

Position paper by Hilton Obenzinger
for discussion within CC

"JAAZ AS AN EXCLUSIVELY JEWISH ORGANIZATION"

I am opposed to JAAZ being defined as an "exclusively" Jewish organization. This definition, unless clarified, runs counter to our intention of developing ourselves as an organization with a revolutionary orientation.

Because of our uneven and spontaneous development, we have yet to fully clarify the goals of our organization, though there have been discussions and a general, albeit vague, understanding. Here is a suggested reformulation of "who" JAAZ is that is based on a position on what the task of JAAZ is:

JAAZ is a Jewish organization that organizes solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinian people; as well, JAAZ organizes to fight anti-semitism within the United States. Our work is primarily within the "Jewish community" and secondarily within the broad American people.

Organizing solidarity with the Palestinian struggle means that we work intimately as part of the Palestinian solidarity movement within the US. Because of the material basis and interest that American Jews have in the Palestinian issue our work has a particular character within the over-all solidarity movement. Typically, solidarity work attempts to educate people on what their material (in addition to moral and political) basis for international solidarity. For Jewish people this has a special character due to the influence of Zionism historically and to actual connections with the state of Israel (e.g. relatives living there, etc.) Any Jewish person who is concerned about the well-being of Jewish people around the world has an interest qualitatively different in this respect.

Organizing to fight anti-semitism within the United States means that we work intimately with the broad anti-fascist and anti-racist movement within the United States. Within this work the distinction between our perspective and the bourgeois, Zionist perspective needs to be drawn out. We link fighting anti-semitism closely to the over-all fight against racism and all forms of discrimination. As well, we fight all forms of reactionary, proto-fascist maneuvers (such as "anti-government-

spending" movements) that Jews themselves might participate in.

Both aspects of our work--the solidarity and the anti-fascist aspects-- are part of our over-all task of fighting Zionism as a political ideology, movement and practice amongst Jewish people. *which also entails cultural work to understand a progressive Jewish identity that is not Zionist.*

With this very brief outline of what I consider to be our tasks, you might ask why am I opposed to our being an "exclusive" organization? After all, I do say we are a "Jewish" organization.

As a developing organization with a revolutionary character, we don't see ourselves separate from other progressive movements, although by our tasks and concerns we are distinct. Naturally, Jewish people will step forward to develop a viable left within the Jewish community. However, other revolutionary activists might have the basis to take up this work as well. For example: what if a married couple decided to join JAAZ but one of them wasn't Jewish? How will we define who's Jewish? Is someone who's father is Jewish and mother isn't not allowed into our organization? Obviously, by our practice, we are defining ourselves as Jewish not on any religious formula. People's histories make it clear to themselves that they are Jewish--or that they are concerned to take up our tasks of organizing within the Jewish community.

Our definition of "exclusive" itself smacks of Zionism and racist over-tones--not that our practice has been that. However, if we do not correct our understanding of this point it is possible that we could develop as a narrow-"ethnic", sectarian interest group, and not a revolutionary organization that shares an interests with all working and oppressed people to overthrow capitalism and imperialism and replace it with a way of life free of oppression.