

JEWISH SOCIALIST

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SHOULD THE STATE SUPPORT SEPARATE SCHOOLS?



AIDS—A Jewish Response **Emma Goldman Staged**

Antisemitism in Ancient Rome

Jewish Feminist Conference

Soviet Theatre

EDITORIAL

Bigotry comes in many forms and from many directions particularly in today's political atmosphere, when crass self-seeking, enacted at everyone else's expense, passes for political philosophy. It might make life easier for socialists if anti-gay and lesbian rhetoric, along with racism, antisemitism and other forms of dogmatism, intolerance and oppression came, predictably, from a white, anglo-saxon, moral Right. But the reality is rather more intellectually and politically taxing. In Haringey, groups have emerged in the Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities which are vitriolically opposed to lesbian and gay activities, both inside and outside their own ethnic groups. So it took great courage, as well as a clear political understanding of the implications of such communal divisions, for so many people to turn up for the demonstration against bigotry and racism, organised by Haringey Black Action last May (page 3).

At a time when people seem to crave the comfort of simplistic solutions to insoluble problems, a disease like AIDS seems heaven-sent for reactionaries to use as a device to dehumanise and marginalise once more, people who were at last beginning to make headway in their demands of full rights to a place in the mainstream of society and for their specific

needs to be recognised. Anyone with the scantiest knowledge of 20th century history might have expected Jews — particularly those who put pen to paper and use long words to air their opinions in the columns of newspapers — to have understood the implications of attacking and distancing yourself from groups with which you have shared a common fate. But as Mike Lee and Rabbi Tony Bayfield describe (pages 10 and 11), the debate about AIDS in the Jewish community has at best failed to address the real issues and has at times been so threatening as to be almost indistinguishable from Nazi propaganda.

This poses a challenge to all of us on the left of the community. It is not enough for us to write letters to the press or even march on demonstrations. People are dying and not only are their needs and those of their families, partners and friends not being met, but their deaths and suffering are being used as a threat and defined as a punishment for their non-conformism. We are tacitly accepting divisions which serve the interests of the Right and threaten a broad range of groups if we fail to take creative political action against this growing assumption that some people are sub-human, unworthy of our concern and the recipients of some kind of divine retribution.

CONTENTS

News:

- Marching together; Matzos for Mandela; Jews choose; The murderers among us; Students still under siege; Non-Zionists of the world unite; Ben Linder remembered 2

Features:

- Sanctified hypocrisy by James Baaden 7
- A class of their own by Michael Heiser and David Rosenberg 8
- Homophobia in the Jewish community by Mike Lee 10
- AIDS — a Jewish response by Rabbi Tony Bayfield 11
- Class struggle against deportation by Adrienne Wallman 12
- Selective silence by Louis Marton 13
- Friends, Romans and antisemites by Michael Rosen 14

- New outlooks for Jewish feminists by Julia Bard, Ruth Lukom, Marian Shapiro, Adrienne Wallman and Diana Neslen 16
- Back in the USSR by Stephen Shenfield 19
- Letters 20
- Emma takes the stage by Carole Charnow 22
- A prophet of our time by Ralph Levinson 24

Reviews:

- Inside the Promised Land by Jeanette Copperman and Judith Yellin. . . 26
- Magnolia Street by Adrienne Wallman 27
- The Jewish Film Festival by Rosalind Haber and Michael Heiser 28
- It's the Same Old Story by Charlie Pottins 30
- Chicken Soup with Barley by Ruth Lukom 31

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Marching Together

The Jewish Socialists' Group took part in a defiant, 3,000-strong march through Haringey, North London, on 2 May. The march against racism and anti-gay, anti-lesbian bigotry, and particularly in defence of black gays and lesbians under attack both outside and within their own communities, was jointly called by Haringey Black Action (HBA) and the Positive Images Campaign.

According to HBA: "A national backlash against lesbians and gays and against black people is gaining strength. In Haringey, groups such as the Parent's Rights Group, Haringey Parents' Association, the National Front, the New Patriotic Movement, the Tories, the Liberals, various religious fundamentalists, the Union of Democratic Mineworkers and many other bigots have launched an attack on lesbians and gay men.

Some Asian and Afro-Caribbean organisations have aligned themselves with right-wing forces by attacking lesbians and gay men within their own communities.



Photo: Marian Shapiro

These black organisations are using the issue of homosexuality to create ignorance, fear and division in the black community. They want to win support for themselves, not by improving the lives of black people but by stirring up bigotry and preaching hatred. Instead of coming up with real ways to fight racism, they want to create confusion. They want to exercise control and pretend to be our 'leaders'.

Other groups are using black culture to hide their hatred of lesbians and gays. They say that homosexuality is a 'white disease' or is 'genocide of the black race' and that real black homosexuals don't exist. In reality, they don't want homosexuals to exist or to have basic rights.

For years, so-called community leaders have claimed to speak for us. But they don't. They only speak for themselves and their interests. Don't let community leaders speak for you. Homosexuality is *not* a "white disease". Black lesbians and gays have always existed in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Nor is homosexuality a disease. We are proud to be lesbian or gay.

Homosexuality is *not* genocide. Black people are really being murdered by white racists in Azania (southern Africa). Black people are really being murdered by racists and fascists in Britain. To say that homosexuality is genocide is to insult brothers and sisters fighting real genocide and fighting for liberation."

Not surprisingly, the same black nationalists promoting



Photo: Marian Shapiro

the antisemitic views of Louis Farrakhan have added their voices to the attacks on black gays and lesbians.

The implications of the backlash for the Jewish community were brought home in the leaflet distributed by the JSG on the demonstration: "The Jewish Socialists' Group fully supports this demonstration called by Haringey Black Action and the Positive Images Campaign. We condemn attacks on lesbians and gays within black communities and in society as a whole, and affirm our solidarity with all oppressed groups.

As Jews we are acutely aware of the historical links between antisemitism and persecution of gays and lesbians and our terrible shared fate under Nazism. We know how far a society that labels one minority as inferior and expendable can go — and how it will attack other minorities too. When a Tory councillor spoke recently of 'gassing homosexuals', this had a chilling resonance for all Jews.

Today the assault on lesbians and gays goes hand in hand with attacks by racists and fascists on ethnic minorities and anti-racists, on women's equality and on socialism, and it comes with a rising tide of antisemitism

which includes physical attacks on Jewish people and property and overt expression of antisemitic ideas. There are some differences in the way each group is attacked but there are no hierarchies: *We are all targets.*

It may be tempting for each group to focus solely on its particular issue but we must recognise the sweeping nature of the renewed right wing ideology that threatens us all. The racists and fascists have not narrowed their vision; *we must not narrow ours.* We must link together and strengthen our specific struggles against the backlash without isolating any minority or submerging its oppression.

And we must also take on our own "enemy within" Like other communities, the Jewish community has certain religious and lay spokespersons who are exploiting the AIDS tragedy to bolster homophobia and to attack gays and lesbians within and outside the Jewish community. We condemn and struggle against the reactionaries and chauvinists within our own community and we unite with all who stand against racism, fascism and bigotry. *Defend gays and lesbians! Isolate the bigots, the racists and the fascists.*

Matzos for Mandela

On the evening of Thursday 16 April, the fourth night of *Pesach*, over 150 people gathered outside the South African embassy in London. They had come together to celebrate a *seder* organised by Jews Against Apartheid, in solidarity with the People of Southern Africa in their struggle for freedom.

Jews from all sections of the community participated in the ceremony together with non-Jews. The specially adapted *haggadah* drew parallels between the liberation of the Jews from Egypt and the liberation struggle currently taking place in South

Africa and Namibia. Using cups of wine were dedicated to working for a just society in South Africa; those killed by Apartheid; the children who will form the post-apartheid society; and those imprisoned under the regime. The service included the traditional symbolic foods (served from trays as the police had forbidden the organisers to use a table): *maror* (horseradish) the bitter herbs of slavery; and *charoseth* (apples nuts and wine symbolising the mortar used by the slaves in Egypt) represented the virtual slavery of the Southern African people; *matzo* (the unleavened bread



Photo: Marian Shapiro

dom be won. The struggle is my life." For further information about Jews Against Apartheid, please write to BM JAA, London WC1N 3XX.

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The Murderers Among Us

In the wake of the trials of Barbie in France and Demanjiuk in Israel, the unearthing of Waldheim's past and the furore over Reagan at Bitburg, the issue of Nazi war criminals has come to the fore in Britain. The internationally renowned Wiesenthal Centre, which devotes its work to bringing Nazis to justice, submitted a list of 17 names to the Home Office of suspected Nazi war criminals it believes are currently living comfortably in Britain.

Philip Rubinstein, Secretary of the All Party Parliamentary War Crimes Group, recently addressed a London Branch Jewish Socialists' Group meeting giving details of these suspects and explaining the historical background of their involvement in war crimes and how they subsequently found refuge in the West.

The suspected criminals are drawn from the regions of Eastern Europe that fell under Nazi occupation, such

as the Ukraine, where large numbers of the indigenous population gave active and passive support to their Nazi occupiers as they hunted down the Jews. They helped in the administrative tasks and in the police units and militias.

After the Nazis' defeat many collaborators, fearing for their future under communist rule, claimed refugee status in the West. America viewed them as desirable immigrants and its resettlement scheme sought agricultural workers in particular. Its proclaimed screening process for war criminals was worked inefficiently, often by officials given just two days training. At the same time there was specific recruitment of a number of Nazi scientists and intelligence officers to carry out anti-Soviet work.

In 1948 Britain issued a decree putting a stop to the prosecution of war-time collaborators. The late 1940s also saw the West actively

participating in the reconstruction of (West) Germany where a number of ex-Nazis were reinstated in leading positions in different institutions.

Philip Rubinstein explained that with the generation of Nazis and Holocaust survivors dying out, and with the disturbing proliferation of historical revisionism, especially in West Germany, there were now frenetic attempts to keep alive the memory of the Holocaust and its lessons for succeeding generations.

The Jewish Socialists' Group has added its voice to those calling for a thorough investigation of suspected Nazi war criminals in Britain, to bring them to justice. The JSG has further demanded a public inquiry as to how suspected Nazi war criminals came to Britain, what they have been doing here (one was awarded an OBE by Her Majesty!), and why they have not been investigated before; and has called on the Government to make public its files on Klaus Barbie and others under similar suspicion.

The Tory press seized on the sensationalism of the



Photo: Marian Shapiro

Nazi issue for a couple of days before devoting much more space to deriding "Nazi-hunters". "Nazi Hunting... is a new and distasteful blood sport", claimed the *Daily Telegraph* — probably as much a defence of "tasteful" blood sports as an attack on anti-fascists!

More recently the Home Office has received a list of 34 further suspects living in Britain. It is up to the anti-fascist movement as a whole to see that Nazi war criminals are brought to justice and to use this opportunity to educate a new generation about the nature of fascism and the need to fight it.

Jews Choose

As England (but not Scotland or Wales) voted for five more years of the same on 11 June, there doesn't seem much cheer or comfort for a socialist, Jewish or otherwise. But here is a round-up of a

few election happenings and anecdotes of Jewish socialist interest.

The Board of Deputies sent a questionnaire to candidates standing. At least in the case of the Labour candidate

for Brent East, one Kenneth Robert Livingstone, this was followed up by a meeting with three "representatives" of the Jewish community locally, including Rabbi Rabinowicz, the minister of Cricklewood synagogue. According to Livingstone, he told them what they wanted to hear. Since it was Rabinowicz who, a few years back, fulminated from the pulpit that no Jew should vote for Livingstone were he to be selected as a candidate, *Jewish Socialist* can only speculate on just what Livingstone told him.

In Hackney North, Yiddish was used as one of a number of minority languages in the election literature of the Labour candidate, Diane Abbott. It explained that as a Black person, she would be sympathetic to the needs of

Black and other ethnic minorities.

As for Jewish MPs elected; a welcome back in particular to Harry Cohen in Leyton and a welcome for the first time to Mildred Gordon in Bow and Poplar. She gamely battled through a minefield of stereotypes such as "trotskyist" (the gutter press) and "everyone's favourite Jewish aunt" (the *Jewish Chronicle*) to win.

Unfortunately there were near misses for Anna Tapsell in Streatham and Barbara Roche in Hornsey and Wood Green. Reliable sources inform *Jewish Socialist* that the latter had a stormy session with the executive of Poale Zion, which prompted her to remark that they were all on the same side and there was an election to win...

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Students Still Under Siege

To mark the 20th anniversary of the 1967 war which brought about the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, three Palestinian women toured Britain addressing various groups on the Palestinian experience of living under Israeli military occupation.

One of the three, Carmella Armanious, a lecturer at Bir Zeit university, told a Jewish Socialists' Group meeting in London about the legal, administrative, official and semi-official practices through

which the occupation is maintained, and described its effect on those on the receiving end.

She spoke particularly of the oppressive conditions under which the Bir Zeit students carry out their studies. Books are frequently banned; there is constant interference from the authorities; and the university is often closed by order for long periods.

Despite official constraints on political activity, Bir Zeit continues to be a major focus for resistance to the occu-

pation. On 15 April, following a wave of arrests of Palestinian political activists in the West Bank, 500 Bir Zeit students held a peaceful demonstration. Israeli troops dispersed the students, at first with tear gas and rubber bullets, and seconds later with live ammunition. Mousa Hanafi, a third year history student was killed by soldiers' fire. And collective punishment has been meted out to the students as the university has been ordered to close for four months.



Photo: Marian Shapiro

Non-Zionists of the World Unite

The sixth annual international secretariat meeting of the International Jewish Peace Union (IJPU), held in Paris on 8-10 May, brought together an impressive range of Jewish groups working toward Israeli-Palestinian peace. As well as the IJPU/Israel & Palestine Journal Paris staff, there were representatives from the Jewish Socialists Group (UK), Middle-East Peace groups from Denmark and Sweden, American chapters of the IJPU (New York, Berkeley and Seattle), representatives and observers from Oriental Jewish peace groups in Israel — YATED, East for Peace,

and from the World Organisation of Jews from Islamic Countries. There were also representatives and observers from Shasi — the Israeli Left Party, and from the Progressive list for Peace (PLP).

Maxim Ghilan, editor of *Israel & Palestine*, gave a detailed report-back on the recent Palestine National Council "unity conference" in which he noted optimistically how the door had been left open for further dialogue with the Israeli peace camp. This optimism was confirmed at the end of the IJPU gathering when non-Israeli participants met two PLO represen-

tatives who stressed the PLO's willingness to work with Israeli and Jewish peace groups. (Israel's law banning direct Israeli/PLO contacts prevented wider participation in this meeting).

On a less optimistic note, the IJPU meeting received reports of schisms within the Israeli peace movement — between Jewish and Arab sections of the PLP and between the PLP and Rakah (Israeli Communist Party). But the most profound impact on the IJPU meeting came from the Oriental Jewish Peace groups who outlined the failure of Ashkenazi Left and

"traditional" peace movement to address the urgent issues of Oriental Jews.

The IJPU urged that the schisms be mended and that all peace oriented groups co-operate and direct all energies against the forces of oppression and war. It reaffirmed its peace policy of a Palestinian state alongside Israel negotiated with the PLO as the sole legitimate representatives of the Palestinians. It further urged broad Jewish support for an international conference on the Middle-East, including all parties to the conflict, under the auspices of the UN.

Ben Linder Remembered

In the aftermath of the assassination by Contras of Ben Linder, a US engineer, New Jewish Agenda plans to raise a Jewish brigade to work in Nicaragua, to be called the Ben Linder Brigade.

At a rally in New York, Nicaragua's deputy UN am-

bassador Julius Icaza denounced US policy, but said, "We know there are many Ben Linders in this country." Rabbi Balfour Brickner of the Stephen Wise free synagogue attacked Reagan's backing for the Contras and said that Ben Linder "was the free-

dom fighter, not Reagan's Contras".

Linder, from Portland, Oregon, had been helping on a hydro-electric project to bring badly needed electricity to villages in Northern Nicaragua. The Contras attacked with grenades, then shot him

in the head at point-blank range as he lay wounded.

In Portland, 1,500 people attended a protest meeting as soon as the news came, and the city council called a week of mourning. Benjamin's mother, Elisabeth, told reporters, "My tax dollars paid for the bullets that killed my son."

SANCTIFIED HYPOCRISY

James Baaden looks at the significance of the beatification of Edith Stein a Jewish convert to Catholicism, who died in Auschwitz.

On 1 May this year the ranks of those whom Roman Catholics may venerate as Blessed were increased by one. Pope John Paul II beatified an illustrious German Jewish philosopher, transforming her from Edith Stein, as she is generally known, into "the Blessed Teresa Benedicta of the Cross". Born in 1891 in the then German city of Breslau (present-day Wroclaw in Poland), Edith Stein was a woman of remarkable achievements. Earning her doctorate in 1916, she was one of the first generation of German women to study at a university in her own country and a committed campaigner for women's voting rights. She became a prominent member of the phenomenological movement, the philosophical school which developed around her teacher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and in the years up until the early 1920s published a number of highly acclaimed learned treatises.

Born into a moderately observant Jewish family, she had abandoned the practice of Judaism as a girl, and in 1921, following a period of intense emotional and spiritual upheaval, was baptised as a Roman Catholic. In the years immediately afterwards, she withdrew from the world in a spirit of ascetic self-effacement, though she re-emerged into the intellectual limelight in the late 1920s and early 1930s. By this stage, she was again lecturing widely and publishing, but the establishment of the Third Reich in 1933 brought her career to a screeching halt. By Hitler's standards she was a "non-Aryan"; that she had been a devout Catholic for over a decade was irrelevant. She thereupon entered a nunnery of the Carmelite order, taking the name Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, and in 1938 was transferred to another Carmelite community across the border in the Netherlands. The respite from Nazism was only brief. Holland was occupied by the Germans in 1940 and in 1942, as the destruction of Dutch Jewry got underway, she was deported to Auschwitz, where she died in the gas chambers within a few hours of her arrival.

Demands that she be beatified (ceremonially proclaimed "Blessed" by the

Vatican — the step which normally precedes canonisation, the formal declaration of sainthood) were first heard in the Catholic world 30 years ago. In 1962 the Church authorities formally opened the process of investigation required to establish an individual's "eligibility" for sainthood. Nothing much was heard until the rather sudden announcement late last year that the Pope would beatify Edith Stein in Germany in May 1987. The enquiry process had come to a positive conclusion; Edith Stein was to be pronounced a *beata* (Blessed One) on the grounds of her death as a "martyr for the faith".

At this point, I became involved, taking an interest both as her biographer and as a Jew. In a sense, the Roman Catholic Church is welcome to beatify and canonise whom it pleases, but by raising the issue of Edith Stein's "martyrdom", the Church was referring to an event in Jewish history, the Holocaust. She was killed, in common with the other 6 million Jewish victims of the Holocaust, because she was a Jew. It is therefore both dishonest and wrong to claim her as a Christian martyr — one who has suffered death for his or her Christian beliefs. I also wondered what the Church was trying to say to Jews and other non-Christians by selecting for such a prominent honour one who is perceived as having abandoned Judaism and "converted" to Christianity?

I put these views in a letter to the Vatican, and rather startlingly received a quite explicit and sharply-worded answer from the official in charge of her case, one Father Ambrosius Eszer, a German priest of the Dominican order. He was most annoyed with "uneasy" Jews who "only now" were attempting to "interfere" in Catholic affairs, and stated that Edith Stein had "given her life for the conversion of the Jews to the Catholic Church." He largely ignored the specific historical data I had cited and certainly struck me as not all that well-informed about Edith Stein. In the months immediately afterwards I published articles in the *Jewish Chronicle* and the Catholic weekly *The Tablet*, setting forth my arguments

and Fr Eszer's response. A controversy began to unfold. The World Jewish Congress made representations, progressive Catholic theologians in Germany objected to the Church's attempt to "beatify itself" by glossing over Catholic complicity in the Holocaust. In Israel, Shulamith Aloni, the Citizens' Rights Party leader, expressed disgust at the Pope's intentions. Meanwhile, the Vatican's own Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews attempted a damage-limitation exercise by asking me to suggest how the beatification might be presented with a view to causing the least possible offence to Jews. Coming up with a few such proposals was not hard; yet the fact remained that the grounds on which the whole beatification was based — the martyrdom contention — were flawed.

At any rate, the beatification took place before a crowd of 70,000 in a stadium in Cologne on 1 May 1987. When I was asked to comment, I said that it seemed that the Pope had tried to respond to Jewish objections and misgivings. Furthermore, not long before the Church had met with international Jewish leaders to come up with a solution to a bitter dispute about a Carmelite nunnery at the Auschwitz camp site. This rapprochement, coupled with the Pope's careful choice of words in Cologne and his many positive references to Judaism, seemed to suggest some sort of sensitivity on the part of the Vatican.

Now I am not so sure. By officially receiving Kurt Waldheim at the Vatican, the Pope has entirely undone whatever good work might have been achieved earlier this year. The repeated pattern in Catholic-Jewish relations seems to be one of frequent offensive actions by the Church followed by vaguely contrite and perplexed noises about "tragic misunderstandings" and the need for "reconciliation". In point of fact, each of the 1987 mishaps, the Auschwitz nunnery, Edith Stein's beatification, and the Waldheim visit, has had the same focus, namely the Church's attitude towards the Holocaust. The usual maudlin "interfaith" talk of misunderstanding, atonement, tragic divisions, the mystery of suffering, the need for reconciliation, and so on, does not in practical terms seem to get us very far. What is needed is honesty. □

James Baaden's biography of Edith Stein will be published next year by Collins.

A CLASS OF THEIR OWN

The hotly disputed demand by Yesodey Hatorah School for voluntary-aided status points up the challenge posed by religious ethnic minorities to received socialist wisdom on secular education. Michael Heiser interviews Rabbi Abraham Pinter — a Labour councillor in Hackney and vice-principal of Yesodey Hatorah.

The rabbi stroked his beard, tugged at his peyes and pushed back his chair. There we were, in his study, the secular Jew and the vice-principal of Yesodey Hatorah School, the strictly orthodox Rabbi Abraham Pinter. He was speaking to me about the school and its struggle to survive and become voluntary-aided. Voluntary-aided education seems to be a matter of first come first serve. The Church of England and the Catholics have a network of voluntary schools in every town and city in the country. There are a few Jewish schools, most in London, under the auspices of the London Board of Jewish Religious Education, such as the JFS (Jews' Free School). But there are no strictly orthodox Jewish schools voluntary-aided, as Pinter would understand the term "orthodox". And as yet there are no such aided schools in the faith of minorities more recently established such as Muslims or Hindus.

Yesodey Hatorah has been in Stamford Hill since 1942. It was established, with an initial six pupils, by Austrian refugees. According to Pinter, the first thing a displaced community sought to do was to create an educational facility. "They saw it would be impossible for them to retain their culture without suitable educational institutions. As the Stamford Hill community has grown so has the

school. There were further influxes, for example, from Hungary in 1968 and Aden in 1969. These latter were Sephardim but the overwhelming majority (90%) of the 10-12,000 strong community are Ashkenazim.

There are now as many as 960 pupils at the school, with two thirds of these being in the girls' school and the remaining third in the boys' school. The two schools, although adjacent, are completely separate from each other. Age range is from two and a half to 15, from toddler to 'O' level. The school, Pinter points out, is the only one in the Stamford Hill area to take in children from all the religious sects in the community. Indeed, even the convenient journalistic shorthand "community" may be a misnomer. There are, says Pinter, children from 20 sects in Yesodey Hatorah, predominantly Lubavitch, Belz and Satmar.

Here I remarked on the contrast between Yesodey Hatorah and other Jewish schools I had visited. For instance, I said, I can remember being struck at the North West London Jewish Day School how all the wall displays seemed to relate to Israel, that the school might as well be in Jerusalem as in Brondesbury. Pinter smiled. "Here we don't touch Israel", he said and added, tactfully, "because people get upset". He went on to explain how

the different Orthodox sects have hotly expressed and widely divergent points of view, ranging from the strident religious Zionism of Lubavitch to the unbending anti-Zionism of Satmar.

But what has brought Yesodey Hatorah into the news, is its application for voluntary-aided status. The story goes back 30 years, but is being played out all the time against a backdrop of a declining and changing population in the secular state schools and an official uncertainty as to how to treat religious schools.

In the late 1950s, Yesodey Hatorah was due to transfer to new buildings under the auspices of the (then) London County Council. This never came about, although another Jewish school, but not a strictly orthodox one (Avigdor's) did transfer at the time. In 1969 Yesodey Hatorah again applied for voluntary-aided status. The (by then) Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) promised to support the application on three conditions; that the school had adequate premises, a qualified staff and that it met the minimum requirements of a secular curriculum. The application went to the Department of Education and Science (DES), which agreed support in principle in the early 1970s.

But when it came to turning principles into practice, things were different. In 1975 the DES said it could not support the application whilst there was a surplus of places at maintained schools in the area (that is, secular state schools). Yesodey Hatorah went to the Ombudsman who said that the DES should not have given an "in principle" agreement in the first place. That clarified things but did not help Yesodey Hatorah.

It has not changed since then. The school got a new site and built a new building for the girls' school, but it has seemed caught in a ping-pong match between ILEA and the DES where each side is constantly changing the rules. In 1982, for example, they were again turned down by the DES, this time for reasons of finance. "Keith Joseph (Education Secretary at the time) found it difficult to decide on a Jewish school", said Pinter and added "I don't think Jewish

In the name of secularism...

The National Secular Society have been the most vocal opponents of Yesodey Hatorah's request for voluntary-aided status. The Society favours "an open, multi-cultural society; not socially divisive segregation on grounds of religion, sex, class, or skin colour." Good. But their memo to the ILEA Labour Group on this issue was less convincing: "... the extension of voluntary-aided status to such schools... would mean... segregating the children of immigrant families, pressurised by their religious leaders, from the host population... this would inevitably exacerbate the existing prejudice and discrimination against immigrants."

Apart from questioning the appropriateness of the terms "immigrant" and "host", its Powell-like inevitability argument is extremely dubious. Indeed the Society's apparently radical concern for the rights of children collapses into fairly standard ethnocentrism. "Since most of the parents of the children attending Yesodey Hatorah School were born in this country, their families having been here for half a century, they could reasonably be expected to have integrated by now with the host community — at least to the extent of speaking English and sending their children to English state schools. But in fact they still speak Yiddish, their children are made to wear strange clothing and observe the strictest religious customs, they refuse to allow them to be educated with English children."

Although these children have been born and bred in Hackney, London, England, their insistence on speaking their own language — Yiddish — apparently deprives them of English nationality. However, as in standard British racism, it

all comes down to numbers in the end: "... these families average seven children," claims the Society, "... a good argument for them to be exposed to some responsible sex education including information on the world population problem and the overcrowding of this country."

Barbara Smoker, the Society's President, returned to the population explosion with Malthusian foreboding in a remarkable letter to the *Jewish Chronicle*: "... their numbers will increase by 350% from generation to generation — which, with their custom of early marriage, means at intervals of about 18 years. At this rate, in (say) 180 years, 500 couples would produce, if my arithmetic is correct, some 300-million descendants; thus, within the next two centuries, even if every non-Hasidic family were to stop breeding altogether, this country would be filled with overcrowded houses, their occupants being dependent on the rest of the world for the agricultural space to feed them."

These statements have generated justifiable charges of racism against the Society — who are in danger of giving secularism a very bad name. As a secular Jewish parent myself, opposed to all religious coercion, I would choose not to send my children to a separate religious school, but if they grow up speaking Yiddish fluently, I will be delighted; if they wish to express Jewish culture through clothes or any other external manner — fine. I would also want children of religious Jews to be aware of secular alternatives within and outside the Jewish community, but such alternatives will have to be a lot more attractive than the ignorant prejudices currently being expressed in the name of progressive secularism.

DAVID ROSENBERG

And so to the present day. ILEA, which no longer supports the application now gives in essence two grounds for their refusal. The first is that of opposition to denomination education in principle and to any new denominational schools. But, as Pinter points out, two new denominational schools, one Church of England and one Catholic have been designated by ILEA in the last year. Yes, replies ILEA, but those are in Thamesmead. In Hackney there is a surplus of places at maintained schools.

So Yesodey Hatorah is caught on a two-pronged fork. The real reason for their refusal, charges Pinter, is institutionalised racism. ILEA is opposed to an orthodox Jewish school, but won't say so in as many words.

But things have been changing recently in the local Labour Party. For a long

time, the Labour Party opposed denominational schools in principle whilst in practice (again) turning a blind eye to those that already existed. Now there is a new awareness of the rights and cultures of Black and other ethnic minorities, particularly in the field of education. Ethnic minority languages are prized and encouraged. So Yesodey Hatorah can place their demand within the framework of "meeting ethnic minority needs" and find support for them. The demands haven't changed of course, although the language and the frame of reference have. The local Labour Party and Labour-dominated Hackney Council now support Yesodey Hatorah's request, won over by the argument that it is institutionalised racism to support one denominational school but not another. ILEA still remains stubborn, but even here Pinter is hopeful. While Frances Morrell

was leader, he found a very negative attitude, but deputy leader Bernard Wiltshire supports the school.

Others have been more outspoken in their opposition. The remarks of Barbara Smoker, the President of the National Secular Society who referred to Yiddish as a "ghetto language" have been widely quoted. "These are not the worst remarks I have had from her" said Pinter. He explained the position of Yiddish in the school. For over a third of the pupils, it is their mother tongue and it is taught as a language in the school. There is a difference between the sexes here. "Boys might talk Yiddish to each other, but girls' gut language is English". Even the Sephardi children speak Yiddish. How about academic standards, which have been criticised? Pinter is ready with a battery of statistics. 40-45% of girls get a minimum of 5 'O' levels grades A-C, compared with 6-7% in Hackney as a whole.

But perhaps the most fundamental objection to Yesodey Hatorah is what is seen as its "separateness"; a feeling, which is shared by many secular people, Jewish and not Jewish that all ethnic groups and both sexes should be educated together. Secular schools should certainly be required to make appropriate provision for the needs of cultural and religious groups. For instance, I said to him, I happened to chair the governing body of a school in Brent which has a substantial Muslim minority. Brent has instituted a Charter for Muslim pupils which covers such matters as Halal meat in school dinners, appropriate religious instruction, assemblies and dress for girls, particularly for PE. Why should not the demand be that maintained schools in Hackney institute similar measures for Orthodox Jewish pupils?

Pinter said that he would agree with me that schools should be encouraged to take account of the cultural and religious needs of all pupils. But, he added, there were things which Orthodox Jews require which it would be going too far to ask of others. For instance? "For instance, separation of the sexes". There should be

an obligation, on authorities, he said, to meet the needs of all communities. They should do their best to meet these needs in maintained schools. "But if they cannot, there should be separate provision."

How about multicultural education? Well, he said "education about other communities is happening slowly; the way is to go and ask people how they live with their neighbours". He found Jewish children better in this respect than native "white" children. And Judaism, he emphasised, teaches respect for others.

I found his answers in this area frankly



Photo: Melanie Friend

unsatisfactory. Thinking about the tremendous amount of effort that has been expended in authorities such as Brent and ILEA to develop a multicultural curriculum and to teach the importance of diversity, I made a mental note "Must do better".

But there is one area of the provision of equal opportunities where Yesodey Hatorah does better than state schools and that is in the education of children with special educational needs. Unlike most state schools (despite the requirements of the 1981 Act) they will accept any child, whatever their disability. There are children with severe learning disabilities at the school, because their parents will not send them to state special schools, "even though", Pinter added, "they could get a religious exemption". Another unsatisfactory area is the issue of unqualified staff. I have heard from Hackney teachers that Yesodey Hatorah uses MSC-funded staff. Pinter acknowledges the lack of qualified staff and points to it as one more reason for voluntary status.

In the end, as a secular Jew, I am still not quite happy with Yesodey Hatorah. I agree with the need to provide an education which meets the specific needs of individual communities and although I would prefer this to be in non-denominational state schools I am not opposed to the principle of communities providing for their own educational needs. And I feel happy defending Yesodey Hatorah against remarks such as that made by ILEA member Peter Aylmer, "They must come to terms with the host culture". But I would be happier defending, say, the secular Bundist *folkshuln* of pre-war Poland.

It is the religion which sticks in my gullet. So I ended up by asking Abraham Pinter what his attitude was towards secular Jews. I had, I said, a very positive attitude towards the school's use of Yiddish and non-Israelocentrism. At the same time I would maintain the values of secular Jewishness and demand equal respect for these. Again, I found his answer cryptic. He could not separate the two, culture and religion and so he personally could not come to terms with the concept of a secular Jew. "It can't just be intellectual". At Yesodey Hatorah, education came through religion. For instance now it was "Why we keep *Shabes*". But Abraham Pinter and his 960 pupils are as Jewish, in their own way as the Jewish Socialists' Group and (*lehavdil!*) the Board of Deputies. If we support rights for Jews as an ethnic minority we cannot be blind to diversity nor selective as to which rights we champion. But neither should we be uncritical.

AIDS, Homophobia and the Jewish Community

Homophobic attitudes among many Jews have intensified in response to AIDS. Mike Lee outlines the positive and practical response the Jewish community ought to be offering.

Why does the traditional Jewish community in Britain find it so difficult to deal with the issue of AIDS? You only need look at the letters' pages of the *Jewish Chronicle* recently to see the volume of correspondence this subject has generated. Most of the letters have either been about the liberal/orthodox argument about the status of Jewish Law or moralistic condemnations of homosexuality (or both!). The former is a debate that has been going on for years and over many issues; the latter has been dormant and has arisen specifically in relation to AIDS.

Obscuring the issues

What is interesting is that the actual issues raised by the AIDS epidemic are hardly mentioned. What we see instead are the following:

- AIDS as divine punishment for gay men for breaking the Holy Law, with writers frequently referring to biblical passages which can be interpreted as condemning (male) homosexuality. They fail to mention that in Africa, for example, AIDS is transmitted mostly heterosexually, with equal numbers of men and women affected;

- an obsession with "sodomy" as the means of transmission of HIV (Human Immuno-deficiency Virus — the virus thought to cause AIDS), with no recognition that it is not only the number of sexual partners (though this is still a very important factor), but also what *sort* of sex people have. Ways of encouraging "safer sex" are never discussed;

- by a strange displacement, seeing homosexuality, as well as AIDS, as a disease which can be spread (by seduction) and can be cured by psychiatry. This

medicalisation of homosexuality has a long history, but the recent tendency of enlightened psychiatry has been to see it as an alternative lifestyle — which of course it is;

- an absence of comment on lesbians, perhaps because there are fewer references in the bible that can be quoted, or maybe it is because they are a relatively low-risk group (at present) which would contradict the notion of "divine punishment" for homosexuality;

- a division of people with AIDS (PWAs) into two groups: the "guilty" ones who deserve what they get — gay men and intravenous drug-users; and the "innocent" ones who deserve our sympathy and compassion such as haemophiliacs and other recipients of blood products, the wives of men infected with HIV, and the babies of women infected with HIV. Of course people with other diseases like lung cancer, are not judged in this way, but are given unconditional sympathy.

As a result of these obsessions, important issues about HIV infection and AIDS are ignored, for example, "safe sex", health education, the implications of testing, discrimination against PWAs and people with HIV, the gross under-funding of research and support and so on.

Jews at risk

Yet despite all this resistance, there are pressures within the Jewish community to organise services around AIDS. Jews in Britain are already at risk, have been infected with HIV, have been diagnosed with AIDS or ARC (AIDS Related Complex — illnesses caused by HIV infection where the opportunistic infections and cancers of AIDS are not found) and have died from it.

A Jewish Response

Rabbi Tony Bayfield outlines the challenge that AIDS poses for the Jewish community.

The Jewish community is clearly divided on the subject of homosexuality. There are many, especially within traditional circles, who affirm the legislation of the Torah and insist that sodomy and, by extension, any form of homosexuality, is an abomination. There are others, including myself, who believe that a person's sexual orientation is a private matter and that the real concern of religion and morality should be how a person uses their sexuality — selflessly and selfishly, lovingly or exploitatively, responsibly or irresponsibly. Just as the identification and punishment of the stubborn and rebellious son or the death penalty for adultery have been removed from the operative area of Jewish law, so should the condemnation of behaviour which is of no one's concern but the adults themselves.

The resurgence of discussion about homosexuality has been brought about by the emergence of AIDS. It is crucial that the two issues do not get confused. Alarming there are already signs that the homosexual community could quickly

become the equivalent of mediæval lepers — or Jews — blamed for the plague and victimised accordingly. Such is the power of the drive to scapegoat. Anyone who has ears to hear with must surely know that AIDS is a disease which can be transmitted both through homosexual and heterosexual intercourse. In Europe and the USA, AIDS may for the moment, be most prevalent amongst homosexuals, but in Africa the heterosexual community is profoundly affected. Moreover, the fact that a person has contracted AIDS says nothing whatsoever per se about their morality nor even about their sexual activity. Babies can be born with AIDS; husbands or wives can contract AIDS in the course of marital relations.



AIDS is already present in the Jewish community in Britain. Jews have died and are dying of AIDS. The disease presents us with a great challenge. It challenges us, heterosexuals and homosexuals alike, to think very seriously about how we use sexuality, and highlights the potentially

But why have a specifically Jewish agency dealing with AIDS? Aren't the existing services able to help already? Besides the fact that most agencies are at present under enormous pressure, there are some areas a Jewish group could usefully cover including:

- dealing with family and friends such as counselling a family whose son is diagnosed with AIDS, and who have to deal not only with this knowledge, but also with his "coming out" at the same time, with a sensitivity to Jewish cultural issues;

- bereavement counselling in a Jewish context, with awareness of traditions and contact with sympathetic rabbis;

- tapping the sources of funding within the Jewish community as well as the voluntary commitment and professional expertise available..

Facing a dilemma

Already in the USA, where both the Jewish and gay communities are larger, and AIDS has been around longer, the National Jewish AIDS Project (NJAP) was set up in February 1986, with mainstream Jewish support and funding. At present though, such a group in this country would face a dilemma: how to deal with the issue of AIDS and at the

dire consequences of using that sexuality selfishly or irresponsibly.

Yet there will continue to be people who fall victim. Some will be completely innocent; some will have misused their sexuality. In either case they will require support and compassionate treatment. There are no limits to the obligation of *bikur cholim*, caring for the sick. We will need to be a well-educated and informed community, not turning away or recoiling out of misinformed prejudice. We will need hospices. We will need synagogues to act as an extended family and a real community. We must not allow the debate over the morality of homosexuality to cloud this need and this demand. There may be no lepers; no Jews casting out Jews; no shunning out of fear or mistaken self-protection. We should urge of all a selfless, loving and responsible attitude to sexuality. Equally we should urge of all compassion and concern for the sick.

This article first appeared as the editorial in the Spring 1987 issue of Manna, which we thank for allowing us to reprint it here.

same time ignore the group still most affected by it — gay men. (87% of the total number of cases of AIDS diagnosed in the UK from 1982-April 1987 were homosexual men). One resolution of this dilemma is to by-pass organisations set up by the gay community, and to create "respectable" groups, which will attract wide support and funding. This would parallel the government's attempts to marginalise the Terrence Higgins Trust (both in terms of its pioneering work and also in funding) and to support non-gay identified help services instead.

The risk of this approach is that it could alienate gay men if the organisation had a moralistic attitude to homosexuality. In contrast, the Terrence Higgins Trust, though not a gay organisation as such, was set up as an initiative of the gay community, and has gained its respect and confidence. (The impact on intra-venous drug users and other high risk groups is clearly a matter for them to analyse).

Banning information

As an illustration of this dilemma, the Terrence Higgins Trust recently organised a study day aimed at the Jewish community. This was held in a mainstream Jewish centre. The administration of the centre

objected to a leaflet the Trust had produced, which was directed at gay men. This leaflet uses explicit language and pictures to get across the message of "safer sex", and in order to hold the meeting there, the Trust promised not to display the leaflet.

This reaction was from a Jewish organisation concerned with the spread of HIV, and in contact with young people. So religious based moralism actively impedes informing people using clear and explicit language, aimed ultimately at saving lives! Also, at this study day, the final panel discussion turned into a debate on homosexuality, rather than looking at ways to organise to help people whose lives have been touched by AIDS.

However, the Jewish community can no longer ignore the issues. But what is the best way to organise? Given the tremendous resistance, the mainstream Jewish community is not going to support an agency based on the gay community. Maybe the solution is to have a Jewish-based group which will attract support but which will also avoid moralistic positioning towards the groups affected. Whether this can be set up in the present climate of scapegoating remains to be seen.

Class Struggle Against Deportation

Adrienne Wallman describes the deportation of a Turkish family, and its effect on their friend Brian Simons (material is drawn from the book *Zeynep — that Really Happened to me* by Zeynep Hasbudak and Brian Simons, and from an interview with Brian Simons).



In November 1983 British born Zeynep and Fatih Hasbudak (aged 7 and 5) and their parents, Polat and Kebire, born in Turkey, were due to be deported to Turkey. The family had, according to the Home Office, "overstayed their welcome" in Britain. At the time Zeynep was a pupil at William Patten Infants School in Stoke Newington, north London; Brian Simons was her teacher and helped start the anti-deportation campaign which began following the Home Office decision.

The campaign centred on the school, with the pupils involved in writing letters of protest and petitions to the Prime Minister and the then Home Secretary, David Waddington, and picketing the Home Office. The family went into hiding where they stayed until the following March when Polat Hasbudak was arrested while going to collect a parcel from the post office. He was sent back to Turkey. Kebire, Zeynep and Fatih decided to fight on but the Home Office was adamant and they too were deported on 4 April 1984. Twenty other Turkish workers from Hackney were deported in the same week.

In June 1985 the school raised money to bring Zeynep and Fatih over to Hackney for a holiday. Zeynep, who in the past had been part of the Hackney Peace Movement's festivities, now joined a march organised by the Young Socialists in aid of imprisoned miners and helped welcome miners to Hackney on behalf of local trade unionists. The Mayor of Hackney organised a party for the children and parties were also held at William Patten school, all in keeping with the parties and celebration which had characterised the campaign from the beginning. But on 19 July Zeynep and Fatih returned to their parents in Turkey. The Hasbudaks are still in Turkey where the children go to a more overcrowded and much stricter school when they were used to in England. For Zeynep the

transition has been particularly hard — English is her first language and she was seen as an outsider, laughed at for the way she talked and dressed. She also found many of the rules unfamiliar at first but is learning to adjust to the realities.

While the family were in hiding Brian Simons wrote the first half of *Zeynep*; he hoped it would publicise the campaign. When the campaign turned out a failure he abandoned the project, but on Zeynep's return for her holiday he was reading the story with her and began to write down her comments. These take the form of a commentary to the accompanying photographs and form the second part of the book. The book is intended for both children and adults but its style is geared far more towards children, and that's as it should be. It was children who were very much at the centre of the campaign both as victims and as fighters against the deportation. Young children are not often given a political role but William Patten school has a record of political activity eg it has run book and record sales for the ANC and was active in the miners' strike, and is now organising demonstrations and meetings to maintain present class sizes. In the Hasbudak's case the children were able to experience at first hand the harsh workings of the British Home Office. They learnt the art of confrontation and rebuff and eventually saw their classmates sent away to a country they

had never known. For Zeynep and Fatih the lessons were hard. Zeynep writes "Deportation means you have to go away from this country and you can't come back. But why did they do it to us and we never did anything wrong? My mum and dad worked here for ten years and they never did anything wrong. So why do they have to go? And that's not fair."

One consequence of the campaign was the effect it had on Brian Simons, both as a political activist and as a Jew. He felt an affinity with Turkish people and could see similarities between their experiences and his own. Brian's father had worked in the same tailoring factory as the fathers of children in his class and his mother had done the same sort of low-paid home work as the Turkish women were doing. As a child he himself spent his summer holidays sitting patiently reading and drawing in the factories of Stoke Newington while his parents were working. He inherited from his parents a working class socialist Jewish identity which was independent of the surrounding world; "it seemed to live in a vacuum", and defined itself as "not English". "When I saw my grandmother reporting to the police station with her aliens registration card, or encountering ordinary anti-semitism, I felt an animosity towards the apparent benevolence of British laws in allowing our presence here at all. I grew up with that animosity. I had no sense of Jewish homeland but felt exiled. Why did we have to be grateful for allowing our presence here? I refused to feel grateful that there hadn't been an English Hitler. Similarly it was required of Zeynep's family that they be grateful for British justice in letting them settle here. Why?"

Politically Brian was reminded of the weakness of the left. "For example, if you look at the threat to deport Sri Lankan refugees from this country an important factor is that the 'friendly'

relations between the capitalist governments of Britain and Sri Lanka exist only in the interest of profit. Opposing the deportations implies a vision of a socialist future. Such a future has to be made and the vulgar populists of British socialism don't find that convenient to their careers. On the other hand a generation, in fact an elite, of left wing activists has grown up lost in a world of resolutions and can't easily meet the 'unpoliticised' all those whose causes it claims for its own. So between the left wing vulgar opportunists and the left wing vulgar economists you have an awful lot of vulgarity! In the midst of all the theorising and posturing, culture and lived experience are marginalised. Some of the left think that defending mining communities is 'old fashioned', anti-semitism is 'old hat' too."

Zeynep was aware that to be on television she had to appear to be the flavour of the month but for her and

her family it was very much a question of right and wrong and their anger was genuine. Brian and his pupils and all those who helped were trying to protect genuine friendships, the officials were concerned with what was on a form. There was real support from all sections of the community and this support went across traditional divides. Money was collected at a mosque, the British Trotskyist and Communist movements helped, and the Jewish Tory opposition leader of Hackney council wrote a letter to the Home Office asking for compassion to be shown. It seems to me that a lot of responsibility fell on Brian Simons — perhaps he deliberately invited it as Zeynep became almost like a daughter to him — and in the end he saw the deportation as a personal failure.

He describes the situation as a "nightmare", which brought home to him again the repressive nature of the state which he'd experienced for example in France in 1968, in Southall in 1979,

and during the miners' strike when he was hospitalised by the police after being hit on the head — this really banged home the message. "I kept looking at Zeynep and telling myself we're going to win but I saw the enormity of what we were up against."

The Half Moon Young Peoples' Theatre has adapted the book into a play which is touring schools in Tower Hamlets, East London, as a Theatre in Education programme and similarities between Zeynep's story and that of Anne Frank and her family have been brought out. The play will be performed for Zeynep when she comes over on a holiday this July to stay with Brian and his two children. (Zeynep — That Really Happened to Me, by Zeynep Hasbudak and Brian Simons, published by ALTARF, £2.50. There is also a ten minute video. Both available from ALTARF, Panther House, Room 216, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X 0AP and all good bookshops. □

SELECTIVE SILENCE

The committee who recently awarded Elie Wiesel the Nobel Peace Prize paid tribute to his commitment to all oppressed peoples. Louis Marton questions Wiesel's efforts on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

The Nobel Peace Prize always adds power to glory... but seldom the other way around. Mother Theresa of Calcutta required no additional glorification of her saintly deeds but did, indeed, require money to implement them. Lech Walesa needed no power but undoubtedly was protected by fame. Henry Kissinger was promoted a hero of peace after the terror-bombings of Cambodia, which directly opened the way to the auto-genocide of Pol Pot and Company. Menachem Begin received the Nobel as a deposit on the Camp David account, which is paid back — with interest — through Sabra and Shatila.

Elie Wiesel has several advantages over the preceding winners. First of all, he could just as well have received the Nobel Prize for Literature. Although he pretends to be first and foremost a witness, he is, indeed, one of the greatest writers of our time. Technically speaking, there is nothing new in his style; nevertheless, the depth of his passion and force of his thought make him a

very exceptional storyteller, an archaeologist of the lost world of Central European Jewry.

Is having been a just witness of a single tragedy enough to ensure glorification through the Nobel Peace Prize and being granted the power that comes with it? But, according to the Nobel Committee, Wiesel did more: "He enlarged his engagement to all oppressed people and races... and became a guide and spiritual leader of our time".

Reading these lines, one wonders whether they speak of Elie Wiesel in the present or future tense. Apart from his work on Hassidic Jews and the Holocaust, his efforts on other fronts seem to be rather modest, particularly if seen in the context of humanity as a whole, of "all peoples and races".

Little risk is involved in condemning, as Wiesel did, the way Nicaragua treats Mesquito Indians, the torture in Chile, or the killings in Cambodia... from Manhattan. Nor does Wiesel become a guide when taking side on such issues

as nuclear weapons or famine in Africa even though all contributions from anywhere are welcomed. But Elie Wiesel was not just anybody before his Nobel Prize. He certainly will never be just anybody after getting it.

Of all issues concerning injustice and suffering, Wiesel is more reserved on the Israeli-Palestinian problem. He is somewhat shy: "I have never been a Zionist, but with the attacks on Zionism by those who pervert language and poison memory, I can only consider myself a Zionist... Our non-Jewish friends should also do so". We are back here to traditional terms of Jewish "self-defence", of conspiracy against Israel.

Wiesel speaks to Palestinian Arabs without illusions: "I understand your anger. Yes, it is humiliating not to belong to any organised society, not to have a home... Yes, it is depressing, degrading to live on the margin, on the twilight zone of history... to personify the eternal stranger who arouses at best pity and charity... when one desires justice".

He goes far but no further: "I suffer with you... but I condemn your actions", he says to the Palestinians. And, on another occasion, he adds: "I never criticise Israel from outside Israel. This is the price I decided to pay when I chose not to live there".

Wiesel, who went to grammar school in France and wrote most of his books in French, would not get away with this demonstration of logic in the country of Descartes. One can, of course, declare solidarity with both parties, and, indeed, feel the suffering of both. But how, then, can one condemn the deeds of those who "live in the twilight zone of history" while forbearing from mentioning the responsibility of those who, after pushing the Palestinians into this margin, prepare, in the name of Zionism, their *holocaust*?

The word is not easy to write, for a Jew, for a survivor, as Wiesel is, of the East European holocaust. Yet it is not used here for effect, style or in a sudden attack of phantasmagoria. The very week Wiesel received the Nobel Prize, Itzhak Shamir declared that Israeli colonization of the West Bank would be intensified because "there should be no difference between one or the other half of Eretz Israel". Palestinians, as far as Zionists of Shamir's variety are concerned, should not even sit on the "margin". They should, the sooner the better, go anywhere. Preferably hell.

What, then, should be the deeds, the response, of those who are condemned to non-existence? And where should one find the voices of those who are still capable, at least mentally, of sharing such suffering? Let us be realistic: Nobel Prize or not, Wiesel and the rest of us Jewry of this generation do *not* share this suffering in our flesh; do *not* hear from our children, the unwilling punks of history, the words "No future"; it is not our home that disappears under the bulldozers of the Israeli Defense Forces... Defense of what?

Jean-Paul Sartre, the one Nobel Prize winner who did not care about his Nobel, is dead and buried. No one would require from Elie Wiesel, the writer, to take a stand on any specific issue. Sometimes writing is enough. But if some people nowadays need moral guidance it is the Israelis, and Wiesel may be just about the only man on earth from whom they might accept it. His Nobel Prize may still become a burden worth carrying... or a bubble too light to rest on any man's shoulders. □

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Friends, Romans and Antisemites

Racism was not invented by capitalism as some socialists claim, but serves subjective needs which span differing economic systems, argues Michael Rosen.

It would be quite easy to assume that what the Roman historian Tacitus said about Jews in 112 AD, or what happened to the Jews in York in the 12th century would not be subjects of debate in the journals of the Socialist Workers Party. But no, it's been filling the aisles, these last few months, in part, due to my saying in a letter that racism was not invented by capitalism, as one of their ideologues had suggested. I said it existed in Roman and medieval times as antisemitism.

This heresy has been treated at great length, proving that all pre-capitalist antisemitism was either religious persecution or economically motivated persecution, or non-existent anyway.

In the blood

The whole argument turns on *what is racism*? The old definitions of racism revolved round ideas of "race". In other words a racist attitude would be one that describes a person or a people, (including oneself) as belonging to a "race" with characteristics and behaviour inherited and determined by genes or "blood". It describes these characteristics and behaviour as different from those of other "races". And then, inevitably, these so-called differences result in a league table of superiority which can be used to justify

abuse, oppression, murder, condescension towards others; and/or glorification, self-flattery and elitism towards oneself.

It is clear from general usage that the word is no longer confined to describing people who believe in "race". People who abuse Irish people, move travellers on, or attack Bengalis, are all described as "racists" without necessarily assuming that the abusers believe in "race". In other words, for "race" we have to substitute "tribe", "people", "nation", "group", and "community". The essence of racism has become an assumption of the genetic unchangeability of the characteristics of any "group of people" you choose to describe as a group. You then treat that group however you choose — eg badly.

According to the SWP, racism was invented by capitalism as part of imperialist plunder, which itself is an essential element in the birth of capitalism. This statement is only correct in one very narrow sense: the invention of the "science of racialism" by 19th century anthropologists was a direct result of the exploitation and oppression their fellow-countrymen had launched on the rest of the world. But that's not the way the word "racism" is used in day-to-day conversation by lefties and Marxists. So, were the Romans,

for example, racists? Were they anti-semitic?

It's difficult to see the Romans for what they were, given the whole Roman-adoring apparatus of schools and museums: "They were brilliant at baths and democracy." Firstly, we have to remember that the Romans became occupiers of most of the known world. They occupied in order to exploit. As a result they enslaved and massacred. Roman expansion meant that the regime was in a permanent state of military activity. There was always somewhere to conquer, some people to suppress or "order to maintain."

Enter the Jews

Who were the Jews between, say, 200BC and 200AD? Well, Zionists and anti-semites, we were as unlike a "race" or "nation" then, as now. There were as many Jews living outside Judea/Palestine before the fall of the temple in 70AD as inside. In the many Jewish communities spread across Europe, Asia and North Africa there was plenty of marrying in, plenty of proselytising and plenty of converting. End of "race" and "nation" concepts.

So what did the Romans do to them and what did they think of the Jews? The classical Marxist text of Abram Leon says that the Jews were a "people-class" of merchants and traders, indispensable to the land-based economy of the Romans. So, we are to infer, antisemitism, as we understand it today, did not exist. There was envy, arbitrary malicious gossip, military persecution, but overall toleration.

Revolts against the Romans

Does this stand up? What are the historical events? The period from 63BC to 135AD, in Judea, is a catalogue of Jewish revolts and Roman persecutions. Thousands and thousands of Jews in these 200 years were, at various times, sold into slavery, crucified, massacred in battle or slaughtered as undefended citizens.

For those who lived, there was a mass of taxation levied by hated collectors (often collaborating Jews, called "publicans" in the Authorised Version of the New Testament). There was a constant string of offensive acts against the Jewish beliefs, like profaning the temple with images, or putting up statues of emperors as gods. More seriously, by dint of the occupation, the Romans prevented the Jews from having a Jewish king of the line of David. The consequence of all this are the hundreds of small revolts, messianic movements (eg Jesus) and the major revolts and slaughters of 66-74AD and 132-135AD. The latter revolt resulted in Hadrian sticking up temples to Jupiter and himself on the site of the old Jewish temple.

In Rome itself, there was tension

between Jews and Romans from 139BC when Jews were expelled from Rome for attempting to set up a synagogue. There was a clear confrontation of ideologies in Rome where the Romans at various times demanded allegiance to rulers, emperors, gods and emperor-gods while the Jews demanded the right to worship one invisible god. After 63BC there was a regular influx of Jews from Judea as slaves, and Jewish burials of the first century BC show the low social status of Jews at this time.

Latin attitudes

But what did the Romans say about Jews in this period? Tacitus says that the Jews are a race (!) with bizarre and sordid practices, prone to superstition, with evil and disgusting customs like being prone to lechery, eating apart from others, having sex only with themselves, practicing circumcision and causing converts to cut themselves off from their families. He reports that Titus believed the temple ought to be destroyed so that the Jewish religion might be abolished. He reports how in AD19 the senate passed a decree that 4,000 Jews should be transported to Sardinia to put down brigandage there and if they perished, little loss. The rest were to leave Italy unless they renounced their profane rites.

Juvenal notes Roman Jews' poverty, their begging and slothful sabbath customs.

Martial objected to the stench of Jewish women keeping fast on the sabbath. Dio Cassius is reported as saying "I don't know the origin of the name 'Jews' but it is also applied to all those others, who though of a different race, emulate their customs."

Tiberius is reported as expelling Jews from Rome because the Jews were converting large numbers to their own way of life.

Philostratus notes that the Jews have been in revolt not only against the Romans but against all mankind too. Cicero says in the senate that the Jewish religion is alien to the splendour of the Empire, that Jews were born for slavery and that Flaccus should be praised for preventing Jews from levying their own tax and sending it to the temple in Judaea.

Suetonius observes an old man of 90 having to drop his trousers to see whether he was circumcised as it was suspected that he was trying to avoid paying the temple tax levied from Jews to pay for the temple of Jupiter in Rome.

Martial says that one of the reasons he's leaving Rome to go to the country is to get away from the noise of Jews being taught to beg by their mothers.

Marcus Aurelius is quoted as getting weary of stinking and riotous Jews and being glad that he found less turbulent peoples.

Quintillian trains orators to use the fact that "we" hate those who have fathered evil, like the originator of the Jewish superstition, Moses.

What do you reckon? For me, it is quite clear that the Romans were racists both in the loose sense we use the word now and also in the purer sense too. The point is that the Romans were imperialists. Where they dominated, an ideology sprang up to describe the people they oppressed and the people who revelled. As part of imperialism, the colonised people arrived in the mother country. Any aspect of the colonised people that doesn't fit the ruling class ideology is deemed dangerous and an intrinsically foul characteristic of that race.

Not an economic proposition

SWP members have been asked to swallow the Leon analysis wholesale. It asks them to accept that racism is somehow a purely "economic" or "class" phenomenon, "invented by capitalism". The explanation is too neat. The Jews in Roman times weren't a "people-class" — an ethnic group of one economic class. And when later, Jews did tend to be a "people-class", the idea cannot explain why Jews who weren't traders/bankers/merchants were persecuted too. The answer lies in the functioning of ideology and the role of the subjective.

In an objective sense, racism might be seen as serving the interests of the ruling class, but in a subjective sense racism satisfies people's needs and desires, one of the most powerful being the one that positions you in the world. The subjective is not simply determined by the objective. Or, put another way, the ideological and cultural is not simply determined by the economic. For example, seemingly obsolete or anachronistic ideologies can survive very differing economic circumstances. More than that, ideology can shape economic set-ups. When the First Christian Crusade reached the "Holy Land" in 1099 they slaughtered the "infidel", the Jew and the Eastern Christian. It was economic nonsense, but culturally logical. By the thirteenth century the "Holy Land" was a rich source of Venetian plunder. When the Nazi war machine moved into top gear against Jews in 1943 it was economic madness, but culturally logical.

Racism is a danger to us all, not simply because it enables rulers to exploit us more easily but also because it threatens people's way of life and culture with anything from abuse to pogrom. We cannot oppose it in its *totality* with economic simplifications. □

See *Jews and Christians, Greco-Roman Views* by Molly Whitaker (Cambridge University Press, £9.95).

We approached the prospect of a Jewish feminist Conference with varying degrees of apprehension and excitement. Some of us had had virtually no contact with Jewish Feminism; others were familiar with debates which had been fought out, sometimes with sisterhood, sometimes with great acrimony over the last few years. We were all pleased that Tess Shephard, Jenny Goodman and Sharon Gold, three women from Yorkshire, had taken on the considerable task of organising a conference, as it seemed to signify a new start for Jewish feminists; a chance to breathe new life into the Jewish Feminist Group and to develop a range of ideas which had been submerged by previous painful and debilitating debates.

We were even more pleased when we arrived to find ourselves in the delightful surroundings of Beechwood Conference Centre, a lovely house in beautiful, wooded grounds just outside Leeds. The food was good, there were plenty of corners to sit and talk and the sun came

NEW OUTLOOKS FOR JEWISH FEMINISTS

an event so she went without any preconceived ideas. "I felt ready to participate fully," she said. "It was refreshing to listen to all the arguments even though I didn't agree with all of them." Adrienne agreed. "It was nice to have no men around," she said, "and to sit in a group without people leaping up and putting five points of order. But it was frustrating too. I would have liked to pursue some of the subjects for longer, but the timetable was so full, I kept finding it was time to stop and move on to something else."

In a way, though, this feeling of frustration is a credit to the organisers, and an indication that the workshops and support groups were dealing with subjects Jewish women want and need to explore.

One workshop made a particularly

140 women came to Leeds in May for a Jewish feminist conference.

Four women look back at this event.

very glad I heard her."

The tape/slide programme from the Jewish Women in London Feminist Oral History Project had a similar impact. Condensed from many hours of interviews, it tells the life stories of three Jewish women from widely differing backgrounds.

"Its strength was the diversity of women they choose," said Marian. "I think a lot of people hadn't known there were Indian Jews; they sat there with their mouths open. The tape was wonderful but far too short. When it finished you thought: 'It's not enough. I want more.'"

"It was lovely; it was warm; it was powerful stuff," said Ruth. "And there was a good practical discussion afterwards about how to get funding for this sort of thing. 'Sadly, this project has recently lost its funding which will be a great loss, so if anyone has any further ideas about sources of salaries, let us know and we'll pass the information on.'"

The workshop on Secular Jewish Identity led by Lara Marks, left many of its participants feeling frustrated by lack of time and opportunity to develop their ideas. Marian felt that "It suffered from having too many people in it so there was no time to follow up the discussion and make political points. It

was interesting but very anecdotal." Nevertheless, important facts emerged about events which had stimulated women to rethink their Jewish identity. "Sabra and Chatilla came up as an important reference point for many women," said Ruth, who would have liked to have been able to take the discussion on Israel/Palestine and Jewish identity further.

The workshop on The Outlook for Jewish Socialist Feminists, given by Julia Bard, which aimed to look at how we can make effective alliances in today's hostile political atmosphere was so overcrowded that discussion was very difficult. "There were a lot of undercurrents which were not expressed," said Julia, "which was a bit frustrating."

"But a suggestion did come out of it that we should have a whole conference to follow up some of issues," said Ruth, "and have a real chance to argue it out over Zionism and the conflicts between different strands of feminism."

"There were some good points made about working on single issue campaigns," said Marian, "like Jews Against Apartheid, where you work with other Jews who you'd have quite large political differences with in other arenas. And it isn't a matter of burying or ignoring those political differences, but of them not

being the focus of the work."

Adrienne went to the workshop on Jewish Women and Spirituality. "I don't think I'm a secular Jew," she said. "I've always felt that if I gave up religion I wouldn't feel I was being Jewish any more and I'm interested to see how other women define themselves as being Jewish. This workshop was really about religion rather than spirituality. A couple of the women had been wearing *kapels* (skull caps) and *talesim* (prayer shawls) and I found that really uncomfortable on the first day. They didn't see it as copying men at all, but a way of expressing being Jewish. It was very interesting to hear them talk about the way people in their own local communities react to seeing them. These two women were lesbians, so that probably doesn't make them

against people being religiously observant," said Marian, "but I do have things against people making me be religiously observant. I found that irksome."

"It struck me, when they started saying grace after meals on Saturday that they just launched into it suddenly without any explanation and without making an effort to tell people who weren't familiar with it, what was going on," said Adrienne. "I found that very odd."

"On the other hand," said Marian, "I was able to be quite eclectic. There was so much to choose from but I was left wondering slightly what to do next with all this energy and experience, all this diversity of background, age and culture."

"It was an inspiring weekend," said Ruth. "But I think now we possibly underestimated ourselves and that it could have stood a healthy row. People seemed to want to dip a toe in and then back away again. But maybe there's time for the arguments later."



Photo: Marian Shapiro

out for some of the time at least.

"I was worried that there were going to be major political arguments with a lot of bad feeling, but I was pleasantly surprised by the welcoming and friendly atmosphere and also by the diversity of backgrounds and age ranges," said Marian. "That diversity seemed to be a source of strength rather than dissension."

"By the time I arrived, I'd convinced myself that the whole conference was going to consist of radical and revolutionary feminists having rows with socialist feminists and arguments about Zionism and religion," said Julia. "It was such a relief to walk into that relaxed atmosphere. There were differences, but a lot of people seemed to be genuinely trying to develop a more well-thought-out political analysis rather than just shouting at each other."

It was Ruth's first experience of such

deep impression. Janina Bauman, author of *Winter in the Morning*, which tells of her life and escape from the Warsaw Ghetto as a young girl, described her experiences during that period. Adrienne said, "It seems very easy just to see your own little world and forget about historical events which have led up to where you are." Marian agreed. "Her courage and fortitude were really inspiring, and it was so moving to hear about people resisting or trying to resist. She also gave a deeper significance to some things that I've thought about in a different context. There was a collective recognition from the audience when she asked if we'd ever looked in the mirror and wondered if we looked Jewish. For us it's a matter of concern; for her, it was, literally, a matter of life and death. She also talked about Polish antisemitism before, during and after the war, and about being a member of the Communist Party for 20 years. I'm



Photo: Marian Shapiro



Photo: Marian Shapiro

accepted in the synagogue, anyway, and they sometimes have to face quite a hostile reaction when people first see them."

These were only a few of the workshops, and there was a wide variety of support groups as well. There were also many cultural events including singing, dancing, two films and a live performance. "There was such a relaxed atmosphere," said Julia. "Everyone joined in the singing — and I was surprised and pleased that people kept reverting to the Yiddish songs after all the freedom and peace songs in other languages."

"The creche also looked very good," she said. "The children were obviously having a great time which meant that mothers really could relax and enjoy the conference."

We weren't entirely happy with the way religion had been dealt with by some women at the conference. "I have nothing

We all felt strongly that important steps had been taken at this conference and that contacts had been made and information and ideas exchanged which must be maintained if Jewish feminists are to develop strategies to challenge oppression both within the Jewish community and in the women's movement. The *Jewish Feminist Newsletter* is an important element in this network, as is *Jewish Socialist* magazine. We must continue the debates which were started at the 1987 Jewish Feminist Conference; to drop out of sight until some more brave, hardworking women are prepared to organise another conference would be to sell ourselves out, as well as the people who put so much time and creative energy into this event.

The *Jewish Feminist Newsletter* and the *Jewish Feminist Group* are at Box 39, Sisterwrite, 190 Upper Street, London N1. The newsletter costs £2 for a year.

JEWISH FEMINIST CONFERENCE

A variety of social, political, spiritual and cultural events and a warm atmosphere

created an inspiring weekend,

says Diana Neslen

There is an advantage in coming fresh to debates, in missing out on intervening developments and schisms. There is a disadvantage too: a feeling that one's credentials are not established, that one has not worked one's passage. This leads to the desire to give way to those with clearer, more formulated positions. The advantage, though, is that you can pick up with more clarity where the movement is. You are not so hampered by baggage from previous voyages.

Such was my position at the Jewish Feminist Conference in Leeds. No words can adequately convey my admiration for the sterling efforts of the organisers in making this gathering possible.

While sleeping arrangements were limited, the food was a marvellous revelation, particularly for the price we paid. The gathering of speakers provided something for all tastes and, indeed, the atmosphere created allowed horizons to expand. It was said that because of lack of community subsidy, those who could not afford the trip were excluded. Unfortunately, community subsidy usually has strings attached and the eclectic fare provided would have been impossible, had communal sensitivities been allowed to limit the menu.

We arrived in Leeds, Jewish women from many corners of Britain, as divergent as our personal histories, but searching for common links to forge a chain to compensate for the isolation so many of us feel.

Some Jewish women are struggling alone in left-wing communities. Some are searching for a more substantive way of celebrating Jewish spirituality. Some are in, but isolated from, mainstream Jewish communal society, with its stifling proscriptions and material pretensions. Some are just anxious to develop links with more radical and exciting thought than is at present available in their own lives.

The overall impression was one of search and ferment, but the direction of the search needs to be carefully considered, because it is my tentative impression that it could lead to an escape from the mainstream into dimensions which are doubtless personally satisfying and enriching, but are nevertheless, a

version of tending your own garden.

A very strong strand, well represented at the conference, was a search for a more substantive way of expressing female Jewish spirituality. The quest for a spiritual dimension is by its very nature a personal search, because each individual has specific inner strivings and demands at particular times in their lives which only a spiritual dimension can address. At one extreme it can provide the serenity to cope more effectively with the burdens of daily living and, strengthened and refreshed, to address public as well as private concerns, often in radical and more adventurous directions. At the other extreme, it can lead to a retreat from turmoil of the world outside into an invigorating exploration of inner growth.

Historically this quest, though, is most pronounced at times of flux and insecurity, and can act as a brake on public activity. Whole communities can gain succour from mystical submergence and, while feeling invigorated, can actually be more vulnerable to outside forces precisely because of their retreat from the larger whole and their lack of allies when they are threatened.

Another discernible strand was the search for a specific Jewish identity. The parameters of Jewish identity covered a spectrum ranging from religious to Zionist. But the parameters limited the debate because they left alone the very large historical legacy of an international Jewish diaspora whose existence is haunted by its invisibility. This is indeed the fault of a Jewish education which too often stops at the destruction of the Second Temple and starts again in 1948. Without a true knowledge of our history, we may be condemned to search for false idols.

Finally, among the discernable strands, was the one addressing political concerns. This strand engaged participants by demanding not only an emotional unburdening, but also an intellectual rigour. The request was urgently articulated precisely because our times require a degree of disciplined endeavour in addressing the complex issues which we,

as Jewish women, face.

We all needed the indulgent unburdening among our fellows. It strengthens us to feel we are not alone. We wish to share our feelings of oppression in an open and, on the whole, caring atmosphere. This, though, cannot be an end in itself. Oppression has a meaning only insofar as it makes us aware of our responsibility to challenge our own oppressions. To do this, we cannot afford to be selective. While Elizabeth Schwarzkopf's actions in Nazi Germany were identified as oppressive in a spare and moving performance by a Jewish woman artist, Carl Jung was uncritically accepted as a profound source of insight in another context. Carl Jung too was a fellow-traveller in the 1930s. It may be possible to accept his insight, but Jewish people have a responsibility to examine his actions.

We cannot stop at challenging our own oppression. The responsibility must extend to challenging the oppression of others. There was a petition to the Israeli Chargé d'Affaires against the destruction of olive trees in the West Bank. Only three people had signed it by the time I left. Perhaps people genuinely feel offended that they are again being called upon to take a stand against Israeli actions for which they have no responsibility. However, nowhere in the conference was it clear that an umbilical cord to Israel had indeed been cut. Even if it had been, it is tempting to argue that we still have a responsibility publicly to deny any collusion in actions which are done not only in the name of the State, but also according to our so-called diaspora leaders in our own name as well.

This is one woman's response to an inspiring weekend. It is, by nature, selective and many will doubtless feel it has not addressed areas of great meaning to them. Inspiration depends upon the correct stimulus and while I have some personal criticisms, I am thankful to have had the opportunity to experience the occasion and to respond. It was obvious that I was not alone in this; many other women also left invigorated and galvanised by a successful venture, our appetites whetted. □

BACK IN THE USSR

Stephen Shenfield sees different attitudes to Soviet Jewish emigration reflected in a recently staged play.

Leonid, an ambitious surgeon, persuades his brother Boris to emigrate with him to the West. They visit their elderly parents, Semyon and Roza, who live at Sholom Aleikhem Street 40 in the old town of Odessa, to urge them to come with them. Roza, torn between her sons and her stubbornly loyalist husband, finally agrees to leave. Then, just before departure, Semyon jumps from the balcony to his death. The sons, whose visas expire the next day, go anyway, but Roza chooses to stay to bury Semyon and die on her native soil.

This is the dramatic plot of Arkady Stavitsky's play, *Sholom Aleikhem Street 40*, set in the late 1970s and written several years ago but staged only with the coming of Gorbachev's cultural thaw. The play's treatment of the sensitive issue of Jewish emigration, relatively frank by past Soviet standards, has made it a minor sensation for the Soviet theatre-going public.

It is doubtful whether this play could be considered a great work of art. The characters are little more than vehicles for different outlooks on life, Soviet society and patriotism. So our main interest in examining the script is in comparing these outlooks.

The most obvious line of division is that which separates the majority of

characters, who regard themselves as part of Soviet society, from the alienated, the would-be emigrés. Leonid is really the only major "anti-Soviet" character, for Boris is a weak person who, lacking a standpoint of his own, has fallen under his brother's influence. Leonid wants to go West because his ambition has been thwarted by antisemitic discrimination:

"I am by nature a Western man. My medium is force, energy, enterprise. There I would long ago have become head of some great clinic ... I do the most important operations, and it is my chief who rises in rank. I save the ill, and it is about him that the newspapers write. Naturally — he is Voronov and I am Margolin. Not quite blond ..."

Leonid's character, while explained as a reaction against injustice, is a repulsive one all the same. His cynicism, egoism and ruthlessness shock his brother. To Boris' misgivings about the pain they are causing their parents, he replies: "I am a surgeon, and don't consider an operation cruelty". There is no recognition that people might be prompted to emigrate by anything more positive than gullibility or greed. Little "new thinking" here.

What is new, however, is a second line of division within the camp of the "Soviet" characters, between harsh dogmatists and more tolerant humanists. In part this is a generation gap — the young idealist non-Jewish friend of the family, Fedor, against his father Petruk, who boasts of his patriotism but does not hesitate to build a dacha for his chief with State funds. It is also a gap between personality types — Roza, who understands and forgives her sons, against Semyon, who cannot bear the shame and rejects them as traitors.

Roza is the heroine of the play. In his introduction, Stavitsky tells us that she embodies "a feeling many of us have almost lost — love for one's courtyard and neighbours". She stands for patriotism — not the cold State patriotism of her husband, but attachment to an immediate local community. One's homeland, she explains to Leonid, is "the place where a person was born and grew up. This courtyard is our homeland." This was where members of the Margolin family were shot by the Whites and burned by the Nazis, and where the survivors were saved from starvation by their neighbours in the hard times after the war.

The "public opinion" of the courtyard, to which Roza is sensitive, is not identical with the "officially approved

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"opinions" to which Semyon is exclusively attuned. When Semyon tramples his sons' photos underfoot, the neighbours disapprove. But as Roza waits for the taxi to depart forever, she feels that the courtyard has abandoned her:

"The courtyard is always right ... Nobody came to say goodbye to me ... But is that really right? Really just? ... For the first time I doubt whether the courtyard is right. I protest against the decision of the courtyard!"

And her harangue awakens the conscience of the neighbours who gather round.

The neighbourly solidarity which is Roza's ideal has largely faded away in the disordered impersonality of "modern life", hardly less so in Moscow or the new quarters of Odessa than in New York. Whether it can be recaptured is not clear. If Roza embodies the humane heritage of the past, it is Fedor who expresses the hope for a future in which humanity gradually learns to live by the light of reason.

Fedor brushes aside his father's warning that he is putting his job and dissertation at risk by associating with

people who are about to emigrate. In his dissertation he has referred to Boris' work (Boris is a mathematician); Boris himself urges him to delete what is now a dangerous reference, but Fedor refuses to contravene scientific ethics in this way.

Fedor's (and Stavitsky's?) credo emerges in an argument between Fedor and Leonid after the couple who are taking over the Margolin's flat on their departure come to see it. When told that the family is emigrating, the man is embarrassed and the woman remarks: "If only more of them would go. Accommodation is in short supply!" Leonid tells them to get out. Then:

Leonid: Now do you see what "friendship of the peoples" means?

Fedor: You think she speaks for the whole people?

Leonid: You I didn't have in mind, Fedor: You are one of ours.

Fedor: Excuse me, I am neither one of yours nor one of hers. In a reasonable world people are linked only by the idea of brotherhood and love of good.

Leonid: And of the Homeland, with a capital letter. Equally alien to me are those who lightheartedly desert it and

those who don't care about [that desertion] or even derive satisfaction from it. So much sweat and blood has soaked into this land. . .

The Western campaign for Jewish emigration from the USSR has obscured the fact that the main internal pressure to stimulate Jewish emigration comes from antisemites. One of the purposes of *Sholom Aleikhem Street 40* is to establish the claim of many Soviet Jews for a secure and equal place in Soviet society against all those, both inside and outside the USSR, who strive to deprive them of their rights and their homeland.

But the most important message of the play is not, perhaps, a specifically Jewish one. It is Roza's call to allow human compassion to temper the cruel demands of political fanaticism. Although the pretensions of "correct" politics are not fundamentally contested, they need to be combined with kindness and pity. And here the division between "Soviet" and "anti-Soviet" starts to dissolve. For the father Semyon and the son Leonid are at one in the ruthless pursuit of their opposed goals, and this is what makes tragedy inevitable. □

Letters

AVOIDING THE ISSUES

While the Jewish community continues its drift to the right in British politics, *Jewish Socialist* makes no attempt to analyse the reasons for that drift and the politics behind it. The *Perdition* issue offered such an opportunity. Instead, David Rosenberg complains like some frustrated liberal of being "left on the sidelines" despite possessing "a more sophisticated and sustained critique", while the Zionists/anti-Zionists slug it out.

The JSG has avoided the issue of Zionism as being central to the political drift of the Jewish community, in order to avoid alienating the radical Jewish intelligentsia.

On David Cesarani's article, one would expect a historian to have some regard for factual accuracy. Kastner, the Yaron

character, is depicted as the victim of a politically hostile judge and lawyer who nonetheless triumphs posthumously. No mention is made of Labour Zionist supporters who testified against him; still less his *post-war* trip to Nuremberg to gain the release of Waffen SS General Kurt Becher in the name of the Jewish Agency; the fact that all six judges came to the same conclusion on this question; or that all six judges agreed on the facts of the case even though they split 3-3 on their interpretation regarding collaboration. He avoids one key question. Did the Zionist movement, with its rationalisation of antisemitism as being inherent in non-Jewish society, help or hinder rescue? Did or did not Zionism prioritise achieving statehood over rescue?

The issue of collaboration is always painful. Every nation and group had its

collaborators, including those who suffered grievously, yet no one would suggest that collaboration meant that a nation had brought its misfortunes on its head, rather that it was the product of certain politics — right-wing, tribalist, nationalist, bourgeois. Where Zionism was and is different is that it was the strongest Jewish current worldwide and its actions internationally impeded rescue work inside and outside Europe and also because of its use of the Holocaust as a means of legitimising the Israeli state.

This is the problem with Roberto Sussman's article. One cannot confine Zionism to Palestine because its roots were nourished and grew in the Jewish diaspora. If antisemitism were to grow again, Israel may prove to be no more of a sanctuary now than it was 50 years ago. This too is why *Perdition* is relevant.

Finally Cesarani, after making great play of crucifixion metaphors (since when are such metaphors automatically antisemitic?) asks of the "good Jews" in *Perdition*, "what sort of Jews are they? They are anti-Zionists or communists or non-identifying or totally assimilated." I can understand Cesarani's petit-bourgeois hatred of such Jews. But does the JSG also share those feelings and does it have to provide a platform for them?

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

PERDITION DEFENDED

Dear Brothers, (sic)
In the last issue of *Jewish Socialist*, Zionist historian David Cesarani, was allowed (invited?) to write an article attacking *Perdition*. I, the play's author, was interviewed by telephone. No warning. No time for any considered response to the questions posed. Just a phone call from a stranger speaking on behalf of your magazine. Why the distinction?

On the question of collaboration, David Rosenberg quotes me as saying: "The lower down the social scale, you found collaboration." I said quite the opposite: From a class point of view, the higher the ascent in the social scale, the more one found collaboration. The lower the descent, the more one found resistance. The difference is crucial.

In his hostile review of a play to which he admits not having read, Rosenberg is nevertheless able to write: "The paranoiac parlance of *Perdition's* director, Ken Loach, increasingly took the form of classic fantasies of Jewish conspiracy — fantasies more commonly associated with fascists. . . In the wider world this (Zionist) lobby exists only in the minds of antisemites. . . Accusations of antisemitism against *Perdition* were not taken seriously." He then refers to *Perdition* as: "ahistorical, crude and conspiratorial ideological fantasy."

For someone who, I repeat, has not read the play, that's quite a mouthful. Reading between the lines, it's difficult not to reach the conclusion that what Rosenberg is saying, is that I, and Ken Loach are antisemitic.

One of the most consistent and pernicious tactics used by Zionists against their opponents, is to equate anti-Zionism with antisemitism. Neither Ken Loach nor myself have ever, at any time, referred to a "Jewish conspiracy". This slur is

pure invention used by Zionists like Cesarani. Always we have insisted that Zionism is a political tendency, and does not represent the Jewish community.

By the time this letter is printed *Perdition* will be on sale in the shops, published by Ithaca Press. I advise readers of *Jewish Socialist* to read it, and make up their own minds.

Jim Allen
Manchester

David Rosenberg replies: We sincerely apologise for the proofreading error which totally distorted Jim Allen's response to the second interview question on the purpose of the play, and we welcome the opportunity to put that right. Indeed the missing lines from the transcript go further than Comrade Allen's correction and might even disturb some of his more fervent and less critical supporters, eg Comrade Greenstein. It should have read: "The higher up in the social scale the more you found collaboration, the lower down the social scale the more you found resistance whether they were Zionist or non-Zionist."

I make no apologies at all for the political critique I offered on the *Perdition* affair, and completely reject Allen's claim that I am accusing him or Loach of being antisemites. My article (which reviewed the controversy, not the elusive script) clearly condemned those who respond to what they don't want to hear, or find politically embarrassing, merely by shouting "antisemite" as if that's the end of the matter. I also condemned that brand of essentialist anti-Zionism which skates freely over contradictions in Jewish responses and reduces and explains all Jewish activity with reference to an apparently unchanging and ahistorical phenomenon it calls "Zionism" and simplistic notions of an all powerful "Zionist lobby". I tried to show how these apparently opposing elements among Zionists and anti-Zionists feed off each other and do not move us forward.

My plea was for an open and materialist approach to sensitive Jewish issues, which cuts through the blocking techniques of those reactionaries who try to suppress discussion and avoids the pitfalls and self-defeating attempts of those who are straight-jacketed by their rigid ideological dogma. I respect the intentions and motives of Jim Allen as a socialist and

anti-fascist and hope that he and others involved or interested in the *Perdition* affair will take my criticisms in the spirit of socialist debate in which they are intended, and will seriously reflect on these and other arguments put forward in *Jewish Socialist*. Finally to Jim Allen's salutation "Dear Brothers", I draw his attention to the composition of our editorial committee.

TOO NEGATIVE

I was surprised to see such a negative review of Gill Seidel's book, *The Holocaust Denial*, in *Jewish Socialist* No 8. For such an important pioneering work to be undermined with accusations of it being too emotional and based on inadequate primary research — both of which I did not sense — seemed to detract from the insights that the book provided. The editorial of *Jewish Socialist* No 9 recognised the importance and dangers of the revisionist strategy of the far right, in its denial of the Holocaust. Statements such as these are strengthened by studies such as Seidel's, providing an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of revisionism. I was disappointed by the negative review of a book which I felt was both clear and illuminating.

S Witton
Bradford

SPECIAL PLEADING

I was surprised that a secular magazine like *Jewish Socialist* should allow its review of *Paul: the Mythmaker* (*Jewish Socialist* No 9) to indulge in special pleading for religious authority. I strongly suspect that any government by priesthood, be it Moslem or Jewish as much as Christian, would turn out to be violently oppressive. It is all very well for the reviewer to show tolerance. There is little tolerance lost on "ideological aggressors" if they don't accept undemocratic priestly coercion. I fear that those socialists who do not study religions and their history neglect the threat that religious revival will continue to pose until their ideologies are radically reformed.

Michael Abelson
London E4

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struggle to have the play produced in the UK.



Emma Goldman

I am an actress but for the sake of fulfilling a dream I became a producer. My dream was to take a play about Emma Goldman seen in Boston six years ago, and to place the heroine in front of new faces; to learn more about her and in some way become part of her world. How I became obsessed with Emma Goldman I expect I'll never really know. But that night, confronted with this enigmatic, gloriously dangerous anarchist, this great dreamer, lover, and committed feminist, all in the form of a small, dark, sensual Jewish woman, I was in some way changed. Perhaps it was the pride of sitting amidst 200 people and knowing that she was part of my heritage, my culture, part of me, that made me want to look deeper into the life of this "little revolutionary in pince-nez".

Born in Kovno, Russia, in 1869 to Jewish parents, Emma Goldman grew up during a period of the worst poverty and repression Russia had known. Early on, she developed an appetite for the libertarian and egalitarian ideals of the Decembrists and the Nihilists. Following the many Jews who left Russia for the beckoning shores of America, Goldman fled to New York in 1884, seeking freedom from the limitations of her society and from the restrictions of her strict Jewish

upbringing. Before long, Emma learned first-hand of the appalling living and working conditions of the American working class. After the hanging of the Haymarket martyrs who were arrested during workers' strikes in Chicago, Goldman dedicated her life to "the memory of my martyred comrades, to make their cause my own."

The ensuing 20 years of Goldman's political activism in America read like the diary of an inspired revolutionary. She gave hundreds of lectures and public appearances marked by police presence, arrests and imprisonments and published many articles and a successful magazine. She was vilified by the conservative press and pursued by the American authorities who eventually succeeded in deporting her in 1919. Her tireless fight for human rights and free speech led to the founding of the American Civil Liberties Union and inspired many American activists, including Roger Baldwin and Margaret Sanger.

On women's issues Goldman was said to be "8,000 years ahead of her time". In an era when women wore murderously tight corsets, Goldman preached free love and the liberation of women from the chains of the "market place of marriage" which she likened to prostitution saying, "She (the wife) is paid less, gives much

more in return in labour and care, and is absolutely bound to her master. The prostitute never signs away the right to be her own person."

Goldman's unique charm lies not only in her energetic exploration of personal freedom but also in her feverish pursuit of passionate fulfilment. She was known for her many colourful love affairs and advocated "open relationships". Of her life long comrade and one time lover, Alexander Berkman, she once said, "Sasha and I love each other but we do not own one another." She was an early campaigner for birth control and, through her practice as a nurse and midwife, was one of the first practitioners of family

a labour of love, an adventure and sometimes a disaster. My partner, Alison Sterling, and I began production a year ago by reading the many Goldman biographies, and tackling Goldman's 650 page autobiography, *Living My Life*. But the excitement of discovering Goldman was soon overshadowed by months of fundraising, negotiating with directors, theatres and funders, working with the play's author, Howard Zinn, and grappling with the countless obstacles that seemed, at times, destined to sink the project.

Given the Arts Council's refusal to support the project we decided to mount a fundraising campaign within the Jewish

Paulette Randall. In April we began casting. How the hell would we find anyone who could take on the role of Emma Goldman? And then we found her, a Jewish American actress, Michele Costa. Although we did not have a policy of casting Jewish actors and actresses, it was interesting that those with the most sympathy for the aims of the play and a feeling for the rhythm of the dialogue were indeed Jewish. Of the eight cast members, five are Jewish and six are also American.

Now come the rewards of those many months of concentrated efforts. Working with a wonderful script and the beautiful Yiddish music, the excitement of getting



Artistic directors Alison Sterling (l) and Carole Charnow (r).

planning. She was a great lover of opera and dance and a noted reviewer of Ibsen and Chekhov. She was simultaneously feminist, anarchist, intellectual and philosopher, and free spirited romantic who offered women an inviting challenge: "Emancipation should make it possible for woman to be human in the truest sense. Everything within her should reach its fullest expression. All artificial barriers should be broken, and the road toward greater freedom cleared of every trace of centuries of submission and slavery."

For me, Goldman is a powerful symbol of Jewish womanhood; its power, strength and courage; our grandmothers who came to the West in great ships from Russia and Poland; who came alone at 18 and 19 to a country of new languages and new rules. And who, once there, resolved to make it their home and to bring to it their dreams and ideals.

Producing *Rebel in Paradise* has been

community. We found it difficult to locate sources of Jewish funding and were surprised by the general sense of indifference. I feel that it is important that the Jewish community makes provision for arts which are geared toward a wider public. Perhaps some sort of co-ordinating body could help to consolidate and make available sources of support within the community which would give access to small groups like ourselves. The enormous interest we have had from the Jewish community in coming to the show and publicising it through Jewish networks clearly demonstrates the need for this type of project.

The greatest financial support came from the trade union, NALGO, who gave us £10,000 worth of sponsorship. This was a fantastic boost which brought more funds, more interest and more credibility. This good luck was followed by another break; the Young Vic and our director,

articles published and watching the set design unfold, seeing the cast and production team set to work bringing creativity, enthusiasm and exceptional commitment to the project. This play has brought me something I hadn't expected; a sort of fulfilment as well as the pride of working closely with another woman to tell the story of someone who's about as close as I can get to my idea of a heroine; a great, solid force to be reckoned with, nothing less than a brilliant woman and — she's a Jew. Now that is worth a few sleepless nights! □

Rebel in Paradise opens at the Young Vic Studio in London on 14 July for four weeks and at the Edinburgh Festival on 10 August for three weeks.

A Prophet of Our Time

Primo Levi, writer, chemist and concentration camp survivor, committed suicide earlier this year. Ralph Levinson pays tribute to him and describes his life and work.

That the word "ghetto" was first used in relation to the Jews of Venice must have seemed anathema to Italian Jews during the century preceding the Second World War. The Jews had everything to gain through the unification of Italy in the 1850s and they threw their weight behind Garibaldi and the Risorgimento. The emancipation of the Jews resulted in full activity in economic life. Even through the Fascist era they became more and more assimilated into the professional classes and made a considerable impact in science and literature. Unlike Central Europe, where Jewish emancipation was also in progress, there was little vitriolic antisemitism.

Italian Jews were diverse both culturally and politically. Don Vittorio Segre, in his autobiography *Memoirs of a Fortunate Jew*, describes his youth during fascism. His father was a prominent fascist, wealthy and landed, who was still protected by local officials after the racist laws of 1938. Natalia Ginzburg, another Italian Jewish writer, came from a socialist and anti-fascist background. Carlo Levi, author of *Christ stopped at Eboli*, spent years in prison during the Mussolini regime.

The Jewish attachment to religion had rapidly become symbolic rather than pious. To the assimilated Italian Jew the rituals were quaint little anachronisms and the only sign that separated them from everybody else. Segre remembers the Jews around him in the '20s and '30s as bourgeois and laconic.

In *The Periodic Table* Primo Levi describes his antecedents under the chapter headed *Argon*. This is a noble or inert gas which is chemically unreactive; unable to change by combining with other elements. His forebears came from Spain, via Provence, to Piedmont, where they remained in a state of relative affluence (and inertia) trading silks. His family were integrated into the economic life of the country but retained

a certain waspish identity. To conceal their irreverence for the Catholic Church they referred to it through a Piedmontese Jewish dialect which parallels Yiddish in its wicked humour and capacity for insult.

It was only after the imposition of Mussolini's antisemitism edicts of 1938 that Levi, as a young man of 20, began to suffer for his Jewishness. During the early war years he tried for a student assistantship but "the professors snidely or even arrogantly" told him that the racial laws prohibited it. During this time his fellow Jews of Turin "gathered

in the gym of the Talmud Torah... and taught each other to find again in the Bible justice and injustice and the strength that overcomes injustice." Yet, for Levi, the chemist, sceptical and rational; where was this omnipotent God? "This Kadosh Barukhu, the 'Saint Blessed Be He'; he who breaks the slaves' chains and and submerges the Egyptian chariots? He who... inspired the liberators Ezra and Nehemiah, no longer inspired anyone; the sky above us was silent and empty: he allowed the Polish ghettos to be exterminated, and slowly... the idea was making headway in us that were were alone."



IF NOT
NOW,
WHEN?

PRIMO
LEVI

Author of
THE PERIODIC TABLE

"It is not often that
one feels a better person
through reading a book,
but this novel
somehow has that effect"
CHAIM BERMANT,
Observer

ABACUS

THE Periodic Table

PRIMO LEVI

'This is a book it is necessary to read.'

Saul Bellow

TRANSLATED BY RAYMOND ROSENTHAL

Here, Levi, the culturally assimilated industrial chemist, asserts the dawning awareness of his Jewish identity and his solidarity with his brothers and sisters in occupied Europe. It is worth noting that passages like these had an affect on the American Jewish establishment. By the early 1960s Levi was a celebrated writer in Italy but his books were initially received with difficulty in the English-speaking world. It took 10 years for *The Periodic Table* to come out in English — an absurdly long time for such a widely admired work. His atheism was a sore point. *Commentary*, the influential American Jewish journal, wrote that Levi had a "tin ear for religion" and that he was "the worst sort of Jew". Levi reviled the excuse that the Holocaust was a manifestation of the mystery of God's will. He drew further blood when he criticised Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

Towards the end of the war, Primo Levi was part of the anti-fascist move-

ment, joining the partisans in the mountains armed with a pearl-handled lady's revolver. This episode of his life reminds me of the experiences of the Russian Jewish writer, Isaac Babel, the intellectual Jew "with spectacles on his nose" who rides into battle with the Cossacks of Budyenny's Red Cavalry. Not that the partisans were Cossacks but the idea of Levi, the world's gentlest man, holding a pistol, cuts a strange image though he, unlike Babel, never got to fire a shot in anger. He was captured by the fascists, handed over to the Germans, and transported to Auschwitz, where his life was saved because of his skills as a chemist.

Levi wrote about Auschwitz and his wanderings through Europe back to Turin in two novels: *If This Is A Man* and *The Truce*. He has described himself as a technician who noted down what he saw in Auschwitz. He does use the skills of a technician in selecting and defining his material but a deep humanity pervades

his writing. It takes a remarkable spirit to describe the horror of Auschwitz from the inside, or to reflect on the details of the human condition within the camp without sentimentality or self-indulgence, and never lose touch with your sense of humour. The episodes are described with humility and hope. Throughout *If This Is A Man* there is the sense of the writer bearing witness and being conscious of his responsibility in carrying out this task.

About 15 years elapsed between these books and *The Periodic Table*, *If Not Now, When?* and the recently published *The Wrench*. *The Periodic Table* takes the properties of certain elements in the chemical Periodic Table of elements and relates them to episodes in Levi's life. There are reflections on his youth in Italy, wry and mischievous comments on scientific method and his life after his return to Italy. The chapter headed "Vanadium" tells how after many years, he came across the German overseer of the concentration camp laboratory, through his work in varnishes. This overseer, Muller, was "neither infamous nor a hero... a typically grey human specimen, one of the not so few one-eyed men in the kingdom of the blind." A correspondence begins which generates conflicting emotions. In Levi's case they are underpinned by an exhaustively intelligent analysis of Muller's claims for expiation. And the dry humour: "It was obvious that he (Muller) wanted from me something like an absolution, because he had a past to overcome and I didn't: I wanted from him only a discount on the bill for the defective resin."

If Not Now, When? has been described as one of Levi's lesser works. It is a beautifully written story that affirms his identity with the struggling Jews of Eastern Europe. A group of rugged Jewish partisans wring a tiny victory out of a hopeless cause. Some of the characters are rather flat but throughout I could sense the voice of the writer, human, direct and full of love.

When I read of his death last month I felt I had lost a close friend. Everyone I knew who had read his books was dumbfounded by his suicide. As the poet Alvarez said in his introduction to the BBC TV tribute to Levi, he was the last man in the world you'd think would commit suicide. Levi's appearance on the programme confirmed the regard I had for him through the literature. He was gentle, courageous and wise. And Philip Roth's tribute to Primo Levi was entirely appropriate when he wrote that he was "the most delicately forceful enchanter I have ever known". □

Broken Promises

Inside the Promised Land – A Personal View of Today's Israel by Gerald Kaufman (Wildwood House, £12.95)

Gerald Kaufman's book, *Inside the Promised Land*, reads rather like a political thriller, as Kaufman embarks on a quest for the causes of a change in the country's atmosphere. "Something increasingly disagreeable about the place, an ominous and disturbing sourness," takes him to Israel in the winter of 1985 to try and find out what is happening to the Israeli "car of state" which, he says, is "freewheeling remorselessly downwards towards an abyss into which all the passengers' hopes seem doomed to sink if the brakes are not speedily employed."

The book is racy and readable, and Kaufman's presentation of ideas, which will be unpalatable and controversial to those who still hold the view "Israel right or wrong", is entertaining and persuasive.

But despite the book's vivid style it points a depressing and disturbing picture of an Israel increasingly polarised between right wing religious fundamentalism and a sick and declining Labour Party dominated by an Ashkenazi middle class which fails to recognise that its days of elitist hegemony are over, and which exists in a cultural air pocket insulated from the reality of their loss of effective power.

He interviews a range of Israeli political figures from Shulamit Aloni and Abba Eban, to Rafael Eitan and Meir Kahane, as well as academics, Sephardi local politicians, kibbutzniks and West Bank settlers. He outlines the "Maimonides Manifesto", an ideology that bases the possession of the land and its boundaries on biblical texts, which asserts "the total sacredness which applies to every clod of earth and grain of dust on which our feed tread". This advocates policies towards the Arab inhabitants which range from stripping them of civil rights, through expulsion to finally genocide: "the wiping out of any trace of Amalek". According to Dan Horowitz, Professor of Political Science, this political Messianism provides the ideological underpinning for radical nationalism. Israel's democratic structure is not strong enough to carry the problems and the situation is ripe for fascism with Arik Sharon at the helm.

We visited Israel exactly a year later than Kaufman, in the winter of 1986. For both of us it was the first visit for several years and an opportunity to compare our impressions of present day Israel with those of our earlier experiences. We spoke with friends, family, and strangers. On our return we read Kaufman's book and were able to compare our impressions

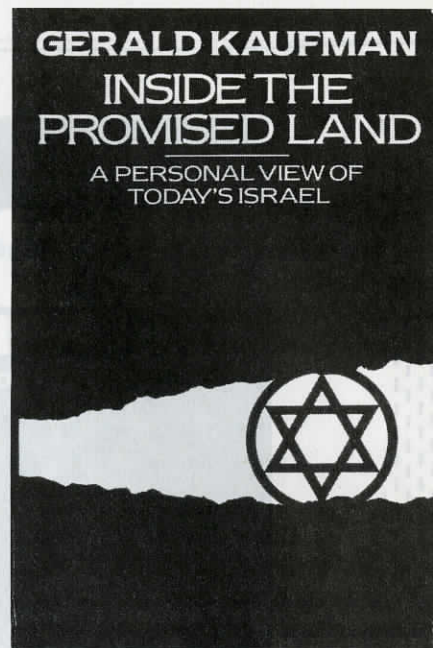
with his. We thought the book generally accurate in its assessment, as far as it went, and sympathised with his sense of urgency.

There has always been tension in Israel between secular Jews and the religious establishment which has exercised legislative control, particularly over family matters, through pressure exerted by the religious parties in the Knesset. Now there is an added day-to-day tension which exists between certain fundamentalist religious groups and the secular population. Friends spoke of newly built neighbourhoods in Jerusalem where the secular Jews move out once the religious fundamentalists, *haredim*, move in. The "Who is a Jew?" debate was raging once more in the Knesset and the Press. There was a violence between Jew and Jew simmering under the surface of the society which for us was represented most tellingly by the information that Israelis no longer give lifts indiscriminately to hitch hiking soldiers. There had been incidences of soldiers mugging their drivers. For us this was symbolic of the breakdown in unity between Israelis, much more marked since the Lebanon war, which had been fostered through the need for cohesion in the face of the external military threat. The socialist idealism of the earlier Zionist pioneers is disappearing and there is resignation and disappointment amongst some of the older generation of left Zionists, a loss of direction reflected in the Labour movement's loss of control over the State.

As a Labour politician, as well as someone closely acquainted with Israel, Kaufman attempts to explore the current failure of the Israel Labour Party in a country where the management vote Labour and the workers vote Likud. He examines the Ashkenazi/Sephardi split and puts forward various theories to explain why 70% of the Labour vote is Ashkenazi. Dr Sarah Shemer, an Israeli pollster, told Kaufman, "The Ashkenazi Jews are the ones who have been making the decisions. The Labour party has not opened up positions for Sephardis. The Sephardis have been told by the Ashkenazis how to act, how to speak, how to behave. And they've had it."

The Sephardi vote for Likud is partly characterised as a protest vote against the way in which Labour has ignored Sephardi needs. Kaufman also describes growing Sephardi confidence as they discard their earlier passivity as new immigrants dependent on welfare from the Labourite institutions.

A failure of the book is its sexism, characterised by the way Kaufman describes women mainly in terms of attributes like "pretty" and so on. He does not mention



the way in which some women's issues such as the rabbinic control over divorce have been taken on by the mainstream, let alone feminist initiatives. Whilst we were there a forum of women's groups was held, which was attended by organisations ranging from Mapam women to women's refuges. We were told that women had made both gains and losses. The increased militarisation and loss of vision resulted in greater pressure for women to put their energies into "family life", strong in Israel at the best of times. For us as two single women in our late 20s and early 30s, it was difficult to see any place for ourselves in a society that revolved so heavily around the family. But groups had grown up that were challenging this, and with an increased divorce rate this challenge might well increase.

Tellingly Kaufman also does not explore Labour's internal divisions since 1967, its continuing confusion over the occupied territories and consequently its failure to give a coherent lead on the peace issue. Nor does he write about the Israeli Peace Movement or Palestinian Israeli dialogue. None of the politicians he interviews is further left than Shulamit Aloni's Citizen's Rights Party which advocates no dialogue with the PLO. The Progressive List for Peace is ignored in the book and the resulting impression is bleak and unhelpful. This contrasted for us with Uri Aveneri's *My Friend, The Enemy*, (see JS8), which regards a dialogue towards peace as a realistic possibility and offers the hope of a fundamental shift in Israeli public opinion as a result of a PLO gesture of recognition. Despite its omissions, we enjoyed Kaufman's book. As one of his Israeli friends tells him, the Jews outside Israel have a duty to speak their minds to Israeli Jews. Kaufman isn't shy to do so.

JEANETTE COPPERMAN AND
JUDITH YELLIN

Golding Memories

Magnolia Street by Louis Golding, Gollancz, £4.95.

When I was a child I remember rows of streets named after trees – Sycamore, Larch, Beech – neat terraces stemming from the main trunk of Waterloo Road, in Hightown, Manchester.

These streets have now disappeared, part of the "slum clearance" of the 1960s, to be replaced by dismal nondescript council houses. But the "streets of the flowering shrubs", as Golding calls them, live on in *Magnolia Street*. Apparently Golding would never say which street Magnolia Street represented, but it is believed to be Sycamore Street where he himself lived with an aunt from 1910. Louis Golding was born in 1895 in Red Bank, an area of back-to-back slums in walking distance of Manchester's Victoria Station, where the immigrants arrived after a dismal train and boat journey, fleeing the pogroms of Eastern Europe. His move to Sycamore Street, in the relatively upmarket area of Hightown, followed an argument with his orthodox father over religious observance, and in 1913 he won a scholarship to Oxford where he began to write. Most of his life as a writer was spent in London where he mixed in rather more illustrious circles than he had known in Hightown. But, like many such people, his greatest artistic inspiration was the street and city of his youth.

In the novel, Max Emmanuel, the acclaimed artist who goes from Magnolia Street to conquer the salons of Fitzrovia in the 1920s, paints the faces and spirit of Magnolia Street even when he sets up his easel in Tunis or Salonica. Because Magnolia Street, his past, his roots, is in his blood.

The novel is part realism, part fantasy, narrated as if by an observer who leads us backwards and forwards from 1910 via the First World War to 1930. On one side of the street live the Jews, on the other the non-Jews. There is suspicion and mistrust and hatred and occasional attempts at reconciliation, the latter being the life-long aim of Mr Emmanuel who strives only for "love" between all people. However, it may be that Golding used the metaphor of the street to describe wider divisions between Jews and non-Jews. My grandfather owned a shop on the corner of Sycamore Street and Waterloo Road (here called Blenheim

eventually marry and move south to the New Forest.

Golding describes a lost world of "fire goyahs", the non-Jewish women who came to light the fires of the orthodox Jews on the Sabbath; front parlour shops selling home-made *ingber* (ginger sweets); grocery shops selling pickled herrings in barrels. But it is also a world in the process of change. Many of the Jews who inhabited Magnolia Street in 1910 had moved up from the poorer districts of Red Bank and Strangeways. Then as their fortunes ebbed and flowed they moved again – either to larger houses on Cheetham Hill Road itself (Begley Hill Road in the book) or even to Didsbury, or to non-Jewish districts like Hulme, or overseas to America.

The book ends in a great welter of nostalgia with the return home of the wealthy Bella Winberg, now married to a Swedish millionaire and living in New York, and Mick Shulman, son of the Rabbi who becomes light-weight boxing champion of the world. They decide to have a party and invite all past residents of Magnolia Street, Jews and non-Jews, who, as the final curtain falls, come together in joyful celebration just as the idealistic Mr Emmanuel had always imagined. Of course, it's fantasy, and an irony too, as the book ends in 1930 when events in Europe were leading to the destruction of six million Jews.

The characters pass before our eyes as on a continuously moving canvas. Some are drawn in more vivid detail than others, some are funny, some tragic, some just sad. What is in evidence throughout is the spirit of the place, and those bonds which tie us all to our past however far we move.

ADRIENNE WALLMAN



Adrienne Wallman's grandfather, outside his shop.

PROJECTING JEWISH IMAGES:

Rosalind Haber, Filmmaker and co-ordinator of the first Jewish Film Festival in 1985, assesses two films about Jewish women



Anthropologist, Barbara Myerhoff, and film director, Lynne Litman, met at a women's writers conference and decided to work together on a film about the orthodox Jewish community of Fairfax, Los Angeles. But during production of the film, Barbara Myerhoff discovered she had cancer, which changed the direction of both her life and of her study of the community. It also changed the direction of the film.

In Her Own Time (Dir Lynne Litman, USA, 1985) follows her facing her last months of life as she confronts her own death as well as the meaning and relevance of Judaism to her and to Jewish women in general.

Barbara is received by the community with support and kindness. She is also given religion in the form of a *get* (a religious divorce), prayers and a ceremony in which she is renamed in the hope that the Angel of Death will not recognise her and will therefore pass her by. A secular Jew, she observes the ceremony from behind the partition which separates the women from the men, appearing to follow the proceedings with the supposed objectivity of the anthropologist, the scepticism of the atheist and the need of the dying. In the community wig shop, a very gentle woman helps her choose a wig, while explaining the function of the *shaytl*, as well as expressing the sense of security the community offers her in an insecure world. The session passes off with a mixture of inquiry and fun as Barbara's image changes with each wig she tries on. We are left to assume, though, that this inquiry into aspects of female modesty was coupled with her preparation for the possible effects of chemotherapy.

Her next visit was to the *mikve* (ritual baths). There, an equally gentle and wel-

coming woman explains the meaning of the ritual and attempts to dispel what she considers to be the popular misconceptions about it. She sees the *mikve* offering renewal as opposed to purification from spiritual and physical uncleanness, and invites Barbara to take a ritual bath, and, as in the renaming ceremony, we see her immediate personal need being met while her mind goes on questioning. However, this questioning is only intimate and rarely goes into any depth. Barbara is presented in a vacuum: we know very little about her life and background. Were this study to have been an anthropological one, with claims to being "scientifically objective" (and therein lies another debate), this may have just been acceptable. But it wasn't. It was a very personal study, and her reactions to this community needed to be set against more than her present situation, however understandable that may have been.

This film raises issues but fails to confront them and the contradictions they present to its subject. Lynn Litman has nevertheless made a well crafted and deeply moving film portrait of a brave and engaging woman.

Spark Among the Ashes (Dir Oren Rudavsky, USA, 1986) also touches on the issue of women and religion. Another documentary, its story is two fold. Maria Jakubowicz, an elderly member of the once vibrant, but now dwindling, Cracow Jewish community, had for a long time been asking US visitors to help her fulfil her wish of holding a barmitzvah in her synagogue. It would be its first since the War. This request is finally taken up by Rabbi Korzenik who, with 13-year-old Eric Strom from Stamford, Connecticut, makes the journey to Cracow with their

translator, a survivor of Auschwitz.

We follow the request in Poland, the preparations in Connecticut, the arrival and the ceremony. Amid all this the parties give their views on what the exercise means, both for themselves and for Jewry as a whole. Young Eric proves eloquent and charming, mercifully sparing us the all-too-frequent bratishness of adolescent Americans, particularly those who hit the silver screen. Particularly touching is Maria Jakubowicz, for whom this ceremony bears a very personal significance: a young relative of hers was deported and murdered just before his barmitzvah. One senses Eric's awareness of both the public and private import of his gesture, and both he and his hostess bear themselves with impressive dignity. That they managed to do so amid the clamour of an American publicity campaign, surrounded by international press and photographers as well as film crew, is all the more impressive.

But there is another half to the story. Eric's rabbi is a woman. This does not appear to bother Maria Jakubowicz, although I was not sure whether this was a matter of principle or because she was in no position to choose. However, Rabbi Korzenik's ministry is objected to by Rabbi Elbaum, an orthodox rabbi from New York. He, too, goes to Cracow, but with the avowed intention of preventing this "travesty". In a dramatic scene at the start of the synagogue service, he attempts to remove Rabbi Korzenik's *tallis* (prayer shawl) from her shoulders, and her from the podium. In order to minimise the disruption, Rabbi Korzenik agrees not to preside over the barmitzvah, and the ceremony goes ahead.

Woven into this are interviews with young Jewish Poles, all of whom agreed that they wanted to keep the religion and culture alive, but disagreed as to how feasible this was. Coupled with Maria's story, all of which was translated by the Auschwitz survivor, this made for an overwhelming sense of loss and struggle which was even more poignant as it took place amid the internal ideological wranglings of the rabbis over the age-old and continuing struggle over sexism.

Nevertheless, we could at least rejoice in Maria's evident happiness at the fulfilment of her dream, and in the knowledge

2 Views of the Jewish Film Festival

that there are young Jews like Eric who will keep alive the spirit of those who died.

Rudavsky's use of archive footage, interviews and reportage combine to create a sense of history, as well as of a future dependent on present debates. The chaos of the events was reflected in the chaotic structure of the film. My preference would have been for a more structured (and shorter) film which would have allowed us to engage more deeply with the issues.

Although the question of women rabbis was raised, the debates were not developed. Like *In Her Own Time*, this is a film which competently raises issues, reports events and engages with its characters, but which fails to develop the arguments and explore the underlying contradictions. I hope it will stimulate these debates, though, and that we will see more work from these filmmakers — and others — which will take these very important questions further. □

Michael Heiser reviews two films which look at the lives and conflicts of Jews and socialists

Two films at the recent Jewish Film Festival were *Pobre Mariposa* (Poor Butterfly) from Argentina and the French film *Les lendemains qui chantent* (Song-filled tomorrows).

In the first, the "butterfly" of the title is Clara. The time is 1945 and Germany has just surrendered. Clara is a radio announcer of the sort that does advertisements for soap and toothpaste just before the pips. She is married to a surgeon and her daughters are being brought up as Catholics. All close to the Argentine middle-class norm. Except that she has a Jewish father, who she hasn't seen for years but who dies suddenly in mysterious circumstances. Clara comes to his funeral, unable to understand the Yiddish of her relatives and crosses herself before his coffin.

She is impelled to find out about his life and why he was killed. She finds herself taking the tram to a working class district of Buenos Aires where soapbox orators speak of the Revolution on street corners. Here her father lived, a journalist on a hand-to-mouth socialist newspaper.

Clara finds out that her father was on the trail of Nazi war criminals coming to Argentina; that he got too close for the comfort of some very influential figures in the country. She looks for allies but no one will help her: not her middle-class husband with his well-connected contacts; not her Jewish relatives, who treat her as an outcast. Only her Jewish Communist cousin comes to her assistance and when he tries to get official party backing he is told the matter is not a "priority".

The "poor butterfly's" life is shown to be, as it were, a gossamer web. Her daughters, bright and fair-haired in their pre-First Communion white dresses complain to her that they had been insulted as "Jews" at school ("We're not Jews, are we Mummy?"). But the killers are on Clara's trail because she, like her father, has found out too much. A stray bullet in the rush-hour evening traffic and the radio station manager is left to shout, with a minute to on-air time, "Bring me another announcer". (One is found.)

The director, Raul de la Torre has succeeded in crafting a powerful anti-fascist fable. As an Argentinian film it is obviously significant because it is able to make statements about how both civil and military governments of the past turned a benevolent blind eye, at the very least, to fascism. But it has a wider relevance to those fighting fascism anywhere. To quote the director, "Most . . . will be moved by what happens to this 'poor butterfly' which is to some extent what happens to many. All of us are wandering through life and suddenly we must face some kind of reality."

Les lendemains qui chantent is set a few years later in another continent; in the Jewish Communist Paris of the early 1950s. Marcel Slivovitz is a loyal Party member. Although he now has his own furrier's business he tells his more sceptical assistant, "I may be a worker on my own account but I am a worker." Suddenly he hears that his Russian nephew, Yaneck, whom he has never seen, will be visiting Paris with a ballet troupe. A word in the right place, a few strings are pulled and

Marcel and family get to meet Yaneck, at a reception put on by the local Party in the violinist's honour. But the Russian seems ill at ease. Taken home by Marcel's children, he asks to take a bath and then disappears through the bathroom window, leaving only a message in Yiddish in a notebook. We later find out that it is a list of the Soviet Yiddish writers murdered by Stalin (Perets Markish, Itzik Fefer, David Bergelson and so on) with a message "Gekenken zey . . ." (Remember them).

Marcel is distraught. He is no longer treated as a "good comrade". The Party hierarchy think he must have been in the plot to spirit Yaneck away. Marcel can't sleep and falls ill. In the final scene, a Jewish communist choir sings of the "song-filled tomorrows" of the title, as Marcel paces the courtyard below, unable to identify any more and cast out by his erstwhile comrades.

It is interesting to compare the way Yiddish is used in the two films. In *Pobre Mariposa* the use of Yiddish emphasizes Clara's exclusion from the Jewish community. She can't speak Yiddish and therefore can't speak to relatives who themselves can't speak Spanish. When she attempts to put flowers on her father's grave, a Rabbi shouts at her in what is to her a harsh and incomprehensible Yiddish. As a contrast, in *Les lendemains qui chantent* it is Yiddish which the French and Russian Jews have in common. At first, with a Russian interpreter on hand, conversation is stiff and formal. "Do you speak Yiddish?" Marcel asks his nephew. The interpreter quickly interrupts, "What need is there of Yiddish when I am there." But Yiddish becomes a tool of complicity as Yaneck manages to communicate, without an interpreter, with Marcel's daughter, his cousin.

Both films offer fascinating glimpses of a Jewish and Socialist life of the past, as well as how the two may seem to come into conflict. Nowhere is this more graphically illustrated as during Clara's father's funeral, when his comrades interrupt the service with a spirited rendition of the *Internationale*, complete with red flag held aloft.

Both are very recent films (1986 and 1985) and both are evidence of an examination of the life of Jews and Socialists of the past with messages that are clearly relevant for all today. □

COMINGS AND COHENS

It's the Same Old Story by Steve Cohen
(Manchester City Council Public Relations Office, £1)

At the time of writing, under siege in a Manchester church, Viraj Mendis is still fighting for his right to stay in Britain. His plea to be treated as a political refugee, in view of the repressive regime in Sri Lanka, has been dismissed by the Tory Home Office.

His supporters have been attacked, and his life threatened, by Nazi thugs encouraged by the Tory press hate campaign.

Inspired by this case and others — Anwar Ditta from Rochdale, Nasira Begum from Manchester, more recently Manchester building worker George Roucou — my old *landsman* Steve Cohen has written a timely little book.

His stated purpose is "to retrieve the hidden history of immigration control... more importantly in terms of resistance to control."

Tory media hysteria against immigrants, racist slurs? It's the same old story. "The Unwanted, the Unfed and the Unemployed" was the *Manchester Evening Chronicle* editorial on 19 April 1905, supporting the Aliens Act because it would exclude "the dirty, destitute, diseased, verminous and criminal foreigner."

About Jewish immigrant workers in Manchester, *Spy* magazine in 1892: "... these filthy, miserly vermin, these rats who are content to abide in their dirt and rags in the cesspool of humanity known as the slums and to exist at making trousers at fourpence-halfpenny a pair to the exclusion of the British workmen."

"These creatures, these loathsome things, are not few. They swarm like rats in the sewers..."

That the immigrant workers were far from "content", but fought for better conditions, only made things worse in the eyes of the press.

"It is from the competition of these pauper aliens that the British labourer is

reduced to want and it is by their anarchical and socialistic opinions that his lot in life becomes further unsettled", asserted the *Stockport Advertiser* in 1891.

In 1905, a Jewish couple and their son were refused entry to join another son already in Manchester, even though relatives assured the authorities they would see the old couple did not become a "burden" on the rates.

In 1985, a Bangladeshi was refused permission to join his wife.

A tailor who had worked in Manchester for four years returned to Russia to bury his father. He stayed there another four years, until he had saved the money

It's the same old story



STEVE COHEN

to return. He was refused re-entry, on the grounds that he had been away too long.

That was in 1907. Under today's immigration laws, non-British citizens, even if permanently resident here, can be refused re-entry if away more than two years.

Steve says immigration controls are racist in their whole conception. Leading up to the 1905 law was the agitation of the antisemitic British Brothers League and Tory MPs.

Fascists and right-wing Tories campaigned, particularly in London and the Midlands, to bring about the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act. Encouraged by this success they haven't stopped since.

Although noting that Tory governments passed both laws, Steve doesn't spare any illusions about Labour governments, or attitudes in the Labour movement.

In 1950, Tory MP Cyril Osborne was demanding "separate figures for coloured immigration". But it was the Labour Cabinet which set up a Committee to review "means which might be adopted to check the immigration of coloured people from the British Cononial Territories."

In opposition, Labour attacked the 1962 Act. But three years later a Labour government was introducing tighter controls.

In 1892, The Trades Union Congress demanded immigration controls against fellow-workers. After the 1958 Notting Hill race riots against Black people, local Labour MP George Rogers blamed... black people!

The TUC approached the Ministry of Labour proposing work vouchers in 1958 — four years before the Immigration Act.

Among the most anti-immigrant, and viciously antisemitic, writers at the turn of the century were such "socialists" as HM Hyndman, of the Social Democratic Federation, and Robert Blatchford of the *Clarion*.

Writers on Labour history have tended to miss out such facts or their significance. No wonder the National Front's *Spearhead* felt it could embarrass socialists in 1980 by evoking "the obvious patriotism and candid racialism of these early socialists."

There was a fightback. In 1904, a mass rally in Stevenson Square, Manchester, heard Salford councillor Thompson declare that "being a socialist, he recognised no nationality."

In Manchester, the Jewish Tailors' Union, the Trades Council and the Independent Labour Party were particularly active against controls.

Margaret Bondfield of the Shop Assistants and Frank Brien of the Dockers' Union were among speakers at a 3,000-strong meeting called by the Jewish Tailors' Union in London in 1902.

The racist argument among trade unionists was very ably challenged by Jewish workers in the pamphlet *The Voice of the Aliens*.

Written by Joseph Finn, and endorsed by clothing and other trade unions, as a response to the Cardiff TUC's anti-immigrant resolution, the pamphlet was launched at simultaneous mass rallies in Leeds and Mile End, London. A speaker at the London rally was Eleanor Marx.

Steve acknowledges differences between yesterday's struggles and today's, and does not pretend that antisemitism and other forms of racism are the same. His point is that they are linked.

His purpose is to link the fight back against them, and to stress the way immigrants today are continuing this fight. He says battles around individual cases like that waged by Viraj Mendis and supporters, are especially vital in arousing awareness and resistance.

In between his own professional assistance in immigration cases, Steve has studied this history for some time. But this little book was clearly a "rush job" to help the struggle that is now being waged.

This probably explains some faults in style (the repetitive "for instance") and errors such as calling the British Brothers' League "neo-fascist" (proto-fascist would be more correct).

I also got a feeling of work being hastily re-jigged to fit the current campaign. There is a need for a more worked-out perspective.

For all that, Steve has dug out some fascinating material, and I, for one, appreciate the Northern angle on a too-often Londonocentric field. More important, he has made his contribution as part of the fight that is going on.

For Jewish Socialists, this little book is also valuable in reminding us of our history and re-awakening the tradition in which we fight.

Reproduced at the end of the book, in its entirety, *The Voice of the Aliens* still rings out today, powerful in logic, proud in spirit, class-conscious and socialist in outlook, ably exposing and indicting the links between racism and opportunism in the labour movement. Steve's book would be worth getting for that alone.

CHARLIE POTTINS

Chicken Soup Runs Foul

ARNOLD WESKER'S
CHICKEN SOUP WITH BARLEY



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Chicken Soup with Barley, Half Moon Theatre, London

Arnold Wesker's play *Chicken Soup with Barley* served the dual purpose of an excuse for a London Branch outing plus a venue to sell *Jewish Socialist* magazine. Some comrades sold five copies while my laid-back sandwich-board selling methods resulted in no sales and one enquiry into the cost of the programme.

The play opens on 4 October 1936 in the East End basement of Sarah and Harry Kahn who are described in the programme notes as "a family who happen to be Jewish, working-class and committedly socialist". Excited Communist Party members are running in and out of the basement making preparations for a march and rally. (It seems Mosley and several hundred fascists happen to be in the area that day too).

The first act is the best. The pride and joy of the community in defeating both the fascists and the police, linking arms with the Limehouse dockers, men, women and children all angry and ready to fight while the Board of Deputies urges people to stay away. Acts two and three show the gradual disintegration of the family and their political ideals — all except Sarah. Sarah remains strong and sure to the end, when everyone else has turned away in bitter disillusion. Warm and angry Sarah, pressing food and tea on both friends and family, never forgetting that it was bowls of chicken soup with barley that saved her daughter's life. This is a woman I could fall in love with, so why did my buttocks clench seconds after she appeared on stage? This ain't no fiery socialist, I thought, this is a yiddishe mama straight out of a television sit-com. I glanced towards the wings waiting for Maureen Lipman to appear. Wesker himself describes this woman as "fiery". Her prodding of Harry is her "attempt to point out to a weak man his weakness". I regret that no such subtleties were expressed in this performance.

During the second act Harry has a

stroke. (You see his accent kept changing from East End Jewish to North London Greek-Cypriot and it must have been an awful shock to him). However, fret not for Harry who at least manages to spend most of the remaining scenes slumbering in an armchair. I, for one, was willing to swop places. It was one of Harry's slumbering moments that provided the highlight of the evening for me, when Sarah tip-toes over to him to remove a smoking cigarette from his mouth and has to peel it from his upper lip. (Sharp intakes of breath from an absorbed audience). Actually this audience were a noisy lot. They hissed when the projection screen above showing the "march of time" flashed pictures of Mosley and Hitler, and they purred affectionately when six-year-old Ronnie wandered out on stage wrapped in a huge blanket.

This is a powerfully good play and Sarah is the spirit of socialism — "You want me to move to Hendon and forget who I am? If the electrician who comes to mend my fuse blows it instead, so I should stop having electricity? I should cut off my light? Socialism is my light." Terrific lines and characters should not be squandered. The East End Theatre Company, according to the programme, "is pleased to present this play as part of the Jewish East End Celebration". The pleasure, I'm afraid, was all theirs.

RUTH LUKOM

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 1987 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.

JOIN THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP NOW
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