

“Jewish question,” nature of Zionism and state of Israel:

7 January 2009

Some basic elements are essential to draw a demarcation line

1. In the Middle East and the Near East, as in other geographical areas where capitalism did not develop as much as in Europe and America, in the absence of significant struggles of the working class for the socialist revolution, **the national question has taken a central place** in the twentieth century. It is within this complex framework that we must analyse the question of Palestine and Israel.

2. **The Jewish people has the same rights as the other peoples** (including the Palestinian people) to benefit from its own national state. Although it's regrettable that Israeli and Palestinian proletarians do not fight together for the socialist revolution, for a binational state, or, better yet, for a Socialist Federation of the entire Middle East, it's clear that the least bad solution, under the current capitalist system, seems to be the existence of two separate states, the borders of which remain to be defined in order to allow an equal access to all natural resources of Israel-Palestine, including water and the sea. This evolution may facilitate a clarification of class antagonisms and may push the exploited masses to struggle for their own interests, and not behind their respective national bourgeoisies.

3. **Most Marxist analyses of the so-called “Jewish question” lead to an impasse** and do not enable us to understand

- the history of the Jewish people (reduced to a wrong identification between Judaism and the circulation of money within precapitalist societies; or between the small commercial middle class and the Jewish people);
- the existence of Zionism (reduced to a religious ideology deprived of any national roots)
- and the state of Israel (reduced to a temporary outpost of Western imperialism).

4. **Most Near and Middle East States owe their existence to the maneuvers of the rival imperialist powers** (France, Great Britain, United States) which have divided this region and continue to play one state against another for economic (oil, markets, etc.) and / or strategic reasons. In this sense, Israel is not a more vicious “imperialist puppet” than Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon or Egypt – or even Iran or Syria. **We can't systematically denounce one of these “puppets” (Israel) without ruthlessly exposing the others.** Yet it's what, in fact, the Far Left, the anti-imperialists, the anti-Zionists do most of the time. At the end of the day these political currents choose to support some states against other states just because they use a nationalist or pseudo-anti-imperialist rhetoric. Acting so, they disarm and disempower the Israeli, Arab, Turkish, Kurdish and Iranian proletarians in front of their own bourgeoisie.

5. **Those who accuse Israel (a colonial state which uses mythical biblical references to justify its legitimacy) of being today a “racist” state only reproduce arguments developed by Soviet Stalinists.** In coded language, this argument has fuelled anti-Semitism in the USSR and in the “people's democracies,” and perpetuated anti-Semitism in the Arab-Muslim countries, and even in the West, under various forms. The comparison between Israel and South Africa is part of the same type of easy propaganda for lazy minds, which calls upon the good anti-racist feelings and White Man's guilt, who regrets his colonialist past but forgets that Western imperialism continues to plunder Africa today, and to fund permanent civil wars if not genocides (Rwanda). **Israel is not a more racist state than France, Switzerland, Sweden, Japan or the United States.** Being used in all circumstances, the weapon of anti-racism risks to become useless in our hands.

6. **It is criminal to compare Israel to Nazi Germany,** Hitler and Sharon, and Jenin to the Warsaw Ghetto. The Nazification of a political enemy only obscures the fight against it and makes it more difficult to fight it. French militants should remember those who presented de Gaulle as a “agent of fascism” during the Second World War or after the 1958 legal state coup. Was their political analysis correct? De Gaulle was certainly an enemy of the working class, but he has not introduced fascism in France. In the case of Israel, this comparison goes often together with a disgusting manipulation of centuries-old anti-Semitic feelings in the European or Arab-Muslim societies. And in this case it's perfectly hypocrite to hide oneself behind the writings of anti-Zionist Jews or Israelis to cover a gross manipulation.

7. **A Jewish activist who struggles in Israel does not express himself (herself) in the same terms as a non-Jewish activist who fights for “justice in Palestine” outside Israel.** It is perfectly normal for an Israeli militant to remind his countrymen that the bombing of Jenin, the fact of tattooing numbers on the skin of Palestinian prisoners, the bombing and killing of Palestinian civilians in their homes, all these war crimes evoke terrible memories to him. But this kind of comparison with Nazism is unacceptable in other countries than Israel or in the

mouth of non-Jews. Everyone knows that Jews like sometimes to tell anti-Semitic jokes, Africans can ridicule Blacks, and Arabs laugh about other Arabs. When a European or a Euro-American tells the same jokes they do not have the same meaning. Why should it be different when serious political questions are involved?

8. **In France, anti-Jewish racism is as repugnant as anti-Arab racism. One is not “less dangerous” than the other**, as it is implied in veiled terms (or openly) by many Left militants, on behalf of a numerical imbalance (there are, indeed, much more violent and deadly acts against North Africans than against Jews in France¹). Anti-Semitic acts in France are as condemnable as racial discrimination and legal assassinations (committed by French police) suffered by workers coming from the Maghreb, by their children or grandchildren. In Israel, the hatred of fundamentalist Jews or of some Zionists against Arabs and Palestinians is as despicable as the hatred of fundamentalist Muslims and nationalists against Jews or Israelis. One racism is not more permissible than the other, and there is no reason to claim that anti-Jewish racism is an “understandable response” or a distorted expression of the Palestinian “national sentiment” and revolt against Israeli colonization.

9. **Anti-Zionism is not automatically synonymous with anti-Semitism.** The rulers of Israel are completely dishonest when they engage in this kind of slanderous political amalgam. The intellectuals who label as “Judeophobic” those who criticize Israel and Zionism are also dishonest because they try to prevent a serious debate on the devastating and criminal effects of Israeli governments policies. Once that said, those who criticize Israel outside its borders have a particular responsibility, especially in a country like France, which has sent 70,000 Jews to death without the smallest demonstration against such deportations; a country in which the state authorities have denied for forty years their participation to the genocide; and a country which has a long anti-Semitic past, even before the Dreyfus Affair. It’s necessary to ruthlessly criticize Israel (as well as all states). But we can’t ignore the weight, ambiguity or scope of certain arguments. Only one example: many anti-Zionists denounce a “media conspiracy” supposedly led by the media owners and “Zionists” against them. Not only this analysis is questionable but one must be especially blind not to realize that this kind of argument nurtures the ancient myth of a “Jewish (world) conspiracy.”

10. **One can’t claim to support the rights of the Palestinian people while marching in the streets with the worst enemies of the proletariat, whether the Hamas, the Islamists or French Far Right or fascist groups.**

11. **The Palestinian Authority is as much the enemy of the Palestinian people as the state of Israel is the enemy of Jewish workers, or the French government is the enemy of French proletariat.**

¹ *This trend has been dramatically modified by the murders committed by French jihadists in a Jewish school in Toulouse (2012) and in a Jewish Parisian supermarket (2015).*

Starting with a discussion with French and American comrades, “Limits of anti-Zionism” has become the common title to a series of articles written during the last 15 years about Left anti-Semitism and its possible connections with certain forms of anti-Zionism. France is the European country which welcomes both the most important Muslim (3 to 6 million) and Jewish (around 600,000) “communities.” It is also the country which saw a dangerous revival of holocaust denial after 1979, thanks to several generation of (in)famous agitators and “provocateurs”: Robert Faurisson (a literature university teacher), Roger Garaudy (an ex-Communist Party leading intellectual converted to Islam), Alain Soral (a failed journalist-essayist who became a “national-socialist,” according to his own words, quite famous on YouTube for his aggressive videos) and Dieudonné (an antiracist stand-up comedian who became a professional anti-Semite under the disguise of anti-Zionism). Those interested by these questions will find many articles on this subject (in French) on Ni patrie ni frontières’ website (nfnf.eu) and mondialisme.org, a common portal with two other radical journals.

Limits of anti-Zionism (1)

A Criminal Amalgam

Since the beginning of the second Intifada, and especially since the Israeli military forces, under the direction of Sharon, re-occupied the territories that were under the control of the Palestinian Authority, on several occasions, there was a recrudescence, in the ranks of the extreme left, of a whole series of crude slogans and doubtful comparisons between the policy of the state of Israel and that of Nazism. With this aim, the critics proceeded by successive reductions. Initially, the Israeli government of national union, which almost all parties supported, became the “Sharon government.” Then Sharon became the “Butcher,” then “Charogne” (the charnel one) – a sinister example of dehumanization of a class enemy. Finally, some merged Sharon into Hitler². CQFD.

To understand how we got there, I will approach the “theoretical” base that allowed these slips using an article published in *Socialist Review* of July-August 2002; then I will take two significant examples in the French (*Socialisme*), and American “revolutionary” press (*Socialist Worker*)³. However, anyone with a computer can find hundreds of other occurrences of this criminal amalgam, simply by using a search engine on Internet, and typing in the words “Sharon” and “Hitler.”

Let us note that in this field, as in many others today, one can find solid reasons to fight against an adversary only by comparing him to Hitler. From Bush (who compared Milosevic and Saddam Hussein with Hitler) to the “revolutionaries,” one finds a common language and Pavlovian reflexes, indicating a particular poverty of thought that is not astonishing in the American president, but which must cause worry in the case of militants who have, supposedly, a theoretical tradition and capital consisting of a range of solid arguments which could be used to fight Le Pen, Milosevic, Saddam Hussein or Sharon.

Alleged “economic” origins of anti-Semitism

² It is interesting to note who were probably the first ones to accuse some Jews to be Hitler’s accomplices, even in the time of Hitler’s Germany. As Tom Segev recalls, in the *Seventh Million*, extremely violent political fights happened between the ancestors of the Labour Party (Mapai) and Likud (Herut), the party of Ariel Sharon. The Jews of Palestine knew perfectly well what occurred in Germany and, because of very restrictive clauses concerning immigration in Palestine, they had to make extremely painful choices from 1930 to 1940. But the fact that Zionist Jews used this kind of villainous amalgam to disqualify other Jews politically and morally does not in any way justify the use of this tactics by the extreme left today.

³ Except for some nuances, the three publications quoted above defend the positions of the British Socialist Workers Party. Claiming to follow in the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky, this rather lively group (in the early stages of its history, not anymore) introduced some alternatives into Leninist orthodoxy by denouncing state capitalism in all the so-called socialist or workers’ states, and adopted a more critical analysis and attitude to national liberation movements than the various branches of the Fourth International. (*Unfortunately, after the Portuguese revolution of 1974-1975 during which the International Socialists, the ancestor of the SWP, chose to support a so-called left wing of the Portuguese military forces, and after its “Leninist turn” which led to the formation of the SWP in 1977 it politically degenerated to become an opportunist group without any principles.*)

In the July-August issue of *Socialist Review* (the monthly publication of the British SWP), Sabby Sagall reviews what she considers the Marxist position concerning the “Jewish question.” She divides the history of anti-Semitism into several periods.

Before the industrial revolution, anti-Semitism, according to her, was mainly caused by the fact that Jews were usurers, tax collectors, bankers, tradesmen, in short, intermediaries necessary to the operation of the small commodity production and then of incipient capitalism. This “analysis” repeats an assumption advanced by the Trotskyist Abraham Leon in 1942 in *The Jewish question: A Marxist interpretation*, a book that had merit at the time, because it was produced under extremely precarious conditions, but which is totally obsolete today.

Progress of historical research

Indeed, historians have considerably advanced during the last sixty years. One can read, for example, some of the articles published in the four volumes of *La Société juive à travers l'histoire*. This collection of contributions was published under the direction of Shmuel Trigano (Fayard, 1992). In Islamic lands, during the Middle Ages, Jews, far from being specialized only in trade and monetary exchanges, exercised nearly 250 different professions! We are here very far from the stereotype of the Jew unable to cultivate the land or to work with his own hands. The immense majority were hawkers, servants, employees, peasants, craftsmen and their assistants.

In the medieval Occident, at a time when, in theory, Jews were confined to certain professions, they in fact engaged in many other trades than those that were allowed to them by the Church. Jewish large traders and bankers did not constitute the majority of the Jewish population, however small the communities were (they varied from a few hundred to a few thousands of individuals, at the time and were very dispersed on the European continent).

The tax registers of the 12th century, for example, show that only a minority of the 3,000 Jews living in England had to pay taxes, and this minority paid for the whole community, too poor to pay anything. In Germany, in the fourteenth century, of 8,000 families, 2,000 were poor and depended on alms from their co-religionists. Certain Jews were so destitute that they joined groups of marginal and delinquent Germans, which explains why the vocabulary of the German underworld contains such a significant number of Hebrew words! In Moravia, in a community of 50 hearths, in the 17th century, 5 families provided 3/5 of the community taxes. In Amsterdam, at the end of the 18th century, 4,000 people maintained 18,000 poor. In Frankfurt, in 1870, 25 % of the community had no resources. In Warsaw in 1872, the financial, industrial and commercial upper classes represented only 6 % of the Jewish population. These few examples taken in a seven century interval show well the falseness and the perversity of the “Judaism = religion of money” myth, a myth propagated by the various religious and political institutions, taken up again ad nauseam by Marx in the *Jewish Question* and again recently illustrated by Jacques Attali in his book about the Jews and money⁴.

The “economic” explanation quite simply does not quite hold water. Likewise, we should not be astonished that certain Marxists gather untruths so that their theses do not appear glaringly wrong. Thus in the Sabby Sagall article already quoted, the author claims that in the Middle Ages the Jews enjoyed “*protections and privileges*,” that they had a “*legal status much better than that of the serfs*,” assertions which all lead the readers to think that the majority of the Jews formed part of the privileged classes, at that time, which is false. Purely economic explanations do not make it possible to understand the reasons for the centuries-old hostility of the masses to the Jews, whether they lived in the countryside or in the cities.

The religious factor played a great part because all Western societies until the 19th century rested on Christian values and these values organized everything: political power, justice, education, law, social life, etc. Moreover, linguistic, ethnic, and national factors had a role: apart from Hebrew, Judeo-Spanish or Yiddish, Jews often spoke another language than the one practiced in the country where they lived (for example, the English Jews expelled from France to England in 1066, spoke French, before being driven out from England two centuries later, in 1290; in 1895, 80 % of Serbian Jews still spoke Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) as did about 96 % of Bulgarian Jews, etc.) and this peculiarity distinguished them and isolated them from the remainder of the population; finally, the fact that Jews could read and write (for religious reasons) made them a very distinct minority, in an ocean of illiteracy and crass ignorance maintained by the dominant Church and classes. The elimination of illiteracy constituted a very appreciable asset for them when they were allowed to use their talents, and that could only cause hatred and jealousy.

⁴ This completely irresponsible intellectual did not hesitate to propagate his views in the media, explaining that the Jews had the “genius of money.” It is hard to understand why people equipped with so many allegedly hereditary qualities would have built a state perpetually in full financial bankruptcy and why all the Jews of the planet are not billionaires. But it does not matter to Attali that his absurd theses are grist to the mill of the coarsest anti-Semitism and do not tally with the facts. Since it gives him publicity, he is happy.

However, the fact that Marxists reduce anti-Semitism to a primarily “economic” question has a second problematic consequence: it implies that, when capitalism will disappear, all forms of racism will go up in smoke⁵. It is difficult to imagine a more naive position.

Israel: a “settlers colony” with has the air of a national liberation movement

With regard to Zionism, it has been curious that the British Socialist Workers Party, which justifiably supports the Palestinian national liberation struggle after having supported, in a relatively critical way, all movements of national emancipation for half a century, does not realize that Zionism was also a kind of national liberation movement, even if it led to creation of a settlers’ colony quite similar to what happened in the United States, Australia or South Africa⁶. In all these cases, European settlers used very “unpleasant” methods to impose their rule. However, isn’t this the case of all the national liberation movements? If the majority of them were not supported by American imperialism, they profited from the very effective military support of Russian imperialism. Where is the difference?

An inescapable theoretical difficulty

Finally, the argument that Zionism requires anti-Semitism to exist recalls the arguments of those who claim that if women did not wear revealing mini skirts or low necklines, men would not be raped them. (Sabby Sagall goes as far as writing that “*when anti-Semitism does not exist, Zionism creates it out of whole cloth.*” She quotes in support of her “thesis” the fact that the Mossad placed a bomb in the ‘50s inside a Baghdad synagogue to create panic among Iraqi Jews.) It is hard to believe that only one bomb was enough to put an end to 2,000 years of a supposedly idyllic coexistence!

Let us push this “reasoning” a bit further: isn’t it true that if there were no more Jews, there would be no more anti-Semitism? That is, in any case, the reasoning which Marx advances in *The Jewish Question*, when he explains why once all peoples (including the Jews) will be freed from their religious alienation, the Jews will disappear (obviously, in 1844, Marx did not think of a physical elimination, but of a total assimilation and disappearance of all cultural, religious, racial, social, etc., barriers between human beings).

It is obvious that the existence of the Jewish people poses a problem for the “Marxists,” and that they do not manage to define a position *vis-a-vis* these millions of men and women who do not fit within their rigid theoretical framework. Apparently irritated, Sabby Sagall explains that: “*most of the peoples of antiquity were assimilated to the surrounding societies and disappeared as distinct ethnic groups.*” Ah, those Jews, what spoilsports!

Curiously, Arab and pan-Arab nationalism fascinate the majority of these “Marxists”, even if these ideologies are more complex to understand than Jewish nationalism. But it does not matter for them. Suddenly, none of them is astonished by the lack of “assimilation”... of the Arabs! Marx did not write a book called *The Arab Question* or *The Moslem Question*, so these Marxists feel at ease to indulge into all kinds of catastrophic innovations⁷.

Jews and Arabs: 2,000 years of peace?

In her article, Sabby Sagall also claims that the Arabs and the Jews lived harmoniously for 2,000 years, and that only the existence of Israel and its “provocations” have triggered the hostility of the Arab masses towards the Jews. There still, the author is deliberately ignoring reality and does not take account of the historical data.

Whoever opens the Quran even for a few moments, could not be unaware that it’s filled with extremely violent and heinous propositions against the Jews. Admittedly, anti-Jewish diatribes coexist with more moderate language, but the subtlest parts of the Quran did not have, historically and politically, a significant impact on Muslim leaders and “religious scientists”⁸. Additionally, it should be stressed that the Jews were subject to a specific legal status in the Moslem world (that of *dhimmi*) undoubtedly better than that which they had under medieval Christendom, but which did not guarantee a total legal equality, and prohibited them from engaging in certain functions. *They were, in fact, a suitable permanent scapegoat available for the Muslim rulers any time they were confronted with a national or international crisis and wanted the Arab masses to express their frustrations against an easy target.*

⁵ This absurd position is quite common in the propaganda of the revolutionary groups regarding all flaws of current society. It enables them to neglect the conflicts which divide nations, ethnic groups and genders, to take refuge in the happy belief that the revolution will solve all. To quote another version of this blindness: “*It is only when the majority of the Jews will denounce Israel that anti-Semitism will be overcome.*” (*Socialist Review*) As if anti-Semitism did not exist before 1948 and the Jews were the main responsables of it! In Yair Auron’s book (*Les Juifs d’extrême Gauche en Mai 68*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1998), a former leftist militant (probably Maoist) who visited Palestinian camps during the ‘70s tells of the extremely hostile reaction of his interlocutors when he naively told them that he was Jewish.

⁶ Cf. the article by Yoren Iftachel on the Bedouins of Israel, *Transeuropéennes* n° 22.

⁷ This is why some seek to explain why fundamentalist Islamism is a quasi-revolutionary ideology, but we will cover this subject in another article.

⁸ In the same way, the most anti-Jewish (thus anti-Semitic) reading of the New Testament influenced the Christians for 2,000 years, and not more balanced interpretations. Even recently, the Catholic Church had to destroy a million copies of a new edition of the Spanish Bible, because it contained many anti-Semitic comments.

Lastly, the author forgets to say that the situation of the Jews in the Arab countries became more difficult during the 20th century, not so much because of the creation of Israel in 1948, but because of the national liberation movements which affected this region and began at the very start of the 20th century. The French living in Algeria had to pack their bags, like the Jews were obliged to leave the Arab countries, because these two communities, for partly different historical reasons, did not show any significant solidarity with the struggles for national independence in the areas where they lived, and because they occupied a social position that was “privileged” in many respects compared to the destitute Arab masses, at least in their relationship to the colonial powers. And even if Israel had not been created in 1948, it’s a good bet that the local nationalists would have used the Jews living in the Arab countries as scapegoats in any event.

Zionism was born and thrived historically especially because millions of men and women, for both religious and historical reasons, always considered and consider still that they have something very much in common, something more powerful than the relationship to one specific national state or another. This “something” (this sense of belonging to a people) varies according to the individuals, the periods and the social groups, and since the creation of Israel it’s obviously used and manipulated by Zionism. However, it existed well before the Holocaust and Zionism.

In such a political and theoretical confusion, it’s easily understandable how, in daily anti-Zionist propaganda a few doubtful slips can occur. We will give two examples.

A dangerous zeal to prove their position...

Number 3 of *Socialisme* (p. 8 and 9) presents two photographs side-by-side: one shows German soldiers during the Second World war and the other one shows an Israeli soldier. During one of the demonstrations of “solidarity” with Palestine in Denfert-Rochereau, in Paris, the area was covered with anonymous small posters reading: “Hitler has a son: Sharon.” To draw a parallel between Sharon and Hitler can only bring left-wing people, full of good intentions (but having, nevertheless, a bottom unconscious anti-Semitism), to give free rein to their racist impulses. These two photographs play the same role as the moronic slogan I quoted before. The captions under the photographs are still worse: on one side, there is “Nazi soldier,” on the other side an “Israeli soldier.” First of all “Nazi” is not a nationality, as opposed to “Israeli,” but a political affiliation. The editors of *Socialisme* do not know if this German soldier was also a “Nazi” soldier. On the other hand, what the German soldiers (belonging to the NSDAP or not) did to the Jews had nothing to do with “hazing” as the caption claims: a hazing obliges somebody to run around nude, or makes him swallow something disgusting, etc., in short, the kind of humiliation practices common in French military forces 50 years ago or in the faculty of medicine still today. German soldiers did not “haze” the Jews, they **exterminated** them without the least pity. **The difference between hazing and exterminating 6 million people is not a simple nuance of language.**

On the other side, *Socialisme* presents a photograph of an Israeli soldier who “threatens” (according to the caption) some Palestinians. Firstly, this photograph is cut, that is cropped: cropping leads us to believe that the soldier threatens the family with its child, but it does not show the people who are certainly on the ground, or further away. *Socialisme* does not specify in what circumstances the photograph was taken, whereas, concerning the photo of the Jews and the German soldier, everyone knows what occurred during the Second World War. Moreover, the word “to threaten” is much stronger than the word “to haze.” For a weak mind, the conclusion is simple: what Israelis do to the Palestinians is at least as serious (if not worse) than what the Nazis did to the Jews⁹.

The main parties of the Israeli democratic state do not intend to exterminate the Palestinians and never devoted themselves to practices of massive elimination of thousands of Palestinians. To imply the opposite is irresponsible¹⁰. On the contrary, it’s in the Arab States that the *Protocol of the Elders of Zion* is freely distributed¹¹

⁹ Besides, it includes one of the reversed anti-Semitic arguments often used by the Left and extreme left. Some virtuous souls are astonished that “a people who underwent so much persecution during its history can in its turn carry out a wild repression in the occupied territories.” Firstly, this reasoning begins from a false premise, that of the collective responsibility: all Germans were not Nazis (Hitler threw more than one million of them in the camps) and all the Jews were not victims to the same extent (some collaborated with the Nazis, hoping to save their life; others thought only of themselves, emigrated in time and were unaware of the fate of their co-religionists; others fought with weapons, etc.). In the same way, all Jews today do not agree with Israeli governments’ policy and Tsahal war crimes. And some Israelis even refuse to be drafted. Moreover, this reasoning rests on the naive idea that anyone who was the victim of an injustice, oppression, torture (or whose parents or grandparents were martyred or killed) would automatically have a higher moral stature and political clarity. This is not far from the idea of a genetical superiority, due to the direct or indirect experience of martyrdom. In brief, this floats in fantasy land.

¹⁰ The Israeli state is carrying out a dirty war which, like all modern wars, hurts civilians more than professional soldiers. In any event, in this particular conflict, the distinction between civilian and military is hardly valid, since any Israeli, man or woman, can be called up for the military service and any Palestinian can be involved in an organization practicing anti-Jewish terrorism.

¹¹ A forgery manufactured by the Tsarist police to support the thesis of an imaginary Jewish plot to dominate the world.

and where a whole bunch of Nazis was recruited after 1945 as political and military counselors. It is in the Arab States that the newspapers diffuse anti-Semitic propaganda daily. And it's the Arab States which kill or imprison Jews, simply because they are Jewish. The article in *Socialisme* does not mention any of this.

Modern anti-Semitism

Number 3 of *Socialisme* publishes extracts of Tony Cliff's¹² autobiography¹³ (*A World to win*), and an article by Daniel Lartichaux. These two texts are filled with inaccuracies about anti-Semitism. D. Lartichaux claims that "the only motive" of the "horrible acts" against the synagogues in France is "the conflict in the Middle East." He forgets to mention that there exists in France a long-standing anti-Semitism, in both rightist and extreme rightist circles as in leftist fringes, and in part of the Maghrebian or Franco-Maghrebian population. Votes for Le Pen come from both right-wingers and left-wingers; moreover, coexistence between Judaism and Islamic religion in the Maghreb was not always without difficulties; this element must influence the behaviour of those whose parents or grandparents were born in "Islamic" lands.

The extract of Cliff's autobiography also contains enormous errors. Cliff dares to write that: "*the economic and intellectual ghetto disappeared*" in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century. Whoever knows a bit the history of German Jews knows that anti-Semitism persisted well after the first unification. Otherwise, Hitler would never have made it a part of his program in *Mein Kampf*. Likewise, he could never have easily imposed all his anti-Semitic laws once he came to power, and certainly not the Final Solution. But obviously, such a hypothesis makes it easier to reduce Nazi anti-Semitism to the simple need of inventing scapegoats for the "*crisis that destroyed the means of existence of important layers of the lower middle class*" (*Socialist Review*).

Moreover, Cliff forgets to mention the launching of Scud missiles against Israel and all the speeches and acts of the Arab leaders against Israel for 50 years. If the Jews of Israel have not been massacred or at least thrown into the sea since 1948, it's not because the "Arab States" did not want to do it, but because the Jews prevented it, and to that purpose, they used all possible allies. At the time of the 1948 war, Russian imperialism saved the Jews by massive weapons deliveries via Czechoslovakia. Later the American imperialism took up the task much more effectively.

Admittedly, the question of Israel is complex, and one cannot say it all in two pages, but by establishing a dangerous parallel (and with anti-Semitic connotations, even if it's obviously not *Socialisme's* intention) and forgetting to speak about the anti-Semitism which still targets Jews in Germany and France today, the author implies that the Jews had another immediate and concrete solution. Which one?

In theory, a world socialist revolution, but there never was one, and nobody knows if there will be one soon. Faced with a very concrete anti-Semitism, it was necessary and it is necessary to defend oneself. In the past, hundreds of thousands of Jews tried to follow the path recommended by *Socialisme* today; they were involved in all the currents of the workers movement. The least one can say is that this choice protected them neither from the Left's anti-Semitism nor from extermination by the Tsar, the Nazis, Pétain and others. Moreover, the Left always underestimated the "Jewish question" and the extreme left.

How is it possible not to understand that the existence of a state – possessing, in addition, nuclear weapons – seems to the Jews, since the Holocaust, a (relative) guarantee which looks more certain than a century and half of beautiful speeches against racism? This policy leads certainly to a total dead end from a historical point of view, but the workers movement has its share of responsibility in this failure. Again, it's necessary to admit it honestly and to seek the causes of this failure.

If Israel did not exist and had not decided, roughly speaking after the Eichmann trial in 1961, to lead a worldwide campaign against anti-Semitism, we would not know the hundredth of what we know today about anti-Semitism, the passivity of the majority of the European populations, and the complicity of the bourgeois states before and during the Second World war. If today Israel partly uses the Holocaust to justify its colonialist policy in Palestine, it's because, for decades, the Left and even the extreme left did not regard anti-Semitism as a fundamental problem¹⁴.

A dangerous slip

The second example of doubtful anti-Zionism is illustrated by *Socialist Worker*, published by the International Socialist Organization in the United States, which compared the progress of Israeli tanks in the streets of Jenin with that of the Germans in the Warsaw ghetto! Exploiting the declaration of an Israeli officer who had made this

¹² Leader of the British SWP, deceased in 2001, who made his first debut in Palestine under the British mandate, in the Trotskyite movement, before becoming a revolutionary activist in England.

¹³ Leader of British SWP, deceased in 2001, who made his first debut in Palestine under the British mandate, in the Trotskyite movement, before becoming a revolutionary activist in England.

¹⁴ This problem did not begin recently, as some historical examples can testify; for example, the attitude of the French Socialists during the Dreyfus affair or that of the French Resistance during the Second World War and afterwards, both of which considered anti-Semitism as a minor problem.

comparison, the American weekly brings grist to the mill of anti-Semitism while hiding hypocritically behind the remarks of a Jewish Zionist!

However, it should be pointed out, there are no concentration camps in Israel/Palestine and the Israeli military forces does not occupy a “foreign” country (the situation is much more complex); the Israeli soldiers are not fighting thousands of kilometres from their native ground, and especially they do not intend to exterminate the Palestinian population like the Nazis and their Polish henchmen did.

This comparison can only nourish anti-Semitic feelings which here, in France, brought individuals who were either simpletons or manipulated, or both, to try to burn down synagogues, to throw stones and beat up Jews in the street.

Moreover, this position does not help the Palestinians to be clearly aware of their leaders’ true objectives. It is one thing to favour the existence of a Palestinian state, another to unconditionally support Arafat’s and his allies’ corrupt dictatorship.

It is one thing is to support the Palestinians’ fight for their democratic rights, another to believe (or to make us believe) that terrorism is only or mainly the product of the Israeli expansionist policy.

Religious forces (Hamas, Jihad) and non-religious (PLO, etc.) all defend martyrdom – which amounts, logically, to massacring Israeli civilians regularly and preventing any peaceful coexistence between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

Limits of anti-Zionism (2)

What is Zionism?

There are many definitions of Zionism and all sorts of Zionists: religious, atheist, Socialist, right-wing, left-wing, extreme right-wing, etc. It is not useful to go into the details of all the nuances or divergences that separate them. It is enough to indicate that Zionism is a form of nationalism, therefore an ideology that rests on an imaginary community of interests between individuals belonging to different social classes. Zionism tries to mobilize, in a completely uncritical way, the Jewish people on an international scale and the Jewish citizens of Israel behind the government of the state built in the Middle East since 1948.

Does a Jewish people exist?

For *Socialist Worker*, the Jews are only those who practice Jewish religion, like the Catholics, Protestants, Hindus or Buddhists and thus the Jewish people does not exist. Consequently, the Jews have no “right” to a state. Indeed, if one denies the existence of a Jewish nation, and therefore its right to some land on this planet, it’s much easier “to solve” the problem... on paper. Unfortunately for our dogmatists, there is, in fact, a Jewish people, and today even an Israeli nation and state. One cannot turn back the clock.

But the problem should be investigated a bit further. Marxists have always defended the right of all peoples to self-determination as a democratic claim that could possibly resolve certain inextricable situations. For that reason, for example, Trotsky momentarily considered the possibility that Afro-Americans may create their own state, faced with the incorrigible racism of Euro-Americans. On the other hand, Marx was opposed to the national liberation struggles of certain Central European peoples, because they did not seem to him to follow the “History’s direction.”

Today, one can draw up the balance between these positions: Socialists had no influence on the development of the various national liberation struggles and the 20th century saw the emergence of numerous new independent states. Apparently this process of fragmentation into nation-states, even in the old Europe where separatist movements thrive, like in Scotland, Basque Country, Catalonia and Corsica. This desire of a social withdrawal, this need for local, regional or national identity, unfortunately, proved to be much stronger (and dangerous) than proletarian internationalism and class solidarity between the exploited.

One can regret it, denounce nationalism as a dead end, but how can one close one’s eyes to this phenomenon and be astonished that the Jewish people wanted, also, to have its own state? Nothing prevents us from believing that one day the Roma people, an anti-statist minority until now, also claims to have a nation-state with a piece of land on this planet.

It’s within this more general framework, that we have to understand the strength of Jewish nationalism, the renewed interest of many secular or atheist Jews for their culture and their religion, etc. To this general situation came to be added the elimination of 6 million Jews during the Second World war. The Holocaust convinced (definitively?) the Jews that they could only count on themselves, and that if they did not want to be slaughtered once again, they had to form a solid block, to support the creation of a state which had an imposing military power and to conclude all necessary military or economic alliances, including with the most villainous states.

Is the nationalism of the oppressed less harmful than the nationalism of the oppressors?

What hides behind the often a-critical support for national liberation movements, is both the idea that the nationalism of old nations is more harmful than the nationalism of the young nations, and also that national liberation struggles could accelerate the advent of a socialist revolution. This analysis is completely erroneous.

No victorious national liberation movement in the Third World led to a social revolution. Colonial or imperialist domination was replaced by implacable dictatorships over the working class and exploited classes in China, Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam, etc. That does not mean, however, that we should have abstained from opposing colonial wars, but it fixes the limits of the support granted to national liberation struggles and especially to the organizations that lead it, and to the illusions spread by these movements. In brief: we should support the right of any people to dispose of its own destiny, but refuse to carry the bags of its future exploiters!

Unless, following the example of *Le Monde diplomatique*’s incorrigible third-worldists, one wants to praise politicians like Nasser, Ben Bella, Torrijos, Chavez, Castro or Noriega, while giving them socialist and anti-imperialist virtues that they never had.

Is Zionism colonialist?

Yes. Israel is a colonial settler state whose evolution resembles that of the United States, Australia, even, in some aspects, South Africa, even if there was a small Jewish population residing there before the various Alyahs. The comparison with South Africa is, however, dangerous because the Palestinians’ situation in Israel does not have, for the moment, any relation to that of Black Africans in South Africa before the end of the apartheid and

because it dangerously criminalizes not only the Israeli government but all its citizens¹⁵. But one can't deny that Israel was built on the violent expropriation of the Palestinian land, businesses and real estate and that this process has never stopped until now.

Is Zionism imperialist?

If one wants to say that Israel has **expansionist aims, yes**. But how can we qualify then the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, and of Lebanon by Syria, to take only two examples in the same geographical area? If one uses the word "imperialist" in the sense of expansionist, that is true of an impressive number of states on earth, which leftists do not spend the same amount of time denouncing as they do for Israel.

But leftists also use this word in another sense: they consider Israel a "servant" or an "outpost" of American imperialism. Any movement that promotes a national ideology can be led to alliances with one or more "imperialist" powers. It's what the Algerian FLN, the Vietnamese FLN, all guerrilla movements of Latin America and Africa, the Cuban state, etc., did with Russian imperialism. It's what the Afghan resistance did by accepting American help. Israeli governments chose American imperialism after being directly helped by the Soviets, at the crucial moment of the creation of Israel, in 1948. Thus, we can't deny the Israeli state has strong affinities with the large imperialist powers, but that does not transform this state into an imperialist power, if we take into account the economic and financial meaning of the term. Or in any case, it would be necessary to sustain this claim with detailed figures, and not to be content with invective.

Is Zionism racist?

Any nationalist ideology can, at one moment or another, use racist arguments. And any national state uses, at one time or another, the weapon of xenophobia or racism. Sometimes the state, nationalism and racism go together, sometimes they choose their own way, but there is no major incompatibility between the three elements. Besides, that's why revolutionaries support the disappearance of all nations, borders and states.

Therefore, yes, Zionism has a potential racist dimension, but like any other national and nationalist ideology, including that of the Palestinians, and **not more than another.** Let us note that even within Israel there are powerful racist prejudices among the Jews themselves, prejudices denounced for decades by Eastern or Ethiopian Jews, and sources of real discriminations in Israel.

However, to constantly underline the racist tendencies of Zionism, while being silent about the racist tendencies of Palestinian nationalists is extremely dangerous. The systematic use of this argument is relatively new, as shown by the Durban international conference on racism during which the majority of those present condemned Israel as a racist state. Those who want to absolutely show that Zionism is a racist ideology exploit moral indignation caused by the Holocaust and try to turn it against Israel. This process is villainous because it succeeds, step by step, in making a parallel between Zionism and Nazism.

And it's precisely what the American *Socialist Worker* did by comparing the Palestinians of Jenin with the Jews locked in the Warsaw Ghetto, and what the French *Socialisme* did by juxtaposing photographs of Nazi and Israeli soldiers. Such comparisons are not innocent at all, because they belong to the favourite weapons used by holocaust deniers and anti-Semites who want at all costs to show that Jews are as racist as the others, and even more.

Lastly, becoming trivialized, the charge of racism becomes a cliché, which loses its impact for most people and reinforces the new creed of the reactionaries who preach, invoking common sense, that "everyone is racist" and that one can't do nothing about it.

One state or two states?

Socialist Worker preaches the creation of a state that would bring together Jews and Palestinians. This position is incoherent. One cannot at the same time claim that the Jews are only practitioners of a "religion," that they occupy a "foreign" territory, that their state is "racist," "colonialist" and a plaything of "imperialism" and believe at the same time that the Jews could live tomorrow on the same territory as Palestinians. *Socialist Worker* does not even use the term "binational state," which is logical, since it denies the existence of a Jewish people and thus a Jewish nation.

If the Jews of Israel are the "*Pieds noirs*" [French settlers in Algeria] of Palestine, or a simple group of fanatic or crazy religious people, then it's necessary to draw the appropriate conclusion: they must return to the "imperialist" metropolises which they left, as it happened to the million of French who lived in Algeria or to the Portuguese who lived in Angola, Mozambique or Guinea-Bissau. This was the creed of the PLO for many years (see the declarations of Shukeiry who wanted "to throw the Jews into the sea") even it changed of position in 1988, and it remains the position of terrorist organizations like the Hamas¹⁶ and the Islamic Jihad which plant bombs in Israel.

¹⁵ On this problem, one can read **Bennett Muraskin's article**: "Is Israel a Colonial Settler state? Perhaps with a lot of provisos" **on the Net** <http://jewishcurrents.org/israel-colonial-settler-state/>

¹⁶ *Hamas just changed its position about the existence of Israël and I bet we will soon see anti-Zionists who (until April 2017) supported Hamas as a progressive alternative, denounce it as a pro-imperialist force.*

Socialist Worker knows this very well, but it carefully avoids posing the problem. And to make the situation even more inextricable, this publication takes refuge behind a UN resolution that is inapplicable, even if it states a perfectly justified right. One can hardly see how the 4 million Palestinians leaving in the Diaspora could recover the land, businesses and houses that were expropriated as well as the jobs they lost. Where would the expropriators (that is, the Israelis) go? The payment of compensation seems more reasonable, and an extensive “right of return” seems to be an aberration for the Palestinians – but also for the Jews of the whole world.

The Jews established a state based on force, as all the peoples who sought to have their own territory. According to the Zionist legend, they arrived in an uninhabited area but today even some Israeli historians disprove this gross lie. The compromises that must be made one day will be inevitably painful and unjust for both parties. This is why I had written in my letter to *Socialist Worker* that the Israelis “did not occupy a foreign country” and that the situation was “more complex” than a traditional colonial occupation of a distant territory. The borders of the state of Israel are by nature extensible, since from the beginning neither this state nor the state of Palestine had a recognized existence and consequently clear borders.

Considering the current situation, and the nationalist ideology that mobilizes the two peoples concerned, it seems impossible that Palestinians and Israelis could immediately live in the same state. Two states and not one are therefore needed.

Does the state of Israel engender anti-Semitism?

No, this charge is absurd. Or, it’s true only in the sense that all states create hostility to their nationals when their armies carry out criminal acts. The armed intervention of the United States in Serbia, Afghanistan, in Iraq or Somalia engenders anti-Americanism: many people, belonging all political tendencies, scorn the Americans. But as one could also say that Chirac, at this moment, causes anti-French reactions in the Ivory Coast or that Mitterrand caused anti-French reactions before in Africa and in the Middle East.

We can’t mix up the citizens of a state with the policy of their government, and we should publicize the struggle of Israelis who oppose their government and fight for peace, even at the risk of imprisonment and being regarded as traitors by their compatriots.

We must always explain the differences between Israelis (citizens of Israel), Jews as members of the Jewish people and Jews as practitioners of Judaism. Anti-Semitic morons are fundamentally motivated by their racist impulses and not by the criminal acts of the Israeli military forces.

It is not the Israeli state that engenders anti-Semitism, but the anti-Semites themselves who need anti-Semitism to express their frustrations. The struggle against anti-Semitism needs serious explanations on the origins of racism rather than twisted reasoning and ensnarement of excuses.

Will the state of Israel involve “us” in a world war?

This way of putting the question reveals one of the main reasons why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict stirs so much passion in France, while, in fact, this confrontation, which is minor when judged by the size of the directly implicated populations, remains marginal and other world conflicts are infinitely more lethal. As the singer Noa (who happens to be Itzhak Rabin’s daughter) said, “*In Israel, more people die because of road accidents than because of terrorist attacks;*” the importance of the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation is measured rather by its duration, the number of refugees and exiles concerned (several million) and above all by its symbolic importance.

Many people have the impression that the Western world could be on the verge of the chaos, or in any case threatened by terrorism, because of Israel (actually, because of “the Jews”). The billionaire Ben Laden reinforces this impression, while pretending to be interested in the fate of the Palestinians, that is, by exploiting their situation, like all Arab leaders. But, as has always happened, he will forget them at the first opportunity. The absence of Palestinian militants in the Al Qaida networks seems to indicate that its demagogic character does not easily deceive them.

To analyse Middle Eastern wars in connection with Israel, it’s necessary to touch on the problem of the origin of these wars. Even if this state had not been created in 1948, the competition would be very strong in this region, which is unstable since the collapse of the Ottoman empire. This is due largely to the actions of the main imperialist powers during the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, which sought to divvy up zones of influence, acquire markets, control oil reserves or at least control its price. If Israel did not exist, the local states would still play on the economic rivalries existing between the various imperialist powers.

There are real conflicts of interest between Europe and the United States: Middle Eastern oil is vital for Europe, but not for the US. The existence of Israel and its total economic dependence on the United States complicate the situation a little more, but these two elements are not at the root of the fundamental tensions between the imperialist powers, between the national states of the Muslim world, and between rich and poor countries. Clearly, those who use Israel as a scapegoat, who believe that without this state the Western world would live in peace, forget the two world wars, the cold war and all the colonial wars for a century.

Does the gathering of the Jews in a separate state constitute a capitulation in front of anti-Semitism?

No. For a few decades, hundreds of thousands of Jewish workers and intellectuals believed in socialism, even in a socialist revolution. In Europe as well as in North America and Latin America, the labour movement included many Jewish militants and theorists, revolutionary and atheist, as did Marxist and anarchist movements. But

considering the passivity or inefficiency of the international workers movement in front of the persecutions and massacres which stroke the Jews, particularly before and during the Second World war, one can understand that the majority of the Jews concluded that the attempts of a significant minority of them to solve the alleged “Jewish question” by a socialist revolution were failures. The Soviet Union, held up as a paragon by the vast majority of leftist people for decades, acted as a foil, given the importance of anti-Semitism in this country and the way Stalinists used it there as well as in the “people’s democracies.”

Leftists request from the Jews to trust them blindly, to believe that the small revolutionary groups, if ever their ideas seized the masses, would not commit the same crimes and would create an improved humanity. It is a lot to ask, no? Especially when it’s known that a (small) part of the French holocaust deniers comes from the extreme left. This same extreme left does not hesitate to demonstrate with groups that hold up the flags of the Hamas and scream “Death to the Jews” in the streets of Paris. Again, recently, Saturday, October 12, 2002, a call expressing “solidarity with the Palestinians,” signed by dozens of left and Far Left organizations, denounced current Israeli policy, **without mentioning even once the terrorist attacks** that made hundreds of victims in Israel. Moreover, who can affirm seriously that anti-Semitism will disappear in a socialist world?

Lastly, it’s false to claim that Israel does not fight anti-Semitism. On the contrary, it has done just that for 50 years. It mobilizes all efforts against anti-Semitism on an international scale. Obviously, this propaganda does not make anti-Semitism disappear (which propaganda could do it?), but one can’t deny it imposed limits on its public expression in Western democratic countries.

Between the Palestinians and colonialism (or imperialism), which does one have to support?

Given the way in which the question is put, one must support the Palestinians, of course, but it all depends on what you mean: Palestinian people or the PLO?

In fact, this way of posing the problems only recycles an old argument already used by the Stalinists and the international bourgeoisie during the cold war: “Whoever is not with us is against us.” It is curious that a political current that initially refused to choose between American imperialism and Russian imperialism again takes up this kind of reasoning. *Socialist Worker* is the weekly of the International Socialist Organization, whose ancestors fought in the years 1940, 1950 and 1960 both against the Stalinists and against the American bourgeoisie. Today and tomorrow, just as yesterday, we have no reason to choose between Sharon and Arafat, the rope and the firing squad. If one day a solution takes shape between Israelis and Palestinians, it will be done despite the nationalists on both sides, Zionists, members of the PLO or of the terrorist-jihadist movements. Thus, we have to say it openly, and not hide our intentions for tactical reasons.

The Palestinian Authority is as much the enemy of the Palestinian people as the right-wing and left-wing Israeli parties are the enemies of the Jewish people.