

## My Position on Zionism, Jewish Identity etc.

(Sent to committee members 1<sup>st</sup> December 2006)

- I do not believe in systemic solutions to the Israel-Palestine conflict (or indeed to conflict in the world in general). e.g. I don't take the Marxist position that the conflict will eventually be resolved by the overthrow of capitalism, an unlikely occurrence anyway. Nor do I think that democracy is THE answer.
- Accordingly I think that conflicts need to be addressed and dealt with by recognising the power dynamics at work and taking action to shift those power dynamics sufficiently to bring about change for the better.
- In the Israel-Palestine conflict it seems to me at least arguable - and I am inclined to believe - that it is not US imperial power which is the primary mover but the powerful linked set of narratives about Jews and Jewishness (much of it brought together, developed and expressed by Herzl) which has gained predominance in the West since the Second World War and especially since 1967.
- These narratives have a number of features which make them extremely powerful. (a) They provide a new secular Jewish identity at a time of declining religious observance, intermarriage and assimilation. (b) They posit a unique, endemic and inexplicable form of prejudice against Jews, called 'anti-Semitism'. (c) All 'gentiles' are liable to behave 'anti-Semitically' and therefore any discourse they may start about Jews must be treated with the utmost suspicion. (d) It was inattention to this 'fact' which led to 'the Holocaust'. (e) The uniqueness of 'anti-Semitism' is what provides the underlying rationale for a unique solution, the creation of an exclusive Jewish national state regardless of the consequences. (f) Any criticism of these narratives is further evidence of 'anti-Semitism'. This historicist device, used also by Marxism and psychoanalysis, ensures the unsinkability of the narratives.
- Unsinkable narratives, theories, arguments should be treated with great caution, especially when they are the basis for political policies. There are lots of areas in which the Zionist narratives are deficient in fact and reasoning, but most people, and especially those in positions of power, don't go there for fear of being labelled 'anti-Semitic'.
- The Zionist movement has a relationship to Jewishness which is extremely difficult to disentangle. My own view is that Zionism effectively hijacked mainstream secular Jewish identity - in other words that it is now difficult to have a *primary* identification as a Jew if you are (a) not religious and (b) not a Zionist. Others argue that Zionism was a natural product of Jewish thinking (the same is maintained about Marxism and psychoanalysis). Whatever the truth, this subject must not be a no-go area. Of course there are risks in discussing these matters, but leaving them undiscussed allows Zionists to argue without fear of contradiction that any attack on Zionism is an attack on Jews. This poses a greater risk to us all.
- I have used the term 'Jewish power' to describe the set of narratives outlined above, the way that they are maintained and refined, and the way they are organised to achieve certain objectives. This idea arises out of the psychology of groups. Whatever group we may think of - the family, social classes (including elites), religions, ethnic groups, corporations, the military, states, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, football supporter groups etc. - they all have power - that is a degree of freedom of action greater than that of the individual. This is the rationale of their existence. It therefore seems to me perfectly legitimate to use the term Jewish power in the same way as we speak of US power. This does not mean that all Jews or all US citizens agree with the dominant narratives at any particular time.
- In speaking about these matters we shouldn't be expected to get it right all the time - I'm sure the moment I send this email I'll think of further aspects to all of this. There is, therefore, a need for a space for us to say things which will shock. If on reflection we decide that a particular line of thought led in an unproductive direction, fine. On the other hand we may discover that a particular shocking thought is a key to understanding what is going on. To set up rigid boundaries to thinking does, in my view, much more harm than good.