

IN ANSWER TO SHIELDS

By William Gorman

* * *

In the WORKERS PARTY BULLETIN (VOL. II, No. 2), Comrade Shields subjects my article on the Zionist Congress to a page and a half of ridicule before he declares "enough of this forced facetiousness." Had he kept this in mind at the very beginning, he could have avoided giving a painful display of how serious political questions can be treated with thoughtless frivolity.

Shields writes, "Gorman finds nothing whatsoever in the deliberations of the Congress to take seriously enough to analyze, comment upon and indicate the Bolshevik solution....He finds it sufficient...to laugh at the whole proceedings, solutions and problems alike." We shall see in a moment who is displaying a lack of seriousness. Shields suggests that my proposed solution to Jewish-Arab-British differences is "hand-holding and joining." Given the proper degree of sophistry, a joke can be made out of anything. I was discussing in an earlier part of the article the ineffectual nature of individual acts of terror and the dangerous nature of its source--the semi-fascist, anti-Arab Revisionists. Rather than isolated terror actions, "what is required first is a political program which could mobilize both Jews and Arabs in Palestine, which could gain the support of the neighboring colonial peoples and the sympathy of the workers of the world." Shields overlooks this quotation because it provides him with nothing to laugh about. It is at the heart of the present impasse in Palestine.

Shields, armed with a powerful magnifying glass, notes carefully that I use the phrases "Jewish people" and "Jewish workers" interchangeably. From this he deduces brilliantly a contradiction to my previous point that the Jewish workers must break their present coalescence with the Jewish bourgeoisie. Further down, Shields makes another brilliant deduction. From the almost axiomatic statement that the Jews of Palestine should appeal to the British workers for support, Shields deduces that I want the Jews "to throw their full strength behind the Labor Party of Great Britain." One heavy blow follows another. He finally deduces that I really mean that Palistinian Jewry should support the anti-Jewish immigration position of the British Trotskyists. From all this I can only conclude that there is no sure-fire, guaranteed defense against political kibitzers in our movement.

I have no desire to explain away the serious errors of the British Trotskyists or the incidental errors of Comrade Gates. There are a few general points raised by Comrade Shields upon which I would like to comment.

Shields writes, "...all the other peoples whom Comrade Gorman mentions, he supports simply by virtue of the fact that they are struggling against imperialism and lays down no other condition for his support. For the Jews, however, this is not enough." This is another brilliant deduction by Shields. Like the present party position, I give critical support to every anti-imperialist struggle. But there was a different point involved when I wrote that Palistinian Jewry must turn away from the Zionist leadership which was ex-

posed as bankrupt by the whole proceedings of the Zionist Congress, and "begin to look elsewhere, to the peoples of Egypt, Indo-China, India, Burma, Malay, the Philippines, Indonesia - all of whom are struggling valiantly to free themselves from imperialist exploitation and terror." In all the countries mentioned, there has occurred or is now occurring a violent mass military effort to expel the imperialist power. This is not and has not been the case in Palestine. Up to 1939, the whole Zionist leadership and program based itself upon the military intervention of the British against the possible threats of Arab resistance. Since the 1939 White Paper, we have witnessed individual acts of terror against the British. But we know from experience and from theory, that individual acts of heroism as a substitute for mass action only indicate the disorientation and even impotence of the masses due to lack of leadership, program and perspective. An objection might be raised that a violent Jewish uprising in Palestine today would be suicidal. Given the present relationship of forces between the small Jewish population and the large British troop concentration, this would be the only possible result. The problem then is one of changing the present relation of forces. Concretely, this means the Arabs of Palestine, of the neighboring countries and, in a final sense, the working people and colonial people of other countries must be drawn into the struggle against British imperialist rule. Thus, a Palestinian Jewish worker who paid serious attention to the struggle in Indo-China, Indonesia, etc. would see (1) that the only alternative to individual terrorism is not passivity but mass "terrorism" and (2) that the present resistance and hatred of British rule in Palestine is an integral part of the world-wide revolt against imperialism rather than a part of the plans of bourgeois Zionist chauvinists who envision an exclusive Jewish State with Jewish rule and exploitation of the Arabs. Shields interprets this point in my LABOR ACTION article as an insistence that the Jews of Palestine "must also shake hands with all kinds of exotic people before Comrade Gorman will support them." What can you do with this joker?

Comrade Shields exaggerates the role of the slogan of the right of self-determination to resolve the differences between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine. The revolutionary movement stands for the right of self-determination for any ethnic, racial, national group. However, this abstract right has nothing to do with the concrete struggle in Palestine today and tomorrow. The prime oppressor of both Jews and Arabs are the British. The Jewish and Arab ruling classes vie with each to be the exclusive instrumentality of British rule. The Jewish workers are in constant economic conflict with the Jewish capitalists and the Arab workers will not too long from now demonstrate their bitter hatred of the Arab effendi. The struggle against British rule is therefore identical with the struggle against the Jewish and Arab bourgeoisie; and, conversely, the class and colonial solidarity of the Jewish and Arab workers. How Shields continuously can compare the relation of the Jews and Arabs to that of the Russians and Ukrainians or Russians and Finns at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution is beyond comprehension. All available evidence too confirms the fact that the growing solidarity of the Jews and Arabs is built on the needs and objectives of the class struggle. The next stage is to combine unity on the class economic front with unity on the anti-imperialist front. It is only by the most abstract schematic thinking and total blindness to the socialist potentialities of the present struggles in Palestine that Shields can predict "with mathematical certainty" the

destruction of Palistinian Jewry after independence is achieved. (As examples of independent Arab states Shields provides Syria and Lebanon which are no more independent of France than the "banana republics" are independent of the US!) This left-handed apologia for Zionism is based on at least some of the theoretical premises of Zionism: awe before the "ideological cement" of "nationalism" without confidence in the capacity of a united working class to shatter it within the dynamics of the class struggle; indifference to the character of the epoch which is revolutionary on a continental and world-wide scale which objectively changes the character of the struggle within Palestine itself; indifference to the pivotal role occupied by the advanced Jewish proletariat in relation to the oppressed Arab peasantry of Palestine and the neighboring countries. Like the Zionists, Shields sees anti-semitism and national hatred as a static, constant factor unaffected by the class struggle. He assumes fundamentally the political premises of the Jewish bourgeoisie - fear of an Arab numerical majority, and the political premises of the Arab bourgeoisie - fear of a Jewish majority. He preoccupies himself with the schematic problem of numerical majorities after independence and even after socialism is achieved, rather than with the living, almost identical needs of the Jewish and Arab masses in the present-day class struggle and anti-imperialist struggle.

(Lest anyone attempt to apply the above arguments to the Negro question in the U.S.: the Negroes have been especially enslaved, oppressed and exploited on a racial basis by the white slaveholders and capitalists for over one hundred and fifty years. The objective premises, therefore, exist for the application of Lenin's position on the national question. This is not so in Palestine where the Arab ruling class has not oppressed or exploited the Jewish masses, nor has the Jewish ruling class exploited or oppressed the great majority of the Arabs. Rather, both nations have horizontal class structures and both nations are decidedly oppressed and exploited by a third - the British.)

One final point. Shields objects to Trotsky's opinion that the attempt to achieve a Jewish state under capitalism "is to pose a reactionary Utopia." He makes it clear that it is our duty instead "to strengthen the exceptionally weak strategic position of the Jewish nation." What does Shields mean? Does he propose that we raise Jewish immigration to Palestine as the practical solution to the problem of anti-semitism? Or, perhaps, the slogan of a Jewish national homeland or a Jewish state? It is impossible to reply to Shields' cursory objections to Trotsky on this question until Shields makes adequately clear how much of Zionist politics and positions he now embraces. What began as a few belabored jokes at the expense of a LABOR ACTION article may end as a total capitulation to Zionism.

#