

## Some Thoughts on the Future of PSC

**1. Last year PSC nearly collapsed completely.** I think we need to ask ourselves why this happened. My own view is that the problem was not, on the whole, a question of personalities but one of frustration, even despair. PSC has existed since 1982. I am extremely vague about its history, but my impression is that the Campaign did good work until Oslo, and then things began to go wrong. However, viewed in terms of what one imagines its objectives to be (I have never seen these written down and if they do not exist they must be formulated), PSC has rather little to congratulate itself for, whether before or after Oslo. The situation of Palestinians within Israel, in the West Bank and Gaza, and in the refugee camps in the surrounding countries has continued its unremitting deterioration. Certainly in Britain public awareness of the issues has increased, and PSC may be able to claim some credit for this; the effect on ordinary Palestinians' lives has, I fear, been negligible.

**2. Where, then, do we go from here?** I have one firm proposal and a number of suggestions. I begin with the first. We need to know how we got to where we are, in other words **we need a historical perspective.** Without this we will be in great danger of retrying old strategies which have failed to get us very far. I propose, therefore, that we set up a study group to compile a history of PSC. This should include a consideration of PSC's relationship to other related organisations. There should be a firm deadline for completion of this task, say six months, and I would be in favour of publication if at all feasible. The following suggestions about how we should proceed might well be modified by the findings of the historical survey.

**3. My impression is that PSC has completely neglected the European dimension.** With an accelerating movement towards a common European foreign policy (whether Britain is part of it or not), we will be missing a major opportunity to influence events if we fail to direct a significant part of our energy in this direction. Israel, and no doubt the United States as well, is seriously concerned that its virtual impunity in international affairs is beginning to be challenged by a Europe which is finding an increasingly powerful voice of its own. I would have thought that there is a need for us to establish regular contact with like-minded organisations in other European countries and to organise joint events. The possibility of a European Federation of Palestine Support Groups springs to mind. We should specifically target British MEPs in our campaigning.

**4. I feel that we should make a much more determined attempt to make contact with people of Jewish background,** both in Israel and elsewhere, who either support our aims or who are at least sympathetic to aspects of them. Michael Adams believes that the main impetus for positive change will eventually come from the Jewish/Israeli side and I believe he has a point. I do, however, see a dilemma here. On the one hand I want to say (see next paragraph) that Jewish identity is to some extent a political construction and is to this extent destructive; on the other hand I want Jews to stand up as Jews and say ‘I do not accept that you are doing this in my name’. We cannot escape the reality that non-Israeli Jews in the West are, as a body, an extremely potent force supporting the continuing oppression of the Palestinians. Edward Said is right that they have, paradoxically, succeeded in uniting liberalism and Zionism in the minds of the majority of Westerners. We desperately need the help of those Jews who oppose Zionism to untie this Gordian knot for while our Jewish colleagues can only be accused, rather feebly, of being Jewish self-haters or communists, other supporters of the Palestinians are often effectively undermined by being accused of ‘anti-semitism’. Furthermore, we should not ignore those Jews who remain Zionist, but are uncomfortable about the human rights implications of their credo; Peace Now activists largely fall into this category. Such people are probably not going to join PSC, but we should whenever possible engage them in debate. It occurs to me that for pragmatic, rather than ideological reasons, it might be a good idea to delegate the overseeing of this aspect of our policy to someone of Jewish background.

**5. Linked with the last paragraph is the whole question of Jewish identity,** or indeed of identity in general. The phrase ‘But surely they/we should have a place of their/our own’ is rarely challenged because it is not deconstructed. It sounds reasonable, but it is based on a whole set of assumptions, particularly nineteenth century notions of nationality and colonialism, with an admixture of outdated racial theory and social Darwinism. We need to get our own ideas on such matters really clear. What do we mean, for example, when we talk of multi-culturalism? Do we believe in ‘Jewish identity’? Indeed, how do we view our own identities? The problem with this whole area is that it has largely been taken over by theorists who speak an arcane language in which all sorts of irrational theories with unjust consequences can be dreamed up. In my view trustworthy ideas can be expressed in plain language, and I believe we should aim to do just this. Of course, we are dealing here with a subject which has much wider implications than the Palestine/Israel

conflict, but then that is true of every other aspect of this subject. Dare I suggest it? - another study group?

6. The consideration of identity and multi-culturalism leads naturally on to **the problem of American imperialism**. Although, like most supporters of the Palestinians, I was well aware of the importance of this dimension, the recent events in Iraq (and Britain's poodle-like behaviour) have focussed my mind wonderfully. Edward Said's concept of 'orientalism' was demonstrated in action with devastating clarity for it was quite clear that different standards were being applied to Iraqis and Israelis. It seems to me that there is **a fundamental psychological problem** here which we need to confront. Human beings are a particularly powerless species; they therefore worship power and despise powerlessness. If they can identify with the powerful, they will do so. Behind the veil of liberalism, perhaps at times our own included, lies at least a sneaking admiration for the oppressor and a sense of disgust at the antics of the majority of the oppressed. Of course, this is not the whole picture; identification with the victim (certainly true of my own relation to the Palestinians) is a strong counter-force. But even this feeling can be used to advantage by the oppressor. It seems to me that Zionism has cleverly succeeded in harnessing both psychological currents, admiration of the oppressor and identification with the victim. In its support for Israel the United States is viewed both sympathetically as the succour of the oppressed (!) and admiringly as the sole super-power which can throw its weight about as it likes. Both serve to bolster American chauvinism. I do not underestimate the problem of educating people, and especially politicians, about their own baser motives and the distortions of thinking that these lead them into, yet I believe that we should recognise this as part of our task. There are two approaches to this problem. The first is top-down; you educate people about the reality, rather than the rhetoric, of American (and British) foreign policy and hope that this will effect a change at the deeper psychological level. The second is base-up; you attempt to teach people about their own susceptibility to imperialist (i.e. atavistic) ideas and await a change in their political views.

7. **It is in the nature of imperialism that it divides those whom it wishes to oppress.** This is not just a conscious policy on the part of the imperialist, though he will certainly use it to his advantage. It is again a psychological phenomenon. To put it in plain language (as I must after what I wrote above!) 'nothing succeeds like success' but also 'nothing fails like failure'. The winning side in a conflict feels buoyed up with a sense of its power and unites to achieve its objective; the losing side,

aware of its powerlessness, thrashes about vainly for a solution to its woes and often ends up taking out its frustration on its own. The Palestinians have been hopelessly divided ever since the advent of Zionism, while it has been the gradual and unremitting success in achieving its objective that has united an enormous diversity of opinion within Zionism. We need to be aware that the Israelis have cleverly pushed the PNA into carrying out its own dirty work and we must insist that we support the whole Palestinian people, not just those owing allegiance to the Arafat. The fracturing of the Palestinian opposition to Zionism has its echo here in Britain; there are a number of different pro-Palestinian groups all working away on their own, with slightly different objectives, and knowing little about each other. While co-operation with other groups may not be easy to arrange, it must surely be an ideal which we aim for. For disunited we fall.

8. I hesitate to add my last suggestion because I know how much resistance it is likely to engender. But I do not believe that we can begin to challenge the perception of an exclusivist Israeli state as a necessary haven for Jews if we do not face head-on the use which has been made of **the barbarous mistreatment of the Jews by the Nazis**. It is customary when speaking of such matters to utter the required mantra ‘of course nobody could possibly condone ... etc.’ but this encapsulates the kernel of the problem. The expectation is precisely that such an accusation will be made. And so, as often as not, only rather bland statements follow about the unworthy use of ‘the holocaust’, and anything which might conceivably be construed as revisionism is avoided like the plague. The identification of ‘the holocaust’ with Jews is so complete that I suspect most people would correct you if you spoke, without qualification, of the eleven million who died in it. And that is not to mention the millions of others, largely Slavs, who were not killed in concentration camps but were lined up and shot. There is a need to start deconstructing the rhetoric about the Nazis’ massacres (a) to demonstrate the way in which they have been used dishonestly to bolster Zionism and (b) and to show that however horrific, they form part of a pattern of atrocity in human nature with which we in PSC are all too familiar. Holocaust centres have sprung up all over the United States and elsewhere; as far as I am aware they are largely funded by Jews with Zionist sympathies and concentrate entirely on the massacre of Jews; to this extent they are part of the Zionist propaganda machine. While there is quite rightly an outcry against the rise of a new right-wing hatred of Jews, and at the University of Sussex there is a project to monitor racism on the internet, little or no attention is paid to the all-pervasive stereotyping and hatred of Arabs. I mention only the recent BBC1 programme about the SAS behind the lines in Iraq, ‘Bravo Two

Zero.’ At one point an SAS officer puts obscene words to an Arabic song. Can one imagine a producer creating a similar scenario with a Jewish-Israeli song? It is time we exposed this kind of one-sided political correctness.

9. In 1883 William Scawen-Blunt wrote a poetic tirade against the British bombardment of Alexandria called ‘**The Wind and the Whirlwind**’. I would like to quote a few verses:

I have a thing to say. But how to say it?  
I have a cause to plead. But to what ears?  
How shall we move a world by lamentation,  
A world which heeded not a Nation’s tears?

How shall I speak of justice to the aggressors,  
Of right to Kings whose rights include all wrong,  
Of truth to Statecraft, true but in deceiving,  
Of peace to Prelates, pity to the Strong?

Where shall I find a hearing? In high places?  
The voice of havock drowns the voice of good.  
On the throne’s steps? The elders of the nation  
Rise in their ranks and call aloud for blood.

Where? In the street? Alas for the world’s reason!  
Not Peers not Priests alone this deed have done.  
The clothes of those high Hebrews stoning Stephen  
Were held by all of us, - ay every one.

Yet none the less I speak. Nay, here by Heaven  
This task at least a poet best may do,  
To stand alone against the mighty many,  
To force a hearing for the weak and few.

We cannot all be poets, but we *can* stand against ‘the mighty many’. It is easy to despair, particularly when one considers the similarity between what Scawen-Blunt was describing in 1883 and our current problem. But if we want to believe in a world fit for our children and future generations we have no option but to fight on. We may console ourselves that it is on the darkest of nights that you can best see the stars.

Francis Clark-Lowes

18 January 1999.