

# **The Palestinian Struggle, Zionism & Anti-Semitism**

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# Contents

## **Palestinian Self-Determination & Zionist**

**Colonialism** *by Sean Malloy & Doug Lorimer* ..... 3

## **The Nature of Israeli Society** ..... 15

1. Why Israel Is Not a Democracy *by Tim Wise* ..... 15
2. The Reality Behind Israeli ‘Socialism’ *by Adam Hanieh* ..... 20
3. Migrant Labour in Israel *by Assaf Adiv* ..... 23

## **Socialists & Anti-Semitism** ..... 27

1. Open Letter to the ADL ..... 27
2. Does Anti-Zionism Equal Anti-Semitism? *by Peter Seidman* ..... 30
3. The Real Story of the Fight to Save European Refugees  
From Hitler’s Terror *by Peter Seidman* ..... 38

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# Palestinian Self-Determination & Zionist Colonialism

*By Sean Malloy & Doug Lorimer*

“The complexity of the Israel/Palestine conflict is that at its root is a conflict between two fundamentally legitimate aspirations”, Vivienne Porzolt claimed in *Green Left Weekly* No. 110. This assertion is wrong and only serves to legitimise Israel’s denial of the right of the Palestinian Arabs to national self-determination.

Throughout her letter Porzolt presents a fundamentally Zionist position which incorrectly argues that the Israeli state is a result of a “legitimate” Jewish struggle for “national self-determination” and that anti-Zionism is equivalent to anti-Semitism.

Understanding the issues involved in this debate requires an explanation of often complex historical and theoretical questions.

## Origins of modern anti-Semitism

The Zionist movement was founded on the claim that world Jewry constituted a single nation. But neither then nor now, do Jews constitute a single nation — a historically constituted, stable community of people formed on of a cohesive economic life based on capitalist economic relations within a common territory, giving rise to a common language and common culture. But what national cohesion, for example, could there be between Russian, German, American or Ethiopian Jews, who were completely separated from each other, inhabited different countries and spoke different languages? All these disparate communities had in common was their religion.

In the early days of the Zionist movement it was fashionable for its theoreticians to compare their movement with the European national movements of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The English have a state; the French have a state; the Jews should also have a state, “as Jewish as England is English”, ran the argument. Since the old

bourgeois form of nationalism has become somewhat discredited today, some Zionists (particularly “left” Zionists) seek to compare Zionism to the anti-colonialist movements of the oppressed nations of Asia and Latin America. Thus, the Zionists’ conflict with the British in the period immediately preceding the establishment of Israel in 1948 is portrayed as an anti-colonial struggle. However, both analogies are totally false.

Early European nationalism was based on developing capitalist society. French nationalism, for example, was a reflection of the will of the rising capitalist class in France to create a national basis for production and exchange of commodities, to eliminate the old feudal restrictions on free trade and free production.

During that time, European Jews were completely assimilationist in their outlook. The economic processes which gave rise to the European nation-states began to lay the groundwork for the integration of the Jews into these newly developing nations. But these processes did not proceed evenly.

Eastern European society, especially after the abolition of serfdom in Russia in 1863, found itself in continuous crisis. The old feudalism began to rapidly decay. But there was no concurrent flourishing of a vigorous capitalism to take its place, as there had been in Western Europe during the decline of feudalism. Eastern European capitalism, was weak, distorted in its development, and in general unable to expand at a pace sufficient to absorb the dislocation resulting from the rapid disintegration of feudal relations.

Consequently, the influx of peasants into the cities and towns during the decay of feudalism began to make the position of the Jews, concentrated in the towns, untenable. Poverty-stricken peasants flocking to the cities in search of jobs saw the increasingly impoverished Jewish community as competitors in a highly restricted labour market. The newly emerging non-Jewish urban middle class sought to enrich itself in a limited market at the expense of Jewish traders and artisans. And the big landowners and capitalists sought to divert the discontent of non-Jewish workers and peasants from themselves toward a convenient scapegoat. All this resulted in a qualitative increase in anti-Semitism, continual anti-Semitic riots and pogroms.

The Eastern European crisis led in turn to a massive Jewish emigration. Some three million Jews left Eastern Europe, mostly for Western Europe and the US. The arrival of these Jewish immigrants coincided with a worsening of conditions for the Western middle classes who were threatened with bankruptcy by the rise of powerful capitalist monopoly corporations in the West. The ruling classes in the West lost no opportunity to divert the growing discontent of the ruined Western petty bourgeoisie away from themselves and onto the large numbers of Jewish immigrants. The result was a rise in Western European anti-Semitism in the last quarter of the 19th century.

In general, the collapse of East European feudalism and with it the traditional position of the Jews as small merchants, moneylenders, and artisans in the craft production of certain consumer goods, along with the inability of capitalism in Eastern or Western Europe to integrate millions of displaced Jews, led to the rise of modern anti-Semitism, different from and qualitatively more severe than medieval “anti-Semitism”.

## The Zionist movement

The Zionist movement, which arose in the late 1800s as a response by a *minority* of the Jewish middle classes to this new wave of anti-Semitism, held that anti-Semitism was not caused by particular historical processes, but that it was inevitable as long as Jews lived among non-Jews. The Zionist leaders sought to solve the problem of Jewish persecution not by attacking its cause, the decadence of European social systems, but by forming a separate, exclusively Jewish state.

The idea of creating a Jewish “national homeland” was raised in 1882 by Leo Pinsker in his pamphlet *The Self-Emancipation of the Jews*. In 1895 Viennese journalist, Theodor Herzl, expanded on the theme in his book *The Jewish State*. In 1897 Herzl chaired the first congress of the World Zionist Organisation in Basle.

The most immediate problem for the Zionist movement was where the new state was to be located. By 1897 virtually the entire world had been divided up by the Western powers. The same processes which had created modern anti-Semitism, and thus Zionism, had also given rise to imperialist capitalism. The giant capitalist monopolies in Western Europe and the US had integrated the non-industrialised areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America into the world market, and had politically subordinated them as overseas colonial possessions.

Consequently, a new Jewish “national” state could be created from just two sources — either from out of the imperialist countries themselves, or from a colonial territory under the control of one of the imperialist powers.

The former course was excluded by the fact that within the imperialist countries the Jews did not constitute a oppressed *national* group, but a persecuted *religious community*. If they *had* constituted oppressed national groups like the Irish, Scots and Welsh did in the United Kingdom, or the Quebecois in Canada, then a movement for Jewish national self-determination would have directed itself *against* the imperialist ruling classes.

But being a middle-class movement with the aim of creating a separate “homeland” for a religious community, Zionism did not have the strength to act independently for its aims. The Zionist leaders therefore sought to persuade one or another of the

European imperialist ruling classes that the establishment of a Jewish state in the colonial world would be in their interest.

Herzl petitioned the Russian tsar, the German kaiser, the British king, even the pope, to obtain support for a Jewish state in Palestine. In return for their support, Herzl promised these rulers Jewish backing for their imperial aims in the Arab East.

In a letter to the German Duke of Baden in 1898, Herzl declared:

With the Jews a German cultural element will enter the East. The fact that the Zionist movement is headed by German writers even though of Jewish origin can serve proof of this. The [Zionist] Congress language is German. The great majority of the Jews belong to the German culture. We need protection. German protection is therefore the best for us: we alone cannot do this.

### 'Historical claim' to Palestine?

Porzolt asks: "what is illegitimate about the idea of a national homeland for Jews in the land where they have historical links, links which have been kept alive in their cultural memory throughout the period of the expulsion from it"? She here repeats the grotesque Zionist myth of the purported "historical rights" of Jews in Palestine. This myth is a central element of Zionist ideology. As Abram Leon observed in his book *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation*:

Whereas Zionism is essentially a reaction against the situation created for Judaism by the combination of the destruction of feudalism and the decay of capitalism, it affirms that it constitutes a reaction against the state of things existing since the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70 of the Christian era ...

Zionism sees in the fall of Jerusalem the cause of the dispersion, and consequently, the fountainhead of all Jewish misfortunes of the past, present, and future ...

Zionism has never seriously posed the question: Why, during these 2000 years, have not the Jews really tried to return to this country? Why was it necessary to wait until the end of the 19th century for a Herzl to succeed in convincing them of this necessity?

In reality, just so long as Judaism was incorporated in the feudal system, the "dream of Zion" was nothing but a dream and did not correspond to any real interest of Judaism. The Jewish tavern owner or "farmer" of 16th century Poland thought as little of "return to Palestine" as does the Jewish millionaire in America today. Jewish religious messianism was no whit different from the messianism belonging to other religions. Jewish pilgrims who went to Palestine met Catholic, Orthodox and Moslem pilgrims. Besides it was not so much the "return to Palestine" which constituted the foundation of this messianism as the belief in the rebuilding of the temple of Jerusalem.

Even before the Roman conquest of Judea in 70 AD, three-quarters of the Jewish population lived outside Palestine. As for the indigenous Jewish community, it was gradually absorbed by neighbouring populations during the following centuries, just as were the Philistines, the Phoenicians, the Nabateans, and other tribes of the ancient Orient.

Moreover, if the Jews have a historical claim to Palestine, then why don't the Arabs have a historical claim to Spain and Sicily which were once integral parts of the Islamic Empire?

### Zionist colonisation of Palestine

After Herzl's death in 1904 the Zionists carried on his efforts to secure imperialist support for their plan to colonise Palestine. This negotiation process resulted in 1917 in the Balfour Declaration, in which Britain declared its support for the establishment of a "national home for the Jews in Palestine".

The Balfour Declaration was designed to win Jewish backing of Britain in the first world war. It was later revealed that Britain had promised independence to the Palestinian Arabs, who outnumbered the Palestine Jews by about eight to one at the time, in return for Arab support in the war.

When the League of Nations finally "legalised" the spoils of World War I, Britain received a mandate to rule over Palestine and to establish a Jewish "national homeland" there.

The attempt of the Zionist leaders to establish an exclusively Jewish state in Palestine dictated their policy toward the indigenous inhabitants. Generally, when European settlers came to colonial countries, their aim was to exploit the wealth of the country, including the labour power of the inhabitants. The Zionists, however, wanted not just the resources of Palestine, but the country itself, to serve for the creation of a new national state. The Arabs, therefore, were not to be exploited economically, but *replaced* by Jewish settlers. It was this fundamental aim that determined Zionist policy in Palestine from 1917 to 1948. Until there was sufficient Jewish settlement to constitute a Jewish state, the Zionists supported British control of Palestine and opposed repeated uprisings of the Palestinian Arabs fighting for their national independence. An independent Palestine would have put an end to the Zionist scheme of establishing a Jewish state at the expense of the Arab majority. Therefore, "whoever betrays Great Britain betrays Zionism", declared Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion — later to become Israel's first prime minister — in 1935.

While supporting British rule over Palestine, the Zionists proceeded to construct a "society within a society". The Jewish National Fund purchased land from absentee

Arab feudal landlords and then evicted the Arab tenant farmers. Selling or leasing Jewish lands to Arabs was prohibited. The JNF opposed land reform, as this would have put land into the hands of the Arab farmers who worked it and who, unlike the feudal sheiks, would refuse to sell.

A policy of “Jewish labour” and “buy Jewish” was established. Arab labour and production were boycotted by the Jewish settlers. This meant that Arab farmers who were evicted from their land were unable to find work in Jewish-owned businesses.

Throughout the period of the British Mandate, the Zionist colonisers confronted the Palestinian Arabs as a foreign invading force, intent on ousting them from their own country, opposing Palestinian independence, fighting alongside the British Army, opposing land reform. This process of colonisation initiated in 1917 culminated in 1948 with the establishment of the Israeli colonial-settler state.

## The creation of Israel

After World War II, the Zionist organisations came into armed conflict with the British, who tried to hold on to Palestine as a colony instead of supporting the creation of the Israeli state. But in the meantime, the Zionist forces had gained the support of the United States.

Although some Zionists try to portray their conflict with the British as an anti-colonial struggle, it was really a conflict between two thieves. The establishment of Israel in 1948, with the full support of Washington, was made possible only by the expulsion of 900,000 Palestinian Arabs from their homeland and the confiscation of their land. The Palestinians who remained became, by Israeli law, second-class citizens in their own country.

Porzolt denies that Zionist forces usurped power in Palestine. She writes:

The Zionists (along with Jordan) certainly took by ruthless force areas of territory which the UN had assigned to the Palestinians in their 1948 plan for the partition of Palestine. Both states thus denied the Palestinians their independent state. But the UN partition plan itself created two states, Israel and Palestine. The creation of the state of Israel was thus legitimised by the left and the right, the Soviet Union and the western powers.

The first thing wrong with this argument is that it ignores the whole process of Zionist colonisation of Palestine *before* 1948. Secondly, simply because the UN approved the partition of Palestine, does that make it right? If the UN were to endorse the British partition of Ireland, or to decide to partition South Africa into black and white “homelands” would that make the decision legitimate?

The UN’s decision to partition Palestine — a decision made under extreme pressure



from US imperialism — violated the right of the Palestinian Arabs to national self-determination. The demands of the Palestinian Arabs (who at that time constituted 76% of the country's population) for an independent, united Palestine were ignored.

The fact that the *Stalinist bureaucracy* in the Soviet Union (which Porzolt identifies as “the left”) approved this plan doesn't make it any less reprehensible. Did the approval by the Stalinist left and the Nazi right of the partition of Poland in 1939 make it “legitimate”?

While the creation of Israel was “legitimised” in the interests of imperialism, through the UN, it was not legitimised by Palestinian Arabs. As Palestine Liberation Organisation Chairman Yasser Arafat observed in his address to the UN General Assembly in 1974:

This General Assembly, early in its history, approved a recommendation to partition our Palestinian homeland ... The General Assembly partitioned what it had no right to divide — an indivisible homeland ...

Furthermore, even though the partition resolution granted the colonial settlers 54% of the land of Palestine, their dissatisfaction with the decision prompted them to wage a war of terror against the civilian Arab population. They occupied 81% of the total area of Palestine, uprooting a million Arabs.

Porzolt asks, “Why should national independence for the Jews be, of itself, any more racist than independence for the Palestinians or the Kanaks or any other people?” The “national independence” of Israel is racist because it is based on the dispossession and eviction of the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine by a colonial-settler state. Colonialism is, above all, *racism*.

## The Holocaust and Israel

“Holocaust denial or revisionism by the subtle dilution of the term trivialises the oppression of the Jewish people which was their impetus to struggle to found the state of Israel. Without the Holocaust, it is certain that Zionism would not have gained the near universal allegiance of Jews or won their determination to implement it. Where else did they have to go?”, Porzolt writes.

It's true that without the Nazi attempt to exterminate Europe's Jews, the Zionists could not have won the “near universal allegiance of Jews” (which they did not enjoy before World War II). However, it is false to say that the Nazi extermination program was the Jews' “impetus to struggle to found the state of Israel”. As we have already noted above, the Zionist colonisation of Palestine began long before the rise of Nazism in Germany.

During the 1930s the Zionist leaders actively opposed Jewish resistance to the Nazis and refused to launch a campaign to force the Western “democracies” to open

their doors to the Jews. Immigration to the West would have destroyed the Zionist goal of creating an exclusively Jewish state in Palestine at the expense of its indigenous inhabitants. It is the Western “democracies” who, by systematically refusing to open their borders to the Jews seeking refuge from fascism during the 1930s, condemned millions of European Jews to the Nazi genocide.

Porzolt’s question about where else European Jews had to go *after* the defeat of the Nazis implies an acceptance of the Zionist argument that only the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine could save Jews from anti-Semitic persecution. But the Jewish community in Palestine was not saved from genocide because of its presence in the “holy land”, but simply because of the fortunate fact that Hitler did not conquer the Middle East. As Nathan Weinstock observed in his introduction to Abram Leon’s book *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation*:

... the results of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine offer further proof of the impossibility of finding a lasting solution to the Jewish problem within the framework of capitalism. Zionism is based on the assumption that the concentration of the Jewish masses in a national homeland would insulate them from anti-Semitism. For the Zionist considers anti-Semitism to be an inevitable phenomenon in non-Jewish society — or, as Pinsker put it, a psychosis peculiar to the gentiles — and not an outgrowth of the social structure. But it is an illusory solution. Aside from the fact that at most it could only provide a *partial* answer to the Jewish problem (since more than four-fifths of world Jewry live outside Israel) it ignores the fact that the fundamental roots of anti-Semitism lie in the *worldwide crisis of capitalist society*. If a new wave of fascism were to arise, there is no reason why its racist policies should mysteriously stop short at Israel’s frontiers. After all, if Hitler had conquered Palestine would he have exempted Palestine Jewry from the gas chambers?

Still, it is true of course that *within* the almost purely Jewish society of Israel (at any rate before the 1967 conquests), anti-Semitism is out of the question. But it is a dubious achievement: ironically, the Israelis appear to be today the *only* Jewish community in fear for their physical existence.

Of course, what the Palestinian Arabs objected to was not Jewish immigration to Palestine, but Zionist colonisation of their country. In his 1974 speech to the UN General Assembly, Arafat pointed out that “if the immigration of Jews to Palestine had had as its objective the goal of enabling them to live side by side with us, enjoying the same rights and assuming the same duties, we would have opened our doors to them as far as our homeland’s capacity for absorption permitted ...

“But that the goal of this immigration should be to usurp our homeland, disperse our people and turn us into second-class citizens — this is what no one can conceivably

demand that we acquiesce in or submit to.”

As Arafat and other PLO leaders have repeatedly explained, the real issue in the Middle East is not whether or not the Israeli Jews can live there, but whether they have the right to dispossess and oppress another nation.

## Israel & the US

Porzolt says that Israel “would be in no position at all to act out its historical trauma on the world stage in this way if it were not in the interests of the United States which bankrolls it. Israel is to the United States as the Lebanese Phalangist militia is to Israel. In our support for the Palestinians, let us keep the real enemy in mind, and not waste too much venom on its cat’s paw, the Israeli government.”

But if Israel is the realisation of Jewish “national independence” how can it be simply a “cat’s paw” of the United States?

Because of its particular origin as a colonial settler-state, Israel has always pitted itself as an *ally* of the US against the anti-imperialist movements of the Arab peoples. The character of Israel as an imperialist outpost in the Middle East was clearly demonstrated in October 1956 when Israel responded to the anti-imperialist measures of the Egyptian government, capped by its nationalisation of the Suez Canal, by joining Britain and France in invading Egypt.

Israel’s aggression against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in June 1967 was motivated by the same aims as its 1956 invasion of Egypt. The Israeli ruling class hoped to be able to hold on to any territory it could grab. In addition, it sought to topple the nationalist governments in Egypt and Syria and replace them with governments that would be more amenable to recognising Israel.

The June 1967 war was a turning point for Israel. Before the 1967 war, Israel’s capitalist economy had been heavily subsidised by aid from the US and West Germany. This imperialist aid, which continued and increased after 1967, combined with Israel’s territorial expansion in the war, laid the basis for Israel’s transformation into an imperialist power in its own right.

While Israel remains dependent on inflows of US financial aid, this does not mean it is simply Washington’s “cat’s paw” in the Middle East. Israel is an imperialist ally of the US, but like Australia it has interests which can conflict with those of the US. For example, the US would like to see some token accommodation to the Palestinians demand for the liberation of that part of their homeland occupied by Israel in 1967, in order to stabilise the political situation in the Middle East. But Israel refuses to make any such accommodation, because any weakening of its control over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip could undermine its colonial super-exploitation of Palestinian Arab

labour.

Porzolt's argument that the "real" enemy of the Palestinians is the United States is simply an attempt to avoid taking a position against the source of the Palestinians' national oppression — the existence of the Israeli state.

### What is national self-determination?

Porzolt writes: "the aspirations of peoples for self-determination are universally recognised. Whatever we may think about the limitations of nationalism as a vehicle for social liberation, the contemporary form of that aspiration is the independent nation state. The complexity of the Israel/Palestine conflict is that at its root is a conflict between two fundamentally legitimate national aspirations." This is another common Zionist argument — the appeal to the right to national self-determination, abstracted from the actual relations between nations.

According to this line of argument, the Jewish people, after being oppressed throughout the world, have a right to "national self-determination". The establishment of the state of Israel was the realisation of that "right". Because of the historical persecution of the Jews, their right to maintain the state of Israel supersedes the national rights of the Palestinian Arabs, including their right to return to their country.

This argument mixes together the plight of Jews elsewhere in the world, as an often persecuted religious community, and the situation of the Hebrew-speaking people today in Israel, who have come to constitute a distinct nation dominating a state that oppresses the Palestinian Arabs.

National self-determination, as Porzolt observes, means the right to form a separate state. But the claim that the Israeli Jews have an equal right to self-determination with the Palestinian Arabs ignores the fact that the Israeli Jews already have a separate state — one founded on the homeland of an expelled nation, the Palestinian Arabs. That's the *source* of the problem, not one possible solution.

As Marxists, we do not view the right to self-determination as some abstract moral right belonging to all nations at all times and under all circumstances. National self-determination is a progressive demand only insofar as it mobilises an *oppressed nation* against its oppression. Moreover, support by the working people of an oppressor nation for the right to self-determination of the oppressed nation lays the basis for an internationalist alliance between the working people of both nations directed against the ruling class of the oppressor nation.

National self-determination means that an *oppressed nation* has the right to choose whatever state forms it decides are necessary *to end its national oppression*. To reverse their national oppression, the Palestinian Arabs demand the dismantling of the colonial-

settler state that took over their country, the right of the refugees to return, and the establishment of a united, democratic, secular Palestine.

## A democratic, secular Palestine

Usually, struggles for national self-determination take the form of the oppressed nation demanding the right to separate from the oppressor nation and form its own independent state, as today in Puerto Rico, Quebec or British-occupied Ireland.

Palestine presents a different variant. There, national oppression was carried out by the establishment of a colonial-settler state through the forcible partition of the country and the expulsion of much of its indigenous population.

The demand for a democratic, secular Palestine arose out of this specific history. It flows from the reality that the Israeli state is anti-democratic, since it denies the rights of the majority of the country's indigenous inhabitants and prevents them from returning or even participating in its future.

The PLO calls for a secular state in opposition to the state of Israel where Jews, by virtue of their religion, are granted rights that are denied to Christians and Muslims. Jewish religious law bears down heavily on Israeli life, regulating everything from marriage to public transportation. The fight for separation of church and state has been a part of the program of democratic revolutions for more than 200 years.

Finally, the demand for a unitary Palestinian state addresses the forcible partition of "an indivisible homeland".

Much of the Israeli left and many Jewish leftists around the world are imbued with the contradiction of supporting the existence of Israel and an end to the national oppression of Palestinians. But the national oppression of the Palestinians cannot be ended as long as the Israeli state is maintained. Self-determination for the Palestinian Arab nation means the dismantling of the Israeli state and its racist, colonialist institutions. How can the Palestinians exercise their right to national self-determination if they are not allowed to return to their country? Yet if the Palestinian Arabs do return, and are accorded their full rights, then, as the Zionists themselves point out, it would mean the end of Israel as a separate Jewish state.

To demand self-determination for the oppressor nation robs the concept of national self-determination of its democratic content. It gives the oppressor nation — in this case the Israeli Jews — a veto power over the choice of the oppressed nation and thus guts the demand for *self*-determination of the oppressed nation.

At the moment the majority of the Hebrew-speaking workers in Israel support the maintenance of the Jewish state. This support helps keep them ideologically enslaved to the Israeli capitalist ruling class, blocking them from fighting for their own class

interests. Unless and until the Israeli Jewish working class ends its support for the Israeli state and supports the demand of the Palestinian Arabs for a united, democratic, secular Palestine, it will remain the “cat’s paw” of Zionist colonialism. ■



1948: Palestinian refugees flee Zionist terror.

## The Nature of Israeli Society

# 1. Why Israel Is Not a Democracy

*By Tim Wise*

Webster's *New World Dictionary* defines democracy as, among other things, “the principle of equality of rights, opportunity and treatment, or the practice of this principle”. Keep this in mind, as we'll be coming back to it shortly.

Now, imagine that the United States abolished its constitution, or perhaps had never had one to begin with. No Bill of Rights. No guarantees of things like free speech, freedom of assembly and due process of law.

And imagine if Congress passed a law stating that the US was from this point forward to be legally defined as a “Christian nation”. As such, Christians would be given special privileges for jobs, loans and land ownership, and Christians from anywhere in the world would be given preference in immigration, extended automatic citizenship upon coming to America.

Furthermore, imagine if political candidates espousing certain beliefs — especially those who might argue that the US should be a nation with equal rights for all, and not a “Christian nation” — were no longer allowed to hold office, or even run for election.

Imagine that laws were passed that had the effect of restricting certain ethnic and religious groups from acquiring land in particular parts of the country, and made it virtually impossible for members of ethnic minorities to live in particular communities.

And imagine that in response to perceived threats to America's internal security, new laws sailed through Congress, providing for torture of those detained for suspected subversion. This, on top of still other laws providing for the detention of such suspects for long periods of time without trial or even a formal charge against them.

In such a scenario, would anyone with an appreciation of the English language, and with the above definition in mind, dare suggest that we would be justified in calling

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Abridged from [www.zmag.org/bios/homepage.cfm?authorD=96](http://www.zmag.org/bios/homepage.cfm?authorD=96). *Tim Wise* is a US anti-racist activist, educator and writer.

America a democracy?

## Jewish state

Of course not: and yet the term is repeatedly used to describe Israel — as in “the only democracy in the Middle East”. This, despite the fact that Israel has no constitution; despite the fact that Israel is defined as the state of the Jewish people, providing special rights and privileges to anyone in the world who is Jewish and seeks to live there, over and above longtime Arab residents. This, despite the fact that Israel bars any candidate from holding office who thinks the country should be a secular, democratic state with equal rights for all. This, despite the fact that non-Jews are restricted in terms of how much land they can own, and in which places they can own land at all, thanks to laws granting preferential treatment to Jewish residents. This, despite that fact that even the Israeli Supreme Court has acknowledged the use of torture against suspected “terrorists” and other “enemies” of the Jewish state.

For some, it is apparently sufficient that Israel has an electoral system, and that Arabs have the right to vote in those elections (though just how equally this right is protected is of course a different matter). The fact that one can't vote for a candidate who questions the special Jewish nature of the state, because such candidates can't run for or hold office, strikes most as irrelevant — hardly enough for them to call into question Israel's democratic credentials.

If what we see in Israel is indeed democracy, then what does fascism look like?

I'm sorry, but I am over it. As a Jew, I am over it. And if my language seems too harsh here, that's tough. Because it's nothing compared to the sickening things said by Israeli leaders throughout the years. Like former prime minister Menachem Begin, who told the Knesset in 1982 that the Palestinians were “beasts walking on two legs”. Or former PM Ehud Barak, who offered a more precise form of dehumanisation when he referred to the Palestinians as “crocodiles”.

Speaking of Barak, in his April 14 op-ed in the *New York Times*, he insisted that democracy in Israel could be “maintained”, so long as the Jewish state was willing to set up security fences to separate itself from the Palestinians, and keep the Palestinians in their place. Calling the process “unilateral disengagement”, Barak opined that limiting access by Arabs to Israel is the key to maintaining a Jewish majority, and thus the Jewish nature of the state. That the Jewish nature of the state is inimical to democracy as defined by every dictionary in the world matters not, one supposes.

Barak even went so far as to warn that in the absence of such security fences, Israel might actually become an apartheid state. Imagine that — unless they institute separation they might become an apartheid state. The irony of such a statement is



nearly perfect, and once again signals that words no longer have meaning.

### Barak's 'generous offer'

Interestingly, amidst the subterfuge, other elements of Barak's essay struck me as surprisingly honest — much more honest, in fact, than anything he had said while he was prime minister, during which time he supposedly made that “generous offer” to Yasser Arafat about which we keep hearing. You know, the one that would have allowed the maintenance of most Jewish settlements in the territories, and would have restricted the Palestinian state to the worst land, devoid of its own water supply, and cut off at numerous choke points by Israeli security. Yeah, that one. The one that has been described variously (without any acknowledgement of the inconsistency) as having offered the Palestinians either 93%, or is it 95% or maybe 96% or perhaps 98% of the West Bank and Gaza.

In the *Times* piece, Barak finally came clean, admitting that Israel would need to erect the fences in such a manner as to incorporate at least one-quarter of the territories into Israel, so as to subsume the settlements. So not 93%, or 96 or 98, but at best 75%, and still on the worst land. Furthermore, the fences would slice up Jerusalem and restrict Arab access to the Holy Basin and the Old City — a direct swipe at Muslims who seek access on a par with their fellow descendants of Abraham.

That this was Barak's idea all along should surprise no-one. And that such a “solution” would mean the final loss for the Palestinians of all but 17% of their pre-Israel territory will likely not strike many in the US media or political elite as being terribly unfair. If anything, we will continue to hear about the intransigence of the Arabs, and their unwillingness to accept these “generous offers”, which can only be seen as generous to a people who have become so inured to human suffering that their very souls are in jeopardy.

Or to those who have never consulted a dictionary — which defines generous as, “willing to give or share; unselfish; large; ample; rich in yield; fertile”. In a world such as this, where words have lost all meaning, we might as well just burn all the dictionaries.

Sometimes, the linguistic obfuscation goes beyond single words and begins to encompass entire phrases. One such example is the oft-repeated statement to the effect that “Jews should be able to live anywhere in the world, and to say otherwise is to endorse anti-Semitism”. Thus, it is asked, why shouldn't Jews be able to settle in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem?

Whoever says such a thing must know of its absurdity beforehand. The right to live wherever one chooses has never included the right to live in someone else's house, after taking it by force or fraud. Nor does it include the right to set up house in

territories that are conquered and occupied as the result of military conflict. Indeed, international law expressly forbids such a thing. And furthermore, those who insist on the right of Jews to live wherever they choose, by definition deny the same right to Palestinians, who cannot live in the place of their choosing, or even in the homes that were once theirs.

Needless to say, many Palestinians would like to live inside Israel's pre-1948 borders, and exercise a right of return in order to do so. But don't expect those who demand the right for Jews to plant stakes anywhere we choose to offer the same right to Arabs. Many of these are among the voices that insist Jordan is "the Palestinian state", and thus, Palestinians should be perfectly happy living there.

Since Palestinians are Semites, one could properly call such an attitude "anti-Semitic" — seeing as how it limits the rights of Semitic peoples to live wherever they wish — but given the transmutation of the term "anti-Semitism" into something that can only apply to Jew-hatred, such a usage would seem bizarre to many.

## Terrorism

The rhetorical shenanigans even extend to the world of statistics. Witness the full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* placed by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations, which ran the same day as the Barak op-ed. Therein, these supposed spokespeople for American Judaism stated their unyielding support for Israel, and claimed that the 450 Israeli deaths caused by terrorism since the beginning of the second *intifada*, were equal to 21,000 deaths in the US from terrorism, as a comparable percentage of each nation's overall population.

Playing upon fears and outrage over the attacks of September 11, the intent was quite transparent — get US readers to envision September 11 all over again, only with seven times more casualties!

Of course, if one were at all concerned with honesty, one might point out that the number of Palestinian noncombatant (that is to say civilian) deaths, at the hands of Israel in that same time period, is much higher, and indeed would be "equal to" far more than 21,000 in the US, as a comparable share of respective populations.

To be honest to a fault would be to note that the 900 or so Palestinians slaughtered with Israeli support in the Sabra and Shatilla camps during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, would be equal to more than 40,000 Americans. Even more, the 17,500 Arabs killed overall by Israel during that invasion would be roughly equivalent to some 800,000 Americans today — the size of many large cities.

In a world where words still had meaning, such things might even be considered "terrorism".

Ariel Sharon once said: “A lie should be tried in a place where it will attract the attention of the world.” And so it has been — throughout the media and the US political scene, on CNN in the personage of Benjamin Netanyahu, and in the pages of the *New York Times*.

And in my Hebrew School, where we were taught that Jews were to be “a light unto the nations”, instead of this dim bulb, this flickering nightlight, this barely visible spark whose radiance is only sufficient to make visible the death-rattle of the more noble aspects of the Jewish tradition.

Unless we who are Jews insist on a return to honest language, and an end to the hijacking of our culture and faith by madmen, racists and liars, I fear that the light may be extinguished forever. ■

## The Nature of Israeli Society

# 2. The Reality Behind Israeli 'Socialism'

*By Adam Hanieh*

Philip Mendes writes in "Write on", *GLW* 261: "The Labour Zionist movement which ruled Israel from 1948 to 1977 strongly identified with traditional socialist objectives." The idea that the Zionist movement, at least until the fairly recent past, had a definite socialist tinge, is widespread. It is, however, false.

**Fact 1:** Israel was founded in 1948 on expulsion through organised terror of 750,000 Palestinians. At the time, the Zionist "socialists" claimed that Palestine was a "land without a people" — as racist a declaration as the comparable *terra nullius* in Australia.

**Fact 2:** The establishment of the Israeli state on May 14, 1948, represented a colonialist conquest by white Europeans and Americans. Prior to 1948, 89.6% of Jewish immigration to Palestine came from these areas.

These Euro-American Jews (known in Israel as *Ashkenazi* Jews) were to become the elite of the new state. The only way to lure this element was through generous tax exemptions, comfortable positions in the bureaucracy and privileged housing conditions. *Ashkenazi* Jews are the leading ideologues of Labour-Zionism and the social base of the current Israeli Labour Party.

With the expulsion of the Palestinians, the only people left to fill the labouring jobs were Jews from Africa and the Middle East (known in Israel as Oriental Jews). A massive wave of migration from these areas took place after 1948, and Oriental Jews came to constitute nearly 60% of the Israeli population.

The term Oriental Jew is itself ideologically motivated, an attempt to disguise the fact that these Jews are culturally Arab, not European. However, they are divorced

from their Arab traditions, living as second-class citizens in Israel.

Many of these Jews were forced to live in squalid camps for over a decade while their white Ashkenazi counterparts ran the state. Despite being 60% of the population, they were discriminated against by being denied access to housing, education and employment.

In 1969-70 Oriental Jews made up only 37.4% of Grade 8 students. According to 1969 data, 30% of Oriental Jewish children lived below the poverty line, compared to 4% of children with Ashkenazi parents. The 500 years of Oriental-Jewish history are not mentioned in school textbooks, while the dominant literature and music are *Ashkenazi*.

This institutionalised racism is not socialism.

**Fact 3:** The Palestinians who remained within Israel suffer enormously as third-class citizens. This is a natural consequence of a state that defines itself as a “Jewish state”: it must discriminate against non-Jews.

Between 1948 and 1967, 90% of Arab lands in Israel were confiscated (i.e., stolen) from their owners and given to Jews. Only Jews were permitted to buy or lease land.

In education there were no Arab textbooks, and only the Zionist version of history was taught. Of the 37,343 students in higher education in 1969, only 700 were Arabs. Arabs were prevented from establishing their own political parties and barred from anything but menial jobs.

**Fact 4:** It is often claimed by Zionist ideologues that the early Israeli state was socialist because of the strength and influence of the trade union federation Histadrut. The reality is that Histadrut was an investment arm of large capital and anything but a trade union federation. During the late '60s (the so-called peak of Israeli “socialism”) Histadrut-owned companies employed 25% of Israeli wage-earners and accounted for 22-25% of the Israeli gross national product.

The first company established by Histadrut, Soleh Boneh, developed into the largest corporation in Israel, building luxury hotels throughout Africa and military bases throughout Asia. Until recently, Histadrut controlled all health insurance in Israel.

Two of the key companies behind Histadrut were AMPAL (American Israel Corporation), which was a finance company that directed US capital investment in Israel, and Koor, a major company in the field of construction and manufacture. These companies were not controlled by workers, but were privately owned, profit-driven enterprises.

Like the rest of the upper echelons of Israeli society, Histadrut has been dominated by *Ashkenazi* Jews, many of whom went on to become very rich.

**Fact 5:** The other argument offered for Israeli socialism is the *kibbutz*. The *kibbutz* is often claimed to be an example of a “worker cooperative” in which Israelis worked together for nothing but the good of the country. The reality is strikingly different.

In 1964, 92% of *kibbutzim* were affiliated to Histadrut companies, which sold the goods produced for a profit. This profit ended up in the hands of companies such as Koor and AMPAL, not Israeli workers.

During the 1960s, more than 50% of *kibbutz* labour was wage labour, not the voluntary labour so praised by Zionists. The dirty jobs in the *kibbutz* were performed by foreign Jewish volunteers.

Israel has always been a colonial-settler outpost dominated by large capitalist corporations and backed by US imperialism. It is based on the dispossession of the Palestinians and entrenched racism against Arabs and non-western Jews. To claim otherwise is not only to take the word socialism in vain, but to ignore the brutal facts of history. ■

## The Nature of Israeli Society

# 3. Migrant Labour in Israel

*By Assaf Adiv*

You always see them in groups. At the end of the day, silent, holding nylon bags containing their suppers — usually a loaf of cheap bread. After a day's work, they gather around local stores drinking bottles of beer, their only social luxury. Their faces are burnt tan, their hair straw-like. They probably somewhat resemble the Jewish *chalutzim*, who came to Palestine from Europe at the end of the century to build a state with Jewish labour.

But back in 1948, after the *chalutzim* managed to replace the native Arabs, they lost interest in the hard labour and scorching sun.

Then came the Eastern Jewish immigration (*Mizrahim*). Throughout the '50s and '60s the state of Israel was built by Jews from Yemen, Morocco, Iraq and Egypt. The emphasis was still “Jewish labour”; Arabs who remained inside Israeli territory were confined to their areas under strict military rule until 1966. For Arabs to work in Jewish cities was possible only through the right connections and a special pass.

All this changed with the 1967 war. Israeli economic energies were now ready to expand outward. The Israeli geographic expansion in '67 ironically returned to Israeli control a large number of Palestinians who had been chased out in 1948. The military victory opened a whole new market for selling goods and exploiting cheap labour.

While the *Mizrahim* were quickly pushed upward to become a more privileged working class or join the middle classes, over 26 years Palestinians filled their places in construction, food services and agriculture.

Within a short time, the standard of living in the territories grew (in comparison with other Arab countries). The long-term result, however, was that Palestinian society became a population of migrant workers. Because Israel did not allow any independent

industry to develop in the territories, the proletarianised Palestinians there became completely economically dependent on Israel.

Just as employment in Israel was used after '67 to pacify the population in the occupied territories, it was used once again when the Intifada broke out in December 1987, this time to starve Palestinians into making political concessions.

The first step was to issue magnetic ID cards at the beginning of the Intifada. Anyone who had spent time in jail, which included quite a few of the young male workers, was refused an ID card.

The next step was the partial closures imposed on the territories during times of upheaval. These closures solidified into policy in March 1993. Closure, which began as a tool to “combat terror”, became a policy of “separation” which was staunchly supported by the Israeli peace movement.

Eight roadblocks were erected between the territories and Israel, through which all Palestinian males (and occasionally females) required a pass to cross. The separation was not in fact territorial, as Israeli settlers continued to cross freely, but was rather a means of separating the Palestinian people from Israel.

The hope was that with the further erosion of an already collapsing economy in the territories, Palestinian political fortitude would crack, paving the way for an internal sell-out. Meanwhile, Israeli contractors and farmers became frustrated with the trickle of workers from the territories, and began pressing for more reliable sources of labour.

What appeared at first to be a far-fetched alternative soon became hard fact. Today, there are roughly 100,000 foreign workers in Israel. They constitute more than 66,000 of the 160,000 total workers in construction. Statistics from May indicate that about 51,000 foreign workers are registered, and another 15,000 are working illegally in this field. In July, head of the Contractors' Association Amos Bar'am was in Thailand to arrange to bring over 15,000 more.

*Cartography* magazine recently disclosed that 25% of Israeli companies employ or seriously consider employing foreign workers.

For company owners, the economic incentive is clear. In a large company such as A. Dori, an Arab construction worker who is a citizen of Israel earns an average monthly salary of 3600 shekels (US\$1200), including social benefits paid by the company. Foreign workers at A. Dori receive US\$600 a month for salary and expenses — half of what Arab workers make.

Kav La'oved, a Tel Aviv-based organisation for workers' rights, is inundated with cases of mistreatment of foreign workers. In its January '95 newsletter, the organisation describes how these workers' rights are violated:

Upon arrival their passports are confiscated by their employers, their salaries are unlawfully



withheld and high sums deducted, presumably as a deposit to be returned when the worker leaves the country. These deposits are often not returned to the worker, under the claim that he “violated the agreement”. They work extra hours and on Saturdays with no extra pay; they live in crowded, inhuman conditions, usually in flats rented by their bosses. If workers dare to complain or are considered troublemakers, their bosses hire armed guards to evict them.

Vasil Yurdanov was brought to Israel from Bulgaria in 1994 by the company Ortal and sent to work for a company called Mei Arad. Not only did he receive his salary two months late (\$255 monthly for 10 hours a day), but when he was fired, the company refused to return his deposit of \$95. He then received an order for deportation within three days.

There is another twist to this sad story of a whole community living away from home with no rights and in the margins of a foreign society. Not only have they been used to oust the Palestinian working class in the territories, but they now pose a threat to the Arab working class in Israel.

Ibrahim and Muhammed Miari are former employees of A. Dori. Along with 16 other workers, between January and June they were fired and replaced with Romanians. Muhammed, who had worked there for 11 years, was accused by the company of being “undisciplined” — a bizarre claim, since only two years previous he had been awarded a company prize for a project in Eilat. Maslah Tarabeih of Sakhnin reports that he was told by his local manager: “We know that you are the best workers, but the company wants to replace all of you with Romanians.”

During the writing of this article, another 50 workers from Sakhnin have been fired from A. Dori Cesaria, supposedly because of cutbacks. The fact that they were replaced by 60 foreign workers implies that lack of company money is not the reason. Three years ago, A. Dori employed at least 1500 Arab workers, 100 from Sakhnin alone. Today only six from Sakhnin are left. A. Dori’s new building projects in the city of Modi’in employ 100 workers, all of whom are Romanians.

Zvi Timor, spokesman for the Ministry of Labour, told the Workers Advice Centre that ministry regulations forbid the replacing of locals with foreigners. He said that if the ministry hears of such an incident, the company can be prohibited from employing foreign workers altogether. When asked how many companies have been apprehended for violating these regulations, Timor’s aide reported 48 cases.

Meanwhile, the largest company in Israel, Solel Bonch, employs 4000 foreign workers. The company was reported in June to have replaced 20 Arabs with Romanians in its Tromim factory near Haifa. Will the Ministry of Labour actually carry out its threat and send home the other 4000 Romanians as a punishment? It seems more

likely that Solel Bonch and A. Dori will influence minister of labour Ora Namir to allow such “minor violations” to slide. ■

## Socialists & Anti-Semitism

# 1. An Open Letter to the ADL

[In the 1972 US presidential elections the campaign of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) vigorously defended the Palestinian liberation struggle. This led to the Zionist B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League (ADL) launching a sharp attack on the party, charging in a November 20, 1972 statement that the SWP had “crossed the line into outright anti-Semitism”. This drew the response below from the party’s candidates.]

December 6, 1972

Mr. Arnold Forster

General Counsel

Anti-Defamation League

315 Lexington Ave. New York, NY 10016

Dear Mr. Forster,

In a report to your 59th annual meeting, Lawrence Peirez, chairman of your “fact-finding” committee, charged that the positions of the Socialist Workers Party — especially as expressed in our 1972 presidential campaign — have “crossed the line into outright anti-Semitism”.

This allegation is a slander, and we demand that you publicly retract it.

Anyone the least bit familiar with our election campaign and the views and record of the Socialist Workers Party knows that the SWP has always been a staunch opponent of anti-Semitism and of racism and bigotry of any kind. We have championed struggles against anti-Semitism wherever they have appeared — from the United States to the Soviet Union. Our European cothinkers were in the forefront of the struggle against the anti-Semitic terror of Nazism. Many of them perished in Hitler’s death camps. In this country before World War II the SWP carried out a campaign demanding that US borders be opened to Jewish refugees from Nazism.

In the report referred to above, Lawrence Peirez says that the SWP calls for “the

outright destruction of Israel”, and therefore is anti-Semitic. It is true we see the elimination of the Zionist state of Israel as necessary. But opposition to a specifically “Jewish” state in Palestine cannot be equated with anti-Semitism. Such an equation wrongly identifies the interests of Jews around the world with Israel and Zionism. We believe it is *your* identification of Zionist policies with the Jewish people that helps to fuel anti-Semitism today.

The incorrectness of equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism can be more clearly seen by considering the racist, settler regimes of South Africa or Rhodesia. Opposition to the existence of the white-supremacist regimes that usurped power in those countries, and made the black Africans second-class citizens in their own land, obviously cannot be equated with racism against the Dutch or British settlers who live there.

We oppose the state of Israel because it took over the territory of another people, the Palestinian Arabs, and forced them into a life as refugees or as second-class citizens. This was a great wrong perpetrated against the Palestinians, and their resistance struggle is not based on anti-Semitism but is a fight for justice, human dignity, and self-determination.

The Socialist Workers Party supports the Palestinians’ struggle to regain their homeland and to establish a democratic, secular Palestine, where Jews and Arabs could live together with equality and religious freedom. We believe that it is in the interests of Jews everywhere, including in Israel, to support this struggle.

Because of the fundamental injustice involved in the creation of Israel, the Israeli state can only maintain itself through allying with the United States and other reactionary imperialist powers against the Arab peoples. To sustain itself, Israel has created a militaristic, undemocratic regime engaging in expansionist aggression against Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

Here in the United States the charge of anti-Semitism has been falsely levelled against Black people and Puerto Ricans when they fight for control of the schools in their communities or for jobs in proportion to their numbers. Thus your organisation charges that anti-Semitism also comes “from extremist segments of other minority groups”.

When you side in this way with the fascist-like Jewish Defence League and racists like Newark Assemblyman Anthony Imperiale to oppose the struggles of the Puerto Rican and Black communities — whose interests are you defending? When you brand leaders of these struggles, such as Luis Fuentes, as anti-Semites, you are siding with white racists in the oppression of another people. The anti-Semitic legions of American fascism will come from the ranks of these people whom you are objectively making your allies today.

The danger to the Jewish people does not come from the Socialist Workers Party and the Black and Puerto Rican liberation struggles. The threat to Jews comes from the racist imperialist government of the US — a government capable of the genocidal war crimes against the people of Vietnam, a government that shut its borders to Jews fleeing Nazi terror and a government that supports Zionist Israel.

Increasingly, young Jews around the world are coming to see that the only hope for the Jewish people is to side with struggles against *all* forms of racist oppression and exploitation around the world — to side with the struggles against racism in this country and to side with the struggle of the Palestinian Arabs against the state of Israel and its imperialist backers, for a democratic, secular Palestine.

You identify the welfare of the Jewish people with Zionism and with the racist militarist settler-colonial state of Israel. The Socialist Workers Party believes that the ideology of Zionism disarms the Jewish people in the fight against anti-Semitism. We identify the welfare of the Jewish people with support to the just anti-imperialist struggles of the Arab peoples. Do not try to disguise your disagreement with us by using the slanderous charge of anti-Semitism. We repeat our demand that you retract this slander, that you do it publicly and immediately.

Sincerely,

*Linda Jenness*

*Andrew Pulley*

Socialist Workers Party candidates for president and vice-president in 1972.

## Socialists & Anti-Semitism

# 2. Does Anti-Zionism Equal Anti-Semitism?

## An Answer to the Anti-Defamation League

*By Peter Seidman*

On December 21, 1972, two weeks after the Jenness-Pulley open letter was sent, 60 people picketed the New York offices of the Anti-Defamation League to publicise their demand that the ADL retract its charge that the Socialist Workers Party is “anti-Semitic”.

A delegation headed by Linda Jenness, SWP 1972 presidential candidate, met with ADL officials and presented them with an open letter signed by Professor Noam Chomsky, writer Murray Kempton, literary critic Dwight MacDonald, Rabbi A. Bruce Goldman, and others who supported this demand.

The letter said: “while we do not necessarily agree with the program and policies of the Socialist Workers Party, we believe that their opposition to Zionism cannot in any way be equated with anti-Semitism.

“We respect the right of the Socialist Workers Party and others to express their opinions about the situation in the Middle East without being unjustly attacked in this manner.”

The open letter had been written in response to charges made on November 20 that the 1972 SWP presidential campaign, because of its opposition to Zionism and the state of Israel, had crossed the line into “outright anti-Semitism”.

Jenness told the ADL officials that “anyone the least bit familiar with my election campaign and the views and record of the Socialist Workers Party knows that my party has always been a staunch opponent of anti-Semitism and of racism and bigotry of any

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This article was first published as a four-part series in the January 12, January 19, January 26 and February 9, 1973 issues of the *Militant*, the newspaper of the SWP. It has been slightly edited.

kind. We have championed struggles against anti-Semitism wherever they have appeared — from the United States to the Soviet Union.

“Our European cothinkers were in the forefront of the struggle against the anti-Semitic terror of Nazism. Many of them perished in Hitler’s death camps. In this country the SWP carried out a campaign demanding that US borders be opened to Jewish refugees from Nazism.”

Jeness explained that the SWP “supports the Palestinians’ struggle to regain their homeland and to establish a democratic, secular Palestine where Jews and Arabs can live together with equality and religious freedom. We believe that it is in the interests of Jews everywhere, including in Israel, to support this struggle.

“The ADL charges that the SWP calls for ‘the outright destruction of Israel’, and is therefore anti-Semitic. We see the elimination of the Zionist state of Israel as necessary. But opposition to a specifically ‘Jewish’ state in Palestine cannot be equated with anti-Semitism.”

The ADL officials told Jenness that they would not retract their charges. They issued a press statement reaffirming their characterisation of the SWP as anti-Semitic.

The statement said:

It is the ADL view that Jewry the world over has a deep, abiding commitment to the survival of Israel. In the wake of the Nazi Holocaust the question asked by a whole people, if not by the whole world — Where are the persecuted to go? — was answered in the birth of the long-promised Jewish state.

Wherever they may be today, Jews overwhelmingly believe that, whatever legitimate controversies may exist in the Middle East and whatever the conflicting viewpoints between Israeli and Arab, Israel’s existence as a sovereign state is absolutely non-negotiable.”

Manifestoes and propaganda calling for the destruction or the dissolution of the Jewish state, are, therefore, direct assaults against world Jewry and, along with activities supporting those sworn to destroy Israel, constitute the ultimate anti-Semitism.

The unabashed support given by the SWP and other radicals of the far left to Arab regimes that have waged war against Israel, or to revolutionary terrorists sworn to Israel’s liquidation are in essence a war against the security of the Jewish community. For just as Israel’s security depends in large measure on support from the Jews in the United States and elsewhere, Jews here and abroad have come to believe that their own security and their own hope for ultimate survival depends in large measure on the survival of Israel as a sovereign state.”

The ADL representatives also presented Jenness with a report entitled “Danger on the Left”, which they claimed documented their charges that the SWP was anti-Semitic.

## Zionism no defence for the Jewish people

Presumably, this document represents the best effort of the ADL to prove its charges against the Socialist Workers Party. However, “Danger on the Left” not only fails to do so but also exposes the threat Zionism poses to Jewish people around the world.

This “fact sheet” contains no evidence of SWP statements or actions defaming the Jewish people, or supporting their oppression. No such evidence exists.

The sole basis for the “anti-Semitic” charge is the fact that the SWP is opposed to Zionism.

The Socialist Workers Party has always made clear the distinction between its opposition to Zionism, which declares that the Jewish people all over the globe have a right to inhabit an exclusively Jewish state in Palestine, and its support to the legitimate struggle of Jews, and of all oppressed peoples, against any form of racism and racial oppression.

The ADL and other Zionist groups maintain that the present state of Israel is the only defence Jews have against anti-Semitism.

The crux of the ADL argument is that because Jews have been the victim of oppression, and because the Zionist movement believes that the only defence against that oppression is to be found in the state of Israel, anyone who disagrees with this policy is an anti-Semite and a threat to world Jewry.

However, the fact that more than a million and a half Palestinians have been driven from their homes and land in order to clear the way for this Israeli “haven” for the Jewish people creates some contradictions for the Zionists. For if in fact the very establishment of the state of Israel required the expulsion and exile of another nation, there are surely grounds to oppose Zionism without being anti-Semitic.

How can safe refuge be found in a state that must militarily conquer a nation of two and a half million people, occupy its land, and be in endless war with the refugees it has created, and with all the surrounding nations? How can Israel be a “haven” for the Jews when it is totally dependent for its survival on aid from US imperialism, which is an enemy of the oppressed around the world?

How can one people find security and protection from racism in a state that breeds racism against the Palestinians in order to justify its occupation of their homeland? How can Jewish people find peace in a state that must create a militarist society to maintain the expulsion of the Palestinians from their own country?

The ADL quotes the 1971 SWP resolution on the Middle East, which, after explaining these contradictions of Zionism, concludes:

We explain to the Israeli Jews, as we have in the past, that their future lies only in aligning themselves with the Palestinian and general Arab liberation movements,



wholeheartedly and without any reservation whatsoever. It will be to the extent that they do this that they can escape from the trap that Zionism and imperialism have set for them in the Mideast.

This statement constitutes for the ADL, “The ultimately anti-Semitic impact of the SWP propaganda”, because of “its insistence that the Jewish people surrender their security and their entire future to the Arab guerrillas ‘without any reservation whatsoever’”.

In order to resolve their contradictions, the Zionists have had to explain the struggle of the Palestinians to regain their land as motivated by “anti-Semitism”. Therefore, according to this logic, anyone who supports the self-determination of the Palestinian people is anti-Semitic.

By this reasoning, we are asked to believe that the 25-year struggle of the Palestinians for the right to control their own future is in reality simply an expression of anti-Semitic rage that must equal or exceed the worst excesses of Hitlerism.

## How ADL distorts Palestinian struggle

The real basis of the Palestinian liberation struggle lies not in anti-Semitism but in opposition to the Zionist policies that led to the creation of Israel at the expense of the Arab inhabitants of Palestine.

It is true that because the Zionists carried out their crimes in the name of “the Jewish people”, it has been possible for reactionary forces in the Middle East to use the anti-Zionist feelings of Palestinians as a base for anti-Semitic campaigns. But this is not the basic issue in the fight against the state of Israel, nor are the Palestinian liberation fighters motivated by anti-Semitism.

The ADL deliberately misquotes the statements of Palestinians in order to “prove” its charge that they are anti-Semitic. For example, the “fact sheet” quotes from *The Militant* of October 9, 1970, a passage from a document entitled “Towards a Democratic State in Palestine”, which the *Militant* reprinted from Al Fateh, a Palestinian liberation organisation.

The ADL describes this as a “broad attack on the Jews of all countries”, and prints the passage as follows: “Jews contributed men, money and influence to make Israel a reality and to perpetuate the crimes committed against the Palestinians. The people of the Book ... changed roles from oppressed to oppressor.” The ADL claims that this quote shows, in a “glaringly apparent” way, “disdain for the Jewish people”.

What did the Al Fateh resolution really say? First of all, the whole point of the resolution was to define what was meant by the call for a democratic and secular Palestine — where an end to Zionist exclusivism would mean not that the “Jews would

be driven into the sea” but that peoples regardless of their religion or culture would live peacefully as equals.

Second, the document noted the growing number of Jews who had allied themselves with the Palestinians in support of these views.

And third, the particular passage selectively quoted by the ADL revealed the very real sensitivity to the condition of the Jews expressed by Al Fateh in its resolution.

Here is how the resolution appeared in *The Militant*:

Jews contributed men, money and influence to make Israel a reality and to perpetuate the crimes committed against the Palestinians. The people of the Book, the men of light, the victims of Russian pogroms, of Nazi genocide, of Dachau and other Polish concentration camps shut their eyes and ears in Palestine and changed roles from oppressed to oppressor. This is THE Jewish dilemma of modern times.

Far from “disdain”, this document reveals that genuine fighters against oppression challenge injustice of every kind. In their resolutions, the ADL and other Zionist organisations have shown no such sensitivity to the plight of the people Israel oppresses.

It is strong testimony to the liberating and humanitarian thrust of the Arab revolution that it is the oppressed, from the despair of their refugee camps, who seek to define the moral dilemma of their oppressors.

Another “proof” the ADL offers for its charge of anti-Semitism against the SWP is the editorial that appeared in *The Militant* on September 15, 1972, after the death of eleven Israeli athletes kidnapped by members of Black September, a Palestinian organisation. The ADL quotes this passage from the editorial: “The deaths of 11 Israeli participants in the Olympics on September 5 brought forth a hypocritical uproar of indignation from government officials and news media in capitalist countries around the world.”

The ADL then proceeds to attack *The Militant* because “there was no uproar of indignation whatsoever from *The Militant* which criticised the murderous outrage merely as being ‘ineffective’ and a ‘diversion’. The SWP paper added that the purpose of the world’s outcry had been ‘to make the criminal look like the victim’ — thus laying the blame for the massacre on the corpses of the murdered Jews while blaming the Arab terrorists only for a mistake in tactics.”

But this is a lie. *The Militant* did not place the blame for the massacre on the 11 Israeli victims. Rather, the editorial blamed the Zionist state of Israel:

The entire publicity campaign is designed by the capitalist rulers to bolster the image cultivated by Israel as a small, defenceless country at the mercy of the Arab people. The reality is the opposite.

The state of Israel — backed to the hilt by US military might — is based upon the

brutal suppression of three million Palestinian Arabs. The Israeli government expelled hundreds of thousands of Arabs from their homeland, expropriated their land and property, and condemned them to miserable lives in refugee camps. The Israeli state's wars of aggression have cost the lives of many thousands of Arab civilians. The "humanitarian" Israeli state tortures Arab liberation fighters that it captures, uses napalm against Arab civilians, and destroys entire villages as retribution for acts of resistance by Palestinian liberation fighters.

Such Israeli atrocities against the Arab people do not produce headlines or condemnations from capitalist government officials and politicians.

In fact, as long as the Zionist state exists, the people of Israel will face Munich-like dangers or worse — because the state of Israel stands in the way of liberation for an entire oppressed nation. This is precisely why revolutionists oppose Zionism as any kind of defence for the Jewish people.

The capitalist press did not record its outrage at Munich because of its concern *for* the Jewish people — no, the headlines were aimed *against* the Arab revolution.

Moreover, when the Olympic games were held in Munich in 1936, capitalist newspapers did not publicise the anti-Semitic exclusion of Jewish athletes from the German team, nor any of the other anti-Semitic crimes of the Nazi government. Has the capitalist press become more benevolent since then? Or is it not that the advancement of imperialist aims today, unlike in 1936, requires headlines about the death of the Israeli athletes.

## Zionism allies Jews with reactionary forces

The Zionists maintain that Israel is a secure and necessary haven for Jews in this world. But they do not confront the socialist argument that Israel, whose existence is based on the conquest of the majority by a minority and which must protect this conquest by reliance on imperialism, represents a dangerous trap for the Jewish people. While revolutionists urge the Jewish people to unite with oppressed Palestinians and other oppressed peoples in struggle against capitalism and imperialism, the Zionists urge reliance on these reactionary forces.

In "Danger on the Left", the ADL says that:

... political extremism — that of the left as well as that of the more familiar right — presents a dire and continuing threat to Jewish security. The extremists' anti-Israel war is only one aspect of the peril they present to the Jewish community. Their fundamental struggle is against the democratic system and those liberal values that have afforded safety and opportunity to an historically beleaguered minority people. The creation of social ferment, including the condoning, the advocacy and even the use of violence, is

the tactic of their “revolution”, and it is in revolutionary violence and assaults against the democratic process that Jewish security has been endangered and in which overt anti-Semitism easily breeds.

The lineup of forces presented by the ADL is clear. On the one hand are Israel, the US, and Zionism; and on the other the Palestinian liberation movement, the radical left, and the anti-Semites. The ADL presents this as democracy and tolerance poised against genocide, bigotry, and violence.

The ADL even goes so far as to criticise revolutionary opponents of the capitalist state of Israel for ignoring “Israel’s socialism and the fact that it is a political democracy born in a war of true national liberation. To recognise these facts would be to contradict the romantic, simplistic image and purpose now assigned to the Arab guerrillas; so Israel becomes an ‘imperialist’ power and the enemy of the ‘people’s’ war.”

The absurdity of this world view is readily apparent. It is precisely the US and its allies, including the Israeli government, that today represent genocidal military policies. The US war against the people of Southeast Asia ranks with Hitler’s policy of extermination of the Jews of Europe in its unmitigated savagery. The government of Israel is one of the diminishing number of powers that support this war.

Perhaps for this reason, “Danger on the Left” contains a lengthy section aimed at red-baiting and attacking the US antiwar movement. It is ironic that the ADL, which insists that the state of Israel is necessary so that the *Jewish* people will never again suffer as they did at the hands of Hitler’s Germany, attacks a movement in this country that is fighting to stop the US policy of genocide in Indochina.

Referring to the SWP and the Young Socialist Alliance, “Danger on the Left” declares: The Trotskyists have opposed the injection of issues other than Vietnam into the programs of the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC) and the Student Mobilisation Committee to End the War in Vietnam (SMC), the two anti-war groups they *dominate*. They fear that the injection of other issues would divide their hard-won coalition and lose them the allies and the following they have acquired by *exploiting* the widespread opposition to the Vietnam war. But they regard the lessons, the techniques, and even the loyalties garnered in the anti-war movement as “transferable” to other concerns when the time is right. One such concern is the war to destroy Israel.

The resolution adopted by the Socialist Workers Party at its August 1971 convention likened the Palestinian guerrillas to *America’s enemies in Vietnam*. And it declared:

“The mass anti-war movement has sensitised large numbers of people to the role of US imperialism and to solidarity with the colonial revolution. The expansion of these movements will be important factors in the increasing growth of sentiment in solidarity

with the Arab revolution.” [Emphasis added.]

The charge that the Trotskyists “dominate” the antiwar movement in order to “exploit” antiwar sentiment is utterly false and absurd, as is the claim that the Vietnamese revolutionaries are the “enemy” of the American people. The logical outcome of the ADL’s Zionist position is a program of red-baiting the antiwar movement; supporting US aggression in Vietnam; defending the capitalist system, which today is the major source of anti-Semitism in the world; and cheerleading for the military expansion of the Israeli state.

It is no wonder that as more and more young Jews begin to sympathise with the struggles of oppressed people around the world, they find themselves joining and supporting causes and movements that put them at odds with the international political stance of the Israeli government and the Zionist organisations.

This has been the case with Jews who support the antiwar movement, and it has been true of many Jews who have become supporters of the Black liberation struggle in the US and other struggles for self-determination around the world.

And, despite the ADL’s attempts to spread “anti-Semitism” slanders, young Jews continue to join the very organisations that the ADL increasingly subjects to attack — the Socialist Workers Party and the Young Socialist Alliance. ■

## Socialists & Anti-Semitism

# 3. The Real Story of the Fight to Save European Refugees From Hitler's Terror

By Peter Seidman

In November 1972 the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of the B'nai B'rith issued a "fact sheet" entitled "Danger on the Left". This slanderous document attacked the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA), and other organisations that oppose Zionism, as being "anti-Semitic".

The ADL's document has been reprinted in the *Congressional Record*. Articles reporting on its contents have appeared twice in the *New York Times* and also in the "Race Relations Reporter", a newsletter published by the Race Relations Information Center in Nashville, Tennessee.

Recently, the ideas contained in "Danger on the Left" have served as the basis for a new attack on the SWP and YSA in a statement entitled "The YSA, Anti-Semitism & Israel ..." issued by the social-democratic "Youth Committee for Peace and Democracy in the Middle East".

Albert Shanker and some other Teachers union leaders have, in addition, made use of the "anti-Semitism" charge to slander Black and Puerto Rican militants struggling to place the schools in their communities under the control of their Black and Puerto Rican inhabitants.

What motivates the publication of the ADL's document and the wide circulation of its charges against the left at this time is certainly not a sharp rise in anti-Semitism here in the US. Nor is it any encouragement of anti-Semitism by the SWP or YSA, or

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other radicals, as is claimed in “Danger on the Left”.

Rather, what underlies the circulation of this “fact sheet” at this time is a desire on the part of the ADL, and those who agree with its views, to slander all opponents of the racist and militarist state of Israel as “anti-Semites”. This is an attempt to intimidate the growing numbers of people willing to listen to the ideas of radical opponents of Zionism.

The ADL, the Young People's Socialist League, and other pro-Zionist organisations are committed to the continued existence of the state of Israel. But Israel was founded and can only continue to exist at the expense of the Palestinian people, who were violently expelled from their land by the Zionists. The continued oppression of the Palestinians by Israel is only made possible by the support Israel receives from US imperialism. And so, defenders of the Zionist state must also be defenders of the capitalist system upon which it depends.

### ADL defends capitalism

As defenders of the capitalist system, it is not surprising that the ADL opposes revolutionaries and other participants in movements for social change whose ideas and actions *challenge* the capitalist system. The ADL believes that Jews should depend on this system for protection from anti-Semitism, both in Israel and here in the US. However, instead of arguing out these differences in a rational way, ADL resorts to *slander* and accuses anti-Zionist radicals of being “anti-Semitic”.

They say in “Danger on the Left”:

Their [anti-Zionist radicals'] fundamental struggle is against the democratic system and those liberal values that have afforded safety and opportunity to an historically beleaguered minority people. The creation of social ferment, including the condoning, the advocacy and even the use of violence, is the tactic of their “revolution”, and it is in revolutionary violence and assaults against the democratic process that Jewish security has been endangered and in which overt anti-Semitism easily breeds.

This portrayal of revolutionists as the source of violence and assaults against the democratic process is false from top to bottom, as is the idea that revolutionary activity and radicalisation in society in general are the breeding grounds for overt anti-Semitism.

The policies of the ADL, which urge reliance on the “democratic system” and “liberal values” of capitalism, in fact fatally weaken the ability of Jews to defend themselves from anti-Semitism. Here we will take up, as a case study of this terrible weakness of the ADL's analysis, the history of the most horrible anti-Semitic outrages of human history — the barbaric Nazi campaign of genocide against the Jews during

the 1930s and 1940s.

## Capitalism & anti-Semitism

Following World War I German capitalism faced unparalleled economic crisis. Lacking investment funds and squeezed out of foreign markets, the economy reeled from bouts of intensive inflation to prolonged recession and massive unemployment.

This produced a tremendous radicalisation of the powerful and well-organised working class. Ultimately, in order to maintain its profits, a section of the ruling class chose a collision course with the workers aimed at breaking the backs of their unions and political parties.

The mass movement of small shopkeepers, professionals, and other middle class and lumpen elements crazed by the effects of the economic crisis and welded together by Hitler behind his fascist National Socialist Party became a weapon of big capital against the workers movement.

Anti-Semitism, along with anti-communism, was part of the ideological glue used to hold the Nazi movement together and to direct its fury against the Jews and the workers. In this way, and given the failure of the Communist and Socialist parties of Germany to provide effective leadership in the struggle against it, fascism served to turn the middle class victims of the capitalist crisis against the workers and the Jews, who were also victims, instead of against the real criminals — the capitalist ruling class.

When Hitler became chancellor of the German government in 1933, he transformed the anti-Semitic actions of the Nazi goon squads into official state policy against the 350,000 Jews of Germany. In April 1933, the Nazi regime imposed an official boycott on all Jewish businesses. In that year, Jews began to be excluded from all the professions and many of the cities and towns of Germany.

By September 1935, the Nuremberg Laws were passed, which deprived all German Jews of their citizenship. German Jews were excluded from the 1936 Olympic games in Munich.

The Nazis unleashed a campaign of physical terror against Jews, making public announcements that their police chiefs could not be “responsible for the safety of enemies of the Reich”. By 1933, the *New York Times* had carried descriptions of the prison camp at Dachau. That year, there was one estimate made that there were 80,000 prisoners in 65 camps throughout Germany.

Following the assassination of a Nazi ambassador in Paris by Herschel Grynszpan, the son of a Polish Jew, expelled from Germany by the Nazis, the Nazis unleashed a pogrom against the German Jews on November 10, 1938 — the infamous “*Kristallnacht*”, the “Night of Broken Glass”. This orgy of revenge for the death of the German diplomat



included the burning of some 195 synagogues, the destruction of more than 800 Jewish-owned shops, and the looting of some 7500 others.

Twenty thousand Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps. And on November 12, 1938, the German government imposed a collective fine of approximately \$400,000,000 (one billion marks) upon German Jews as “money atonement” for the death of Vom Rath, Grynszpan’s victim.

During this time, anti-Semitic regimes were also bearing down on the 725,000 Jews in Hungary, the 900,000 Jews in Rumania, and the 3.3 million Jews in Poland. With the conquest by German imperialism of Austria (with 200,000 Jews) and Czechoslovakia (with 350,000 Jews), the anti-Jewish terror threatened to engulf all of Europe.

### A matter of life & death

In the wake of this mounting Nazi repression, refuge in other countries became a matter of life and death for hundreds of thousands of Jews and other fighters against fascism as well. By May 1939, for example, there were enough applications for US entry visas on file in the US consular offices in Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia to fill the existing US immigration quotas for the next five years!

The Roosevelt administration, the upholder of the “liberal democratic values” so beloved by the B’nai B’rith, followed a consistent policy of barring entry to this country for these refugees, thereby condemning many of them to death. This policy of the US government showed that any serious effort to save the victims of European anti-Semitism would require a fight *against* Roosevelt’s administration, and not reliance on it.

*The Socialist Appeal*, a predecessor of *The Militant*, in an editorial that appeared on July 9, 1938, explained the reason why:

Capitalism in its death agony can no more solve the refugee problem than any of the other social problems clamouring for solution. The existence of these refugee hordes is in itself a symptom of its social decay and political reaction ...

Revolutionary socialists must everywhere fight for unrestricted immigration into their countries, and especially for the right of asylum for all victims of reaction.

### New Deal & refugees

Following Hitler’s march into Austria in March 1938, Roosevelt announced plans for an international conference to aid refugees from Germany and Austria to be held at Evian, France. Roosevelt launched this conference with a statement about how the US has always been a haven for the oppressed and a land of the free.

But in motivating the conference, he explained that no country that attended

would be expected to raise its immigration quotas to solve the refugee crisis, that the US would not raise its quota, and that all funds for projects of the conference would be raised from private agencies.

This general approach of the New Deal to the refugee crisis was first conceived in the State Department, where Cordell Hull, then secretary of state, circulated a memorandum in response to growing public outcries over the events in Europe. Hull said it would be better for the State Department to “get out in front and attempt to guide the pressure, *primarily with a view toward forestalling attempts to have the immigration laws liberalised*”. (Emphasis added.)

With this kind of purpose discreetly buried behind a lot of government hoopla about “America’s concern for the refugees” it is not at all surprising that the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees that finally emerged from the Evian Conference was a farce. By August 1939, this committee, which was supposed to represent the relief efforts of 32 nations, had a bank balance of \$9672!

Many other examples can be given of the callous way in which US immigration quotas, visa procedures, and consular regulations were used to impede the entry of Jewish refugees and others seeking to flee from Hitler’s advancing armies. These are well documented in at least three books that students of this subject may wish to read: *While Six Million Died* by Arthur D. Morse (New York, 1967); *Paper Walls, America and the Refugee Crisis* by David S. Wyman (New York, 1968); and *The Politics of Rescue, The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust 1938-1945* by Henry L. Feingold (New Brunswick, NJ, 1970).

The outcome of all this was that between 1933 and 1943, more than 400,000 more people could have legally entered the US from countries under Nazi domination than were actually permitted. Between 1938, the year of “*Kristallnacht*”, and 1941, when the involvement of the US in the Second World War made transportation from Europe almost totally unavailable to refugees — a period of time when the acute plight of the refugees was at the height of public attention — there were still some 60,000 unfilled places in the US immigration quota.

More revealing than this, of course, is the fact that quotas existed at all. At a time when so many lives were threatened, the US insisted on maintaining an immigration quota system based on restrictive legislation aimed at cutting off the flow of immigrants into the country.

In 1944, John Pehle, at the request of US Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, issued a study of State Department refugee policy since 1938, which he entitled: “Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of the Jews”. Any honest estimate of the Roosevelt administration’s policies

would confirm these findings.

## Zionist opposition to lifting quotas

In 1942, Rabbi Stephen Wise, the leading Zionist spokesman in the US, complained to his friend Felix Frankfurter: "I don't know whether I'm getting to be the J of Jude, but I find that a good part of my work is to explain to my fellow Jews why our government cannot do all the things asked or expected of it."

As we have seen, the Roosevelt administration, far from aiding the masses of European refugees from Nazi terror, had in fact stood quietly by while hundreds of thousands of Jews and others were being murdered. Estimates as to the total number of refugees that were permitted to enter the US between 1933 and 1945 vary from about 150,000 to a high of about 250,000. A very small number indeed compared to the millions of victims of fascism.

Why at this time did Rabbi Wise consider it his job "to explain to my fellow Jews why our government cannot do all the things asked or expected of it"?

Zionist and many leading non-Zionist Jewish organisations had different but complementary reasons for uncritically supporting the New Deal despite Roosevelt's murderous inaction during the refugee crisis. The Zionists had as a primary aim securing the backing of US imperialism for a Jewish state in Palestine. Zionists in the US followed the same strategy as their cothinkers in Europe, seeking to show how the founding of Israel would benefit imperialism's plans in the Middle East.

They felt that any struggle against New Deal immigration policies might interfere with Zionist attempts to woo US support for their plans. Further, Zionists believed that rescue operations in general tended to divert resources from their efforts to establish an exclusive Jewish state in Palestine.

Wise was once asked, for example, what he thought of the idea of resettling the refugees in the former German colony of Tanganyika, one of a number of racist and impractical schemes talked about by Roosevelt. Wise's answer is very revealing: "I would rather have my fellow Jews die in Germany than live somehow, anyhow, in the lands which bear the imprint of yesterday's occupation by Germany, in lands which may tomorrow be yielded back ... to Germany."<sup>a</sup>

Even in 1943, during Hitler's genocide against the Jewish people, Itzhak Greenbaum, head of the Jewish Agency Rescue Committee, declared to the Zionist Executive Council:

If I am asked could you give from UJA [United Jewish Appeal] moneys to rescue Jews?

I say "No"; and I say again, "No". In my opinion we have to resist that wave which puts Zionist activities in the second line.

A number of major Jewish organisations, like the B'nai B'rith and the American Jewish

Committee, had not yet become Zionist by 1938-39. These organisations had their own reasons, complementary to those of the Zionists, for wishing to support US imperialism even at the expense of fighting against US immigration policies restricting the admission of the European refugees.

### ‘Good Americans’

The B’nai B’rith, the American Jewish Committee, and the American Jewish Congress were organisations of the wealthiest and most assimilated US Jews, many of whose families had emigrated to the US in the early 19th century, primarily from Germany. They were the elite of American Jewish society. They thought of themselves as “good Americans” just as many of the elite Jews of Germany — on the eve of Hitler’s rise to power — thought of themselves as “good Germans”.

These Jewish leaders believed that any influx of Jewish refugees from Europe would undermine their assimilation into US society. They believed that large concentrations of non-English speaking Jews from the ghettos of Europe would in fact provoke an anti-Semitic reaction here in the US.

They argued that the best defence against anti-Semitism was for Jews to appear as “American” as possible, that is, as the most patriotic supporters of the New Deal. They wanted to project the image that Stephen Wise did to the American Jewish Congress, when he told it that: “[Jews] are Americans, first, last and all the time. Nothing else that we are, whether by faith or race or fate, qualifies our Americanism.”

These Zionist and non-Zionist Jewish leaders sought every chance to show how “American” they could be. They even went along with the Roosevelt administration’s astonishing argument that one reason for the restrictive visa regulations was to prevent an influx of revolutionaries and Nazi agents “disguised” as refugees! This excuse was used to deny refuge to thousands of victims of anti-Semitic terror and fighters against

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<sup>a</sup> In the same vein, the Zionist leader and future Israeli prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, wrote to the Zionist executive on December 17, 1938:

“The fate of Jews in Germany is not an end but a beginning. Other anti-Semitic states will learn from Hitler. Millions of Jews face annihilation, the refugee problem has assumed worldwide proportions, and urgency. Britain is trying to separate the issue of the refugees from that of Palestine ... If Jews will have to choose between the refugees, saving Jews from concentration camps, and assisting a national museum in Palestine, mercy will have the upper hand and the whole energy of the people will be channelled into saving Jews from various countries. Zionism will be struck off the agenda not only in world public opinion, in Britain and the USA, but elsewhere in Jewish public opinion. If we allow a separation between the refugee problem and the Palestine problem, we are risking the existence of Zionism.” — *Ed.*

fascism.

Some non-Zionist Jews who for their own reasons did not wish to struggle against the US government for the admission of the refugees found a useful rationale in the Zionist claim that *only* in a Jewish state in Palestine could the Jewish people find any real security. After all, if this was so, why bother to struggle to help them find safety anywhere else.

Conversely, from the Zionist point of view, any such struggles that might have proven successful would only have undermined their arguments that the Jewish state they sought to create in Palestine could provide the only security from anti-Semitic attacks.

This coincidence of interests led to a criminal policy in which the major Zionist and non-Zionist US Jewish organisations subordinated the interests of the Jewish refugees to their policy of support to Roosevelt. And this is why Rabbi Wise, who wondered whether he was getting to be the J of Jude, spent so much of his time explaining to his fellow Jews “why our government cannot do all the things asked or expected of it”.

The policy followed by Wise and other Jewish and Zionist leaders was one of total abstention from any meaningful struggle to aid the victims of fascist anti-Semitism in Europe to obtain refuge here in the US.

It is true that the major Jewish and Zionist organisations contributed money and personnel to rescue operations in Europe, and that they also organised a number of rallies bringing attention to the plight of Jews suffering under Nazism.

But with the exception of a few organisations — such as the Jewish Labor Committee, at that time a non-Zionist organisation, and Peter Bergson's Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe — a maverick group in the Zionist movement — the major US Jewish organisations never demanded that the US government “open the doors” to the victims, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, of fascism in Europe.

## A shameful record

Their shameful failure to do so is part of the historical record.

Following a Nazi boycott of all Jewish merchants in Germany in April 1933, many organisations, Jewish and non-Jewish, called for an international boycott of German goods, including a demand that the US impose a trade embargo on Germany. The B'nai B'rith and the American Jewish Committee opposed the call for a boycott, warning against any “public agitation in the form of boycotts and mass demonstrations”.

These, they considered, “serve only as ineffectual channels for the release of emotion. They furnish the persecutors with a pretext to justify the wrongs they perpetrate and, on the other hand, distract those who desire to help with more

constructive efforts.”

The protest of the oppressed serves only to furnish a justification for the oppressor!

David Brody, a scholar who made a study of how the Jewish press dealt with the refugee crisis, reported the following in the June 1956 *Publication of the American Jewish Historical Society*:

Almost nothing is to be found in the Jewish literature between 1938 and 1942 expressing significant dissatisfaction with the immigration laws. *B'nai B'rith Magazine* had run periodically editorials on “the Old America”, when the door was open to all who wished to enter; this might be construed as an implicit criticism of the quota restrictions. After 1938, such editorials no longer appeared. The *Annual Reports* of the American Jewish Committee made no adverse mention from 1938 to 1942 of the immigration laws. The American Jewish Congress also maintained silence ... The significant exception to this position was the non-Zionist labour organisations belonging to the Jewish Labor Committee.

## Immigration limits

In April 1939, Rabbi Wise testified before a congressional hearing on immigration. Wise said:

I want to make it plain, so far as I am concerned, there is no intention whatsoever to depart from the immigration laws which at present obtain. I have heard no sane person propose any departure or deviation from the existing law now in force.

... I feel that the country and the Congress should not be asked to do more than take care of a limited number of children. The bill provides for 10,000 each year for a period of two years. After all, we cannot take care of all of them. Germany has a population of five or six hundred thousand Jews.

When asked to state the position of the B'nai B'rith and the American Jewish Committee on proposed legislation that would loosen US visa requirements and permit more German refugees to enter the country, Max J. Kohler testified on behalf of those organisations to the House Committee on Immigration: I think that is a salutary thing, but our plea is in behalf of non-labourers and some exceptional persons.”

“I oppose special legislation for their [German refugees] benefit.”

This was the record of those who today accuse the Socialist Workers Party and Young Socialist Alliance of being “anti-Semitic”.

## The record of the SWP

We have shown how and why leaders of Zionist and most Jewish organisations in the US raised no significant protests against the policies of the Roosevelt administration

that left hundreds of thousands of refugees, Jews and others, to die at the hands of the fascist anti-Semites in Europe beginning in the 1930s.

It is ironic that today leaders of these very same Jewish organisations, like the B'nai B'rith, are attacking the Socialist Workers Party for being “anti-Semitic”. For in contrast to the policies of the B'nai B'rith during the worst campaign of genocidal terror against Jews in the history of the world, the Socialist Workers Party did not stand idly by, but rather engaged, with others, in a struggle to force Washington to admit the refugees.

Furthermore, the SWP saw that the fight to admit the refugees was a crucial component of the broader fight against a growing fascist and anti-Semitic movement that developed in the US during the 1930s.

The SWP disagreed with the view put forward by most Jewish and Zionist leaders that Jews should rely on the “democratic system” and “liberal values” represented by the Roosevelt administration as a shield against anti-Semitism. It also argued against the idea that the creation of an exclusive Jewish state in Palestine represented any real protection for Jews from the anti-Semitic terror sweeping Europe.

The SWP explained, in contrast to the ideas put forward by most of the Jewish and Zionist organisations, that Roosevelt and the capitalist government he headed were not at all allies of the Jews in any fight against anti-Semitism.

In fact, the Roosevelt administration was a hotbed of anti-Semitic officials and actions. Despite Roosevelt's carefully cultivated reputation as a friend and benefactor of the Jews, he placed the handling of all problems relating to the refugees from Nazi terror in Europe in the hands of bigots who could safely be relied upon not to take any meaningful action to save the European Jews.

For example, Breckinridge Long, the man Roosevelt appointed as assistant secretary of state for refugee problems, was an early admirer of fascist Italy, where he had served as an ambassador.

In 1933, Long had sent a letter to Roosevelt containing this favourable description of conditions under Mussolini:

Many men are in uniform. The Fascisti in their black shirts are apparent in every community. They are dapper and well dressed and stand up straight and lend an atmosphere of individuality and importance to their surroundings ... The trains are punctual, well-equipped and fast ...

In 1941, Long wrote in his diary of his approval of the then US ambassador to the Soviet Union Laurence Steinhardt's clear cut opposition to “immigration in large numbers from Russia and Poland of the Eastern Europeans whom he characterises as entirely unfit to become citizens of this country. He says they are lawless, scheming, defiant — and in many ways unassimilable. He said the general type of intending

immigrant was just the same as the criminal Jews who crowd our police court dockets in New York and with whom he is acquainted ... I think he is right — not as regards the Russian and Polish Jew alone, but the lower level of all that Slav population of Eastern Europe and Western Asia.”

Myron Taylor, a former president of the US Steel Corporation who played a key role in the Roosevelt administration’s refugee work, had two pictures on the wall of his office: one was of Roosevelt, the other of Mussolini.

So much for the “friends and benefactors” of the Jewish refugees!

The Roosevelt administration, despite the bigotry of its officials and the criminal nature of its refugee policies, was not, of course, a fascist government. In Germany, because of its weaker economic position internationally, the ruling class had been forced to crush the radicalisation of the workers under the blows of fascism. But US capitalism had responded to the radicalisation with a series of concessions and reforms.

These reforms helped avert the threat of revolution by maintaining the workers’ illusions in “the democratic system” and its “liberal values”, despite the terrible unemployment and brutal attacks on union organising drives of the 1930s.

These illusions allowed the capitalists to cloak the realities of their rule, the brutality of which was so readily apparent in the naked dictatorship of the German and Italian fascist states. Hence, the New Deal provided a more economical form of government for the capitalist rulers of the US than the costly police state of their German counterparts.

In order to maintain the illusions of the working masses in Roosevelt, the cooperation of the trade-union bureaucracy, the leaders of the Communist and Socialist parties, and of the major Jewish and Zionist organisations was necessary. By following an active policy of collaboration with Roosevelt, these misleaders prevented their followers from carrying out any meaningful struggle against unemployment, for trade unions, or against anti-Semitism.

This did not mean that no fascist threat existed in the US during the 1930s. The social crisis in the US had created the conditions out of which, as in Germany, layers of the middle classes and demoralised workers could be organised into fascist groups. Father Coughlin’s Social Justice Movement, the Silver Shirts of William Dudley Pelley, and the German-American Bund of Fritz Kuhn were examples of these kinds of organisations.

Unlike the case in Germany, no section of the US ruling class stood solidly behind any of these fascist movements. This did not mean, however, that at some later time the capitalists might not have turned to active backing of these groups.

In sharp contrast to the policies of many Zionist and Jewish leaders of the time, the



SWP understood that quiet apologetics for an uncritical reliance on the New Deal was no defence against the fascist danger in the US. Also, the SWP understood that the fight against fascism at home was clearly linked to the fight for the rights of asylum for victims of fascism in Europe. This strategy was clearly spelled out in an editorial entitled "Open the Doors!" that appeared in the October 29, 1938, *Socialist Appeal*, a predecessor to *The Militant*:

The only real answer to the barbarism practised by the reactionary capitalists in the name of national culture, is the mobilisation of working class forces on the basis of international solidarity against all class and national oppression. In the performance of this duty of organising practical aid for the disinherited and mistreated victims of fascist reaction, the working class forges unbreakable international links in the chain of its struggle to pull civilisation out of the mire.

The American proletariat must unite to help the refugees so that in this very process they may prevent the same thing from taking place in their own country. By making their power felt in warding off the blows of reaction delivered against the oppressed of other countries, the American workers at the same time mobilise their strength to defeat similar attempts at oppression at home.

... the American workers, including the Jewish workers, can perform a far more useful service to the refugees, including the Jews, by making forceful demands not on the British government [to admit the refugees to Palestine] which need not and will not pay the slightest attention, but on "their own" government. We must demand the open door for refugees not merely in faraway Palestine, but here at home in the United States. Why has not Roosevelt attempted to have the quota law completely abolished — or even revised upwards? This would be really practical aid to the refugees. It would be an excellent way to combat anti-Semitism because it would mean an educational campaign against race prejudice conducted in the ranks of the working class.

Organise the masses around this demand for the open door and this demand will make itself felt! For the abolition of the quota law and for the reestablishment of the United States as a haven for political refugees! This is the only real democracy — the fight for the Open Door for all refugees!

Following the "Night of Broken Glass" pogrom in Germany, the *Socialist Appeal* of November 19, 1938, carried this front page statement by the National Committee of the SWP:

... Workers!

Solidarity with those who suffer at the hands of fascism is one of the best ways of establishing, in this country, an unbreakable wall against the advance of American fascism.

Unite! Join hands!

Show the Hitlerite assassins and pogromists the real position of American labour by your protest meetings!

Show them that the American working class means it seriously when it says that it detests anti-Semitism and the anti-Semites like the plague!

Show the victims of the fascist terror that you mean it seriously, by stretching out to them the hands of fraternal solidarity, by demanding of the American government the free and unrestricted right of asylum for the Jewish scapegoats of fascist barbarism!

### The campaign to 'Open the Door'

The SWP viewed such an effort as part of an overall struggle against the growth of any fascist movement here in the US.

The SWP argued that in order for such a struggle to be successful, it would have to be carried out in a massive way, uniting in action not only those who were already convinced radicals but much broader forces as well.

As a step toward launching such a campaign, all the arguments put forward by the fascists and right-wingers, as well as by many liberal Jewish and Zionist leaders, to discourage the masses from actions demanding changes in the immigration law had to be answered and refuted.

The *Socialist Appeal*, which reflected the views of the SWP, explained why the demand for opening the door to refugees should be supported by working people. It linked this demand to their struggles against unemployment, for the building of trade unions, and other issues of concern to the workers.

### Refugees & unemployment

For example, the December 3, 1938, *Socialist Appeal*, in a front-page editorial, "Who Opposes the Open Door?" explains what was wrong with the argument that admitting the refugees would only increase unemployment. This objection was used by the capitalists to gain support for their closed door policies among US workers, who were plagued with high unemployment.

The *Socialist Appeal* exposed this capitalist hypocrisy:

This is the reverse of the argument that killing off all the unemployed would get rid of unemployment. But the truth is that unemployment is a functional disease of capitalism, caused not by the lack of any need for work to be done but by the requirements of capitalist profit ... In point of fact ... the introduction of a new body of consumers ... [might indirectly result in] an increase of general employment.

... However, the objection loses all weight when we merely reflect that there are

now in the United States about 12 million or more unemployed. The problem of unemployment is not going to be solved one way or another by the addition or subtraction of half a million persons ...

The *Socialist Appeal* presented a program that would aid both the victims of Nazism and of unemployment. The SWP called on workers to fight for the right of everyone to a decent job and standard of living. This could be done by fighting to divide the hours of work available equally between all who wanted to work, without cutting pay for anyone.

Another common argument against admitting the refugees, and one generally accepted by many Jewish and Zionist leaders, was that if Jews were admitted to the US, their presence would only increase and aggravate anti-Semitism.

The December 3 *Socialist Appeal* explained, however, that “fighting for and carrying through the demand to admit the refugees is today the most effective blow that could be struck against anti-Semitism ...”

Anti-Semitism arises out of the needs of decaying capitalism, not from the attitude of the Jews. There is no doubt that it is making headway in this country. There is no doubt that in some quarters it becomes more open in the face of the demand to admit the refugees.

But it will not retire if the Jews try to hide in the sand. It will, as reaction always does, grow stronger at the weakness of its opponents. Anti-Semitism has to be smashed; it will not be conciliated into disappearing ...

In this way, reaction, which lurks behind anti-Semitism, will be prevented from consolidating; and the ranks of the genuinely progressive forces within the country, steeled by a firm and unambiguous battle, will be better prepared for the broader struggles that lie ahead.

## SWP in action

The SWP carried out two kinds of campaigns aimed at doing as much as possible, given its limited resources, to put its ideas into action.

First was participation in the American Fund for Political Prisoners and Refugees, an organisation established in June 1938 with George Novack, an SWP leader, as its secretary, and with John Dewey, Suzanne LaFollette, Sidney Hook, Meyer Schapiro, and Vincent R. Dunne on its national campaign committee. One function of the Fund was to raise money for the relief of some of the worst-off victims of fascism in Europe — the persecuted revolutionists who were ignored by the official “rescue and relief” agencies. Chapters were set up in cities across the country to raise these funds.

However, American Fund supporters also organised public meetings, petition

drives and educational work in unions, and other activities to win broad support and endorsement for resolutions and actions demanding that the government open the doors to all the refugees. After only five months, for example, New York City supporters of the Fund had distributed more than 15,000 manifestos demanding the admission of the refugees; pasted up more than 25,000 stickers; and held street meetings in every borough. The SWP produced a special one-cent edition of the *Socialist Appeal* on the refugee issue; 10,000 of these were sold in New York. And the Young People's Socialist League, at that time a youth organisation in solidarity with the SWP, vigorously sought support on campuses for the demand to open the door.

Nationally, a massive petition drive was launched to win support for the demand that Congress admit the refugees. A reading of *Socialist Appeal* during 1938 and 1939 shows that the Fund obtained endorsement of its demand from, among many others: Executive Board, General Drivers Union, Local 544, Minneapolis; Carl Skoglund; Ferdinand Lundberg, author of *America's 60 Families*; James T. Farrell, author of *Studs Lonigan*.

Also from Local 5, American Federation of Teachers, New York; Toledo Industrial Union Council, CIO; Boston United Office and Professional Workers Union, CIO; Harris County (Houston) CIO; and the Executive Committee of the Essex County (New Jersey) Workers Alliance, an organisation representing thousands of unemployed workers in the Newark area.

Thousands of individuals whose organisations may not have endorsed the Fund's appeal heard the arguments of its supporters at meetings throughout the country.

## Antifascist demonstrations

In addition to its support for the American Fund, the SWP was also active in alerting US workers to the need for vigilant action against the fascist and anti-Semitic goon squads of the Coughlins, Pelleys, and Kuhns.

The most dramatic of these actions was called by the SWP for February 20, 1939, when a fascist meeting was scheduled for Madison Square Garden in New York. Fifty thousand workers turned out to show their opposition to the fascists. The massive demonstration was attacked by the police force of New York's Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia (a pro-Roosevelt "progressive"). The massive turnout was achieved despite a boycott of the demonstration by the Communist and Socialist parties.

Communist Party (CP) policies were always designed to promote the interests of the bureaucratic Stalinist rulers of the USSR, not to further the class struggle in the US. The CP sought to convince the US ruling class that a friendly policy toward the Soviet Union would result in the CP using its influence among US workers to blunt the class

struggle. Hence CP leaders opposed any genuinely independent struggle against fascism that might threaten to bring workers into direct conflict with Roosevelt's New Deal.

The CP's Kremlin mentors had failed to lift even a finger to make the vast territories of the USSR available as a place of refuge for capitalism's victims in Europe. So the very existence of the demand on Washington that it "Open the Doors!" was an embarrassment — particularly after the signing of the Stalin-Hitler pact in August 1939.

The major Jewish papers in the city also warned their readers against participating in the February 20 antifascist action. The *Day* said: "Jews of New York, do not let your sorrows guide you! Avoid Madison Square Garden this evening ... Don't demonstrate! Don't give the Nazis the chance to get the publicity they desire so much."

Another Jewish paper, the *Forward*, wrote:

Reports have come ... that certain irresponsible organisations are sending people to today's Nazi rally in Madison Square Garden in order to demonstrate there.

There can be no more shameful thing for the Jews and opponents of the Nazis than such demonstrations which will lead to bloody fights and riots ...

Avoid the area around Madison Square Garden today and do not participate in any demonstration around the hall.

Six years after Hitler came to power in Germany, a Jewish newspaper is explaining that in order to avoid shameful fights and bloody riots, Jews and others should not demonstrate against the fascists!

## Fourth International

The efforts of the SWP during the 1930s flowed from a revolutionary socialist analysis of and opposition to capitalism, the source of both anti-Semitism and fascism in today's world. In Europe, cothinkers of the SWP in the Fourth International, who shared these views, fought bravely against the fascists. Many of them sacrificed their lives in the struggle.

The importance of the fight against anti-Semitism and for relief for its victims was stressed at the founding conference of the Fourth International in October 1938. "The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International" (better known as "The Transitional Program"), the central programmatic document written by Leon Trotsky and approved at the conference, says:

"An uncompromising disclosure of the roots of race prejudice and all forms and shades of national arrogance and chauvinism, particularly anti-Semitism, should become part of the daily work of all sections of the Fourth International, as the most important part of the struggle against imperialism and war. Our basic slogan remains: Workers

of the World Unite!” That analysis holds equally well today.

The *silence* of the major Jewish and Zionist leaders and organisations in the US greatly hindered efforts to involve the masses of Jews in a campaign to fight anti-Semitism in the US and offer some practical relief to hundreds of thousands of victims of Nazi terror in Europe.

The desire of the Zionist leaders to win the support of US imperialism for a Jewish state in Palestine is what caused them to act in ways so detrimental to the real needs and interests of the Jewish people. The Zionist leaders follow the same strategy today. This is why they attack as “anti-Semitic” the Socialist Workers Party and the Young Socialist Alliance.

But it is the Zionist organisations like the ADL, who defend in the name of *all* Jews — the relative privileges of the Israeli Jews at the expense of the Palestinian people, that are acting against the best interests of the Jews. It is the Zionist organisations like the ADL, who attack — in the name of *all* Jews (as in documents like “Danger on the Left”) — the struggles of Blacks, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans against oppression, that help genuine anti-Semites to gain a hearing among the oppressed, who are a majority of the people around the world.

These policies separate the Jewish people from their potential *allies* in any future fight against *real* anti-Semitism, as opposed to the slanderous and fabricated “anti-Semitism” charges hurled today by the Anti-Defamation League against revolutionary socialists and other fighters against capitalist injustice. ■

Ever since its establishment in 1948, Israel has been enveloped in a thick fog of propaganda myths, spread by both its Zionist rulers and its Western supporters.

The reality is that Israel is a capitalist settler-colonial state, founded on the dispossession of the Palestinian people who have been waging a just struggle ever since to regain their homeland.

And far from providing a safe haven for the Jewish people, Israel is necessarily in permanent conflict with the Arab world. The first article in this collection examines these realities.

A second group of articles looks at the nature of Israeli society, pointing out its inherently racist, anti-democratic, exploitative character.

A final selection of articles looks at the question of anti-Semitism. Are socialists anti-Semitic because they support the creation of a democratic, secular Palestine where Jews and Muslims can live together in equality? Is emigration of all Jews to Israel the 'solution' to anti-Semitism or should it be fought by actively struggling against it in each country and ultimately by fighting to replace capitalism with socialism?

*Resistance books*