

# A Letter on the Jewish Question

**Introductory note:** This letter was written to Comrade Shelton immediately after I had read his article in the July 27 "Militant" dealing with the Jewish question. As the text of the letter will show, I suspected even at that time when I had had no word from Comrade Shelton, that it was the editors who were largely, if not entirely responsible for some of the obviously false statements appearing under Comrade Shelton's name. I have had my own experience with this practice, the propriety of which we shall leave for discussion on another occasion. My suspicions were correct. I have since been informed by Comrade Shelton that much of what I objected to, including the absence of any positive program to solve the Jewish problem, was the work of the editors, who threw out an entire paragraph giving support to the slogan of free immigration to Palestine. With this explanation we set the record straight.

D. J.

Dear Dan:

I hope you will not be offended if I am sharply critical of your article in the July 27 "Militant" on the Jewish question. Perhaps some of the formulations were the result of the editor's pen and not yours in which case a protest should be lodged, but I will go on the assumption that the article was written in its entirety by yourself.

In general, it is a concession to the Cannonites' whole political approach to continue to write articles on the Jewish question demonstrating the terrible fate of the Jews under capitalism, instead of writing articles telling the Jews what to do about it. Our articles should cease to moralize generally upon the ills of capitalism and the benefits of socialism, and must instead present a practical program for people to act on. Otherwise the Jewish worker reading our press can justifiably say, "Well, the Zionist program may be difficult to realize, but it is better than nothing, and that is what you have to offer." (Your article, after all, only presents the difficulties of achieving a Jewish state, a rather false argument, and fails to show that, realizable or not, it would be reactionary.)

More important than this, are certain formulations in the

article which seem to me to be direct concessions to the Cannonite position on the subject. To say that "The 'Jewish Homeland' today is a place of horror to the Jews, reminiscent of their life under Hitler is false. The crucial difference is that in Palestine they are an oppressed nationality, whereas in Germany they were a persecuted and atomized minority. That is, in Palestine they are a concentrated national grouping, able to have their own organizations of all sorts, and for this very reason able to conduct a determined and organized fight against their oppressors (as they do today), whereas in Germany they were helpless. If one is to take your assertion literally, it becomes difficult to understand why European Jews should want to go to Palestine, or, more important, why we should raise the slogan to let them go there. And that is precisely the conclusion the Cannonites will draw."

Again, when you state that "Hagana's struggle up to now has not been anti-imperialist, but rather a struggle for continued Jewish immigration," you fall into the Cannonite trap. That assertion is of the same order as Cliff's question, "Can Zionism be anti-imperialist?" Both look at the formal aspect of the question, that is, the ideology involved, and thus ignore the real content. The answer to Cliff's question is that the Zionist ideology can never be anti-imperialist, but that out of the Zionist movement, and even temporarily under Zionist leadership, there can emerge an anti-imperialist force. The answer to your assertion is that despite the collaborationist ideology of the leadership, the struggle of the Hagana for continued Jewish immigration is anti-imperialist. The British realize this very well, and you yourself even demonstrate that this is so in your article, when you point out how British plans for Palestine are incompatible with further Jewish immigration. To be sure, the leadership would like to confine the struggle to the level of harassment, but then our task is to broaden and develop it into a rounded and all-embracing revolutionary battle, not to tell the Jews that theirs is not an anti-imperialist struggle. In politics as in everything else, things do not appear all at once full-formed.

Yours,  
Dave Jeffries