

A Defense of Labor Action's Policy

Continuing our discussion on the problem of Palestine, we are publishing two additional communications from our readers which present a viewpoint sharply different from that held by LABOR ACTION. We are also presenting a reply to the communications received, defending our original editorial stand. In view of the fact that the five letters published have been exclusively AGAINST the LABOR ACTION editorial, we can see no possible objection to the fact that Henry Judd's article, in the name of the editorial staff, is somewhat longer than the limits set in the discussion.

Contributions from our readers, not exceeding 1,000 words in length, are still welcome and will be published in the order in which they are received.—Editor.

The editorial statement "Palestine Tragedy", originally published in LABOR ACTION, has stirred up a good deal of discussion and controversy. This exceedingly complex question (except to those with preconceived answers and thus possessing that comfortable sureness common to all doctrinaires) was not "solved" by our editorial, nor was it intended as such. The fact that our statement announced the beginning of a discussion in LABOR ACTION suffices to indicate its tentative character. Yet the publication of no less than five letters from readers, all of whom disagree substantially with the editorial, convinces us that we were on the right road, our critics are in serious error.

We shall not reply to each individually—all, from the calm presentation of the problem in Sylvia Weiss' letter to the unfortunate demagogic outburst of Leon Shields, advance the same position of support to partition and offer basically the same arguments. Our remarks are intended to cover all letters, and are not to signify an end to the discussion in LABOR ACTION, but rather an interim defense.

Leon Shields is, in any case, consistent and clear. Whereas the other contributors advance the position that the Jews are engaged in a struggle for national existence, that this right is theirs, that the right of self-determination and separation is theirs etc. (all of which statements we acknowledge, accept and grant!), Shields is the only one who draws the political conclusion from his analysis that socialists must support this struggle, arms in hand, and he urges a campaign for arms to the Jewish fighters in Palestine. Comrade Findley, however, thinks our slogan of "Cease Fire" is an excellent one! More arms and cease fire, somehow, do not jibe. Thus we see even among the "pro-partitionists" a bit of confusion. This does not necessarily reflect on our critics, but merely indicates the difficulty and complexity of the problem.

Beginning about the time of Trotsky's recognition, in 1939, of the progressive character of Jewish nationalist aspirations as distinct from Zionism, the Workers Party, and LABOR ACTION, alone among revolutionary socialist and Marxist organizations have steadily evolved a new, flexible, non-doctrinaire approach to this question. Having rejected as outmoded the former orthodox position (Lenin and Kautsky) according to which assimilation would settle the "Jewish Question", in light of its basic analysis of the revival of nationalism when related to the socialist struggle, the Workers Party and LABOR ACTION, as against the entire Trotskyist movement, championed the right of the remnants of the Jewish people, survivors of Hitler, to free immigration to Palestine. Then the Workers Party developed a concrete political program for Palestine itself, around

the slogan of a common Arab-Jewish struggle against imperialism, and for a solution of the inner Palestine problem by means of a sovereign Constituent Assembly. The essence of this position was recognition of a fundamentally common progressive link between Arab and Jewish nationalist aspirations, but only under certain circumstances we shall specify below.

NOT NATIONAL STRUGGLE

Now a further step is proposed to us by our critics—namely, we of the Jewish people in Palestine should champion the current struggle against the Arabs, on the grounds that it is a progressive national struggle (in the Leninist sense, according to several of our critics) and therefore must be supported. We consider this proposal to be entirely wrong and must reject it, regardless of our appreciation of the spirit in which it is made. Why? Because it is false that, in the circumstances under which the fratricidal semi-war in Palestine is being fought, the issue is that of a national minority attempting to win its independence from an oppressing majority. Such an analysis of events in Palestine, a distortion of reality and an oversimplification of the problem, is precisely what must be proven by our critics, not merely asserted! It can only be done by abstracting Palestine from the world, the imperialist world concretely, and attempting to make us believe that the issue in Palestine is 500,000 Jewish people seeking to win freedom from one million Arabian exploiters—a case of Poland, let us say, fighting for separation during the days of the Czarist Empire. In this superficial picture, of course, the Mutfi is equivalent to the Czar, and some individuals like Shields have permitted themselves to be so far thrown off balance as to imply a "defense" of the dead Revisionist Jabotinsky who, you see, was so broadminded towards the Arabs that he was willing to have coins printed in Arabic and Hebrew, no less! (The military forces in Germany are so "fair" towards the Germans that they allow all money to be executed only in German).

Simultaneously with his recognition of the progressive nature of revived Jewish nationalism, Trotsky warned of the trap Palestine could prove to be, under Zionist leadership. In our opinion, this trap was set and has now been touched off. This constitutes, in part, the Palestine tragedy. Why? Because nationalism, like any other social force, is neither progressive nor reactionary in and of itself. Nationalism is a force in our world which can under given conditions, be directed toward revolutionary and democratic goals and thus become part and parcel of the socialist struggle. But if nationalism is made use of by and becomes subordinated to imperialism, or if nationalism seeks to gain its object at the expense of and over the body of another people, then it is being exploited for reactionary purposes. What is the case in Palestine today? Abstractly considered, the struggle of the Arab masses against imperialism, as well as the struggle of the Jewish masses against imperialism is progressive and must be supported. But there must be a struggle against imperialism, and not against one another! The attempt of the Zionist movement and its supporters to assert its will and achieve it ends against and at the expense of the Arabs in Palestine is every bit as reactionary as the attempt on the part of the Arab League, and its supporters to prevent the Jews from winning their national aspirations. Palestine, gripped within the embrace of world imperialism, is the scene today of a fratricidal struggle which is equally reactionary and wrong on

both sides because it can only benefit imperialism, which snatches up and utilizes, for its own ends, both Arab and Jewish nationalism. Can the Jews attain national statehood by fighting the Arabs? No. They can only succeed in becoming the slavish tools and dupes of imperialism, American imperialism in this instance. Can the Arabs win their freedom by destroying the Jews? No, for they must then accept a role as agents to British and, eventually, Russian imperialism.

What conditions are necessary for a progressive nationalist struggle? It must be directed against imperialism and its agents. It must be carried on independently, in a political scene of any third imperialist force. Its aims must be achievable without the trampling under foot of the rights and aspirations of any other people. In our opinion, not a single one of these conditions holds in Zionist-led struggle in Palestine. It surely does not hold for the Arab side. The Jews have the right to separation, partition, say our critics. Even when the exercise of that right, under the conditions, means fratricidal war with another oppressed people, the calling in of foreign arms and support to win the war, the conquest—at least in part—of the opposing people, and the continued subjection of the country to imperialism—that is, UN control instead of British mandate? Such is not the exercise of a democratic right, but submission to a false policy and the springing of a trap. Do our critics believe that the UN partition, which they propose we accept, can be effected, put into practice, in any other way? The events since November 29, with the steady capitulation of the Jewish leadership to UN and American imperialism, give the answer. An independent struggle is possible in Palestine, yes, but never one of Arab against Jew so long as imperialism still dominates the scene. This holds true alike for both Arabs and Jews.

EXAMPLE OF INDIA

Findley demands that we look at India. We willingly accept his request because it illustrates our point. The differences that is, not the similarities which Findley believes prove his case. In India, says Findley with complete truth, LABOR ACTION accepted the partition of that country into the Dominions of India and Pakistan. Not only did we accept it, but long before (again, alone in the Trotskyist movement) we championed the right of the Moslem people to self-determination, that is, separation. But the division of India, took place under entirely different circumstances than the division of Palestine. (1) India's partition took place simultaneously with the necessary withdrawal of British imperialism; in fact, the two were intimately bound up—with withdrawal of imperialism to the position of indirect rule made possible partition—that is, (2) an agreement, an understanding between the two rival political leaderships of the Hindu and Moslem communities. Is this the case in Palestine? Is imperialism withdrawing from the scene, as in India? Pray, do not tell us the British mandate is ending—yes, to be replaced by the UN "mandate", controlled by America. Has there been an agreement reached between the two communities, or is the partition purely something proposed by the external, foreign agency (UN) and accepted by only one of the communities concerned? If the proposed division of Palestine was similar to that which occurred in India last year, we would have accepted it. It is the differences that preclude such a course. Suppose Britain had proposed an Indian division unacceptable to the Hindus, but accepted by the Moslem League. And that then the Moslems, armed and supplied by the British imperialism, had gone to war to effect this partition? This, which fortunately did not occur, would be closer to the picture at present represented by Palestine.

Finally, Findley demands that we concretize the meaning of the original editorial, and clarify some of its statements. Let me briefly elaborate. The slogan "Cease Fire" is clear enough. It means that both sides are to end the fratricidal strife and to seek, by all possible means, to arrive at a satisfactory and peaceful solution. As an agitational slogan, this is directed equally against both leader-

ships and all organizations now doing their best to enflame the situation; its positive goal is to arouse popular support among both Jewish and Arab workers who have all to lose by continuation of the war to the extent that they shall force their leadership to halt. What other slogan could be used by a revolutionary vanguard among the Jewish and Arab workers today? None of our critics proposes any, except Shields who shouts for "war." (No nation has won independence without violence, he informs us, forgetting that this violence must be directed against a real enemy and oppressor.)

AFTER CEASE FIRE

But we do not stop with this slogan. Once firing has ceased, the basic problem still remains; although it will be well on its way to solution because it will signify a popular will to arrive at a solution. Is it not obvious that it is intervening imperialism (the remaining British and the anxious American interventionists) who are stimulating the firing? What next? The answer suggested in the editorial no doubt needs elaboration which we propose to offer. Comrade Findley does not demand blueprints, but at least "hints" of what is meant by "assurances and concessions" of both sides. Here are some that spring readily to mind.

(1) A solemn declaration by both Arab and Jewish political leaderships that henceforth the problem of Palestine is no longer in the hands of imperialism (UN, etc.), but is the exclusive concern of the two peoples involved. A declaration of Palestine's independence from the world of imperialist intervention.

(2) The complete renunciation by the Zionist movement of its aim to make a Jewish state out of the whole of Palestine, and its recognition of all the democratic rights and freedoms that belong to the Arabs as well as the Jews. This means the open abandonment of the long-held Zionist political goal.

(3) Simultaneous with the removal of imperialism's hand, an attempt to solve by mutual agreement the problem of the inner relations between the two peoples inhabiting the country. Does this signify partition? Important and basic as this issue is, it is not the question as our critics believe. We oppose partition; we oppose unconditionally a UN partition which can only be enforced in the reactionary manner we have described. But we recognize that partition may be, even probably can be, a step towards a solution. The editorial definitely stated this. "... the status quo of partition can be conceived of as a possible transition to a solution..." This will depend upon the conditions and circumstances under which a partition is arranged, carried out, agreed upon etc. LABOR ACTION is absolutely not against a partition solution of Palestine as a "lesser evil" to continued and expanded warfare between Arab and Jew which, to us, is the "greatest possible of all evils." But this partition cannot be a UN imposed partition, backed by combined Jewish-imperialist bayonets! Is this not clear?

It will be said: But clearly neither the Arab League nor the Zionist leadership will accept such a program. Granted. We are as aware as the next that such a program for reconciliation and common struggle against common enemies must be imposed upon both leaderships, by their own peoples under socialist leadership. But is not the first step toward the implementing of such a program the arming of a few socialist Arabs and a few socialist Jews with a correct ideological, political and social understanding of what is needed? This has been and will remain the modest aim of LABOR ACTION, predicated upon its rejection of both blind Zionist chauvinism and the equally blind denunciation of progressive nationalism by the orthodox Trotskyist parties. "Down with partition," say the Cannonites (SWP); but dare not take the next step of supporting the Arabs who are engaged in fighting partition. "Support partition," say our critics, most of whom fear to face the need for its enforcement (with Shields' exception). We reject both ideas. "Cease fire, join together through mutual concessions and assurances, cast out imperialism and settle your own problems, by your own partition, if needs be."

HENRY JUDD

Final Month!

Branch	Quota	Jan. 26	Pct.
Manhattan SYL	\$30.00	\$52.00	173
Buffalo	600.00	745.00	124
Connecticut	50.00	60.00	120
Hibbing	5.00	6.00	120
San Pedro	100.00	120.00	120
Baltimore	100.00	119.00	119
Streator	20.00	21.00	105
Boston	60.00	60.00	100
Indiana	50.00	50.00	100
New York Misc.	20.00	20.00	100
Oregon	50.00	50.00	100