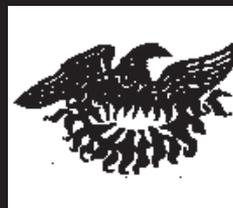


# workers' liberty

## reason in revolt



# Solidarity, yes! Boycott, no!

## Why supporters of "two states" should not join the "smash Israel" boycotters

### An open letter to Hilary and Steven Rose from John O'Mahony

**C**OMRADES: As well-known supporters of the proposal to boycott Israel, you will have been pleased by the boycott resolutions carried recently by the lecturers' union UCU and the journalists' union NUJ, and by the move to "boycott Israeli institutions" contained in Resolution 54 to the conference (starting 19 June) of the public services union Unison.

You, I know, support a boycott as something to help bring about "two states" in Israel/Palestine — Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, and the creation of a sovereign, independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. On the goal of "two states", I agree with you. But I believe the boycott will harm rather than help that cause, and in this Open Letter I want to explain why.

The mood for boycott is backed by strong feelings of indignation and outrage against Israel, and by a powerful and unanswerable sentiment that *something* must be done by the British labour movement to help the Palestinians.

The following, the main, features of the relationship of Israel and the Palestinian people cry out for action against Israel and on behalf of the Palestinians.

- The relationship between Israel and the Palestinians is one of overwhelming Israeli superiority in the technology of modern war. Israel's bad showing in the July 2006 war in Lebanon has not altered that. The Israeli right concludes from that experience that there should be another such war, so that Israel can reassert its military superiority.

- Israel uses the disparity in power and armaments with sickening ruthlessness and evident disregard for Palestinian civilian casualties.

- Israel has ruled over the Palestinian majority territories as an occupying colonial power for exactly forty years — since the June war of 1967.

- The Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are harassed in their livelihoods and studies by the Israeli army, pauperising them.

- Israel has the power to change things, and to undercut the Hamas type of reaction. It has done the opposite.

- Israel, in fact if not in plain words, is opposed to allowing the Palestinians to set up their own state. When Israeli leaders speak of a Palestinian state, they do not mean what the Palestine Liberation Organisation means — a sovereign, independent, Palestinian state, in contiguous territory, alongside Israel. The Israeli leaders, or most of them, mean Palestinian autonomy in chopped-up territories under the military control of Israel.

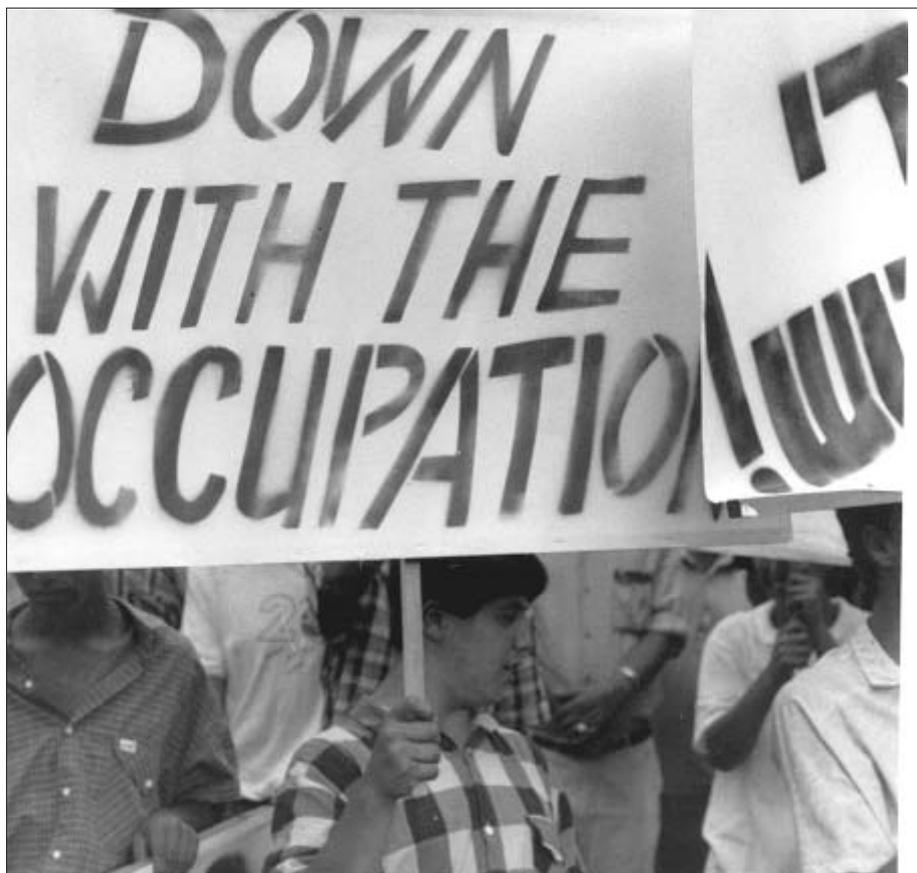
- The "roadmap" for peace in the Middle East, set out four years ago and backed by the United Nations, the European Union, Russia, and the USA, has so far come to nothing. Whatever chance it had of being forced on Israel has been a casualty of the chaos which has mired the USA and its allies in Iraq.

- In order for Israel to accept, and collaborate in setting up, a genuine independent Palestinian state, it will have to come under very strong and determined international pressure, in the first place from the USA. No such pressure is being put on Israel. Israel is a valued ally of the USA in Bush's "war on terror".

And meanwhile the carnage goes on.

Those are the main elements in the case for boycotting Israel — or, rather, for taking some action against Israel and for the Palestinians. "Boycott" is the easy and obvious action.

It can be argued against the above list that it is one-sided and unfair to Israel — that it leaves out of the picture the long history of the Israel-Arab conflict, in which the Israeli Jews are a small



Israelis demonstrate against occupation. Boycott the Israeli peace movement?

nation surrounded by big enemies, and, for recent history, the terrible campaign of homicide bombings (mounted mainly but not only by Hamas and Islamic Jihad) which followed on (many Israelis would say grew out of) earlier peace agreements, which collapsed in 2000. The harassment of Palestinians which prevents them going about their business, oppressive though it is, and unnecessary and arbitrary as some, perhaps most, of it now is, cannot reasonably be separated from Israel's effort to protect its citizens from homicide bombers.

But it is necessary at this point to declare my own point of view. I am a supporter of the PLO position of a two-states settlement — a sovereign, independent, Palestinian state in contiguous territory, side by side with Israel. And I think British trade unionists should help the Palestinians. We have a duty to help them.

I, like other members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, have been active in protest activities to try to do that — pickets, demonstrations, meetings (including speaking tours for Israeli refuseniks and Israeli peace activists — something which would seem to be ruled out by the comprehensive "boycott"

motion).

I believe that a boycott, though at first blush it seems the obvious thing to do, is not in fact the way to help the Palestinians. On the contrary, it would be counterproductive. Its effect on Israel for the good would be marginal, and it carries enormous political overhead costs, costs that would be far greater than any help a boycott movement could conceivably give to the Palestinians. All in all, there are, I believe special considerations to be taken into account in this case.

### Why not boycott?

**T**HREE things — and they overlap — seem to me to speak strongly against a boycott movement.

- A boycott movement against Israel would, once it took off, inevitably become a movement against "Zionists" in Britain. In practice, and according to all the relevant experience, that

*Continued on page 2*

would mean: against Jews. The boycott movement would become, or, if you prefer, become indistinguishable from, an anti-Jewish movement.

● As I've noted above, you, if I understand it correctly, support a boycott as a measure to put pressure on Israel to concede "two states". Those who have the organisation to bring boycott proposals to union conference agendas do not. The hard core who promote boycott are in the first place, the SWP/Respect and those around it in such movements as the "Stop The War Coalition".

They do not support a two-states settlement. They oppose it.

They are committed not to a Palestinian sovereign state alongside Israel, but to the destruction of Israel and its replacement by an Arab state in which those Jews who will survive the military conflict and its immediate aftermath would have religious but not national rights.

For hard-core boycotters like the SWP, the purpose of the boycott is not to push Israel to particular concessions. The purpose is to brand all Israeli Jews and all "Zionists" as untreatable except by force. For such people, boycott is seen as part of the programme of destroying Israel.

They used to call their programme "secular democratic state", but, supporting Hamas as they do, they now tend to fade out the qualification "secular". Talk of campaigning for any sort of secular state in tandem with political Islamists is, it seems, too preposterously self-contradictory even for the SWP/Respect!

The ardent boycotters on the British kitsch-left support clerical-fascist organisations such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Muslim Brotherhood (in Britain, MAB). All such groups advocate and promote not the PLO programme of two states — the only basis on which any approximation to justice can be won for both the peoples in the Jewish-Arab conflict — but the destruction of Israel and its replacement by a theoretical Islamic clerical-fascist regime, as in Iran, for instance.

Their tactics are deliberate mass slaughter of civilians (including Muslims) by individuals who believe that their instant reward for mass murder will be ascension into a Hollywood Arabian Nights style paradise replete with harems of virgins. The reckless, criminal indifference of Israel to "ancillary" civilian casualties in their military action rightly outrages us. Even in its worst instances, however, this is something not to be equated with people who take the deliberate slaughter of people in the London Tube, in a Tel Aviv night club, or on a Baghdad street, as their deliberate purpose.

It is the Islamists' slogans for Israel-Palestine that have dominated the "anti-war" movement and its demonstrations: "Palestine shall be free/ From the river to the sea". On the London march in protest against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon last July, many (seeming) non-Muslims took up the cry: "We are all Hezbollah".

That no doubt embodied an emotional identification with the victims of Israeli warfare, and an emotional hostility to Israel. But such sloganeering is possible only to people who do not know the nature of those with whom they identify, and what they mean for Arabs and for Muslims, especially the women, or who are too politically disoriented to care. Large numbers of young people are in the first category. The SWP/Respect work to pull them into the second.

The kitsch left does everything it can to disorient young people who oppose war and obey the good and healthy impulse to side with the oppressed and with the weak (the Palestinians) against the strong (Israel).

It is not a question here only of the SWP adapting to its clerical fascist allies. Long before they discovered the progressive revolutionary potential of Islamism, even when they were passionately against those of us who championed the Muslims of Bosnia against the Serbian chauvinists who were slaughtering them, this organisation advocated not two states but the destruction of Israel.

Not to argue for two states is not to serve the interests of the

Palestinians. The result is the same whether those embodying such politics are motivated by Islamist-fascist millenarianism, in which the fate of the Palestinians or any other people (Muslim peoples included) in "this world" counts for nothing, or by visions of a world "anti-imperialist" revolution and by ancient political animosities to the Jews of Palestine (which undoubtedly dominated the founder of the SWP, the late Tony Cliff, himself, as you know, in origin a Palestinian Jew).

This "background" cannot but affect what a boycotting campaign led by these people will mean in practice.

The forces who promote boycott have for many years actively opposed any effort to help the Palestinians secure their own state alongside Israel. When the activist left was united in the Socialist Alliance, in 2001, the SWP repeatedly voted down proposals that the Alliance should demand Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. They go on demonstrations with petitions and chants: "Two states solution! No solution!"

Despite the "humanitarian" face they give their anti-Israel agitation, they are ultimately as little concerned with the well-being of the Palestinians as are the religious crazies of Islamist clerical fascism with whom they have twinned themselves.

Their goal implies, all things taken into account, no solution or relief for the Palestinians until Israel is destroyed; and not even those who most ardently wish the destruction of Israel believe that that will happen soon.

One of the issues in play now in the Middle East is whether or not the very historical possibility of a "two states" solution is being destroyed. The kitsch left no less than the Islamist right *want* it to cease to be a possibility.

## The South Africa analogy

**Y**OU, comrades Rose, argue from comparisons and analogies which on examination do not hold up. Apartheid South Africa, for example.

In the present boycott movement around the Jewish-Arab conflict, South Africa features on two levels. The precedent of the South African boycott is invoked to argue for a boycott of Israel. And Israel is said to be identical to, or travelling fast to being a society identical to, apartheid South Africa.

The comparison of Israel with apartheid South Africa is in my opinion very instructive. First, take the boycott tactic.

An international boycott lasted from the beginning of 1960 to the end of apartheid in 1994 — that is, dating apartheid from 1948 when the Nationalist Malan regime formalised and extended racial segregation, for 34 years of the 46 year life of full-blow apartheid. A campaign that lasted so long, without any change in what it was campaigning against until the very end, was self-evidently limited in its effect!

Limited and, in fact, contradictory. Contradictory, because it struck also at blacks and coloureds. The academic aspects of the boycott, for example, did that.

The boycott "principle" was used by the ANC to oppose direct links between British unions and the new black-majority unions which grew up in South Africa in the 1970s and 80s.

The attitude of the kitsch-left to the Israeli trade unions is, like its attitude to the Israeli Jewish working class, one of stark hostility, and, frequently, denial that they are unions at all. But the Israeli unions, though their policies on Palestinian rights are not what we would wish, are genuine workers' unions, not comparable to the whites-only unions in South Africa. There are many peace movements in Israel with which we can and should work. Boycott cuts off the channels for working for "two states".

But, you will say, those channels have produced little, and even a limited new form of pressure must be desirable. Other things being equal, yes! In fact, however, the main function of the boycott of South African goods was not its practical effect

in forcing concessions, but as a vehicle, a "hook", for a relentless drive to make South Africa stink the nostrils of people who believed in human equity.

That, of course, was appropriate. On a certain limited level, too, the boycott expressed the objective of smashing, beating down, and overthrowing the South African apartheid state — which (in contrast to what "smashing" Israel would mean) signified not foreign conquest, but replacing minority with majority rule. That too was good because it was necessary. The blacks and coloureds of South Africa were helots. Nothing except destruction of the apartheid regime could serve their interests.

Here we already tread on the ground of what is wrong with equating Israel with South Africa. It is grotesque in its misrepresentation. As soon as we come close to facts, they speak out against those who equate Israel and South Africa.

South African white society was built on black economic enslavement, on the exploitation of people defined as without rights because of their "race". That was true as far back as the mid and late 19th century, before the British conquest of the Boers in the war of 1899-1902.

And Israel? The all-shaping characteristic of the Jewish colony in Palestine was the determination of its dominant and most dynamic elements *not* to be exploiters of Arab labour. They aimed to create a Jewish nation, with Jewish workers and Jewish farmers as its essential component. The Jewish colony, and Israel, never rested on the exploitation of Arab labour. They built a society in parallel to the Arab society (and most of it, anti-Israel myths notwithstanding, on reclaimed waste and swamp land).

The amount and importance of Arab labour in the Israeli economy grew after June 1967, but in its extent, centrality, and irreplaceability it never came to merit even bracketing in the same economic species as South Africa. Israel was and is a Jewish nation state (with a 20% Palestinian Arab minority) separate and distinct from the Palestinian Arabs.

It is possible to deplore the fact, and possible to refuse to come to terms with it. But the fact is that Israel confronts the Palestinians and the rest of the Arab world as a national state. In contrast to South Africa, it is not necessary for the liberation of the Palestinian Arabs that the Israeli national state be destroyed.

You, comrades Rose — if I've got it right — accept that. You believe that a Palestinian state alongside Israel, "two states", is the solution — not the destruction of Israel.

Yet you go along with, ally with, and in practice serve politically, those who favour a radically different outcome, the destruction of Israel. By invoking the nonsensical equation of Israel with South Africa, you feed the demoralisation of Israel which is the root of so much that is poisonous on the left — and which in practice serves to push back, or aside, concentration on helping the Palestinians secure the settlement which you, like us, thinks makes most sense, an independent Palestinian state.

## Demonising "Zionists"

**I**F THE movement to boycott South Africa served as an agency for spreading international understanding of the foul racist nature of apartheid South Africa, in the case of Israel the boycott movement comes after, not before, widespread demoralisation of Israel. Again, the contrast with South Africa is telling, and not on your side of the argument.

In the fight against apartheid, not too many socialists, I guess, wasted time reflecting on the sad fate of the Boer nation, which had been championed during the Boer war of 1899-1902 against Britain by socialists all over the world (though some of us paused to link that fate with Karl Marx's famous dictum, "The nation that enslaves another can never itself be free"). There was never any real injustice in the way the Boers of South Africa were perceived by the international anti-apartheid movement.

There is great injustice, and injustice based on grossly misleading, one-sided, and falsified "history", in the way Israel is perceived by most of the left. The "Stalin school of falsification" initially did that work, which the kitsch-left has now taken up.

Of course it is just and proper that Israel be faced with hostility for what it does to the Palestinians over whom it has such great, and greatly abused, power. It can be argued, and up to a point justly, that Israel here gets what it deserves, reaps what it sows.

Yet Israel is indeed — as uncritical apologists for Israel so often assert, without thereby invalidating the point — singled out, measured by standards applied to no other nation, its citizens now held responsible to the third and fourth generations for what their ancestors did or are alleged to have done.

Politically, on this question, you are products of the Cliff school of Jewish-Arab politics and history. You have, in advocating two states, broken from the key conclusion of that school, that Israel must be destroyed — somehow, and by someone, even a Saddam Hussein or an Assad or an Ahmedinejad.

I can't know how much of what you learned in that school you still hold to. But the role you have played in the boycott-Israel movement indicates that you still hold to a great deal of it.

You know how the history goes. Jews were persecuted in Russia and Eastern Europe. The socialist movement fought that persecution. (Not all socialists did, and those who did, did not always do it adequately; but on the whole the socialists did fight it). Jews became a powerful and often pioneering force in the socialist and revolutionary movement.

# Trade unionists for two states

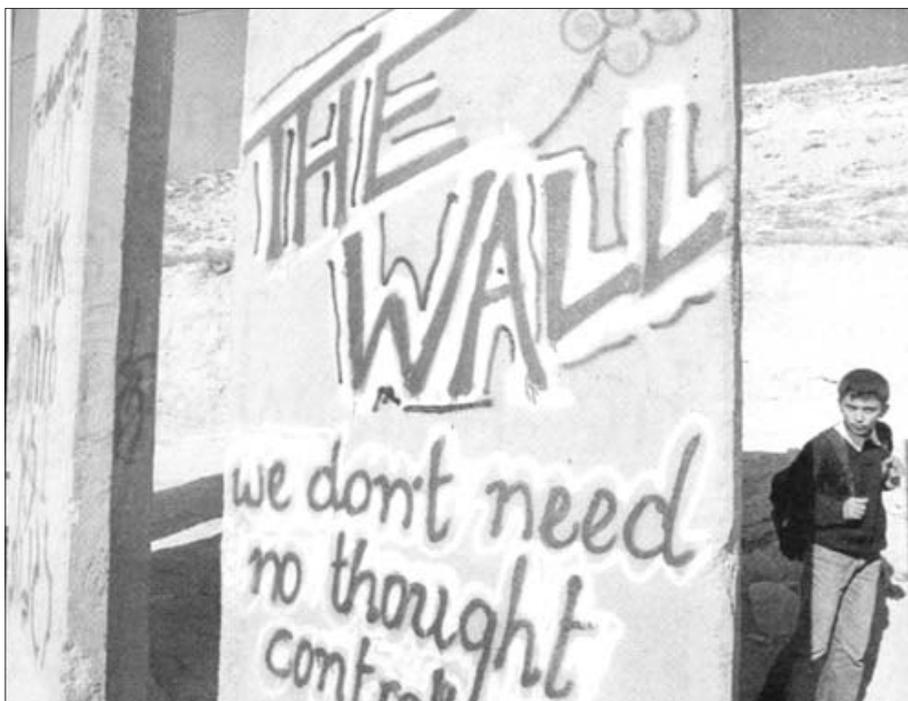
These basic policies on Israel-Palestine — policies which allow a way forward through building working-class unity across the divides — were adopted by the Executive of the Communication Workers' Union in 2002.

*Trade Unionists For Two States: Palestine Alongside Israel* works to win support for these policies in the labour movement. It seeks affiliations from trade union branches, and organises practical activities to help promote the cause of Palestinian rights: an independent Palestinian state with the same rights as Israel.

- We are for the immediate withdrawal of the Israeli state from the Occupied Territories.
- We support a fully independent Palestinian state on the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem alongside Israel. Israel should come to a generous settlement with the Palestinian refugees that is a true compromise and can be mutually agreed.
- Whilst we understand the Palestinians are in a desperate situation and recognise that they have the right to fight the Israeli state, we oppose the Islamist suicide bombers who kill themselves and Jewish civilians and the rocket attacks launched from Gaza.
- We oppose Hamas and Islamic Jihad who are fighting not just against Israeli occupation, but for the destruction of Israel and the creation of a theocratic states.
- We believe that acknowledging that both Israel and Palestinian people have the right to their own state is a way to help bring an end to the conflict.
- We would support a socialist federation across the whole region that recognised that the various peoples have the rights to their own states. This could only work with the voluntary agreement of the peoples involved.

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Then came Zionism, a Jewish-nationalist and even Jewish “racist” mirror image of the nationalism and racism in the society around them. The Zionists’ starting point, their root, and therefore the original sin of Zionism, was a buying-into the pressure of the anti-semites.

The Zionists urged Jewish workers to abandon the class struggle in their own countries and to go to Palestine, to create utopian socialist colonies there, the kibbutzim. The socialists fought them, in an effort to hold Jews to the working-class socialist fight in the countries they were already in.

True to their reactionary petty bourgeois nature, the Zionists allied with imperialist powers and worked to win their favour. Generations of anti-Zionist socialists and communists have been told how the Zionist leader Theodore Herzl went to the anti-semitic Tsarist minister von Plehve and tried to bargain with him (as if that was made Herzl in part responsible for what von Plehve was and did).

Eventually, in 1917, Britain, which would assume control of what had been Turkish Palestine a year later, declared itself in favour of a “Jewish national home” in Palestine.

In Palestine, the Zionist colonists built their own economy, excluding Arab workers from their enterprises. That was not Jewish nationalism — condemnable in such of its manifestations in Palestine as this, to be sure — but something more. This was “racism”. It was the harvest from the seeds planted when the Zionists “capitulated to” the racist pressure of the anti-semites in Europe.

Then, worse by far! The Zionists allied with the Nazis. Again, they had a common premiss. The Zionist premiss was not Jewish nationalism. What in other peoples was nationalism, in the Jews was racism, and racism most foul! It was racism identical to that of the Nazis.

Depending how deep-dyed in the kitsch-left culture on Zionism one is, what comes next varies. “The Zionists” collaborated with the Nazis in German-occupied Europe. Here too they became identical with the Nazis, who were engaged in an attempt to extirpate the Jews of Europe. Why, some of them helped the Nazis to organise the deportation of a million Jews from Hungary to the death camps!

At the end of the 20th century, Jim Allen, arguably the most talented left-wing dramatist in Britain, wrote a play, *Perdition*, in which he descended to branding “Zionists” (and Jews — his target-finder wobbled a lot) as co-responsible for the Holocaust, or parts of it. Ken Loach, far and away the most important left-wing film-maker in Britain, produced the play — or tried to — at the Royal Court Theatre.

To pick up the main thread again: in Palestine the Jews collaborated with the British imperial power, which in turn served their interests. As one British colonial official put it, the Jews would create a “little loyal Ulster” in the Middle East to serve Britain. (Everyone in or near the kitsch-left hears about that dictum, early in their association with it: few hear that the official, Ronald Storrs, became one of the leading anti-Zionists of the 1940s). The Jews robbed the Palestinians of their land.

“The Zionists” (the Jews) used their great power in the councils of the world to ensure that, as the 1930s moved towards the outbreak of World War Two in 1939, no country would accept more than a trickle of Jewish refugees from Germany. Jews who wanted to escape the threat of Hitler would not — so “the Zionists” decreed, and statesmen like Roosevelt meekly followed their decrees — be allowed to go anywhere else but Palestine. In this way, and in many other ways, “the Zionists” bore some responsibility for the Nazi massacre of Europe’s Jews (including the Zionists!)

At the end of World War Two, after a little bit of a misunderstanding between the Zionists and the British, the Zionists changed imperial masters, and put themselves at the service of

US imperialism. The United Nations, serving the USA, decided to partition Palestine and create a Jewish state, Israel (and a Palestinian one, too, but that is something that tends to get lost in the telling). Israel then drove out millions of Palestinians. Ever since, Israel has served imperialist interests in the Middle East.

I’ve telescoped the story a lot, but I don’t think I’ve made it cruder than it is. See, for example, Jim Higgins, a once-central representative of the old pre-SWP IS culture, and one who was far from ignorant, in a debate in *Workers’ Liberty* in 1996-7 ([www.workersliberty.org/node/8210](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/8210)).

Where to begin unravelling this writhing tissue of poisonous “historical” worms? The first thing that strikes you in this tale of irrepressible human evil, oppression, and mischief-making, is that the villains are the people, and most of the leaders of the people, who more than any other in recorded history were the victims of (capitalist) reaction, oppression, and industrialised mass murder. A people of whom two in every three in Europe — Europe all the way from the Caucasus to the Breton coast — were murdered, after they and their forebears had, over decades and even centuries, been maligned as human demons, the source of most of the evils in the world.

The second thing that strikes you is how relentlessly and stupidly malignantly some of the constructions on the facts, quasi-facts, and alleged facts are. “The Zionists” could tell the US President his policy on immigration, and they would tell him to keep Jews out? Of course they could! “The Zionists” were and are inhuman demons.

The third thing that strikes you is the stratospherical lunacy of much of what is attributed to “the Zionists”, if you tie it together into something like coherence. For example, in Allen’s play and Lenni Brenner’s books (on which Allen seems to have based himself), “the Zionists” wanted a million Hungarian Jews dead because that would help them “get” Israel after the war. (The four or so million already dead in 1944 were not a strong enough moral case, it seems — but I can’t explain what I can’t understand...)

“The Zionists” not only collaborated with the Nazis, but manipulated and used them for their purposes. Even during the Holocaust, the Jews (as “the Zionists”) were pulling strings and determining what happened. The emergence of Israel was the result. Even Hitler and the Nazi movement — ultimately, if you know how to interpret things — served the interests of Zionism.

The fourth thing that strikes you is the stony-hearted lack of sympathy and empathy, or even sympathetic understanding, with which the absolute anti-Zionists approach the history of their subject. Everything is grist to their mill. Conflicting or contradictory elements in the real history are ruthlessly cut away.

Did Jewish or “Zionist” leaders “negotiate” at gunpoint with the murderous power which had them in its grip? Of course some of them did. Aha, that tells you the “real” nature of Zionism, its true inner affinity with Nazism!

It is the testimony of history that anti-semitic persecution in Poland, Germany, and other countries drove those Jews who could get there to go to Palestine, and that anti-semitism after the defeat of the Nazis (there were pogroms against returning Jews in Poland, and riots in Paris) convinced the surviving Jews that nothing would serve them but their own state. Those events turned Zionism from a minority movement into the viewpoint of a majority of Jews, and transformed the situation in Palestine by ensuring that hundreds of thousands of Jews moved there in the 20s, 30s, and 40s.

Is that how it was? No, in the conventional account, it wasn’t like that at all! It was the inner nature of racist, malignant “Zionism”, its devilish plotting and string-pulling, that shaped

events.

It is the testimony of history that little more than a decade after the British took over Palestine, and after the Balfour Declaration, Britain tried to renege on its promise that Palestine could be a Jewish national home. It began to impose restrictions on Palestinian Jews (acquiring land, for instance) and on Jewish immigration that culminated on the eve of World War Two (that is, on the eve of the Holocaust) in largely stopping Jewish entry to Palestine.

Throughout the World War and the Holocaust, and up until Britain quit Palestine in 1948, it systematically and rigorously excluded all but a meagre quota of Jews from Palestine. It interned illegal refugees, and effectively condemned many would-be refugees to death at sea as they, Jewish boat people, sought to evade the controls in miserably unseaworthy craft.

True? Nonsense! “The Zionists” and Britain worked hand in glove!

It is the testimony of history that when the state of Israel was declared in May 1948, all the imperialist powers with one exception imposed a rigorous arms embargo (the same sort of thing as was done against the Muslims of Bosnia in the 1990s) against Israel, whose ill-equipped citizen army faced the professional (and some of them, British-officered) armies of Egypt, Syrian, Jordan and Iraq.

The exception was Stalin’s Russia, which, eager to create difficulties for its British rival, sent guns via its puppet state of Czechoslovakia.

Nonsense! Israel was an imperialist stooge, always.

It is the fact of history that three quarters of a million Arabs were driven out or fled in 1948, in a war in which Arab armies attacked the territory allocated to Israel by the United Nations in 1947. The Egyptians came with the slogan, “Drive the Jews into the sea!”; and, naturally enough, they had or could hope for the support of the Arabs in the areas they invaded.

Nonsense! Here too “the Zionists” were in absolute control — and millions, not three quarters of a million, were driven out or fled.

It is the testimony of history that nearly as many Jews — about 600,000 — were driven out of the Arab countries to Israel in 1948 and after.

What’s wrong with that? Why wouldn’t they be? They were probably “Zionists”.

And so on and so on.

The fifth thing that strikes you is the grotesque one-sidedness of the “history” that underpins the kitsch-left’s picture of the Arab-Jewish conflict. Muhammed Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, the leader of the Palestinian Arabs, went to Europe and tried to raise a Bosnian Muslim legion to fight for Hitler. He shared Hitler’s objective of annihilating Jews. He wanted the Nazis armies to drive the British out of Palestine. If the Nazis had gained control of Palestine — even temporarily — they and he would have massacred every Jewish child, woman, and man.

In the conventional kitsch-left account? It is perfectly understandable! Husseini was an anti-imperialist, looking for what allies he could get. Of course he had a right to do that, and should not be judged adversely for it.

The wartime antics of the Mufti are no secret, but quite widely known. The most stern judges of the Zionist or Jewish “collaborators” are entirely indulgent of the Mufti. The Arabs had rights in Palestine, you see. The Jews didn’t. That is the point of much of the poisonous pseudo-history.

The Arabs are and always were the legitimate people, with the normal rights of self-defence, including the right to manoeuvre for advantage between their enemies and their enemies’ enemies. The Jews had no right — no right to what? To be in Palestine? To live? If the choice were Palestine or death, it was better for them to die?

Comrades Rose: how much of this stuff do you go along with? How much of what you learned in the IS/SWP have you jettisoned? How much of it have you simply not thought about for a long time?

## The dynamics of boycott

YOU CAN justly reply that this history has no bearing on the question at issue: for or against a boycott of Israel now. It has, however, a very great deal of relevance to the political-cultural framework in which this discussion takes place. And to what the kitsch-left and their Islamist allies will make of a boycott movement.

The grotesque “history” — not history, but the demonisation outside of history of an entire people — which I have touched on (there is a very great deal more of it) is dominant on the kitsch left, and underpins the “solution” to the Israel/Palestine conflict most widely accepted on the “left” — destroy Israel. Destroy the demon spawn of Zionism (and of Nazism: that is what is said, and when not said, widely implied, mad though it is).

It is the proponents of such views — themselves the allies of clerical-fascist Islamists who have their own mystic-religious “dialect” of this “devils and angels” story — that you ally with and serve in the “boycott Israel” campaign.

I want to keep the lines clear. Yes, boycott is logically separable from all the historical demonisation. No dispute there. The policy of boycott is not necessarily tied into the demonisation. Logically.

But in reality? In reality, this boycott movement gains its active force from people who hold to and propagate the “absolute anti-Zionist” demonisation which I have touched on above.

Now, in Britain, the boycott is a weapon against Israel in the



# What you can do

**I**f not boycott, what? There is a wide range of positive activities by which we can make solidarity with the Palestinians without the drawbacks of boycott. In fact, the boycott demand often serves a diversion, directing people towards token or downright counterproductive activities instead of what they could do positively.

1. Demonstrations, lobbies, pickets, petitions, trade-union resolutions, focused on positive demands for "two states", rather than on increasing generalised hostility to Israel. One of the plagues of much of current "pro-Palestinian" activism is that, because it is in principle opposed to recognising Israel and making limited demands on it, it eschews the sort of limited demands which can be won immediately and yield some progress. For example, regular pickets of the Israeli embassy in London helped win the early release of five Israeli refuseniks jailed for much longer sentences than those usually imposed on refuseniks (indeed, theoretically indefinite sentences). Such protests might also win concessions on checkpoints within the West Bank, or on Gaza students not being allowed to attend universities outside Gaza.

2. Direct links (visits, speaking tours, etc.) between trade-union, student, etc. organisations here and Palestinian and Israeli workers' groups and peace movements.

3. Support for groups which send international "observers" to the West Bank to help monitor Israeli military actions and groups like Ta'ayush which work to build grass-roots Jewish-Arab links in Israel/Palestine.

4. Pressure on the British and other Western governments to take a clear stand for "two states" and to condemn Israeli government measures blocking the way to it.

5. Material aid to Palestinians in the West Bank (e.g. sending books and other supplies).

By building a real movement around such activities, focused on positive demands for Palestinian demands rather than "hate Israel", we could reach the level where the question could be posed of industrial action by workers internationally to hasten a "two states" settlement, e.g. to block military supplies to the Israeli government, or to demand a definite stand from their home governments.

hands of people, secular kitsch-leftists and Islamist clerical-fascists alike, whose goal is to destroy Israel and — as a corollary — to pay no heed to the needs of the Palestinian people, except as a source of pseudo-humanitarian agitation against Israel.

Rejecting a Palestinian state alongside Israel, they have no rational goal, no goal realisable in the calculable future, no democratically acceptable goal, in their agitation against Israel. They and no-one else — certainly not anomaly-ridden two-states supporters like yourselves — will dominate and shape the boycott campaign.

Comrades, you cannot but remember the numerous episodes in the colleges in the 1970s and 80s in which kitsch-left "anti-imperialists" and "anti-racists" banned college Jewish societies, or tried to ban them, and harassed their members. What else do you do with "racists"? And, unlike the nationalists of other peoples, Jewish nationalists (as we've seen) are ipso facto racists, the historical legatees of the Nazis and in some respects their living embodiment in the Middle East now.

The lunacy and hysteria are not mine, are not in the last sentence, but in the events I allude to, the bans on student Jewish societies, the branding and harassing of all "Zionists" as "racists".

You cannot but know that. You cannot but remember it. You know about cases like that of Miriam Shlesinger, a former chair of the Israeli section of Amnesty International and a strong critic of the Israeli government's mistreatment of Palestinians, who in 2002 was thrown off the editorial board of an international journal of translation studies by the editor, a British academic, who wanted to boycott Israel.

You think such things can help the Palestinians? You think it would be progress to involve Stop The War, MAB, and the supporters of Muslim jihadists, in seeking out and hounding local "supporters of the racist state of Israel", "Zionist-racists", and "Zionist agents of imperialism"?

Or do you think it won't happen, or, to put it at its weakest, is not likely to happen, as a result of the boycott campaign? Why not? Such things can be kept under control? Who will control them?

Nobody will control them, once a freewheeling campaign gets going. Attacks by Muslims on Jews have increased greatly throughout Europe in the last years. The chance that a boycott of Israel *now*, in this situation, mounted by these people (SWP/Respect and their clerical-fascist allies), will lead to a targeting of Jewish Zionists, is, I suggest, large enough to deter friends of the Palestinians and advocates of a two-states settlement from adding their weight to the campaign.

And let me remind you of something that is likely to be forgotten. In the old campus wars against "Zionism", it was *Jews* who were targeted as "Zionists". Non-Jewish Zionists — people like Tony Benn, then a prominent member of the Labour Friends of Israel group — were left alone. That won't happen now? Why will it not?

## Anti-semitism

**A**T THE conference of the university lecturers' union AUT in 2005, you, Steven Rose, said: "How dare they call me an anti-semitite when many of my family died in the Holocaust and I have fought anti-semitism all my life?"

Anti-semitism, of course, is the vexed question. And it begs the question, what is anti-semitism?

In terms of your feelings — how could anyone other than a moron entertain a general hostility to a whole category of disparate human beings, however defined? As a species, socialists tend to *like* people, to wish them well.

How could people of Jewish background subscribe to the idiocies of anti-semitism? Or, as Tony Cliff once said in response to the idea that he was an anti-semitite: "I've got a Jewish wife and Jewish children. Of course I'm an anti-semitite!"

Yet that doesn't quite cover it — for Cliff, for Cliff's politi-

cal orphans, or even for you.

Here it is surely not a matter of racism, or of comprehensive subjective dislike of all the vastly varied people who are, in one way or another, Jews. Leave aside the term "anti-semitism" for the moment, and examine the substance of what it means to hold to the position that the SWP/Respect and its political satellites have on the Jewish-Arab conflict.

They — unlike you — believe that the Israeli Jewish nation should be abolished. Since there is no way that it can be persuaded to abolish itself peacefully, that means in practice that it should be conquered and its state destroyed; and those who want it destroyed must support those "anti-imperialist" Arab or Muslim states that alone can do it.

This proposal to destroy a nation state is unique on the left. There is no equivalent attitude to any other nation. The South African analogy is utterly false here: the objective of the serious left there was that minority rule be destroyed, and replaced by majority rule, not that a whole nation be conquered.

Whether you call that unique attitude anti-semitism or not, the position that the Jewish state should be destroyed is hardly "pro-semitic". And there is more, of course.

Most Jews alive today identify to one degree or another with Israel — critically and reluctantly, or uncritically and with gut chauvinism. Given the history we have briefly covered, how could it be otherwise?

The main exceptions I know of are some varieties of revolutionary socialist, and a small layer of religious Jews. Jews naturally identify with Israel, critically or uncritically. The drive against Zionism as the acme of "imperialism", as "racism", and all the rest — how can that not, to one degree or another, be, or become, a drive against non-Israeli Jewish Zionists? Especially those who can be identified because they stand up against the "anti-Zionists", belong to a Jewish or Israeli society at a college, or run a shop which refuses to join a boycott? How, therefore, can the political programme of the "destroy Israel" merchants not be anti-semitic? Anti-semitic both in its core — destroy Israel; Israel is an illegitimate historical formation; the Jewish state must be abolished and swallowed up into a non-Jewish state — and in all that is spun from it?

The position that Israel is illegitimate contains in embryo (even if its proponents do not understand it or wish it) a full-scale anti-semitism. You don't share that position — but you ally with and help those who will use a boycott campaign precisely to popularise and reiterate the idea that Israel is illegitimate, etc.

This is not, self-evidently, *racist* anti-semitism. Nor old-style Christian or Islamic anti-semitism. Yet it does involve a pretty comprehensive hostility not just to Israel but to all most Jews alive, those who will not see "anti-imperialist" and "anti-racist" "reason". Persecution of Jews, albeit on a mild level as these things go in history, was a feature of some campuses in the 1980s.

There have been quite a number of anti-semitisms in history, feeding into and off each other, but distinguishable one from another. The nearest (partial) equivalent I can think of to today's "left" anti-semitism is the proselytising Christian anti-semites. They were not necessarily hostile to Jews as people — they wanted to save their souls. And only incidentally, in pursuit of that benign goal, did they break Jewish bones and burn Jewish bodies — or cast a tolerant eye on those who did that on behalf of the cause they themselves wanted to serve.

Everyone knows August Bebel's statement that the "anti-Rothschild" type of old anti-semitism partook of "the socialism of the fools". You could call the present "left" anti-Zionism, the "anti-imperialism", or the "anti-racism", of the idiots.

I conclude: there is no way in the circumstances I have outlined that a boycott movement will not, to put it at its mildest, run the risk of being an anti-Jewish movement. There is no way that participation in a movement for boycott, led and shaped by people mortally hostile to the continuation of Israel, does not conflict with your commitment to the only rational settlement — two states.

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