states and of justice for both peoples would vanish from history.

The delegitimisation of Israel implicit in your starting point already contained all the essential elements of the Arab nationalist conclusions that inexorably work their way to the surface. Along the road, your benign re-running of history has vanished like the political mirage it was.

There is no middle ground between, on the one side, accepting Israel's right to exist and to defend itself, Jewish self-determination, alongside self-determination for the Palestinian Arabs, and, on the other, denying Jewish self-determination in the only way it can be denied — by force of Arab state arms that, victorious, would deny national rights to the Israeli Jews.

IF YOU are inclined to respond: "if Israel won't be reasonable, then too bad for the Israelis" — that is a good illustration of the logic I am uncovering. Exasperation and disappointment with Israeli insistence on the state's right to continue as a Jewish

national state have propelled you, initially an advocate of a benign "alternative history", on to the ground of Arab and Islamic revanchism and chauvinism. (All right, you're half-hearted about it, and in fact Israel is not faced with conquest, but it is the political logic that concerns me here.)

Answer this question: you advocate, as your first choice, a single secular democratic state over all pre-1948 Palestine. It cannot conceivably come into existence in any near or foreseeable future. What do you now propose?

You know that support for Arab conquest is as incompatible with honest advocacy of equal rights for the two peoples as support for Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza would be.

What are you are left with? A fantasy proposal and in the real world support for Arab states who are even more distant from your ideal than Israel is!

IN A SENSE, of course, Marxism is "the science of alternative history" — we orient to one sort of possible development and fight to secure it, fight to push development off the track the bourgeoisie have laid down, and so on. We do aim to tidy up history's messes and injustices, in so far as that is possible. But we are limited.

We have to root ourselves in the trends in reality that work for what we want to help develop. And we base ourselves on working-class action as the force that can reshape what history has done so far. Not the least fault of your approach is that you write the Israeli Jewish working class out of history.

The two-states policy allows for advocacy of all the necessary concrete reforms in Israel, and for the education of the



Late 2001: a public meeting initiated by Workers' Liberty brings together British PLO representative Afif Safieh (left) and Bernard Misrahi of the Jewish Socialist Group (second from right) to express solidarity with Palestinians on a political basis that opens up the possibility of Arab-Jewish peace and cooperation. Speaking: Sean Matgamna (right); in the chair, Kate Buckell (second from left).

Arab and Jewish workers away from chauvinism.

It cuts off no progressive revolutionary possibilities that otherwise would exist.

Mutual recognition of each others' rights by Israeli and Palestinian workers can, above all, allow the beginnings of working-class unity.

Certainly the two-states policy creates difficulties for socialists in Arab countries, and does not endear us to militant Arab and Islamic chauvinists in Britain. But only someone who forgets the democratic and socialist ABCs could think it dispensable, or dismiss the Jews in Israel as a "troublesome little people" standing in the way of historical progress. Whose history? Whose progress?

YOU REJECT two states in the name of international socialist revolution? But a socialist revolution in the Middle East will have to have a programme of full national self-determination for non-Arab minorities in the region. Honest Arab socialists cannot but be for Jewish as for Kurdish self-determination – that is, in Palestine, for two states.

Or was the attitude of the Bolsheviks mistaken in 1917, when, proclaiming the right of nations like the Poles and the Finns to secede from the Russian state, they implemented a programme of consistent democracy on the national question in the former Tsarist Empire? Are the teaching of the Lenin-Trotsky Third International and of the Fourth International on consistent democracy and self-determination as the solution to national conflicts, mistaken?

I encounter people who respond to the "two states" idea with the scandalised declaration – "socialists are not for division, but for unity! We should not want separate Palestinian and Jewish states, but one united state". In fact, under the slogan of "unity", they usually mean a state in which the Israeli Jews have lost their

national rights.

All this sort of stuff, when it is not, as it often is, disingenuous and hypocritical, is plain foolish – innocent of all acquaintance with Marxist and socialist thinking on such questions over the last 150 years!

The particular concern of socialists is to bring into being a framework of coexistence that will allow Jewish and Arab workers eventually to unite, within the states and across the borders, so that they can learn in common action to work for socialism in the Middle East.

The entire Marxist tradition holds that where there is such chronic antagonism between peoples within a state that one wants to separate from the other and have its own state, then separation is a lesser evil than forced union.

Separation begins the process of removing the antagonism by introducing a peaceful *modus vivendi* between the historically warring antagonists.

Democratic separation is the only way to preserve or prepare working-class unity.

We want unity, not division, but the way to democratic mutual respect between peoples, and the way to working class unity, is sometimes through separation.

An independent Palestinian state will mark tremendous progress, not alone for the Palestinian people, but also for the people of Israel.

Either Israel has the right to exist and defend itself, and its Jewish majority have the right to maintain a distinct and independent existence as a nation as long as they like – or they don't.

If they do, then we seek a solution that secures the rights of Jews and Arabs alike. If they don't, all rights belong to the Arabs. Such an idea is absurd and unjust, but at least it is a clear and honest Arab chauvinist position.

That is the basic terrain of this question.

I ONCE read a story – I can't remember where, and it may be a true story – which encapsulates the experience of those who begin with the benignly motivated but fantastic and unrealisable proposal for a Jewish-Arab secular-democratic state and are then driven by a logic they do not understand on to the ground of Arab and Islamic chauvinism and revanchism.

Medieval Italy. The people of a small village decide that they will not eat animals anymore; perhaps St Francis walked among them. So they became vegetarians. Set on vegetarianism as their style of life, they succumb to "secondary narcissism" and proclaim it the best and the only proper sort of life. Soon they became convinced that anything other than the vegetarian life is immoral. But here, they are on dangerous ground.

Only the Pope and his bishops can decide what is moral and immoral. Any challenge to their right to decide what is and is not moral is heresy. But the villagers stubbornly hold to their opinion: not to be vegetarians is immoral.

So they are persecuted.

They resist, fight back. Guerrilla war develops between the villagers and their persecutors. Greatly outnumbered, the villagers are driven up into the barren mountains. Vegetation there is scarce. What will they eat?

They are in this fix because they think eating animals is immoral. There is no going back on that: they can't eat mountain sheep, goats and hares. They will surrender and be burned at the stake, eat animals – or ...?

In fact, they solve their dilemma by eating the flesh of the enemies they kill. They don't like this; but it is not a moral principle on a par with the prohibition on killing and eating animals.

The vegetarians on principle turn into cannibals.

Those who start out seeking a benign rerunning of the history of the last hundred years in Palestine, wind up aligned with, and as propagandist outriders for, Saddam Hussein. Those who refuse to choose rationally from the best real possibilities wind up supporting the forcible suppression of the Jewish nation in Palestine!

Andrew, the only benign solution to the Jewish-Arab conflict now is the liberation of Palestine from Israel's grip and the setting up of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Advocacy of that programme is the only way ever to begin to unite the Jewish and Arab workers in the Middle East.

There is no middle ground – it is either two states or the Islamic-Arabic revanchist fantasy.

The "secular democratic state", for the reasons I have outlined, works only to smooth the road of people who don't stop to think about the issue towards vicarious Arab-Islamic chauvinism.

The vegetarians of alternative history wind up supporting the Saddam-Hussein-style cannibals of contemporary Middle East reality.

Yours,
Sean Matgamna

Anti-semitism and the left

This was written in 1988 as an open letter to the late Tony Cliff, of the SWP.

DEAR CLIFF,

After Hitler, anti-semitism disguised itself, and drew new nourishment from the conflict between Arab and Jew in the Middle East which had been intensified by the Holocaust. It was a doctrine that dared no longer speak its old name except in whispers and occasional back-alley fascist shouting; but by the '70s it had another name which it dared to speak, indeed to shout, in a loud chorus in which participated most of the governments and states of the world, including some of the worst governments in existence. A new name: anti-Zionism.

Of course, not all anti-Zionists were, or are, anti-semites, but almost all anti-Semites were, by the '70s anyway, anti-Zionists.

That allowed them to enlist in the vast chorus of progressive, anti-colonialist humanity. It conferred a new self-righteousness, and a new broad respectability, on their Judeophobic obsessions.

From obscure, intellectually low-grade, and discreditable theories about economics, and from racial myths which flew in the face of science and everyday experience as well as contradicting all hopes of human equality and solidarity, anti-Semitism had risen to a higher plane of existence. It found a place on the revolutionary left it never had before.

After the 1967 war, Israel's continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and the manifest intention of some forces in Israel progressively to annex those territories, outraged the powerful mid-20th century sentiment of anti-colonialism. All democrats and liberals, Israelis too, and of course other Jews, condemned it, or aspects of it.

The hardened anti-semitic "anti-Zionists" could sing along in chorus, sharpening the note and intensifying the beat of the political chant here and there.

At the time of the June 1967 war the far left still universally accepted the right of the Israeli Jews to a nation-state, and demanded changes on that basis. Afterwards the left passively absorbed the new Palestine Liberation Organisation policy of the 'secular democratic state' (i.e. an Arab state over all Palestine, with religious rights for Jews).

To Israel was posed the ultimatum that its citizens must surrender self-determination and the possibility of defending themselves, and dissolve their nation, settling for the rights of a religious minority in a projected Arab secular democratic state — which Arab state, by reason of size and the military force required to establish it, would be at the mercy of the bigger Arab states like Iraq or Syria, not one of which recognises minority rights.

To Jews who identify instinctively with Israel, most of the left is inexorably hostile. And none more hostile than the SWP, Comrade Cliff! The relationship is symbolised for me by lines of Socialist Workers Party members at the conference of the National Union of Students, many of them in the regulation

tough-guy 'revolutionary' leather jackets, harassing young Jews about the Middle East.

Your stance, I contend, is anti-semitic. Not, of course, racist — but it packages a comprehensive hostility to most Jews (that is, what has always been the content of anti-semitism) in socialist and anti-imperialist verbiage. Those in the Second International who tried to express hostility to capitalism through hostility to Jews ("the Rothschilds", etc.) were aptly described as preaching a "socialism of idiots". What much of the left says today about Zionism, Israel and imperialism is the anti-imperialism of idiots.

A central part of your political work for decades, comrade Cliff, has been to cultivate and spread that idiocy.

We should support the right of the Palestinian Arabs to have their own state; but to deny the Israeli Jews the same right, and to advocate a Socialist United States of the Middle East without self-determination for all the small nations in the region, is to step from democratic politics into the politics of communal and national revenge, and implicitly to assert that there is such a thing as a "bad people" undeserving of rights.

You, comrade Cliff, consider those politics Trotskyist. You consider especially intense, militant advocacy of those politics to be a hallmark of Trotskyism. In fact they stem more from Stalinism than from Trotskyism. It spread to the left from the USSR and the satellite countries, where, after World War 2, official government anti-Zionism provided a new flag of convenience for the Judeophobia long endemic there.

This official left "anti-Zionism" spread from the East throughout the labour movement. It spread to the non-Stalinist left partly by way of Stalinist influence, partly as a by-product of the left's proper involvement with campaigns against colonialism and imperialism.

You, comrade Cliff, bear a great deal of the responsibility for this state of affairs. The shift after the 1967 war from radical criticism of Israel to support for its destruction happened almost imperceptibly over time, almost by political osmosis between the left and militant Palestinian Arab nationalists to whom the left adapted itself.

But that happened because the left had been "educated" on this question by "anti-Zionist" horror stories in such works as your 1967 pamphlet *The Struggle in the Middle East*, which were completely devoid of any proper historical perspective on the events of the Jewish-Arab conflict and, while confining themselves to radical criticism of Israel and not supporting its destruction, were ambivalent at best on our



From his polemics in the mid-1940s, through his 1967 pamphlet on The Struggle in the Middle East, and right up to his death in 2000, Cliff was a major — and harmful — influence in the Trotskyist movement on the Israel-Palestine question, not only in Britain but also internationally.

programme.

The position we took on the June 1967 war put the finishing touch in practice. In 1948 the Trotskyists had sided with Israel or been for the defeat of both sides. In 1967 we came out for the destruction of the Israeli Jewish state and nation. One could not be defeatist here as, say, you could be defeatist for France or Germany, where even the worst defeat would not lead to national destruction. For Israel it would.

In 1967 we had all felt obliged to differentiate from PLO leader Ahmed Shukhairi, with his chauvinist calls for "driving the Jews into the sea". But soon we endorsed the call for the complete subjugation of the Jews in its new "reasonable" packaging — the call for a secular democratic state.

We thereby took our place in one of the strangest parades in history — the march of anti-semitism from the condition of utter disorientation Hitler left it in back to respectability.

No people in recorded history ever did anything comparable to what you ask the Israeli Jews to do: surrender their state, disarm, and place themselves at the mercy of their bitter enemies of many decades. And if you want pioneering gestures arising out of boundless self-sacrifice or confidence in human goodness and solidarity, only a fool would go looking for them from the relatives of those who died in Hitler's murder camps!

Of course nobody expects it, and all such talk is just the build-up of moralistic lubricant for the real conclusion: that the Arab states should be supported against Israel.

In SWP-speak that conclusion is hedged about with ifs and buts and hopes and fantastic aspirations for a socialist solution to magically change the terms of the problem. The Arab working class will solve things.

I too fervently wish that the Arab working class should emerge as an independent force. Like you I believe that the Arab working class will change the situation and that the Arab

working class will win socialism in the Arab countries. But to invoke the Arab working class as the element which will wipe away the national conflict is a strange mixture of political sleight of hand, muddled thinking and wishful thinking.

Think about it. So, the workers of the different Arab countries become politically active and independent? But what will their programme be for the Jewish-Arab conflict? What should international socialists propose to the Arab workers that they should do about the Jewish-Arab conflict?

In fact, Cliff, your own programme is identical to the Arab nationalist programme! You cannot advocate that the Arab working class breaks with its own bourgeois nationalists' programme!

In response to the charge that the SWP is effectively anti-semitic, Chris Harman wrote in *Socialist Worker* some time back that the National Front was always denouncing the SWP as Jewish because many of its leaders are Jews. This was a not quite delicate way for Harman to say that some SWP leaders are Jewish. As if that was decisive, as if that wiped out the comprehensive hostility to most Jews and the unique attitude to Israel!

It is a good example of the self-deception practised on the left on this issue. We are not Nazi-style racists, or any sort of racists; we are not against Jews; some of us are Jews, and would be or are persecuted by Nazi-style racists; and we are not Christian bigots hostile to Jews — ergo, we can't be anti-semites!

But you are comprehensively hostile to almost all Jews! You want to destroy the Israeli Jewish state and the Israeli Jewish nation. A sizeable part of the left considers Israel to be imperialist-racist evil incarnate, deserving of nothing but fire and sword in a

holy war!

The left now is in the same moral position vis-à-vis individual Jews as the medieval Christians who could say honestly that they wanted to save the Jews from themselves. They wanted to convert them. They loved and tried to save the sinners, while hating the sin. The obdurate sinners in the dungeons and fires of the persecution probably didn't find that much compensation.

The "anti-Zionist" left thinks of itself not as persecuting but as the opposite; not as hate-mongering, but as promoting love and solidarity with the oppressed; not as murderous but a protest against murder and a crusade to stop it.

And yet... and yet... at its heart it proposes policies which amount to the murder of a nation, a nation which arose out of the ashes of the greatest mass murder in recorded history. And yet it does preach hate for a whole people, for a nation and for its Diaspora of supporters around the world who will not "see reason". And yet, it does side with the potential oppressors of that nation.

One of the world's biggest neo-Trotskyist groupings (the "Morenists") says explicitly: "Today Arab racism against Israel is progressive". Implicitly, you say the same.

Comrade Cliff, I suggest that your politics on this question are the opposite of the general Marxist teaching on how to resolve national and communal conflicts. I suggest that your approach to the question is not that of a Marxist at all, but that of someone who is rabidly subjective on the question — someone who is still fighting old faction fights with Zionists back in the Palestine of the 1930s and '40s.

If that isn't so, if your position on this question is derived from Marxist and socialist considerations and not from special feel-

ing, then why don't you advocate the collective right of return for the ten million and more Germans driven out of Eastern Europe at the end of the Second World War? Why do you not demand that Gdansk be renamed Danzig and returned to Germany?

You have not always had your present position. You did not have it even as late as 1967. You had radically different views back in 1938.

Yet — and I'll finish on this point — you now consider seriously mistaken the position you took in the '30s and '40s in favour of the right to enter Palestine for Jews who could get out of the clutches of the Nazis (and who had nowhere else to go). So you said in an interview published in the SWP magazine a while back.

In retrospect you think that the British imperialists were right to shut the door in the face of Jews facing death! Let them die if the alternative is letting them into Palestine! Those were the alternatives, and that — in retrospect: you had better instincts at the time — is your choice. Could anything show more clearly the monstrousness of the position you now hold than that retrospective judgment?

Cliff, the fact that you are a Palestinian Jew has given what you say on this question an authority which you have not had to win by argument. Your nationality disarms the obvious criticism. But you left Palestine in 1946. You could get a passport and the means to come to Europe. What should the other Jews in Palestine have done then? Emigrated too? But nobody would have taken them, any more than they would have the many thousands of 'displaced' Jews then languishing in refugee camps in Europe.

I recall a passage in Trotsky's writings about Germany in the early '30s. He pours scorn on Communist Party officials who "are very much inclined to spout ultra-radical phrases beneath which is concealed a wretched and contemptible fatalism". Meanwhile "they get their passports ready".

"Worker Communists, you are hundreds of thousands, millions; you cannot leave for any place; there are not enough passports for you. Should fascism come to power, it will ride over your skulls and spines like a terrific tank. Your salvation lies in merciless struggle."

The Jews in Palestine couldn't leave either, Cliff. Just as in the '30s, there were "not enough passports". The "merciless struggle" followed and goes on.

In that struggle you do not now represent the internationalism which the isolated and heroic (though I think in some respects politically mistaken) Trotskyists in Palestine defended in 1948; you have slipped back to communalism and nationalism. Only you have "changed peoples", and now function as an Arab chauvinist, the mirror image of the Jewish chauvinists you broke with in your youth. In your youth you despised the chauvinists on both sides; now you are a propagandist for the chauvinism of one side.

It is time that you stopped miseducating young people on this question, Cliff, including young Jewish people revolted by the brutal realpolitik of Israel. High time. There is no solution, still less a socialist solution, in Jewish or Arab (or vicarious Arab) chauvinism. Cut it out, Cliff!

Sean Matgamna

The hijack state?

The Socialist Workers Party has recently reprinted John Rose's pamphlet, *Israel: The Hijack State*. Its staple is denunciations that would be reasonable as polemic against the actions of Israeli governments, made unreasonable by a context in which they are used as arguments against the very existence of an Israeli Jewish nation.

Rose says he wants "a socialist republic with full rights for Jews and all national minorities". Do "full rights" include national self-determination? Like many on the left, Rose seems to think that by calling for socialism he is relieved of any need to think through the national question itself.

What does the title mean — "the hijack state"? Logically a "hijacked" land should be given back completely. The SWP do not say that plainly. They say that the Jews have "full rights". But they do not mean full rights. They certainly do not mean that the Israeli Jewish nation should have the right to national self-determination. The SWP's sympathy for Hamas because it contests Yasser Arafat's "sell-out" (recognition of Israel) is one indication that the real logic of their argument is for the destruction of the Israeli Jewish nation. There can be no

full "giving back" of Palestine to the Palestinian Arabs without the expulsion or dispossession of the people who have been born and have grown up there over the last 50-odd years.

Rose is aware that some of the issues are more complex, and sometimes tries to cover his flanks. He develops the standard "anti-Zionist" argument that the Zionists collaborated with the Nazis in a more measured tone than other writers do. Yet his presentation is fundamentally just as one-sided as the cruder versions. He presents too simplistic a view of the Zionist movement — as if it had only one political expression, it planned in advance to "collaborate" in World War 2, and then it uniformly "collaborated", out of free choice rather than terror or timidity. Huge numbers of Zionists who fell outside that stereotype are simply forgotten.

The SWP's arguments consist of reflex "anti-Zionism" in a version that carries a socialist coating but is Arab-nationalist inside. What passes as a socialist analysis is no more than a series of one-sided prejudices.

Mutual respect or religious war?

Israeli socialist Michel Warshawski wrote this open letter to a friend in Israel's mainstream peace movement in late 2000.

IT HAS BEEN seven years exactly since I wrote my last letter to you. It was the day after the signing of the Oslo Accords, when you invited me to dance with you in Menorah Square, celebrating an Israeli-Palestinian peace that had not yet acquired the suffix "process". Permit me to quote for you a few passages from that old letter:

"You danced in the square because you were happy about this peace. Not just plain peace, but a blend of peace, security, Palestinian chest-beating over sins committed (renunciation of terrorism), and far-reaching concessions by the other side. A peace that you can be proud of. A peace — so you boast — for which we are giving nothing ('Just a tiny bit,' whispers the prime minister) and gaining much: recognition, greater security, a halt to the Intifada, renunciation of terrorism, being relieved of the Arabs, and more. You are happy about this peace, and in its honour you invite me to dance with you. No thank you...

"Ever since I've known you, fifteen years already, you have struggled for peace, not as a value in itself but as a means of assuring us, the Israelis, of security. You are in favour of withdrawal from the Occupied Territories in order to assure Israel a Jewish majority; you demonstrated against Sharon because you were concerned for the soul of the Jewish youth; and you agreed to talk with the PLO lest we be compelled to talk with Hamas. I, by contrast, see peace as an end and not merely as a means, and call for getting out of the Occupied Territories because we have nothing to be there for, even if the occupation did not cost us even one victim or one cent; and I am against shooting children — and adults — simply because it is forbidden to shoot children or ordinary civilians.

"So what could be better for you than this peace? You got rid of Gaza, you separated Israelis from Palestinians, you gave them the dirty work and you didn't even promise



withdrawal or a real state. Could peace possibly be bought more cheaply? To you the Israeli-Palestinian connection was always a zero-sum game: anything we give them means less for us. He gains, I lose. If you were capable of really thinking in terms of peace, you would understand how far wrong you are: the more rights the Palestinians receive — more independence, more pride — the more we too profit. The more stingy we are, the more we lose...

"Nevertheless, the two of us are now committed to the same campaign: to bring about the full implementation of the Oslo agreement, in hopes that the new arrangements will prepare the ground for a true peace between Israel and the Palestinians. 'In hopes,' I say, because unlike you I do not rely on 'historical necessity' nor on Yitzhak Rabin and his government... Regarding Rabin and his government, you will agree with me that the burden of proof rests not on my shoulders but on yours..."

Since the writing of these lines you celebrated the peace and you became fat and prosperous. The repeated and varied violations of the agreements did not move you, not to speak of any change in our culture of war and occupation, the arrogant tone of those negotiating in our name and their attempts to demand more and more in exchange for less and less. And why should this move you? You got what you wanted — separation, security,

economic prosperity for the members of your class, validation from the international community and the ability to look at yourself in the mirror again with a feeling of satisfaction and self-righteousness — and for a dime. The orders of the day were orders of reconciliation with the settlers, and you endeavoured to explain to whatever Palestinian friends you still had that if they want peace they had better take into account the requirements of internal Israeli reconciliation. Otherwise they will receive nothing except another disaster on their people as happened in 1948, etc. You did not demand sincere negotiations with the Palestinians and went along with the salami system, and when we told you that this will not work and that a war will surely break out again, you answered: "If they want, they'll get, and if not that's their problem." Because for you a war of conquest is preferable to a civil war.

"After all the dancing and rounds of applause for the architects of the agreement, are you prepared, along with me, to take to the streets in order to make sure that the prime minister does not get cold feet again, but does everything he can to get the agreement implemented? As one who is not obligated by Arafat's signature, are you prepared to demand that the issue of the settlements be dealt with starting now since, perhaps unlike Arafat, you and I know that there is no possibility of advancement without immediately dealing with the settlements. Are you prepared, along with us, to demand more freedom and more rights for the residents of the West Bank, even if this isn't written in the agreement — out of concern for their human rights, or perhaps just because this too is a condition for advancement? Will you join us in demanding the release of the masses of political prisoners, or will you say, like Rabin, 'You didn't ask, we didn't promise, now it's too late.'

"I fear that again it will be just us — my friends and I — alone in this campaign, and that the entire job of making sure this agreement — which is far

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from satisfying to us – gets implemented, will fall on us as well.” And that’s the way it really was. In your eyes we were again dreamy leftists or worse, warmongers, enemies of peace. “You demand even more than Arafat;” “Let the government conduct the negotiations”; as well as “We have to consider the right-wing voters.” For all your listening to our dear brothers and sisters in the settlements of Ofra and Tapuah, you stopped hearing the voices coming from Gaza and Nablus, from Dura and Kalkiliya. And, indeed, why listen to them? In peace as in war you determine what is good for us and what the reasonable borders are in a future agreement. In all your colonial arrogance you determine as well the Palestinians’ text in the script of peace. Since 1993 you and your friends have been enjoying the fruits of peace, and the Palestinians await the fulfillment of your promises of withdrawal, of independence, of sovereignty, of freedom. They wait under an occupation, they wait under closure, and you celebrate and eat the fruits of peace. How long did you think that could last?

And lo and behold, to your surprise, they’re not reciting the lines you wrote for them but their own script, and it is spoiling your show. The truth is that the Palestinians, and not only the Left and the Islamic Movements, but also the official spokespeople, never hid for a moment their red lines and their conditions. But, as I’ve said, you didn’t see any need to listen because, after all, you are the exclusive director of the peace show.

You are angry today, you are boiling with rage: Why demonstrations all of a sudden? Why the sudden demands for sovereignty over Jerusalem? Why the demand to evacuate all the settlements? What is all this hate against the army, Barak, the Israeli peace camp? Who gave those Palestinians the right to depart from the script and recite a different text? What ingratitude, after all

you were willing to give them, after seven years of peace happenings funded by the European countries!

Once more you tell them “don’t come looking for me.” Don’t come looking for me because I’ve returned to the bosom of the consensus in order to defend my people and my homeland. The truth is that you haven’t returned to any consensus because you never left it. You have never stopped working for national reconciliation with the worst enemies of peace. And, by the way, as regards this reconciliation effort in which you became so prominent after Rabin’s assassination, the Right understood very quickly not only that you have no ideological backbone or morals, but to what degree you are a sucker. Like every extortionist in cheap detective films, the Right understand that cowards like you can be extorted endlessly. As much as you were ready to pay to avoid a civil war, the Right demanded more: from East Jerusalem you came down to Abu Dis, from Abu Dis to Hizma, from Hizma to Beitunia. Today you are ready to die for Psagot and Netzarim. Excuse me, not to die, to murder for brothers and sisters who settled in the heart of Gaza for the sole purpose to frustrate any possibility for peace.

The other day in a meeting in Jerusalem, one of your comrades from Meretz, from among the best and most honest of them, said: “I am confused”. In light of the lack of confusion from you and most of your friends, I wanted to compliment him on his confusion. But I remembered the pictures I saw that day on television, the same media that is hostile to human rights, to intellectual honesty and to journalistic ethics, and I refused to be lenient with him, to be understanding towards his confusion. What is there to be confused about? A conquering army is using tanks and helicopter gunships to disperse demonstrations. What is so hard to understand here?

Seven years of deception and violations of agreements, and the Palestinians rise up. What is so hard to grasp? Barak threatens to impose Jewish sovereignty on the Haram/Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and they refuse to accept it as a permanent solution. What is so hard to understand? There is no place for confusion. There is an occupation and there is a struggle against the occupation. There are demonstrators and there is an army that has received orders to shed their blood. And don’t come to me with the story of the rifles. Your glorious war record qualifies you to understand what even CNN reporters understand, that those rifles do not endanger either Israel or the soldiers if they don’t get too close. They don’t even endanger the occupation, since the

means of control that have been developed under the guise of the peace process permit Israel to fully control the Occupied Territories “without the Supreme Court and with B’tselem,” but also without a massive military presence. “Bloodletting” was part of the contingency plans that the army prepared in the event that the Palestinians declare independence unilaterally, long before Sharon’s provocation, and every child can see that the IDF was prepared in advance to spill blood. Your confusion, my dear friend, is artificial, because if it wasn’t for the shame of all that is being done in our name and according to the orders of the prime minister you support, you would not have any problem seeing who is the victim in need of support and who is worthy of condemnation.

As for you, my friend from Peace Now, you’re not even confused. You boil with anger at the Palestinians because they spoiled your celebrations and refuse to let you continue living the illusion that the occupation is concluding and that peace rules the land. Peace is a tango that takes two equal partners dancing in unity; it is not a dance of one who drags around his partner at will. And what do you say? “If that’s the way it is, they are not partners.” This time you’re right. In your dance of peace you have no partners, only enemies. For your peace is his occupation; for your success is his loss; for your reconciliation is a closing of the door on reconciliation with the Palestinians.

“We have signed a cease-fire agreement, and it is good that we signed. But peace is still far away, because peace demands honesty, because peace demands equality. You want to force them to lie, you want of them a peace of surrender, you are celebrating a peace of master and slave. Under such conditions there will perhaps be peace-and-quiet, but Peace, no. Not until you open your eyes and your heart. Not until we are ready for a peace of partnership and equality.”

This is what I wrote you seven years ago exactly. You preferred to block your ears and close your eyes. I am sorry, I really am, that only through bursts of gunfire at Psagot and the exploding of missiles near Netzarim were they opened once more. I hope that your heart and your mind will open quickly as well, before buses explode in our cities. The choice has not changed: either genuine peace without dealing and deception, a peace of mutual respect, or a descent to a religious war in which there will be only losers.

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Ken Livingstone and anti-semitism

On 4 March 2002 Ken Livingstone wrote a piece in the Guardian explaining where he stands on anti-semitism, what he thinks about the Israeli state, and why criticising the actions of that state is not anti-semitism. I wrote this letter in response. It wasn't published.

Is Ken Livingstone an anti-semite? His motley career includes four years as an upfront editor of Labour Herald, a "Labour left" weekly so dependent on the Workers' Revolutionary Party (WRP) that it collapsed when that organisation did, in 1985. David Blunkett, Margaret Hodge, and others such were regular Labour Herald contributors, but its technical editor was a WRP Central Committee member, Steven Miller.

The WRP itself was financially dependent on Arab governments (including Iraq). Livingstone spoke on WRP platforms; he benefited politically from a WRP press campaign denouncing his predecessor in Brent East as "the Zionist Freeson" — i.e. the Jew Freeson.

He backed a WRP campaign in the trade unions against a Jew being appointed chair of governors of the BBC.

On page 3 of one issue of the WRP daily paper Newline, 9 April 1983, Livingstone, responding to an interview question, said, yes, a recent BBC "Money Programme" investigation of WRP financial links to Gaddafi's Libya had been the work of "Zionists". Across on page 2, a lunatic editorial explained that the BBC was part of a world "Zionist connection" stretching from Ronald Reagan through Mrs Thatcher's cabinet all the way to the editors of a paper critical of the WRP, and inter alia of anti-semitism, Socialist Organiser (I was one of those editors).

It was "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" stuff, with "Zionist" substituted for "Jew". In the next Socialist Organiser I asked Livingstone, who could not, I said, agree with the Newline editorial, to dissociate from it. He never did — or from any of the other crazy "anti-Zionism" in Newline.

Ken Livingstone is surely not a moron-level anti-Jewish racist. I doubt that, day to day, he automatically dislikes people who are Jewish or of Jewish background.

But he is an anti-semite in that he subscribes to the dominant kitsch-left (originally Stalinist) account of 20th-century Europe and of the Middle East which demonises Zionists and Israel; denies the right of the Jews in Palestine and then in Israel to defend themselves, to aspire to self-determination (in fact, though it is less "politic" than it used to be to say so, their right to exist as a collective); habitually equates Zionism with Nazism; and condemns Jews, especially Jews who will not share this attitude to Israel, as suspect or downright "racists".

In practice this cannot but mean hostility to all Jews who, critically or chauvinistically, support Israel, that is, to most Jews alive. Necessary and proper criticism of Israel is here only an "occasion" to express this root and branch antagonism.

It is out of this background that Livingstone — surrounded by ex-Trotskyist advisers who vehemently share such politics — began abusing an Evening Standard reporter and then, when told he was a Jew, carried on verbally jabbing him in the solar plexus with jeers about being like a concentration camp guard.

PAGE 8 The News Line Saturday April 9, 1983

From 'Socialist
Organiser' to
Thatcher & Reagan

this Morning SATURDAY
April 9, 1983

The Zionist connection

A POWERFUL Zionist connection runs from the so-called left of the Labour Party right into the centre of Thatcher's government in Downing Street. There is no difficulty whatever in proving this.

Top of the list, we have the most recent appointment of Mr Stuart Young, a director of the 'Jewish Chronicle', as youngest-ever chairman of the BBC, having been a governor only since 1981. He is the brother of Mr David Young, another Thatcher appointee who is chairman of the Manpower Services Commission.

This is the key organisation which the Tories are transforming into a 'corporatist front', behind which they seek to mobilise jobless youth from 14 years upwards into a 'slave labour' body to break trade union wages, safety procedures and working conditions... Thatcher has rolled out these appointments with magisterial arrogance while the Labour Party and TUC chiefs have accepted them without a murmur of protest'. (News Line, March 28, 1983).

The Tories know they can rely totally upon Zionist imperialism to produce the most hated reactionaries, in order to transform the situation at a later date into a pro-fascist, anti-Semitic pogrom against all the Jews in general.

Zionism made it possible for a number of rich Jews to leave Nazi Germany with the agreement of the Fuhrer provided they agreed to become Zionists. The Tories know too they have a powerful anti-Semitic trump card up their sleeves, to replay once again as the most reactionary manifestation of racialism, which is anti-Semitism.

From the support and advance publicity which the 'Jewish Chronicle' gave the BBC's 'Money Programme' on March 29, the reactionary Zionist link was clear for all to see. But it also stretches through Downing Street channels right into the White House and President Reagan.

The latest Reagan military provocation against Libya early in March raises in its sharpest form the central political question. Do Trotskyists defend the Libyan regime of Gaddafi against US imperialism as a matter of principle, or do they

denounce it as 'the reactionary Islamic government of Libya' and seek a 'neutrality' between US imperialism and Gaddafi? This is the position of 'Socialist Organiser', claiming to speak for 'lefts' in the Labour Party.

The same organ supported the Zionist-sponsored 'Money Programme' on March 29. They wrote: 'We (Socialist Organiser) didn't wait for the BBC to tell us about the WRP's probable links with Libya. The fact that the BBC now says it doesn't make it any less true'. (April 7, 1983). (Our emphasis).

Here is, unqualified support for the work of Thatcher's appointee as chairman of the BBC, who is also a director of British Caledonian Airways and the British Overseas Trade Group for Israel. 'Socialist Organiser' has landed itself right bang in the middle of Thatcher's hand-picked Zionists as an outright supporter of their policies of witch-hunting the WRP and the News Line for our principled stand against imperialism and in support of the Libyan masses under their leader Muammar Gaddafi.

The question of the hour, we repeat, is the pro-Zionist policies of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations and their hatred of the Palestinians and Libyans alike.

In the background of the 'Socialist Organiser' one can detect a powerful current of anti-Arab racism — also shared by Reagan and Thatcher. This is the substance of their support for the 'Money Programme' and their lying affirmation that Gaddafi finances the WRP with a '£1.5 million subsidy', claimed by the faceless person on the BBC 2 programme.

This is a lie from start to finish. Because the WRP unhesitatingly supports the Libyan and Palestinian people and its leadership against the nuclear war plans of Reagan, Thatcher and the Zionists in their campaign to destroy all national liberation movements in the Middle East. 'Socialist Organiser' has joined the class enemy.

The Zionist connection between these so-called lefts in the Labour Party right through to Thatcher and Reagan's White House is there for all to see in its unimpeachable nakedness.

The WRP editorial of 1983. On the facing page Livingstone told readers that the exposé of the WRP's funding by Arab dictators must be the work of "Zionists".

What is "left anti-semitism"?

What is "left-wing anti-semitism"? Where is it manifested? What is to be done about it?

There are three difficulties, three confusions and obfuscations, that stand in the way of rational discussion of what we mean by "left-wing anti-semitism".

The first is that left-wing anti-semitism knows itself by another and more self-righteous name, "anti-Zionism". Often, your left-wing anti-semite sincerely believes that he or she is only an anti-Zionist, only a just if severe critic of Israel.

The second is that talk of left-wing anti-semitism to a left-wing anti-semite normally evokes indignant, sincere, and just denial - of something else! "No, I'm not a racist! How dare you call me a racist?"

No, indeed, apart from a nut here and there, left-wing anti-semites are not racist. But there was anti-semitism before there was 20th-century anti-Jewish racism. And there is still anti-semitism of different sorts, long after disgust with Hitler-style racism, and overt racism of any sort, became part of the mental and emotional furniture of all half-way decent people, and perhaps especially of left-wing people.

Left-wingers are people who by instinct and conviction side with the oppressed, the outcasts, those deprived of human rights, the working class, the labour movement. We naturally side against the police, the military, and the powerful capitalist states, including our "own". We are socially tolerant; in contrast to the "hang 'em, flog 'em, build more jails" types, we look to changing social conditions rather than to punishment to deal with crime — we are people who want to be Marxists and socialists, and consistent democrats. Confused some such people may be, racists they are not. We are not saying that left-wing anti-semites are racists.

The third source of confusion and obfuscation is the objection: "You say I'm an anti-semite because I denounce Israel. I'm not anti-Jewish when I denounce Israel, but anti-Zionist". And sometimes, at this point, you get the addition: "By the way, I am myself Jewish".

The objector continues: Israel deserves criticism. Even the harshest criticism of Sharon's policies in the West Bank and Gaza, and of Israel's long-term treatment of the Palestinians, is pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist, not anti-semitic. To equate criticism of Israel with anti-semitism is just crude and hysterical Zionist apologetics.

No, by "left-wing anti-semitism" we emphatically do not mean political, military, or social criticism of Israel and of the policy of Israeli governments. Certainly, not all left-wing critics of Israel or Zionism are anti-semites, even though these days all anti-semites, including the right-wing, old-fashioned, and racist anti-semites, are paid-up "anti-Zionists".

Israel frequently deserves criticism. Israel's

policy in the Occupied Territories and its general treatment of the Palestinians deserve outright condemnation. The oppressed Palestinians need to be politically defended against Israeli governments and the Israeli military. The only halfway equitable solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, a viable, independent Palestinian state in contiguous territory, side by side with Israel, needs to be argued for and upheld against Israeli power.

Solidarity condemns Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. We defend the Palestinians and champion an independent Palestinian state side by side with Israel.

The difference here between left-wing anti-semites and honest critics of Israel — a category which includes a very large number of Israeli Jews as well as Israeli Arabs — is a straightforward one of politics, of policy.

The left-wing anti-semites do not only criticise Israel. They condemn it outright and deny its right to exist. They use legitimate criticisms, and utilise our natural sympathy with the Palestinians, not to seek redress, not as arguments against an Israeli government, an Israeli policy, or anything specifically wrong in Israel, but as arguments against the right of Israel to exist at all. Any Israel. Any Jewish state in the area. Any Israel, with any policy, even one in which all the specific causes for justly criticising present-day Israel and for supporting the Palestinians against it have been entirely eliminated.

The root problem, say the left-wing anti-semites, is that Israel exists. The root "crime of Zionism" is that it advocated and brought into existence "the Zionist state of Israel".

Bitterly, and often justly, criticising specific Israeli policies, actions, and governments, seemingly championing the Palestinians, your left-wing anti-semites seek no specific redress in Israel or from Israel, demanding only that Israel should cease to exist or be put out of existence.

They often oppose measures to alleviate the condition of the Palestinians short of the destruction of Israel. Thus the petitions and chants on demonstrations: "Two states solution, no solution!"

A neat illustration of this was provided three years ago when, at a meeting of the council of the SWP-dominated Socialist Alliance, a supporter of this newspaper proposed the slogan "Israel out of the Occupied Territories". It was voted down, and much vaguer ones, "Free Palestine", "Victory to the intifada", voted in.

Why? "Free Palestine" can be understood in different ways, depending on your definition of "Palestine". Therefore it can accommodate those who, without having studied the complexities or the history of the Jewish-Arab conflict, instinctively side with the oppressed and outmatched Palestinians, and for whom "Free

Palestine” means simply that Israel should get out of the Occupied Territories. And it can also accommodate those, like the proponents of the slogan, the political Islamists of the Muslim Association of Britain/ Muslim Brotherhood and others, who define “Palestine” as pre-Israel, pre-1948 Palestine, and by “Free Palestine” mean the destruction and abolition of Israel, and the elimination in one way or another of the Jewish population of Israel, or most of them.

The political differences spelled out here are easily understood. But why is the drive and the commitment to destroy Israel anti-semitism, and not just anti-Zionism?

Because the attitude to the Jewish nation in Israel is unique, different from the left’s attitude to all other nations; and because of the ramifications for attitudes to Jews outside Israel. Apart from a few religious Jews who think the establishment of Israel was a revolt against God, and some Jews who share the views of the leftists whom we are discussing here, those Jews outside Israel instinctively identify with and support Israel, however critically. For the left-wing anti-semitic they are therefore “Zionists”, and proper and natural targets of the drive to “smash Zionism”.

The attitude of the “anti-Zionist” left to Israel brings with it a comprehensive hostility to most Jews everywhere - those who identify with Israel and who defend its right to exist. They are not just people with mistaken ideas. They are “Zionists”.

In colleges, for example, where the anti-Zionist left exists side by side with Jewish students, this attitude often means a special antagonism to the “Zionist” Jews. They are identified with Israel. They, especially, are pressured either to denounce Israel, to agree that it is “racist” and “imperialist” and that its existence is a crime against the Arabs — or else be held directly and personally responsible for everything Israel does, has done, or is said to have done.

In such places, where the left “interfaces” with Jews, the logic of the unique attitude to Israel takes on a nasty persecuting quality. In the past, in the mid 1980s for example, that has taken the form of attempting to ban Jewish student societies. Non-Jews who defend Israel’s right to exist are not classified in the same category.

But is the attitude of the “absolute anti-Zionists” to Israel really unique? There are seeming similarities with left attitudes to one or two other states — Protestant Northern Ireland, apartheid South Africa, or pre-1980 white-ruled Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) — but the attitude to Israel is unique, because the reality of Israel cannot properly be identified with Northern Ireland, apartheid South Africa, or white Rhodesia.

In apartheid South Africa and white Rhodesia a minority lorded it over the big majority of the population, exploiting them. Israel is a predominantly Jewish state consisting of all classes. The Jewish nation does not subsist, and never has subsisted, on the exploitation of Arab

labour, or depended in any essential way on such exploitation.

The general left hostility to the Northern Ireland Protestants — who are not exploiters of Catholic labour, and who are the compact majority, if not of the Six Counties, then of the north-east half of the Six Counties — is the closest to the attitude to Israel.

But it is not widely believed on the left that the Northern Ireland Protestant-Unionists simply have no right to be there. The right of the Jews to “be there” is denied in those sections of the left that we are discussing. The organisation of Jewish migration to Palestine — that was the root “crime” of Zionism, of which the “crime” of establishing Israel was only a further development. The “solution” is not only to undo and abolish Israel, but to reverse Jewish “migration” — which now includes people born there, to parents born there — and to roll the film of Middle-Eastern history backwards.

The prerequisite for left-wing anti-semitism is the catastrophic decline in the culture of the left over the last decades, a decline which allows people who want to be socialists to chant “Sharon is Hitler, Israel is Nazi” and similar nonsense without checking on the words. The specific framework within which what we have been describing exists, and without which it probably couldn’t exist in these “left-wing” forms, is the poisonous and systematic misrepresentation and falsification of the history of the Jewish-Arab conflict and of the Jewish people in the 20th century. We can only touch on that here.

In real history, Jews fled to Palestine, where a small Zionist colony and a small pre-Zionist Jewish community already existed, from persecution in Europe in the 1920s, 30s and 40s. In the 1930s and 40s they fled for their lives from Nazism, which killed two out of every three Jews alive in Europe in 1939, in a world in which no non-persecuting state would let them, or enough of them, in.

They fled to the existing Jewish national minority in Palestine (a long-established minority which, though small, was for example the majority in Jerusalem in 1900).

While Hitler was organising mass slaughter, Britain shut out Jews from Palestine, interned those who tried to enter. Overloaded, unseaworthy boats carrying illegal cargoes of Jews sank in the Mediterranean trying to get to Palestine (for example, the Struma, in which over 700 people died).

Israel was set up by those Jews on licence from the UN, which stipulated two states in Palestine, one Jewish and one Arab. When the state of Israel was declared in May 1948, the surrounded Arab states invaded. States like Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt were then British-dominated, and some of the armies were staffed by British officers.

The Israelis defended themselves and won. In the war three quarters of a million Palestinian Arabs were driven out or fled; in the same period and afterwards, about 600,000 Jews were

expelled from or fled Arab countries.

In the Arab invasion of 1948, the Arab-Palestinian state was eliminated. Most of its territory went to Jordan, and fell under Israeli control in the war of 1967. That was a tremendous tragedy that will only be redressed when an independent Palestinian state takes its place alongside Israel.

This complex and tragic history is presented by the “absolute anti-Zionist” left as a conspiracy of Zionism, conceived of as a demonic force outside history. It is not rare to find “left anti-Zionists” arguing that this Jewish-Zionist conspiracy was so all-powerful that it was able even to manipulate Adolf Hitler and the Holocaust in which six million Jews died (see the play by the veteran Trotskyist Jim Allen, *Perdition*, of which Ken Loach planned a performance at a London theatre in 1987).

The core idea, the root of modern left-wing anti-semitism, is that Israel, in one way or another, is an illegitimate state; and that therefore, in one way or another, it should be done away with. If its citizens will not be the first in history to voluntarily dismantle their nation-state and make themselves a minority in a state run by those whom they have had to fight for national existence; if they will not agree to voluntarily dismantle Israel and create a “secular democratic Arab state”, in which Israeli Jews can have religious but not national rights - then they must be overwhelmed and compelled to submit or flee by the Arab states, now or when they are strong enough.

Usually beginning with the benign-seeming proposal to sink Israel into a broader Arab-majority entity in which “everyone could live in peace”, the chain of logic rooted in the idea that Israel should not have come into existence, that it is an illegitimate state, leads directly — since Israel will not agree to abolish itself — to support for compulsion, conquest, and all that goes with it. Israel must be conquered.

Even the work of a writer like Hal Draper can feed into this poisoned stream. While Draper made valid and just criticisms of Israel, he accepted that it had a right to exist and a right to defend itself. He denounced those who wanted to destroy it. But he made his criticisms in the tone and manner of a prophet denouncing sin and iniquity. He too thought that Israel was an illegitimate state, that it should never have come into existence and should go out of existence as soon as possible.

By agreement, and only by agreement, he

believed; but the subtleties got lost. There is nothing to stop someone swayed by Draper’s denunciations of Israel, and accepting his idea that Israel is an illegitimate state, then impatiently insisting: if not by agreement, then by conquest.

And so an increasingly-disoriented SWP-UK could look to a Saddam Hussein to “free Palestine”, that is, conquer Israel.

The point here is that states and nations are the products of history. There is no such thing as an illegitimate nation or a “bad people” which does not deserve the rights conceded to other peoples.

The German socialist leader August Bebel, confronted by raucous denunciation of “the Jews” ludicrously depicting them as the epitome and embodiment of capitalism said of anti-semitism that it was “the socialism of the fools”.

The anti-semitic left today, which depicts Israel as the hyper-imperialist power — either controlling US policy, or acting as its chief instrument, the story varies — is in the grip of an “anti-imperialism of the fools”. And that in practice leads to a comprehensive hostility to Jews not far from what Bebel called the socialism of fools.

One of the great tragedies of today is that many young people, whose initial instincts to oppose Bush and Blair in Iraq and to support the Palestinians are healthy, are being poisoned with “left-wing” anti-semitism through the “anti-war movement”.

“Left-wing anti-semitism” is, in short, a comprehensive hostility to most Jews alive, branding them as “Zionists” and seeing that description as akin to “racist” or “imperialist”. It excepts only those Jews who agree that Israel is racist imperialism in its most concentrated essence, and oppose its continued existence.

The general antidote to this anti-imperialism of fools is the propagation of rational democratic and socialist politics. Such politics focus on a political solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. They measure and criticise Israel — and the Arab states — according to their stand in relation to that just solution — the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

There is an immediate “antidote” to left-wing anti-semitism too, and it is a very important task for Marxist socialists like those who publish *Solidarity*: relentless exposure and criticism of their politics and antics — without fear of isolation, ridicule, or the venomous hostility of the vocal and self-righteous left-wing anti-semites.