

# JEWISH SOCIALIST

No 11 Autumn 1987

THE MAGAZINE OF THE JEWISH SOCIALISTS' GROUP

£1

## JEWISH WORKERS' BUND 90th ANNIVERSARY



**Investigating  
Barbie's lawyer**

**Le Pen's friends**

**Perdition – the  
continuing story**

**The uses of  
Jewish history**



# JEWISH SOCIALIST

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No 11 Autumn 1987

## EDITORIAL

While we join with socialists across the world to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the revolution that brought down the despotic Tsarist regime in Russia, Jewish socialists will be stretching their memories a little bit further this autumn. For 90 years ago the very first socialist party in Russia was founded: the Jewish Workers' Bund — a mass movement which not only nurtured and hastened the growth of the revolutionary socialist movement in Russia, but also revolutionised Jewish life. After centuries of apathy and resignation the Bund brought the Jewish workers' hope, and an instrument through which they could struggle to fulfil that hope. In the stormy decades before it was almost entirely obliterated in the Holocaust, the Bund became the largest and most influential movement among the Jewish workers in Eastern Europe. It organised and supported workers in struggle, defended Jews against antisemitism and contributed enormously to the Yiddish cultural life of the Jewish people.

Today times have changed. Those who claim to be "leaders" of our Jewish community, swim complacently with the

Thatcherite tide, treat socialism and the Jews as mutual enemies, and use the term "Bundist" not as a source of pride but as a term of abuse against political enemies they cannot control. They try to hide, bury, ignore or deny the past in smug self-satisfaction at their current certainties.

We, however, continue to believe that a flourishing Jewish future can only be realised under democratic socialism, and our commitment to the struggles of our own times, in our own context, is strengthened not by burying the past but by making ourselves and others more aware of the experiences of the generations of Jewish socialists who came before us. The reprinted paragraph from Vladimir Medem (p16) and the articles by Julia Bard (p3), Clive Gilbert (p16), Majer Bogdanski (p17) and Esther Brunstein (p18) provide an insight into these experiences.

Times and conditions may have changed but many of the issues which the Bund raised and has struggled to influence — of socialism and minorities, and of the nature and future of the Jewish people, still remain to be resolved.

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Bundists in Warsaw, May Day 1933 Majer Bogdanski	

## 90 years on

There were songs and poetry, laughter and tears at the London celebration of the 90th anniversary of the Jewish Workers' Bund. In a room packed with people of all generations, the audience sat rivetted as Majer Bogdanski, a lifelong Bundist whose political education came through the harsh conditions of pre-War Poland, told the story of the Bund. He graphically described the oppression faced by the Jewish workers in Russia. The 13 delegates at the first conference in October 1897 in Vilna represented existing organisations — the strike funds and self-education groups which had been set up in the 1870s. So the Bund was not created by those early activists; rather, it grew from the grass roots of the Jewish community and opened its doors to anyone who wanted to participate in the struggle for a better world.

"Tsarism oppressed everyone", said Majer, "but the Jews had a special oppression. They were confined to the Pale of Settlement, they were limited to certain trades; and they were also oppressed *inside* the community, where those with strong elbows exploited the others."



Barry Davis

The Bund had a huge impact as Jewish workers began to realise that they no longer had to be "the slaves of slaves, but could join together to fight for better conditions."

One of the Bund's first tasks was to organise self-defence groups against the pogroms. They also assumed from the very beginning that they would be part of the wider Russian socialist party which was to be set up the following year. In both 1905 and 1917 Jews and non-Jews fought together against the vicious Tsarist regime.

From 1919, when Poland became independent, until the outbreak of the Second World War, the Bund played a central role in the lives of Polish Jews, organising trades unions and leading the daily struggle against antisemitism. "Poland was reborn under the sign of antisemitism," said Majer. "Worst of all was the quiet, virulent antisemitism which meant Jews couldn't be employed in a wide variety of jobs."

One of the major achievements of the Polish Bund was the establishment of Jewish schools where all subjects were taught in Yiddish. With no government support, and serving the very poorest families, they still managed to maintain a system of secular Jewish education all over the country.

There was a youth organisation called *Tsukunft*, a children's organisation called SKIF, and a sports organisation called *Morgnshtern*, all of which were affiliated to international



Majer Bogdanski

organisations. The Bund, itself was part of the Socialist International from its early days.

Majer described his response to "that shameful Molotov-Ribbentrop pact", news of which came "like an earthquake" in the summer of 1939. There were extraordinary acts of bravery in the ghettos — like the man who smuggled himself out of the Warsaw ghetto to trail one of the trains to Treblinka, taking Jews to what they had been told was a work camp. He smuggled himself back in and told the truth about the death camp so the Bund could warn people not to go voluntarily to the assembly point for transportation.

Bundists who survived the War rebuilt the organisation in the different countries in which they found themselves. Today there are Bund organisations in the United States, Israel, Canada, Australia and South America where they work together with socialist parties and keep up their work on Jewish culture and language.

"If I was asked to say in two words what the Bund gave us," said Majer, "I'd say: dignity and hope."

Inspired, we moved on to the cultural part of the celebration. There were songs of work, struggle and hope, some familiar, some less well known. There was also poetry, read in Yiddish and English by Majer Bogdanski and Barry Davis, which breathed life into the bare facts of Jewish existence in Eastern Europe.

The high point though, was when everyone, young and old, socialist, communist and those who had never even seen the words before, sang the two songs which have traditionally ended meetings of the Bund: *Di Shvve*, the anthem of the Bund, and *The Internationale*, the anthem of socialists the world over, this time sung in Yiddish, the language of the Jewish Socialists of 90 years ago.

JULIA BARD



All generations celebrate the Bund's anniversary.

## Dayschool against apartheid

On Sunday 20 September, Jews Against Apartheid (JAA) held a dayschool on South Africa attended by about 25 people.

The morning was given over to the address by the keynote speaker, Cedric Mayson, an exiled South African now living in London and on the Anti Apartheid Movement's National Committee.

In a useful and interesting speech, Cedric Mayson outlined the historical background to the current situation in South Africa and Namibia, tracing the development of the ANC from its formation in 1912.

Speaking on violence, he pointed out that until 1961, the ANC had a policy of non-violence. However, the 1961 Sharpeville massacre meant that passive resistance was not enough. The use of force by the ANC was a legitimate action against an oppressive regime, parallel to the resistance movement in World War Two, he said.

On the positive side, trade union activity in South Africa had grown enormously despite fierce government repression. Sanctions (both internal and external) were beginning to bite and the current situation in South Africa, although

difficult, gave some cause for optimism.

In the discussion that followed, Cedric Mayson touched on JAA's role. He stressed the need for JAA to be part of the wider anti-apartheid movement and the unique opportunity it had to raise the consciousness of the Jewish community about apartheid. It also had a key role to play in becoming an authoritative voice on the links between Israel and South Africa.

After lunch, due to the small number of people attending, there were only two workshops rather than the advertised five.

The workshop on the Jewish community in South Africa was led by Desmond Hertzberg, a South African currently living in England and claiming to be a founding member of Jews for Justice, a South African Jewish group in opposition to apartheid. While he gave some interesting factual information on the composition and affiliations of the community, he also expressed opinions which were in direct contradiction to JAA's views, including the outrageous statement that Black men (sic) did not want the vote. Attempts at argu-

Photo: Marian Shapiro



Cedric Mayson

ment were met with the response that people who had not lived there had no right to express opinions, and in the end several participants walked out of the workshop in disgust. It would have been acceptable to argue against such views coming from another participant, but surely workshop leaders should reflect the aims of their host organisation? JAA needs to learn a lesson from this experience and vet its speakers more carefully in future.

The Israel and South Africa workshop began with a showing of the recent *Diverse Reports* programme on the military and economic links between the two countries. A surprisingly disciplined discussion followed. No one disputed the facts presented by the programme and all felt that JAA could play a part in opposing Israel's support for South Africa and in addressing the UK Jewish community

here on the issue in a non-alienating way. Hopefully, the forthcoming report from JAA on Israel and South Africa would go some way to achieving this.

The plenary, led by JAA's Chair, Shalom Charikar, focussed on the need to influence the South African Jewish community by developing channels of influence and using them constructively. JAA's recent letter to Rabbi Cyril Harris criticising his acceptance of the post of Chief Rabbi of South Africa and offering to meet him for discussion was welcomed as an important step in the right direction. In conclusion, Shalom stressed that although the Israel/South Africa issue was an important one for JAA, it was also vital to focus on those in South Africa suffering under the iniquitous apartheid system.

JAA can be contacted at BM JAA, London WC1N 3XX.

## Vanunu – brother speaks out

With Mordecai Vanunu's trial about to start his brother, Meir, spoke to a packed JSG meeting in August this year. He spoke, to begin with, of the family's home background; they came from Morocco to Israel in 1953 and both brothers had had an orthodox education.

Mordecai, as is now well known, had been employed as a technician at Dimona, Israel's nuclear installation, and details about this had appeared in the "Sunday Times". As a result, in a

closed court, he now faces a battery of serious charges; aggravated treason, aggravated espionage and assisting the enemy in a time of war. The first of these carries, at least theoretically, the death penalty, the last one a sentence of twenty years.

But did Vanunu reveal anything not already well known, at least in official circles? As Meir said, "If anyone believes Vanunu revealed anything new they should be relieved of their post." What he had done was

to demand the right of the Israeli public to know information which, officially at least, was being kept from them. "How can they make up their minds," he asked, "when there is nothing in the open?"

Most of the 75-strong audience was sympathetic and Meir was warmly applauded at the end of the meeting.

A few weeks later, the JSG participated in an act of concrete solidarity with Vanunu, a picket of the Israeli embassy called by CND. The JSG leaf-

let given out at the picket urged the Jewish community, the peace movement and all progressives in Britain to join with it in calling for the trial of Vanunu to be open and public, supporting those in Israel making this demand and working for a nuclear free Middle East.

The real danger to the Israeli people, the leaflet emphasized, was from entry into the nuclear arms race and not from any "secrets" which Vanunu may have revealed.

## Lifting the lid

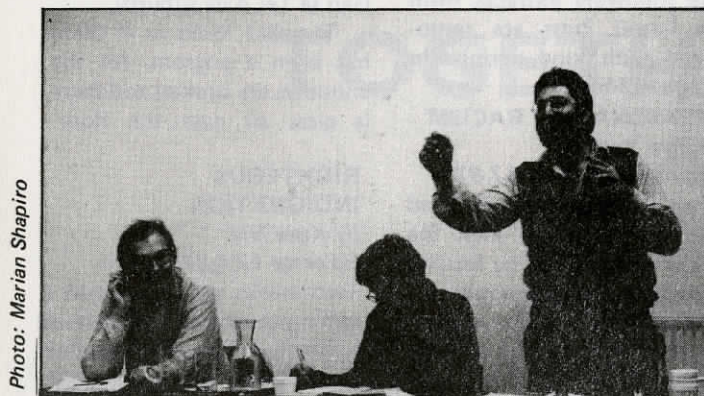


Photo: Marian Shapiro

"You haven't been invited here to be lectured to but to participate in debate". With these words David Rosenberg opened the Jewish Socialists' Group Dayschool on "The Politics of the Jewish Community in Britain today", held at Conway Hall, London in September.

**What is a Jew in this community – what is good for us as Jews?**

Michael Safier started the discussions by describing some of the conceptions that the Jewish Establishment pours its power and resources into perpetuating. The "real" Jewish Community, it claims, is one which is purged of all modernist ideas. It is, he explained, in terms of its Zionism, a reverse colonial community. It is a part of the wider Zionist Commonwealth with a strong free-market economy and therefore a natural affiliate to the existing government as well as all liberal and conservative elements worldwide. Holding up a copy of the *Jewish Chronicle Colour Supplement*, Michael introduced us into a new growing Jewish community in an article entitled "Fringe Benefits in Bushey". These liberal and conservative elements really do come true over the rainbow in Bushey where their smug semi-detachedness and Ford Sierradom are portrayed as achievements by the *Jewish Chronicle*.

**"We must produce more babies or we'll disappear"**

Julia Bard described the different implications for women living in the traditional values of the Thatcherite '80s. These "values" emphasise the importance of the unity of the family and yet Conservative policies split Black and Asian families across the world. The Establishment proudly perpetuates the view that Jews in Britain "look after their own". The reality of this

Photo: Marian Shapiro



philanthropy is that women are increasingly taking on the burden of their families' health and welfare problems rather than contacting their local social services.

### Prisoners of Zion

Charlie Pottins, battling against an exuberant violin and piano rehearsal next door, discussed the role of Zionism in Anglo Jewry. When describing the history of Zionist ideology in Britain, Charlie quoted Theodore Herzl who advocated "diverting the stream of Jewish immigration away from Britain as they brought antisemitism with them". The discussion went from the *Spare-Rib* debate and antisemitism on the Left

to a meeting held in Battersea Arts Centre where June Jordan and Jenny Bourne discussed the Israel and South Africa connections. Many in the workshop put forward the view that Zionism had never been such a dominant ideology in Jewish working-class areas as it had been elsewhere in the community.

**"I am Jewish therefore I think"**

The Jews and anti-racism workshop discussed the need for Jews to "come out" as Jews when campaigning on anti-racist issues with other ethnic groups. The workshop learned that Chassidic families were also victims of Conservative immigration policies and many families were divided as a result of them.

### Dismissing the myths

The third workshop of the afternoon was entitled "Who cares? Welfare and social issues in the Jewish community". As Conservative ideals of self-sufficiency hack away at our Welfare State, the old and infirm have become depen-

dent on the support of unpaid volunteers. We learned that our Jewish community sends more money to Israeli welfare services than it gives in support to "their own" Jewish poor.

### Stuart links up

"The Dayschool was brought to its conclusion by Stuart Linke of JONAH (Jews Organised for a Nuclear Arms Halt) and Mike Heiser of the JSG in a discussion entitled "Determining our Future – Challenging and Changing the Politics of the Jewish Community".

Stuart described a cold, wet Chanukah service or – ganised by JONAH at Molesworth where a small group of JONAH people grew to a

crowd as closet Jews detached themselves from the curious who filed past them. Said Stuart "our strength to be activists will come from building our own Jewish community." Mike Heiser chronicled prevailing views of Jews as "Thatcher's favourite bedrock of support" as espoused by Hugo Young in that (supposedly), liberal organ *The Guardian*. Are Britain's Jews victims of a "mobile privatisation" – individuals with their own lifestyles who never challenge society? For the second time that day the *Jewish Chronicle Colour Supplement* raised its ugly gloss as we were dragged back to Bushey.

Why does Thatcherism find echoes in the Jewish community? Why have we been encouraged to bow to the state? Have we lost the sense of a collective community? No one was left in any doubt of the problems we face. But there were over seventy reasons not to be despondent about the future and they left Conway Hall with a little more strength to face it.

## New Year revolution

This *Rosh Hashana* the *Jewish Chronicle* refused to publish joint New Year greetings from the Jewish Gay Group and the Jewish Lesbian group (see page 7) and also refused to accept New Year greetings from the Nottingham Jewish Lesbian Group. We are appalled but not particularly surprised at this latest example of intolerance by the "Organ of the Jewish Community" and would like to express those greetings through our pages – albeit a bit late. We would also like to return greetings to the groups concerned and wish them luck in the struggle over the coming year. If any other groups or individuals have had greetings or advertisements refused by the JC, we'd like to know so we can join forces to oppose this kind of bigotry more effectively.



Photo: Marian Shapiro

John Bunzl (right)

Most Jews in Britain know very little about Austrian Jews today. When John Bunzl, who lives in Vienna came to talk to the Jewish Socialists' Group about his community the room was packed with people of all ages and backgrounds, including a number of refugees from Nazi Austria.

Before the war there were 200,000 Jews in Austria (see John Bunzl's article in JS No 6/7). Today there are only 10,000, and almost none of these lived there before 1945. Today's Austrian Jewish population consists mainly of recent immigrants from the Soviet Union, a large number of them non-Ashkenazis from regions in the east like Georgia and Kazakhstan. There is also a growing group of immigrants from Iran.

John talked graphically about the atmosphere within the Jewish community, which faces increasingly explicit anti-semitism, and he described the paranoia and sense of precariousness felt by the establishment in the light of Waldheim's election and recent statements. The effect of this is to place enormous pressure on radicals within the community to keep their criticisms of the Jewish establishment to themselves.

Despite the difficulties, though, a group of Jews who don't conform to the leadership's expectations has started to meet regularly on a fairly informal basis, to discuss their ideas and offer each other support. The JSJ will stay in touch with them.



Photo: Marian Shapiro

This picture was taken in Santander, northern Spain, two days after the death of Rudolf Hess.

The following extracts from the Israeli Press are reproduced with kind permission of *Israeli Mirror*.

**"REASONABLE" RACISM**  
by Ziva Yariv

*Yediot Aharonot* 10.7.87  
When Rabbi Kahane shrieked that we ought to kick the Arabs out of Israel by loading them into trucks, people said the man was a lunatic, a Nazi, an alien implant, and that the anti-racism law had been passed to deal with creatures like him.

But when (Reserve General) Rehavam Ze'evi put forward the idea of a population transfer, which means, albeit in more educated language, the expulsion of 1.5 million Arabs from this country, the anti-racism law seemed forgotten. Instead of shouts of disgust, the response was a relaxed academic debate conducted on the pages of our newspapers.

Commentators earnestly discussed the history of the transfer idea; reputable researchers calmly and thoroughly examined its ideological, sociological and political angles. Some of them did indeed reject the idea as impracticable, but others treated it as a legitimate and considered proposal that deserved serious attention and should be checked out by experts in the fields of transport and haulage.

**POGROM AGAINST PALESTINIANS**

*Ma'ariv* 24.6.87

"We split into two groups. Some of us stormed the front door while others broke in through the windows. We smashed the door and the windows with bricks and boards to get in. They deserved to be killed. We also had grenades. They were lucky we didn't use them. They deserve everything. They harass young girls in the neighbourhood and live 15 to a room, making a mess," said one of those who took part in the pogrom against the flat inhabited by three Arabs in the Ramat Amidar quarter of Ramat

Gan (a Tel Aviv suburb).

The flat looks as if there has been a pogrom. All the windows are broken and there is glass all over the floor.

**RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION**

by Kubi Niv  
*Ha'aretz* 17.4.87

Two weeks ago I watched a news report on the visit of a Black women's delegation from South Africa to Israel. The reporter explained that there were "women deprived of their rights" who had come from distant South Africa to visit our Knesset. Inside the Knesset a member of the Labour party addressed the women in her Polish-accented English, making sure she spoke very slowly and emphasising every word. Speaking as if she was facing a group of retarded children, she droned on about the need to struggle for equality, and similar nonsense.

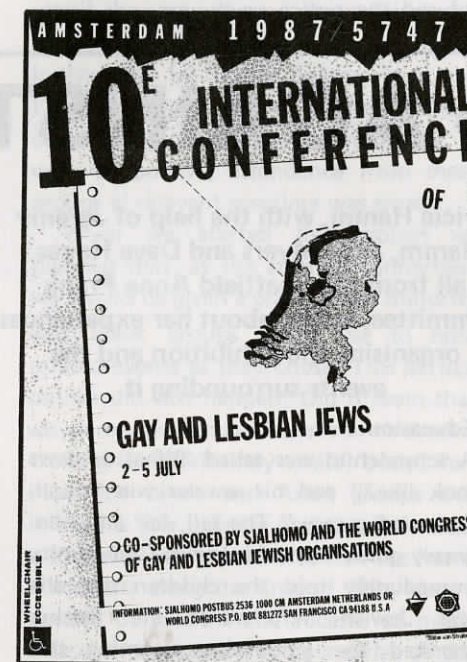
I looked at my TV screen in a state of shock. My God, I thought. Why did they bother to go to South Africa to find and bring over a group of women "deprived of their rights"? Why send a plane to South Africa? I would have no difficulty bussing in 50,000 "women deprived of their rights" from East Jerusalem, Nablus, Ramallah etc.

Why does no Israeli TV reporter ever say that Palestinian women are "deprived of their rights"? Why doesn't that socialist Labour Knesset Member ever address a speech in her primitive English with the Polish accent to Palestinian women, telling them about the need to struggle together for equality? How blind can one be?

The South African racist regime at least allowed this delegation of rightless women to visit Israel. However, our own beloved and enlightened Israeli government will not permit any delegation of rightless Palestinian women to travel on such an errand, neither to South Africa nor to anywhere else.

## TOGETHER IN HOPE

James Baaden reports on the 10th International Conference of Gay and Lesbian Jews.



Nearly 300 people from Europe, Israel and the Americas took part in the conference which was held in Amsterdam in July. Initially an annual event but biennial since 1983, the conference is organised by the World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organisations, which unites about 25 associations, ranging in size from substantial synagogue congregations to small local groups. The task of arranging the conference was handled by Sjalhomo, the Amsterdam-based organisation for lesbian and gay Jews in the Netherlands.

This year's conference was not only the first to take place in Europe, but also the best-attended so far. Responding to the urgings of representatives from outside the United States, the executive of the World Congress had decided that the next gathering should take place outside America. The great majority of the organisations in the World Congress are of course in the US, and there was some doubt in Washington whether American Jews would be inclined to cross the Atlantic in 1987. These apprehensions were hardly allayed by the wave of anxiety about "overseas terrorism" which swept the US in 1986.

Sjalhomo, the Dutch host organisation, was formed in 1979, and today has about 160 members. Like many of the World Congress member groups outside the US, it began as a chiefly secular organisation, formed "to strengthen the identity of homo- and bisexual men and women". It aims to "stand up against racism, fascism and sexism" and to "achieve equality and recognition of the gay and lesbian lifestyle within and outside the Jewish world" — enterprises which it sees as contributing in the long run "to changing the attitudes of society as a whole".

In Britain, the World Congress is represented by its oldest member organisation, the London based Jewish Gay Group formed in 1972. Chiefly male in composition, it has recently forged links with a newer Jewish Lesbian Group and both are currently looking at ways of uniting

without giving up their particular concerns and perspectives — possibly under the new umbrella title *Hineinu* (Here we are). The Amsterdam conference was a useful arena for exploring such possibilities, because it provided an opportunity to meet other lesbian and gay Jews with varying experiences of the permutations of the gay male/lesbian equilibrium. Chicago, for instance, has just witnessed the reunification of two communities, one exclusively lesbian and the other chiefly male, which had come into being following a rancorous split several years ago. Boston, on the other hand, is proud of the harmonious parity between women and men which has always characterised its organisation, *Am Tikva* — (People of Hope). Miami, meanwhile, has maintained one organisation, although the women within it have developed an autonomous format and organise regular women-only events.

The Amsterdam conference was opened by the city's mayor, himself a Jew, who recalled Amsterdam's historic role as a place where minorities had found not only refuge but a social environment based on tolerance and respect. The mayor's involvement was one sign of the conference's high profile. Another

was the fact that it took place in the Krasnapolsky Hotel, a grandiose establishment in the heart of the city. The main part of the conference comprised two full days of small workshops and larger theme-groups. Topics included "Second-generation Holocaust survivors", "How Jewish gays and lesbians can increase their influence within the Jewish community", "A new liturgy and life-cycle ceremonies for lesbian and gay Jews" (led by a gay rabbi from California). "What Israel means to us" and "Being a gay parent". There were services on Friday night and Saturday morning, a visit to the outstanding new Jewish Historical Museum, and a Holocaust commemoration in the ruins of the *Hollandsche Schouwburg*, the cinema building where Amsterdam's Jews were rounded up and confined before being transported "to the East". The conference itself concluded with a plenary session at which resolutions on subjects such as apartheid, Soviet Jewry, AIDS testing, immigration laws, and religious liberty in Israel were discussed.

The 10th International Conference brought together Jews of extremely varied backgrounds. For most of the more than 160 US participants, it was the first encounter with a Jewish community in a non-American context. For many of them it was clearly a novel and sometimes moving experience; the international nature of Jewry suddenly made manifest. Experiencing Amsterdam was equally fascinating for British Jews, but for different reasons. One striking feature was the high level of acceptance which Sjalhomo finds in its relations with communal institutions (perhaps the result of traditional Dutch reverence for civil liberties cross-fertilising the country's Jewish population?). Another was the perceptible legacy of the past in a nation directly savaged by the Holocaust. For all, it was an occasion to mourn those Jewish gay men lost to AIDS and to reaffirm vigilance in the face of the manipulation of the AIDS crisis everywhere as a pretext for a wholesale onslaught on the

basic human rights of gay men and lesbians.

The issue of acceptance was thrown into sharp relief for British participants not long after their return from Amsterdam. To be sure, in a year which has seen both elected and would-be politicians seriously demanding genocide (90% of gay men should be "put in the gas chambers" according to the Conservative leader of South Staffordshire council), nothing

should surprise. Hoping such views did not hold sway within the Jewish community, the Jewish Gay Group and the Jewish Lesbian Group, under the new joint banner of *Hineinu*, submitted a *Rosh Hashanah* greetings notice to the *Jewish Chronicle*, sending their best New Year's wishes to friends and relatives. The paper, which has not refrained from printing letters foaming with homophobic bigotry, refused the notice on the grounds firstly

that it might "offend" — and secondly that gay and lesbian Jews (presumably their very existence is referred to) are "against Jewish law". Approaches are being made to the *Jewish Chronicle* to review its hostile stance on this point. □

*Further details about Hineinu, the Jewish Gay Group and the Jewish Lesbian Group can be obtained by writing to: B M JGG, London WC1N 3XX.*

# SHEFFIELD AGAINST FASCISM

Tricia Hamm, with the help of Jeremy Hamm, Julia Myers and Dave Hayes, all from the Sheffield Anne Frank Committee, writes about her experiences organising the exhibition and the events surrounding it

## Education

A schoolchild was asked "What do Jews look like?" and his answer was "small, dark and greasy." The tall, fair and non-greasy guide from the Jewish Community immediately told the children that she was Jewish. Afterwards the teacher thanked the guide for assuming this pretence!

In Sheffield — as elsewhere — in classrooms and staffrooms, Jews are hardly visible, but "Jew" is a common term of abuse, and "Jewing" refers to scrounging. None of the widespread anti-racist educational initiatives have included any reference to Jews.

Over the four week period of the exhibition over 200 school groups made visits — 4,000 pupils between 9 and 18. It became very clear that two things in particular were likely to produce a positive response in children. The first was the level of preparation by, and commitment from, their teacher (particularly if the preparation was in an anti-racist framework). Secondly, it was an advantage to have guides available, so that children could receive information not just from the exhibition boards in front of them, but more actively from people who often had direct, personal experiences to relate.

Teachers attending the familiarisation course at the start of the month received a pack produced by the seconded teacher entitled "Sheffield in the World 1987". This set of photographs of multicultural, present day Sheffield could be used in schools, to allow children to understand the importance of one's "home" and

"place", and to suggest identification with the Frank family.

The *emphasis* in the teaching approach was crucial. One school, while learning about the historical background, made displays about their own families; in their visit they looked only at the sections of pictures of the Frank family. This teaching approach aimed to enable children to empathise with people who were and are targets of racism. It worked very well.

The Council Arts Department also contributed floor-level artefacts to make the exhibition more accessible, more tangible to children. These included a photo album with prints of the Franks to emphasise the ordinariness of the family; a blown-up photo of a swimming pool in Nazi-occupied Holland with the sign "*Voor Joden Verboden*" (Forbidden to Jews) accompanying a notice on a beach in South Africa "*White Persons Only*", and underneath both a caption "where do YOU stand?"

The considerable interest shown by teachers seems to come not only from the exhibition's relevance to subject areas, but also from its focus on a young person who is a familiar symbol: white, not particularly "ethnic", middle class, even quite English in the TV portrayal. It seems that teachers who have not previously been active in anti-racist education regard this as a less threatening way of approaching issues of current racism. How do we deal with this dilemma?

Bruno Bettelheim in his book *Surviving the Holocaust* asked why Anne Frank has

been so taken up by the world, in television, film and literature. What kind of a role-model is she? He feels that the Frank family's decision to go into hiding was a retreat, to survive, it would have been far more realistic either to try to leave Holland or to split up and to live among gentile families. He feels that the use of Anne Frank suggests an unease in confronting what was happening — are qualities like self-delusion and refusal to consider active resistance the reason why the story is so acceptable? And if so, does not the story reinforce general ideas of human powerlessness under domination, and specifically Jewish passivity during the Nazi period?

When I was guiding children around the exhibition, I found myself referring to "ordinary families" and "normal family life". What kind of negative ideas about themselves would this have been promoting, to children from "normal families" where there was violence, or to children not living in nuclear family units?

Another problem with the exhibition is the lack of attention to other group victims of the Nazis. Children, when asked, did not know who else, besides the Jews, were put in concentration camps.

## Reactions

We are a small group and we're proud of the programme of talks, exhibitions and other events that we've brought to Sheffield. There have been many positive aspects to the talks. In terms of numbers only one attracted less than 30 people, and some like Kitty Hart's "Return to Auschwitz", drew in nearly 200. Many of the subjects have not been raised in such meetings in Sheffield before, and some like the "Fighting Today's Fascists" event, should lead to further discussion and action.

We do feel critical of certain aspects of our organisation. With hindsight it's clear that we should have borrowed fewer exhibitions and used each one more effectively. Regarding the talks, attention to technical detail (eg acoustics in a particular hall) was sometimes lacking and we could have been more imaginative when it came to thinking about the relationship between speakers and people in the audience. Also, not all our venues were wheelchair accessible.

The showing of the exhibition was the outcome of a long period of negotiation between the independent committee and the City Council. We were asking for a lot

of commitment — an expensive educational programme as well as the £7,000 hire fee. The support of ward and Constituency Labour Parties, as well as of individual councillors, ensured the release of resources. But in other ways we were disappointed by the Left. Why was there so little help? One reason could be the lack of understanding of European fascism in the 1930s and '40s; another could be a nervousness about being seen to raise issues relating to Jews. Though individuals in trade unions and the Labour Party — as well as the women's community and black communities — were supportive, attendance from these groups at relevant meetings was small.

When we started this project we planned that, as the steering committee, we would be given a grant which minority and black groups could use to hold related events as they chose. This participation did not happen. Did it seem that we were some kind of benevolent but controlling (and definitely white) body? Perhaps for black and Asian groups this seemed a low priority and the Holocaust a historical white problem. We have heard comments along the lines of "Why does a decade of fascism still receive so much attention by contrast to centuries of the slave trade and oppression here and now?" Other reasons such as class and Zionism must also have been part of this reaction.

As far as Jewish people in Sheffield were concerned, we should say first of all that the community here is small, ageing and relatively well off. When we first asked the Representative Council to participate in our programme their reaction was negative and patronising. They were especially unhappy about being associated with anything that was called "anti-racist". In their reaction too, there

seemed to be a fear about "provoking" antisemitism (or simply giving Jews a more public profile).

Doubts about the exhibition itself were overcome after pressure from many sources, including the Board of Deputies. A conciliatory meeting was held, following which a warmer relationship between our group and the "community" developed. But we were annoyed when the Representative Council refused to circulate our programme, publicising only four talks — all relating to Jewish experience of the Holocaust or Jewish culture. We felt that the Representative Council was denying the ability of people within the community to think for themselves.

Many within the community have helped us a lot as guides, and some friendships have developed. There is greater acceptance and understanding from both sides. We too have had some stereotypes challenged!

We know that the programme attracted a wide range of people. Importantly it has raised awareness of Jews and presented us as a diverse community. It has brought out many people with interesting stories to tell: Jews who came to Sheffield as child refugees and never became part of the community; local non-Jewish people who have memories of the war and the liberation of the camps. Many in Sheffield will have learned a great deal about how a people in Europe came close to being destroyed. We hope that connections have been drawn with the experiences of other minority groups suffering oppression in the past and the present, and some lessons learned. Perhaps as useful as anything to come out of the exhibition, we have become more confident to take a serious part as Jews in the anti-racist movement. □



## Dewsbury – a taste of Honeyford

Anne Krisman surveys the media response to the race and education row

The Dewsbury coverage followed a summer of tabloid race stories, always guaranteed to unite racist readership. The seeds were sown late in July, with the reporting of the PAT (Professional Association of Teachers) conference. Much space was given to the views of a primary school head who lamented the decline of Latin and Greek, in comparison to the teaching of mother tongues. "If there is nothing more monocultural than Bengali, I don't know what is." (*Today*, 29.7.87) In August came the spate of stories about race awareness training, where white participants claimed they had been abused and brainwashed by black course leaders. A double page *Daily Mail* spread (1.9.87) told the sad story of Dorothy Phillips (a pseudonym) who was sent on such a course: "I tried hard to put the whole thing behind me, but after it . . . I was, if anything, beginning to think like a racist." A *London Evening Standard* JAK cartoon showed stereotyped black cannibals with spears dancing around a pot, where missionaries were saying, "Actually, I'm on a Birmingham City racial awareness course." (27.8.87) There was, of course, the inevitable Notting Hill carnival coverage. The *Daily Mail* (2.9.87) juxtaposed a stark image of a Rastafarian in confrontation with a black policeman with a romantic portrait shot of the policewoman who had been stabbed. Back-lit to give a halo effect, the picture was reminiscent of the treatment the newspaper has given to Zola Budd and Margaret Thatcher.

These stories all gave clear messages: that white people were under threat by the black population and that claims of racism could be countered by examples of black hostility. The world view was one of a wronged white victim. The possibility of black readership and reaction was probably not even considered.

As a teacher within a predominantly Asian school, this type of coverage worries me. Inside my own work-place, I can never assume a white norm. My first year form are confident to answer "Present" to the register in Bengali, Punjabi, Hindi or English, they bring in photos of Imran Khan and the actress Rekha for the wall display and fantasise about their ideal school dinners, normally biryani, samosas and Cornettos (although the reality is usually fish and chips and custard).

Outside the world of my classroom, the Dewsbury episode was a sobering one. For those unaware, it dealt with 25 Yorkshire parents who were refusing to send their children to an 85% Asian school, and who were standing out for places within the predominantly white Overthorpe school. For the popular Press, it became described in headlines as "Asian Row". The parents soon became identified as the "Dewsbury 25", heroes to the cause of a good English education. They had a leader, publican Eric Haley, who spouted Conservative sentiments: "It is the right of all parents to choose what school their children go for." They had a clutch of photogenic children who wept as they were dumped on the premises of a school that didn't want them. They also had the weight of the British media behind them.

The issue, according to the Press, was about parents' rights and traditional English culture. The *Sun's* leader, entitled "The right to choose", made this clear: "The parents understandably fear the education and cultural upbringing will be adversely affected in a school which inevitably will be catering mainly for Muslims . . . That is not racism . . . it is simply that they are English. They live in England. And they want their children to get a traditional English education." (5.9.87)

The assumption was that the pure English children would be tainted by the presence of Muslim children. The *Daily Mail* sent a reporter to spy on Headfield School. He came back with the astonishing facts, "in the playground many of the children were Asian, many in traditional dress. They shouted to each other in Urdu or Gujarati as they played together. They did, however, use good English in the company of white children." (5.9.87) This theme, of a strange breed taking over white territory, was echoed in BBC News. After showing footage of a separate Muslim school, it stated, "the Dewsbury parents, like the Muslim parents, feel that they are being swamped by an alternative culture." These emotive words gave the impression that the religious Muslims and white racist parents were two sides of the same coin.

Yet what was this mythical "English education" that was repeatedly mentioned, yet never defined? Everyone's favourite expert on education, Ray

Honeyford, explained in an article in the *Daily Mail* (4.9.87). Parents, he stated, "want their children to know about Jesus Christ, the Roman invasion, the Norman Conquest and Elizabeth I, as well as absorb the Bible and the great English poets and novelists." Indeed, if Muslim parents were unhappy at this concoction, then they could go off and form their own school with a "Pakistani-Muslim ethos".

The simplistic coverage set its own limits. The possibility that some parents were white and happy with a multi-cultural environment was hardly hinted at. The Muslim parents' viewpoints were a side issue. The *Daily Mail's* effort at balance was to find an Asian woman who had taken her daughter away from the "boycott school". No wonder, if its reporters were continually harassing the children there. Only one edition of the *Sunday Mirror* stood apart from the rest of the Press. Their leader on 13th September criticised the white parents for "parading prejudice under the banner of parental choice." It also scotched the bizarre notions of Englishness — "many of the pupils were born in Yorkshire and would be qualified to play cricket for the county . . . the parents' claim that the protest is about 'culture', not race, is nonsense." Elsewhere in the newspaper Muriel Gray wrote cynically about the children who were used as pawns in their parents' racist game and Paul Callan pointed out the positive aspects of the school environment despite the racial tensions within the area. Compared to the other newspapers, this all seemed radical stuff.

As a Media Studies teacher, sometimes it is difficult to deal with topical events. The distance of history is not there. During the Dewsbury incident, I filed my press cuttings and got on with the day to day business of teaching in a multi-ethnic school. Recently I attended a Parents Evening where a white mother explained that her first year son wouldn't do Hindi (part of his compulsory Language course). Why not, I asked. "Because," she whispered, "He doesn't like Asians." It was that conspiratorial tone that reminded me of the Dewsbury coverage and encouraged me to deal with it. The media has similarly defined its audience and assumes complicity in a racist viewpoint. □

## WITH FRIENDS LIKE THIS ...

Louis Marton counts the cost of support for the Palestinians from Barbie's lawyer.

The name of Palestine and the fate of its people have twice in the recent past been dragged unnecessarily where they do not belong. The same man, French lawyer Jacques Verges, was instigator both times. An honourable fighter for the cause of independent Algeria, Maitre Verges some 25 years ago saved many FLN resisters from the guillotine, the only "freedom" the French colonizers understood. But times have changed, and Verges is seeking other causes, good or bad.

The first concerned Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, leader of the leftist Lebanese Red Army Faction, accused of terrorist actions against trains and public buildings in France. Abdallah's guilt or innocence will likely never be known because his lawyer, Verges, advised him not to attend his own trial. Abdallah got life imprisonment, mainly because he refused to defend himself. The trial ended in great confusion, on both political and legal issues; it remained perfectly unclear whether Abdallah's group was or was not behind at least some of the bombings and, if so, whether he was working for Syria, Khomeini or anyone else.

Verges explained to the court that by sentencing the Lebanese fighter, the court — and France — would at the same time be condemning the cause of Palestine. This argument was not only perverted but also dangerous for Palestinians, since if Abdallah's guilt were to be proved, this would classify Palestinians — and above all the expression of their national identity, the PLO — exactly the way their adversaries want to define them: as terrorists.

Maitre Verges then moved on to another trial, this time offering his (according to his own statement) unpaid services to Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie.

The legal defence and outcome were the same as with the Abdallah trial. Barbie, on his lawyer's advice, boycotted the proceedings and got the heaviest sentence allowed under French law, life imprisonment.

Verges again succeeded in dragging Palestinians into the trial, stating there was no real difference between what Hitler and Barbie did to Jews and Gypsies and what France did to Africans and Algerians, Americans to Vietnamese, or for that matter what Israelis do to Palestinians; Sabra and Chatila were compared to Auschwitz. Verges tried to demonstrate Barbie's innocence much the way Dr Servatius tried for Eichmann: that the defendant was only a small cog in a big machine, devoid of personal responsibility. In other words, everyone is guilty on the same level, except for Nazis themselves.

To stress this point, Verges, whose mother was Vietnamese, asked for the assistance of a Congolese and an Algerian lawyer so that "Aryan" Barbie would be defended by a Yellow, a Black and a Brown. The basic idea was, of course, to demonstrate a "rainbow coalition" of colonized against colonizers — an issue certainly worthy of consideration, but in no way related to the matter of the head of the Lyon Gestapo accused of torturing and sending to death camps Jews and Christians, children and old women, etc.

This was apparently too much, even for the Third World. Two of the founding fathers of Algerian independence, Hocine Ait Ahmed and Mohammed Harbi, protested against what they considered a manipulation of history: "If we Algerians should have any role in this trial it would not be as witnesses for the defence of Barbie, but as witnesses for the prosecu-

tion in the name of the rights of man (sic) which legitimize our own fight". They added that fighting for justice today also means combating Third World regimes where human rights are downtrodden.

Palestinian intellectuals, as far as we know, did not react, which is quite understandable insofar as they are apparently not at issue. Verges's attempt to associate their name and their fight with two very different issues is, however, far from innocent or inoffensive.

On one hand, Palestinians are being used, once again, as objects, tools, as a screen on which anybody may project his own delusions, and not as full human beings and even less as a people with their own past and projects for the future. This lip-service in the name of Palestine may very well hide, smear or erase the reality of Palestine. On the other hand, one of the main problems in the Palestinians' strategy is finding a way to speak to Jews and not brand them as Nazis. The late Issam Sartawi proved that the way to do this was by appealing to one's sense of humanity, to make visible the injustices done to Palestinians. . . in other words, to make Jews and Palestinians allies and not adversaries. Or, as put by Sari Nusseibeh, who lives in Jerusalem and thus has full knowledge of what occupation means "In spite of all my suffering I refuse to be dwarfed by the circumstances into an immoral racist".

Palestinians need many things — arms, money, medicine, allies. The one thing they certainly do not need is perverted egos. May God protect them from friends such as Verges. They can probably deal with their enemies themselves. □

Reprinted with kind permission from *Israel and Palestine*, July 1987.

# A mere detail of the Tory conference?

David Rosenberg looks at responses, left and right, to Alfred Sherman's invitation to Le Pen, leader of the French Front National

A rather dull party conference season was unpleasantly livened up by the proposed visit of Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the French Front National, to address a fringe meeting at the Conservative Party conference. He was invited by the leading far right Tory, Sir Alfred Sherman, a former adviser and speech writer for Margaret Thatcher, and now head of his own new right think tank, Policy Search (a name surely more appropriate for the SDP!). Le Pen no doubt saw the visit as an opportunity to bolster his image as a statesperson and as a suitable partner for the "respectable" right.

News of the invitation first broke in *Private Eye* in mid-August and was later confirmed in the *London Evening Standard*. At the political establishment end, the next few weeks saw a few disgruntled murmurings from the press and a handful of Tory "wets", interlaced with wild rantings from Sherman in the letter columns of various newspapers from the *Telegraph* through to the *Jewish Chronicle*, justifying the planned visit.

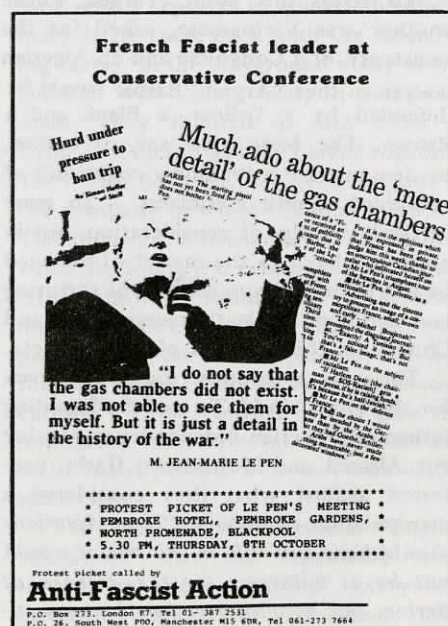
Starting with a classic liberal defence of free speech, Sherman soon dropped his guard and out poured his gushing admiration for Le Pen's virulently anti-Third World immigration policies and strong minded defence of national identity and culture, or as Sir Alfred dramatically puts it—even if etymologically unsound—defence from "cultural genocide".

Meanwhile anti-racists and anti-fascists began to mobilise. The Jewish Socialists' Group had been particularly well prepared by a talk given in July by a JSG member who lives in Paris, Barry Smerin, on "France after the Barbie Trial" in which he graphically illustrated the antisemitic,

racist and fascist essence of Le Pen's party, through their public and more internal statements.

As soon as the invitation was confirmed the JSG issued a press statement drawing on this material, condemning the invitation, condemning the Tory Party for tolerating it and thereby providing Le Pen with a platform, and calling on anti-racists and anti-fascists to mobilise for a demonstration if the invitation was not withdrawn. This call was enthusiastically taken up by Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) who began to mobilise nationally for this demonstration.

Then in mid-September everything changed. Le Pen made his outrageous, and now infamous statement, about the Holocaust being a "mere detail" in the history of the Second World War, and suddenly the British Press and political establishment shifted gear. This point



was not lost on the Black communities and the Afro-Caribbean newspaper, *The Voice*, noted how Le Pen's anti-Black racism was being tolerated and it had to wait for his comments about the Holocaust before any widespread condemnation was forthcoming. They asked whether there might have been the same reaction if Le Pen had referred to the enslavement of millions of Black people as a "detail" of history.

Sherman, however, still did his best, or his worst, to defend Le Pen, claiming that his answer was elicited by a trick question. There was a "conspiracy" against Le Pen, he said, carefully choosing his words. In a last gasp defence, Sherman repeated Reagan's Bitburg bombshell of yesteryear that the SS were as much victims of the Nazis as the Jews.

Meanwhile, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, who were part of the earlier murmuring brigade felt under pressure to be more incisive. Trying desperately to find a way of condemning the visit without any hint of condemnation of, or conflict with, the Tory hierarchy, a Board spokesperson in a radio interview condemned the visit but urged that there be no demonstrations if it should go ahead. No doubt with a voice behind him whispering "Cable Street 1936" he went on to urge Jewish people to stay as far away from Blackpool as possible! Their partners the *Jewish Chronicle* did their bit by editorially implying criticism of Sir Alfred while turning over large chunks of the letters page to him to respond, and denying such space to statements or letters on the subject from the JSG.

Tory leaders were clearly worried about the implications of the visit going ahead but not, apparently, because of the politics of Le Pen, but rather because of the diversion it would create from the orgy of triumphalism that the Tory conference was supposed to be, and especially as Le Pen's meeting was planned for the Thursday night before the leader's Friday rally. Tory chair, Norman Tebbit, in uncharacteristically cryptic language described Le Pen as "not a Conservative" and urged conference delegates not to attend his meeting, but he refrained from any specific criticism of any particular statement. Mind you, it might have been seen as hypocritical given that his local Chingford Tory association was submitting a resolution for the conference calling for the abolition of all race relations laws, ie never mind immigration, we want the right to be racist against Blacks here and

now. And it should also be noted that when Sherman was making his most pronounced statements on immigration and matters racial in the mid-1970s, when the Tories were worried about losing working class support to the National Front, among Sherman's closest allies and supporters at that stage were Tebbit and Thatcher, the very people now trying to diplomatically distance themselves from the Le Pen invitation. And throughout the whole of this latest sorry episode Sherman claimed that he did not receive one written request from any Tory MP to call off the visit.

As a very clear issue there was a welcome almost total unity on the Left campaigning against the visit. The exception, some might say predictably, was the Revolutionary Communist Party, who shared Norman Tebbit's difficulty in finding adequate words with which to condemn Le Pen. They settled on "chauvinist" (not very strong really!) and argued that we've got lots of racists here already so why the hypocritical hysterics about

this particular chauvinist. To their credit the RCP did prominently display a JSG reply to their drivel which argued that: "Le Pen is not just another racist spreading his 'chauvinist opinions'... He is a fascist whose followers' racist violence is just a foretaste of the kind of regime they would impose on the working class as a whole... We consider that opposition to the visit was an act of international solidarity with those suffering and fighting racist attacks in France."

Perhaps the least satisfying aspect of the whole affair was the way the Tory party was let off the hook by the racist coverage in the mainstream press. Instead of uncovering the political basis of the invitation to Le Pen, the papers kept their analysis at the most shallow, racist and individualised level. Practically every article on the subject stressed, usually halfway through the story, "Sir Alfred Sherman, who is himself Jewish..." as they revelled in their highly dubious "Jew invites fascist" angle. It was as if Sherman was acting completely alone

outside of the context of developments within the Tory Right, and as if the whole episode was about his clumsy attempts to do something useful for the Jewish people! Sir Alfred Sherman saw how things were being presented and played along with it. This analysis spread also to sections of the Left and the anti-racist movement.

The reality of course, was that a hard right in the Tory Party has been campaigning for many years now for increasingly harsh immigration policies and for repatriation, and for the old right slogan of "family, church and nation". Sherman is part and parcel of that movement and his Jewish identity is irrelevant to any serious analysis.

The JSG welcomed the cancellation of the visit and issued a public statement making it clear that: "We do not believe Sherman was acting alone... and so we treat it as a warning about the kind of ideas that the far Right of the Tory Party wish to provide a platform for if they can get away with it." □

## The thoughts of Chairman Alf

Alfred Sherman has travelled a long way politically since his youth in the Communist movement during which he joined the International Brigade and shot fascists in Spain in the 1930s. He began to make his mark on the immigration "debate" with two features in the *Daily Telegraph* in September 1976. In the first one called "Why Britain cannot be wished away" he wrote:

“The imposition of mass Third-World immigration against the wishes of the majority of the native population constitutes a serious failure of this country's representative institutions and party system...”

Having turned a nation of shopkeepers into a nation of shop-stewards, we might consider better remedies than importing more shopkeepers. This was followed by "Britain's urge to self-destruction" in which he said:

“The imposition of mass immigration from backward alien cultures is just one symptom of this self-destructive urge reflected in the assault on patriotism, the family—both as a conjugal and economic unit—the Christian religion in public life and schools, traditional morality in matters of sex, honesty, public display and respect for the law, on educational values,

thrift, hard work and other values denigrated as "middle class," in short, all that is English and wholesome...”

Conservatives have traditionally stood for the legitimacy of the English people's instincts. They would be wise to do so now, in a civilised manner while there is still time.

He developed this immigration theme in a piece entitled "Britain is not Asia's fiancé" in the *Sunday Telegraph* in December 1979. He argued:

“The Asian fiances issue is the visible tip of a submerged but inescapable problem; the conflict between the instincts of the people and the intellectual fashions of the establishment where British nationhood is concerned...”

The United Kingdom is the national home of the English, Scots, Welsh, Ulstermen (and those of the Southern Irish stock who retained British identity after their fellow-Irish eventually rejected it). They have no other motherland. Its history, institutions, landmarks are an essential part of their personal identity. They wish to survive for future generations as an identifiable national entity.

No less important, they have been willing to work, suffer and die for it generation after generation. This national

identity is a birthright. To attenuate it in any way against their wishes is a form of spiritual genocide.

By contrast, for the jet-age migrants and their communities, Britain is simply a haven of convenience where they acquire rights without national obligations.

... and so to the Le Pen affair and the *Jewish Chronicle*, September 1987, where he claimed:

“Le Pen reflects opposition in France among Jews included—against their swamping by millions of North African Moslem Arabs who wholly reject French identity and loyalty and Judeo-Christian democratic values.

As Jacques Soustelle, among others, has publicly argued, these immigrants and their progeny are manipulated by Iranian, Libyan and Saudi paymasters; they constitute reservoirs of drug-trafficking, crime, terrorism and antisemitism.

Given these statements it is not surprising that Sherman saw fit to invite Le Pen to Britain. The surprise is that Le Pen hadn't already invited Sherman to speak in France! □

# PAST TENSIONS

Teresa Thornhill made a painful journey to Germany with her father to trace his family's roots

My father's father was a German Jew. According to Jewish Law, I am a gentile. But that bit of Jewish background has a lot to do with who I am.

Today the main thing I trace to being Jewish is a sense I acquired as a small child of being different from other English people. I didn't understand it then. I was told only the bare fact that my long-dead grandfather had been a German Jew: I didn't know what that meant, and because my father refused to own his Jewishness or pass any of it on to me, I grew up feeling like a gentile with a dad who was "odd".

I thought—and was told—that we were different from other families because my parents were artists, and, unlike their middle class friends, had no money. When I asked them what class we belonged to they declared, "Oh, we're artists, we're in a class of our own."

Even as a kid I knew there was more to it than that. My mother, despite having no money and being an artist, passed very easily as a middle class English woman. The person who made us decidedly un-English was my father.

This was most obvious after my parents split up, when he came to visit us in the country town where my mother had retreated to rebuild her life. There he stuck out a mile. He looked different from my schoolfriends' dads, his views were different, and, where they were cool and reserved, he was intense and emotional.

When people treated him like an outsider, I was torn between shame and anger. I identified with him strongly, and, as I grew up, I sought positively to show that I too was different, that I wasn't just another English clone.

I had a lot of Jewish friends at university. When the subject came up I would sometimes mutter "I'm partly Jewish too"; but the words were hollow. I said them without knowing what they meant but I had a vague sense that one day I would try to find out. After university I became involved in feminism, Irish solidarity politics, and anti-racism.

It was the early '80s in London, and racism was becoming a big issue. All around me Black women, Irish women, Spanish and Jewish women were describing (for the first time) how uncomfortable they felt in middle class, gentile, English

circles. How they felt put down and ignored by women who appeared to assume that everyone's reality was the same as theirs. They were made to feel that they spoke too loudly, showed too much feeling, had funny accents, were uneducated.

Although I found the anger intimidating, I found it easy enough to accept what was being said. I knew what that sense of "not fitting" felt like. What I found difficult was that it was always assumed that I belonged amongst the middle class gentile women.

In debates about class, race and background I accepted the middle class Brit label. I could see that I appeared to be one. But I knew my background didn't square with those of the other middle class women I knew; I felt different but couldn't find a tangible reason for my sense of being different. Eventually, I began to think about my dad being partly Jewish, and what that might mean.

I knew that, for him, being Jewish had always been a negative thing, associated with being the butt of antisemitism at school in the 1930s. His parents hadn't told him he was Jewish, but the boys had guessed and begun to taunt him with it. In a state of hurt bewilderment he had come home one school holiday and happened upon his father's passport, which revealed that he had been born a German Jew and become British by naturalisation. When confronted, my grandfather acknowledged this but refused to discuss it.

As a small child I had sometimes tried to get my dad to talk about being Jewish and being German, but he maintained there was nothing to tell. His childhood had been lonely and his relationship with his father very distant. He felt alone in the world, cut off from his parents and siblings.

As for any sense of community with other Jews, that was entirely lacking. He could be hostile to the point of antisemitism towards people who identified positively as Jews. Looking back now, I remember several Jewish faces among his women friends; but they weren't identifying Jews and I think if he was drawn to their Jewishness, it was unconsciously. When I asked him, a couple of years ago, why he didn't identify as Jewish, he grimaced and said "Because in my position you lose out both ways: to Jewish

people you're not a real Jew because your mother's not Jewish, and yet you never feel comfortable among gentiles either!" I found his attitude depressing but could see how he had come to feel like that.

And so I was amazed when, at the age of 63, he casually remarked that he would like to go to Germany to visit the place where his father had lived as a child. When I saw that he meant it, I offered to go with him for five days in June 1985.

The Home Office informed me that my grandfather's naturalisation certificate said he was born in 1873 in the village of Friedelsheim near Mannheim. That was all the information we had, plus the advantage that we both spoke some German.

When it was time to go, I felt nervous about the trip. My dad was a difficult person at the best of times, and it was years since I had spent a stretch of several days with him. Also, although my sense of being Jewish was very tenuous, I had negative feelings about Germany and knew it would be uncomfortable to be there trying to trace Jewish ancestors. I had no idea what we might find out about my dad's family or how he would react. He thought his father, who had come to England in 1897, leaving his family behind, had brought out all his brothers and sisters in the early 1930s. They had gone on to the US and Canada and contact with them had been lost.

There must have been other relatives who had not got out. I had often wondered about this, even as a child, and tried to work out what I felt about it. When I thought hard, it made me shudder but my dad's apparent lack of emotion towards this side of his family made it very difficult for me to feel connected to those people.

As the train chugged east across Belgium, dad began to talk about his father. He didn't know why he had first come to England, but by the time he met my grandmother, in about 1900, he was running a successful china and glass business in London. She was from the East End, of Irish and Scottish background. My grandfather was naturalised as British in 1904, but was interned during World War One because of his German origins. This caused great distress and in 1916 my grandmother arranged for their name to be changed from Dornberger

to Thornhill.

In the 1930s they were harassed for being Jews. A brick was lobbed through their window. Presumably it was because of these experiences that they decided not to tell my dad about his father's origins. He was born in 1922, and sent away to boarding school at five or six. His brothers and sister were much older and had lived through their father's internment. They went into the family business, and later emigrated to Canada.

After a long journey down the west bank of the Rhine, we arrived in Mannheim. We spent the night there and next morning set off for Bad Dürkheim, the nearest small town to Friedelsheim. The train snaked out of the industrial greyness of the city into a countryside of lush green vineyards. A long line of low hills formed the horizon, and church spires were dotted here and there. It was a fine June morning and I was surprised to find my grandfather had grown up in such beautiful surroundings.

In Bad Dürkheim we went straight to the record office. It was in an old building which had been expensively modernised. The Clerk politely gave us several addresses in the town where members of the Dornberger family had once lived, but said that those streets had been bombed and we wouldn't find them now. She had no record of Sigmund, my grandfather, or of Leopold his father. We should try the record office in Wachenheim.

Friedelsheim lay a few kilometers across the fields, within sight of Bad Dürkheim. It was lunchtime when we arrived; the spotless village streets were empty and silent. I left dad with the luggage and knocked on a door to ask where we might find a guest house. An alsatian in a pen barked sharply, but the man who came to the door was friendly. The house next door did bed and breakfast; where was I from? I told him my grandfather had once lived in this village. "Dornberger?" he replied. "The Dornbergers lived over there," pointing to a large crumbling group of buildings on the far side of the road.

We spent the next few days taking photos of the house, talking to people in the village, and walking the endless paths between the vineyards. We called at the record office in Wachenheim and were shown birth and marriage certificates for Leopold and his wife, but no death certificates. They must have left Friedelsheim before they died; they couldn't have lived beyond the 1920s. There were birth records for my grandfather and various brothers and sisters. But it was frustrating to have so little information: we wanted to know what they had done here, what kind of Jewish community it had been,

why my grandfather had upped and left at 24.

The second night, there was a Festival in the village. A marquee was set up and people sat at long tressle tables eating fish and drinking beer. Two couples of my dad's age introduced themselves. They revealed neither surprise nor embarrassment that two English Jews should appear in their village 40 years after the Holocaust, trying to dig up the past. Every reference to the War and to the fact that the Dornberger family were Jews was matter of fact, emotionless, polite. However, they were remarkably friendly and seemed keen to help.

It turned out that one of the men, Herr Schowalter, had bought some land from one of the Dornbergers after the War. The owner was already living in



America, and the sale had been arranged through a lawyer. They confirmed that the Dornbergers had been in the wine-growing business they didn't know when or in what circumstances the last of the family had left.

One of the women got up and called to a very old man sitting at another table. He came and sat with us and spoke in a strong local dialect. All I understood was the word "keller"; Liese, Herr Schowalter's wife, translated: one of the Dornbergers had spent the last part of the war hiding in a cellar in Bad Dürkheim.

The old man went on, telling us who had lived in the house, mentioning Dornbergers we had never heard of, saying that "der David" (my grandfather's uncle) had been "financial agent" to the people who owned the vineyards.

He may have given a lot more information, but this was all I understood in my limited German.

Eventually the old man went back to his table, to join his drinking companions. Liese ordered more wine and began to talk about her family. Her daughter, she said, was married to a young man who was doing very well in business. "We call him 'the Second Jew'," she said and laughed loudly. I wondered whether I was hearing right. She repeated herself, slowly: "Der zweite Jude!"

When we got back to the guest house my head was spinning and I really needed to talk. On top of everything we had been told about the family, that was the first time I had experienced an antisemitic remark in a really personal way. She hadn't consciously intended it against us — that was clear from the way she laughed. But she had shown just how near to the surface German antisemitism still is.

But dad didn't want to talk. He had been cold and bad tempered ever since we arrived in Friedelsheim; displaying only a very guarded curiosity about what we had seen and heard, as though he was trying to say: "None of this can touch me".

The following day Herr Schowalter showed us the Dornberger field he had bought, and pointed out the old synagogue, now converted into a cottage. Then he drove us to the Jewish cemetery in the next village.

In the cemetery the sadness of it all really hit me. I had never been to a Jewish burial ground before; here we were on a Sunday morning, stumbling around overgrown, untended headstones inscribed in Hebrew, and about a quarter of them bore my family name. (If dad had been able to show that it meant something to him, too, then it would have been OK. But he was acting as if he didn't give a damn.)

I left Herr Schowalter and dad conversing stiffly, and wandered off on my own. In a corner by the hedge I pulled back the ivy on a headstone and read:

"Josef Dornberger, geboren August 1847, gestorben Januar 1925".

The legend was so clear. Here was the proof that I was connected to a people who had a 1000-year history here in Germany. I felt pain and rage that I knew so little about them, and that there appeared to be no way of finding out. A few names and dates in a record office were pretty meaningless. And I felt rage with my dad, who, through his father, had had a handle on such a huge and rich chunk of history, and who had not sought to seize it until it was 30 years too late.

# In a house in Vilna

The founding of the Jewish Worker's Bund marked the beginning of a revolution in Jewish life as well as placing the issue of national and cultural rights on the agenda of the Russian socialist movement, says Clive Gilbert

In a small house in Vilna, on 7 October 1897, thirteen Jewish workers' delegates from the cities of the Pale of Settlement attended a meeting. While lookouts anxiously kept an eye out for the police, the meeting declared the formation of the General Union of Jewish Workers in Russia, Lithuania and Poland—the Bund. The first mass socialist organisation in the Russian empire was born.

The view prevailing in European socialist and marxist circles was that the Jews, though perhaps a nation under feudalism, were now merely a caste, doomed to disappear by the deepening of capitalist social relations.

The demand for Jewish national rights was seen by European Marxists as reactionary diversion from the class struggle. Marxism had not yet come to grips with the phenomenon of national liberation struggles, let alone with the fact that there exist within capitalist society, groups whose oppression stems from historical sources other than capitalism itself. Some socialists went so far as to welcome antisemitic pogroms as a mass phenomenon which would somehow automatically impel the masses in a general anti-capitalist direction.

The founding of the Bund marked the beginning of a conscious refusal by the Jewish workers to accept the extinction of their demands for national and cultural freedom. The Bund's definition of Russian Jewry as a nation bore no relation to Zionist or religious concepts of Jewish nationality which were grounded in idealist or mystical interpretations of Jewish history. The Bundist view was based on an analysis of the material reality of Jewish existence in Russia. The millions of Jews of the Pale of Settlement spoke their own language, maintained their own culture and religion and lived, for the most part, in territorially concentrated communities. The Jews of Russia thus constituted a clearly definable national group whose national consciousness had been further intensified by antisemitism, government-inspired pogroms and discriminatory legislation.

The leaders of the Bund never intended to limit themselves to the formation of an autonomous Jewish workers' organisation. The Bundist leaders saw the establishment of a Jewish social-democratic organisation as an important step along the road to forming an all-Russian socialist party—a particularly opportune step since the Jewish workers were proving themselves the most class-conscious workers in the empire and the most willing to respond positively to socialist propaganda.

It was largely the Bund's organisational efforts which led to the founding of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDRP) in Minsk in 1898. The congress was attended by three delegates from the Bund and six Russians. The only worker present was a member of the Bund delegation. At this stage the Bund had already recruited many workers while the infant Russian party consisted of a few hundred intellectuals.

The Bund immediately made its already active printing presses, as well as resources and expertise, available to the Russian party, and submitted itself to the latter's authority while having its autonomous status confirmed. The RSDRP grew, and by the time of the 1905 revolution it had about 9,000 members. At that time the Bund's membership was about 30,000.

The Bund recruited so many people in such a short time by rooting itself firmly in the consciousness of the Jewish working class, from whom it won a loyalty much deeper than that normally given to political parties. The Bund came to identify unreservedly with the aspirations of the Jewish workers for national and cultural rights as well as for social justice. It took the lead in organising self-defence squads against the pogroms, in offering practical support to workers in struggle and in openly challenging clerical and bourgeois reaction within the Jewish community.

*This article is an extract from Clive Gilbert's recently published pamphlet, A Revolution in Jewish Life – The History of the Jewish Workers' Bund. It is available from JSG, BM 3725 London WC1N 3XX for £1.25 (+25p p&p).*

1987 • "ניינציק יאר, בונד" • 1897

## THE BUND

by Vladimir Medem, 1919

Listen carefully to the word "Bund". It comes from the word to bind. Bind together into one complete entity all separate things with a tie. To join feeble energies into one huge power. Put your ear to the chest of the Jewish worker and listen; his heartbeat is strong and steady. Look into the eyes of the comrade; they are wide open and clear. Take his hand; it is strong and hardened. How come? How is it that a single person, a grain of sand in this huge desert of a world, a tiny drop in the turbulent sea of life which surrounds you with thousands of brutal enemies, which destroys a whole world, grinding countries and states into dust, drowning in its depths countless human existences, how is it that in the middle of this enormous whirlwind stands a person with sparkling eyes, undaunted by the storm? Look, comrade, into your own soul. There you will read the answer: you have a home, a family, a basis to stand on; you can feel that around you, above you and within you there is a great force that supports, embraces and carries you, makes you strong and does not let you fall. Do you know, comrade, the name of this enormous force? Do you know what is the name of your home, your family, your existence, your hope? Stand up comrade! lift up your head and sing the old *Shvueh*! This is the Bund!

# An act of resistance

Hirsh Lekert, a young Bundist shoemaker, became a legend and a symbol of Jewish resistance to Tsarist oppression when he attempted to assassinate a viciously antisemitic army general. Majer Bogdanski tells his story.

On 1 May 1902, in the town of Vilna, the Russian, Polish and Lithuanian Socialist parties, together with the Bund, held a united international May Day demonstration. Shortly before then, a new governor had been appointed. His name was von Wahl and he was a Tsarist army general and a German baron. He had already notched up quite a history. As a young officer he took part in suppressing the insurrection of 1863 in Poland. A sadistic antisemite, his first objective was to liquidate the Bund, which he particularly hated.

On that May Day, he filled the streets of the town with secret agents, police, army and Cossacks. At a given signal, the workers came out of their secret assembly places and demonstrated behind two red flags. Soon the police, army and Cossacks stormed the demonstrators, knocking them mercilessly with their rifle butts and swords, severely injuring many of them. They also arrested many people, including Jews.

When von Wahl heard that there were Jews among those who had been arrested, he fell into a rage and decided to teach them a particular lesson; he had them segregated from all the others so they could be flogged. He personally issued the instructions as to how, and of what material, the whips were to be made, and he also supervised the flogging. As a prelude, the day before, all the victims were forced to run between the *stroy*, two lines of police facing one another, who beat the runners with black-jacks. The next day they were dragged, one after the other, stripped naked to the waist, and thrown onto a plank. One guard sat on the victim's head and another on his legs and they gave each of them between 20 and 25 lashes, according to the fancy of von Wahl.

The news of this monstrous deed created an uproar, not only throughout Russia, but also far beyond her borders.

A 20-year-old shoemaker called Hirsh Lekert, a member of the Bund, whose wife was expecting their first baby, on his own initiative, acquired a gun. One evening when von Wahl went to the circus to watch a performance, he waited for him outside. When von Wahl appeared at the exit, Lekert shot him. He only managed to wound him slightly, but Lekert himself was apprehended on the spot and brought to trial before a military court. He was sentenced to death and hanged on 10 June 1902 at 2.10am in a field outside Vilna. The place where he was executed was cordoned off for miles around. The only witnesses were the military doctor, the military rabbi and four battalions of soldiers. When the rabbi asked him to repent for the "murder" he had attempted, Lekert answered that a murder was being committed then — on him.

He walked to the gallows erect and unaided. When the noose that the hangman threw over his head got stuck on his nose, he jerked his head to make it slide down to his neck. He was buried at the spot where he was hanged and then the soldiers marched backwards and forwards until the ground was completely flattened and no one could tell where the grave was. Several attempts were made to find where the body lay, but to no avail.

The effect of Lekert's deed was enormous on both the Jews and the Tsarists. It demonstrated to every one of them that Jewish workers could no longer be despised. Although the Bund was always opposed to individual terror, Hirsh Lekert was recognised as a martyr and was immediately admitted into the pantheon of martyrs of the Bund. He became a national hero and songs were sung about him. Numerous poets wrote about him — and indeed, poems are still being written about him to this day. In Poland, countless youth groups of the Bund wore badges bearing the name of Hirsh Lekert.

## A child of the Bund

**Between the two world wars the Bund in Poland established a system of secular Yiddish schools. Esther Brunstein describes her childhood at the Medem Shule in Lodz, cut short by Nazi occupation.**

Both my parents were members of the Bund. My father was a very, very active member. I don't think the school was reserved for children of Bund members, but the majority were probably children of Bundists and sometimes children of communists who wanted their children to have a good Yiddish education.

We started before school with the kindergarten, Grosser *Kinderheym*. Grosser was one of the founders of the Bund. I started there at the age of three or four and from then I went on to the Medem *Shule*. My brothers didn't go there. When I was terribly little my parents had to move from Lodz and my elder brother joined the ordinary school in the town where they lived. On coming back he would have lost some schooling, which was unthinkable. I think my other brother didn't go because my parents could not afford the fees. The parents were mainly working class people, but by no means all. At one time my father worked within the town hall, when a socialist council was elected, and later he was some sort of businessman dealing in textiles. Lodz was the biggest industrial textile centre and he was a master weaver in a factory in Lodz.

The aim of the Medem *Shule* was a good Yiddish education — which took in everything — Yiddish culture, literature, the whole way of Jewish life — and this was different to the other schools, which didn't have it. The first year of school was in Yiddish only. Later on Polish was introduced because Polish was the language of the country. I remember learning geography, mathematics and nature study in Yiddish and Polish history in Polish, but Jewish history in Yiddish. The beauty was that the children that finished our school spoke better Polish than the Jewish children who went to ordinary Polish state schools. The educational standard was very high. In 1936 our school got an international prize for its standard of teaching. As pedagogues our teachers were excellent. And nothing was compulsory. The school was run on free and democratic lines.

There was nothing luxurious in the physical surroundings of our school. We did not have nice gardens. We were always

aware that there were financial difficulties. There were about 20 pupils in each class. We had seven years starting at the age of six or seven. Later on, because it was important as we lived in Poland that our Polish was good, our lessons were in Polish. If you wanted to get into *Gymnasium*, the exams were in Polish. We prided ourselves on having a good standard of Polish.

I remember all the teachers with absolute devotion and love. When I talk to my children sometimes and ask them how do you look back on your school years, there is very little left there that draws them back to it. There is nothing that means an awful lot to them. For me, maybe because it was cut so cruelly, it has become much more important. There was a great feeling of belonging. It was an extension of home. The teachers were excellent and they would, I am sure, be taking a lower salary in order to teach in our school. There was something very special about the school, maybe because we really felt we were being taken care of as little people. As people we mattered. We knew they cared very much. There was this feeling of *not* just going to school in the morning, finishing in the afternoon, and that's it. Maybe it was because the majority who went to the school had this great love for Yiddish, for getting to know oneself and who we were that it played such an important part and felt like an extension of home.

I have come away with the feeling that it was a great privilege to have been there. What this school has given me, and what comes through a lot of our literature — like Peretz and Ash and others who were Jewish but touched on universal problems — was a very strong feeling of what was right and what was just. We somehow



Vladimir Medem

managed to carry it within us. And as far as I am concerned it helped me in the ghetto in the darkest hours of the war. I have always retained this feeling and belief in my fellow human being. I still carry it with me. Soon after the war we were looking for whoever was left, who in the school survived. After your relatives you looked for survivors from the school. We found just a few.

Our everyday conversations at school were in Yiddish and Polish. There were some parents who sent their children to the school because they wanted them to acquire this great knowledge of Yiddish but among themselves they probably spoke more Polish. You had little groups forming in school — some spoke more Yiddish, some more Polish, but everybody had Yiddish as a natural language.

Other Jewish children went to Jewish schools but not Yiddish schools. Yiddish wasn't taught there. They were state schools for Jewish children. Jewish children would go to school on Sunday. Polish children went to school on Saturday.

At the Medem *Shule* we had no such thing as a religious assembly. The other schools did but it was not forced upon us. We had a hymn for the school, which wasn't sung everyday: "*Lomir zingen a lid tsu der Yiddisher shule, vos iz aleman undz azoy tayer. Lomir zingen mit freydn un mit hofnung ful, oyf a velt a fraye a naye*". (Let us sing a song to the Yiddish school, which is dear to us all. Let us sing full of hope and joy for a new and free world).

The ultra orthodox had their own schools. There were girls that I knew going to *Beys Yankev*. There were all kinds of other religious schools. Another very good secular school was the Borochoy School of the Poale-Zionists. During the war most of our teachers had left Poland to try and get into Russia. Some went to Warsaw. We were left with a few plus some former students. In the first year of the ghetto we still had a sort of school. There wasn't much learning but we did get a little bit of soup when we went there. A few children from the Borochoy school came into our class because there were not enough children and teachers for two and it was important that we kept together as a group. We continued for as long as it was possible to continue in the ghetto.

Whether you were a Bund party member or not, the school had great meaning. The important educational aim of the school was to try from the material available and the methods employed to give you a sense of justice. I know this has definitely helped me form my thoughts.

It was through analysing simple works of literature, to bring out that *this* is the important thing — how to conduct oneself in life. Also there was the sense of unity at school, for instance when we took our lunches to school, we would often put them in a communal basket so that the children who were not so well off also had something nice to eat. The teachers managed to impart the importance of one's behaviour inside and outside school. Sport was important — to be a free human being. Beauty was important. Everything was considered important and they worked very hard to bring these points out.

Boys and girls did everything together. We were one of the few co-educational schools at the time. There was a great sense of equality in our school. We had men and women teachers and this was very progressive for its time. When they taught the Hebrew prophets, they taught not just in terms of what they were saying would happen but what was right to do. In Vilna they had very good teacher training colleges for the Yiddish schools.

They imparted a strong sense of Jewish identity not through nationalism but a folkkultur and a sense of belonging to a people, so whether you chose a secular or religious way you still had the same

beginning. It was possible to identify fully with your past and remain secular Jews. There were children from religious backgrounds at our school as well. They had great respect for it. They came for the education.

I knew as a child that I would be envied because I had this kind of schooling. In Lodz there were only two such schools — ours and the Borochoy school. Poland had only two decades between two wars. It needed much more time to feel the impact that these schools would have for future generations.

During the school holidays our teachers organised activities at the school. Many children lived in difficult conditions so they organised outings and projects. As a child they gave me a sense that I mattered. Every individual mattered. I don't think I romanticise. If anything that has been so lovely is cruelly cut short then it becomes even more so. I know how much it mattered to me in the war years. Even when the school stopped we still kept as a close group. We would still meet.

We did not go to school on *Rosh Hashana* because we would not be allowed. I don't think it was important to do so just as a *dafke* (to be contrary). Even though we were not a state funded school, we were still under the rules that

every school was. I do distinctly remember when *Pesach* (Passover) was talked about. That was brought to us as a holiday of freedom. I remember coming home and telling this to my father and he would sit down with me. It was explained to us that the Jewish people as a whole revolted and there then followed the exodus to the promised land. It was pointed out to us as a fight for freedom.

My one regret to this day is that though the Yiddish they taught us was beautiful they tried to rid it of the Hebrew. That was wrong I now know. You cannot get to know the joy of Yiddish literature unless you know some Hebrew. They tried to purify it. They would take a Hebrew word and spell it phonetically in Yiddish. We would for example be given 20 Hebrew words and told to make sentences with them and then we were asked to substitute them with Yiddish phrases. I would have liked to have learnt and known more Hebrew because they are so interlinked. Maybe if we would have continued to live there it would have changed. I still keep in touch with some friends from the school. I sent a letter off yesterday to a friend in Buffalo whom I have known since kindergarten days. We were together in the ghetto. Not very many have survived. □

## In on the act

Louis Marton plays around with a play by Jim Allen

(The scene is a (royal) court room in London in 1987)

JUDGE: Dr Marton, you are known as a Jewish peace activist and media expert. I suppose you are a defence witness?

MARTON: It depends. I was a founding member of the International Jewish Peace Union and have been engaged in the publication of the *Israel & Palestine* political report for the last 18 years. During World War II I lived in Budapest. Some 10 years ago I started my personal research on the Jewish community in Hungary during the war and found some unpublished material on Kastner.

JUDGE: I assume that you are an anti-Zionist and agree with Mr Allen.

MARTON: To say that I am anti something I would have to accept a definition of the concept. What is Zionism? Who is a Zionist? In the last 100 years Zionism has been so many things. For me, at its beginning it was the liberation movement of Jewish masses in Eastern Europe.

JIM ALLEN: Herzl was a racist. His insane accusation against all non-Jews states: "The people among whom the Jews are living are in general overt or covert antisemites."

MARTON: What is insane is to take a sentence out of its historic context. Herzl's words simply describe what the majority of Jews living in Eastern Europe at the time felt to be their daily experience.

JIM ALLEN: Israel today is a racist state.

MARTON: Very well. I know that nowadays, in the name of Zionism, Palestinian Arabs are denied nationhood and often the simple right to live where they are born.

JUDGE: So you agree with Mr Allen on this point?

MARTON: I also know that Stalin's secret police murdered thousands of people on the grounds that they were Zionists. Their only crime was to be Jews. Gomulka's Poland also arrived at the final solution of its "Jewish question" by persecuting members of the opposition and finally chasing them out of Poland as "Zionists". I would prefer to deal with facts and not semantics.

JUDGE: This is very interesting but we are trying the case of Jim Allen who alleged that Zionists collaborated with Nazis in the extermination of the Jews and with the allegations that Mr Allen is an antisemitic villain. What is your contribution?

MARTON: I would accuse Mr Allen of repeating commonplaces as if they were sensational new facts.

JUDGE: Mr Allen has also been accused of rewriting history. JIM ALLEN: *Perdition* shows how some Zionist leaders collaborated with Nazis during and before World War II.

MARTON: Mr Allen is more cautious in the foreword to the play than in the different versions of the play itself. But the facts are well known. He simply added a new thesis.

JUDGE: What do you mean?

MARTON: To put it crudely, in almost every country the Nazis found Jews to serve them. This may be called collaboration, although I would prefer manipulation. This was the case in Poland and Hungary and has been revealed by many historians, mainly Jews.

JUDGE: So, what is wrong with Mr Allen's thesis?

MARTON: On the one hand he pretends that everything is part of a plot to save only a few Jews and build the State of Israel with the selected ones. On the other hand he says that collaborators were Zionists. As he puts it, "the Zionist knife in the Nazi fist."

JUDGE: Is this not true?

MARTON: Certainly not. During World War II and before, Zionists held many different shades of opinion. The dividing line was not between Zionists and others but between people who understood what the Nazis really meant to do and those who did not. In Hungary, the Jewish Councils, set up by the Germans to administrate the ghettos in Poland, whose role was to keep people calm until the trains took them to the gas chambers, were made up of all sorts of people. Some were Zionists, others members of the Bund, others had no clear cut political convictions. The same goes for the underground. The Warsaw ghetto resistance was led by Mordechai Anilevitz, a left-wing Zionist, and his second-in-command was Marek Edelman, a non-Zionist who still lives in Poland and is an activist in Solidarity. People in the ghettos reacted to the situation according to their background, education, social position, what they thought of the Germans and so on.

JIM ALLEN: But I have a testimonial from Professor Rodinson, saying: "It cannot be said to my mind that Jim Allen distorted the facts".

MARTON: I have the greatest respect for Maxime Rodinson and I fully agree with his analysis of what Zionism did in the Middle East but I think he's wrong about Eastern Europe.

JUDGE: Could we go back to the facts? Defenders of the play say that accusations of historical inaccuracies have never been proved.

MARTON: But we are talking about the facts. One cannot select some facts and put them together to prove a thesis while neglecting others. If inaccuracies mean errors in fact, I could indeed cite a couple of inaccuracies but I don't mind them. If by inaccuracies we mean the distortion of history, Mr Allen's manipulation and omission of the facts is certainly distorting history.

JUDGE: Writers should be allowed some poetic licence.

MARTON: You cannot have your kosher cake and eat it. Mr Allen's play is not fiction insofar as it is about real events and real people. He is defending a thesis, not a fictional work. If I were asked to judge it as a work of art I would be even more critical. I am used to seeing hysteria about the Middle East. This is the first time I have seen so much hysteria about World War II.

JUDGE: Mr Allen complains about this too.

MARTON: He is right. The trouble is that he is as hysterical as the others. When they accuse him of antisemitism, he shouts back: "You are Zionists". He constantly conflates Jews and Zionism. For instance, he calls Hannah Arendt "a Zionist in Germany". Well, Hannah Arendt held different positions on Zionism during her life but she was mainly sceptical and hostile to it.

JUDGE: Is Jim Allen distorting history?

MARTON: I am afraid he is. For example, Kastner is constantly referred to as a Zionist leader. Then when it comes to Hannah Senesh and her comrades they are referred to as Jewish parachutists. This infers that a Zionist leader betrays Jewish paratroopers who came to organise the resistance.

JUDGE: Was it not so?

MARTON: They were indeed betrayed. The trouble is that they were Zionist paratroopers sent from Palestine. Hannah Senesh was a kibbutz member and belonged to the same Zionist movement as Kastner!

JUDGE: What about Kastner?

MARTON: Rudolf Kastner was certainly a scoundrel and, manipulated by Eichmann, he became a collaborator. I would not hesitate to call him a war criminal. Kastner was nobody until 1944. He lived in Transylvania and when North Transylvania became Hungarian again, moved to Budapest and was involved in a rescue committee composed of representatives of various Zionist parties. When the Germans arrived they set up a Jewish Council on the same lines as in Poland. Kastner joined the council on behalf of the rescue committee. His task was to save what could be saved. At the beginning, there were two sets of negotiations. Firstly, the official one between Eichman and the Jewish Council. Eichman wanted the council to be the sole channel of communication between the German authorities and the Jews. His goal was to create ideal conditions for the final solution; to keep people quiet by feeding them disinformation. The second, unofficial, negotiation took place between officers of Eichmann's staff who came to Budapest with recommendations from the Jewish community in Slovakia. Under this agreement, either the SS officer Wisliczeny or Eichmann himself would take bribes to delay or cancel deportations. From this point on, the Zionist rescue committee dominated the negotiations. The outcome was Joel Brand's well known mission to Palestine with Eichmann's, or rather Himmler's, proposition of lives for goods.

JUDGE: These are, as far as *Perdition* is concerned, technical details. The real question still is: was Kastner guilty? Were Zionist leaders guilty?

MARTON: Without these details no one can understand how and why Kastner played such a role. There are some more important and very disturbing details. (1) Kastner's first German contact happened to be a Hungarian Jew, Ander Gross. He had been a paid agent of the Abwehr, the German military intelligence since 1942 and also had connections with the Gestapo. (2) Joel Brand, the envoy to Palestine, was a member of both the Zionist movement and the German communist party in the 1930s and was probably a Comintern agent. Reality is far more complicated and dramatic than Mr Allen's simplifications. To answer your question about guilt. Hungarian Jewish leadership as such was certainly guilty of abandoning its people. Of not resisting evil, if you wish. Why did they do it? Probably from sheer stupidity, because they misjudged their adversary in spite of their knowledge of what went on in Auschwitz. Probably also to save their own lives and those of their families. Kastner's role is better known, but he was not alone and was probably not the most important.

JUDGE: But it cannot be denied that at least one Zionist leader collaborated with the Nazis?

MARTON: Yes indeed. But Kastner was probably the only one in this case. Jacob Gens was a fool. Czierniakow, who committed suicide after obeying the Germans, was a victim. But let us take another example. I know of at least two communist underground leaders who had to take part in the selections in the camps. They had to decide who the Germans would kill. Did they do it in order to save their own kin? Would Mr Allen call them collaborators? Both became hard core Stalinists after the war. Would this make them Nazis?

JUDGE: What were Kastner's motivations?

MARTON: There are various theories. He himself said that he was trying to ensure the survival of the community. He may have believed this, but it is, of course, still a lie. According to unpublished documents, mainly accounts of witnesses

from Hungary, Kastner collected over \$3 million in 1944 by dubious methods. Part of the money went to Eichmann's and Wisliczeny's pockets, but not all. Contradicting this version is the fact that after the war both Kastner and Eichmann lived in very modest circumstances. There are rumours of Kastner recovering the money after the war and handing it over to *Mapai* or Ben Gurion's government in 1948. Several of his actions could be seen to support these rumours; he never tried to hide his past and in fact considered himself a hero. He became a second line Israeli politician, nearly a member of the *Knesset*. To my mind, Uri Avneri, publisher of the weekly paper *Haolam Haze* gives the most plausible explanation. He knew Kastner in Tel Aviv and thought he was a megalomaniac, describing himself as the man who saved Hungarian Jewry. He was also a passionate card player. He thought he could play cards with the devil — and lost.

JUDGE: If I understand your argument, you would class all, or most, Hungarian Jewish leaders as guilty?

MARTON: It would certainly be fairer to put it that way. Of course, some leaders did resist, among them Otto Komoly, head of the Zionist underground.

JUDGE: Resistance was not hopeless?

MARTON: Not at all. By the way, at the time of Kastner's trial many people made the point that if he had urged people to escape or resist rather than hiding the reality of the gas chambers, many more lives would have been saved. In fact, the Kastner trial was a showdown between Labour and Nationalist-Liberals. But this would not fit with Mr Allen's thesis so it is not mentioned. To return to historical facts, Kastner did save 1,680 people on his famous train. That is not many compared with the 700,000 who were deported and killed. But other members of the rescue com-

mittee, who were just as Zionist as Kastner, saved many others.

JUDGE: How many?

MARTON: Several thousands. At a later stage, members of the Zionist underground collaborated with Raoul Wallenberg and saved thousands of children whose parents were deported, including myself and my brother. This story alone would make an excellent play, but of course no thesis can be attached to it.

JUDGE: To come back to *Perdition* as a play?

MARTON: There is not much to be said except that it is third rate historical journalism. I am honestly sorry for the Royal Court staff, they certainly deserved something else. There is at least one play on the subject, Joshua Sobol's *Ghetto*. It deals very harshly with Jewish Councils, describes them as traitors, but it has what *Perdition* lacks: depth, poetic invention, three dimensional people, dramatic situations.

JUDGE: How do you explain accusations of antisemitism and threats from the leaders of the Jewish community?

MARTON: On the one hand, the Jewish leadership is absolutely hysterical about anything concerning Zionism. On the other hand, Allen's constant semantic confusions between Jews and Zionists and his references to Christian religious vocabulary are simply obscene. They give the impression that Jews are on trial as traitors in a Christian court. If some people feel that there is an anti-Jewish subtext in the play, this is quite understandable. This does not imply that Mr Jim Allen is an antisemite. But he has been so careless about history, so sure of his thesis, he does not seem to care about the feelings of living people. No one can appreciate the courage of dissent more than I do, but frankly he was ill advised and did a bad job. He does not deserve martyrdom. □

## DIVIDING LINES

*Perdition* finally had its first public reading at the Edinburgh Festival. Gail Chester reports.

Freedom of expression is as fundamental to my politics as is opposing fascism and antisemitism, so I was keen to see *Perdition* at the Edinburgh Festival and judge how these issues were resolved. As no sort of specialist, my gut reaction and vested interests were my only guide — like most of the audience, I imagine. Having seen it, I reckon the gut was where Allen was aiming — which is fair enough — but that in doing so, he tried to obscure his vested interests, which isn't.

For me, the gut-wrenching started with crossing the picket line outside the theatre. It was composed predominantly of young Zionist students who politely handed out leaflets and sang songs of tenuous relevance. I reflected bitterly that the only other time I had crossed a picket line was to enter A Woman's Place to discuss what was happening in *Spare Rib* after Israel invaded Lebanon. On that occasion, Jewish members of Women for Palestine were smugly convinced that I was the knee-jerk Zionist.

So why did Jim Allen and Ken Loach (neither Jewish nor Palestinian) push this highly emotive topic to the top of their political agenda? Creativity springs inevitably from an artist's experience, and any work which appears to deliberately disengage from that must be evaluated with particular caution. It is hard to imagine a white anti-racist writing a sympathetic play about how the princes of West Africa willingly sold their subjects into slavery. Yet as a Jewish woman, I am asked to accept that my struggle is helped by blaming the victim once again.

The first nine-tenths of *Perdition* is set in a courtroom and superficially the arguments seemed well balanced. At first, I was lulled into complicity, sharing Allen's presumed abhorrence for much current Israeli government policy, while his characters' words appeared to accuse the Zionist leaders, not the Jew in the street. Even so, the way he denied the psychological pressure of fascism on all Jews,

and his failure to distinguish between different strands of Zionists, made me a little uneasy.

However, watching the closing scene forced me to reassess the whole play and reluctantly I have concluded that, however unconsciously, it is as unthinkingly antisemitic as many other products of the surrounding culture. In the closing minutes, unable to leave the audience to judge from the available evidence in the body of the play, Allen puts the "guilty party" in a room with his accuser. Away from the pressure of court, he breaks down, admits his guilt and produces as "evidence" the image of two young women he watched helplessly in the Budapest sunshine, laughing and licking ice-creams as they strolled together on to the train for Auschwitz.

Such outrageous emotional manipulation can have no factual basis. Once again, we are used in our traditional role as the source of sympathy and cheap emotion. I wondered afresh about Allen's

choice of a woman as Dr Yaron's accuser and, more significantly, about the play's only other character, apart from the interchangeable middle-aged male prosecution and defence counsels. I cried as I listened to the testimony of this witness — a tragically childless woman in her thirties who had survived sterilisation experiments in Auschwitz. I was surprised at how bloodless I found *Perdition* until this woman appeared — the sole witness confronting the misdemeanours of the community leaders. The actress played the role for every available drop of anguish. In retrospect, I felt conned. I felt the real suffering of real women had been cheapened. Consequently, I find myself unwillingly resistant to accepting the validity of any of *Perdition's* claims. If they were sound, could they not stand on their own merit, without needing to be shored up by highly offensive dramatic tactics?

I felt conned again, having written the above review, when my attention was drawn to the printed version of the play. In an invited afterword, David Cesarani, one of the play's main critics, writes: "Any discussion of Jim Allen's *Perdition* and the controversy which it caused must begin with an important caveat. The text of the play printed here [and performed in Edinburgh] is a drastically revised version of the one that went into rehearsal and which was released to the press for pre-performance information . . . The extent of the current revision is such that it renders a good deal of the commentary at the time of the 'Perdition Affair' almost irrelevant: much of the detailed critical comment has been deflected in the editorial process."

In the Edinburgh programme, no reference was made to recent changes. It

merely referred to cuts because of time constraints and an impending libel case.

In the same afterword, Jim Allen accuses the Zionist lobby of an elementary lack of honesty and attempting to stifle debate, while excluding the extensive discussion in *Jewish Socialist* (no.9) from what is supposed to be the fullest possible coverage of Press comments to date. At the considerable risk of having us all branded as Zionist apologists, I do wonder who our enemies are, with comrades like these.

Despite everything, no useful purpose was served by banning the play. It was the business of the Royal Court to enquire earlier into the historical and artistic reliability of the work. If so much attention had not been drawn to *Perdition* by banning it, it would fairly soon have sunk without trace — it was, after all, a fairly bad play.

## MISSING THE MARX

Jim Allen defended his play, *Perdition*, at the SWP's annual event, Marxism '87, not altogether convincingly, argues David Rosenberg

After all the furore over *Perdition* had begun to cool down and with a sanitised version on sale in bookshops, Jim Allen was given the opportunity to examine frankly the whole controversy among friends as 300 socialists — including critical JSG members and a handful of Jewish students — filled a hall at "Marxism 87", the annual SWP event, to hear his talk. In an atmosphere free from the widely expressed anger and bitterness that the central themes of his unperformed play had provoked, Allen had the opportunity to analyse the response to the play, to separate the predictable orchestrated Zionist campaign from the more genuine serious critics and draw some conclusions about the nature of his arguments as he was presenting them. If these issues are worth pursuing he could have looked at how to raise them constructively, how to *engage* rather than merely enrage the Jewish community.

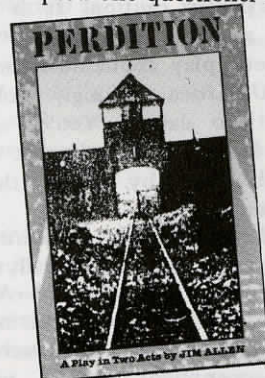
It was a wasted opportunity. Most of the 30 minutes of his talk was taken up not with such an analysis but instead with a crude and simplistic account of what he continually termed the "conspiracy" (Zionist, not Jewish he assured us!) to stop his play being shown. He came over like someone who feels forced into a corner by apparently powerful forces and all he can see is his distorted image of these forces that he thinks have put him there, completely ignoring the basis on which these forces operate. He seemed to have lost sight completely of the issues he was trying to raise in the first place.

The Jewish establishment's attack on the play was conducted largely through whispering campaigns, rumour and innuendo. Unfortunately Allen descended to the same level in his attempt to explain why the play was not shown at the Royal Court and stopped from appearing elsewhere. He talked vaguely of threats to theatre managers locally, nationally and internationally (New York) but named no names. He spoke disturbingly of how he heard of the cancellation of the possible transmission of the play on BBC by picking up the *Jewish Chronicle* and reading of the assurance given to the Zionist Federation by the BBC that they would not show it. From this instance he drew the fantastic conclusion that the "Zionists" had greater access to the top media people than the British ruling class which prompted one questioner from the

niscent of the opposite end of the political spectrum and he glibly dismissed inferences about the possible antisemitic nature of his crucifixion metaphors in the play by saying that he had been an atheist for many decades and so these metaphors had no particular meaning.

As for the floor contributions, the ones from SWP members (every other one — this was a slickly managed discussion) were long and predictable denunciations of Zionism that could have "graced" any meeting remotely connected with Zionism in the last 20 years. The non-party line contributions were a lot more interesting and challenged Allen's language and analysis on a number of points.

Perhaps the most ironic feature of the *Perdition* affair which came through strongly at this meeting is how Allen himself mirrors the fictitious Dr Yaron, the Zionist official who is the central character of his play. Contrary to mischievous propaganda, Dr Yaron is depicted not as an evil and conspiratorial figure but as a man whose motives are good and genuine — to rescue Jews — but who gets sucked into the whirlwind of an ideology after which the motives behind his actions and the effects of his actions diverge from each other in a perverse and disastrous way. Jim Allen is a solid anti-fascist who has succumbed to the whirlwind of a narrow fundamentalist anti-Zionism, the effects of which are far removed from the anti-fascism that motivates him and from the real questions that should be posed about Zionism. □



floor to ask him just what kind of class analysis this fitted into. Throughout the talk Allen persisted in using the language of "conspiracy" in a manner more remi-

# CABLE STREET

## the making of a myth

Cable Street of the 1930s has a legendary place for London's Jews. Ken Leech uncovers the street's post-war history for other immigrant and minority groups.

"Everything happens in Cable Street", commented Sarah in Arnold Wesker's *Chicken Soup with Barley* (though, in the event, it was Sidney Street and the siege that she had in mind). But she might have had a confused memory of the famous Battle of Cable Street, whose 50th anniversary occurred last year and which holds an abiding place in anti-racist mythology. The Battle, which took place in the East End of London on 4 October 1936, is a myth in the strict sense of the term: an event of imaginative power, a source of inspiration, a symbolic conflict with which those involved in subsequent struggles could identify.

But there are mythical elements also in the popular sense which form part of the memory of that day. Thus it is still widely believed that the Battle brought an end to fascist activity, drove Mosley out of the East End, was masterminded by the Communist Party, and that it was a struggle between fascists and anti-fascists which occurred at the heart of the Jewish community. All these ideas are false. Fascist activity increased after the Battle. Mosley addressed a crowd of 12,000 at

Victoria Park one week after Cable Street, and, as a Special Branch report of November shows, the British Union of Fascists continued to grow in these months. The Communist Party's role was ambivalent, as Joe Jacobs, former Stepney branch secretary showed in his autobiography *Out of the Ghetto* (1976), Cable Street was never the heart of the Jewish community but was the boundary between the Jewish area (to the north) and the Irish dock area (to the south). And the Battle was not between fascists and anti-fascists, but between anti-fascists together with other local residents and the police.

None of this denies the enormous contribution to morale which Cable Street gave to the anti-fascist struggle, nor its symbolic importance to future generations. But Cable Street has an attraction for myth-makers. My purpose here is to place Cable Street in the wider context of mythology. For no street in Britain has attracted more hostile and misleading publicity, attained such notoriety, or been the subject of so much bureaucratic muddle in the area of housing. Around Cable Street a whole cluster of myths and half-truths accumulated, particularly in the period from the late 1940s to the early '60s. False stereotypes both of the street and, to some extent, of the East End as a whole, as well as of its growing black population developed in this period, and this has contributed to the media's handling of black communities elsewhere, and to subsequent racist polemic.

Cable Street is a long street which stretches almost the length of the old Borough of Stepney, from Royal Mint Street through almost to Limehouse. From the beginning of the 17th century, the Western district, known as Rosemary Lane, formed the heart of Rag Fair, a flourishing street market. Further east, two impressive squares were built: Wellclose Square, and Princes Square (later renamed Swedenborg Square).

From the end of the 16th century there had grown up what Stow called "a filthy straight passage" of poor housing in the riverside area. By the early 19th century, while considerable improvements in roads and houses took place, Rosemary Lane and Cable Street were,

as Francis Place noted in 1824, "the least improved". Mayhew in 1861 commented on the concentration of foreign lodging houses, particularly in Ship Alley, and observed that there was "a sprinkling of coloured men and a few thorough negroes" including "negro beggars". But the main immigrant groups in the Cable Street area were Irish dockers and coal-whippers, and German sugar refiners.

Cable Street was mentioned frequently in popular literature from the late 19th century onward as a place of squalor and violence. The New Survey of London in the 1930s commented on its "unsavoury reputation". According to Peter Thompson, who founded the Methodist East End Mission, "the neighbourhood teems with lazy idle drunken lustful men and degraded brutalised hell-branded women."

In the 1940s the history of modern Cable Street entered a new phase. A community of black seamen, mainly from West Africa, Somaliland and the Caribbean, had grown up there towards the end of the war, and around this new population came the growth of a cafe quarter. There were accounts of gang warfare between West African and other communities in 1947, and towards the end of the year over 3,000 people signed

## FACING UP TO ANTISEMITISM:

### How Jews in Britain countered the threats of the 1930s

by David Rosenberg

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a petition to Stepney Council about conditions in the cafes and pubs. The last few months of 1947 saw a series of wildly exaggerated articles about the black community in what the press were now calling "London's Harlem". Thus Vivien Batchelor wrote in *John Bull*: "Seamen all over the world know of Cable Street, and if their tastes lie that way, make for it as soon as their ships dock. Some of them are coloured boys just off their first ship. A few months ago they were still half-naked in the bush."

A more balanced account was given in a talk by Patrick O'Donovan on "The Challenge of Cable Street" on BBC radio in February 1950. O'Donovan rightly pointed out that the street was "not extraordinary except maybe for the first hundred yards" nad that "the majority of the street deeply resent the name it has been given." Yet he reported that, within the first few hundreds yards, there was "a sense of hopelessness and a poverty that has ceased to struggle. It is as bad as anything I have ever seen in London. . . I think these few hundred yards are about the most terrible in London."

Another popular theme was the alleged danger that the black community was at risk from "political agitators". Over the years that I knew the Cable Street communities (1958-67), one of the most striking features was the lack of any involvement in British politics. There were some strong nationalist groups, notably from Zanzibar and Somaliland, and several eccentric political parties such as the "Liberal Party of Malta", which had what appeared to be its world headquarters at 86 Cable Street for a while. Its window contained statues of the Sacred Heart and Our Lady and a photograph of Joe Grimmond, with votive lamps burning before all three!

Many writers simply focused on the dirt of the street. It is, wrote Ashley Smith in *The East Enders* (1961), "the filthiest, dirtiest, most repellently odoured street in Christendom." By contrast in 1960, George Foulser, a seaman who was often in the local pubs, wrote a full-page account in *The Observer* entitled "Cablestrasse" which offered a more cheerful and friendly account of the street: "It is a place with an atmosphere of its own, a combination of British and overseas traditions. From all over the world, people have travelled to settle in Cablestrasse; to live and work together as peaceful fellow-citizens. They are an object lesson in living for other people everywhere."

Apart from a poorly researched survey by Phyllis Young in 1944, the only serious study of the neighbourhood in the early years of the black settlement was Michael Banton's *The Coloured Quarter* (1955), although Banton himself recognised it was, "no coloured ghetto, but a depressed working class neighbourhood." He estimated that in 1950-52, there were 300-400 West Africans and West Indians in the area.

Between Young's survey and Banton's book, Cable Street was the subject of a vast number of mainly inaccurate articles in the press. After 1955 the publicity focused mainly on housing and prostitution, and was sparked off by the publication of Edith Ramsey's pamphlet *Vice Increase in Stepney*, and by the extraordinary role played by the Anglican parish priest, Father Joe Williamson who fought a highly individualistic battle for slum clearance, using the press, TV and every available means. And his campaign had spectacular successes — improvements in Royal Mint Dwellings, the demolition of Sander Street, the alerting of a large section of the country to the realities of Cable Street, and the establishment of the Wellclose Square Fund which still works with, and provides help for, women trapped in prostitution.

Yet, in spite of the spectacular and persistent nature of the campaign for improved conditions, the story of the property in Cable Street makes depressing reading. The agitation about the slum conditions went on from 1944 for over twenty years. It was not until 1967 that any major clearance work took place.

Today, virtually nothing is left of the old community and neighbourhood. Brick Lane, which had a different history and always a different character from Cable Street, is far more significant as a symbolic focus for ethnic minorities in the East End. But the Cable Street history is important for the anti-racist struggle today for several reasons.

First, it was a classic example of a successful attempt to contain black people within an area of decayed housing and social fragmentation. The record of the (entirely white) Stepney Labour Council in relationship to the black community, and issues of racial justice, is appalling. The black community was seen as virtu-

ally confined to Cable Street, and, apart from their negative portrayal in the media, for the most part ignored.

Secondly, the image of the black man as an uncivilised slum dweller, a vice racketeer, a violent criminal, was built up from the experience of Cable Street and similar dockland areas. Much of the racist polemic of the 1960s was shaped by these kind of stereotypes. "Blaming the victims" was the governing principle. In the East End itself, while organised racist groups rarely entered Cable Street, the conditions there fuelled their polemic from their regular platform in Cheshire Street in Bethnal Green.

Thirdly, there was a lack of cultural organisation and political strategy in Cable Street. So, in contrast to the later experience of the Bangladeshi community in Brick Lane, the Cable Street experience was one marked to a great extent by despair, hopelessness, a degree of social autism, and a lack of faith in all white political institutions and the possibilities of change. But there were exceptions. Much of our campaigning was amateurish and primitive, but some important figures emerged from the early struggle. The recent growth of a vigorous political consciousness among Somali women, for example, cannot be understood in isolation from the early Cable Street years when the entire Somali community in London had a social base in one of the side streets.

Finally, the history of Cable Street housing shows both the importance and value of limited campaigns, and the need for much more systematic ways of linking local and national struggles. Probably the most enduring legacy of the Cable Street era is the determination, among black and white people, that such oppressive slum enclaves should never again be allowed to develop in Britain. □



## WHOSE HISTORY?

Roberto Sussman reviews a new and challenging attempt to understand the "Jewish Question".

Ilan Halevi's *A History of the Jews, Modern and Ancient* (Zed Press, £7.95) is a welcome contribution to the debate on Jewish history. His book is lucid and accessible, bringing together current research on the "Jewish Question" and new insights into the historical roots and current development of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Much of this material has been confined to academic circles or submerged under clouds of mysticism, apologetics or dogma.

The structures of nation states and political parties require more of history than merely "explaining" the past. "Official" histories aim to draw from the past a sanction for present ideologies,

policies and attitudes. This is true for the State of Israel just as for any other nation state. But Israel also claims jurisdiction over all Jews, so its "official" history claims to explain the evolution of Jewish communities worldwide in a way which sanctions the basic tenets of the official state ideology: Zionism.

In its most vulgar versions, a glorious Biblical epoch is followed by 2,000 years of pogroms, massacres and expulsions culminating in the Holocaust, and finally relieved by the creation of the State of Israel. This description of events is Judeo-centric: it explains Jewish communities in terms of "us" and "them", the *goyim*. It is also idealistic: it depicts world Jewry as an abstract, timeless, ahistorical group whose survival is explained in terms of their continuous attachment to a binding national-religious identity centred in *Eretz Israel*. This identity is supposed to have evolved from early messianic beliefs towards its only legitimate expression — secular Zionism.

It is not necessary to be radical or anti-Zionist to reject at least some aspects of the "vulgar Zionist" version of Jewish history. For example, Simon Dubnow, a respected Jewish historian at the turn of the century, whose view of Jewish history was idealistic (in the sense described above), was opposed to the Palestine-centrism — the focussing primarily on Palestine — which is an essential feature of any Zionist historical discourse. Another respected historian, Salo W. Baron, whose *Social and Religious History of the Jews* is a classic work, sharply criticised one of the central pillars of "vulgar Zionism", the characterisation of diaspora Jewish existence exclusively in terms of powerlessness, martyrdom and suffering. He called this the "lachrymose" conception of Jewish history. More sophisticated versions retain the centrality of Palestine (Israelocentrism today), but make an effort to reconcile it with developments in the general society, and to incorporate various contradictions. For example, the leading ideologue of labour Zionism, Ben Borochov, tried to justify the goal of creating a territory for the Jews in Palestine as a historical necessity which could be theoretically supported by orthodox Marxist arguments.

Marx himself established the premise that Jewish religion (implying Jewish

specificity and identity) had to be explained through history and not despite history. But the classic orthodox Marxist text on Jewish history is by Abram Leon. Leon's theoretical framework rests on a basis of materialism — an understanding that ethnic-religious Jewish identity came exclusively from the economic and material situation of Jewish communities. Despite Leon's challenge to the official version of Jewish history, its determinism and reductionism are obvious flaws. Nevertheless, we must recognise the merit and courage of 23-year-old Abram Leon writing this materialist version of Jewish history in the terrible conditions of Nazi occupied Europe.

It is politically important to clarify historic events precisely because of the way they are used by official ideologues. Indeed, the breadth and openness of debate which challenges any "official" history is an accepted barometer of how democratic an institution is. So an important aspect of a critical work like Halevi's is precisely to generate this debate. The lack of open and profound criticism of the official version of Jewish history (particularly in the diaspora), far from being a sign of political strength of institutions, points to political stagnation and/or lack of democracy. There are degrees to which historians and political commentators can remain relatively detached from ideological constraints of a state or a party. In this respect one has to distinguish Halevi (and Rodinson) from other critics of the officially accepted versions of Jewish history and/or Zionism, who are too apologetic to Palestinian nationalism and/or yield to various forms of debased Marxist dogma. For example, some Trotskyist groups have made Leon's work almost an article of faith in understanding Jewish issues. This is a disservice to Leon's revolutionary spirit.

As a member of the political apparatus of the PLO, Halevi (more than other critical or anti-Zionist authors) is susceptible to the accusation of being an apparatchik of "the other side". However, despite devoting too much of his book to the development of Zionism and Israeli society, Halevi is at pains throughout to denounce the schematic and reductionist arguments of less thinking anti-Zionists. Also, even if there is an ideological symmetry between the political

### JEWISH ANARCHISTS

A number of Jewish Anarchists are hoping to form a group or network. They say: "The Jewish Anarchists are often ignored as part of our radical Jewish heritage. This absence of information of such a significant movement is one which we wish to rectify. We believe that the anarchist critique of the State and authority fits largely with our experience as Jews living as a minority in a nation State. We wish to re-establish a Jewish Anarchist Group to discuss how we, as Jewish Anarchists, want to work with other Anarchists to challenge the institutionalised oppression of the State."

Anyone who is interested should write either to Jewish Anarchists, c/o Anarchist Group, Bradford University, Great Horton Road, Bradford BD7, West Yorks or to Jewish Anarchist Group, Box JAG, 52 Call Lane, Leeds 1.

apparatuses of the State of Israel and the PLO, and their corresponding followers, this does not mean there is parity in terms of resources and power. The PLO is much weaker than the State of Israel and this lack of power must be considered in any debate.

Like other critics of Leon, Halevi rejects the idea that economic factors deterministically explain ideology. Instead there is feedback between these elements. Jewish communities interacted with a wide variety of surrounding societies. In Biblical times, various forms of Judaism competed with each other for the ideological hegemony of "the tribe". The rabbinical talmudic variety, which had the backing of powers such as the Assyrian, Persian and later, Greek and Roman empires, emerges as just such a hegemonic form of Judaism, in the form of an ethnic religion with an associated genealogical myth (what Halevi calls "the Law"). This political hegemony of the rabbinical caste, with its mandate to represent the Jewish community (the *kehila*) granted by the non-Jewish powers that be, adapted to the variety of environments in which Jewish communities found themselves. This political structure survived through the expansion of Islam in the Mediterranean world, and through the migration of Jews from western to eastern Europe in the Middle Ages.

In modern western European states the *kehila* became a civil association without coercive power over its members, who, in turn, became integrated into the national culture as French, German, Dutch citizens "of the Jewish faith". In eastern Europe, a non-territorial Jewish nation emerged with its own language: Yiddish; its own working class, bourgeoisie, intelligentsia; and with its own secular, but Jewish, political and cultural institutions (notably the Bund, but also Zionist parties and organisations). Here the *kehila* survived in the form of an orthodox religious establishment without its former monopoly of power, so it had to compete with the new secular forces for political control of the community.

In the Muslim world, the local form of *kehila*, the *dhimi*, lasted well into modern times but was shattered by complex forces. For example, European colonialism granting special status to local Jews (especially in Algeria) alienated the Jews from nationalist post-colonial governments. After 1948, the double loyalty *vis a vis* Israel obviously exacerbated this situation and, in the case of Iraq, the action of Zionist provocateurs increased conflict even further. However, Halevi rejects the anti-Zionist myth which plays down anti-Jewish riots and gives excessive prominence to (real or imagined)

Zionist-inspired machinations in persuading Jews to go to Israel.

Halevi explains why there is so much confusion about the question: What is a Jew? It is indeed a clear question only if placed in a specific geographical and historical context. Were Jews in western Europe from the late 19th century onwards a religious minority like the Huguenots? Were Jews in pre-War Poland a national minority like the Ukrainians or Germans? Were Jews in pre-1948 Iraq a theological community like the Maronites or Copts? The only way in which these dissimilar types can be roughly fitted into a single definition is to recall a common religious origin — their former community organisation under the *kehila* (or *dhimi*) model. So the Zionist concept of a Jew (embracing all Jews at all times and in all places) must be tied to this form of religious identity. This is significant in understanding to what degree theology is an essential feature of a Zionist state.

However, Halevi's assessment of Jewish diversity leads him to some debatable conclusions. For example, the "Germanness" of Ashkenazi Jews in the midst of Slavic populations as a parallel to the "Spanishness" of Sephardim among Arabs and Turks, is misleading. When Sephardi Jews were expelled from Spain they left a united national monarchy in which Castilian language and culture was beginning to be identified as "national". These Jews did carry a sense of "Spanishness". But Ashkenazi Jews migrated eastward much earlier, when Germany as a political and cultural entity did not exist. Instead there was a collection of small kingdoms, duchies and counties where many related dialects were spoken and which gave rise to Dutch and Flemish as well as modern German.

Halevi breaks new ground in looking at Jewish history from the point of view of an Oriental (non-Ashkenazi) Jew. He explains that the fact that Ashkenazi Jews and their descendants in America comprised 90% of world Jewry before the Second World War made it easy to identify "Jewish" with "Ashkenazi". But today 65% of Israeli Jews are not Ashkenazi. The interaction between Ashkenazi and Oriental Jews challenges the simple polarity of Israeli Jews versus Palestinian Arabs — which is how most Zionist or anti-Zionist commentators describe the conflict. Halevi argues that the conception of Zionism as an ideology as well as a motive for settling in Israel-Palestine, was different for these two Jewish groups.

The Ashkenazi Zionists came to build a "new" nation, which was distant from the despised *shtetl* or *kehila*, so the early

pioneers were prepared to become labourers and farmers. The Oriental Jews, many of whom were middle or upper class in their countries of origin, wanted to preserve this status together with their traditional way of life as a *dhimi*, but this time in a Jewish state, liberated from the unpredictable protection of non-Jewish authorities. The expectations of the Orientals were rudely shattered, from the DDT with which they were sprayed when they arrived, to their being dumped in "development" towns without services or facilities.

A new Hebrew-speaking nation emerged, its upper and middle class largely Ashkenazi and its working class almost exclusively Oriental. The Oriental population do not think of themselves as being "Arab Jews" or "Arabs of Jewish religion" as some Palestinian and Arab nationalists think. With the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza becoming a permanent feature, cheap Palestinian labour flooded the Israeli labour market and a large number of Oriental Jews became middlemen and contractors. While a predominantly Ashkenazi right wing ceases being a political fringe, the Zionist project seems to be evolving, in Halevi's words, from "colonial socialism" to "Middle Eastern fascism", though South Africa's apartheid seems more accurate as a model of a future political nightmare. There is still hope, though, that this Hebrew nation could integrate itself peacefully into the region while retaining its own national culture and political independence. As Halevi concludes, what the most politically advanced anti-Zionists mean by "dezionisation" of Israel is not the abolition of Israel as a nation state and its forcible absorption into an Arab or "binational" Palestine, but the removal of those ideological elements embedded in its present institutions which lead to oppressive and racist policies and attitudes. Such a new Israeli state would coexist with a Palestinian state and issues such as boundaries, return of refugees, etc, would be settled in the framework of state-to-state negotiations. If not by conviction, then for pragmatic reasons, this conception of the future is now accepted by most of the PLO leadership.

Halevi avoids the self-righteousness of some dogmatic anti-Zionists among the western European left — not to mention dogmatic Zionists who are equally arrogant but more influential within western European and North American political opinion. One statement aptly expresses the spirit of Halevi's book: "Our intention here has been to make people understand and feel, not to promote a magic formula in which history would give up the ghost."

# Images of Yiddishland

London hosted a season of Yiddish cinema this summer. Michael Heiser reviews the collection it offered.

One of the highlights of the Festival of the Jewish East End was the month-long concurrent Yiddish cinema season at the National Film Theatre on the South Bank. Those who doubt the popularity or appeal of Yiddish should note that all the films I saw were well-attended, with an audience spanning all generations.

For people born in the 1950s, probably our first "taster" of Yiddish cinema was provided by the American documentary *Almonds and Raisins*, which was shown in London some three or four years ago and was subsequently transmitted by Channel Four. This reviewed the American and Polish Yiddish cinema of the 1930s; its roots, audience and social significance and included clips from classics such as *Grine Felder* (Green Fields) and *Yidl mitn fidl*. Ever since that taster, I for one had been keen to sink my teeth into the "real thing".

*Almonds and Raisins* was, in fact, included in the season, but as a late replacement for *Mir Kumen on*, made for the Bund by Polish director Aleksander Ford in 1935. When this documentary about the Bund's children's hospital, the Medem Sanatorium, first came out in Poland it was banned as "communist propaganda"; this time round copyright problems were blamed for its non-appearance. Either way we didn't get to see it. But this documentary about a working-class movement providing health care for people who could not otherwise afford it would have sat uneasily with the fact that the sponsor of the season was a private hospital!

Of the films that were shown, both *Mirele Efros* and *Got Mentsh un Tayvl* (God, human being and devil) are filmed adaptations of stage plays by Jacob Gordin. Both succeed in combining themes from classic authors (King Lear and Faust respectively), with occasionally cloying sentiment and an underlying socialist message. In *Mirele Efros* (1939), Mirele, an imposing matriarch, is persuaded by her family to give them control of the business she has built up. Once she has handed over the reins, they reject her and the values she supports. This is symbolised by their refusal to honour a pledge she has made to give a decision to a communal charitable hospital. In *Got, Mentsh un Tayvl* (1950), the Devil comes

in disguise to a poor upright man and persuades him to buy a winning lottery ticket. He now thinks only of riches and his own gratification and this causes him eventually to bring ruin to himself and those around him.

At their worst, both films are sentimentalised melodramas. But at their best they would have had a very clear relevance to the lives of their audiences, less the cinema audiences of 1930s or 40s America than the working class theatre audiences of the Lower East Side at the turn of the century. For instance, in *Got, Mentsh un Tayvl*, the protagonist, in partnership with the Devil, takes on his neighbours as *tales* (prayer shawl) weavers, rejecting their request to lend them money so they can set up a *tales*-weaving co-operative on their own account. The evocation of sweatshop conditions and industrial accidents must have been in tune with the audience's own experiences.

Perhaps the most telling and vivid contrast was provided by the final evening of the season when the pre-war Polish *Di Freylekhe Kabtsonim* (The Happy Poor People) was followed by *Bruxelles-Transit*, made in 1980.

*Di Freylekhe Kabtsonim* (1937) stars Shimen Dzigan and Yusroel Schumacher, two well-known stars of the Jewish cabaret stage, as a pair of *luftmenshn* in a poor Polish *shtetl*. Out for a walk in the hills above the town (with some breathtaking views, filmed near the *shtetl* of Brzeziny) they come across a pool of oil which has been spilled. They conclude they have stumbled on an oil well. News of their "discovery" soon gets out and a whole rumour-industry springs up. An army of stock types is called into play; the grasping neighbour out for a quick profit, the dependent wife and family, the swoon-worthy *matinée* idol of an actor and the beautiful daughter who duly runs off with him, taking with her the map on which the site of the "oil well" is marked. Dzigan and Schumacher set off to try and get it back. At one point these eminently sane men find themselves in a mental hospital. This provides an additional edge, as if to say that they (and by extension the community they come from) are keeping their sanity while the whole world goes

mad about them. The underlying message is the impoverishment and growing desperation of the Polish Jewish community. But it is a community full of life, devising stratagems to cope with the situation in which they find themselves; some ridiculous and escapist but all very real.

*Bruxelles-Transit* was made about half a century later by the Belgian director, Samy Szlingerbaum, who died last year at the tragically early age of 35. (Nowhere in the programme was reference made to this fact, a culpable omission.) The narrator, whom we never see, is the director's mother. She tells, in Yiddish, how she came to Belgium as a refugee from the ruins of Poland in 1946. The black and white photography illustrates her journey with shots of Brussels stations; the train journey, stopping at stations and finally arriving in a strange city. Once in Brussels, everything is unfamiliar: the language, the people and the customs. Actors re-enact episodes from their life in coming to terms with this unfamiliarity; not being understood in the shops when they speak Yiddish, pressing clothes for a living in their back room and the police raid when they are told their papers aren't in order.

Initially the film left me with a feeling of emptiness. It does not beckon you into a community, as the others do. *Di Freylekhe Kabtsonim* is set specifically in the Poland of the 1930s; it gains its strength through its context. *Bruxelles-Transit* has a timeless character. For all that it is narrated in Yiddish it is constructed at a level of generality so that it could relate to any immigrant community reconstructing their life in a strange town. At one point two old men meet on a Brussels street corner. There is a flicker of recognition, they knew each other from Poland. They sit together on a bench for a while. This reminded me of descriptions of old Punjabi Sikh men sitting on park benches in Southall. Seen this way, *Bruxelles-Transit* makes links which, arguably, the East End Festival as a whole failed to do, to the lives of other minorities, to their own struggles and attempts to maintain their culture as something living and changing. As such, it can show the relevance of Yiddish as a resource today.

## PLAYS ON JEWS

David King casts a critical eye on plays of Jewish interest presented at Edinburgh this summer.

A number of interesting plays were presented at this year's Edinburgh Festival. Among these, the one which caused the most fuss was, of course, *Perdition*, which, after being rejected by the Assembly Rooms was at last read in public at the Lyceum Studio. This was done for the very good reason of preventing it becoming too much of a cult. The Union of Jewish Students (UJS) was there and got lots of publicity, and I sold several copies of *Jewish Socialist*.

Although I didn't get a ticket (they went faster than my mother's gefilte fish balls) I've now read the play and the (very much larger) correspondence surrounding it, so I'll just briefly comment. Despite its apologists' claims to the contrary, the text does explicitly say that the Zionists were "prepared to sacrifice the Jews of the Diaspora" in order to strengthen their claim for a Jewish State, and that they positively obstructed rescue attempts in order to further this policy. I see little difference between saying this and saying that they positively desired the Holocaust.

This having been said, it is clear that there is a case to answer: was the Zionists' first priority rescue or the creation of a Jewish State? The problem with this play is that by overstating its case, it discredits itself. There are, of course, other problems, such as the proliferation of anti-semitic metaphors such as polluted wells and blood sacrifices, which have been pointed out by David Cesarani.

An interesting contrast with *Perdition* is another play about the Holocaust, Peter Weiss's *The Investigation* which is also based on trial transcripts, this time of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials of 1965. Whereas *Perdition* is concerned entirely with large issues of Jewish destiny, *The Investigation* presents the workings of the Auschwitz death machine in vivid detail, yet neglects to mention the fact that most of the people murdered there were Jews! This is connected with the dubious political analysis of Nazism which the play presents: that Nazi fascism is just an extreme form of capitalism, and its victim is humanity as a whole. This analysis is typical of left wing German thought in the 1960s which marginalised the Holocaust and prevented people from genuinely coming to terms with it.

What the play does achieve by its unflinching description of the concrete details of the murder process and of the killing by starvation and labour of the camp's inmates is to prevent the Holocaust becoming an impenetrable, monolithic, abstract horror; something which it is impossible to understand. Where this staging unfortunately went wrong was in making the individuals into abstractions: the play was performed on a bare open stage, by six players who constantly switched roles between witnesses and defendants. No stable personalities were present (with the exception of the judge). In order to prevent another occurrence of fascism, we have to understand, at the level of the individual, how a fascist society both dominates and co-opts that individual. We also have to be able to identify with the victims, although identification is not a substitute for political analysis.

*It Turns or Herzl vs Kafka* is a new play by the Israeli playwright Joseph Mundy. Two men, who believe themselves to be Theodor Herzl and Franz Kafka are made to live in the same room, as an experiment, by the director of their mental asylum. "Herzl" is manic, fiendish, driven; "Kafka" is mild, bewildered, dominated by "Herzl". "Herzl" is creating the New Jew in his vision of a militaristic, total state. "Kafka" is the Old Jew, the humanist intellectual who just wants to be left alone to write. There is certainly a problem with the choice of Kafka to represent this historical type. Perhaps Heinrich Heine would have fitted better. It's also a little unfair on Herzl. If the director is God, then the nymphomaniac nurse may represent American aid and its effects. She offers herself to both "Kafka" and "Herzl": "Kafka" rejects her but "Herzl" embraces her enthusiastically.

But things are not so simple. "Kafka" dreams of a penal colony in which he is the vice director (the director of the penal colony, in true Kafka style "keeps himself to himself"). He invents a torture machine (which thankfully does not possess any of the macabre features of the execution machine in Kafka's story, *In the Penal Colony*) in which he tests the strength of both "Herzl's" New Jew, who passes the test, and "Herzl" himself, who does not. We are reminded of the cruelty of

intellectuals and their role in the creation of the totalitarian state. (This is even more unfair to Kafka.) In the end the director removes "Kafka" from the room as being too dangerous. The experiment has been a failure.

A major highlight of the festival, for me, was *The Battle of Cable Street* by Simon Blumenfeld. The entire action takes place in Fred's Cafe in Manningtree Street. Here the Communist party cell which organised the anti-fascist counter demonstration, decide, after stormy debate, to go ahead, against the initial opposition of the London District branch of the party. The reason is not their natural Jewish reaction to Mosley's Jewbaiters (they are not all Jewish), but their feeling that this time the working people are leading them, not vice versa. Nevertheless Joe, the sensitive but politically inexperienced leader of the group, reveals his anxiety at breaking party discipline. His comrade and lover, Pearl, emerges in this the central scene of the play as the stronger character with her simple faith in the workers and her confidence of success. Finally, the Party, overwhelmed by popular feeling, agrees to back them and, after some nervous moments, the fascists are routed.

The strength of this production was the simplicity of its dramatisation and its appeal to the audience — this is a play for the heart, not the intellect. I believe the play will be staged in London and I strongly recommend it as a tonic for tired or disillusioned anti-fascist troops.

*Rebel in Paradise*, the life story of Emma Goldman was the subject of an article in the last issue of *Jewish Socialist* so I'll simply say that I found it an extremely enjoyable and moving play. My only criticism would be that in providing a picture of Emma as a woman, as a person who insists on living life here and now, and not just after the revolution, it neglects the real originality and consistency of her political ideas. Her speeches are reduced to mere slogans, which, while exhilarating, lack weight. Something similar happened in the film *Rosa Luxemburg* and also in a recently screened programme (on C4) on the life of Alexandra Kollontai.

DAVID KING

## Israel on parade

This *Savage Parade* by Anthony Shaffer at the Kings Head Theatre Club, London

The 1967 Middle East War launched a period of euphoria for Jews both in Israel and all over the world. By winning a spectacular military victory over superior forces, a Jewish army had not just exhibited strength, but also confounded yet another antisemitic prejudice. All that not that long after Israel had caught, brought to trial, and with due legal procedure, hanged the man perceived as responsible for the final solution. History seemed to be rewritten, the impossible seemed within reach, and literally millions of Jews fell pray to the delusion that therefore the normal laws of human and political behaviour did not apply to Israel. It could foster nationalism, rule over national minorities and conduct a military occupation, somehow, without hurting anyone.

It is to Anthony Shaffer's credit that even 20 years ago he did not fall for this. *The Savage Parade*, though ostensibly a whodunnit about the identity of a kidnapped Nazi killer (is he really the crimi-

nal or an Israeli commander testing his subordinates?) deals with the human tendency only to see evil where we expect to find it. The captured Nazi first denies his identity, but admits to it after the Israelis around him insist that he exhibits the mental, as well as physical traits of the wanted man. At this point, he changes tack. Can they not understand his motivation? he challenges them. Do they, too, not want to have a homogeneous state and be a conquering power? Do they not face similar problems? "But we are not like you; we also have a love of humanity!" one of his captors replies in horror. The play leaves us with the question: whether such a love, even if genuine, can balance the structural tendency of expansionist nationalism to degenerate, not into the historically unique death camps, but into dispossession and repression.

The test of that theory lies, of course, in the experience of the Palestinians. Shaffer's play makes a pacy case for seeing

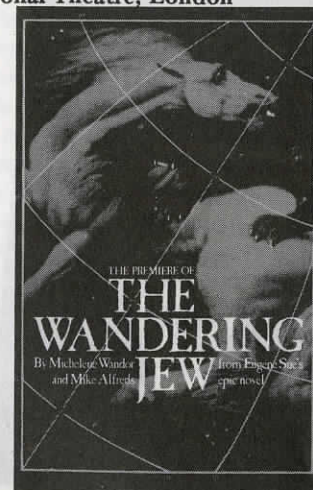
them, although they are never mentioned by name, as the new semitic victims. (Some will argue that they cannot be, for they are not as passive as those of old, but given the lessons of history, one can hardly blame them.)

These are views worth airing, and it is only a shame the play will reinforce the myth of the Mossad as a body of men touring the world to catch Nazi criminals. It only ever caught one, Eichmann, and although the Israeli government could have got its hands on other well known Nazis, like Barbie and Mengele, since they lived quite openly in Latin American dictatorships dependent on Israeli military assistance, it never bothered. The Mossad nowadays specialises in the assassination of Palestinians abroad, where its targets have been not just PLO leaders, but also people guilty only of embodying Palestinian national culture, such as the great novelist Ghassan Kanafani. □

ELFI PALLIS

## Wanderer stops at The National

The Wandering Jew  
National Theatre, London



Mike Alfred's production of *The Wandering Jew* has not been given an enthusiastic critical reception and it is a measure of the influence of such reviews that the play is to close early because of poor houses. This is unfortunate and does not bode well for the two remaining shows his National Theatre group is to perform, which are just as unusual as *The Wandering Jew*. It is also surprising. I came away with the feeling that those who had criticised the play as simplistic had basically

misread it. This is not a realist drama in the Ibsen/Chekhov mould and to treat it as if somehow it ought to be is necessarily to distort its style and to be disappointed.

The play is Mike Alfred's and Michelene Wandor's adaptation of a 19th century epic novel by Eugene Sue. The title refers to a figure in Christian mythology who was condemned to wander eternally for refusing rest to Jesus on the way to the crucifixion. The plot follows the fortunes of the six young descendants of a fabulously wealthy convert from Catholicism to Protestantism, himself a descendant of the Wandering Jew. Persecuted by Jesuits because of his conversion, he leaves his money in a trust fund to be redeemed by his descendants in a hundred and fifty years time. The young people know nothing of the wealth awaiting them but have inherited medallions bearing a mysterious injunction to meet on a certain day at a house in Paris. The only people who know the purpose of this assignation are a handful of Jesuits, led by the greedy and ambitious Rodin, who is determined to steal the money to further his desire to be Pope.

The plot that unfolds is like a combination of Dickens, a Gothic novel and a nineteenth century version of *Dynasty*

but it is played with a bone-dry humour that places the melodrama within a frame of social satire. The sharp division between the good characters (who are very, very good) and the bad characters (who are horrid) is clearly not meant to be taken at face value in this production, even if it was in the original novel. The mock epic style of the piece means that the company of seventeen play fifty parts (including a horse and a lion!) and they accomplish this feat with considerable energy and relish.

The least convincing part of the play is the relationship between the plot and the presence of the figure of the Wandering Jew. The connection is that the young protagonists are supposed to be the last surviving descendants of the Wanderer who can only rest once they have fulfilled their destiny. This is not wildly satisfactory and does not link well into the dominant political theme of the rest of the play, which is anti-clericalism. Having said that, it is a great shame that this production has not met with more success. At a time when the rest of the National Theatre's programme is fairly safe, this play is unusual and deserves to be better appreciated. □

AMANDA ARISS

# ALIMENTARY ANGUISH

*Good Enough to Eat* by Leslea Newman  
(Sheba Feminist Publishers, £4.95)

"Liza surveyed her face. Her dark brown eyes were shaped like almonds, set wide apart and fringed with thick lashes. Her nose was small and her lips curved gracefully like the wings of a small bird. Her skin was clear, though pale, and her high cheek bones gave her face the shape of a heart."

Where do you think that came from? (a) a feminist novel, (b) Barbara Cartland, (c) Catherine Cookson? Amazingly enough the correct answer is (a). That highly original way of describing a woman comes from a feminist (sic) novel called *Good Enough to Eat* by Leslea Newman.

I had hoped that this book, about a Jewish woman with bulimia (an eating disorder characterised by compulsive bingeing followed by equally compulsive vomiting, fasting or the abuse of laxatives or enemas) would take a serious look at why Jews are obsessed (or perceived as obsessed) by food. It's an interesting question but this book doesn't throw up any of the answers.



but I know that the reason behind it is that, like many refugees' children, my parents spent their childhoods in poverty. If you don't know where the next meal is coming from, or even if there's going to be one, then the subject of food naturally assumes disproportionate significance. There's not a hint of this history in Liza's world.

Peppered with Yiddishisms, the book reads like the alternative dictionary of clichés. Our pretty heroine with her *shikse* nose (wouldn't it be nice to read a positive book about a woman who weighs 20 stone and had a face like the back of a bus?) fed up with unsatisfactory relationships with men, decides that she might be a lesbian. After a bit of rudimentary angst she goes to her local lesbian feminist bookshop to find out, stopping off at the women's café on the way.

By a stroke of luck she bumps into a lesbian called Anemone and her whole life is changed. Anemone turns out to be not only an ex-compulsive eater but also half Jewish. After a few hiccups, Anemone (so what was wrong with Linda Klein as a name?) and Liza (who is now thinking of changing her name to Topaz) don't quite walk off into the purple sunset holding hands, but near enough.

After their first ecstatic night of love, Liza has a blinding flash of realisation;

what she'd really wanted to put in her mouth all these years was not junk food at all, it was a nipple. To my mind, as an in-depth analysis of why women are lesbians, that sucks.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if everyone could come out, find a lover, a welcoming lesbian community and the answer to their eating problems all in the space of a week? Lovely, but not very likely.

There's definitely a space for some serious writing dealing with Jewish women, food and sexuality but it's not going to be filled by this lavender tinted view of the world. Unfortunately, *Good Enough to Eat* leaves a nasty taste in the mouth.

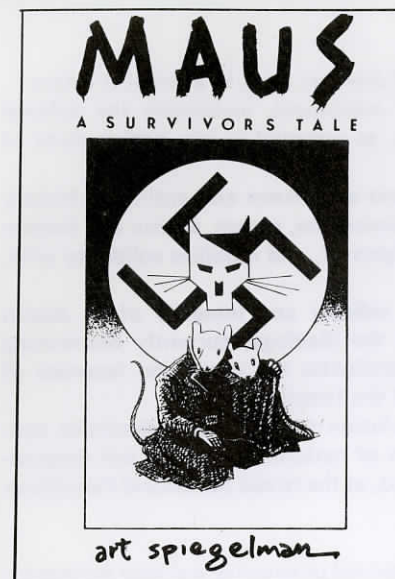
MARIAN SHAPIRO

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*Maus*, by Art Spiegelman (Andre Deutsch £9.95 hardback, Penguin Books, £5.95 paperback)

"The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human." This quotation from Adolf Hitler opens *Maus* by Art Spiegelman and determines its imagery. In this cartoon strip of the Holocaust, Jews are represented as mice, Poles as pigs and Germans as cats.

The book tells two tales in parallel. A contemporary story frames the historical one. In the present we have Art's ambivalence towards his father and his unresolved resentment and guilt about his mother who committed suicide. In the past is the story of Art's parents, Vladek and Anja Spiegelman, their life in pre-war Poland and the events leading up to their deportation to Auschwitz in 1944.

The book is beautifully drawn and it is impossible not to be moved by the events. Vladek's faithfully transcribed words made me painfully aware that I was eavesdropping on a true story. The narrative speeds along and I found the book both gripping and, ultimately, profoundly dissatisfying.

The portrayal of people as animals carries a disturbing subtext which should be challenged. By giving different national and cultural groups the characteristics of particular species, it follows that the relationships between them are predetermined. At its most simplistic level, if Germans are cats, that is predators, then Jews as mice, are their natural victims. This view implicitly denies that the Holocaust was an obscenity inflicted on one group of humans by another group of humans. To portray it as inevitable is both to ignore history and deny the possibility of learning from history and challenging present day fascism. It allows Art Spiegelman to ignore the question "Why?" and to focus on one individual's experience. As a reader, this approach left me feeling distressed and powerless. □

MARIAN SHAPIRO

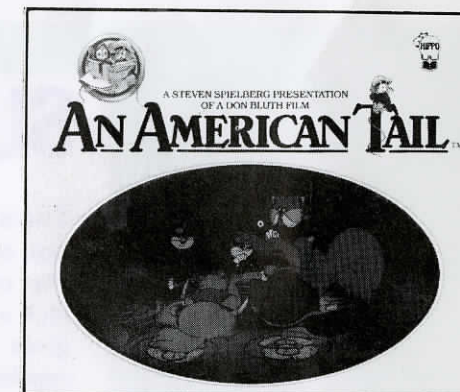
of mice and mice

*An American Tail*, the Steven Spielberg presentation of the Don Bluth film. Also available in a series of children's books published by Hippo Books at £1.75.

Children's cartoon films are the stuff of fantasy. Their appeal is that they take us into dimensions wildly outside our experience. But what about socially relevant children's cartoons? Indeed, what about cartoon films for children on Jewish experience?

*An American Tail* was apparently designed for this purpose; to use the expertise acquired in the Disney industry and marry it with the resources of the Steven Spielberg empire to tell the story of Jewish emigration to America from tsarist Russia at the turn of the century.

Using mice to make us even more lovable than we are already, and centred round Feivel — a true *lobos* (rascal) of a young mouse — the film hints at dealing creatively with prejudice and racism,



humiliation at the immigration office, toil and struggle in the sweatshops and the general problems of living in an alien and hostile environment. All of these are ideas that young children are quite capable of relating to, but *An American Tail* fails miserably. I wasn't exactly asking for marching mice, with red flags on their tails, squeaking 'The Internationale', but I expected something better than the reproduction of crude stereotypes, particularly with regard to women and Irish people.

What is ultimately so disappointing is that the film is thoroughly conformist, finishing as it does in the unquestioned images of the American Dream. Feivel is a cute and lovable mouse but he left me feeling pretty cheesed off. Come back Micky Mouse, all is forgiven! □

DAVE KATZLIEBER

# 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.

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