Against left-wing antisemitism!

By Sean Matgamana

Opposition by socialists and consistent democrats to Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians in the occupied territories is proper, just, necessary and good.

Many thousands of the new members of the Labour Party will naturally support the weaker side in this conflict, the Palestinians, and see them as the oppressed people that they are.

Many who have never before given much thought to the Israel-Palestine conflict will begin to seek explanations, solutions, proposals and slogans to express their gut solidarity with the Palestinians.

Many will be won to what appear to be pro-Palestinian policies, slogans, and ideas that in fact, if you look at them closely, and relate them to Middle East realities, are not pro-Palestinian at all. They are anti-Israel, not pro-Palestinian.

For instance, though the official position of the Palestine Liberation Organisation is for a free and independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, where Palestinians are the majority, or were the majority in 1967, the ostensible left opposes that policy. They insist that Israel should cease to exist and give way to an Arab state in the whole of pre-1948 Palestine.

Since Israel will not agree to abolish itself, that means that Israel must be conquered in war, and forcibly put out of existence. Arab chauvinist and Islamic clerical fascist regimes must make war on Israel and destroy it. “Anti-Zionists” must back them in a war to destroy Israel.

Leave aside the rights and wrongs of it. Israel is not going to be destroyed in the calculable future. It is too strong, it has strong allies, the Israelis will fight for survival. A policy that postpones any solution for the Palestinians until after the destruction of Israel is therefore a policy that condemns them to indefinite waiting.

Look closely and you’ll find that of the three sorts of political advocates of destroying Israel — Arab chauvinists, Islamic clerical fascists (far right political Islam) and the “anti-imperialist” left — none of them are all that concerned about the living Palestinian people. All three are far more anti-Israel than they are pro the Palestinians. In meetings, the pseudo left habitually vote down resolutions that demand Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and the setting up of an independent Palestinian state there. Nothing less than eliminating Israel will do for them. To all three of them the Palestinians are political tools, ciphers, the “good cause”, but not the real one.

It was the Arab states that refused to let the three quarters of a million Palestinian refugees of 1948 work and build new lives for themselves. The great massacres of Palestinians were inflicted on them by Arabs — in Jordan in “Black September” 1970, in Lebanon in 1982.

Newcomers to the Labour Party will find the self-proclaimed Left in an advanced state of political hysteria on these questions. They will find — on internet discussions, for instance — people seemingly thinking of themselves as of the left who deploy the filthiest of old-style antisemitism.

They face the danger of being politically and morally poisoned by the politically de-caying old left. They will find that the distinction between “anti-Zionism” and antisemitism, is, increasingly, a small one. On some of the pseudo-Left it is ceasing to exist, or already, more or less, has. (See article by Ruth Willis on back page).

New comrades should study the issues before deciding where they stand. This issue of Workers’ Liberty is produced to help them. It consists of part of the new book The Left in Disarray, and some older pieces.

Note: Ruth Willis wrote Defend Jackie Walker? Not like this! (page 20). Sean Matgamna wrote the rest of this pamphlet.
How Israel came to be the world’s hyper-imperialist

For the... Arab-chauvinist logic, we need look no further than the [second] main ‘world Trotskyist’ group, the International Workers’ League. To put it bluntly, Zionism grew out of the anti-Semitism of 19th century Europe, and of the anti-Semitism of the Russian Tsarist Empire. Theodor Herzl was a product of this culture. Herzl’s vision of a Jewish state was a direct result of his experience as a journalist in Vienna. Herzl was witness to the pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe, and he was horrified by the way Jews were treated by the Russian government. He saw that the only way to protect Jewish lives was to create a state of their own. He believed that a Jewish state would be a place where Jews could live free from persecution.

Herzl’s vision was not well-received by the Russian government. In fact, it was met with opposition from both the Russian government and from Jewish communities. But Herzl did not give up. He continued to work on his project, and in 1905, he published a pamphlet called ‘The Jewish State’. This pamphlet was a call to action, and it was widely read. It was also translated into many languages, and it became a key document for the establishment of the state of Israel.

In 1917, the Balfour Declaration was published. This declaration was a commitment by the British government to support the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. This was a major victory for the Zionist movement, and it marked the beginning of the modern state of Israel.

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Palestinian Arabs fleeing Galilee during the 1948 war

about Israel. The Stalinist campaign against Zionism petered out in 1953, with Stalin’s death. Israel’s right to existence was not questioned on the left. No one on the left openly advocated that Israel be abolished and destroyed. Not even the Stalinists did. The pronouncements of Ahmed Shukeiri, head of the then Egyptian-controlled Palestine Liberation Organisation, who stuck to the old slogan, “drive the Jews into the sea”, were seen as an embarrassment, and as something entirely alien to the left. The left was aware of the plight of the Palestinian refugees, but no one put the sole blame for that on Israel. Israel said that “the Palestinian state” was Jordan, which had seized almost all the territory allocated to the Arabs by the UN in 1947. That was true, except that the Palestinians did not rule in Jordan and would suffer mass slaughter there in “Black September” 1970.

Outside of Arab countries, there was no talk of reversing the 1948 “settlement” in Israel-Palestine, not until in 1967 Israel acquired control of the whole of pre-1948 Palestine. Then, demands for Israel to withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967 were submerged in the new Palestine Liberation Organisation policy, declared in 1969, of a “secular democratic Arab state (with religious rights for Jews) in all of pre-1948 Palestine. That slogan won widespread support on the left. As has been said, its immediate political effect was to delegitimise Israel, defining it as a state which should never have come into existence and therefore had no right to go on existing. It delegitimised Israeli nationalism, which was redefined as “anti-Arab racism”. The old Stalinist equation of Zionism with Nazism was there in the repertoire to be dug up and put front-stage, and it was. Indignation at Israel’s continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza gave autonomous life to the “nice, secular democratic state”, version of abolishing Israel, that is, in practical terms, conquering it.

After 1967, Stalinist states, notably Poland, revived their old “anti-Zionist” themes from 1949-53. A forerunner of AWL commented: “One of the worst signs of the recession in Poland… has been a very thinly disguised eruption of anti-Semitism… Under the banner of anti-Zionism the Partisans [harder-Stalinist faction] play the anti-Jew tune blatantly, playing also the Polish nationalist tune – in this country which saw its millions of Jews leave survivors as they vanished into Auschwitz only a generation ago”.

Indignation over Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982 helped generate the strange idea that Israel is the hyper-imperialism, the epitome of imperialism, the imperialism of imper-
Jews who to one degree or another, critically or fondly, sup-
port Israel.

The Trotskyists had resisted the demonisation of “Zionism” (as distinct from political opposition to it) from its first ap-
pearance in 1929. Max Shachtman, speaking for the whole US
Trotskyist movement, published an article in The Militant (1
October 1929), which declared that: “Not every movement led
by spokesmen of an oppressed nationality is a revolutionary
movement. It is a lamentable fact that at the present time the
Arab movement is directed by uncomoncialists... They are against all Jews as Jews. They set up the reactionary
demand for the ‘restriction of the Jewish immigration into Palestine’...” It denounced the way in which for the Stalinists
rise magic wand of the “Third Period” had transmuted this
reactoratory movement into a “national revolutionary uprising
against British imperialism”. The American and other Trots-
kyists continued during the war to advocate an open door
in Palestine (and in America, of course) for Jewish refugees.

After the war, some Trotskyists backed the Jewish guerri-
las against the British, defining their struggle as an anti-im-
perialist movement (Felix Morrow in the USA, some in
France). The Shachtmanite Workers Party USA backed Israel’s
right to independence and its right to defend itself, though
they also deplored the partition of Palestine, a political entity
which had existed for a mere 30 years. It would have been im-
possible for the Trotskyists of that period to see Israel as a rep-
resentative, surrogate, or tool of “imperialism”. As we’ve seen,
arms supplies to it were embargoed by all the big pow-
ners except Russia, and certainly it was not a tool of Russian
imperialism (which in any case the Orthodox Trotskyists did
not recognise as an imperialism).

The Trotskyists had denounced the Stalinists’ antime-
tic campaign in 1949-53. In the mid-1950s, when Nkita
Khрушchev denounced Stalin, there was widespread further
comment in the Trotskyist press about Stalinist antisemitism,
and this around the time when Israel invaded Egypt in al-
liance with the British and French, as part of a British-French
operation to reclaim the Suez Canal.

The kitche left-way of seeing the problem, as the Islamic
clerical-fascist way, is not only anti-Jewish, but also anti-Pale-
stinian. It rules out any redress for the Palestinians this side
of the destruction of Israel, and the setting up of an Arab or Is-
lamic state in all pre-1948 Palestine, including what is now
Israel.

That left routinely equates Israel with apartheid South
Africa, an equation that does not stand up. The Jewish popu-
lation of Palestine has never depended on the exploitation
of Arab labour, and the treatment of Palestinians in Israel has
never been remotely like that of black and “coloured” people
in apartheid South Africa. There is, however, a “parallel” be-
tween Israel and South Africa that the serious left must take
doing it. Remember Britain seized the Cape of South Africa dur-
ing the Napoleonic wars, and began to put pressure on the
Boers who had been there since the 17th century.

Beginning in 1835, many of the Boers went off inland and
founded new states. Eventually British expansion from the
Cape caught up with them. The Boer War of 1899-1902 fol-
lowed. Everywhere Britain was disliked. People backed the
Boers. So did socialists. There was mass opposition to the war
in Britain, from the socialist left, from Liberals and even from
future Prime Minister Lloyd George. Britain’s war was de-
nounced by much of the anti-war “movement” as “a Jewish war” – a war for the interests of “Jewish financiers” and on
behalf of Jewish settlers in South Africa. Though it is now
half-forgotten, that was a large component of the case against
the war made in Britain – and perhaps elsewhere: I don’t know – by the anti-war campaign, and it was a big, vigorous,
racous campaign.

The Boer republics had denied equal political rights to new
settlers, and that fact was used as an ideological weapon to
justify Britain’s war. What settlers? “Jews”, said much of the
anti-war movement. (Including some leaders of the British
Marxist organisation, the SDF, Henry Hyndman and Harry
Queld. Hyndman’s use of antisemitism in anti-war agitation
was part of the bill of indictment which the British followers
of Daniel De Leon, and James Connolly, who split from the
SDF in 1903 to form the Socialist Labour Party, drew up
against him. Hyndman was far from being alone in the SDF
on that). Such people as the Liberal J A Hobson, whose study
of imperialism Lenin would draw upon during World War
One, also denounced the war as one for Jewish settlers and
for international Jewish finance.

The “Jewish settlers” were the “Israelis” in the war; “inter-
national Jewish finance” was the world Jewish (or, today,
“Zionist”) conspiracy or quasi-conspiracy, and, for some
hegemony; and Britain was what the USA is today, the chie-
backer of “the Jews”. The campaign against “the Jewish set-
tlers” and Britain was a campaign on behalf of the Boers
who were the foulest anti-black racists.

HEBREW NATION

At the beginning of the 20th century, those who fulmi-
nated against “the Jews”, unlike the kitche left today, had
no inkling that they were feeding a fire that would engulf
two out of every three of Europe’s Jews.

The policy of eliminating Israel – not of stopping Israel ill-
treating the Palestinians, and of winning for the Palestinians
their own state, on the land where they are the majority or
were the majority in 1967, but of conquering the Hebrew
nation in Israel, depriving them of self-determination, killing an
incalculable proportion of them – that policy is, in and of it-
sel, a fully tooled-up species of aggressive antisemitism. The
attitude of wanting to eliminate an entire nation is, on the left,
unique to Israel. Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians natu-
really and justly provokes hostility and condemnation, and
sharpen the desire to help the Palestinians. The desire to see
the Hebrew nation conquered and destroyed, coupled with
positive support for any and all forces attacking Israel, rang-
ing from suicide-murder bombers from the clerical-fascist
Hamas to any Arab or Islamic state committed to destroying
Israel – is a form of self-generating and self-sustaining
antisemitism. In the real world it is not an expression of con-
cern for the Palestinians, though of course most of those who
go along with it think it is. It is hostile to the needs and inter-
tests of the Palestinians on whom it batters.

By making any redress for the Palestinians dependent on
the conquest and destruction of Israel, it rules out redress in
the calculable future. A Palestinian state, however, is still not
unachievable. It could be and should be imposed on Israel by
international pressure and coercion. Tardiness in setting up
such a Palestinian state is allowing the Israeli chauvinists to
work towards making it impossible by way of the expansion
of settler settlements, an Arab-nabab.

One segment of Israeli leaders is, it seems, reconciled to
the program of an Israeli state, covering all pre-1948 Palestine,
within which there will be a vast hostile Palestinian minority
at odds with the Jewish Israelis. They therefore subject to “pre-
ventive” ill-treatment as now for an indefinite span of history.
Such a one-state “solution” would continually reproduce a
hell situation in which both Palestinians and Israeli Jews
would its mirror-image, an Arab-Islamic state in all Palestine
with conquered Jews as a minority.

Those who advocate or pursue a one-state policy serve nei-
er Jewish or Arab Palestine, and from the socialist left. Leaving aside whether it is right or wrong, justified or unjustified, for practical pur-
poses the demand that the Palestinians renounce self-deter-
mation in their own territory, until the destruction of their state at some indeterminate but not far distant date, is an anti-Pale-
stinian policy too. The pseudo-left advocates of this policy are
in the grip either of “anti-imperialist” fantasies which see Is-
rael as the world’s hyper-imperialism, as the metaphorical
essence of imperialism, or of God-will-find-a-way, other-
worldly Islamists in whose picture of realities and likely fu-
ture realities, the Palestinians as living human beings matter
not at all.

The Palestinians are not well-served by their kitche left
and activists, who follow their own agendas and fantasies, not the needs of the Palestinians or the possibilities of
peace. The kitche left of course votes down Palestinian
serving two-states propositions at meetings.

The basic fact is that both the Islamic clerical-fascists and
the “anti-imperialist” left can make full use of the agenda of Israel’s ill-treatment of the Palestinians and some-
times exaggerate it, as many more hostile to Israel than they are friendly to the Palestinians. Fundamentally, they are anti-
Israelis, not pro-Palestinians. In practical politics their sup-
portion with destroying Israel makes them poisoning anti-Palestinian,
too.

If the policy and advocacy of policy, the candi
d answer of properly self-aware absolute anti-Zionists to the charge that they are antisem itic is: “so what? Our attitude is
justified. It is antisem itic, but what of it?” Hostility to Israeli
settlements in Occupied Palestine is antisem itic: the Jew
is and all Jews across the world who back Is-
rael’s right to go on existing, Zionists, too.

The “anti-imperialist” hostility to “Zionists” – who, if
Israel is not also the imperialist, should not be allowed for to go on existing, includ
e most Jews alive – is on some levels as strange as the old antisemitism was when it identified Jews with money. It was
not that there were no rich Jews, no Jewish financiers, as ra-
passed “Jewish money-lenders”. The poisonous tw ist was the identification of
Israel with “imperialism”, the imperialism of fools. Wipe-out-Israel “anti-imper-
ialism” is the anti-imperialism of fools.

With the Greenspanite “imperialism” of fools”, wipe-out-Israel “anti-imper-
ialism” has all the real and alleged sins of all imperialism, and
of advanced capitalist, loaded on to it, and all the hostility to imperialism focused against it. A s gold is the universal equiv-
alent commodity in which the values of all other commodities
are expressed, so Israel is the universal equivalent of im-
perialism. It is not far along that trajectory to the idea of Jews
being the mirror-image of Arab-Islam ic imperialism, because their typical identification with Israel. The article on Paul Foot
and Tam Dalyell in The Left in Dissarray [see Appendix, page
8 of this pamphlet] records a rare public example of the work-
ings of a man of one who knowingly substitutes “Zionist” for “Jew” to rationalise hostility to Jews.

Confronting the old antisemitism which identified cap-
italism with Jews and Jews with capitalism, the German
Marxists had the wisdom to understand that it was “anti-
imperialism of fools”. Wipe-out-Israel “anti-imperialism” is the anti-imperialism of the fools.
Episodes in history

THE ISRAELI-ARAB WAR OF 1948

In November 1947 the United Nations proposed that Palestine, where, under British rule, Jews and Arabs were engaged in simmering guerrilla warfare against each other, be partitioned into a Jewish and an Arab state.

Previously, in 1937, the British Peel Commission had also proposed a partition: the Palestinian Jews accepted the idea, but Britain abandoned it because of Arab opposition. The British formally relinquished control of Palestine in May 1948. The Jews proclaimed the independent state of Israel in the UN-allocated territory. The surrounding Arab states, Egypt, Jordan, Transjordan, which were under British influence or quasi-control, immediately invaded. Some of their officers were seconded British soldiers. They joined with the Palestinian Arab forces that had already been at war with Palestinian Jews. Against most expectations, the Haganah (the Jewish militia) defeated the Arab armies and drove them back. A lot of Palestinian Arabs followed the Arab armies or were driven out. The UN-proposed Palestinian Arab state disappeared, with most of its territory taken by Jordan and Egypt and some by Israel.

The Orthodox Trotskyists had not yet hammered out the ideas that would shape them politically in the decades ahead: of "the colonial revolution" as the leading sector of the world revolution and indeed, where Stalinists controlled the anti-imperialist movement, as one of the roads to workers' states. Those would come after the Russian-Yugoslav split (June 1948); the Maoist victory in China (1949); the Orthodox Trotskyists' conclusion that the Second European Stalinist states were a variant of not-quite-adequate workers' states, species of a new category, "deformed workers' states", which they had inverted; and the start of the Korean war. The Orthodox Trotskyists' Second World Congress was held in April 1948, only weeks before the Israeli-Arab war started. With the possible exception of a handful of people in South Africa, no Orthodox Trotskyist, in Palestine or outside it, backed the Arabs. The Palestinian Trotskyists, in a document of January 1948 published by the official Fourth International magazine in July 1948, declared: "By its racial war against the Jews of Palestine, the Arab League's policy of the imperialist war against the Jewish community is validated. It is a war against the Jewish people, supported and conducted by the imperialist states of the world, in league with the imperialist Jewish minority in the area that is a factor that can serve it even better than Zionism... It is interested in... using this chauvinist war... to crush the Arab workers' and peasants' movement and all the left groups... to brighten racial hatred against minorities". The June-July introduction to the document denounced the May 1948 invasion and demanded "full national minority rights for the Jewish community".

SUEZ, 1956. ISRAEL AND THE BRITISH-FRENCH INVASION OF EGYPT

Egypt was in the vanguard of the Arab-nationalist politics of the Middle East. It had been under British hegemony, with varying legal formulas, for seven decades until an army officers' republican coup d'état in 1952 deposed the King and began to unite the British fethers on the country. Britain withdrew its troops in October 1954. In July 1956 Egypt nationalised the Suez Canal, built and owned by British and French capital. In 1956 Britain had a grip on both Jordan and Iraq. To Arab nationalists, Israel was the great enemy.

Britain and France invaded Egypt and seized Port Said in November 1956. Their pretext was to stop an Israeli-Egyptian war which, with the collusion of Britain and France, Israel had started a few days earlier. The Egyptian state could not withstand the invaders. But the USA could and did. President Dwight Eisenhower put an end to the British-French-Israeli adventure by withholding credit from Britain and France. Financial weapons were used against the military weapons of the British and French, and they were superior. It was a game-changing moment in the history of post-World-War-Two imperialism.

After seven weeks in occupation of Port Said, the British and French, dollar-whipped, withdrew. The British prime minister, Anthony Eden, was forced out of office. Israel withdrew to its pre-war borders. A United Nations garrison was established at Sharm El Sheikh to keep the peace; it would remain in place until 1967, when Egypt forced it out in preparation for an attack on Israel (which Israel would pre-empt in the Six Day War).

The Trotskyists everywhere condemned the British, the French, and the Israelis. The Trotskyists were strongly on the side of the Arab nationalists, against both the European powers and the Arab kings. None of the Trotskyists drew sweeping condemnations of Israel from its role; certainly no-one yet questioned its right to continue in existence. A small pamphlet, Stop the War! Hands off the Arab people!, by Gerry Healy, published at the start of the British-French invasion, encapsulated the mindset, delusions, and historical perspectives of the Orthodox Trotskyists then.

"The Arabs instinctively fear Israel because it is a Capitalist State which they feel is a threat to their desire for freedom... The Imperialists have, in Israel, succeeded in the creation of a state which can lead to a bloody Holocaust that will make Hitler's crimes seem a tea party. The Jewish working people everywhere must denounce Israel's stab in the back to the Arab people. The future of Jewry lies through a socialist solution and not through a Capitalist Israel. A socialist solution demands a real solidarity with the Arab people. In Israel this means unity in action against the common Imperialist enemy between the Jewish and Arab poor peasant and working class. Any other road spells a terrible end for Jewry". Healy was cruder than others might have been, but the crudeness has its own value for understanding the processes by way of which Orthodox Trotskyist attitudes to Israel would evolve.

ISRAEL, THE LEFT, AND THE 1967 SIX DAYS WAR

On 5-10 June 1967, in six days, Israel defeated Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. The Egyptian government had been threatening war against Israel; on 19 May it had expelled UN forces from Sinai and Gaza (there since the war of 1956); and on 22-23 May it had closed the straits of Aqaba connecting Israel to the Red Sea.

Israel struck first, and suddenly, destroying the Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian air forces on the ground and quickly overrunning and occupying Jordan's West Bank, Egypt's Gaza, and Syria's Golan Heights. Militarily, it was a tremendous coup. The pre-1948 entity of Palestine was reunited, but under Israeli control and with the area designated for a Palestinian state in 1947 becoming effectively a colony of Israel. On 19 June Israel proposed a general peace agreement to the Arab states; Israel would evacuate the occupied territory except the Syrian Golan Heights and East Jerusalem in return for recognition by the Arab states and "normalisation" of their relations with Israel. None of the Arab states recognised Israel, or had diplomatic relations with it. In September a conference of Arab states resolved that there would be "no peace, no recognition and no negotiation with Israel". Things again settled into a tense armistice that would last until October 1973.

On the Jewish festival of Yom Kippur, October 1973, Egypt and Syria suddenly struck against Israel. Israel was taken by surprise. Egyptian forces advanced quickly, and for a while it looked as if Israel might be overwhelmed. Israel rallied, and the Egyptians and Syrians were driven back. Five years later Israel and Egypt would sign a peace agreement. Egypt recognised Israel, and Jordan would follow in 1994. Even today they are the only Arab states to have recognised Israel.

1967 was the start of, so far, 50 years of Israeli colonial rule over the Palestinians of the West Bank. In 1967, the international left was vehemently pro-Arab and consequently anti-Israel – "Israel-deatest". Though the Orthodox Trotskyists did not necessarily understand that, this "deatestism" could not be what socialist "deatestism" had been in say, Britain, or France, or the USA in World War One. Defeat for those states did not mean destruction of the country and the society. Defeat for the tiny land of Israel would necessarily mean that, unless there was speedy outside intervention on Israel's side. The general attitude of the left before June 1967 was broadly summed up in the formula of the Pablo-Mandel Fourth International: for a socialist federation of the Middle East with full autonomy for national minorities such as the Kurds and the Israeli Jews. In fact defeatism for Israel in 1967 already contradicted that. Autonomy after Arab conquest begged the question: what would be left to be "autonomous"? And why would the victorious Arabs want to make terms with a defeated and conquered Israel? The 1967 and post-1967 line emerged straight out of the left's belief in the "Arab Revolution" as part of the "colonial revolution" – the colonial revolution that was also, for the Orthodox Trotskyists, a possible socialist revolution and certainly part of the struggle of the two great power blocs in the world, US "imperialism" against Russia and China, designated as non-imperialist.

It was the time of the great demonstrations against the Vietnam war in cities across the world. The habit of intense and uncritical partisanship for Vietnam which had established itself, and of editing out such details as the NLF's Stalinism, spread to other issues, and to Israel and the Arabs. Vietnam had made "anti-imperialism" the defining characteristic of the putative left. The movement against the Vietnam war
How to fight left antisemitism

We need to specify what left antisemitism consists of, in order to debate, educate, and clarify. These, I think, are its main features:

1. The belief that Israel has no right to exist. That is the core of left antisemitism, though it comes in more than one version and from more than one root, ranging from the skewed anti-imperialism of the Orthodox Trotskyists through Arab nationalism to Islamic chauvinism. Advocacy of the destruction of Israel, which is what separates left-wing and Islamist antisemites from honest critics of Israeli policy, should not be tolerated in the labour movement and in the serious left.

2. The belief that Israeli Jewish nationalism, Zionism, is not only a form of racism. That is, it punishes if Israel, Zionists, and Jews abandon Israeli nationalism and support of any kind for Israel. That Jewish students, for example, can only redeem themselves if they agree that the very existence of Israel or of an Israeli Jewish nation is racist.

3. The view that Israel alone is responsible for the conflict with the Arab states (Israel and the Arab world with its 14 states). Avoiding that Israel alone is responsible for creating Arab refugees, and is uniquely evil in doing so. In real history the Arab states mostly refused the Palestinians citizenship or even the right to work.

4. The claim that the Palestine have a “right of return”, that is, the right to the organised settlement in Israel of six million people (only a tiny and dying-off number of whom were born in what is now Israel) is one of the many codes of fact demanding the self-abolition of the Jewish state and justifications for war to conquer and abolish it because it will not abolish itself. It is not the equivalent of free immigration to the UK, or even of mass migration to the UK of millions from Syria, Libya, and Africa. Its equivalent for Britain would be the settlement in the country, organised by a hostile authority, of sixty million people. Socialists should of course be in favour of agreements between Israel and the Palestinians for compensation and for letting individual Palestinians into Israel. Support for a collective right of return is only another form of the demand to conquer and destroy Israel, if it will not surrender.

5. The idea that the forced migration of 700,000 Arabs was a unique evil is also extravagantly wrong. In 1945, 12 to 14 million Germans were driven out of Eastern Europe. They were driven into a Germany reduced to ruins by wartime bombing, where economic life had seized up and millions were starving. Only fringe German nationalists now propose to reverse that forced population movement and to drive out the Poles, Czechs, Russians, etc. who live where Germans once lived.

6. There is a peculiar dialect of Holocaust semi-denial current on the left. I have never heard of anyone on the left who denies that six million Jews were murdered by the Nazis (though, in the nature of things, someone will now jump out from behind a bush wearing a “Hitler was Framed” badge, and call me a liar). What the anti-Zionist left habitually deny is that this unique fact of history had repercussions that we should at least recognise and try to understand, with some sympathy for the suffering Jews and their descendants. On the left the Holocaust is not denied, but it is relegated almost to the status of a “virtual fact”. In truth, the Holocaust discredited all Jewish-assimilationist programs, including ours, the socialist one. It created and hardened the will for a Jewish solution to the Jewish question and for the creation of Israel. There is nothing to be surprised at or scandalised by in that. The Holocaust should be appreciated as a real fact of history, with repercussions and reverberations, and not as something outside the history we are all part of, as a sort of side-show, as a two-dimensional hologram rather than the enormously weighty, reverberating event it was and continues to be.

7. The idea that there are good peoples entitled to all rights, and bad peoples, entitled to none. That too is something I have never heard anyone voice plainly and explicitly. But it is there as an implicit subtext in the idea that we are concerned with national rights only for the presently oppressed, i.e. in this case the Palestinians.

8. There is no one-state solution. Not, as now, by Israeli domination of the whole territory and Palestinians living indefinitely in a purgatory of Israeli occupation, nor through a Palestinian state “from the river to the sea” incorporating the Arab territory. After its Jewish population have been killed or overpowered by Arab or Islamic states. The only just solution that can serve both Jews and Arabs is two states: a sovereign Palestinian state in contiguous territory, side by side with Israel.

If, as may be possible, a Palestinian Arab state is made impossible by the spread of Israeli settlements, then the future will be grim indeed for both Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews.

Gamel Abdel Nasser

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Gamel Abdel Nasser
What is “left-wing” antisemitism?

What is “left-wing antisemitism”? Where is it manifested? What is to be done about it? There are three difficulties, three confusions and obfuscations, that stand in the way of rational discussion of what we mean by “left-wing antisemitism”.

The first is that left-wing antisemitism knows itself by another and more self-righteous name, “anti-Zionism”. Often, your left-wing antisemite sincerely believes that he or she is only an anti-Zionist, only a just if severe critic of Israel.

The second is that talk of left-wing antisemitism to a left-wing antisemite normally evokes indignant, sincere, and just denial – of something else! “No, I’m not a racist! How dare you call me a racist?”

No, indeed, apart from an atypical crackpot here and there, left-wing antisemites are not racist. But was antisemitism before there was late-19th and 20-th century anti-Jewish racism. And there is still antisemitism of different sorts, long after disgust with Hitler-style racism, and overt racism of any sort, became part of the mental and emotional furniture of all half-way decent people, and perhaps especially of left-wing people.

Left-wingers are people who by instinct and conviction side with the oppressed, the outcasts, those deprived of human rights, with the working-class and the labour movement. We naturally side against the police, the military, and the powerful capitalist states, including our “own”. We are socially tolerant; in contrast to “hang ‘em, flog ‘em, build more jails” people; we look to changing social conditions rather than to punishment to deal with crime – we are people who want to be Marxists and socialists, and consistent democrats. Confused some people may be, racists they are not. We are not saying that left-wing antisemites are racists.

The third source of confusion and obfuscation is the objection: “You say I’m an antisemite because I denounce Israel. I’m not anti-Jewish when I denounce Israel, but anti-Zionist”. And sometimes, at this point, you get the addition: “By the way, I am myself Jewish”.

The objector continues: Israel deserves criticism. Even the harshest criticism of Israel’s policies in the West Bank and Gaza, and of Israel’s long-term treatment of the Palestinians, is putative anti-Zionist and anti-Israel sentiment.

The prerequisite for left-wing antisemitism is the catastrophic decline in the culture of the left over the last decades, a decline which allows people who want to be socialists to chant “Sharon is Hitler, Israel is Nazi” and similar nonsense without checking on the words, without pausing to listen to what they are saying, or to think about it. The specific framework within which we have been describing exists, and without which it probably couldn’t exist in these “left-wing” forms, is the poisonous and systematic misrepresentation and falsification of the history of the Jewish-Arab conflict and of the Jewish people in the 20-th century. We can only touch on that here.

In real history, Jews fled to Palestine, where a small Zionist colony and a small, but pro-Zionist Jewish community already existed, from persecution in Europe in the 1920s, 30s and 40s. In the 1930s and 40s they fled for their lives from Nazism, which killed two out of every three Jews alive in Europe in 1939, in a world in which no non-persecuting state would let them in, or enough of them, in. They fled to the existing Jewish national minority in Palestine (a long-established minority which, though small, was for example the majority in Jerusalem in 1900).

While Hitler was organising mass slaughter, Britain shut out Jews from Palestine, interning those who tried to enter. Overloaded, unseaworthy boats carrying illegal cargoes of Jews sank in the Mediterranean trying to get to Palestine (for example, the Struma, in which over 700 people died).

Israel was set up by those Jews on licence from the UN, which stipulated two states in Palestine, one Jewish and one Arab. When the state of Israel was declared in May 1948, the surrounding Arab states invaded. Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt were then British-dominated, and some of the armies were staffed by British officers.
The Israelis defended themselves and won. In the war three quarters of a million Palestinian Arabs were driven out or fled; in the same period and afterwards, about 600,000 Jews were expelled from or fled Arab countries.

In the Arab invasion of 1948, the Arab-Palestinian state was eliminated. Most of the Jews went to Jordan, and fell under Israeli control in the war of 1967. That was a tremendous tragedy that will only be redressed when an independent Palestinian state takes its place alongside Israel.

This complex and tragic history is presented by the “absolute anti-Zionist” as a conspiracy of a demonic force outside general history and outside Jewish history. It is not rare to find “left-Zionists” arguing that this Jewish-Zionist conspiracy was so powerful that it was able even to manipulate Adolf Hitler and the Holocaust in which six million Jews died (see the play by the veteran Trotskyist Jim Allen, Perdition, of which Ken Loach planned a performance at the time in 1987). The core idea, the root of modern left-wing antisemitism, is that Israel, in one way or another, is an illegitimate state; and that, therefore, in one way or another, it should be done away with. If its citizens will not be the first in history to voluntarily dismantle their nation-state and make themselves a minority in a state run by those whom they have to fight for national existence; if they will not agree to voluntarily dismantle Israel and create a secular Arab state”, in which Israeli Jews can have religious but not national rights – then they must be overwhelmed and compelled to submit or flee by the Arab states, now or when they are strong enough.

Beginning with the German attempt to sink Israel into a broader Arab-majority entity in which “everyone could live in peace”, the chain of logic rooted in the idea that Israel should not have come into existence, that it is an illegitimate state, leads directly – since Israel will not agree to abolish itself – to support for expulsion, conquest, and all that goes with it. Israel must be conquered.

Even the work of a writer like Hal Draper can feed into this poisoned stream. While Draper made valid and just criticisms of Israel, he accepted that it had a right to exist and a right to defend itself. He denounced those whom he wanted to destroy. But he made his criticisms in the tone and manner of a prophet denouncing sin and mischief. He too thought that Israel “is an illegitimate polity which it should not have come into existence and should go out of existence as soon as possible.

By agreement, and only by agreement, he believed; but the subject must get lost. There is nothing to stop someone swayed by Draper’s denunciations of Israel, and accepting his idea that Israel is an illegitimate state, then impatiently insisting: if not by agreement, then by conquest.

And an increase in the assertiveness of the Working UKP could look to a Saddam Hussein to “free Palestine”, that is, conquer Israel.

The point here is that states and nations are the products of history. There is no such thing as an illegitimate nation or a “bad people” which does not deserve the same rights as other peoples.

The antisemitic left today, which depicts Israel as the hyper-imperialist power – either controlling US policy, or acting as its instrument in the world (it is in the “antisemitism of the fools”. And that in practice leads to a comprehensive hostility to Jews not far from what Bebel called the socialism of fools. One of the great tragedies of contemporary politics is that a large number of people, whose distaste for opposing Bush and Blair in Iraq and in support the Palestinians are initially healthy, are being poisoned with “left-wing” antisemitism.

“Anti-Zionist” antisemitism, is, in short, first a denial of Israel’s right to exist and rooted in that a comprehensive hostility to pro-Israel Jews, that is to most Jews alive, branding them as “Zionists” and seeing that description as akin to “racist” or “imperialist”. It excepts only those Jews who agree that Israel is racist imperialism in its most concentrated essence, and oppose its continued existence.

The general antidote to this anti-Zionist fools of the propagation of nationalism, racism, and social politics. Such politics focus on a political solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. They measure and criticise Israel – and the Arab states – according to their stand in relation to that just solution – the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

There is an immediate “antidote” to left-wing anti-semitism too, and it is a very important task for Marxist socialists like those who publish Solidarity: relentless exposure and criticism of their politics and antics – without fear of isolation, ridicule, or the venomous hostility of the vocal and self-righteous left-wing antisemites.

Appendix: Jew or Zionist?

Learn how to do it smoothly, tammy

A small outcry greeted the assertion by the veteran Labour MP Tam Dalyell * that there are too many Jews in Tony Blair’s and George Bush’s entourages, and that there are too many Briton’s and the USA’s policy on the Middle East. I found the responses to Dalyell encouraging, but also seriously off the point. The important and effective antisemites now are not those who talk about Histrorities about Jewish influence and Jewish “ca-bals”. Such people can usually expect the response Dalyell got.

Their talk is too close to what the Nazis said to justify genocide. It begs too-questions and implies preposterous answers to them. Do all Jews have the same politics? How can the presence of “the Jews”, or of people of Jewish faith or Jewish background, add up to “Jewish influence” or “Jewish conspiracy”, when the individuals involved often have different opinions and advocate different policies? How, where the neo-conservatives of Jewish origin who are close to George Bush are out of line with the thinking of most American Jews, the big majority of whom are liberal Democrats? Where, though there may be a number of Jews who share the same opinion on certain questions, they are not alone in such opinions, and Jews cannot be defending the opposite view? Where some Jews helped create the movement against the US invasion of Iraq, while they have constantly supported the war, or, in Bush’s camp, helped initiate it?

There is only one semi-coherent version of the idea that there are Jews around, irrespective of whether they agree or fight with each other, then that is a Jewish influence. And that is the Nazi doctrine that Bolshevist Jews and Jewish international financiers, irrespective of all that divides them, are all nonetheless part of one Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world. It is the only version that permits you to the truth that there are bourgeois Jews and Bol-shevist Jews, red Jews and Rothschilds.

Omitting much of an open following now, though such bits of that old antisemitism as Dalyell spewed out should of course be stamped on. A number of writers in the Guardian did stamp on it. It was left to Paul Foot of the SWP, UK (Guardian, 14 May 2003) to defend Dalyell and put the most important present day anti-semitism back in focus. Foot wrote: “Obviously [Dalyell] is wrong to complain about Jewish presence on Blair and Bush when he means Jewish pressure. But that is a mistake that is constantly encouraged by the Zionists”. Foot advises Dalyell on how he should have expressed the same idea in more acceptable words. Call them “Zionists”, not “Jews”. Tammy, and no-one can accuse you of being an antisemite without also having to take on the bulk of the “revolutionary left”. Learn how to do it in the modern fashion, com- fortable. Of course you did not “mean Jews”; you were “Zionists”, didn’t you?

Anti-Jewish feeling and ideas are usually now wrapped up in anti-Zionism. Not all “anti-Zionists” are antisemites, but these days antisemites are usually careful to present themselves as “anti-Zionists”. For that reason, it is light-shedding to a prominent pseudo-left “anti-Zionist” recognising as his political kin someone who denounces Jews – and, Foot thinks, was at fault only in lacking the fineness to say Zionist when he meant jew.

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“Anti-Zionism” is the antisemitism of today. “Anti-Zionism” is not the same as denunciation of Israel, it involves comprehensively anti-Jewish attitudes – rampant or latent and implied – because it starts out from a stark realisation to recognise that the Jewish nation that had formed in Palestine by the mid 1930s had the right to exist, or the right to fight for its existence against those who would have destroyed it if they could. First the most important of which began in 1936, and in a series of wars, 1948, 1967, and 1973, Arab chauvinists tried to destroy the Jewish nation in Palestine. The palestinians did not have bodies that could prevail! Arab pressure on the British overlords in pre-WWII-Two Palestine led to the closing of the doors to Palestine for Jews who otherwise faced death in Europe, and kept them closed all through the war and for three years after the war ended.

In his own way, Foot expresses the logic he himself sees in the “anti-Zionist” language he advises Dalyell to adopt. “There are lots of Jews in Britain who are bitterly opposed to the loathsome Israeli occupation of other people’s countries and the grotesque violence it involves”, Countries,plural? Which countries does Israel occupy other than the West Bank and Gaza? Foot does not mean the ex-Syrian Golan Heights, Israeli-occupied since 1967. He means pre-1967 Israel.

The attitude to Israel which Foot expresses, that it does not have the right to exist at all, begins with denial of equal-ity to the Jews of Palestine and with demonising the Jewish nation there. From that denial comes grotesque anti-Jewish bias and misrepresentation in accounts of the history of the Jewish-Arab conflict and the origin of Israel. The Jewish national-ity had no right to exist; Jews who fled to Palestine from the Nazis had no right to do that; they never had the right to defend themselves, and they don’t have it now.

The overwhelming majority of Jews in the world, in whose post-Holocaust identity is en-grafted, are guilty of racism and betrayal of Jewish internationalism when, however critical they may be of Israeli governments, they defend Israel’s right to exist.

Beginning with denial of the Jewish state’s right to exist, this “anti-Zionism” spreads out to also demonise most Jews in the world. The “Zionists” who are denounced by the “anti-Zionists” of Foot’s kind are always Jewish Zionists, non-Jews who defend Israel’s right to exist and defend itself. (The exception is when they are those who can be denounced as renegades from pseudo-left orthodoxy on Israel and “Zionism” — like the non-Jewish supporters of Work-ers’ Liberty). “Anti-Zionism” is the most potent anti-semitism in the modern world, especially as a dem onstratron of the venomously a property of the pseudo-left, as Dalyell’s state-ment and Paul Foot’s gloss on it shows clearly.

In fact, neither’s of the facts right. Of the three “Jews” he named in Blair’s circle, two, Jack Straw and Peter Mandelson, though both have some Jewish ancestry, do not identify themselves as Jews. The old fashion slandered into a racist, “tell-me-who-your-ancestors-were” definition of Jewishness. By the time Foot came to defend Tam Dalyell, his mistake had been pointed out. Foot didn’t notice. Just call them “Zionists” Tammy and you can’t go wrong.

This “anti-Zionism” is no help at all to the Palestinians. For over half a century the Arab chauvinist demand for the destruction of Israel has been the best helper the expan-sionist Jewish-chauvinist Israeli right has had. If the Arab states and the Palestinians had accepted the Israeli proposal of September 1967 to withdraw from the territories it had occupied in June that year in return for Arab recognition and normalisation of relations between Israel and the Arab states, then the colonialist horrors of the last decades on the West Bank could not have happened.

People like Foot, are not socialist internationalists but vi-carious Arab chauvinists. They are not friends of the oppressed Palestinians, for whom the only just and possible settlement is an independent Palestinian state side by side with Israel.

The main thing “socialists” like Foot and his mentor Tony Cliff have achieved is to confuse old left-wing anti-colonialism with virulent antisemitism, dressed up in the way Foot advices Dalyell to dress it up, as “anti-Zionism”. # Varsity Fair magazine, issue dated June 2003

Tam Dalyell

8 AGAINST LEFT ANTISEMITISM

More online at www.workersliberty.org
A mirror for anti-Zionists

Walking from Westminster to Trafalgar Square one afternoon in May or June 2002, I came upon a small picket-demonstration — a dozen people perhaps — waving Palestinian flags and placards on the pavement across the road from the entrance to the Prime Minister’s residence in Downing Street.

I saw from a distance, and wondered at it, that half the demonstrators were dressed in the black hats and clothes and the beards that identified them as some sort of especially religious Jews.

I had known, of course, that some devout Jews believe that the Jewish religion is an integral part of the identity of all Jews to something that is part of the identity of all Jews to something that is part of the identity of all — and then to Israel — from a minority movement opposed to a Palestinian state, which fundamentally means commitment to a Jewish state, and then to Israel — from a minority movement against Israeli occupation of the Palestinian-majority territories — are other group of people of Jewish background who are out of sympathy with the Jew who create Israel and to Jews demand it of them? (As distinct from seeking a solution that would do something like justice to both Palestinian and Jews.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

most all Jewish people. Critically or mindlessly, unreservedly or grudgingly, to one degree or another, Jews identify with Israel. Why shouldn’t they? How could they not?

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

So they shouldn’t have fought back?"

"No! Jews were meant to suffer."

And so it went on."

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

I was concerned to question and listen — to understand. My theological views being blunt from lack of use, I didn’t in time think to ask him how he knew that his God had decreed the Diaspora but not the Jewish “in-gathering” in Israel.

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

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

I may, through lack of theological subtlety, be crucifying his arguments a bit here. I don’t think so; but if I am, I do not do it knowingly, for effect.

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

Of proponents of this “Marxism”, the most influential in the last 30 years was the late Tony Cliff, a Palestinian Jew in origin — he came to Europe in 1946 — and a vicarious Arab nationalist by conviction. Cliff could get away with preaching Trotsky “Trotskyism”, because they made war on him. He said so!"
Comrades: You, I believe, 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. 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 Palestinians for action against Israel and on behalf of the Palestinians.

Israel has ruled over the Palestinian majority territories as an occupying colonial power since the June war of 1967 — a full half century. The relationship between Israel and the Palestinians is one of overwhelming Israeli superiority in the technology of modern warfare.

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

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

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, along side Israel. The Israeli leaders, or most of them, mean Palestinian autonomy in chopped-up territories under the military control of Israel.

Whatever chance it had of being forced on Israel has been eroded by the Oslo Accords which collapse in 2000. The harassment and oppression of the Palestinians is widespread. They are a small nation surrounded by big enemies, and, for recent times, the biggest of these have been the Israelis who have the nuclear bomb.

The mood for boycott is backed by strong feelings of indignation against the strong (Israel) after their 1982 massacre at 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 44 years of the 46 year life of full-blood 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 efficacy.

You, 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 with, 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 Sharpeville massacre at 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 44 years of the 46 year life of full-blood 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 efficacy.

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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 kitch-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.

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.

THE PSEUDO HISTORY

You know how the pseudo history goes. Jews were persecuted in Russia and Eastern Europe. Then came Zionism, a Jewish-nationalist and even Jewish "racist" mirror image of the nationalisms and racism in the society around them.

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. True to their reactionary petty bourgeois nature, the Zionists allied with imperialist powers and worked to win their favour.

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: this was "racism". What in other peoples was nationalism, in the Jews was racism, and racism most foul! It was racism identical to that of the Nazis.

Then, worse by far! The Zionists allied with the Nazis. What comes next varies, depending on how deep-dyed in the kitch-left culture on Zionism one is.

“The Zionists” collaborated with the Nazis, their mirror self in occupied Europe even as they were attempting to extirpate the Jews of Europe; 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 British film-maker, producer and director who 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. 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 kitch-left hears about that dictum, early in their acquaintance 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 Jews” used the Jewish state 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, as 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, as is the fact that the territory allotted by the UN to the Palestinian state was taken by Jordan — the West Bank, until 1967 — and Egypt).

Israel then drove out millions of Palestinians. Ever since, Israel has served imperialist interests in the Middle East.

I’ve telescoped the story, but I haven’t crudified it: see, for example, Jim Higgins, a once-central representative of the old pre-SWP is culture, and one who was not simply ignorant, in a debate in Workers’ Liberty in 1996-7 (www.workersliberty.org/node/8210).

Where to begin unravelling this writhing tissue of poisonous “historical” worms?

The first thing that strikes you in this kitch-Left tale of irrepressible human evil, oppression, and mischief-making, is who the villains are. They are the people, and most of the leaders of the people, who were the victims of oppression and industrialisation and murder. The people, also, after they and their forebears had, over decades and centuries, been maligned as human demons, the source of most of the evils in the world, had two in every three of their number in Europe — Europe all the way from the Caucasus to the Breton coast — murdered.

The second thing that strikes you is how relentlessly and stupidly many people — and 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! Of course they would. (See Jim Higgins, above.) “The Zionists” were and are inhuman demons.

The third thing that strikes you is the stratospherically lunacy of such as what is attributed to “the Zionists”, if you try to get together into something like coherence. For example, in Allen’s play and Lenni Brenner’s books (on which Allen seem 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! Even during the Nazi movement — ultimately, if you know how to interpret things, and what “really” happened — served the interests of Zionism. Of “the Jews”.

The fourth thing that strikes you is the stone-hearted lack of sympathy and empathy, or even sympathetic understanding, with which the absolute anti-Zionists, some of whom are, to their credit, moved by the suffering of the Palestinians, approach the history of their subject. Everything is grist to their mill. Conflicting or contradictory elements in the real history are ruthlessly cut away. The “absolute anti-Zionists operate with some self-righteousness, an absolute set of double standards.

Did Jewish or “Zionist” leaders “negotiate” at gunpoint with the murderous power which had them in its grip? Of course they did. Aha, that tells you the “real” mindset 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 returning Jewish bodies to Poland, and the apartheid state convinced 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. That hundreds of thousands of Jews moved there in the 20s, 30s, and 40s.

That is how it was? No, in the conventional kitch-Lef-Lead accor
count, 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 Decla-
ratation, Britain tried to renege on its promise that Palestine could be a Jewish national home. It began to impose restrictions on Palestinian Jews (on Jews acquiring land, for in-
stance, and on Jews who chose certain occupations that called for a
‘trophies of War World Two (that is, on the eve of the Holocaust) in
largely stopping Jewish entry to Palestine. The British then, the Poles, and the French, and up until Britain quit Palestine in 1948, it systematically and rigorously excluded all but a meagre quota of Jews from Palestine. It in-
ternal illegal refugees, and effectively condemned many would-be refugees to death at sea as they, Jewish “boat peo-
souled” to evade the controls in miserably unseaworthy craft.

— Nonsense! Britain served “the Zionists!” “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 an arms embargo on their former allies who
thing of 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-officed) armies Egypt (Eytan, Yarmony). The exception was Stalin’s Russia, which, eager to create
difficulties for its British rival, sent guns via its puppet state of

— Nonsense! Israel was a capitalist-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 could hope that in the long term, the area that they invaded —

— Nonsense! Here too “the Zionists” were in absolute con-
trol — and millions, not three quarters of a million, were driven out or fled. There are now 6 million Palestinian refugees!

It is the testimony of history that nearly as many Jews —

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 one-sidedness, the grotesque all-pervading one-sidedness, of the “history” that
underpins the kitch-left’s picture of the Arab-Jewish conflict.
With each side given a paragraph down to the 4th and 5th gen-
eration, is in the other commendable.

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 kitch-left account? — It is perfectly un-
answerable. I have heard an armistice, 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
written down. The most-stern judges of the Zionist or Jewish
“collaborators”, at gunpoint, 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 ma-

Now that you mention that — and for defeating in 1948 those who wanted to kill them or, in the words of the proclamation of the Egyptian army invading Israel, “drive them into the sea”?

The kitch-Lef-Lead distortions of the Holocaust are not only incomprehensible to the average idiot — they are incomprehensible to 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?

MIRIAM SHLESINGER

You know about cases like that of Miriam Shlesinger, a former chair of the Israeli section of Amnesty Interna-
tional and a strong critic of the Israeli government’s mis-
treatment of Palestinians, who in 2002 was thrown off the
torial board of an international journal of translation studies by the editor, a British academic, who wanted to
to boycott Israel.

You think such things can help the Palestinians? You think it
would be possible to involve Stop The War, the MAB, and
the supporters of Muslim jihadists, in seeking out and bountying
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,
not be an inevitable result of the boycott campaign?

Why not? Such things can be kept under control? Who will
them?

Nothing will control them, once a free-wheeling campaign
goes. Attacks by Muslims on Jews has increased greatly
throughout Europe in the last years. The chance that a
boycott of Israel now, in this situation, mounted by these
people, will do anything worthwhile is miniscule.

And let me remind you of something that is likely to be

In the old campus wars against “Zionism”, it was Jews
who were the targets. When the white sheep of Jewish Anti-
whites — and whites 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?

Everyone knows August Bebel’s statement that the “anti-
Rothschild” type of old anti-semitism parroted of “the social-
ism of the fools”. You could call the present “left” anti-
“imperialism”, or the “anti-racists” of the idios.

I conclude: there is no way in the circumstances I have
outlined that a boycott movement will not, to put it at its
mild form, involve anti-semites, antisemites and “anti-
Jewish conflict.

They — unlike you — believe that the Jewish Israeli nation
should be abolished. Since there is no way that it can be
suaded 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 alone can do, they help.

The political reality of international politics, the condition
on the left. There is no equivalent attitude to any other nation. The
South African analogy is utterly false here: the objective of the seri-
threat is not that the state of a country will be destroyed, but that
be placed by majority rule, not that a whole nation be

Does your anti-semitic boycott in sympathy or not, the position that the Jewish state should be destroyed is

Most Jews alive today identify to one degree or another
with Israel — critically and reluctantly, or with some
tility in the history we have briefly cov-

The main exceptions I know of are some varieties of revo-

Nonsense! Everyone knows that the “anti-

Everyone knows that to see Israel destroyed, will lead to a targeting of Jew-
sthat the state should be destroyed is

Both in the case of the Jewish state and of the Arab

As a species, social-

yet. Here it is surely not a matter of racism, or of compre-

Yet that doesn’t quite cover it.

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
people who are so identified because they stand up against the “anti-Zionists”, belong to a Jewish or Is-
aarl 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? Antisem
tic both in its core — destroy Israel; Israel is an illegitimate
historical formation; the Jewish state must be abolish-
allied to a non-Jewish state — and in all that is

The position that Israel is illegitimate contains in embryo
even if its proponents do not understand it or wish it) a full-
scare approach. I mean you, you know that position is sup-
ally with and help those who will use a boycott campaign to
popularise and reiterate the idea that Israel is illegitimate, etc.

An extreme version of this style Christian or Islamic anti-semitism. Yet it does involve a
prettty comprehensive hostility not just to Israel but to most
Jews alive, those who will not see “anti-imperialist” and

Persecution of Jews, albeit on a mild level as these things
go in history, was a feature of some campuses in the 1980s, organ-
ised and instigated by the SWP and their co-conspirators on this
question. You can not but be aware of that, comrades Rose.

There have been quite a number of antisemitisms in history, few of them so distinguishing itself 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 —
theologically — but they did 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.

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Rothschild” type of old anti-semitism parroted of “the social-
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outlined that a boycott movement will not, to put it at its
mild form, involve anti-semites, antisemites and “anti-
Jewish conflict.

The nearest (partial) equivalent I can think of to

But in reality? In reality, this boycott movement gains its ac-
tive force from people who hold to and propagate the “ab-
solutely anti-Zionist” demonisation which I have touched on

Now, in Britain, the boycott is a weapon against Israel in the hands of people, secular kitch-leftists and Islam-
ity like 4th and 5th generation, is in the other commendable.

And let me remind you of something that is likely to be for-

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 great deal of relevance to the
political-cultural framework in which this discussion
takes place. And to what the kitch-left and their Islamist
allies will make of a boycott movement.

The kitch-Lef-Lead distortions of the Holocaust are not only incomprehensible to the average idiot — they are incomprehensible to 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?
Trotsky and the Jewish question

“...the socialist revolution is the only realistic solution of the Jewish question. If the Jewish workers and peasants asked for an independent state, good — but they didn’t get it under Great Britain. But if they want it, the proletariat will give it. We are not in favour, but the classes waging work can give it to them.” Leon Trotsky, 15 June 1940

It is one of the ironies of politics. Trotskyism, in most of its Trotskyist mutations, embraces an “anti-Zionism” that implies nothing less than a comprehensive hostility to all Jews alive; yet Trotskyism in Trotsky’s time and after was a movement in which people of Jewish origin played — and they — a massive part.

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

In the first half of the 20th century, Jewish workers lived in a world that was simultaneously “assimilationist” and anti-Zionist. A Jewish Poale Zion, arguing for international socialist revolution, was often bitter, but the demonisation of Zionism that characterised much of modern Trotskyism was unknown. Zionists were often彼 with the Red Army to defend the workers’ republic after the Russian Revolution of 1917.

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

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

The shift to modern left “anti-Zionism” was part of the Stalinisation of the Communist International. When in 1929 Palestine’s Jewish nationalism was under attack by both Arab and Jewish opponents, the Comintern — inspired by its success in overthrowing the Russian Tsar, to the anti-Semitic pogroms of 1881. They hoped that the universal sympathy for the plight of the oppressed, against the aristocracy — and lo, here the people were rising. The pogroms were therefore welcome evidence that the “people” were responding to the Narkomyn. They were honest, though very confused, people. The Stalinists were cynical manipulators who, in the 1930s, 40s and 50s — with a short break in the late 1940s, when they backed the formation of Israel, in order to make trouble for the British Empire — would fill the labour movement with their own poisonous brand of anti-Semitic “anti-Zionism: what is now “Trotskyism” on the Israeli-Arab conflict.

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

Refusal to go with Stalinism on this question was one of the characteristics of Trotskyism while Trotsky lived. Trotskyists rejected the malignant fantasies of 1929 (for example, in an article by Max Shachtman in the US Militant, October 1929).

Their comments on 1936 did not pretend that it was purely an anti-imperialist movement, or that there could be anything “progressive” about Arab-Muslim chauvinism against Pales tinian Jews. After Epstein broke with the Stalinists, the Militant reported the victories of the degeneracy of Stalinism, his account of what he had seen in Palestine of the CP’s collaboration with Arab nationalists in terrorist attacks on Jews.

In this they reflected Trotsky himself. Throughout the 1930s Trotsky was a man of the Comintern. The CPs were supposed to support for Jewish rights, including the right to migrate to Palestine and anywhere else, while rejecting the Zionist project — and of sympathetic awareness that the world was closing in brutally on the Jews.

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

Always an opponent of the Zionist movement, he warned in the 1920s that the Palestinians could turn out to be a giant ghetto in which the Jews who had fled there might be trapped and mass-sacrificed.

Yet it is plain from his writings in the 1930s that the experience of the Jews was a microcosm of the whole world. The pogroms of the 1920s, not only in Poland and the USSR under Stalin, radically changed Trotsky’s views.

By the end of his life he believed that the persecution of the Jews was a symptom of the totalitarianism of that period, the consciousness of the Jewish people had made the creation of some sort of Jewish state an inescapable necessity. Rightly, he rejected the idea that the Palestine programme of the Zionists could provide an immediate refuge for Jews facing the Hitlers. The only conceivable immediate solution was socialist revolution. But he viewed the demand for a separate Jewish state with growing sympathy. He asserted more than once that after a socialist revolution the Jews would have to have a state of their own if they still wanted it; and it is plain that he believed that they would.

In 1932-3, Trotsky discussed the “Jewish problem” with Class Struggle, an American Marxist publication. He was asked: “How do you see your attitude to Palestine as a possible Jewish “homeland” and about a land for the Jews generally? Don’t you believe that the antisemitism of German fascism compels a different attitude to the Jewish question on the part of Communists?”

Trotsky replied: “I do not know whether Jewry will be built up again as a nation. However, there can be no doubt that the oppressed nations of Europe, and as a matter of fact, the oppressed nation could be brought about only by the proletarian revolution. There is no such thing on this planet as the idea that one has more claim to land than another.

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

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

In a January 1937 interview, Trotsky explained: “During my youth I rather leaned towards the prognosis that the Jews of different countries would be assimilated and that the Jewish question would thus disappear in a quasi-automatic fashion. “The historical development of the last quarter of a century has shown that this perspective is false. Deprived of any home, everywhere swept over to and excrated nationalism, one part of which is antisemitism. The Jewish question has loomed largest in the most highly developed capitalist country of Europe, in my opinion.”

“On the other hand the Jews of different countries have cre-
Conspiracy theories which dominate much of the Left today.

Thought for the anti-Zionist demonology and international "capitulation".

Semites. If so, then evidently Trotsky too was guilty of this.

The nation-state it thereby "capitulated" to Nazi and other anti-Zionism. If proposed to create a Jewish national territory as part of the solution to the Jewish question, Trotsky made the Zionist project utopian and reactionary.

The dispersion of Semites has been a subject of early 20th century experience. He speaks of the victors of World War 2 setting up. And it would be worked out by the Arabs, as for all other scattered nations.

The dispersed Jews who would want to be reassembled in the same community will find a sufficiently extensive and rich spot under the sun. The same possibility will be opened for the Jews who wish to have a future socialist version of the Zionist "methods of solving the Jewish question", methods "which under decaying capitalism have a utopian and reactionary character".

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

Trotsky’s very loose use of the term nation to describe the Jews of the world may perhaps be explained as an unconscious by-product of his acceptance of the need for a territorial solution to the problem of the people “without a land” — the very idea he had scotched at and fought against for most of his life as a reactionary utopia. He still says it is a reactionary utopia and a mirage in its bourgeois Zionist form. But now he counterposes to it not assimilation but a socialist version of the Zionist territorial-state-creating solution.

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

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Are we not correct in saying that a world socialist federation would have to make possible the creation of a ‘Birobidjan’ [an equivalent of the official, though in fact token, autonomous Jewish national republic within the USSR] for Jews who wish to have their own autonomous republic as the arena for their own culture?" One of the most maliciously stupid ideas put into circulation by the Stalinists and adopted by post-Trotsky “Trotskyists” is that because Zionism proposed to create a Jewish national territory it thereby “capitalized” to Nazi and other antisemitism. If so, then evidently Trotsky too was guilty of this "capitalizing".

But the revolutionary workers were defeated again and again throughout the 1920s and 30s — in the USSR, Germany, Austria, France, Spain. The socialist revolution did not happen — not in time to save Europe’s massacred Jews, to save the sixty million people who died in the Second World War, or to prevent Germany being pillaged and partitioned and having 12 to 14 million of its people driven out of Eastern Europe. Not in time to stop the atom-bombing of Japan, or the expansion of Stalinist totalitarianism to engulf ninety million people in Eastern Europe.

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

The “reactionary utopian” solution to the Jewish question received an immense boost from the events of the world war. The need which Trotsky reluctantly came to realize for a Jewish national territory as part of the solution to the Jewish question was now felt with immense urgency by the majority of Jews. And it was made reality not in a benign socialist world, after a workers’ revolution, but in a world dominated by imperialism and Stalinism, realized by way of bitter communal and national conflict and within the framework of a Zionist-Kremlin, and then a Zionist-US, alliance.

The Jewish state was established in a world which was not socialist but still capitalist dog-eat-dog. In Palestine it was not the main Palestinian Jews who decided that. In 1948, the territorial allotted to the Jews by the United Nations was attacked by the armies of the surrounding Arab states, armies under the control of seconded officers of the British imperial army.

If the Jews had lost, they would have been massacred, driven out, or put back under the control of a Britain returning as “peacekeeper”. The Jews won the 1948 war, and three-quarters of a million Palestinian Arabs fled or were driven out. About 600,000 Jews were driven out of Arab countries in following years, though they would be assimilated in Israel, not, like the Palestinian Arabs, allowed to languish in refugee camps and even legally forbidden to work by some Arab governments.

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

If this, on the other hand, Trotsky’s would-be followers did not after his death pursue his line of thought.

In the 1940s, they were caught up in a world view akin to that of the Stalinism of the “Third Period” (1929-33) — the world socialist revolution was on the immediate agenda, and everything had to be interpreted as part of it. Among the forces seen as part of the great sweep of Revolution and anti-imperialism was rising Arab nationalism — the “Arab Spring”.

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

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

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

But the overall drift was towards the operation of gross double standards as between Jews and Arabs, and a comprehensive demonization of Israel and of Zionism. As a rule, “Trotskyists” were vicious Arab nationalists.

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

The “anti-Zionist” and “anti-imperialist” attitude of the Trotskyists and their followers was not advocacy of Jewish-Arab working-class unity and opposition to the Zionist project of a Jewish state, but support for the destruction of the existing Jewish state in the name of Arab or Palestinian “liberation” — murdering, raping, murdering, representing the states against Israel. The “Trotskyist” movement had moved a long way from what it had been even in the 1940s. As some once observed of religious denominations: sects change their denominations not their names.

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

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

You cannot get a more crazy version of the “world Jewish conspiracy” propounded by the old antisemites than the one which sees “the Zionists” manipulating for their own ends the Holocaust, that is, manipulating Hitler and the Nazis even as they killed six million Jews. A clear and logical version of these ideas would have to characterise Hitler as a blind tool of the “Jewish conspiracy”. Yet such ideas, half-fuddled but implicit, are articles of faith in wide layers of the Trotskyist left. They are expounded in erudite, albeit crazy, books by Lenni Brenner.
VI
Internationalism is essential to socialism. It goes without saying that socialists are against Israeli nationalism, and that we condemn Jewish chauvinism and all its manifestations. But Israeli nationalism and Jewish chauvinism do not exist in a vacuum. They are part of a network of interlocking nationalism, chauvinisms and national antagonisms. They are confronted by Arab and Muslim chauvinism which has taken as its goal the destruction of the Israeli state and nation. Any fair account of Israeli nationalism would therefore place its demurrals and condemnations would take account of the counter-nationalisms and condemn them also.

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

The “internationalism” is unequal because the condemnation of Israel is absolute and moral, while condemnation of Arab chauvinism is it is forth-cominging at all in a moral structure, and a series of admonitions. Support for Arab (or Palestinian) rights is not made conditional on them not being nationalists or chauvinists. They are the legitimate nation. The Jews is the illegitimate nation. One lot of nationalists have positive rights; the other, only the right to surrender and submit to the nationalistic and religious chauvinism of others.

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

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

It was in fact inconceivable that they would do that. Therefore? Therefore it was the left against what Israel is doing it in the way it only possible — by conquering Israel. The reasonable proposal with its promise of a just solution in practice became a rationale for supporting someone like Suddam Hussein or any other attempt to conquer Israel.

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

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

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

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

The demonstations of Trotsky are a blast of clean air through the swamps of hysteria, ultra-left fantasy, vicious Arab chauvinism — and, I think, elements of age-old anti-semitism, recyled as “anti-Zionism” — into which much of post-Trotsky Trotskyshism has disintegrated on this question.

The demonstrations all over Britain since the Israeli offensive on Gaza began on 27 December [2008] have been heavily fuelled by raw, justified, outrage at the human cost to the Palestinians of what Israel is doing.

Israel’s offensive in Gaza is in the tradition of the US-British slaughter of Iraqi conscript soldiers retreatin from their occupation of Kuwait at the end of the first Gulf war in 1991. An American soldier described that as “like shooting fish in a barrel”. So too in Gaza now.

Israel has immense technical superiority over Hamas. And the Hamas “fish” swim in the “waters” of a densely-packed civilian population. At least a third of the casualties, maybe more far, have, inevitably, been “civilians”.

The disproportion between the damage being inflicted on Israel’s people and what Israel is doing to the Palestinians of Gaza makes it seem beside the point that this is a two-sided war that Hamas is waging war on Israel. The slaughter in Gaza cancels out awareness of everything else.

The coverage in the press has focused heavily on the slaughter, on the horror, and on the number of civilians being killed in Gaza. So have the nightly images on the TV screens.

Thus the Guardian and other media have done most of the work in conjuring up the feelings and the outrage that fuel the demonstrations: and the “left”, especially the SWP have done much of the organising for the demonstrations.

But the politics of the demonstrations have been provided by the Islamic chauvinists. In terms of its dominant politics — support Hamas, support Arab and Islamic war on Israel, conquer and destroy Israel — the big demonstration on 10 January [2009] in London was politically an Arab or Islamic chauvinist, or even, to a horrifying extent, a clerical-fascist, demonstration. Their slogans, their politics, their program, echoed, endorsed, and insisted upon by the kitchy left, have provided the politics of the demonstrations, more or less drowning out everything else.

The clerical fascists have been allowed to hegemonise the politics of the demonstrations to an astonishing degree. Despite the intentions of most of the demonstrators, these have not been peace demonstration, but pro-war, war-mongering, demonstrations — for Hamas’s war, and for a general Arab and Islamic war on Israel. On Saturday 10 January [2009] in London many placards portrayed Arab heads of state, depicting them as traitors for not going to the aid of the Palestinians.

In their political slogans and chants, the dominant forces on the demonstrations have been not only against what Israel is doing in Gaza now, but against Israel as such, against any Israel — against Israel’s right to exist. Opposition to the Gaza war, and outrage at it, only provide the immediate justification for flaunting and propagating the settled politics of organisations that seek the root-and-branch extirpation of Israel and “Zionism”.

Such politics have long been a central theme of “anti-war” demonstrations, but my strong impression is that they are bolder, cruder, more uninhibited, and more explicit now than they have been.

On 10 January SWPers on loudhailers chanted: “Destroy Israel”. This chant was pervasive: “From the river to the sea/ Palestine will be free” — demanding an Arab Palestine that includes pre-1967 Israel — was pervasive. Placards called for “Freedom for Palestine”, which, for Arab and Islamic chauvinists and added left alie, means Arab or Muslim rule over all pre-1948 Palestine. It implies the elimination of the Jewish state, and since that could be done only by first warring against Israel and conquering it, the killing of a large part of the people of Israel.

Placards equated Israel with Nazism, and what Israel is doing in Gaza with the factory-organised systematic killing of Jews in Hitler-ruler Europe. Placards about “60 years since the Nakba” [the Arab term for their defeat in 1948] — though not many of those — complemented the chants about “Palestine… from the river to the sea” and pointed up their meaning.

The dominant theme, “stop the slaughter in Gaza”, understandable in the circumstances, could not — in the complete absence of any demands that Hamas too stop its war — but be for Hamas and Hamas’s rocket-war on Israel. In so far as the placards and chants gave the demonstration its political identity, it was a demonstration for more war. Even the talk of “the massacre”, though all too accurate, subsumed Hamas into the general population, and was one variant of implicit solidarising with Hamas, its rocket war, and, inescapably, its repressive clerical-fascist rule over the people of Gaza. The SWP in 2007 had welcomed Hamas’s takeover in Gaza.

Talk of “genocide” in Gaza implied an absolute equation of the people of Gaza with Hamas, and absolute solidarity with Hamas.

Even the identifiable Jews on the Saturday 10th demonstration – Neturei Karta, a Jewish equivalent of Hamas, whose people for religious reasons want to put an end to Israel — fitted into the general clerical-fascist politics.

On the January 3rd demonstration, a group of political Israelis rest near me, some with faces covered by scarves or balaclavas with only eye and mouth holes, pointedly raised their fists and started to chant Allahu Akbar [God is great] as we passed the Houses of Parliament.

Platform speakers on Saturday 10th nonsensically but with demagogic effectiveness equated Israel — pre-1967 Israel too — with apartheid, and told us that Israel could be eliminated as white rule was in apartheid South Africa.

The “left” and the ex-left were heavily represented on the platform on Saturday 10th. Andrew Murray of the Communist Party of Britain (chairing). Tarik Al (the rich “fun revolutionary” of long ago, all suffused in a grey-white tinge as if

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he had been dug out of the freezer, the ghost of anti-war demonstrations past). Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn, and George Galloway spoke. The SWP’s Lindsey German, convenor of the Stop The War Coalition, wore a vivid red coat, but that was the only thing red about either her or the platform.

No criticism of the Arab or Islamic chauvinism or Islamic clerical-fascism of so much of the demonstration, nor even any distancing from it. No support for Arab and Palestine Liberation Organisation demands for a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Only one-sided anti-war mongering – pro-Hamas, demanding, in different degrees of boldness and clarity, war to put an end to Israel. Craig Murray, a former British diplomat, made the most clear-cut demand for the rolling-back of 60 years of history and the elimination of Israel.

There was no criticism of the Arab and Islamic regimes other than for their “treason” to the Palestinians in not making war on Israel. A genuine peace march would at least have had some degree of criticism of the refusal of most of the Arab governments to make peace with Israel. And no reference whatsoever to the Israeli working class or to the idea that the Arab and Israeli workers should unite (even if in the not-near future).

Thus, the “left” on the demonstration, its main organisers, were entirely hegemonised and hypnotised by the politics, slogans, and program of Arab and Islamic chauvinism and, explicitly, of the clerical fascists of political Islam.

The feelings expressed in the demonstration had had a six to seven year build-up, during which “left” has promoted the politics of Islamic clerical-fascism, and even its organisations, the British Muslim Initiative and the Muslim-Brotherhood front, Muslim Association of Britain, Hamas is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The “left”, from outside the mainly-Muslim communities in Britain – it is still very much outside: the evidence of the demonstration is that the SWP has gained very few recruits of Muslim background from its half-decade of accommodating to Islam and posing as the best “fighters for Muslims” – has done all it can to push the youth of the Muslim communities behind Islamist political and religious reaction. It has courted and promoted the forces of political, social, and religious reaction within these communities.

Instead of advocating and building working-class unity on ideas and slogans such as “black and white – Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, atheist – unite and fight”, the kitche-left have made themselves into communists, the best “fighters for Muslims”. On the political basis of Muslim communalism, no working-class unity could conceivably be built.

Instead of helping secularising, rebellious youth in the Muslim communities to differentiate from their background, instead of using the anti-war demonstrations to give them a focus broader than their starting point, the kitche-left has “re-totalled” to the communities as such, and to the conservative and reactionary elements within them – including clerical-fascists – and that has helped those right-wingers to control, and the political-Islamist organisations to recruit, the youth, including women.

Instead of organising anti-war movements on the basis of democratic, working-class, socialist politics, it has organised an “anti-war” movement that advacates a general Arab-Islamic war on Israel.

Two seemingly contradictory things dominated the demonstration. The politics of Islamic chauvinism, clerical fascism, and hysterical hostility to Israel gave it its political character – an Islamic chauvinist demonstration in which the forces of the added left sunk their identity, rather as the crazily ultra-left Stalinist German Communist Party in the two or three years before Hitler came to power sunk its own identity into fascist-led concerns with “liberating” Germany from the Treaty of Versailles.

And... it was a heavily a-political demonstration. A large part of the demonstrators, the majority I guess, have not shifted through the politics of the Israeli-Arab conflict, considered the options, studied the implications of slogans, and made deliberate choices, but react “raw” to the horrors of the Israeli offensive in Gaza, and many take the slogans, ideas, and programs stamped on the demonstrations by the Islamists and their “left” allies as things given.

For instance, “Freedom for Palestine”, for many of the marchers, does not mean that they have thought about and understood what the slogan means to those who raise it: Arab and Israeli politics have blurred the meaning of the phrase and confused the ways of the “freedom”.

In fact, Free Palestine, to such people, probably means freedom for the Palestinian-majority areas – Gaza and the West Bank.

The clerical-fascists can people of Islamic background could have been won to secularism. The clerical fascists would not have had the virtually unchallenged political ride they have had on the back of an accommodating added left, and are still having.

It has to be said again that the flood-tide of world-wide political Islam has worked and is working against separating the options, studied the implications of slogans, and made the added left vis-a-vis political Islam.

The demonstrations have also been undisguisedly antisemitic, more so than ever. Placards equating Zionism and Nazism and about Israel’s “Holocaust” against the Palestinians all have implications way beyond Israeli politics and Israel itself. Calls for a boycott of Israeli goods, understandable enough on the face of it, were pretty much central. The main argument against such a boycott is that it is an indiscriminate weapon against all Israelis, and that it would quickly become a targeting of Jews everywhere, in Britain too. A small event on 10 January illustrated the point: a Starbucks café was attacked by some of the demonstrators seemingly because some people thought that it is owned by Jews.

The 10 January demonstration shows that political Islam now has a serious public presence in Britain. Nor can socialists and secularists draw comfort from the experience in the first half of the 20th century when superstition-riddled Jewish communities quickly assimilated and generated large-scale left-wing commitment by secularising Jews. The Islamist politicisation of the Muslim communities is not something specific to Britain, nor is it simply a movement of oppressed people.

Those politicised sections of the Muslim communities are part of a world-wide movement which includes powerful states and some of the richest people on earth (in Saudi Arabia, for instance.) This world-wide movement is, in political terms, very reactionary. It is not likely that any sizeable part of it will soon shed its present reactionary character.

The serious left has to find ways of supporting the Muslim communities here against racism, discrimination, and social exclusion, without accommodating politically or socially to their reactionary traits, and without falling into the politically-suicidal idiocy of pandering to Islamic clerical-fascism by way of adopting its slogans and goals. Involvement of Muslim workers and youth in the labour movement, combined with militant labour-movement commitment to defending the communities against racism and discrimination, has to be our chief method here.

Our keynote politics have to be of the type of “black and white, unite and fight”, not the adaptive Islamic communalism that has reigned on the left for the last decade. Within that general approach we must fight Islamic clerical-fascism and help its opponents in the Muslim communities.

The kitche-left has a lot to answer for over the last decade. There is no way of measuring exactly what could have been done to wean sections of Muslim youth away from political Islam, if not the “left” – in the first place the SWP – had maintained a principled working-class socialist, secularist stand, and combined that with defending Muslims against racism and discrimination, for sure more people of Muslim background could have been won to socialism. The clerical fascists would not have had the virtually unchallenged political ride they have had on the back of an accommodating added left, and are still having.

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With Hitler on the road to Samara

guessing what was going on, the guiding centres of the world Jewish Conspiracy helped him in this work of killing Jews. The Jewish conspirators Hitler in all sorts of nefarious ways. For instance, by instructing the US government, before, during and after World War Two, not to let refugee Jews into America. They did many other things to help the Nazis, some of them things that would need one cleverer than I am to unravel and chronicle for you.

Why did “The Jews” help Hitler kill Jews? That, you see, was the easiest way they could win a Jewish state, Israel. By a process of reasoning inaccessible to the ordinary human intelligence, the Jewish super-consspirators decided that the best way to secure a Jewish state, Israel, was to kill six million Jews.

This idea is of course difficult to grasp. It is the political equivalent of that category of Catholic doctrine — for instance, the Trinity, the doctrine that God is both One and also Three Divine Persons — which is classed by the Catholic Church as a “Mystery of Religion.” A Mystery of Religion is something which, though certified true by the Church, and therefore certainly true, is simply beyond ordinary human understanding.

Don’t waste your time trying to understand. The subtility in their evil of the Elders of Zion has always puzzled the ordinary man, who is doing well if he becomes aware that this conspiracy exists, and has the courage to raise the alarm about it. Yet this formal logic or Marxist dialectics will help you. Rational explanations are neither possible nor necessary. This is a Mystery of the World Zionist Conspiracy.

After all, it was too complicated for even Hitler to understand, and he devoted his life to prolonging the Jewish Conspiracy. Even Hitler could not save himself from being made into an instrument of the omnipotent, omniscient International Zionist Conspiracy that he spent his life fighting.

All you need to know is that the Jews proved too clever for poor Adolf Hitler, who died confused, a Jewish dupe. Hitler came into being with Hitler’s inadvertent help, and it has never in all its history done anything but evil in the world.

The tale I have here sketched in is, of course, mad. Mad as Hitler, Madder than Hitler? Madder than Hitler!

Yet one variant or another, one facet or another, of the crazy stuff which I have just set out in the form of a simple, straightforward story is now very widely accepted on the revolutionary left.

It is not usually expressed either as crudely or as candidly or as coherently as I have tried to express it here. The basis of much of the “left” — the “left” that sees nothing wrong in “allying” in Britain with the British offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Muslim Association of Britain — is that “the Zionists” are and always were, racists; that they collaborated with the Nazis, and, therefore, that they — and the state of Israel which they created: that in particular — share more or less in the practical and moral responsibility for what Hitler did to Jews, and others. That is: they share responsibility with the Nazis for the massacre of Europe’s Jews, for the Holocaust. They are themselves the true heirs of the Nazis. Zionism is Nazi-like racism.

That’s what the Morning Star (like its high-Stalinist predecessor, the Daily Worker which pioneered such ideas in Britain), Socialist Worker and their smaller satellites, such as the Mandelite “Fourth Internationalists” say.

Originating with the Stalinist rulers of the USSR, this sort of stuff has become part of the folk wisdom of the kitch left. To traduce Hitler’s victims, and those who were his potential victims, to blame Jews and Zionists even in part, for the Holocaust, outranges both common sense and known history; it outranges decency. It is plain boasters.

How does the “anti-Zionist” “far left” attempt to make its case, such ideas?

• They indict “the Zionists” in the manner of a police prosecutor, and a very unscrupulous one at that, selecting and presenting only facets and shreds of truth that serve to blacken the character of the accused. Some of the things they select are true, or half-true, or would be necessary aspects of a true and full historical picture.

• They isolate snippets of real history, stripping them of their social, historical and military context, and use them to misconstrue and misrepresent the thing as a whole. They use them to weave large, grotesque, lies. Here, their polemics are entirely Stalinist in character, typically: display, tendentious, mendacious, unscrupulous, utterly contemptuous of truth, understood even on the level of the legal formula, “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

• The Zionists, the Jewish nationalists, they tell you, wildly eyed with surprise and indignation, were... nationalists, and as narrow as other nationalists. Most of what they say is like that: banal. The critical cutting edge is given to the banality by the insistence that Jewish-Israeli nationalism is not a “legitimate” nationalism. Jewish nationalism, they insist, and it is a pillar of their entire outlook on the Middle East, is and can only be racism and fascism.

• They insist that by choosing a nationalistic response to anti-Semitism, the Zionists thereby endorsed the racism of the anti-Semites. Zionist nationalism is therefore, in its most fundamental notion, genetically, so to speak, racist. Jewish nationalism is and always was, essentially, a form of racism: it can not be anything else. It was racist when, fighting against great odds, the Israeli Jews defended themselves against Arab invasion in 1948. It is racist now.

• They wax indignant on the fact that the Zionists, in concentrating their efforts on building up the Jewish nation in Palestine, were sometimes short sighted, factional-minded, politically sectarian and, in the nature of the thing, as narrowly stupid as other nationalists often are.

• They denounce them because they steered a single-minded Jewish nationalist political course through the rocks and reefs of a world hostile to Jews, and large parts of it murderously so.

• They present “Zionism” as some sort of historical debris ex machina on the Jewish people, not as what it was, something rooted in their experience and one legitimate response to it, and a response shared from some time in the 1940s by most surviving Jews.

• The early Zionists, they tell you, eyes blazing with horror and self-righteousness, did not scruple to try and harness to their own purposes the will of anti-semites — even, that of the Nazis — to be rid of the Jews.

They did that in the 1930s and 40s, when it was a matter of trying to rescue some Jews from the murder machine in which the Nazis and their allies had most of Europe’s 6 million or so Jews traped and marked for death.

• In hellish situations, such, for instance, as in Nazi-occupied Hungary in 1944, some Zionists attempted to manoeuvre and negotiate with the powerful enemy at whose mercy they stood. Not only were some such things possibly misguided, actions by desperate people, but, say the kitch left, they were ipso facto treachery and collaboration with the Nazis. They rendered “the Zionists” identical with the Nazis.

They scour the records for instances of it on which to mount charges of “collaborating with the Nazis” and as proof that “Zionism” shares the responsibility for what the Nazis did.

The history of the Jewish people in the 20th century is an indescribably tragic one. The kitch-left approach this history with all the empathy and sympathy with which one would look upon a head of cabbage ground under a ten-ton truck. And with all the understanding and breath of historical outlook, and empathy with the victims of Nazi mass murder, which that head of cabbage could be expected to bring to understanding the history of either cabbages or human beings.

• They are people drunk on Arab nationalism, vicarious Arab chauvinists and allies of political Islam, who use Marxist arguments against nationalist narrowness in general as tools of virulent Arab nationalism, and as the basis of an argument for destroying the Jewish national entity in the interests of the Palestinian Arab nation.

• They operate with something close to a kitch-left dialect of Holocaust Denial. They do not deny that the Nazis killed six million Jews. They do deny to that enormous fact, the Holocaust, any weight or substance in shaping subsequent history; in explaining or excusing or justifying the ferocious spirit of the post-Holocaust Zionists. For the kitch-left it is closer to being a virtual fact than an event whose reverberations still, inevitably, impact on our world now. It took the awful, inhumananess of 1940s Stalinism to identify Jewish nationalism with Naziism and to attribute to “Zionism” a share of the responsibility for the Nazi massacre of 6 million Jews. It is the measure of the Trotskyist left now that it has made that Stalinist libel a fixed part of its outlook on history.
and on current history.

• They present the displacement of 750,000 Palestinian Jews in 1948 as a case of legally evil. They ignore the 600,000 Jews displaced from the Arab countries to Israel in the late 40s and after. They ignore such things as the displacement of 13 million ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe.

• They ignore that it was the Arabs themselves that denied to the Palestinian refugees the right to work and integrate where they lived, thus consigning them and their descendants to the indefinite status of refugees.

• They emphasize that the 750,000 Palestinian refugees of 1948, most of them in the course of nature and fight, now number “6 million refugees”, with the right to occupy land.

Their political conclusion? Not that the Palestinian nation should have its own independent state side by side with Israel, but that Israel must be eliminated! The Israeli Jewish nation formed in the territories of the Jewish nation in Palestine for having come into existence at all and for defending its existence now.

A culture which purveys a malignant Arab-Islamist chauvinistic account of modern Jewish, Israeli, and Middle Eastern history in which the Jewish victims of the convulsions of mid-20th century capitalist Europe are demonised for seeking a refuge from persecution and for defending themselves against the invasion of Arab armies in 1948. Demonsed most of all for winning the right to survive in 1948 and after, and for surviving.

A culture in which the ostensible left is one of the main bearers of the most important modern version of anti-Semitism, under the name of “anti-Zionism” — mortal hostility to the idea of a Jewish state, to its existence now, and to those, especially Jews, who accept and defend the Jewish state, critically or otherwise.

The elevation of this tissue of a-historical nonsense, one-sided anti-Zionism, into the plane that now holds on the left is the index of what has happened to the left, or, better, perhaps, to the once upon a time left.

Just as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion was forged by the Jewish Tsarist secret police in the late 19th century, so was the anti-Zionist “Protocols”, which emerged from the Tsarist secret police in the USSR. It spread first, in the 1940s and 50s, to the Stalinist party around which the whole project was conceived, and later on to a continuum of the anti-Zionist left. Books like Lenni Brenner’s “Zionism in the Age of the Dictators” recycle them; so did Jim Allen’s play, Perdition; so have dozens of articles and pamphlets.

Support for Zionism in Palestine grew under pressure of British attempts to play one community off against another. This demonstration in mandate Palestine was against the 1939 White Paper with called for the establishment of a Jewish national home in an independent Palestinian state within 10 years, rejecting the idea of partitioning Palestine, limiting Jewish immigration and restricting the rights of Jews to buy land from Arabs.

We should stand against the Islamists. We should stand against the upsurge of hysterical “anti-Zionism”. We should not rest until we have removed the symbols and the illusions that bind us. No, Hitler was not right!
What we are and what we do

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty aims to build a movement which can replace capitalism, the current economic and social system based on class division and exploitation, with a new society based on consistent democracy, collective ownership and solidarity - socialism.

We are involved in many movements, struggles and campaigns. Our central focus is the organised labour movement — including trade unions and the Labour Party. Our organisation exists to educate and organise socialists so we can transform the labour movement into a force capable of liberating the working class, and humanity, by overthrowing capitalism.

WHY THE WORKING CLASS?

Capitalism means a world run according to the drives and dictates of the owning and exploiting minority. It means a world in which the majority of people in Britain and a huge and ever-growing minority worldwide.

The “working class” is not just manual workers with a particular accent — it is everyone who has to sell their ability to work in order to live, train drivers and teachers, cleaners and social workers, call centre and IT workers and many, many more.

The capitalists always organise on a “class struggle” basis — fighting militantly and even violently for their interests against those of workers, oppressed people and the planet. Since the economic crisis began in 2008, they have been more aggressive than ever. To make real headway against these predatory appetites, the working class must learn to think and respond in kind. The class struggle will continue as long as capitalism does — to end it, we must fight to win it.

Under capitalism, people are oppressed on many different bases — including gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, sometimes nation — and struggles against these oppressions are crucial. The left must champion them. But it is only the (incredibly diverse) working class itself, as the basic fuel cell and driving force of capitalism, that has the possibility of challenging and overthrowing the whole system, creating a social and political force that can allow all liberation struggles to triumph.

The limited, insecure human rights and elements of democracy working people have won over centuries remain cramped and imprisoned within the confines and pressures of capitalism — a system in which huge areas of social life are completely excluded from democratic control and accountability, and in which the rich not only own the means of producing wealth, but dominate the media, the apparatus of administration and every structure of power.

STAND UP FOR SOCIALISM

It is because we want to help the working class defend and liberate itself from capitalism that we are socialists.

We want a left that fights for socialism — a world freed from class exploitation — an international system in which collective ownership of social resources and production for need allow much more genuine democracy, an end to dangerous climate change and a sustainable relationship between humanity and nature, a continuation of life for everyone, and thus a radical flowering of freedom and individuality.

Until the 1970s or 80s, it was quite common for people even on the left wing of the Labour Party to say it was irrelevant about immediate policies, they ultimately wanted a socialist commonwealth. Today, after the collapse of Stalinism in Russia and Eastern Europe, and decades of neo-liberal capitalist offensive, the left is reluctant to talk about socialism. For the majority today, socialism is either discredited, or something they know little about.

Of course there are major differences among socialists about how to get socialism, what it means. Since the left has won the leadership of the Labour Party, those differences have become more obvious. There needs to be a debate — and the point is the debate should be framed in terms of socialism. Socialists need to educate for socialism, to set down the goal of winning people to fight for a new and radically better world. Campaigning on this or that issue, or against austerity, is not a substitute.

Popularising socialist ideas is not counterposed to, but necessary for, shifting the political debate. Without the spread and growing influence of socialist ideas in the 1880s and 90s, the Labour Party — not socialist, but a big step forward for independent working-class politics — would never have come into being.

After the disaster of Stalinism, we need to refound and reform the socialist tradition, to clearly away the influence Stalinist and Stalinist-inspired ideas have on the anti-Stalinist left, so that we can build on clean, open ground.

AGAINST STALINISM

Many people, parties, and even states, both in history and today, call themselves “socialist”. For many people, “socialism” and “communism” are synonymous with the states that existed in Russia and Eastern Europe prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, or the states which exist today in China, Cuba, North Korea, or Vietnam.

We believe that these countries were not and are not socialist. They were based on systems of class exploitation just as brutal as capitalism at its most savage; in some ways, they were worse, with workers not even having the limited freedoms to form independent unions which we have in most major capitalist states.

The legacy of Stalinism continues to cast a long shadow over left-wing politics around the world, both in terms of the belief that those states represent some kind of model to aspire to, and in terms of Stalinist methodology: unquestioning deference to bureaucratic party or union apparatuses, and the cynical alliances advocated by some on the left with anti-working-class forces such as jihadi Islamism in the name of “anti-imperialism”.

Workers’ Liberty wants to clean up the muck that Stalinism has heaped on the name and ideas of socialism, and rediscover the radically democratic core of revolutionary socialist politics.

TRANSFORM THE LABOUR MOVEMENT, FIGHT FOR A WORKERS’ GOVERNMENT

The AWL argues and educates openly for socialism.

We also develop and campaign for demands to change society in the here and now, and to develop the labour movement into a more adequate instrument for that fight. We want to develop demands which can act as a bridge towards overthrowing capitalism, by developing workers’ organisation, consciousness and ability to fight for their interests against the bosses. Demands like:

• Taxing the rich to reverse all cuts and create quality public-sector services, jobs and homes for all.
• A real Living Wage for all without exceptions; banning zero hours contracts; scrapping anti-union laws and introducing strong trade union rights so that workers can fight to improve their position.
• Public ownership of the banks and high finance to end the crisis functioning as an engine of crisis and inequality, unlock resources for social investment and create a public banking, pensions and mortgage system serving the whole community.
• Reversing privatisation; pushing forward democratic public ownership of services and industries.
• Democratic reforms to both how government is shaped and to the bureaucratic state machine.

To make it possible to fight for and win these demands, we need to fight for dramatic changes in the organisations of the labour movement:

• The trade unions: recruiting thousands and then millions of new members, while fight to make them into militant, democratic organisations of struggle, controlled from below by workers and not by a materially privileged bureaucracy. A special emphasis on recruiting, organising and defending migrant workers alongside these bases.
• The Labour Party: transforming its politics, democratising it from top to bottom and bringing elected representatives, particularly the MPs’, under control. All socialists should join Labour and work to transform it.
• The left, and in particular Momentum, need to become capable of winning these changes.

We believe socialism is impossible without a revolution — a mass movement that breaks up the state machine (police, army, top judges and civil servants, monarchy...) that exists to protect capitalism and replaces it with a fundamentally more democratic system, in which representatives and managers are recallable and mandable delegates, without material privileges. But such a revolution will only be possible when the mass of the labour movement and working class want it, are won over to revolutionary socialist ideas.

As a first step forward, we fight in the labour movement fights to create a workers’ government — a government as accountable and responsive to the labour movement as the Tories are to the capitalists, and which acts and helps mobilise against capitalist wealth and power.

EDUCATE, AGITATE, ORGANISE

Many times in the last century, the absence or inadequacy of socialist organisation has meant revolutionary opportunities and capitalism surviving when it didn’t have to — with terrible consequences for humanity.

Many times big, broad left-wing movements have come to be disastrously misled, or rapidly dispersed in a crisis for lack of clear, well-organised and publicly clear goals, which could gain influence and help bring the movement to greater clarity. The ongoing left-wing movement in the Labour Party faces just that risk.

The radical socialist left in Britain is divided. We pride ourselves on encouraging cooperation and debate between different socialists organisation. At the same time, we believe we are doing work do develop socialist ideas and work in the broad labour movement which no one else is doing.

We educate, agitate, organise for socialism by:

• Working in the trade unions to develop working-class struggle and transform the trade union movement. Build rank-and-file workers’ networks. Publish workplace bulletins to promote socialist ideas at the grassroots.
• Working in the Labour Party to develop a working-class political voice and a movement for a workers’ government. Work in Momentum to make that possible.
• Working in the student movements to build strong, left-wing campus Labour Clubs, push forward student struggles, transform student unions and NUS and develop student-worker solidarity.
• Working in many different movements, including women’s liberation and ecological struggles, and build links between them and the labour movement.
• Publishing a weekly socialist newspaper, Solidarity, pamphlets and books; organise regular meetings, debates and study circles.

Want to help? Work with us, discuss ideas with us and consider joining!
Defend Jackie Walker, but not like this!

By Ruth Willis

The most informative thing about the recent controversy in Momentum — around comments made by Vice-Chair Jackie Walker at an antisemitism training event — has been less the words Jackie Walker herself said, and more the comments made by some of those who have rallied to her defence.

Walker claimed to have asked a neutral and innocent question about, and sought a clarification on, the issues of Holocaust Memorial Day and security for Jewish school students. It soon became abundantly clear that Walker’s defenders recognised (or chose to recognise) a subtext behind the comments. Though Walker’s comments were not antisemitic, these defenders wanted to, and were able to, draw out an antisemitic logic.

I have seen some shocking arguments, made by leftists, in the social media debates I have engaged in. Here are some of the phrases and arguments.

Some commentators have drawn out a meaning of Walker’s comment on Holocaust Memorial Day (about expanding the day to include remembrance of other genocides), by saying, “The Zionists try to use the Holocaust as a propaganda weapon against anyone who opposes anything Israel does”; and “Holocaust incorporated at work again — this evil, Zionist mouthpiece must be challenged”.

Apparently, “Israeli Zionists are corrupting UK politics by lobbying UK MPs and by using accusations of ‘antisemitism’ as a weapon against their opponents”.

On the issue of school security commentators have said such things as, there are genuine “concerns about the deliberate hyping of fears of parents concerning anti-terrorism in order to build a climate of insecurity that enables Israel to then step forward as the ‘protector’. Here we have a recategorization of the trope about manipulative, lying Jews, playing the victim for gain.

The political hostility to any Zionist Jew no matter their political outlook has been palpable and clear. I have been asked “zio is short for zionist or racist”. That we were dealing with “Zionist, nazi vermin. Scum of the earth” — a comment no one saw the need to challenge. It was just left standing there as the debate raged on. I was also told, “any Jew that supports Israel having their own state...needs to be condemned for supporting it... I think those that have created and nurtured Zionism are part of the group that has worked for a long time to control the world”.

This is how the translation from the politics of Israel/Palestine to the recasting of far right tropes works. Ideas about Jews controlling the world are given a left-wing sheen of anti-capitalism. The word Jew is replaced with ‘Zionist’, ‘Israeli’, ‘Rothschild’.
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Anti-Zionists have also reposted the infamous quote falsely credited to Voilante, “To find out who you are not supposed to criticise” with a graphic of a hand crushing people down. When they were told it is in fact a quote from US neo-Nazi, Kevin Strom – was this quote removed? No. It was defended as being true no matter who said it.

Others wishing to support Jackie Walker have reposted articles from the website of Jeff Rense, notorious US conspiracy theorist who disseminates antisemitic and neo-Nazi propaganda.

In a discussion on an antisemitic Rothschild meme, I was informed that “money and debt control this world and its wars. And certain families are at the core of that.” Jews were described as “an alien breed like Rothschild, out to destroy mankind by creating mischief all over the world”.

In Corbyn groups and Momentum groups I have found links to Richie Allen Youtube shows (in association with David Icke).

One of the shocking things about this wasn’t just the obviously antisemitic nature of the original posts but the amount of people who defend this. There were arguments about whether the Rothschilds did indeed run the world.

Is this kind of racist antisemitism rife on the left? No. But it is there and it is often not recognised or ignored because the language can be similar to that used by those who support “anti-Zionism” as a solution to the political problems in Israel/Palestine.