

# Internal bulletin 135

Material for conference, June 22-23 1985.

## Amendments

On International Report and Organisation Report,  
from Casey

## Document

Women's report, from Leicester

## Discussion pieces

Labour Party resolution from meeting May 11-12. (This  
is not a resolution for conference, but indicates  
briefly something of the general line being proposed).

## PALESTINE:

Some thoughts on the question of Palestine, by Scott

The national question in Israel/Palestine, by Ellis

Why not a 'democratic secular Palestine'?, by Kinnell



# AMENDMENTS

from Casey

## International

(see IB 133).

Last page, sub-heading 'Tasks'. Add a new point 4:

"We should also seek to develop links with emigre groups, such as the Eastern European ones, and provide active support where possible".

## Organisation

(IB 133, page 3, section 3)

Delete "On the whole..." to "... our organisational work" (paragraph one). Delete: "We helped to get a coordination of the miners' support committees..." to "... draw them towards us" (para. 6, 7, 8).

Add at end of section.

"We were involved in the Mineworkers' Defence Committee, a belated and strikingly unsuccessful attempt to introduce a degree of coordination into the work of local miners' support groups. That a strike of the length and importance of the miners' strike could have taken place in the absence of any national coordination of the work of the local support groups is an indictment not only of the NUM, but also of the 'revolutionary' left, including SO.

"And whilst the voices of the militants may have come through more in our paper than in any other publication, that was certainly no substitute for us having a voice of our own, something that was singularly lacking for the bulk of the strike. Instead of serious analysis of the NUM strategy (i.e. the lack of any such strategy) and discussion of the necessary alternatives, the paper often had the character of being little more (if at all) than a cheer-leader for Scargill.

"The same shortcoming is in evidence in the SO pamphlet on the miners strike as well ('Scargill consistently did what was necessary in the situation'), and even more so in SO's lack of criticism of Scargill's role since the end of the strike: his failure to <sup>help</sup> build an organised campaign in support of victimised miners, his attempts to lead the NUM into the confederation of Stalinist state-run 'trade unions', his failure to help build a rank and file movement against conservative area leaderships, his support for a set of rule changes which would strengthen the hand of the NUM bureaucracy. With the exception of the last point, such actions have not been seriously challenged by SO.

"We should begin to campaign properly in support of victimised miners. This might involve helping to build the Notional Organisation of Miners in Prison and Supporters. It would certainly involve active support for the National Rank and File Miners' Movement, the lack of reference to which in the pages of SO to date has been another serious inadequacy. We should also take the initiative to stimulate a campaign in opposition to Scargill's attempts to take the NUM into a Stalinist federation of miners' 'trade unions'.

"On this basis we should discuss with NUM contacts and contacts in the former miners' support groups about their political activity after the strike and try to draw them towards us."



## WOMENS DOCUMENT

### INTRODUCTION

Despite the decline in the womens movement, we are the only organisation on the Left to have kept a socialist womens paper going. We have argued consistently for the demands of the womens movement to be made relevant to working class women through the slogan for that building of a mass working class based womens movement. We are one of the few organisations that does not make the mistake of saying that we must win the battle for socialism first and then womens liberation will follow. The struggle for womens liberation is an integral part of that battle.

When Womens Fightback first got off the ground, we touched a nerve in the womens movement drawing 500 women to a conference where only about 100 were expected, around the demands of stopping the Tory attacks on women and of fighting sexism within the labour movement. We managed to build two large conferences and a womens right to work march, and WF was seen as a broad womens paper which attracted women in the LP, TU's and single issue campaigns.

Since that time WF's influence has declined. It is seen by practically everybody as an SO womens paper. We have no contact with TU womens sections and the organising in the LP sections has been taken over, in some areas, by WAC. They have organised around the constitutional issues in the LP, calling for better representation for women, setting up Equal Opportunity Committees, etc., but have done little to turn womens sections out to working class women. The single issue campaigns ~~like~~ ~~these~~, eg. NAC, are seen only on the occasions when a threat to our rights arises -- responding defensively. It is not just WF that has declined, but the womens movement in general.

### OUR WORK DURING THE MINERS STRIKE

Women Against Pit Closures, the womens action groups and the support groups built during the miners strike, put our ideas on the agenda for the first time -- the organisation of working class women around the demands of the womens movement; against nuclear arms, against sexism, the right to define our own sexuality, the right to control our own fertility, etc. all became relevant to thousands of working class women ~~who~~ who have built an organisation of their own and become politicised, many for the first time in their lives.

The womens movement was slow to respond to this because of their old tradition of rejecting 'male' organisations and methods. Spare Rib wrote only two articles on WAPC in the whole twelve months. The main support and linking-up came from women already active in the labour movement, particularly womens sections, and from women on the revolutionary left.

WF, despite our small size, did reasonably well. We made a name for ourselves in a few areas, particularly Notts., S. Yorks., and N. Staffs. In Notts we produced a WF strike bulletin for about 3 months of the strike which was very well received in about 10 miners welfares and kitchens. We took part in the occupation of the Welbeck village hall. In Staffs we held a WF dayschool which drew about 100 women, mostly miners wives from 8 different pits. Three of them joined WF. Another dayschool in Ollerton drew fewer women, about 25, but had a better prospect of keeping links after the strike was over. The women there discussed setting a WF branch up in Ollerton and organising an LP womens section.

We have also made small gains in other areas since the start of the miners strike. Two new branches have been set up in Peckham and Glasgow, both of which have the possibility of drawing new non-aligned women towards us. Basingstoke LP womens section have affiliated to us and seem likely to grow.



WF'S PRESENT STATE

WF does have the potential to grow as a labour movement womens organisation. It is the only working class womens paper around and it is incredibly easy to sell. However, that is not what we are at the moment. Organisationally and financially WF is in a mess. We lost many opportunities over the last year and a half because of it. The work was done with little national co-ordination and without any policy decisions. When we called for a national conference of women and supporters involved in the strike, the initiative was taken from us because of a shortage of time, money and people to do the work.

WF is run by a handful of women, mostly in SO. A large percentage of SO women are not members and don't sell the paper. As a result it makes a loss. We produce 2,500 copies a month at a cost of about £200. We only get about £40-50 a month in standing orders and most branches don't send in paper money. So everytime we are going to the printers we are scratching around for arrears and donations to pay the bill.

To produce the paper we are completely dependent on SO for money and resources. We steal postage, articles and share, particularly during the miners strike, the same platform. When SO suffers from in-fighting and splits, WF suffers with it. So it is little wonder that it is seen as an SO womens paper. The one area before the strike where we had a WF branch, it was run as an SO womens caucus because there wasn't time or back up organisation to do anything else with it. The comrades there said they felt as if they were wearing two hats. Unless we co-ordinate our work and build WF nationally, the same fate will befall the new branches and our new contacts will be lost.

PROPOSALS

Obviously WF, in its present state, is dependent on SO and, until we have built it, it will be mostly SO women doing the work. But we should not lose sight of our aim to build a broader working class based womens organisation into which SO women can intervene with our politics. That is not the situation at the moment and we should recognise that fact.

What we need to do therefore is to pull in our aims until we have built a base and our own resources. We should:-

- 1/ concentrate on three or four activities a year which we can organise in properly and make ourselves known to the activists around the labour movement; eg, LP womens conference, TU womens conference, perhaps a WF dayschool/conference and whatever WAPC organises;
- 2/ direct our work to the womens sections rather than concentrating on building WF branches. Where branches do exist and where we have contact with non-aligned women who want to set them up, they should continue. But this should not be the main focus of our work;
- 3/ direct the paper to the women already active in the labour movement, including in it more theoretical and political articles. It should be produced every two months with a duplicated newsheet in between, until our finances are in better order and we have a proper network for selling it;
- 4/ have a WF organiser in every SO branch who:-
  - a) co-ordinates the work in the womens section or WF branch,
  - b) makes sure that all our women comrades are members and gets new members signed up,
  - c) makes sure that the paper is sold and sends the money in,



- d) makes sure that articles are written for the paper, and
- e) organises, with WF nationally, delegations ~~to~~ and motions to conferences.

This way we can start to build a profile and reputation which will attract other women to it. We need to build a base before we can start to talk about building a broad working class based womens organisation.

## LP resolution

1. The defeat of the miners' strike has accelerated the LP's shift to the right and strengthened the Kinnock/Hattersley leadership.

Although we've been right to argue for a contest for the leadership, realistically we'll now have to shift to a focus of placing demands on the existing leadership.

2. A lot of the soft left has moved over to Kinnock. We should combine:

- a) trying to consolidate and recruit the hard left who resist this drift;

- b) relating positively to the widespread focus now on the next general election.

We demand that Kinnock and Hattersley lead a campaign for a general election and against the Tories.

Simultaneously, we argue for immediate industrial struggle now; for support for an amnesty for sacked and jailed miners (e.g. for sacked miners to appear on official Labour platforms); against incomes policy, against coalitions, for our politics, etc. But we do not make these demands conditions or inhibitions about our campaign for a Labour victory against the Tories.

For ourselves, we should prepare the organisation of a 'Start the General Election Campaign Now' campaign, and further discuss the mechanics of organising such a campaign with other groupings on the Left.



## SOME THOUGHTS ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

I know very little about Palestine or the Middle East. The ideas put forward in this document, therefore, are not the result of some great study of the subject, but have been provoked by reading some of the ideas put forward in recent documents, in particular the document by comrade Kinnell in IB 134.

Israel is an expansionist, sub imperialist state. There seems to me no question of it giving up territory for the creation of a separate Palestinian State. It's trajectory is to gain control over more territory not give it up. At the same time opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian State from Israeli Jews would be likely, because they see themselves as already surrounded by hostile forces, and a Palestinian State as merely a base for PLO operations against them.

As comrade Kinnell points out Israel is one of the world's leading military powers. There is no likelihood of Israel being defeated militarily in the foreseeable future. If it was defeated as a result of military action by the surrounding Arab capitalist states, some of whom themselves have sub imperialist ambitions, the resultant state would be reactionary. A large Jewish population would be trapped within its borders, who would be easy scapegoats for the new bourgeois Arab leaders of the State. This would inevitably lead to oppression of that Jewish population.

Of course if a socialist revolution took place in the Middle East and the Israeli state was defeated as part of a revolutionary war linking up with the Palestinians fight for self determination this need not be the case. A settlement could be arrived at guaranteeing the rights of both Jews and Palestinians, whether within one state or in separate states. We cannot base ourselves, however, on saying nothing can be done until the creation of a Socialist United States of the Middle East.

If Israel is unlikely to agree to a separate state for the Palestinians, and if it cannot be forced to concede militarily, what then is to be done. It seems to me that some lessons could be learned from Northern Ireland. There the Civil Rights campaign of the 1960's was able to win fairly wide support, even winning to it some sections of the Protestants. A similar campaign by Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza for basic democratic rights, rights which the apologists for the Israeli state say exist, could win over some Israeli Jews. Certainly it is more likely than trying to win them over by blowing them up. Obviously, one of the basic democratic rights that would be advanced would be the right of Palestinian refugees to move to the West Bank and Gaza. If the Palestinians were to adopt such a strategy rather than their military strategy it would



undermine the understandable fears amongst Israeli Jews that are whipped up by the Israeli State. It would provide the basis for linking up the Palestinians with, initially, radical Jews and the development of joint action on class issues. No doubt it could be argued that this amounts to saying to the Palestinians lie down and accept the existence of the Israeli State. In a sense it is. But then the fact is that the Israeli State does exist, and it is a fact that the military strategy will not work. So another way has to be found. A sensible person after finding that they keep banging their head against a brick wall moves along the wall in search of a doorway.

We cannot insist that the Palestinians accept such a strategy any more than they accept a two state, or any other strategy. They are an oppressed nation, and as such we support their struggle unconditionally. But such support cannot be uncritical. Our objective after all is socialism not just national liberation. As Lenin put it, "The Communist International has the duty to support the revolutionary movement in the colonies only for the purpose of gathering the components of the future proletarian parties - communist in fact and not just in name - in all the backward countries and training them to be conscious of their special tasks, the special tasks that is to say, of fighting against the bourgeois - democratic tendencies within their own nation."

As we pointed out during the Falklands war our main concern is to fight for the maximum unity of the working class. That unity cannot be achieved if working class Jews are slaughtering working class Palestinians and vice versa. We have a duty to fight against the oppression of the Palestinians we have no duty to see the answer to that oppression as the creation of a separate Palestinian State.

Indeed, ultimately the problems of working class Arabs and Jews cannot be resolved within the restricted confines of the existing nation states, but only by a Socialist United States of the Middle East. That is our aim, and any positions we adopt for the conjunctural situation should be geared to achieving that end rather than seeing democratic national solutions as ends in themselves.

As Kinnell points out a Palestinian State on the West Bank and Gaza would not be even a thoroughly democratic solution, and it would probably make the new state an economic Bantustan. A thoroughly democratic solution requires a democratic secular state within which the rights of both Jews and Palestinians are guaranteed. It seems to me to make little difference whether this democratic secular state is a democratic secular state of Palestine, or a democratic secular state of Israel as long as it really is democratic and secular. So why not get on with the business



of fighting for the existing state to be truly democratic and secular via some form of federal solution. After all as Kinnell points out , "... the central element of any struggle for a democratic solution has to be the mobilisation of the Palestinians under Israeli rule. (They number after all, nearly half the total Palestinian nation, and are by far the most concentrated and also the most proletarianised part of that nation.)"

Conclusions. I agree with Kinnell that a democratic secular state of Palestine, implying in reality a military defeat for the Israeli State, is unlikely. I also think it is very unlikely that the Israeli State will agree to a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza. Nor are Israeli Jews likely to find that acceptable as long as the PLO's military campaign continues. The only solution it seems to me, therefore, is to renounce the military campaign, mobilise the Palestinian masses in the occupied areas around a campaign for democratic rights, and a federal Israel. This would undermine the fears of Israeli Jews that the Palestinians were out to smash their state in order to drive them into the sea. In so doing it would open up the possibility of joint action to transform Israel into a truly democratic and secular state, and for united working class action on class issues, and consequently lay the basis for a Jewish - Palestinian socialist party.

#### SUMMARY

- 1) West Bank and Gaza to become part of a federal democratic secular state of Israel.
- 2) Campaign for this state to be truly democratic and secular providing the basis for uniting Palestinians and Jews.
- 3) For a Socialist United States of the Middle East.

Scott

May 1985



## THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE

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Ellis

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### What is the question?

The national 'question' in general is this: what do socialists advocate when particular nations feel themselves to be oppressed by others? The debate in the socialist movement to find an answer is a very old one. This is not the place to go into it - though it might be useful if somebody did at some point.

The basic Marxist answer has been: all nations have a right to self-determination - i.e. to establish their own nation-state, through the ending of colonial rule, or by secession as appropriate.

At one level, this principle is no more than the application of fairly elementary democratic principles: people have the right not to have other people bossing them around. Further, if you force people to do things, or not to do things, they quite often feel begrudging, and are better left to make up their own minds.

Hence, whilst we, as socialists, don't really approve of nations, we can see that forcing people to abandon national identities is likely to backfire. (Consider our attitude to religion).

But there is a bit more to it, too. Lenin specifically posed the national question in terms of the historical development of capitalist society. National rights were, at rock bottom, the right to form a national state - multinational states, in Lenin's view, being rather exceptional. Or, put crudely, only a 'nation' can have the right to form a state - because only nations can form states. 'Self-determination for people who like soul music' is not a nonsensical slogan (people have every right to listen to soul music if they want, and it would be undemocratic to confiscate all soul records), but they could not really form a state. So 'self determination for nation X' has a slightly different implication: nation X has the right to form its own state.

The specific problem in the Middle East is that two nations lay claim to the same bit of land. A nation state for one is incompatible with a nation state for the other.

From this statement of the problem, it should be clear that I do not accept that our definition of the two peoples is, as many have said, irrelevant. A non-nation cannot (and it is not just a semantic point) set up a nation state.

Left to itself for long enough, the problem could go away. Israel is by no means the only nation to have been established through colonising someone's territory and uprooting the original inhabitants. The USA, Argentina, Australia - to name only three - were formed in the same way. Fortunately for our conference agenda, the original inhabitants there have proved less resilient than the Palestinians - partly, it should be added, because they were subjected to systematic genocide on a vastly greater scale.

For the problem to 'go away' would presuppose terrible slaughter of either the Jews or (more likely) the Palestinians, and a world in which socialism was a very, very long way off. We have to have a



programme that addresses the situation now.

### The 'two states' solution

Most people who think anything at all about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict think that the solution is to set up a Palestinian Arab state next to Israel. (The main exceptions are: (a) most Israelis, who don't want any kind of Palestinian state; (b) many Palestinians, who want a 'secular democratic state' in all of original Palestine; and (c) many socialists and others who support the Palestinians).

There is a big problem with the 'two state' solution, which is that there are a lot of different versions of it. Comrade Carolan argues strenuously that we should not, for the purposes of our debate, worry about details, but concentrate on the basic principles. But it is precisely the details that are important to determine exactly what solutions we are proposing. Just saying 'two states' could mean virtually anything.

How, in the actual situation, might two states - more precisely, a Palestinian state next to the present Israeli state - come into being?

1. The USA decides to cut its losses and force Israel to grant independence to the West Bank and Gaza (which it has the power to do, just by withholding either cash or guns or both). That might happen. But at present, though the US advocates Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, it does not advocate a Palestinian state - it advocates a Palestinian satellite of Jordan (i.e. without even formal independence). With the growing involvement of Jordan in the 'peace process', this is likely to continue to be the US policy, more or less.

For the US to go for an independent Palestinian state would presuppose a big shift in US policy. Of course it might shift its policy. But that is unlikely, short of considerable upheavals in internal US politics (i.e. that they get rid of Reagan and elect Jesse Jackson instead).

Suppose for a moment that the US did change tack. Is it even remotely conceivable that it would opt for a Palestinian state that was advantageous to the class struggle? On the contrary, it would do its utmost to get a Palestinian state that was linked into its general 'strategic interests' - i.e. no trouble to anybody (except its own workers).

2. The Arab states go to war to force Israel to grant a West Bank/Gaza state.

a) Lebanon. Obviously in not much of a state to go to war with Israel.

b) Jordan. Wants a deal. Doesn't want to go to war, and would last about 30 seconds if it did.

c) Egypt. Signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979. War would be profoundly unpopular at home. Would last a bit longer than Jordan, but not much chance of winning.

d) Saudi Arabia. Hasn't got the military power. Any Palestinian state it tried to create would obviously be mortgaged up to the eyeballs anyway.

e) Syria. Verbally very 'anti-Zionist', but in reality wants a deal, and too mixed up in Lebanon.

f) All of them together? Pigs might fly.



### 3. The Israelis have a change of heart.

At present, none of the major Israeli parties (presently in a National Government together) is in favour of a Palestinian state. The most vehement opponents of any conciliation with the Palestinians are the right-wing Likud group (previously Begin, now Shamir).

Likud's social base is largely amongst 'Oriental' Jews - ie. the most downtrodden, poorest, the working class section of Israeli-Jewish society. Their opposition to the Palestinians has many foundations: but a big part of it is that they compete with the Arabs (more and more) for jobs.

So: for Israel to grant the Palestinians the right to a state presupposes a massive political realignment amongst Israeli Jews.

Most of all its presupposes that there is some easing, at least, of the tension between the Palestinians and the Oriental Jews. In fact, what it presupposes is some development of class identity that crosses that national divide.

It is from that starting point, and that alone, that the working-out of a democratic working-class programme has to be looked at. That is, the fundamental issue is this: a democratic policy for the national question has to, must, be part of an overall policy that seeks to make the Jewish and Arab working classes conscious of their own identity.

In my view, it is inconceivable that such unity could be achieved without a vigorous attempt by Palestinians to convince the Jews that their national rights would be respected, that there is no intention to conquer them, or to impose an 'Arab' state on them.

But that is only the beginning - not the end, as Carolan suggests - of wisdom.

### Different kinds of 'two states'

As I said, lots of people are in favour of 'two states'. Without the working class taking the national question on board, 'two states' need not be a democratic solution at all.

A feeble Palestinian mini-state, without any control over for example its own security, or its water supplies, dependent on Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia et al, would not be much of a state. But Israel will not accept any state 'with teeth'.

There are, however, advocates of two states within Israel. The Communist Party (Rakah) - a mainly Arab party - following the Moscow line, advocates two states. For them, of course, it is a policy to be adopted by 'progressive forces', not by the working class.

Their conception is both popular-frontist and 'stage-ist'. Two states are seen as a necessary first step: i.e. first unite with the bourgeoisie to get two states, fight them some time in the future.

Many anti-Zionist socialists advocate a kind of two-state policy. Matzpen, the Israeli Socialist Organisation - nowadays a generic term for a multitude of different groups with a wide variety of positions - from the early '60s advocated a form of two-state policy. (It should be born in mind that Matzpen originally formulated their position before Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza in June 1967. Some aspects of their position were shaped by this different situation).

A joint statement by Matzpen and an (extinct, as far as I know)



organisation called the Palestinian Democratic Front (no relation to the DFLP) put it like this:

"The only viable solution is:

1. To abolish completely all segregationist measures of the Zionists against the Palestinians (this includes their implementation of their right to repatriation) and turning Israel into a normal state of its own population i.e. rather than a state for all Jews and no-one else/.
2. Active participation of the non-Zionist Israel in the anti-imperialist struggle of the Arab people. [This follows criticism of the Arab states earlier in the statement.]
3. Enabling the Palestinians to decide themselves about their political fate". (23 June 1967).

What is to become of the Jewish state?

There are a number of major political problems with a two-state policy. Some I have dealt with. But the basic one is this: the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the fact of the uprooting of Arabs since 1947-8, are supplemented by (a) discrimination against the Arabs in Israel; (b) the denial of the right to return - to roughly the area they, or their parents/grandparents lived - to the Palestinians now living in exile.

A policy that does not address these questions is not a democratic policy. And it is precisely because it does seem to address these questions that the secular democratic state idea is so appealing to many on the left.

The root cause both of discrimination and exclusion of the refugees/exiles is the same: that Israel is a state intended to 'gather in' the Jews. Any Jew, anywhere, has the right to immigrate and be an Israeli citizen (though there are political battles, and legal changes, as to who is a Jew). The expelled Arabs do not. This is the 'Law of Return'.

Because Israel is a Zionist state, it necessarily denies equal rights to the Arabs. No consistently democratic policy can avoid challenging the Zionist nature of the state.

To be precise: a democratic policy has to include - abolishing the Law of Return; equal rights in housing, land-ownership, education, etc; the right of the refugees/exiles to return. There are other democratic demands too. Abolition of various security laws; demilitarisation of the state; secularisation - i.e. ending the disproportionate influence of ultra-religious groups, etc.

Were the state to grant those rights, it would cease to be Zionist. Were it not to grant those rights, it could hardly be said to be democratic. The problem - posed sharply by comrade Carolan - is this: if it grants these rights, it ceases to be a Jewish state. Consequently, to demand of the state that it grant these rights is to deny the Jews themselves any national rights, because the granting of such democratic rights to the Palestinians necessarily cancels out the national rights of the Jews.

It is to offer conciliation - national rights for the Jews - with one hand, and take it away with the other.

This argument is an exercise in formal logic rather than socialist politics.

We are for, here and now, the establishment of a Palestinian state.



Such a state could be established on the West Bank and in Gaza, if Israel was to grant these areas self-determination.

We are for a Palestinian state with no strings. We would be against (and if we had forces there, would fight against) any attempt to restrict or limit the real independence of that state - either by subordinating it to Israel, or to Jordan, or to anybody else.

We would oppose any conditions on the establishment of a Palestinian state that limited its independence.

To say that we recognise Israeli national rights means one thing: we are not in favour of forcing change on the structures of the Israeli state through external military force. We are not in favour of an independent Palestinian state attempting (assuming - which is a daft assumption - that it was capable of it), or any other Arab state attempting, to 'destroy' Israel, to 'smash' the Zionist state from the outside.

Accepting Israeli national rights means that and that only. It cannot commit us to accepting that an inherently racist, discriminatory state is unchangeable. It cannot commit us to sacrificing the democratic rights of those many Palestinians for whom a West Bank/Gaza state is no solution.

We are against conquering the Jews. We are not against transforming the Israeli state from within. And it is especially for forces within Israel that a programme of democratic and anti-Zionist demands is meant.

#### The national question and socialist revolution

A policy to unite the working class is irreplaceable to lay the basis for a struggle for socialism.

To deal with all the issues, it has to link together recognition by each side of the other's rights - i.e. the renunciation of conquest as a policy - with a general programme of democratic and transitional demands.

One aspect of the democratic programme must be to propose steps towards creating a single, unified state. Whilst schemas should be avoided, a first step - i.e. an immediate goal - could be the creation of an independent Palestine.

A step towards unification would obviously be federation. Precise details here are not important. It obviously makes more sense to propose, as a realisable goal, federal unity rather than just demand of both peoples that they abandon any sense of nationality.

Some democratic demands would have to be coupled with transitional-type (or at least social/economic) demands to be realisable. For example: the refugees obviously can't literally return to old houses. New ones have to be built.

A central issue also is the extent of Israel's dependence on US imperialism. We have to fight to end that - and since without imperialist money Israel would collapse, we need to argue for an alternative.

There are two aspects to the necessary alternative. The aim must be a socialist federation of the Middle East, sharing its resources rationally.

And that entails that Israelis accept themselves as part of the Middle East, rather than an extra bit of Europe.



A final comment. It is good that we're having this debate. But there is a danger that it seems obscure to many comrades, who are bewildered by its complexity. No decision should be taken unless we are voting on policy fully understood, and arrived at through informed discussion.

If the majority of comrades still feel bewildered at the AGM, it would be best to postpone a decision, and work out a 'holding position' for the interim.

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### WHY NOT A 'DEMOCRATIC, SECULAR PALESTINE' ?

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Kinnell

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For a long time I stuck to the 'democratic, secular Palestine' slogan. While we're against driving out the Jews, I thought, it's a different matter if Israeli Jews find a democratic, secular Palestine intolerable. That's their problem, and not a reason to change our programme.

I'm now convinced that this argument misses the point. Perhaps a discussion of Scott's article can help explain why, particularly for comrades who, like myself, have argued for a 'democratic, secular Palestine' for many years.

"It makes little difference whether this democratic secular state is a democratic secular state of Palestine, or a democratic secular state of Israel, as long as it really is democratic and secular". So Scott proposes integration of the West Bank and Gaza into a federal Greater Israel, together with a fight for democracy in that state.

Three problems.

1. This Greater Israel would be ruled by the existing Israeli state machine - a Jewish-sectarian state machine. Whatever formal democratic rights were won by the Arabs of the West Bank and Gaza, they would not have real equality. The Israeli Arabs have a number of formal democratic rights and yet are oppressed.

2. If the state were really democratic, it would give national minorities the right to secede. So the Arabs of the West Bank and Gaza would have the right to secede. Because they could hope for no real equality in a Greater Israel, they would want to secede from day one.

3. As it happens, the hypothetical chances of forcing Israel into integrating the West Bank/Gaza Arabs with full rights (let alone giving Palestinian refugees the right to return there) are more remote than those of forcing Israel to withdraw. Even Israeli 'doves' would take fright at a state where Palestinian Arabs were a near-majority (and would soon become a majority given their greater rate of natural increase). One of the Israeli Labour Party's main arguments against annexing all the occupied territories is the 'demographic' argument - too many Arabs, and therefore annexation would have to go together with a great restriction of Israeli democracy.



But the issue is not one of being 'realistic' or 'unrealistic', practical or impractical. It is one of addressing the national questions or trying to evade them.

#### National questions

For, fundamentally, the Palestine problem is not one of individual rights but of national rights.

Israeli apologists remind us that Israeli Arabs have some individual democratic rights enjoyed by Arabs in no Arab state, for example the right to vote. True up to a point, but irrelevant. The Israeli Arabs are nationally oppressed, as part of the general oppression of the Palestinian nation.

Rosa Luxemburg once commented that no material oppression has ever provoked such tenacious resistance as intellectual, cultural and national oppression. For the Palestinians - so far as I can gather from all that I have read - none of their material hardships are so deeply felt as the hardship of being, as a nation, outcasts: outcasts in exile, or outcasts in their own homeland.

In the years before World War 2 the German populations of the Saar (previously ruled by France under a League of Nations mandate), Austria, and Czechoslovakia all welcomed Nazi takeovers of their countries. In the Saar they actually voted for it in a referendum. Why? I don't think they were all ideological Nazis, or naive people unaware of the reality of Hitlerism.

Trotsky commented that it showed the rottenness of imperialist democracy. "The Germans of the Saar in France, the Austrian Germans in the Europe of Versailles the Treaty of Versailles, which imposed harsh conditions on the losers of World War 1, like Austria, the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia felt themselves citizens of third rank. 'It will not be worse', they said to themselves. In Germany, at least, they will be oppressed on the same basis as the rest of the population. The masses prefer under these conditions equality in serfdom to humiliation in inequality".

The Swiss Germans, by contrast, who did not feel nationally oppressed, had no wish for Hitler's rule.

It's an illustration of the tremendous power of the national factor in politics: and pre-war France and Czechoslovakia treated Germans much better than Israel treats Palestinian Arabs.

Any solution in Palestine must, therefore, concern itself first and foremost with the national rights of the two nations: a programme guaranteeing, or supposedly guaranteeing, individual rights simply misses the point.

#### Democratic secular Palestine and democratic secular Israel

Is there any difference between a democratic secular Palestine and a democratic secular Israel? Presumably a democratic secular Palestine would be the inverse of a 'democratic secular Israel': i.e. a Palestinian Arab state machine promising individual rights to Israeli Jews. Leave aside the question of how this could come about: obviously the national question would immediately tear this set-up apart, too. The Israeli Jews would want to secede; they could be prevented only by force, and force that would suppress many individual rights, too.



Could we get a democratic secular Palestine with a mixed state machine? How? That presupposes a high degree of national reconciliation - which could come only after generations.

The Palestinian national movements frequently lay stress on the education they carry out in the refugee camps against anti-Jewish racism, and its success. We need not disbelieve them. But even if there were not a trace of anti-Jewish racism among the Palestinians, there would still be national hostility - a sense of difference, a sense of conflicting national interests.

Both nations - Israeli-Jews and Palestinian-Arabs - want a nation-state. A real united democratic Palestine would mean a state which both could see as their own nation-state. That requires a great deal more than the end of racism.

Almost certainly there must be anti-Jewish racism among the Palestinians. Certainly there is anti-Arab racism among the Israeli Jews. But on that side, too, the problem goes deeper.

A prominent place in the command of the Jewish forces up to 1948 was occupied by the left Labour Zionists (Mapam). It is possible to argue that the views of these people on the Arabs have (and had) racist implications, but they are not racists in any straightforward way: on a number of issues Mapam has supported Arab rights. The leader of the Haganah, Moshe Sneh, later joined the CP: was he a racist?

Yet those Jewish forces fought a bitter national war against the Palestinians and drove them out.

#### The Ireland analogy

Scott's Ireland analogy tells against him. Obviously we are for civil rights in the occupied territories (and in Israel) as we were for civil rights in Northern Ireland. There have been campaigns on such issues, for example the Committee to Defend Bir Zeit University (which has been repeatedly shut down by the occupation authorities).

But one of the criticisms we have made of the socialist involved in the Northern Ireland civil rights movement is that they failed to raise the national question - and thus left the field open for the Provos' narrow nationalism to conquer the Catholic community. Underlying all the individual grievances of the Catholics, the fundamental question was a national one, and that fundamental question had to be tackled.

Likewise in Palestine.

#### Oppressor and oppressed

Generally no situation of serious national oppression can be resolved by proposing to amalgamate oppressor and oppressed nations on the basis of individual equal rights. To propose this in Palestine is to produce a democratic-sounding formula which actually can only be a gloss for Israeli-Jewish subjugation of the Palestinian Arabs (in a Greater Israel) or Arab subjugation of the Israeli Jews (in an Arab Palestine).

Or else it is advice to the Palestinians to become super-internationalists, and then to wait until the Israeli Jews are also super-internationalists and they can live in harmony.

Paradoxically, the 'democratic secular Palestine' slogan actually denies the Palestinians' national rights as much as the Israeli Jews' (and perhaps Scott's article helps to make this clear). The slogan tells



the Palestinian Arabs either to wait until the Arab states subjugate the Israeli Jews or to wait until the Israeli Jews become internationalists.

But Marxists should propose objectives for struggle for the Palestinians which they can win without having to rely on dubious external saviours or a miraculous change of heart by their oppressors. That, to my mind, is a crucial argument for a 'two states' position (whether simply 'two states', or coupled with a proposal for federation, is a secondary matter).

The Palestinians can fight for their own state in part of Palestine, perhaps also linked to Jordan; they can fight for Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, and for national minority rights (including the right to secession) for the Arabs in Israel.

They can - in principle - force such concessions from Israel. They do not have to emancipate themselves in advance from all national prejudice for such a solution to be possible.

The Palestinians could get a democratic secular Palestine - a real democratic Palestine, a real merging of the two nations - only by themselves first becoming pure-minded internationalists, and then the Israeli Jews freely agreeing to give a democratic Palestine to them.

Far from being a solution to the national question, the democratic secular Palestine is something which might be possible after the national question has (by some other means) been solved. You could almost say about it what Marx said about the 'labour money' demand popular with socialists of his day: it can be realised only under conditions where no-one would any longer particularly want to raise it.

#### Local autonomy

Wolf has not yet written up the view he argued at the May 18-19 school, but I'll comment on it here because it's a view I held myself a while back.

He argued for a single, democratic, Palestinian state, with local autonomy for Jewish and Arab districts - at a town or village level, if I understand him right. The apparent advantage of this formula is that it gives the Palestinian Arabs a guaranteed right to return to all of Palestine, and it avoids a messy partition, without assuming an improbable total merging of the two communities.

What's wrong with this - in the form I understood it, for sure, and in Wolf's version too if I've got him right - is that, once again, it evades the fact that national questions are central.

Arab villages in Israel do (in principle) have their own elected local councils. Actually the Israeli state interferes with them badly - denying elections in some villages, dissolving councils on various pretexts if the CP gets a majority, swaying votes with patronage, etc. - but suppose it didn't. That would be not the end but the start of the story.

If these local councils were part of a real democratic set-up, then they would link up and form a representative Palestinian-Arab body - just as all the Jewish settlements before 1948 linked up to form a Jewish quasi-government, without any law or regulation telling them to. And then what? You would have two governments, Jewish and Arab. Either they would rule over different areas, or one would put down the other. And then the democratic rights of Arab local government under Israeli-Jewish rule are no answer to the Palestinian Arabs' national oppression, just as democratic rights of Jewish local government under Arab rule would be no answer to Israeli-Jewish national oppression. (And just as having an SDLP council in Derry City - rather than the old gerrymandered Unionist council - is not an



answer to the national question in Ireland).

Fundamentally, it is impossible to break down the national questions into questions of rights for individuals or districts. It would be more convenient if they could be broken down in that way. But then we're at the level of the position on Ireland advocated by an Italian would-be Trotskyist sect which we met at the LO fete: "an end to nationalism"!

### Violence

One final questions. Some things Scott writes could imply the philistine conclusion that the Palestinians have nothing to gain by violence against the Israeli state.

Now Palestinian violence against Israeli civilian targets is to be condemned. And any military action against the Israeli state is always open to tactical discussion.

But that said, overall the PLO military campaign against Israel has been justified and has had progressive results. It aroused the Palestinians as an autonomous national force; it made the Palestinian issue a national question rather than just a humanitarian refugee question; I think it must have been a factor in the slight easing of the Israeli Arabs' situation since around 1959.

The PLO's military resistance to the Israeli army in Lebanon played a role in provoking the peace movement in Israel.

Obviously the PLO cannot defeat the Israeli army in frontal battle. But then neither could the Algerian FLN defeat the French army. Neither can SWAPO defeat the South African army. Armed actions there could, and can, be part of a struggle eventually capable of making the cost to the oppressor power of continuing oppression too high. And likewise in Palestine.