

JEWISH SOCIALIST

No 1 Spring 1985

THE MAGAZINE OF THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP

85p

**ARRESTED AT CABLE ST 1936
WHERE IS HE NOW?**



ISRAEL AND THE DIASPORA

I B SINGER'S MISOGYNY

CENTRAL AMERICA

YIDDISH TODAY

FEMINISM

FIGHTING RACISM

JEWISH SOCIALIST

BM 3725, LONDON WC1N 3XX

EDITORIAL

There are many strands of Jewish life and a wide variety of interests and experiences within the Jewish community but only a few voices are heard. This is not because the others have nothing to say, but because they have nowhere to express their views.

Many Jews do not fit the uniform, conventional image portrayed by the more conservative, affluent and powerful sectors in the community. There are gay Jews and feminist Jews; Jews in the peace movement, and Jews in the anti-racist movement. There are also thousands of Jews in the socialist movement. All these are part of a vibrant radical tradition of which we are proud.

Yet among socialists, little priority is given to Jewish concerns. Anti-semitism, Jewish culture, the plight of Jews under repressive regimes, are rarely discussed. The Israel/Palestine conflict features prominently, but rigid posturing is more common than dialogue, and sectarian recriminations more common than facing the challenge of Middle East politics.

The Jewish Socialists' Group has launched *Jewish Socialist* to open up areas of discussion and provide a forum for debate on issues that are important to radical Jews in Britain and elsewhere. Pluralism is the lifeblood of all ethnic minorities and the Jewish community is no exception. *Jewish Socialist* plans to reflect this, and we welcome letters and contributions from readers — however contentious!

We hope you find the first issue stimulating and we look forward to hearing from you.

The opinions expressed in *Jewish Socialist* are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Editorial Committee or of the Jewish Socialists' Group.

Jewish Socialist welcomes contributions from readers, but regrets that the editorial committee is not liable for the safe keeping of artwork, photographs and manuscripts. Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope with any material submitted.

This issue was produced by an Editorial Committee consisting of Julia Bard, Clive Gilbert, Mike Heiser, Ruth Lukom and David Rosenberg.

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Cover picture: Charlie Goodman arrested at the Battle of Cable Street in 1936. Photo courtesy of Associated Press.

WHEN IS A FIRE NOT ARSON?

On Saturday 11 August 1984, Earlham Grove synagogue in Newham was completely destroyed by fire. In recent years Newham has been a hotbed of racist and fascist activity. At the last general election the National Front achieved its highest vote nationally in Newham. "Electrical Fault" was the explanation offered in the *Jewish Chronicle*. Further investigation by *Searchlight* revealed that a West Ham Football Club supporter's hat was found in the Earlham Grove rubble; large religious artefacts were dumped in Hackney; an NF member lives in the same street as the synagogue with several other activists living nearby; and around the same time, a Jewish-owned shop just north of Newham was broken into and daubed with antisemitic slogans.

Although no comment from the Board of Deputies appeared in the *Jewish Chronicle* to question the electrical fault explanation, a revealing report appeared in the *Jerusalem Post* on 16 August. It said: "Martin Savitt, a vice-president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews with special responsibility for communal security, has no doubt that it was arson and probably the work of National Front members."

"Following this incident, the worst in Britain for a number of years, the Board of Deputies will contact all UK synagogues to warn them to be on the alert for similar attacks".

A few weeks after the synagogue fire a Halal butcher's shop within a mile of Earlham Grove was reduced to rubble by a petrol bomb... or was it another electrical fault?

RACISTS OUT!

Congratulations to Newham council on their determined policy of evicting racist tenants. For too long now the

victims of racist harassment have been compelled to move rather than the perpetrators. The National Front were quick to come to the defence of the racist family. But their efforts are being closely monitored by East London Campaign Against Racism and Police Harassment (ELCARAPH) to which the JSG London Branch is affiliated. Newham has taken a brave and principled stand. We should demand that other Councils follow suit and get the racists out.

Copies of the ELCARAPH bulletin are available from ELCARAPH, PO Box 273 London E7.

Support the Newham 7 — on trial for defending their community against racist harassment. The trial begins in May. There will be a demonstration in April — watch for details.

JEWS AGAINST PIT CLOSURES

The miners' strike has inevitably meant that some areas face more hardship than others. From among these areas the JSG twinned with Whittle Miners' Wives Support Group. Their treasurer, Frances Stonton responds: "I thank you for your donations and most welcome support. Our support group are still strong. Although some men have gone back to work, it is making us more resolved. Sod the press and Tory Government. We will give them a run for their money. We have nothing to lose now. We are used to the hardship. Support from people like yourselves gives us more heart to fight on. Our men are right to fight for their jobs and future and we back them to the hilt. Till we hear from you again."

F S Stonton, Treasurer
PS WE WILL WIN

Readers wishing to support the JSG miners' fund for Whittle should send cheques/PO's made out to Whittle Miners' Wives Support Group, to JSG BM 3725 London WC1N 3XX.

ETHIOPIAN JEWS WELCOMED?

We welcome the fact that Israel has opened its doors to the Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jews). The response within Israel from both religious and secular authorities gives cause for concern.

ETHIOPIAN JEWS ACCUSED OF "MARXISM"

Ha'aretz 7.1.85
"Young men influenced by Ethiopian Marxism are inciting others against the religious authorities," claimed the official co-ordinating the treatment of the Ethiopian Jews on behalf of the two chief rabbis yesterday at a press conference. He said that these young men were inciting other new immigrants against the rabbinical authorities after they had made the demands (for immersion) of the Ethiopians, or that the opposition came from those who did not want the immigrants to become Jews. The official also claimed that the same young men had threatened their religious leaders.

Koteret Rashit 2.1.85

"They are doing them an injustice by bringing them here," says Eilat's mayor, Rafi Hochman. He has tried to oppose the Jewish Agency's plan to settle the Ethiopians in his town and... actually threatened to cut off the newcomers' electricity and water supplies, should they indeed be taken to Eilat.

"I asked the authorities to at least send only those who can sing and dance so that we can turn them into a folklore troupe for the tourists."

"They are the Yemenites of 1984... We cannot have a situation in which so many Jews of that kind are imposed on us, and are brought here in the middle of the night, so that we wake up in the morning and find them here... Eilat shall not be like Ashdod, which was packed full of Georgian Jews."

Extracts from the Israeli press are reprinted with kind permission of Israeli Mirror.

WEST BANK

Ha'aretz 19.9.84

Women were banned from voting in the council elections held in the town of Emanuel in Samaria last weekend. The leaders of the orthodox town decided to hold elections in order to ensure appropriate representation for all the religious factions in the settlement. Only one woman protested against the ban, but she was unsuccessful.



A NEW VOICE

Mazel tov and good wishes to *Shifra* the new Jewish Feminist magazine. Addressing a broad range of issues facing Jewish women, it gives a voice to people who have been marginalised or silenced and creates an important forum for debate. This is a welcome addition to the narrow range of publications previously on offer to our culturally and politically diverse community.

We wish it every success!



ADVERTISEMENT

The Jewish Women in London Group is a feminist oral history research project. We are concentrating on immigration and settlement, and are interested in interviewing women from as wide a variety of backgrounds as possible, including women who immigrated and settled in London — though they may now live elsewhere — or their daughters. If you would like to contribute to the project in any way, please contact us at Southbank House, Black Prince Rd, London SE1. Tel: 735 8171 Ext 147.

A day at the racists

It's a long time since the fascists took to the streets, but Halal and Shechita are their latest excuse to bring out the Union Jacks. Ruth Lukom went back to the front.

The National Front has a new slogan: The Party that Dares and Cares (or is that the SDP?). Last September about 50 of them "dared" to march through Brighton because they "cared" about the needless suffering of God's creatures at the hands of Jewish and Muslim butchers.

Although most of them looked as if they still enjoyed drowning the occasional kitten, they proudly unfurled their Union Jacks and went 'Forward with Britain' (or is that Robert Maxwell?) singing Rule Britannia. Quite what Rule Britannia has to do with chopped liver or meat vindaloo is beyond me. Personally I felt that "All Things White and Beautiful" would have been more appropriate — but this was no Jimmy Young show.

As a defiant gesture, we erected the Jewish Socialists' Group banner. Those of you who regularly attend marches with the JSG know that this involves much fumbling with aluminium poles and terse instructions: "If you don't hold it taut it'll flop!"

At that moment someone pointed out some NF latecomers goosestepping up the road behind us. Their London train had obviously been delayed and one could imagine the conversation going on behind the Union Jacks: "We must put some-

thing in our manifesto about trains running on time." As they passed to join up with their comrades, I retreated into the background — merely, you understand, to find a strategic point where I could toss my apple core at them.

The march began about midday through Brighton's main shopping centre. The boys in blue flexed their muscles and went into action. They hurled counter-demonstrators into parked cars. They pushed people off the wall that ran alongside the road and dragged one unfortunate photographer, who was nowhere near the march, in front of the NF and threw him on to the pavement opposite.

As the march narrowed on to a pathway entering the park, at the end of the route we found ourselves in front of the Front, as it were. Counter-demonstrators linked arms and stopped where they were. The police and their horses dived in and knocked many people to the ground in the chaos that followed.

For someone whose only experience of police harassment had been a warning to get some L-plates for her moped, this was a rude shock. During the stumbling confusion I was so terrified that I started laughing. White faced and shaken, we made our way to

the grassy slope overlooking the running track where the Front were attempting to hold a meeting.

The most repulsive sight of the day was the Police Inspector and Ian Anderson of the NF surveying the scene and chatting amiably like umpires at Lords.

As the heckling increased, they finally gave up and left; an impregnable

unit of blue protecting the red, white and blue and "British Democracy". We later learned that their task had been made considerably easier by the fact that the police had asked the Jewish Community to stay away. With the honourable exception of some members of the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women, they obeyed orders. It was not our finest hour.

A fighter for humanity

Martin Bobker died in December 1983. His funeral was attended by leaders of the Jewish community, priests and parsons, chiefs of police and constables, blacks and whites, marxists and Tories. There were eulogies and reminiscences. Men and women wept as his body was lowered. Some of us wept more than others because Martin was "special".

Born into a poor family at a time when poverty sat heavily on Jewish shoulders, the death of parents increased the burden. At school he learnt rapidly, his mind developed, grammar school helped to sharpen his awareness. The years of depression, unemployment, fascism, the threat of war and the struggle to make a living all combined to create an environment that was at the same time a prison and a challenge. Not for nothing was the working class club he helped to found called 'The Challenge Club'.

Martin set out on a path in search of what made the world tick. He read books — and how he read books! — with an ever growing understanding. His was not an ivory towered knowledge, but one linked intimately with his everyday experience. He saw most clearly the dangers threatened by the rising tide of fascism — Japan in Manchuria, Italy in Abyssinia, Germany in Europe. Fascism laid claim to the spoils of a world divided and exploited by imperialism.

Martin Bobker understood the need to fight for peace, to fight against fascism and to fight once and for all the exploitation of people by capitalism, be it in the workshop or in the great

demonstration against Oswald Mosely. They participated in the struggle of the people of Spain who refused to lie down on the bloody banquet table prepared by fascism.

Martin was a socialist, a marxist, a Jew who all his life fought for unity against oppression. He fought for Jewish participation in the struggle against fascism at a time when official Jewish organisations pursued a policy of "keep away from trouble". Jewish people *did* stand up and fight together with other anti-fascists. Cable Street is part of our history as is also the valour of the Jewish resistance to Hitler, its Lithuanian Brigade and partisans, the sublime heroism of the fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Martin was an orator of exceptional quality, able to marshal his facts and deliver his message in a simple and most powerful way. He was a man of culture, a lover of music and the theatre. His knowledge of literature was wide ranging, he was able to discuss in depth the Bible and philosophy, history, mathematics and cosmology. Seemingly, he had a knowledge of the whole history of the world. He put his voice and talents to use in the fight against racism, fascism and antisemitism. He taught and influenced many. His was a life of devotion and dedication.

He died aged 70. The last 70 years were given over to the finest cause in the world — the liberation of humanity. I am proud to have known him; I am privileged to walk in his footsteps.

Joe Garman

ISRAEL & THE DIASPORA

The unbalanced relationship between Israel and Jews elsewhere in the world, is in the interests of neither, argues Clive Gilbert

Diaspora Jewish history is characterised by the legitimate concern of one Jewish community for the welfare of another. Despite the widely differing circumstances in which Jews have found themselves, the idea of a "Jewish People" as distinct from Germans, Austrians, Poles, Russians and so on of the Jewish faith, is one that has remained constant. Given the international and endemic nature of antisemitism throughout European history, it could have hardly been otherwise. Since 1948, the Jewish population of Israel has been involved in four major wars and has been placed in situations of extreme danger. It is, today, the most endangered Jewish community in the world so it is no surprise that the more numerous and secure Jewish community of the USA and the comfortable Jewries of Britain and France agonise over Israel's situation.

Since the "emancipation" of European Jewry, heralded by the French Revolution, there was a clear understanding that Jewish liberation depended upon profound economic, social and political change. The cause of Jewish emancipation was identified with European liberalism in the 19th century and with European socialism in the earlier part of the 20th century. Jews were "over-represented" in European radical and revolutionary movements. Of course this is a generalisation, applicable to some Jews, inapplicable to others. Passivity, parochialism, and alienation from non-Jewish concerns — in short a retreat into the ghetto — was a prevalent Jewish response to rejection by European society. Nevertheless there were a number of Jews in the front ranks of the struggle against feudal reaction and against national and class oppression throughout Europe.

Today, when the "ghettoisation" of Western Jewry is a fading memory, and when Jewish integration into the host communities proceeds apace (to such an extent that there are doubts about the long term survival of authentic Jewish culture), Jewish involvement in struggles against oppression is declining. Radical political responses are confined, generally, to a minority of the alienated young, or to the rapidly disappearing remnant of the Jewish communist and socialist militants whose heyday was in the 1930s.

RADICAL TRADITION

The heart and soul of Jewish political radicalism, in modern times, were found

in the Jewish masses of the Pale of Settlement, that area of western Russia to which Jews were restricted by the Tsarist State during the 19th century. Eastern Jewry's social crisis, combined with the nature of Tsarist oppression, gave birth to a Jewish secular, Yiddish culture which facilitated the growth of Jewish political movements; the two most significant were the revolutionary socialist Jewish Workers' Bund, and the Zionist Movement. The huge numbers of impoverished Russian Jews who emigrated to Britain and the United States did not leave their political ideologies at home. Between 1880 and 1914, the Jewish community of Britain was transformed from one of a handful of largely bourgeois families to one of poor, immigrant, working class people numbering, perhaps, a quarter of a million. The participation of Jews in Jewish and non-Jewish anarchist and socialist organisations and in the trade union movement around the turn of the century, has been well documented. This, together with the mass struggles against Mosley's fascists during the 1930s, and the number of Jewish volunteers who fought with the International Brigade in Spain, composes the rich, pre-war, Jewish radical tradition.

Before the Second World War in Britain and throughout the Jewish world, Zionism could make little headway. In Eastern Europe, the battle for the hearts and minds of the Jewish workers was being won by the Bund or by the non-Jewish socialist and communist forces. Zionism seemed to have little relevance to the real concerns of the Jewish people. In Poland, the home of over three million Jews, the Bund emerged as the largest Jewish political party in municipal elections before the Nazi invasion of August 1939.

CULTURAL TAKEOVER

Yet the 1968 Jerusalem programme of the World Zionist Congress proclaimed without qualification "the centrality of Israel in Jewish life. The general content of the programme gives the impression that its authors regarded "Jewish life" "Jewish culture" and Israel as indistinguishable. As far as the "establishment" of British Jewry is concerned, this is true. Jewish education is Hebrew orientated; communally celebrated Jewish festivals have acquired an "Israel flavour"; Israel's independence day is the largest festival of all; and strenuous efforts are made to raise money for Israel. Isolated voices, raising doubts about Zionist ideology or criticising, however mildly, the actions of

Israel's government, are ostracised by the institutions of the Jewish community and abused in the Jewish press. Israel and Britain's Jewish establishment require of the Jewish community unquestioning loyalty to whoever the government of Israel happens to be as well as a regular flow of new immigrants to strengthen Israel's population.

The situation takes on a tragic aspect when we consider the nature of the present Israeli regime and its practices. The increasingly harsh and brutal oppression directed against the Palestinian people in the occupied territories; the obdurate refusal to recognise the Palestinian right to self-determination; the continuing discrimination against non-Jews within the borders of the state; the indefensible policy of supplying arms to oppressive, military dictatorships in Central and South America; the links with South Africa; the growth of religious fanaticism and ugly, right-wing, nationalist influence stand in stark contrast to the honourable tradition of Jewish involvement in liberation struggles.

How has the change come about? How has Zionism achieved such a stranglehold on Jewish culture in the West? Why has the corollary been the drift to the Right of Jewish political loyalties?

Firstly, until 1939 in Eastern Europe, Zionism was the political creed of the Jewish bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. Working class Jewish organisations like the Bund, expressed their opposition to Zionism in the class struggle against Jewish bosses. In Britain prior to 1939, Zionism was a marginal issue among the largely working class Jewish community. Since 1945, the class nature of the Jewish community of Britain has changed. The situation of an immigrant minority, conscious of a history of oppression, resulted in a compulsion to achieve, as far as possible, economic independence of the majority. Hence the proliferation of small Jewish businesses. The traditional status accorded to education among Jews resulted in a high representation of Jews in the liberal professions. Thus the Jewish community in Britain today is mostly petty bourgeois and, as such, a more suitable constituency for Zionism.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The changing class nature of British Jewry has been reinforced by the historical experience of the last half-century. The holocaust of the Second World War in



which European Jewry perished, seemed to confirm the Zionist conclusion that antisemitism was an ineradicable disease, rather than a social phenomenon; and that the only cure for such a disease was an independent, Jewish State in which the Jews could rid themselves, forever, of vulnerable, minority status. The holocaust further demonstrated the isolation of the Jews. In Eastern Europe, Jewish resistance fighters suffered on many occasions from the antisemitism of non-Jewish nationalist resistance, while the Allies displayed an equivocal attitude to the possibilities of saving Jewish lives.

As a solution to the "Jewish Question", socialism seemed to have failed. In Germany the Left could not prevent the triumph of Nazism; the flowering of Yiddish culture marking the early years of the Soviet Union under Lenin and Trotsky, gave way to Stalinism and renewed manifestations of Russian antisemitism.

At the end of the Second World War, Palestine seemed to offer the only relief in the dismal and tragic condition of the Jewish people. The determination to set up an independent Jewish State, and the coalescence of circumstances that secured the support of both the USA and the USSR for such a project, brought about the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. As far as the Jewish people were concerned, Zionism alone had delivered the goods.

STATE AND NATION

Just as the early Zionist movement had tended to ignore the existence of the Palestinian Arabs and their rights, the displacement of the Palestinians was not considered an important issue and Arab attempts to destroy the new state were regarded as being inspired by antisemitism and pure hatred. Most of the political leaderships throughout the Arab world then were semi-feudal tyrannies. This reinforced the profoundly incorrect view that there was no moral justification for Arab hostility. A considerable factor convincing Jews that the Zionist cause was just, was that the establishment of the state had been preceded by a struggle against British imperialism: armies were equipped, for the most part, by Britain. Egalitarian features of Israeli society such as the Kibbutz were cited to prove that the State of Israel would adopt a progressive, perhaps socialist, course of development.

Such a combination of factors gave rise to the Jewish dilemma so expertly and succinctly described by Isaac Deutscher. The Jews had chosen to seek their liberation in the form of a nation state in an epoch when the nation state, as a form of economic and political organisation, had long since shed its progressive historical functions and, in fact, was a brake on human development.

Before 1945, Zionism, as an ideology and political enterprise, sought to relate itself to, and draw adherents from,

the people among whom it had originated — the Jewish masses of Eastern Europe. Zionism failed to persuade its chosen constituency, and Noah Lucas (a critical Zionist scholar in Britain) described the nature of the failure: "Apart from the Zionist minority who voted with their feet (ie settled in Palestine), the masses of Jewry in their territorial concentration believed that their social status could be adapted to the structures of the new states established after the First World War. Hitler proved them wrong, though he did not prove the Zionists right. (Zionism was not predicated on genocide, although with hindsight it tended to incorporate it as a generalized proof of its thesis)".

ISRAEL AND THE DIASPORA

Following the holocaust and the establishment of Israel, Zionism was forced to redefine its relationship to diaspora Jewry given that it was now adrift from its shattered East European cultural moorings. Zionism had to turn to a Western Jewry, possessing material resources useful in building Israel and, in the case of the US, strong enough to exercise some political influence on American administrations in their dealings with Israel. Zionism could offer Western Jewry something in return, not least a surrogate pride in Israel's constructive and military achievements, an especially attractive offer to a people whose morale had been shattered by the destruction of the great cultural wellspring of Eastern Europe. Furthermore, Zionism offered a substitute for authentic Jewish culture — rapidly diminishing as assimilation made ever increasing inroads. In a period when the religious analysis of the human condition is rejected by many people, when largely assimilated, petty bourgeois, Jewish communities like that of Britain, apparently no longer possess the vitality or will necessary to rescue Yiddish culture, Zionism offers a more acceptable way of being Jewish: identification with a distant country whose Jews do the hard work and take on the burden of keeping alight the torch of Jewish culture and the honour of the Jewish people.

The dependence of diaspora Jewry on Zionism and Israel for its "Jewishness" renders it vulnerable to all kinds of emotional blackmail by Israeli leaders. Hence the regular Israeli appeals and demands for more material resources, even if communal institutions in the diaspora must do without.

"Israel stands alone with the Jewish people its own reliable allies"; "The fate of the diaspora depends on Israel"; "If Israel is destroyed, the Jewish people will not long survive". These are the slogans regularly intoned at Jewish meetings throughout the diaspora as if they formed a religious catechism. When Israel needs more arms, more funds for social programmes or for founding new settlements in the occupied territories, diaspora Jews feel duty bound to dig deep into their pockets or to encourage their children to

emigrate. Also, when some muted criticism of Israel is made, the author is required to keep silent, since they are breaking the united front against the "enemy" and have no right to speak out from the "comfort" of the diaspora while Israelis are dying regularly (or, more often these days, killing) on behalf of the Jewish people.

This mutually parasitic relationship between Israel and world Jewry has resulted in a situation where, in Britain for example, the entire Zionist enterprise is confined to fundraising and facilitating the distribution of propaganda by the Israeli embassy.

MORAL CONFLICT

In ideological terms, Zionism no longer has very deep roots, having long since lost any substantial commitment from politically minded and progressive Jewish youth. The increasingly reactionary nature of Israel's rulers and their brutal policies negate any moral appeal that Zionism may once have had. Young Jews are urged to emigrate on the basis of religion, chauvinism, fear of antisemitism, or the attractive prospects of life in a young, new and exciting country, which is how Israel is portrayed by its propagandists.

The tragedy, in the present circumstances, lies not only in the fact that Jewish communities are led to support the dangerous and morally indefensible policies of the Israeli ruling class, but also in Zionism's contribution to the decline of authentic Jewish culture and the Jewish radical tradition. The victory of the Zionist Right has accelerated the move to the right of opinion in Jewish communities. Consequently, in Britain, Jewish participation in the fight against racism has been relatively weak in recent years. As the economic crisis currently afflicting Western capitalism intensifies, its accompanying social and political tensions will result, inevitably, in a profound shock to the Jewish community in Britain — secure in its comfortable certainties. In effect, the Zionist hegemony has substantially aided the process that may have robbed British Jewry of the cultural resources and the strength necessary to survive such a shock.

The traditional solidarity between Jewish communities around the world has been elevated by Zionism to a concept of the unity of the Jewish nation. It claims that the interests of the Jewish people and of the Israeli nation are one and indivisible. In reality, the political destinies of the Israelis lie in the Middle East and, although profound emotional and cultural links will continue between Israel and world Jewry, an Israeli nation, with its own separate culture and its own separate interests, now exists. The emphasis on an artificial national unity between Israel and world Jewry does equal harm to both. A recognition of this reality could prepare the ground for a healthier and more positive relationship, enabling each to deal with the separate crises that confront them.

AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE

Roberto Sussman, a Mexican Jew, examines the implications of Israel's relationship with repressive Central American regimes.

The Israeli government's role as a military/financial proxy of the Reagan administration in Central America has become a controversial issue in recent years. Such involvement with regimes that are (with the exception of Costa Rica) highly repressive and unpopular, holds serious dangers for the Jews of those countries. This has been commented on by the Chief Rabbi of Panama, Herszel Klepfisz, in an interview with the Argentinian Jewish weekly *Nueva Presencia* (8 Nov 1980) after he visited Managua to find out about the situation of Nicaraguan Jews under the Sandinista government. But such comments are rare, and Israel's involvement in this area of conflict is seldom discussed among official Jewish institutions outside Israel — not even by those in Latin America. Indeed, it is often treated as if it were no more than an irritant — giving rise to a sort of conspiracy with which the "enemies of Israel" seek to undermine the support for her among public opinion in the West. Such is the tone in which the Bnai Brith Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has accused the Sandinista government of antisemitism and crude "hatred of Israel".

THIRD WORLD MARKET

There are many geopolitical and economic factors influencing Israel's role in the region. Firstly, being geographically distant and politically detached from Middle Eastern conflicts, Latin America is almost the only breach in Israel's diplomatic isolation in the Third World. This makes it an ideal market for Israel's industrial products, and since the arms export industry is the fastest growing sector of Israel's weak economy (40% of the export revenue in 1980, with a 341% increase in the two years prior to that), the sale of weapons is increasingly becoming an economic necessity. As far as the US government is concerned, Israel's supply of weapons to unpopular regimes relieves Pentagon strategists from the constraints imposed on them by Congress or public opinion.

Secondly, with the exception of Costa Rica, the Central American regimes lack enough popular support to govern without repression so they are greedy for Israel's weapons technology, and in their links with Israel they also seek a measure of diplomatic and political

legitimacy.

Finally, specifically in Guatemala and Costa Rica, the Israeli government has played the role of a financial courier which, in exchange for arms sales, promotes American Jewish tourism to these countries and lobbies American institutions to invest in development projects.

Before the Likud government came to power in 1977, Israel maintained a much lower profile in the region. At the same time, though the Labour Party has criticised the worst excesses of the Likud role, calling them "CIA mercenaries", it does not object to arms sales to these regimes. The only real opposition within Israel to these policies comes from groups and individuals to the left of Labour, like Yossi Sarid, Mapam, the Citizens' Rights Movement, the Communist Party and the Progressive List for Peace. A proposal in the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) to forbid arms

sales to dictatorships was supported by only 15 members in February 1983.

TACTICS TRANSPOSED

Guatemala follows a classic pattern. From 1975 to 1978, under Jimmy Carter's "Human Rights" policies, American military aid to Guatemala was curtailed and the repressive regime of Romeo Lucas turned to Israel to fill the vacuum. The Israeli government not only sold weapons to the regime, but also sent military advisers to train elite army units in anti-guerilla tactics and the secret police in the use of sophisticated electronic surveillance: technology against actual and suspected "subversives".

A threatening effect of this process is what Jacques Lemieux, in the French language journal *Le Monde Diplomatique*, calls the "Palestinisation" of the Indians. Strategies used by the Israeli army in Lebanon and the Occupied Territories



have been transposed to the Guatemalan context, with forced massive population transfers, and the organisation of Indian "civil defence" modelled on the Village Leagues. This peculiar anti-guerilla strategy took place under the ephemeral regime of Rios Montt, whose associates, as Protestants in a Catholic ocean, liked to identify themselves with Israeli Jews and Lebanese Maronites in a sea of Muslims.

The involvement of Israel in Costa Rican politics is the least controversial case. Costa Rica has no army, so Israel's role as financial courier has been more important than that of military adviser. Bearing one of the highest per capita public debts in the world, Costa Rica's government officials asked the Israeli government to use its connections among American military and financial circles to obtain economic support for the construction of an interoceanic railway. One can speculate about the transfer of the Costa Rican embassy in Israel to Jerusalem in terms of this deal.

In El Salvador the former President, A. Magaña has recognised the imminence of an agreement in Israel to train security personnel. One can also speculate about the relationship between this agreement and the transfer of the El Salvadorean embassy to Jerusalem.

THE SANDINISTAS

So far, the Sandinista revolution in 1979 has been the only fully successful popular revolt in Central America against a regime that was a client of Israel. The new Sandinista government reoriented the external politics of Nicaragua from Somoza's right wing, cold war alliances, towards non-alignment. Relations with all communist regimes were established and the PLO was given representation in Managua with the status of an embassy of a sovereign country. Although diplomatic relations with Israel were not severed until August 1982, from the outset the Sandinista

logical "hatred for Israel" or "PLO machinations"; it is more likely to result from Israel's active involvement government harshly condemned Israel's activities both in Central America and the Middle East. This stance, together with the confiscation of property of prominent Nicaraguan Jews who were associated with the Somoza family, prompted the Anti-Defamation League to accuse the Sandinista government of antisemitism. The fact that the government confiscated the synagogue of Managua which was legally registered as owned by one of the Jews mentioned above, was the most delicate issue in this conflict. After meeting leaders of the ADL, the Sandinistas agreed to hand back the synagogue.

Nicaragua's Jewish community consisted of about 50 families, most of whom left during the rebellion against Somoza, the majority of them because of the war itself, but some out of fear that the Sandinistas would produce charges against them for their association with Somoza. It is the testimony of this group which forms the basis of the ADL's allegations against the Sandinistas. But what the ADL fails to mention is their intimate association in business and personal relations with a hated dictator. It was this situation which prompted the Chief Rabbi of Panama, Hershel Klepfisz, to visit Managua and hold meetings with local Jews and Sandinista officials. In *Nueva Presencia*, he denied the ADL allegations saying that he did not find the slightest trace of anti-Jewish hostility, adding that Nicaraguan Jews enjoy full equality, civil rights and freedom of movement. What Rabbi Klepfisz did detect were strong anti-Israel feelings which the Sandinista press and media, like many other left wing Third World movements, tends to voice in a rhetorical and confused manner. However, as Rabbi Klepfisz comments, hostility against Israel is hardly attributable to a patho-

in supplying weapons to anti-Sandinista forces (the Contras) infiltrating Nicaragua from Honduras. After Israel's intimacy with Somoza, her supply of arms to the Contras is seen in Managua as adding insult to injury.

WHO BENEFITS?

The attack of the ADL on the Sandinista government fits perfectly with the cold war strategy of the Reagan administration in the region. Indeed, Reagan himself, in a message to the 70th assembly of the ADL in Washington DC, expressed his satisfaction with the mobilisation of the organisation against the destabilisation of Central America by the Soviets and their alleged proxies, Cuba, Libya, the PLO and the Sandinistas. The attitude of the ADL typifies not only the worst type of opportunism, but also how some forms of Zionist activity aiming to "support Israel" at all costs, have degenerated into a quasi-religious obsession to apologise for even the most morally reprehensible policies of the Israeli government. This attitude is not only repellent to many Jews on ethical grounds, it is also harmful to the long term interests and security of Jewish communities the world over — including the State of Israel itself. This is even more evident in Central America and, concretely, in Guatemala, where violations of human rights have reached almost genocidal proportions. When military officers responsible for these violations make statements like: "Most of our men are trained by Israelis, the models of the kibbutz and moshav are very present in our spirits and we would be delighted to implant them in our highlands," there is reason to fear for the security of Jewish individuals in the region who blindly align their group interests with those of the Israeli government. At the very least, Shamir, Sharon and company should do their own dirty work. They should also apologise for it!

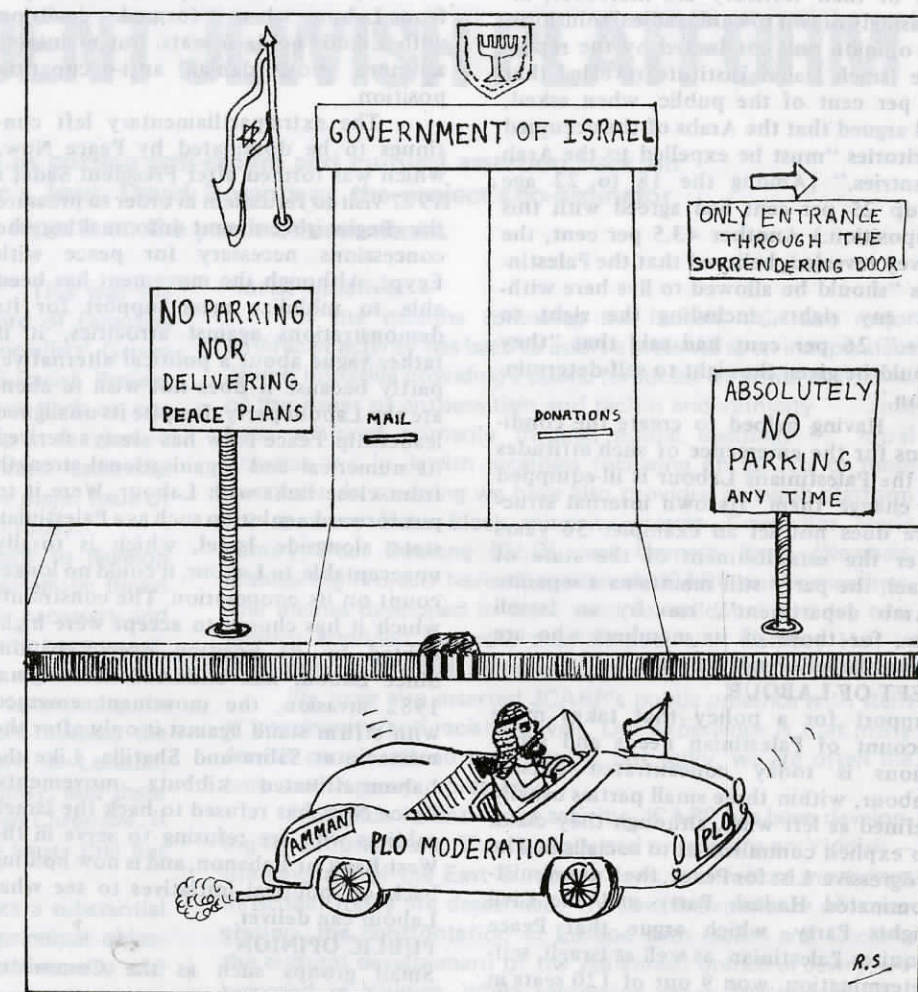
who had derived most of their votes from the Arab sector and some of the more dovish religious parties. The coalition agreement made Labour leader Shimon Peres, prime minister for the first two years, to be followed by Likud's Itzhak Shamir. Former Labour premier, Itzhak Rabin became defence minister, a post which gives its holder authority over the occupied territories as well as the armed forces. All the economic portfolios went to Likud ministers, to the surprise of some pundits who had thought Labour was planning to rescue the Israeli economy.

Labour was not free, within certain limits, to start acting according to its principles. However, after the traditional overture to Jordan — equally traditionally turned down by King Hussein, who does not wish to negotiate on behalf of (or take back) millions of Palestinians — peace efforts came to a halt. Instead, Labour allowed huge amounts of public money to be handed over to new settlements. Even the talk about areas "densely populated" by Arabs proved to have been just talk: the site for the first settlement to be created after the elections turned out to be one of the world's most overpopulated areas, the Gaza Strip. Alongside one of its eight Palestinian refugee camps, Israeli settlers will now construct a fishing village and develop seaside tourism.

When questioned about the defence ministry's policy in the occupied territories, Itzhak Rabin made it clear that he would take a hard line against Arabs disrupting law and order. He meant what he said. By November 1984, two West Bank student demonstrators had been shot dead by soldiers and scores wounded. When asked by the US Administration to take steps to improve "the quality of life" under occupation, the Israeli authorities agreed only to one immediate concession: permission to establish an Arab bank in the West Bank. As for a long term solution, Labour leaders reiterated that they would never talk to the PLO because it was a terrorist organisation, and that there could be no self-determination for the Palestinians. Also, while negotiating a withdrawal from Lebanon, Israel resumed its shelling of Palestinian positions there. This was a political step rather than retaliation for Israeli casualties, since most Israeli soldiers killed in Lebanon in the past year had been ambushed by local Shiites, not PLO forces.

It would perhaps be understandable if such policies, which can only worsen Israel's conflict with the Palestinians, had been forced on Labour by coalition agreements, but this was not so. They had already been expressed in Labour's election slogan, formulated when the polls still gave the party an overwhelming majority. This slogan, promoted by full page advertisements, had been:

"Labour says no:
No to a return to the 1967 borders,
No to the uprooting of settlements,
No to negotiations with the PLO,



No to a Palestinian state . . ."

These four "noes" in turn reflected the party's new manifesto. Alongside the reference to "a clear Jewish majority and a democratic society", the manifesto had reiterated Labour's belief that Israel's security lay in the retention of massive "security areas" in the occupied territories, and in a complete rejection of the PLO. Labour, it said, "excludes the establishment of another Palestinian State between Israel and Jordan." Moreover, "Israel will insist that no Jewish settlement be uprooted." The last promise regarding the settlements had not appeared in any of Labour's previous programmes. It reflected the shift to the right that had occurred during Labour's time in opposition.

LABOUR'S INHERITANCE

This political development within Labour has to be understood in a historical context. Settlement had always been promoted as a positive, pioneering activity from the days of the Yishuv onwards. (When Labour criticised Gush Emunim for wanting to settle right next to the West Bank town of Nablus a few months ago, the movement's leaders sharply retorted that Labour had after all, established Tel Aviv right next to what was then the Arab city of Jaffa.) Labour built its first West Bank settlements almost immediately after the 1967 war, and by the time it suffered its first ever election defeat ten

years later, it had set up nearly 50 of them. While emphasizing its desire for talks with Jordan, it handed over huge areas to Israeli settlers, until the patchwork of Israeli and Palestinian areas that remained "negotiable" could not possibly appeal to anyone. The Likud merely accelerated this process by more ruthless land confiscations and by dropping the demand that settlers should work in the occupied territories.

Labour's stand appears to be acceptable to the majority of its electorate, which is drawn towards Labour's record as the creator of a welfare state and its ability to win wars within a short time, not its concern for a peaceful solution to the conflict with the Palestinians. One of the main factors determining public attitudes was outlined by one of the Hebrew press' best known commentators, Yoel Marcus, in the liberal daily *Ha'aretz*: "Seventeen years of occupation, courtesy of Labour, have not remained without impact. A new generation of voters has grown up which cannot imagine Israel within the boundaries of the (pre-1967) Green Line, and cannot understand why one should reduce its territory. Arab labour, which has 'liberated' so many Jews from the dirty jobs, has created a large number of people who regard any talk of territorial compromise as a threat to their new status."

Israelis who are inflexible about the

WILL LABOUR BRING A JUST PEACE ?

Israel's Likud government brought war in Lebanon, economic chaos and increasing violence in the occupied territories. Does the government of national unity offer better prospects? asks Elfi Pallis.

Labour's return to the leadership of the Israeli government after seven lean years was welcomed by many people inside and outside Israel, who believed the party was striving for a just peace, or at least some sort of peace, with the Palestinians. Such hopes had been encouraged by Abba Eban's frequent declarations that Israelis did not wish to rule over another people, and by a clause in Labour's programme stating that "Israel must remain a state with a clear Jewish majority and a demo-

cratic society." While in opposition Labour had condemned the establishment of settlements in areas densely populated by Arabs and had even expressed sympathy for an interim settlement freeze pending a political solution. The July elections had shown what was wrong with the present situation: though conducted democratically among Israel's 4.2 million citizens, they had excluded over 2 million Arabs living under Israeli military rule in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and South

Lebanon.

THE COALITION

The outcome of the elections, followed by six weeks of coalition wrangles, left Labour at the head of a "National Unity Government" with the Likud and three orthodox parties. As the largest single party Labour had chosen to form a broad front with the Right in preference to a very narrow coalition with the Civil Rights Party, the two small non-Zionist parties

size of their territory are moreover, increasingly drawn towards radical solutions. An opinion poll conducted by the reputable Israeli Dahaf Institute revealed that 15 per cent of the public, when asked, had argued that the Arabs of the occupied territories "must be expelled to the Arab countries." (Among the 18 to 22 age group 25 per cent had agreed with this proposition.) Another 43.5 per cent, the survey revealed, believed that the Palestinians "should be allowed to live here without any rights, including the right to vote." 26 per cent had said that "they should be given the right to self-determination."

Having helped to create the conditions for the emergence of such attitudes to the Palestinians Labour is ill-equipped to change them. Its own internal structure does not set an example: 36 years after the establishment of the state of Israel, the party still maintains a separate "Arab department", run by an Israeli Jew, for those of its members who are among Israel's Arab citizens.

LEFT OF LABOUR

Support for a policy that takes more account of Palestinian needs and aspirations is today concentrated outside Labour, within three small parties usually defined as left wing, although they claim no explicit commitment to socialism. The Progressive List for Peace, the Communist-dominated Hadash Party and the Civil Rights Party, which argue that Peace requires Palestinian, as well as Israeli, self-determination, won 9 out of 120 seats in

the July elections. Mapam, which split from Labour when it formed a coalition with Likud, holds 6 seats, but maintains a more pro-Jordanian anti-occupation position.

The extra-parliamentary left continues to be dominated by Peace Now, which was formed after President Sadat's 1977 visit to Jerusalem in order to pressure the Begin government into making the concessions necessary for peace with Egypt. Although the movement has been able to mobilize mass support for its demonstrations against atrocities, it is rather vague about a political alternative, partly because it does not wish to alienate the Labour party. Despite its unaligned leadership Peace Now has always derived its numerical and organisational strength from close links with Labour. Were it to put forward a solution such as a Palestinian state alongside Israel, which is totally unacceptable to Labour, it could no longer count on its cooperation. The constraints which it has chosen to accept were highlighted by its position over Lebanon. Since Labour had endorsed the original 1982 invasion, the movement emerged with a firm stand against it only after the massacre at Sabra and Shatilla. Like the Labour-affiliated kibbutz movements, Peace Now has refused to back the Israeli soldiers who are refusing to serve in the West Bank or Lebanon, and is now holding back on political initiatives to see what Labour can deliver.

PUBLIC OPINION

Small groups such as the Committee

against the War in Lebanon, the Committee for Solidarity with Bir Zeit and the "Yesh Gevul" soldiers' movement, who say that Israel can extricate itself from its present situation only by offering the Palestinians too the right to self-determination, still enjoy little support from the Israeli public. A demonstration called by "Yesh Gevul" in support of the Israelis who refuse to serve in occupied areas on humanitarian grounds drew less than 5,000 people, compared to the nearly 400,000 that attended the famous Peace Now demonstration after Sabra and Shatilla. The leaders of these groups have welcomed Labour's return to power, but they warn that if the party allows the present situation to continue, not only Palestinians will be threatened. In evidence they point to the Right's growing intolerance of Jewish leftwing activists, the brutalisation of the Israeli police which, used to dealing with rightless Palestinians, nowadays also maltreats Jews in its custody, and the new contempt for democracy.

Where this might lead was illustrated by a recent development in the occupied territories, when the West Bank settlement town of Emmanuel decided to withdraw voting rights from the women living there, on the grounds that women had not had political rights in biblical Greater Israel. Modern democracy, as some settlers have long argued, is not compatible with a Greater Israel. It is difficult to see how Labour can prove them wrong within the present boundaries.

AN INDEPENDENT JEWISH PLATFORM

JCARP has succeeded in putting anti-racism and cultural assertion back on the agenda for London's Jews. David Rosenberg, the project's co-ordinator, reports on the year's achievements.

"A slap in the face to the Jewish community". This was the eloquent greeting from Dr Gewirtz of the Board of Deputies to news of the GLC's grant to the Jewish Socialists' Group which enabled the Jewish Cultural and Anti-Racist Project (JCARP) to be set up. A year later we can look back on our efforts and see that we have indeed given a slap in the face — not to the community — but to its self-proclaimed leadership who are now very much on the defensive on the major issue of Jewish defence and responses to racism in Britain today.

For some years now the JSG have sought to develop greater awareness among Anglo-Jewry of the antisemitic threat and increasing racism, in order to win support for necessary and effective responses. We knew the level of antisemitic harassment, as did the monitors of the Board, but they were able to keep it a carefully guarded secret from the rest of the community. In May this year, a GLC Police Committee report revealed the alarming facts about levels of racist harassment in London, including the harassment of the Jewish community, and these have now been prominently reported in the *Jewish Chronicle*. It is the consistent work of JCARP in raising the issues that has brought this about.

The JCARP initiative was designed to make a substantial and sustained contribution to achieving three principal objectives, all of major significance to the Jewish community and other ethnic minority communities in this country:

- 1) to make Jews more conscious of their position as members of an ethnic minority group with needs and aspirations on a par with other minority groups;
- 2) to draw on the immigrant experience and the radical and anti-racist history of the Jewish community in order more forcefully to challenge antisemitism and racism today;
- 3) to develop and promote secular Jewish culture in the context of building a society enriched by cultural diversity.

JCARP was publicly launched in March 1984 at a reception in the Camden Centre attended by representatives from a range of Jewish, anti-racist and ethnic groups. Naomi Dale, Secretary of the Project Management Group, emphasised the links between the different parts of the project by declaring: "We see anti-racism and cultural assertion as two sides of the same coin." Within this lies the distinctive message that we necessarily fight not only *against* racism but *for* our rights to a self-determined, culturally autonomous future here in Britain. It is only if we have a clear vision of our collective future here that we can effectively confront the threats we face.

The need for JCARP is amply illustrated by the weaknesses of anti-racist thought and action both inside and outside the Jewish community. In the general anti-racist movement there is little recognition of the enduring reality of antisemitism. Many committed anti-racists organise around the slogan, "Yesterday the Jews, today the Blacks" — a view mirrored in the Jewish community by those who believe that racism no longer affects Jews, and by those who have increasingly adopted white Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards Black people. There is a debate that is missing, an analysis that needs to be formed and a programme of action to be developed in order to broaden the dimensions of current anti-racist activity and harness Jewish support for anti-

racist initiatives.

In the months following the launch, JCARP's major anti-racist activity has been to assert a presence as an independent Jewish initiative providing a public forum for informal discussion of the issues of antisemitism and racism and ethnicity. This has been achieved primarily through public meetings in central London and in Jewish localities focussing on aspects of these questions. In so doing we have also provided a Jewish platform for speakers from Black minority groups. Councillor Merle Amory, Paul Boateng (GLC), and Unmesh Desai (Newham Monitoring Project) have all spoken at JCARP public meetings. The themes developed in them were consolidated in a day conference attended by more than 50 people in Conway Hall in November, addressed by veteran anti-fascist Charlie Goodman.

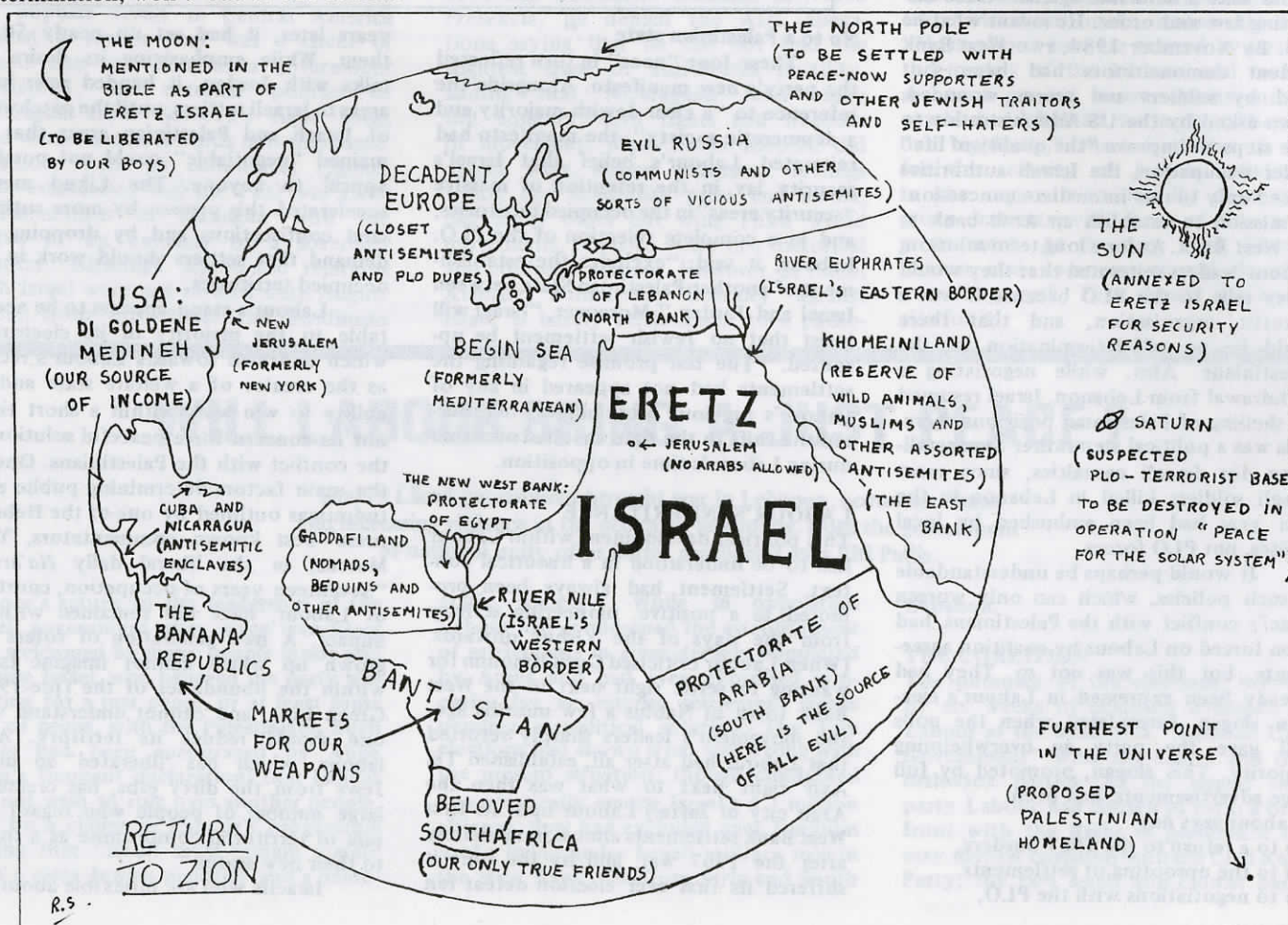
We have also asserted JCARP's public presence with stalls at community/anti-racist festivals. Our experience is that many Jewish people attend such events, but sadly, we are often the only Jewish group represented.

Alongside its anti-racist activity, JCARP has been developing its cultural work. This has focussed principally on Yiddish — the language of the East European Jews from whom most Jews in Britain today are descended. The Jewish experience of immigration, the confrontation in Europe with racism and fascism, the cultural development of the Ashkenazi branch of Jewry, are recorded in Yiddish. While respecting other Jewish languages and cultural traditions, JCARP has looked to Yiddish culture in particular to enrich a creative Jewish life in Britain.

Following an initial public lecture on the history of Yiddish, JCARP organised classes at beginner and intermediate level and has also held two very well attended Yiddish concerts in the Manor House Centre for Judaism in Finchley and in the "East End Yesterdays" festival in Stepney. JCARP has thus played a major part in promoting the resurgence of Yiddish which is a recent and exciting development.

In the remaining GLC funded months, the project is aiming to produce a set of tangible products, foremost among these is an exhibition highlighting the Jewish response to immigration legislation. 1985 marks 80 years of such legislation, beginning with the Aliens Act of 1905, which, directed against Jews, is the forerunner of today's discriminatory legislation against Blacks. In addition JCARP will be publishing pamphlets on Jewish responses to fascism in Britain in the 1930s, and on the cultural side on the importance of Yiddish. Work has also begun on a Jewish anti-racist resource pack, aimed specifically at youth groups, and the final product (pending a further specific GLC grant) will be a video on fascism and antisemitism in Britain in the '80s, made with Anarres Video Co-operative of Hackney.

The achievements of JCARP have been made in the face of the determined, self-interested and co-ordinated opposition of the establishment bodies in the Jewish community. Through JCARP we have managed to reach out to many who genuinely seek to combat racism but are warned off the JSG by the incompetent autocrats who impose their hegemony on the community. JCARP has thus helped to lay part of the foundation for the pluralist regeneration that the Anglo-Jewish community so desperately needs.



TIME TO FIGHT BACK

Harry Cohen MP has given consistent and active support to the JSG's anti-racist work. Here is his message of support to the recent JCARP conference.

Both racism and antisemitism are malicious evils which cannot be tolerated in a decent society. They must be recognised as such and actively opposed. For this reason the GLC's anti-racist year activity is timely and welcome. The Government should be involved at national level. It is not.

For Jews, whilst condemning anti-semitism, to keep quiet about racism and discrimination affecting Afro-Caribbeans, Asians and other ethnic minorities (or, indeed, vice-versa) is a cop-out. With their special knowledge of the misery and suffering which racism produces, and where it eventually leads, Jews must unequivocally stand up against it. This means combining with others who are resisting racism. JCARP is in the forefront of doing this.

All racism is hurtful to those on the receiving end. It is, though, possible to categorise different types of racism.

Direct and deliberate racism is that practised in the community by the National Front and other fascists and

Nazis. These racists are directly responsible for attacks on ethnic minority individuals, families, their homes, community centres and places of prayer; just as they are for attacks upon Jews and synagogues.

Institutional racism is that practised and promoted by those in authority with the weight of their official power who use it for their own purpose and advantage to divide and rule, and create scapegoats for their own political and economic failings. Government, police and the media fall into this category.

Ignorant racism is practised by people duped by those in the other two categories.

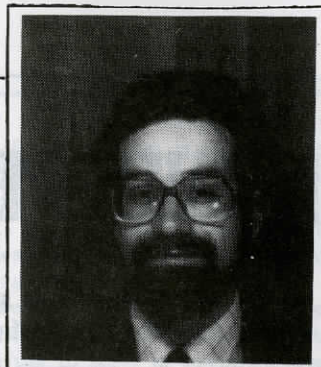
All racism must be clearly shown to be socially unacceptable, but I refer to this possible distinction because the most suitable tactics and methods must be utilised by anti-racists to combat the racists.

Because of the realisation of institutional racism, Jews, or anyone else, cannot simply say, leave the dealing of

racism to the authorities. You could not leave the dealing of antisemitism and Jew-baiting to the authorities in Nazi Germany. The authorities will only respond and change as a result of pressure brought to bear upon them. Whilst there is a single act of discrimination or racist attack, all anti-racists must bring this pressure to bear.

JCARP's aims, and those of the Jewish Socialist Group who launched it, are those of the great radical tradition in the Jewish working class. I welcome them. For too long now the upper hand has been with those who have ingratiated themselves in the Tory establishment. It is for them now to try to justify that position with the evidence of the massive increase in National Front sympathisers and other racists active in the Conservative Party and now going for senior positions.

I hope your conference is a step in your Project going from strength to strength.



YIDDISH TODAY

Far from being a museum piece, Yiddish provides a continuity with our history and is a source of cultural fulfilment today, says David Rosenberg

In its anti-racist activities, the Jewish Socialists' Group has long argued against an assimilationist perspective. It has not been content to march the long road against antisemitism and racism only to disappear at the end of it. It rejects the ethnocentric analyses that Jewish life is either a product of antisemitism or solely reducible to economic relations. The specific participation of the JSG as Jews in the anti-racist movement has not been merely as a rallying point for Jewish anti-racists but a conscious expression of pluralism in the movement to prefigure a pluralistic socialist society. To a large extent the anti-racist movement has now recognised and embraced the cultural assertion of minorities as a positive strength and unifying factor.

However, in working for the progressive assertion of Jewish culture today the Jewish Cultural and Anti-Racist Project (JCARP) faces tough obstacles. These come not only from the assimilatory pressures of White, British, Christian society but also from within the Jewish community itself. We are faced on the one hand with the denial of ethnicity by those who prefer to see themselves as a religious minority consciously distanced from other ethnic groups, and on the other hand by the cultural hegemony of Zionism with its emphasis on the centrality of Israel to Jewish life and the Hebraization of its cultural components in the Jewish diaspora. This process has carried on apace since the establishment of Israel in 1948 to the detriment of authentic diaspora Jewish culture.

A GROWING INTEREST

But there is a reservoir which JCARP has begun to tap and upon which it will build — the reservoir of Yiddish; the language first developed by Jews in Europe 1,000 years ago and once the language of the vast majority of Jews in the world. Moreover, with little prompting the reservoir has already started to flow again. Recent years have witnessed a marked revival of interest among Jews in Britain in their recent cultural history, exemplified by increasing numbers researching their family and communal past and learning and relearning the *mame loshn* (mother tongue) — Yiddish. It is not restricted to Britain. In Paris, Brussels, New York and Montreal, similar, indeed stronger processes are occurring. A documentary of the Yiddish cinema in the 1920s and 1930s entitled *Almonds and Raisins* has recently been playing to packed audiences nightly in a London cinema. London's one remaining Yiddish theatre group is always assured of large

audiences at its performances. There are a growing number of Yiddish classes and song and discussion groups in London.

But who is learning Yiddish today and why? Our classes tend to attract secular Jews aged 25-45 from various backgrounds. Very few are learning Yiddish from a purely academic interest. The majority, rather than looking upon Yiddish as a museum piece, relate to Yiddish as a living language which connects them with their immediate past, provides continuity, and fulfils a very positive role in the construction of their contemporary Jewish identity. For Jews in Britain today, this is not without problems. There is a disjunction between the warm familiarity with the remnants of the Yiddish language and diaspora Jewish culture as found in one's personal and familial Jewish life and the insular, culturally stagnant, Zionist-orientated Jewish communal life. Yiddish is providing one means of developing a progressive alternative.

Yiddish has suffered many attacks this century. In the name of assimilation it was discouraged and denigrated; in the name of Zionism it was suppressed in Israel and declared a foreign language; in the name of socialism its institutions and cultural leadership were smashed in the Soviet Union; and most of all in the name of Nazism millions of its speakers were exterminated. "But who speaks Yiddish today?" is the familiar prelude to various attacks on the language: "It is not a language but a jargon", "It is the language of the despised ghetto Jew", "It is a dying language", "Only the Chasidic (ultra-orthodox) Jews speak Yiddish today", "Yiddish died out, Hebrew is the language for Jews today". All these statements are false and should be recognised as ideological props. Rather than describe the situation, they seek to bring about what they declare to exist. True, Britain's racist immigration policy restricted the entry of the Yiddish speaking East European Jews mostly to the period before 1914, but Yiddish flourished in the next generation.

THE LANGUAGE OF RADICALS

The late 19th and 20th centuries saw a wave of political activity amongst the Jewish immigrants in Britain and a plethora of socialist and anarchist groups were formed. They conducted their agitation in Yiddish as it was the first language of the immigrant Jewish working class. The bitter class struggles of this period may be studied through the Yiddish newspapers. By the 1930s the single largest group among Anglo Jewry

was second generation East European Jews, born in Britain, but in this decade London could still boast four Yiddish newspapers. The resilience of Yiddish has been remarkable, and its resilience lies in its ability to reflect, affirm and give continuity to Jewish life in the diaspora.

Yiddish played a pivotal role in the social and political development of European Jewry and particularly the Jewish working class. The development of modern Jewish culture as expressed in the Yiddish language was intimately bound up with the revolutionary and labour movements.

Nowhere was this more the case than with the Bund — the general union of Jewish labour founded in Vilna in the Russian Empire, in 1897. The Bund played a significant role in the founding of the RSDLP (Russian Social Democratic Labour Party) with whom it later had a very problematic relationship as a result of fundamental differences on the question of national cultural autonomy and its implications for internal party organisation. The Bund not only used Yiddish as the necessary means of communication with the Jewish masses, but also placed great emphasis on the cultural development of the language. The Bund was committed to the fullest expression and development of minority culture under both capitalism and socialism. Hence an identification with the Yiddish language is an identification with that specific period in Jewish history when its socialist subculture and institutions were strongest. Yiddish was fundamental to the Jewish labour movement in East Europe as an affirmation of the vitality of its diaspora existence and cultural pluralism. Thus when the Board of Deputies hurls the epithet "Bundist" at JCARP, which they think is an insult, it is not merely engaging in red-baiting but also seeking to combat a cultural element with threatening ideological overtones.

Effectively the Jewish establishment prescribes a low profile/second class citizen role for Anglo-Jewry and seeks ethnic political mobilisation only on external affairs such as Middle East lobbying which it prioritises high above any issues closer to home. JCARP prioritises the domestic issues which are becoming increasingly sharp with the inexorable drift towards right wing authoritarianism in Britain and the increasing links between the Tory Right and the openly antisemitic fascist groups. JCARP will seek to mobilise Jews in the fight against racism and authoritarianism. It will do so on the basis of celebrating the Jewish anti-racist tradition, and equally drawing on its cultural heritage as a commitment to the vitality of the Jewish community in Britain — an ethnic minority alongside other ethnic minorities in the fight for socialism.

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What's on in Yiddish?



In recent years there has been a marked revival of interest in Yiddish. Many younger people wish to learn the *mame loshn*, while many older people wish to maintain their connection with Yiddish.

In London there are various places where you can learn Yiddish, take part in Yiddish discussions, and enjoy Yiddish culture. However, it is not always easy to find out where such activities take place. We are presenting below a basic guide. It is not exhaustive and we would welcome information to insert in our next guide.

CLASSES

City Literary Institute, Stukeley Street WC2 (242-9872)

Weekly classes on Tuesday Evenings taught by Barry Smerin. Beginners 6-7pm; Conversation (all in Yiddish) 7.15-8.15pm; Intermediate 8.15-9.15pm.

Hackney Adult Education Institute, with JCARP

A weekly beginners class is held at Woodberry Down School, Woodbury Grove N4 (802-5555 eves) on Wednesday evenings, 6.30-8.30pm taught by Frank Pomeranz.

Hendon College of Further Education (202-3811 x234)

Classes are held at the Michael Sobell Centre NW11, taught by Mrs Held.

Beginners: Monday evenings, 7.30-9.30pm; Intermediate: Tuesday evenings, 7.30-9.30pm.

University College London, WC1

A weekly intermediate reading class taught by Barry Smerin, on Tuesdays 1.45pm-3.00pm.

South London Yiddish "Self Help" Circle

Contact Susan Goldstein, Head of Languages and Liberal Studies, Lewisham Adult Education Institute (698-4113). Meets weekly on Wednesday evenings 7.30-9.30pm at the Bungalow Centre, Downham Playing Field, Bromley.

CONVERSATION, DISCUSSION, CULTURAL

Friends of Yiddish, contact Meir Bogdanski (488-3092).

Meets every Saturday, 3.30-5.00pm in Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel, E1.

Di Yiddishe Fraynd, contact Haim Neslen (554-6112).

Meets monthly on Sundays in Coventry Road Shul, Ilford at 3.00pm.

The Mame Loshn Ring, contact Sue Coleman (904-6467).

Meets monthly on Sundays at 3.00pm in the West London Synagogue, 33 Seymour Place, W1.

Yiddish Conversation Society, contact Eve Goodwin (209-1988).

Meets every two Mondays at 2.00pm in 67 Harmony Close, Princes Park Avenue, NW11.

Living Yiddish

Suzanne Lang writes about what learning Yiddish means to her.

A student in a Yiddish class when asked recently why she was learning Yiddish replied, "Vayl ikh bin a Yid" (because I am a Jew). It is five years since I began to learn Yiddish through reading groups and language classes. Non-Jewish friends regard my learning Yiddish as natural. They are aware that Yiddish was for centuries the daily home language of Jews, that there is a rich literature and folklore, and that the traditions and history of Jewish life are embodied in the idioms and expressions of Yiddish. For centuries Yiddish was taken from one country to another, and finally to the new world, by Jews who consciously preserved their cultural heritage.

Many older Jews, active in Leftist movements of the 1920s and '30s, rejected the home language of their immigrant parents and grandparents and responded to the strong pressure of the British education system to become "English" and speak English. At Robert Montefiore School, in the days when all the pupils spoke Yiddish as their mother tongue, they were forbidden to do so at school and caned if they did.

Fortunately I received two educations — one at school in the English Christian traditions and values, and another at home. English was not spoken in my home. My mother and I spoke German

and my father spoke Yiddish, his mother tongue that had survived through his determination to maintain his cultural identity in various countries where he lived before settling in England.

Each year the Jewish festivals rekindle an awareness of the history of our people. All peoples have a past and a future. The past is the cornerstone from which we derive an insight into the present and the inspiration to form the future. The rapid social and technological development of the twentieth century, the commercialisation of mass culture and the pressure on individuals to conform, all militate towards the extinction of Jewish and other folk cultures. The greatest factor in the destruction of Yiddish popular culture was the holocaust. I want to articulate thoughts in the language of the lost generation.

When I recently exhibited pottery, with Yiddish proverbs painted on, at a multi-ethnic festival in Hackney, a Jewish onlooker told me that assimilation was the only way Jews could survive. I feel that Jews without a Jewish culture to express and enjoy cannot be Jews. The latter part of the twentieth century has brought forth an awareness that progress has destroyed the environment and the way

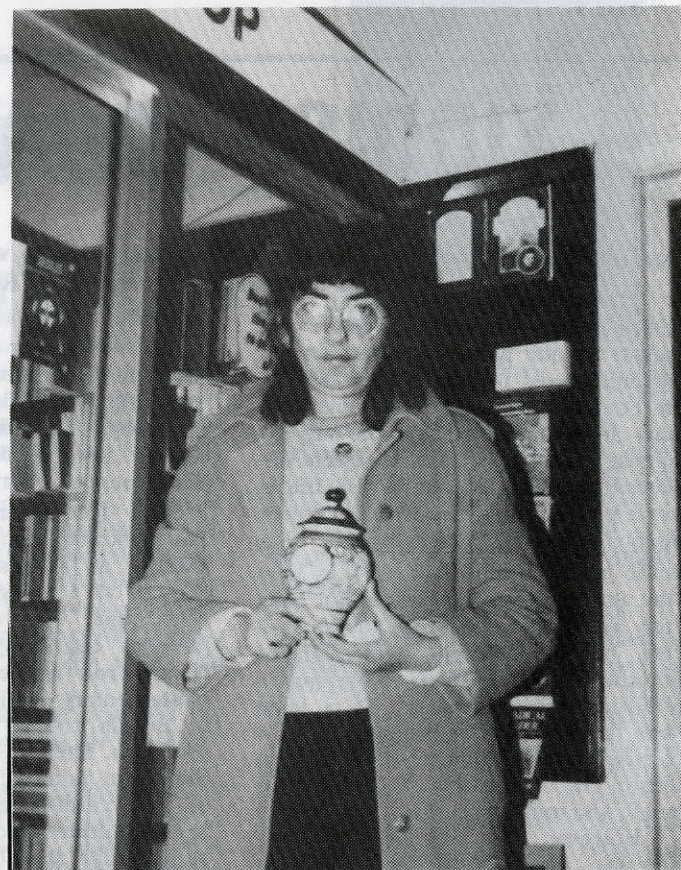


Photo: Julia Bard

Above: Suzanne Lang is a potter. Here she is with some of her work decorated with traditional Yiddish proverbs. Below: Yiddish Students at the City Literary Institute in London.

people live in it. As conservation and restoration go forward with popular support, multi-ethnic education and cultural projects are ubiquitous. Some local authorities

are encouraging ethnic minorities to practice their traditional art forms and learn their mother tongue. The gates have been opened for a renaissance of Yiddish culture. But Jewish cultural identity is still thought of as belonging to a religious faction. Hackney Council job application forms list the category *Orthodox Jew* alongside other classifications. Perhaps Jews themselves who have emphasised their anglicisation are responsible for this. Antisemites have attacked the whole of Jewish culture, not just its religious element. A person I invited to a Yiddish folk concert declined on the grounds that it was bad enough being Jewish, never mind getting involved with Yiddish.

Many Yiddish students today say they are motivated by nostalgia for the words they heard in their childhood. This is not so sentimental as it would appear. Language heard in the cradle is the language that will be spoken

in adulthood. Jews, like all other immigrants, have to learn two cultures — that of the host country and that of their own people. It is this yearning for a Jewish identity that is expressed in the nostalgia for Yiddish.

There are still many pockets of living Yiddish. An elderly native Yiddish speaker recently told me that she felt very strongly the yearning to speak and hear Yiddish; that she felt a deep sense of loss for her *mameloshn* and for this reason was going to attend the *Mameloshn Ring* meeting monthly in London.

The idioms and metaphors of any language are developed through the historical experience of its speakers. The homely expressions of Yiddish offer an insight into Jewish historical experience.

The continuity of this world view is uninterrupted in Yiddish. There is a Yiddish proverb, "Az me zukt, gefint men" (as one seeks one finds). Many people who yearn for a revitalisation of the *mameloshn* are finding classes or groups in which to realise their longing to hear Yiddish spoken as a living language.



Photo: Michael Heiser

CONFRONTING RACISM A ROLE FOR JEWS

For centuries a racist intellectual tradition has tried to justify Europe's oppression of indigenous minorities and exploitation of the Third World. Shalom Charikar, an Indian Jew, looks at the implications of the past and suggests a strategy for the future.

"There is nothing new about racist attacks in Britain. Such attacks have been inflicted on minority communities since they first settled in this country. The massacre of 30 Jews in a riot in London in 1189 following the coronation of Richard 1, was followed by similar attacks in York, Norwich, Lincoln and other places until the small community was finally expelled in 1290." These words come from the Runnymede Trust's recent submission to the GLC Police Committee and this pattern was reproduced in every corner of Europe for 1500 years. Through the centuries such attacks persisted daily and persecution was accepted as "natural".

Over this long period, thinking people have had to justify subjugation and domination by one part of humanity over another. Going back over 2,000 years, Aristotle went through this process and classified the people of North East Europe as being "slaves by nature". Since then, supported by philosophy and backed by theology, members of the dominant group have always insisted that differences between them and their subordinates are natural and permanent. There has always been this necessity to justify oppression. For hundreds of years the Jewish people have always been placed in this subordinate role, but first it was necessary to develop a philosophy — a theology — to justify their subordination.

A MORAL DILEMMA?

Since the start of the colonial period, a new subordinate was required to fulfil a new purpose. Thinking Europeans needed a moral justification for dispossessing Africans, Armenians and Asians and the designation of these groups by scientists as being somehow "subhuman" was sufficient justification for dispossession and slavery. Later, when they could no longer be called "subhuman", this thinking was modified to make it a noble duty: to civilise the native became the "white man's burden".

This new view coincided with the emancipation — without exoneration — of Jews in Western Europe and their participation in all aspects of life in these countries at various socio-economic levels. To some extent the moral justification for the economics of slavery and colonialism was absorbed and accepted

by "emancipated" Jews in Western Europe. It kept recurring, kept alive by constant reminders in the writings of western philosophers and by attacks on Jews. The justification for colonialism, which incidentally ensured maximum profits, was provided by the theology of the time.

The concept of the "Great Chain of Being" showed the human at the apex of creation. From there it was an easy step to prove that "white man was at the apex and the others were somewhere between him and the primate." The belief that Africans were a lower species was the subject of learned discussion for over 100 years and in 1863 a paper was presented to the Anthropological Society in London on "Negroes, Apes and Europeans", claiming that the "Negro can only be humanised by the European." Mark you, the word used is humanise, not civilise. And this was being said in Britain in 1863, long after the abolition of the slave trade, and at a time of civil war in North America, with slavery as one of the issues. Perhaps it was no coincidence that Africa was still to be divided among the European powers. Again the Jews were not quite forgotten and there were attempts to include them in these "scientific" analyses. In France, de Gobineau produced a complicated theory on the decline of civilisation. He is remembered primarily for his analyses of the inequalities of human races and his assertion that "society is great if it preserves the blood of its noblest group." He goes on to say: "The white race originally possessed the monopoly of beauty, strength and intelligence. By its union with other varieties, hybrids were created which were beautiful without strength, strong without intelligence, or if intelligent, were both weak and ugly."

NOT READY FOR THE VOTE

In the second half of the 19th Century deep rooted values were challenged as western democracies rapidly changed from rural to industrial societies. There was a contradiction between widening the franchise at home and denying it to say Algeria or India. In France the prevailing view was that they could so imbue their colonies with French civilisation that they would not want to be

free. In Britain, a minority took the view that Ireland and India could not be denied "what was regarded by the Englishman as his birthright". But few were so altruistic since the pressure of self interest was to keep things as they were overseas, and this could only be justified by the belief either in the permanent inferiority of colonised peoples or in the notion that the subjects were still learning and would one day become ready for freedom. During a period of social turmoil, the personal need to identify with the group coincided with the idea of the "national interest" and since then, racist thinking and writing — nowadays somewhat more subtle — has become commonplace.

It is in such an environment that the Jews of Western Europe were "emancipated" and participated in the socio-economic life of the places where they lived, no doubt receiving some marginal material benefit from their countries' empires. They also participated in the cultural, scientific and philosophical developments of the time. Popular novelists of the period, like Kipling, Haggard and others, expressed the contemporary ethos, that there was a hierarchy of racial excellence in which whites were at the top. Against this historic background, we must examine Jewish responses to racism and racist attacks on Asians and Afro-Caribbeans in this country today, and must consider what can and should be done.

RACISM TODAY

Let us look at a speech made at a political rally not so long ago:

"It often occurs in nature that an animal is fascinated or hypnotised by the danger which threatens it and thus fails either to escape or to defend itself while it still has the power. There is a weird parallel in the fate of nations: whole peoples will watch disaster approach until it engulfs them, apparently unable to stir out of a kind of horrified trance . . . You and I stand at such a time, at such a place. All about me I hear it as you do. In your town, in mine, in Wolverhampton, in Smethwick, in Birmingham, people see . . . what they dread, the transformation . . . of towns, cities, areas that they know, into alien territory."

That was the inimitable Enoch

Powell, Member of Parliament and (then) a Cabinet Minister. He went on: "It is when he looks into the eyes of an Asian, that the Englishman comes face to face with those who would dispute with him the possession of the land."

I have not quoted from the first public speech by Enoch Powell on the subject of Black immigration since it is very hard for a Black person to repeat words that prophesy "rivers of blood" our blood — and then continue with rational, unemotional arguments. But what was the specific Jewish response to that particular speech made in 1968? The *Jewish Chronicle* in its editorial condemned it. Labour MPs, including Jewish Labour MPs, also condemned the speech as one intended to heighten racial tension and provoke acts of violence against Black communities. I recollect its condemnation by Christian Church leaders. I also remember the sudden spurt of violent attacks on Black people that followed. But a specific Jewish response? There was none. And to me and other Black Jews, this silence by the Jewish leadership was audible. For an official Jewish reaction we had to wait a month. The question was raised at a meeting of the Board of Deputies of British Jews (the official communal leadership) — not as part of its agenda, but from the floor. A statement was issued condemning the speech adding that the *lack of restraint on immigration* was an excuse for provocation and racial attacks. This, then was the belated conclusion of the Jewish Establishment after the Immigration Controls of 1962 and 1966.

A JEWISH RESPONSE

The next event I would like to recall is the Ilford by-election of 1978 preceded by Margaret Thatcher's speech on the dangers of being "swamped by an alien culture". Again, one looks for a Jewish response. The *Jewish Chronicle* saw no reason to report or comment on this speech by the then leader of the Opposition. A month later, Sir Keith Joseph addressed a meeting in Ilford. Supporting her speech, he added that Britain was really the place for the English, Scots, Welsh and Ulstermen and a sanctuary for those fleeing persecution. On this basis, he asked the Ilford voters to support Margaret Thatcher. He was criticised by Labour MPs, and his approach was commented upon by the *Jewish Chronicle* and by the Board of Deputies — no doubt to satisfy the non-Tory members of the Board. But the only criticism advanced was that Sir Keith Joseph should not have asked Jews to support a political party *as Jews*. And there the criticism ended. Following some correspondence in the *Jewish Chronicle*, Sir Keith Joseph replied reiterating his support for Margaret Thatcher's swamping speech and adding that it was not a question of colour but of numbers!

Whatever criticism one may have of Keith Joseph's politics, Jews who are Ministers in any government are not there as Jews, but as individuals who represent certain interests and support the policies of that government. But when a Minister or politician writes in a communal journal asking for political support on the basis of spurious fears of being swamped by an "alien culture", then it is legitimate to question the basis of their personal thinking. Can this really be representative of Jewish thinking today? Is it his contention that control over immigration would eradicate all racism? Do Keith Joseph and others believe that the Aliens Act of 1905, which controlled Jewish immigration, resulted in the elimination of anti-semitism in Britain? Perhaps Sir Keith Joseph should read the Runnymede Trust's submission to the GLC Police Committee which reported attacks on Black people in Bristol, Cardiff and Liverpool — riots that continued for days — in 1918. Were these riots due

to fears of being swamped by numbers? Race hate and race violence — against Blacks and against Jews — do not rise or fall according to numbers. They rise and fall according to the extent to which people's prejudices are inflamed and made respectable by politicians and newspapers. Is this what Keith Joseph, addressing fellow Jews — knowingly or otherwise — sought to do?

A pattern seems to emerge. We know that the Jewish Establishment is capable of action and demonstrations when it feels they are called for. There is ample evidence for this in the 1950s, 1960s and again in 1977. Can it be that where the immediate victim is somebody else, the Jewish leadership feels that as Jews they can afford to stand aside and watch fascist attacks on other ethnic minorities? Can it also be that where racist comment and racist provocation comes not from the National Front, but from within the Conservative Party, the Jewish leadership, for personal and political reasons finds itself reluctant to take a stand supporting other ethnic minorities who are being attacked?

What do ordinary Jews — no doubt influenced by the leadership's views — have to say in the columns of the *Jewish Chronicle*? Every six months or so, extreme rightwinger Harold Soref will find some excuse to write to the JC and expound his own brand of thinking, and his views do receive some support from readers. Two such letters were published last August. E. Isaacson from Hendon writes:

"Jews may be divided into three classes: a) by religion but not by race; b) by race but not by religion and c) by race and religion. Categories b) and c) are ethnic minorities. Jews who belong to category a) who are not particularly numerous do not" — in other words they do not belong to the Jewish ethnic

minority. So some Jews are a separate "race" — a very special ethnic minority. And I, and others like me, who anyway "are not particularly numerous" (the numbers game again) do not belong to this group. So according to Isaacson of Hendon and other Jews of his ilk, somewhere on the ladder of "racial excellence" stands the Jewish "racial" ethnic minority — no doubt somewhere near the top of the ladder, presumably. Other Jews — from Karachi, Bombay, Cochín, Persia, Yemen and Morocco — are not of the same "race" so do not belong to the same "ethnic minority". But anyway we are "not particularly numerous" so we do not count at all.

Another letter was from Louis Gordon of London SW3. He writes:

"Like Harold Soref and most Jewish people in this country, I want the Jewish community to remain — officially, legally and socially — where they have always been, namely in the first division of Britain."

So that's where the Jews in Britain have been since the time of the Plantagenets right down to the 1930s! Whatever his idea of the history of the Jewish people in this country, here is an example of the Jew who believes that he has finally "arrived". I am quite sure he would not wish to include Black Jews in his "division", but frankly, that's one division I have no desire to join.

PREJUDICE REVEALED

Finally, let me refer to an incident which occurred after David Rosenberg of the Jewish Cultural and Anti-Racist Project (JCARP) addressed a meeting of the Jewish East End Project in London. He was challenged by a member of the audience on the fact that some weeks earlier he had written a guest article in the *Asian Times* outlining the programme and activities of JCARP. In the discussion which followed, it was said that writing for an Asian magazine was like writing for the National Front. I find this statement disgusting. I detest the view expressed by this Jew — a prominent member of the community who sits on the Defence Committee of the Board of Deputies — that a magazine serving the Asian community is the same as one serving the interests of the National Front. Is this the level of Jewish thinking today? In such "off-the-cuff" remarks, latent prejudices, absorbed and accepted, are revealed.

Let this be the first priority for JCARP, for the Jewish Socialists' Group and for all Jewish organisations opposing racism: to identify, isolate and root out the racism which appears to have been adopted by some elements within the community. Let us, together with like minded Jewish organisations, draw up a Racism Awareness Package directed specifically at us Jews. Can it be that we Jews who have suffered so grievously over the centuries have now learnt to be indifferent to the suffering of others? Can it be that Jewish children taught on the one

Continued on page 24

THE EAST END BATTLES ON

The faces have changed but the story is the same. Forty-nine years after Cable Street, Charlie Goodman is still fighting fascism.

Forty-nine years ago the Jewish working class of the East End of London came out from under the "holding down" by the establishment of the full flow of working class ideals. On 4 October 1936, despite blandishments in the *Jewish Chronicle* — front page, centrefold, "Jews — shut your doors, close your windows, don't be involved" — the Jewish people had had enough of attacks, enough of threats, and decided that the only way that they were going to get anything done was to drive the fascists off the streets physically.

There is a great similarity here between the Asian establishment organisations today who are doing almost the same thing to the Asian people. For a long period of time in the East End the younger people were getting organised. They were fighting back against the fascists. They were organising in trade unions; they were winning support from their gentile working friends to fight against the fascists. The old people kept on saying, "Listen, don't you go, let him go, you stay at home, there are plenty of others who will fight fascism." And the youngsters, as youngsters today are doing, said "Yes — but we've still got to stop them." Gradually the older people began to realise that the young people were right, and there was a need for all, young and old, to unite to stop the fascists. I can well remember one particular incident on the night of 4 October 1936 — there was quite a lot of people walking about with bandaged heads — and one old lady says to me, "Was you in Aldgate?" I didn't want to be a bit of a hero so I said "No". She said, "You wasn't in Aldgate?" I said "no". She said, "Well a fire on you!"

IMPRISONED

At Cable Street I was arrested and served a term of imprisonment. I was visited by a Mr. Prince from the Jewish Discharged Prisoners Aid Society, which was an arm of the Board of Deputies. They called all the Jewish prisoners together and asked "What are you here for?" And one chap said "Well I've been out of work, things have been bad, I couldn't help myself, I went and did a bust". Prince replied, "Oh don't worry, we'll look after you". The next five or six received the same response and then he came to me. "What are you here for?" he asked. "Fighting fascism", I said. "You!" said Prince, "You are the kind of Jew who gives us a bad name. Through you the Jews have to suffer, and it is people like you that are causing all the aggravation to the Jewish people". "I'm very glad you've told me this" I said, "because after I'm released

from prison, I shall be going on a speaking tour of not only the East End of London but other Jewish areas of the country, and I'm sure I can convey the sentiments of the Board of Deputies to them."

Now that day is history, and many Jewish people have left the East End to live in various parts of London. But when two East Enders meet, one of the first things they say to each other is "where were you on October 4th?" This is something that has become a legend.

THE EAST END TODAY

The streets where the racists are attacking, burning and vandalising the Asian people are the same streets where we lived — in St Georges, in Spitalfields — the same shops, except today they are Singh and Ali, when in those days they were Cohen and Levy. It was the same area, with the same struggles of the working class, working in sweatshops and they are being exploited by their own Asian employers. In those days there were attacks, but they weren't as vicious as they are today on the Asian people. Because we were organised, the fascists would only come in on a hit and run basis. An attacker going to a street would see somebody walking along, give them a good hiding and run away, because as soon as we heard of a fascist in the East End, somebody would jump up in one of the 14 cinemas that existed in the borough, and shout "Leave the cinema! All out! Fascist in the East End!". In no time at all, all the young people were out and the fascists were driven away. We had no arson in the way the Asian people are being burnt out in the houses in the East End of London. There were occasions, for instance, when the fascist groups got hold of people, and threw you through a plate glass window. On one particular famous occasion, the *News Chronicle* actually published a picture of two policemen standing in a doorway watching Jewish children being thrown through a plate glass window in Mile End. This was brought up in parliament. Where were the fascists meeting? Mosley always said he never marched through the East End of London; he never spoke in Jewish areas. But on one occasion he spoke outside Philpott Street synagogue, which was one of the biggest and best synagogues in the East End of London and was surrounded by hundreds of police. We never saw a fascist arrested. We saw all the anti-fascists being arrested.

The police reaction is the same today. They are very slow to come, if they come at all. If at the end of a telephone



at the JCARP conference

conversation the person says their name is Ali or Singh or whatever, then it takes a long time before the police arrive to do anything about it. On one occasion I was called to help on an estate where an Asian was being attacked. After a while the police came and threatened to arrest the young daughter of the house, who had phoned for them. They said she was obstructing them in the course of their duty. No attempt was made to head off or arrest the people making this harassment.

So what is the position today as far as we are concerned, as Jews? I feel, very much to my sorrow, that the majority of Jewish people remaining in the East End are taking their stand with the red-necks and with the racists. They are saying the same sort of propaganda as the racists — "the Asians are dirty, they chuck things out of the window, they don't live like us". I have to continually remind them that the same things were said about the Jews. The Jews were "dirty people", the Jews "chucked things out the window", the Jews "lived so many to a room". I was brought up in Camden Town and only went to the East End when I was eleven. My mother couldn't read or write English or Polish, so she used to go down to the East End of London where a particular *landsmen* (someone originating from the same town/village) was the local letter writer. I used to say to my mother, "I don't want to go". I used to cry because as we went down those streets, stuff would come flying out the windows; in the house there were chickens walking about in the room, and they were Jewish people. So the same arguments that the Jewish people are now saying, with the racists or hiding behind the racists are the same things that were levelled against the Jews.

Continued on page 24

SOCIALIST HAGGADAH

1 Shekel - free to slaves and unemployed

"BONDAGE - UP YOURS!" was the rallying cry of thousands of Jews who threw off the chains of slavery, fled Egypt and dealt a massive blow to the Egyptian ruling class and its allies throughout the region. The most evil, parasitic, racist, fascist, anti-working class Pharaoh has been left to pick up the pieces. His brutal regime has crumbled and shock waves and tremors are rippling through dictators and bureaucrats across the Middle East.

For the Jews, it has been hard to contain their delight. At a jubilant feast

they chanted, "Pharaoh's pyramids - out, out, out! Coconut pyramids - in, in, in!" The morning after, wearing their now famous costume of *talesim* and furry hats, hundreds of "Right to Davan" marchers joyfully sang through *shakheris*. One of their articulate leaders, Noah Noodnik (and I do when I see one!) told the story. "I mean, blimey, 'e had to go, didn't he? He tried to stop us davaning, he tried to kill our babies, he beat us and whipped us. But we said, PHARAOH POWER - NO THANKS! On your bike mate.

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JS1

REVOLTING JEWISH WORKERS!

We gave 'im a bloody nose." These sentiments will be echoed by socialists and anti-racists throughout the Biblical world.

So how, with the odds stacked so heavily against them, did the Jews win? They won because they had a revolutionary leadership that would make no compromise with the ruling class or with the gutless and bureaucratic communal leaders. They matched their evil slave drivers blow for blow. Their quiet and unassuming shop steward, known as Moses, coined a phrase that will become a clarion call for militants the world over - "One out - all out". And how well the workers responded.

But why was this victory different from all other victories? Because this heroic struggle of Jewish workers contained a new element, a powerful weapon in the trade union armoury against the bosses that brought the Pharaoh to his knees. Not one, not two, but ten gruesome plagues. Blood, frogs and vermin were just for starters. The bourgeois press talk of "miracles" and "the hand of God" but the days of mysticism and clericalism are numbered. The plagues were the expression of the only true power - the power and muscle of the industrial working class.

Backed up by the rank and file organisation FLAB (Frogs and Locusts Against Bondage) which contains many women, gays, single parent families and other minorities who we don't usually mention until the end of our articles, the Jewish workers smashed their vicious tormentors.

But we leave the last words to Moses, the shop steward and champion of workers rights: "This has been a tremendous victory. Whole masses with no previous experience of political struggles have been radicalised. They talk constantly of strikes and occupations - and when they say occupation they mean pyramids and factories, not accountancy, law or medicine!"

Was Moses tired, and what would he do now?

"Absolutely knackered mate. I've got a splitting headache and my next move is to go to that pharmacist on Mount Sinai and get a couple of tablets."

"*Plagues Against Pharaoh*" badges - 1 shekel each. Bulk orders (a minyan or more) welcome at wholesale prices but don't do us no favours! A "*Plagues Against Pharaoh*" benefit gig will be held at *The Golden Calf on Shabbos*.

IZZY MESHUGGEH (alias David Rosenberg)

Jewish Socialist welcomes further socialist interpretations of Jewish history (or Jewish interpretations of socialist history!).

BUNDISM

In 1897 both the Jewish Socialist Bund and political Zionism came into existence.

How do the two ideologies stand today,

asks B. Meyers

The path leading from 1897 is long. Both the political and social structures of the entire world have undergone radical changes during these years. Even wider is the chasm between Jewish life in 1897 and Jewish life today. Until the Hitler massacres, about 60 per cent of the world's Jewish population had been living in Europe, most of them in Eastern Europe, in a state of poverty and political persecution. Today, the majority of world Jewry live in Western countries under conditions of democracy and comparative well-being. A part - a small minority - live in the State of Israel.

Zionism was, from its inception, primarily a product of antisemitism. According to its fundamental tenets, antisemitism is a peculiar disease which has infected - or can infect - all, or almost all, non-Jews in any country. The mere presence of Jews among Christians is an irritant which generates antisemitism. Therefore, the Zionists say, the only way to solve this problem is for Jews to leave their countries of residence and settle in their own state.

The Bund is based on an opposite concept, namely, that antisemitism is *not* a mysterious and perennial evil. Antisemitism has its causes in the economic, political and psychological conditions of society, and like any other human evil can be cured by changing the conditions which brought it about. The Bund maintains that the Jewish question is one of the general problems of humanity, and can be solved both by changing the conditions of the peoples among whom the Jews live and by cultural autonomy of Jews in the countries where they reside.

Instead of an "exodus" - or an "in-gathering of exiles" proclaimed as a main aim of Israeli Zionism - the Bund advocates greater co-operation with the non-Jewish world, especially with other underprivileged and suffering peoples. Instead of fear and suspicion of non-Jews inculcated by Zionism, the Bund offers faith in humanity and solidarity between people. Instead of *nationalistic* justice, which is often oblivious to the suffering of those outside a particular group, the Bund teaches *international* justice, which combines justified Jewish claims with respect for the rights of other peoples.

AND

ZIONISM

Jewish Socialists of the Bund are convinced that only advancement of democracy and socialism in countries where Jews live as a minority will create conditions for peaceful co-operation between Jews and Gentiles, will erase antisemitism and racism, and further the cultural and national development of *all* peoples.

Contrary to the Zionist tenet that Jews are strangers everywhere, the Bund believes that Jews, although of a different and distinct national origin and identity, are or ought to be equal citizens of their countries, and that they should unite with other citizens in the common struggle for the victory of democracy and socialism.

In its present form, as adapted to Jewish life after its destruction in Eastern Europe and after the establishment of the State of Israel, the Bund's ideology can be briefly stated as follows:

1. Jews are dispersed through the world, and are a distinct nationality though without a common state. In terms of foreseeable trends, they will remain in this situation; as a whole, or in their majority, the Jewish people of today *cannot be remade into a one-state nation*.

2. The present Jewish population of the State of Israel is about 20% of world Jewry, and only an increase of a few more per cent can be taken as possible in the foreseeable future. From this it follows that:

a) The State of Israel does *not* solve the so-called Jewish question, ie, all the problems pertaining to Jews throughout the world.

b) Israel does *not*, and cannot claim the right to, represent the Jews outside of Israel, ie the majority of the Jewish people.

The claim of Israeli leaders to leadership of world Jewry, and their policies of Hebraization of Jewish life and the downgrading of all Jewish communities outside Israel as "places of exile" are fallacious and harmful.

3. The overwhelming majority of the Jewish people live, and in all probability will continue to live, outside Israel; almost half of all Jews live and will

continue to live in the United States. Therefore, Jewish problems must be solved in the countries where Jews live today and will live tomorrow.

4. Assimilation may be an escape for individuals; it is *not* a solution for the Jewish people as a whole with its distinctive national culture and identity. Nor is it desirable from a general human or democratic standpoint. Pluralism, not conformism, is the life-blood of real democracy, and this principle applies to national and cultural life within countries as well.

5. Jewish national problems arising within countries where Jews reside *can* be solved on the basis of freedom and democracy - more securely under democratic socialism - by guaranteeing Jews the rights of freedom and equality. This includes the right to distinctiveness, the right to maintain our own Jewish identity and national culture in accordance with our own will. Within the Jewish community, the Bund strives for a secularized Jewish culture in the Yiddish language.

6. There should be *one* criterion for all Jewish policies. Wherever Jews live - whether as a national minority throughout the world or as a majority in Israel - Jewish policy, certainly Jewish socialist policy, ought to be based on the same principles of freedom, democracy, international justice and comradeship.

Reconciliation of the claims of the Jewish people with the rights of other peoples is the essence of the Bund's approach to Jewish problems, an approach which brings justified Jewish national demands into harmony with the spirit of true democratic socialist internationalism.

This article has been reprinted from Perspectives, a magazine published by the Jewish Labour Bund in the USA in 1963.

COMRADES OR OPPRESSORS?

Women's concerns, like Jewish concerns, are given little priority on the Left. All forms of oppression are different, but we need an integrated strategy to challenge them, says Julia Bard.

There's a great deal of vying for position on the left. Too many groups or individuals claim top place in the hierarchy of oppression or, on the other side of the coin, apologise for "accidents of birth" having put them out of the race. There are also those who recognise no oppression except that of the working class, who perceive only one "them" and one "us" and attack any other struggle as deviation. Others, whose concerns have long been ignored by the left, refuse to have anything to do with these "orthodox" marxists. The result is a frightening picture of fragmentation and sectarianism, like a smashed mirror in which we see ourselves in a sliver of glass surrounded by a distorted image of the rest of the world. At a time when all oppressed groups are under increasing attack from an authoritarian, right wing government, the last thing we need is to lose sight of our allies.

If we are aiming to create a new, non-hierarchical social structure, we need to understand the complex and often contradictory ways in which power is used under the present order. We need to know whose interests lie where and who makes alliances with whom to maintain their own position, even if it's relatively low down the pecking order. To do this we have to recognise who finds themselves in certain positions, why this is, who is oppressing whom and what's in it for them.

LABOUR POWER

For women this means doing battle with men — including socialist men, and even Jewish Socialist men! The socialist and labour movements, dominated as they are by white, middle class males, in this respect, closely reflect the structure of capitalist society. This does not inspire confidence in their ability to change that structure. These men, just like those of the establishment, are still benefitting from and defending the greater power they inherited from feudal patriarchy. The trades unions, for example, have fought tooth and nail since their inception to maintain or create differentials in status, income and power along gender lines. The revolutionary Left, like all orthodoxies, works to maintain the power and authority of those who adhere to the line and to exclude those who don't. In this case, by operating outside the frame of reference of conventional marxist thought,

feminism has been devalued right across the revolutionary left, even by those who pay lip service to it.

There are striking parallels here with the way the left and the labour movement treat ethnic and other oppressed minorities and, indeed, between the left and right political wings. Progressive Jews are familiar with what it means to be placed beyond the pale, both physically and psychologically. Most of the left and all of the right would like us to keep our Jewishness to ourselves and merge in with them in public. And in case we don't understand, they make certain areas of discussion taboo. On the left if you refer to the holocaust, that's "Jewish angst". If you wear a Star of David, you are assumed to be a "Zionist" and therefore a "racist". Alternatively you can only be perceived as a Jew if you are religious and therefore "reactionary".

On the right, you can make it to the top as long as you're more English than the English, but if you do something wrong, quick as a flash you'll be a Jew again. Just as the Labour Party and the Socialist Workers' Party have denied the need for Black sections, almost the entire left has taken an assimilationist position on "The Jewish Question". They have taken a similar "assimilationist" position on women, saying: debate on our terms, within our structures and according to our priorities and we will accept you.

SEX BLIND

Even groups with well thought out analyses and effective strategies for fighting racism are blind to the need

to fight sexism. Anti-racists are well aware, for example, of the dangers of confronting oppression, even to the extent formally allowed by the State. They are familiar with, and horrified by stories of Asians who are themselves arrested when they call the police after a racist attack. They quite rightly protest loudly when it is suggested that incidents like the New Cross Fire were started by the very people who were injured or died. They demand that the police respond to racist violence and they recognise the politics of this demand. They understand clearly that the failure of the police to respond to anti-Black racism is not merely inefficiency, but one of the means by which the State actively perpetuates racism. But what is their reaction to the "negligence" of the police in the Peter Sutcliffe (Yorkshire Ripper) investigation? How have they reacted to the recently publicised information about incest, where doctors, social workers, the police and advice agencies simply refuse to name the crime, even when serious injuries have been done to tiny children? What is their position on rape law which discriminates against women both in theory and practice? What strategies do they have to confront the failure of the police and the courts to defend women against marital violence?

For socialists the role of the State should be just as clear and the parallels are obvious.

WHOSE MORALITY?

Our right wing, authoritarian government bandies about such ideas as "common sense" and "Victorian morality"

It debates the issue of reproductive technology entirely on the basis of the nuclear family while ignoring the fact that the majority of the population lives in entirely different domestic set ups. It indulges in male heroics and generates primitive xenophobia in escapades like the Falklands. Striking miners are starved out, beaten up and called fascists when the real fascists run free, burning down synagogues, putting shit through letter boxes and, with the protection of the State, getting quietly on with their education.

These ideological mechanisms are backed up by economic measures which ensure that all oppressed groups bear the brunt of capitalism's problems. Rugby Council's removal of the "sexuality clause" is a clear example of how unemployment is exploited to attack gay men and lesbians. For women the effects of the recession are far reaching — and deliberately so. The State is currently offloading its responsibilities on to "the family", which actually means unpaid, recognised wives and mothers. Community care actually means unpaid female care and a particularly blatant example of institutionalised sexism is the Invalid Care Allowance, paid to anyone prevented from working because they are caring for long term disabled people *unless they are married women*. And in case women are not being forced back into the home by health cuts, nursery cuts or because they're lesbians, they are being made redundant twice as fast as men.

A COMMON INTEREST

Whatever the discussions in academic circles, biological determinism is what governs most women's lives. Just as racists claim that Black people are genetically inferior to white people, the right wing claims that women's biological capacity to bear children makes them incompetent to do anything else. As with racism, the few who make it are the exceptions that prove the rule: that as a group they are inferior "others" as measured against the "norm".

Women are oppressed by capitalism and men are given (and accept) the job of foreman, just as white, heterosexual able-bodied, middle class... people of both sexes enact a whole range of capitalist oppressions.

Oppressed groups defend themselves — in terms of colour, sex, sexuality, class, ethnicity and so on. They also define the tasks they face. But if there's one lesson Jews should have learnt from the 1930s, it is that no group can confront its oppressors alone. As Jewish Socialists we know that antisemitism cannot be fought in isolation from working class oppression, from anti-Black racism or from sexual oppression. It's time we recognised in practice that we need each other.

HOLOCAUST ANALOGIES

Simplistic and inaccurate use of the word "holocaust" in political rhetoric both diminishes the Jewish experience and undermines the fight against fascism, argues David Rosenberg

GLC leader Ken Livingstone has argued that what Britain has done to Ireland in the last 800 years is worse than the Nazis' holocaust of European Jewry. In a Waterloo street, near Livingstone's office, a large poster of the fascist National Front (NF) proclaims: "Beirut '82 — the REAL holocaust".

The poster contains a fundamental idea to which the NF's energies and resources are increasingly directed — historical revisionism: the denial of the Nazi holocaust. Since the war neo-Nazi groups have themselves acknowledged that the major stumbling block to their progress has been the general, though not necessarily detailed, awareness of the terrible results of European Fascism. The holocaust has therefore been the major educational weapon in the armoury of anti-racists and anti-fascists in this period. The Anti-Nazi League used it to particularly strong effect in the late 1970s, driving a wedge between the NF's leaders and potential supporters by firmly pinning the "Nazi" label to the leadership.

AN ANTI-RACIST WEAPON

But as the generation who experienced the holocaust passes away, unless real efforts are made to thoroughly relate the background, facts and lessons of the holocaust, its utility as an anti-racist weapon will decrease. Indeed, today its strength has already been sapped, but not merely by the passage of time. It is also the result of self inflicted wounds, the prime responsibility for which rests with groups and individuals on the Left and, ironically, also among the Zionists. The beneficiaries are the fascists — a process which socialists must seek to reverse; and here Jewish socialists can make an important contribution.

In recent years, and particularly with the war in Lebanon, the word "holocaust" has become a cliché in describing the destruction wrought by Israeli army and its allies in pursuit of the Israeli government's policy towards the Palestinians. Without in any way diminishing the extent of this destruction or dismissing its ideological basis, when similar actions based upon similar processes occur in other parts of the world, they are described in a host of other terms but no in the language of the holocaust. It is here that the Left's analysis of Israeli actions becomes allied with some very reactionary moralising regarding Jews: it blurs important distinctions and plays into the hands of antisemites. What the Jews suffered in

a European context becomes the terms of reference for what the Israeli/Zionists are doing in a Middle Eastern context. Diaspora Jews are considered responsible for Israel's actions.

It is this notion of collective guilt that informs the Left's constant use of holocaust language in relation to Israel's actions. It is a way of saying to Jews: "Look what happened to you, now look at what you are doing to others". Consequently, the Left often implies that Jews everywhere must not only take responsibility for Israel's actions but that they, above all others, have a special moral duty to condemn Israel's actions. As Jewish socialists who seek to draw a distinction between the needs of diaspora Jewry and the dictates of the currently dominant Zionist ideology, it is especially important for us to affirm that there is no special moral duty of diaspora Jewry to speak out more quickly or more loudly than others. It may be politically useful in order to undermine the Israeli government's diaspora political base but that is a political question not a moral one.

There are those falsely claiming left-wing credentials, who see retaliatory action against diaspora Jews for Israel's actions as legitimate. To blur the distinction between world Jewry and the Israeli government helps provide a theoretical justification for these actions.

A MIDDLE EAST CONTEXT

Ironically, Menachem Begin's interpretation of the holocaust is a mirror image of the Left's. He describes the PLO as "Nazis", compares Arafat to Hitler and believes that compromise with Palestinian demands would precipitate another holocaust. Begin and Sharon also make constant references to the holocaust in an attempt to justify any Israeli military action, however inhuman. They refuse to see the Israel/Palestine conflict in its Middle Eastern context but instead locate it in a historical "Jews v antisemites" context and frequently use holocaust language and imagery. Not only does this produce a completely misleading analysis but the loose use of the word "holocaust" diminishes rather than elevates its significance.

Here we must note a very significant difference of interpretation. The mainstream Zionist movement, from its earliest main protagonists, has held to a metaphysical world view of Jews and antisemites in which the history of Jews is the history of antisemitism — an antisemitism based on irrational

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hatred. Like the conspiratorial antisemite who sees the eternal Jew as a historical constant, so the Zionists see the eternal antisemite. The Zionists view the holocaust as the ultimate expression of this history, but of such magnitude as to be a unique and barely explicable event.

The left however, starts, quite correctly, from a materialist analysis and systematically locates the holocaust within a historical framework. But unwilling to fully face up to very challenging questions about the autonomy of ideology and politics from the economics of the period, many adopt a mechanistic view of the holocaust and see it as differing merely in degree from other historical atrocities and massacres. It is on the basis of this analysis that comments like Livingstone's appear. For socialists two points must be made clear: firstly that such loose use of language diminishes the experience, offending the victims and others; secondly that it is thoroughly reactionary to play off one oppression against another.

The second point raises issues about how useful it is for socialists to argue by analogy. The major strength of socialist theory is that it is both consistent and universal and it demands that socialists act on this consistency. Where principles are concerned, arguments by analogy illustrate this consistency and are an effective educational tool. For example it might be useful to say: "You are against x, y, and z here; why are you not against x, y, and z there?" But when we are dealing with detail, arguments by analogy are more problematic and must be treated with much more care. Often attempts by socialists to draw more detailed analogies of situations to illustrate particular points fail to do justice to either case; the fail to reflect their specific conditions and serve, as with Livingstone's comments, to create a hierarchy of oppression which fosters an inadequate political practice.

It is perfectly consistent with a Marxist analysis to perceive a connection

between social, economic, political and military processes even where the events they relate to may be widely separated. But the labels used to describe these processes are often used not as a tool of Marxist analysis, but in an un-Marxist, subjective, emotive manner. This is particularly true with holocaust analogies which play right into the hands of those who wish to stifle debate about the real issues. The loose and emotive use of the holocaust analogy by the Left regarding the Lebanon invasion gave a perfect opportunity for a close associate of the British Zionist establishment, Conor Cruise O'Brien, to do just this. He managed to successfully pin sinister and antisemitic motives on those speaking out loudly about Israel's actions, while he kept absolutely *shtum* about Jewish protests against the Israeli invasion.

REWRITING HISTORY

The Left's tendency to equate Israeli military actions in Lebanon with the holocaust may therefore be viewed as being partially rooted in a general problem of the use of analogy in its analysis. But this specific case has also built upon previous assertions which arose in the mid '70s about the ideological and practical relationship of Zionism to Nazism. Specifically, there have been assertions that Zionism and Nazism were mutually compatible ideologies; that the Zionist leadership maintained a working relationship with the Nazis and that acting in their own interests against those of the Jewish masses, they collaborated with the Nazis to save Zionists and send them to Palestine. Whilst it is clear that Zionism was not an adequate response to Nazism, and indeed was eschewed by the Jewish masses, and whilst it is true that there were clear instances of the Zionist leadership acting in a self interested way at the expense of other Jews, "collaboration" carries much stronger implications, and two pertinent questions need to be answered: firstly, was the power relationship between the Nazis and the Zionists in the 1930s such that a charge of col-

laboration can be meaningfully applied? Secondly, had the Nazi armies reached Palestine, is there any evidence to suggest that the Jewish population there would have been treated any differently to their sisters and brothers in Europe?

The answer in both cases is no. Indeed, what seems to have occurred is that instances of "collaboration" have been elevated into ideological assertions and history is being crudely rewritten to meet these assertions. One effect is that more questions are asked about the role of Zionism in the 1930s but this is completely overshadowed by a dangerous diminishing of the Nazis responsibility for the holocaust. At its crudest, Zionism and Nazism are described as identical ideological twins and the charge that the Zionists exploit the holocaust to justify Israel's current actions has reached the stage where some socialists, in France and the USSR for example, are questioning the facts and figures rather than the interpretation of the holocaust.

A RESPONSE TO NEO-FASCISM

As Jewish socialists who want to respond in the most appropriate and effective way to antisemitism in the Diaspora, it is vital that we rigorously challenge the inadequacies of the bourgeois and Zionist interpretations of the holocaust while reiterating the facts as fully as possible. There are further dangers ahead for the Left. The fascists, having found an echo for their claim that Zionists exploit the holocaust, now assert that the position of Jews in the West is that of major capitalists; that the "holocaust lie" is used to elicit popular sympathy as a cover for their position as oppressors. This "Left" populist position of neo-fascist ideology must be resolutely opposed by socialists and anti-racists, but that cannot be done by people whose careless and incorrect approach is helping to lay fertile ground for these antisemitic accusations. To diminish or to trivialise the nature and extent of the holocaust of European Jewry is one step on the path to holocaust denial.

STRONG WOMEN

Singer's thinking, epitomised in *Zeitl and Rickel*, is that "old maids, you know, also end up half crazy. But when a woman who has had a man is left alone, it goes to her head." The result, in this Singer story, is a lesbian relationship, which Singer views as the ultimate aberration.

The strong, assertive, independent, or what Singer calls "mannish" women in the body of his work, all come to a bad end and inevitably bring suffering not only on themselves but also on those around them. Elka, the wife of Gimpel the Fool, is a rolling-pin wielder who lies, cheats, and cuckolds her husband: "Her mouth would open as if it were on a hinge and she had a fierce tongue." The tragicomedy of her evil shrewishness lies in what Singer sees as the wrongful reversal of roles: "When you're married the husband's the master", Gimpel reasons plaintively.

The best known of these strong women, "Yentl the Yeshiva Boy", comes off relatively well in comparison to some of the others, but even here Singer hardly shows enthusiasm for the young woman's remarkable intelligence. In recognition of her capacity for and interest in learning, her father quips: "Yentl - you have the soul of a man." "So why was I born a woman?" "Even heaven makes mistakes." Singer, who controls the narrative, seems fully to agree with this explanation. For all the apparent sympathy for Yentl's situation, her inclination to study in preference to mending socks is presented as if it were a kind of failing in her.

The only genuinely positive images of women - Teibele in *Short Friday* or Esther in *The Magician of Lublin* - are those who faithfully carry out their traditional roles and devote their lives entirely to the care of men, no matter what the cost to themselves. Singer's formula seems to read: men serve God; women serve men.

WOMAN AS TEMPTRESS

For Singer, the natural perversity of women lies chiefly in female sexuality, which he seems to regard as a natural "flaw" in women that poses a constant threat to men. They must ever protect themselves against it.

The most persistent of Singer's stereotypes, one that almost subsumes all the others, is woman as temptress. (Of course, in a society that encouraged its men to become scholars rather than providers, women frequently became the economic mainstays of their families, and not the sirens-in-search-of-sex that Singer would have us believe.) In *The Captive*, an elderly Circe-like woman tries to enslave the narrator/writer into faking her dead husband's memoirs: "She took my arm and pressed it to her body. A few times her leg brushed against mine. A sudden lust for that ugly creature seized me." Since Singer does not seem able to see past women's bodies, he presumes that they cannot ever forget their own

sexuality either, no matter how inappropriate the situation would appear to be, nor what their age or occupation. Even when the woman is a poet engaged on a purely intellectual mission, as in *The Colon*, she behaves lasciviously, as if such behaviour were a female reflex to the presence of any male: "Sonya kept talking... At the same time she patted, pinched, and pulled my hand; she even dug the nail of her index finger into it. The calf of her leg she pressed against mine." Her behaviour is described in terms that make the overture repellent; there is even the suggestion of sadism in the detail of nails digging into flesh: the woman's sexuality is an assault.

REVULSION TOWARDS WOMEN

Like so many other male writers, Singer sees the world as essentially male-centred and clearly views women as "other" - separate, subsidiary, apart, alien. He betrays a deep mistrust, revulsion and hostility toward women, especially those who stray in any way from their prescribed roles or cease to organise their lives around men.

Singer portrays women almost entirely as the sum total of their biological functions and in terms of their relationships (or lack of them) with men. He uses physical details of women's bodies as signposts of their personalities. In describing unattractive women - particularly older ones whose physical ageing often seems to discredit them or make them seem absurd - there are always sagging, wrinkled breasts, grotesquely swollen bellies, female odours, and menopausal instability.

Whenever a woman fails to carry out her physiological destiny (remains a virgin too long or cannot conceive) it is presented as the woman's failing for which she can compensate only by showing extreme loyalty and support to her male partner.

WITCHES

In some stories, Singer equates sexuality with the world of demons who lie in wait for their human prey; the witch is a symbol of human depravity. It is useful to compare here the different treatment Singer accords witches of the two sexes; when men are witches, they are more often explicit incarnations of the devil; their evil comes from sources outside themselves. When women are evil, they seem to be depraved in their human essence. In spite of their greater capacity for evil, female witches have less power than male witches, and are all ultimately under the power of Satan himself. So man rules, even in the witch world.

As a witch, woman is given magical powers to heal but also to harm (midwife and abortionist); she is also, of course, accused of sexual aberrations. Cunegonde, in *The Destruction of Kreshov*, is a good example of the witch type - isolated, old and ugly, the object of public scorn and suspicion, she is brutally killed by the angry fiancé of a woman she has ostensibly tried to help.

While Cunegonde, Hodle and other Singer witch figures are based in the *shtetl* and have their origin in traditional folk material, Singer also attributes witch-like characteristics to women in stories with a modern venue. For example, in *Alone*, the Cuban caretaker of a deserted hotel in Miami is described as "a deformed creature... with a hunched back, dishevelled hair... long hairy arms and crooked legs... (who) stared at me intently, as silent as a witch casting a spell". In the flash of a sudden storm, this woman becomes "the witch crouched low like an animal ready to seize its prey".

SINGER'S MALES

Singer's males almost always seem helpless in these situations and are forever entangled with women's sexuality - obsessively, one might even say. The pattern that emerges most often in his stories has the central male figure or narrator caught in a web of his own making, trapped in relationships with several women, all of whom want him. Asa Heshel in *Family Moskat*, Herman Broder in *Enemies*, Yasha in *The Magician of Lublin* and, most recently, Aaron Greidinger in *Shosha* are prime examples.

Singer's men's arousal at women's sexuality and their inability (or unwillingness) to deal with their own feelings leads to hostility to women. Male anger at female sexuality is the theme of *Under the Knife*, one of Singer's most savage stories. Here the protagonist plots revenge against his woman "for being too tough", that is to say, for jilting him. Even in *Shosha*, where the narrator ostensibly loves his childlike wife genuinely, the marriage initiation is a rape.

PORNOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION

In so frequently associating male lust with violence towards women, Singer diverges most strongly from traditional Jewish life and comes closest to the Western pornographic imagination. While he does not go as far as to suggest that deep down all women actually want to be raped, he does seem to believe that women enjoy being victimised, degraded, and overpowered by men. The narrator of *A Quotation from Klopstock* boasts that "A few fiery slaps worked like a charm. After slaps she started to kiss... I knew well how to manage my women." The protagonist of *The Briefcase* provides a good summary of this attitude: "I wronged everybody, but all these women continued to shower me with love." In *Blood*, another of Singer's most brutal stories, Risha, applauding her lover's sexual prowess, uses the language of his trade (slaughtering): "You sure murdered me that time." And in *The Dance*, an abused wife becomes an abused mother after her husband dies: "I made myself a doormat for him. I suffered all his caprices. Even before he asked for something I gave it to him. Once when I handed him his slippers, he took one and smacked me in the face

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BASHEVIS SINGER'S MISOGYNY

Isaac Bashevis Singer has in recent years become one of the most widely read Jewish authors.

But his attitude towards women is deeply oppressive, argues Evelyn Torton Beck.

Isaac Bashevis Singer, who recently won the Nobel Prize for Literature, is the one author by whom thousands of people the world over will measure both Yiddish literature and Jewish culture. Unfortunately, readers who are unfamiliar with Jewish history and culture may assume that Singer's portrayal of pre-war Polish Jewry is an authentic representation of reality. It is, instead, a rather distorted picture of *shtetl* and city life, reflecting fringe elements of that society rather than the norm.

Singer is not interested in the ordinary life of the average Jew. His preoccupation with sex, for example, was hardly characteristic of the hard-working Jews of Eastern Europe, who had to wage a daily struggle for mere survival. His focus is not on the values or realities of Jewish life but on the aberrations of human psychology. Unlike 19th century Jewish writers who, while critical of Jewish life, believed in Jewish values and in the possibility of preserving them, Singer is a pessimistic modernist who be-

lieves all humans are essentially depraved.

While Singer presents men in terms of their individual aberrations, he treats women as a class, making far more frequent use of clichés and stereotypes in depicting them than in depicting men. Singer's vision - combing the traditional Jewish image of women as subservient and inferior with the misogynistic view of woman's nature in the philosophies of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Freud and Weininger - represents a powerful assault on the Jewish woman.

CONFRONTING RACISM A ROLE FOR JEWS

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hand to remember the persecution and degradation suffered by Jews over the centuries, are somehow made to believe that they can, with a clear conscience, ignore similar harassment and intimidation of other ethnic minorities at the hands of the self-same racists?

THE NUMBERS GAME

Secondly, let us consider a broader Jewish initiative. I mentioned earlier the provocation contained in racist comment and speeches are inevitably followed by an increase in racist attacks on Black people, followed by half apologetic condemnations and an explanation of such attacks on the grounds of "numbers". This has now become the accepted course of events — the accepted mores for all political parties and leaders. After violent incidents in Southall, the Conservative MP, Ivor Starbuck, said:

"We have to face with greater clarity the truth that the pressure here of large numbers of people is a recipe for racial conflict going on indefinitely into the future."

On the other side of the house, we have Roy Hattersley, now Deputy Leader of the Labour Party saying:

"... without limitation, integration is impossible..."

Before these politicians, whether Labour or Conservative, make their own brand of excuses, action is required. And this action is not a matter of passing resolutions behind closed doors or writing cleverly phrased letters to the *Jewish Chronicle*, however gratifying such action may be. The action required is out there in the streets where it counts and where Black people are abused and attacked. If Jewish organisations could demonstrate in 1977 in Lewisham against the National Front, what prevents them from standing with us now when we are attacked by right wing Tories? Let us not forget that right wing and fascist elements have now infiltrated the Conservative Party. A report by the Young Conservatives in 1983 revealed the extent of such infiltration directed against Jews and Blacks alike. In the 1980s, racist attitudes and racist comments have become acceptable in some political circles. Can we be sure that following the next speech by Enoch Powell, or any member of the Monday Club, their latent fears and hatred aroused, mobs on the rampage will attack only Black people? Will they not include the traditional European scapegoat — the Jews? For is not antisemitism just one face of racism?

I am glad that the JSG and similar organisations have given the lead in this field — in joining the march against Botha's visit and against the recent National Front march in Brighton. It is time other Jewish organisations awoke to the danger that faces Jews as just another ethnic minority in this country.

RACISM'S POLITICAL PURPOSE

Finally, we should not forget the true role of racism. Racism has a historic function, especially during periods of social unrest. During the Industrial Revolution there was a need to divert attention from the injustices and inequalities at home, to reassure people that what was being done in Asia, America and Africa was not just for profits but was somehow morally justifiable and in accordance with the laws of nature. No doubt it was very comforting to see all those pink blobs in the world atlas, whatever the cost may have been to others. The empire disappeared and slavery was abolished, not through altruism, but because slave labour was no longer productive and international finance and markets could keep the cheap labour which produced raw materials in its place without the use of gunboats. But the legacy of racism, so ingrained in the minds of people in Western Europe, has persisted in spite of political changes of the last four decades. It has been allowed to persist and waits to be exploited again for economic and political gains.

History is ample proof of the rise of hostile attitudes towards minorities, particularly at times of economic crisis and radical change in industrial and social life. In Britain we can discern a pattern of such events. In the 1830s and thereafter, the harassed minority was the Irish. From 1901 it was the Jews. From 1964 it is the West Indians and Asians.

When Enoch Powell first spoke, elevating racism to an acceptable political platform, it was following his failure within the Conservative Party to have his economic and social policies accepted. The adoption of "race" as the prime political platform was a cold, calculated move to rouse latent anxieties and gain political support for economic and social policies.

Prejudice and discrimination, domination and harassment of minorities and weaker sections of the population are products of historical economic and political situations. This is not some demon that emerges in the minds of depraved people because of "numbers", that can be exorcised by social get-togethers, sermons from the pulpit or pompous letters in the *Jewish Chronicle*.

We can only start to eradicate it if we are prepared to change the situation

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Now why are some of our people saying these things? They think maybe that if they keep supporting the racist: against the Asians, they will leave the Jews out of it. That story has been repeated time and time again and it doesn't pay off. In the end when there is no one to turn to, when they've finished with the Asians, and the Irish, there will always be the Jews and they will be on the receiving end again. We say — don't join the racists. A Jewish woman at a meeting said to me, "How can I be a racist? — I'm Jewish". It's so easy to say these things, but the

in which both the majority and the minority find themselves. Today we again face a situation of economic uncertainty and social and industrial unrest. The so-called Welfare State has engendered a complacency and led people to believe that this was indeed the solution to all our problems. The last few years have shattered this illusion. With new technology creating added wealth, has come the revival of debunked philosophies. We are witnessing the disintegration of traditional industries and the break-up of whole communities. Coupled with this the Health and Social Services, that may have helped cope with the problems, are being dismantled. Industries which were intended to serve the community are privatised in worship of a greater god called Profit. We now hear of the possible privatisation of the Law Courts and whispers of similar changes in the penal system. Society is being conditioned to accept that large sections of the population will be permanently unproductive and rely on dole and charity. And this during a period of rising religious fundamentalism, with racism hovering just below the surface of popular and political thinking.

We have also the international scene — the increasing financial indebtedness of the Third World countries, reducing the underprivileged in these societies to permanent poverty. As we see continual hunger and starvation across continents, we know that once again it will have to be made acceptable if we are to maintain the socio-economic status quo in the western world.

A COMMON CAUSE

The industrial unrest and social turmoil we now face must be harnessed to create a society which is prepared to take on and find solutions to the problems facing us. The socio-economic groups which hold and control power will be prepared to use all the means at their disposal to perpetuate a situation of their choice and making. In the crises which will surely follow, another scapegoat will have to be found. As Jews, we have been through all this before.

Are we prepared to face it all over again? This is the problem Jews and other ethnic minorities should be preparing to confront together.

fact still remains, that our role as Jews, as Jewish working class people, is to fight the racists wherever they might be, and when we get our own people echoing the voice of the racists, we've got to be very blunt and ask them the question, "Are you going to support the fascists, or are you a Jew who is prepared to fight against racism?" I believe that things are coming round more. Organisation is taking place where Jewish people are being brought back into the fight against racism, and soon, through this organisation, through the tenants' movement, through the trades unions, Jews will be united with all against racism.

KINDERYORN

קינדעריאָרן

Irene Rosenberg remembers her East End childhood

The alarm went off at 7.10am as usual. How could I have known when I looked out of the window that this day would be so wonderfully different? So sad, and yet so happy?

I had planned to go to the West End to buy a pair of shoes which I badly needed. I decided to take the car to Bethnal Green Station, park it nearby and take the tube to Marble Arch. However, when I got to Bethnal Green it seemed that everyone else had the same idea. So I circled around the streets nearby looking for a place to park when suddenly my heart gave a thump and my stomach tightened. The houses looked hauntingly familiar and the street strangely welcoming. I stopped the car and looked around. I just couldn't believe it. I was outside the house of my childhood.

The lump in my throat became too much to hold back and I burst into a flood of tears, sobbing as if my heart would break. Memories from fifty years ago came flooding back into my head. Faces of loved ones who had gone, floated in front of my eyes and lingered lovingly before me. I could smell the wonderful odours of childhood — my mother's cooking, her lovely soups and stews, *kikhels* made every Thursday for the weekend, the smell of carbolic used for cleaning the house.

I looked around and was astounded at how small the streets were. They had seemed so long and wide all those years ago. On summer days we would take a walk to the Barmy Park near Bethnal Green station and when we were small it seemed miles away.

Somehow I could not bring myself to get out of the car. I just sat looking at "my" house, transfixed, almost wishing I could see the ghosts of my childhood.

My eyes tried to penetrate the windows of the front room. We occupied the first and second floor, comprising a front room adjoining a kitchen-cum-living room. Both rooms led into the hallway, this led out to the back of the house, on to a wide landing with a staircase down to the garden. The toilet was in the hall near the back door. Up two flights of stairs were the bedrooms, two at the front and one overlooking the back yard.

We did not, of course, have a bathroom. When we were very young there was the zinc bath in front of the fire and later on we would walk along to Old Ford Public Baths. There we would buy a ticket and await our turn to go into one of the cubicles. The attendant would run the water and if we needed more hot water we would just call out "More hot in number six please!" There we were, being waited on like nobility, for about threepence, including the towel.

My eyes travelled down the hallway to the garden. I can't remember ever seeing a blade of grass growing, although from time to time flowers from school bloomed there. One time there would be an enormous sunflower, then a geranium, then a fuchsia, proudly pushing their way into my cockney world.

My younger sister and I spent many wonderful hours in the garden. We worked out pathways with stones, divided into sections to make it look pretty, and dug the barren earth to see what mysteries lay beneath the surface. These turned out to be pieces of broken china, cat skulls, worms and coins. We made a wooden hut with old doors and any pieces of wood we could find, and cherished our little house. We stuck cuttings from magazines on the walls and furnished it with our little chairs and table. We lived out our fantasies in a make believe world in our little wooden hut with the help of an old gramophone and records.



My eyes drifted to the house next door to where my beloved friend Frances (Frany) and her brother Eddie lived. We were sworn "blood sisters", and loved and cared for each other. Frany and I saw each other every day of our lives and spent as much time together as possible. With Eddie's help, we made wooden scooters with ball bearing wheels. We fixed small triangular flags on the handlebars and gracefully scooted down the road to Victoria Park, where we spent our summers feeding the animals or fishing for tiddlers.

The last time I saw Frany was when I came to London to stay with my grandparents for a few days just before the bombing started. My father took me to her house but she was out. Her mother made a great fuss of me, but all I wanted was to see Frany. We couldn't wait, so we walked back to Cambridge Heath Road and boarded a bus. As we pulled away, I saw my beloved friend running for all she was worth, but it was too late. I never saw Frany again.

I looked down the road to the corner where the pub still stands, and I could still "see" the crippled man who sat in a wheelchair selling roasted peanuts. He always wore a lot of medals. He must have been wounded in the First World War. My mind travelled to that heavy hearted summer of 1939. We all had to practise wearing our gas masks. They were horrible, evil looking, smelly things and frightened me so much. My brother, although older than I, screamed every time an attempt was made to get him to wear one. My one big worry was what would happen to my twin brother and sister who were only eight months old, since they had no gas masks.

I thought about Bonner Street Junior Girls School where Frany and I went. For some weeks prior to the summer holidays we were shown how to make a kit bag just in case we had to leave London.

On Friday 1st September it was my birthday. I was 11 years old and I skipped down to the sweet shop to treat myself to my favourite pennyworth of chocolate toffee. The placard in enormous letters read WARSAW BOMBED 6AM THIS MORNING. My child's heart began to beat very fast and I rushed back home to find out what this meant.

I remember packing things into that kit bag, and very early the next morning my brother and father, the twins, my younger sister, one older brother and myself walked with our luggage to Cambridge Heath Station.

I don't think I will ever forget that moment. I suddenly became panic stricken at seeing masses and masses of children and parents crying. Some mothers went with their children if they had babies. I was lucky; I had my mother with me.

We waited a long time to get on the train and as we moved away from my dirty, crowded, busy, wonderful, beautiful East End, I think I knew then that no matter where I went, there would always be something calling me back.

I sat in the car for what seemed a very long time. I couldn't bring myself to drive away in case it all disappeared like a mirage.

I've travelled a long way since my childhood and seen many places, but my heart will always be in this street.

Of course I didn't get to the West End that day, and I didn't get my shoes, but I did go home with a pocket full of dreams.

FEAR OF PEACE?

**THE FATEFUL TRIANGLE:
THE UNITED STATES, ISRAEL
& THE PALESTINIANS**
by Noam Chomsky
(Pluto Press, 1983, £6.95)

The whole thing stinks. Anyone who wasn't caught up in it would see that straight away.

What do I mean? I mean Jews and the Israel question. On the one hand you've got the frightened majority, whose emotional stake in Israel is so acute that they panic and hurl abuse at anyone who raises the slightest criticism. Like someone with an electrode permanently embedded in their brain, most of the time they feel an artificial euphoria — but jiggle the electrode a bit and they scream.

Then you've got the frightened minority of Jews like Chomsky, finding Israel just as painful, they react with obsessive criticism. They grimly expose the dirt and attack the frightened majority for their smugness and their hysteria. They pull out the electrode; their brain works again and they can analyse lucidly. But the wound won't heal, and it hurts like hell.

As for dialogue between the two sides, there isn't any — although there's plenty of shouting and name-calling. In the process, the Jewish people is tearing itself apart.

Reading this book is living having salt heaped on the wound. All illusions about Israel are stripped away. Chomsky is careful to include the Israel Labour Party in his scathing critique — he has no time for the bleeding hearts who blame everything on the Likud and long for their beautiful pre-1977 Israel. He looks at the origin of Israel and the series of wars from 1948 on. Naturally he spends most time on the invasion of Lebanon, the bombing of Beirut, and the Sabra-Shatilla massacres. Israeli brutality is contrasted with the pompous rubbish mouthed by supporters of Israel in the West who can't or won't look honestly at what is going on.

How much of this is useful? No doubt, Chomsky is right that as long as Jews in the West — and particularly in the United States — have such a strong emotional stake in Israel, then the prospects for peace and progress in the Middle East are very poor. As long as Israel is the property of the Jewish people worldwide — their hope, their faith and their holiday resort — then God help any Arabs who think they have rights in the land too.

Chomsky's weakness is that he hasn't got a clue what to do about this problem. He sees strong emotions

involved, working against the interests of Jews and Arabs. Jews in the grip of these emotions can't think clearly about Israel, and feel threatened when Israel is threatened. But he doesn't ask obvious questions about these emotions: where do they come from? Are they justified? Are they inevitable, or will they disappear as the circumstances change?

All Chomsky does with these emotions is attack them and attempt to show that Israel is not worthy of them, assuming that they are an unfortunate, inevitable fact of Jewish life. This leaves him helpless when he deals with future prospects in the Middle East. The book ends by looking at a number of possible scenarios and concluding that none lead anywhere except almost complete pessimism.

Chomsky's book, despite its rigour and its accuracy, is unlikely to help in solving the problems which he correctly identifies as being at the core of the Middle-East conflict. The frightened majority of Jews are not going to read it. No one will willingly have their illusions stripped away.

Many Jews seem to need their beautiful Israel. Chomsky's book takes away the beautiful Israel, but doesn't take away the need.

The way out of Chomsky's pessimism is to make a simple assumption: if someone is frightened, there is *always* a good reason. If a group are frightened, then the reason must be sought in the social structures which oppress that group. Anyone who thinks that fears come from nowhere (and uses terms like "Jewish paranoia") is submitting to crude and reactionary idealism.

Chomsky sees Jewish fear as the single biggest obstacle to peace in the Middle East. Assuming Jews have good reason to be scared, we can make progress on Israel only to the extent that we eliminate the causes of this fear.

What are Jews so scared of? Of Gentiles, for a start. Of being picked off while no one does anything to help. Of failure. Of Jewish culture dying. Of always being a tiny, vulnerable minority. Of fascists. Of having to do it all on our own. Of the fear that we see in other Jews. Of being alone at Christmas. Of another holocaust. Of never being fully accepted by the majority. Of always having to justify ourselves. Of always having to justify Israel.

Forty years ago many of these fears had obvious causes. But surely not today. Most Jews are materially well-off and successful. And even if the fears are still present, surely they are trivial compared to what Palestinians have to go through.

If we could weigh things up like

that and everyone agreed on what was most important and went away and did it, it would be easy. But that's not the way it happens. In the real world, as long as Jews are scared of these things, they will cling to Israel and the Palestinians will suffer. Chomsky reminds us in his concluding chapter that Israel can blackmail the United States into continuing its support by threatening to do something crazy, like bombing the Saudi oilfields. As long as Israelis and Jews in the diaspora feel isolated and scared, nothing fundamental will change.

If Chomsky spent less time denouncing the frightened majority of Jews in Israel and the USA, he would also have had time to get some more perspective on the Middle East. You can't produce a socialist analysis of the Middle East just by emphasising the role of US imperialism. The bourgeois nationalists in the area do that all the time.

What is crucial is to make the class struggle central. What form does the class struggle take in the area? Who benefits from the present situation? What are the next steps for the Arab working class and the Israeli working class? How can unity between Jewish and Arab socialists be created? What should socialists in Europe and America be doing to help? Chomsky doesn't even raise these questions, let alone attempt to answer them. Yes, there is a national struggle, separate from the class struggle, but ignoring the class struggle altogether leaves you with little more than liberal moralising. Israelis have no time for that kind of thing, and socialists shouldn't either.

Books like this which shatter myths, expose lies and destroy illusions don't get us any further. The vast majority of Jews won't read it, and most of those who do will not listen to it. If Chomsky is right that Jewish fear is the key to the Middle East conflict, then that's the issue he should be addressing. He should seek out ordinary mainstream Jews, listen to their concerns, and work out ways to convince them that the sources of their fear can be eliminated by the socialist movement; and he'll need to convince the socialist movement that eliminating the sources of Jewish fear is a key priority.

Difficult? Of course it is. It means listening to your parents and relatives and friends instead of arguing with them. It means acting as if you really expect your non-Jewish friends on the Left to care about the things that hurt Jews. It means seeking out Palestinians who are doing similar things among their people and making friends with them, despite the obvious risks. It's *much* harder than writing books denouncing Israel.

But it might work. RAPHAEL SALKIE

The People in the Buildings

Rothschild Buildings: Life in an East End Tenement Block 1887-1920 by Jerry White (Routledge & Kegan Paul, £6.95).

History is mostly written from the perspective of the ruler and the ruling class. This perspective (of the palace/pulpit/parliament/politbureau/pentagon/production-line capitalist alike) is often warped. While they do history's doing, the rest of us are just done. There is, though, a growing tradition of peoples' history which looks at things from *our* viewpoint.

In 1971, Jerry White wandered into the courtyard of the then still existent Rothschild Buildings in London's East End, and was shocked by the "tenements, so oppressive, so starkly repulsive, so much without one redeeming feature". He became obsessed by them, such that he decided to find out why they were built, for whom, and what it was *actually* like to live in them. The result is this brilliant and evocative addition to people's history.

Built on the tide of double motives which characterised 19th century "philanthropy", its first inhabitants were overwhelmingly Jewish, mostly refugees from pogroms in Tsarist Eastern Europe. Combining painstaking research with the extensive oral testimonies of 22 interviewees, and writing with great clarity and flair for the kind of detail which brings the text to life, White, a non-Jew, lovingly and sympathetically describes the lives of the people within and their contradictory relationship with the sometimes hostile world outside.

The life of the Jewish East End is

captured in all its variety and colour. Among the residents of Rothschild Buildings, a sense of community developed built on a common class and ethnic identity. Co-operative and self-supporting in times of extreme hardship, it put to shame the duplicity and hypocrisy of middle class philanthropists who gave piecemeal with one hand, and took back many times over with the other. Wherever appreciable class differences existed, however, this sense of community was severely strained: "The struggle for material security was turned into a struggle of ruthless competition between individuals in which many were willing to force long hours and starvation wages on their fellow immigrants." This crude exploitation, and the many instances of industrial unrest to which it inevitably gave rise, is explored in detail.

In the final chapter, we learn of the proud tradition of Jewish political radicalism, one aspect of which was the Jewish Workers' Circle, in which communists, socialists, left Zionists, and anarchists combined in working class struggle and solidarity, and to spread progressive ideas. This is a tradition with roots extending back to the Bund of which the present Jewish establishment seems to be suffering amnesia.

Perhaps the most important lesson of peoples' history is that, time and again, "ordinary" folk have responded to extremes of hardship with courage and resourcefulness, and have emerged with their dignity intact. Is it too much to hope that these qualities will one day set us free from all oppressors?

MIKE GERBER

THE JEWISH WORKERS' BUND

by Clive Gilbert

PUBLICATION DATE:

APRIL 1985

Price 75p (inc p&p)

Available from:

JEWISH SOCIALIST PUBLICATIONS

BM 3725 WC1N 3XX

FACING UP TO ANTISEMITISM: How Jews in Britain countered the threats of the 1930s

by David Rosenberg

Publication date:

March 26th
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Available from JCARP

Southbank House
Black Prince Road
London SE1 7SJ

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with it. *It was my fault. Not his.*" In causing the victim to blame herself, Singer is not only creating a distorted image of the Jewish woman as emotional cripple. He is also granting licence to her oppressor.

LITERATURE AND LIFE

"We often drew (our) situations from your stories in the Yiddish papers. I wonder if you realise how much literature influences life." As this quote from one of Singer's characters shows, the author is well aware that literature and life are mutually interdependent. For this reason, the images in a fictional world can never be dismissed simply as harmless creatures of the imagination. Unchallenged stereotypes help to keep groups in inferior positions, be they Jews in a gentile society or women in a patriarchy. But while American Jews have long recognised the power of art, and have unhesitatingly spoken out against novels and films that perpetuate derogatory images of Jews, they have remained disturbingly complacent when faced with similarly damaging stereotypes about women.

Singer seems to be responding favourably to the feminist challenge, at least on the level of official pronouncement. At a public lecture in New York City recently, he went so far as to say that Judaism had made a "historical mistake" in not teaching women Torah, that the denial of women's rights had contributed to assimilation, that he welcomed giving Jewish women full religious rights in the synagogue (including aliyot and ordination), and that a reversal of this would be "wonderful for religion and justice."

As encouraging as such remarks may be, they nonetheless stand in stark contrast to Singer's most recent fictional writings, which continue to present the male/female dichotomy in unchanged sexist terms. While it is possible to explain this gap between the written and the spoken word as the result of the time lag between the two media, it seems more likely that this discrepancy is exactly what it appears to be — an unresolved contradiction.

Acknowledging that women have been deprived of their rights within Judaism is an essential step toward the creation of a changed consciousness. But it is only a beginning. For Singer to be able to portray women as full human beings, as subjects seen in relation to themselves and each other rather than as appendages or complements to men, would require a deeper revision and a determination to shed years of acculturation. We can only hope that in time, Singer will influence Singer, and that his theory and his practice will become more fully integrated.

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WHERE WE STAND

Socialism has been central to the modern Jewish experience. The struggle for our rights as Jews has been closely allied with the fight of oppressed humanity. Collectively and individually, Jewish women and men have contributed enormously to working class struggles and progressive movements.

In Britain in 1985 our Jewish establishment actively oppose progressive causes; many Jews have enjoyed considerable social and economic mobility; and the general image held of the Jewish community, apparently confirmed by its institutions, is one of relative comfort and security.

But there is an economic and political power structure in the community and this picture is drawn in the image of its more affluent and powerful elements. The Jewish community is diverse, as are the social positions and interests of its component parts.

In Britain today, with mass unemployment and economic stagnation, an increasingly authoritarian political atmosphere in which racist and chauvinist ideas have gained "respectability", we view the interests of most Jews as linked with those of other threatened minorities and the broader labour movement. Our common interest lies in the socialist transformation of society.

- * We stand for the rights of Jews, as Jews, in a socialist future.
- * We fight for a socialist movement, embracing the cultural autonomy of minorities, as essential to the achievement of socialism.
- * We draw on our immigrant experience and anti-racist history in order to challenge antisemitism, racism, sexism and fascism today. We support the rights of, and mobilize solidarity with, all oppressed groups.
- * We recognise the equal validity and integrity of all Jewish communities, and reject the ideology, currently dominating world Jewry, which subordinates the needs and interests of Diaspora Jews to those of the Israeli state.
- * We support a socialist solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict based on recognition of national rights and self determination, including statehood, of the Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab peoples.

We believe that without a revived progressive political movement within the Jewish community in Britain, its present problems of individual identity, cultural stagnation and organisational apathy will grow worse. Without a transformation of the present economic and political structure of society, a widespread resurgence of antisemitism is to be expected. And unless the socialist movement abandons assimilationist tendencies and recognises the important contribution that different groups have to make in their own way, it cannot achieve real unity or the emancipation and equality to which it has constantly aspired.

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